

**Gerard G. Pendas, Jr.**  
**Narrator**

**Wayne Clark**  
**Interviewer**

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WC: Today 5 September 2008. We are at the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs New York and we are interviewing Mr. Gerard Pendas. Mr. Pendas for the record will you state your full name, place and date of birth?

GP: Gerard. G. Pendas Jr. I was born June 12<sup>th</sup> 1930 in New York City, Manhattan. At the height of the Depression and my father lost his job with the government, he worked at a federal prison and we moved up to Amsterdam New York and spend a few years up there living with my Grandparents until we moved to Albany New York and I grew up on Kent Street in Albany New York. I went to School 4 and School 16, both public schools, my dad worked at Hendricks Brewery. Then we moved to the village of Colonie, which was on the border with Schenectady County and everybody west of Lye Road went to High School in Schenectady so even though I lived in Albany County I went to High School in Schenectady. From Schenectady I moved up to Barker New York and went to Barker Central School and Residence Center for a while. I'd always wanted to join the Marine Corps because one of the veterans coming back from World War II had given me an emblem and I read a lot and heard a lot about the Marine Corps so I very much wanted to be in the Marine Corps. Also, a mess of Marines had come back from the Second World War... I enlisted when I was 15 but I was caught so I waited until the day after my 17<sup>th</sup> Birthday to Enlist in the Marine Corps.

WC: Did you drop out of High School at that point?

GP: Yes, yes I did. I dropped out and joined the Marine Corps. Went to Paris Island Marine Corps Recruit Depot, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, and went through Boot Camp at Paris Island and from there I was assigned to Sea School at Portsmouth Virginia. After Sea School I went aboard the Aircraft Carrier U.S.S Coral Sea.

WC: Let me ask you about this sea school. What was that all about? What kind of training did you receive?

GP: Sea School was just pomp and ceremony. A little bit of gun drill because we would man the secondary batteries aboard ships. At the time sea going detachments were something that were put between sailors and command and most of duties were “look-pretty duties” but we did run the brig, we were the communications orderlies, and we were orderlies to the Captain and Executive Officer. Sea School was mostly just drills, uniforms, parades and pomp and ceremony that we were required to use aboard ship. We did go Danville Virginia for Anti-Aircraft School, just the secondary batteries and we did man 20 millimeter batteries aboard the Aircraft Carrier. I was on the carrier for two years. I got off the carrier and went to the Brooklyn Navy Yard awaiting discharge. I was out on July 14<sup>th</sup>...

WC: What year was that?

GP: 1949. But it got into 1950 and I was still at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. But the 14<sup>th</sup> of July my enlistment was up and I was thinking about reenlistment but the Korean War started on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June when the North Koreans invaded South Korea and there was drafted that was formed from the Brooklyn Navy Yard that was going to Camp Pendleton to join the First Marine Division and I was not a draft because I was a short timer. I got an audience with the adjutant of the Marine Barracks of Brooklyn and told I'd like very much to be on that draft, I'd reenlist and he said “Well if you reenlist for six years we'll let you go” so I did reenlist and got on a troop train and picked up Marines from around from New Jersey and all the ammunition depots across the country. It took us six days to get across the United States and to Camp Pendleton.

WC: And what rank were you at that point?

GP: I was a corporal at the time. I got off the Aircraft Carrier as corporal, I boarded as a private and 27 months later I became a corporal. I sent to the First Marine regiment and I was further assigned to George Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Regiment. I went down there and I became a squad leader because I was a corporal. As soon as the Sergeants started coming I went down to being a fire team leader, and then there was a cry out for men who wanted to be snipers I went to the platoon sergeant and said I want very much to get that job. He said “Well, you're a Corporal, they're just taking PFC's” so I went to see the First Sergeant and told him I had a little bit of experience with Marksmanship, I was the rifle range coach and fired on the Brooklyn Navy Yard Team when we went to Quantico. I'd always fired expert rifleman. I told I just really, really wanted the job. I could do a good job for them. And they were insisting on taking PFC's so I went to the Lieutenant, people started to interview me and finally I got the job. There was no training at all, there was no sniper school, all we got was the '03 Rifle.

WC: Did it have a scope on it?

GP: It had a 8 power Intertell scope on it. It was a stargage '03 that we had been told than Winchester or Remington or whoever made the perfect '03 rifle, the bolt-action five shot rifle, they put a star on the muzzle to signify that all the tolerances within the rifle were absolutely

perfect. So that's where we got the Stargage '03 Rifles and the 8-Power Intertell Scopes. The scopes were really made for marksmanship, competitive shooting, they were indoors, no distance, they were not a field scope. They had a great big elevation knob, and a great big windage knob on. There were no markings up or down or left or right, there were no numbers either. So it was a strictly competitive scope, not meant for the field but nonetheless that was what we got. We had an old gunnery Sergeant that was in charge of us and he took us out the firing ranges and we didn't fire at the known distances, but up on hills where you had guess what the range was. We had to fire up to 600 yards and zeroed these '03 rifles and zeroed our telescopes. The rest of the training was just getting us in shape physically. We had a lot of forced marches and marching with heavy duty packs, field transport packs, just getting our bodies conditioned for the heat and the trials of Korea. We boarded ship, went to Japan, we were at Atsugi, a former Japanese base and then we trained from there and then we boarded LST's in Yokohama and we went and landed in Inchon on landing vehicle tractors, they weren't boats they were tractors. We were in the second wave, I was on boat 2-2. The First wave of the operation was on Blue Beach, for the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines. The first was supposed to be Army and LVT's, landing vehicle tracts, with a 75mm cannon on the front of them and they were going to blow holes in the wall. The seawall was the barrier we had to overcome, the tides were 32 feet, now that's an obscene number, when you think of the water dropping 32 feet, so we had made wooden ladders, we expected to go over the wall. I was in the Command Tractor with the commander of the LVT's, and the commander of platoon, I was in the 1<sup>st</sup> platoon. The commander decided to not go at the seawall but there was a small channel, it was just a sewer with all the waste and water came down from the port of Inchon, came down through this little creek. We went right up the creek and there were about 6 or 7 tractors, with the whole 1<sup>st</sup> platoon and a part of the rest of the company. We got out of the tractors, there was barbed wire and we were under fire, the typical naval amphibious operation, the navy shelling the beach with their 5'', even the *Missouri* was shooting her 16'' guns, we had a lot of naval aviation, a lot of Marine fighter pilots in their Corsairs dropping bombs and strafing the port first and doing what they could to suppress the enemy fire. There was a barbed wire fence and we just got out of our LVT's, we didn't know if we were going up the ditch or through the barbed wire and one of the fire team leaders of the , platoon, Corporal Buck Barnes , was the first the wire and he went to cut the wire and he was the first man killed in the Company, another man went up and finally a corpsman with a bolo knife, just ran up there, a hospital foreman who was supposed to attend to the wounded and smashed the fence down with a machete, of course we all streamed through there then, we had plenty of barbed wire cutters, we cut the wire and gunned through there and we were under small arms fire and it's just... your initial bleeding in combat is something that you must explain that, you have no voluntary control of your body, and a lot of us urinated in our pants, would be tempted to throw up, vomit, had the dry heaves... it lasts about 30 seconds until you realize someone is trying to kill you, you get over that very fast and start returning fire. We moved through that and took out first objective and the navy, typical LST's not knowing anybody was on the hill, we'd moved so fast, thought we were the enemy, opened up with their

40mm and 5" guns on us, luckily there was only one man wounded I think but we finally got them to stop but there was a lot of LST's that thought they were going to win the war, they had a gun up on the front of the LST and they firing into us because we went through the port so fast and got our objective. I think the story was some of the Marines turned their 30mm Machine Guns around and shot back at the LST's to let them know they were doing the wrong thing but finally that subsided. We spent the night there, we were probed a little bit, we jumped off the next morning and the assault was coming off the beach and we were moving down a road and up came a jeep it was the division commander and the assistant division commander, Oliver Prince Smith, Major General, and Brigadier General Craig and there they were right in amongst us and they gave us a hello to the company and kept right on moving. Just after they left, went through a pass they had gone through and had grenades rolled at us, out of a cut in road and we sent a fire team up there and they kept on lobbing grenades at us, there were about five of them up there, a suicidal mission but they had allowed the entire column to through and then when we had the machine guns, that's what they wanted to do the damages to. They kept on firing on us and at that point I saw one of the bravest things I've ever seen and it was a Navy Hospital Corpsman that ran up to one of the Marines that was wounded in the street and was patching him up and they rolled another grenade down on top of them. He just gathered up his patient and covered him with his body, surely he got some shrapnel in his back and in his buttocks, got up and started working on the patient again. The other corpsman, seeing that his partner had been wounded ran over, pulled down his pants and started working on him. They were all just out in the open receiving small arms fire and then eliminated those five and moved on. We boarded some tanks, it was a tank infantry assault, we moved so fast we came upon the enemy, they just stood up and didn't know what was going on, at the time there were many people who claimed that they did it but we were stopped on the column of tanks where the road turned to the right and there was a small little village, there was a house, hootch you might say, just a mud hut and a long it was a huge haystack and out of the fence came a black stove pipe, that didn't make any sense at all, so there we were within 50 feet of it just looking at it and all of a sudden that black stovepipe started to move and it started to go down, so we started beating on the top of the tank with our bare hands, pistols, butts of rifles, anything we had to try and tell them "TANK, TANK, TANK" and we saw it was a tank camouflaged in those bales of hay, we could only see the muzzle. So we all dove off the tank, and the 90mm of the tank, he must have been told by the tank behind him, pivoted his gun and at 50 feet just blew that tank away. The blast from that 90mm, there was one guy who was slow getting off the tank and he broke his leg, we waited there a little more and we realized if they had their tanks, some had been eliminated earlier but we were standing there on our tanks getting ready to go, and the road curved the right through some open rice paddies some 600 yards away that would have been a perfect tank trap, and all of a sudden around the corner comes a motorcycle with a sidecar, it's a North Korean motorcycle, with a Sergeant driving it and a warrant officer in the side car, with an attaché case, everyone started shooting at him. I was on top with a 50 caliber machine gun, was a weapons of opportunity, it was attached to the tank. I busted a couple of rounds off and saw the headlight go out and they

were dead before they went five feet and the motorcycle kept on coasting and we all thought “well it’s got a bomb on it” so we all ducked. It crashed into a telephone pole. We went and grabbed an attaché case and gave it to an intelligence scout, a couple of days later found out it was a message to tell the remaining tanks at Inchon to retreat, they didn’t realize we were that far in. In the assault I got my nickname Peepsight, we were blown off the tanks by a heavy machine gun, they had a little water cooled machinegun with very small wheels, and it was at a good distance and the lieutenant called to me “Pendas get up here” and pointed it out to me so I took a zero in on it, I made the initial comment that the scope was not meant for field but I could here the elevation and wind age using the brush, so I aimed at the gunner, even in the telescope he was just a bare little silhouette, no bigger than the tip of a pen , I could see two of them, it was about 750 yards , I aimed at the gunner who was still shooting at us and I let one go, and the telescope as competitive so you had to reach up , pull it back, work your bolt, put another round in the chamber and look at it and he was still there. I aimed at the gunner but killed the assistant gunner . I realized what I had done and I knew about Kentucky Windage, and I took a shot and got the gunner. I realized my scope was off thirty some odd inches on windage, it was a point of humiliation to say “take that telescope away from him Lieutenant” because he wanted to know he had the fift“take that telescope away from him Lieutenant” because he wanted to know ,he had been watching through the semi fifty binoculars, why I hadn’t taken the gunner out first. I said “well... you know the light and smoke, and not knowing the distance.” I was just making up excuses, and they said “take the telescope away from him and make him use the peep sight.” They started to call me peep sight just to rub my ass in it a little bit, it’s stuck and some sixty years later it’s still there. In the assault we mostly fought in the city of Seoul. We set up in a prison; it was shaped like a wagon wheel, and it was full of prisoners and we didn’t know who they were, bad guys or what? Mostly they were probably political prisoners. We didn’t let them go but at the time the North Koreans started dropping mortars on the prison I think they were trying the kill some of these prisoners they hadn’t killed before, they were probably teachers or some people with education, probably pretty good people but we didn’t know right from wrong so we just left it for the Republic of Korea army to sort out. We went back to the streets, and there were these roadblocks, made out of basket weave sacks and they weighted about 100 kilos, which is more than 100 pounds, and they were full of dirt and stone and everything. They were across this main boulevard which was called Mae Po Boulevard, and that night they assaulted with tank infantry, they had three T-34 tanks. A T-34 had two tanks on the back of it for fuel, and if you got a couple rounds into them that diesel fuel might eventually ignite. That night they attacked with the tanks, and one of our Sergeants picked up a 3.5 Rocket Launcher and fired a round, hit the muzzle of this T-34 tank. They retreated, because we killed all of their infantry, we had our machine guns all zeroed in on them, they didn’t have a chance coming down that Boulevard. When the tank backed up it ran over a mine and exploded and lost it’s tracks, and another tank backed up and did the same thing. We had mined the road out in front and they were disabled but we... that was the 25<sup>th</sup> of September, ten days after we landed. That was about the end of the North Koreans in the city of Seoul. Then of course as you know, MacArthur came in and gave the county back to Syngman Rhee, we just folded up our little tents so to speak and went back to Incheon, the sandy beach. At the time everybody figured the war

was over, it really was over. We thought we were going to go around to the eastern shore of Korea, we were going to go on Queenboats, called Q- boats, they were American LST's that were given to the Japanese Navy, they had a Japanese crew and a Japanese captain. We were down on the beach waiting to get aboard, the army had supplies all over the beach. Of course Marines will steal and we stole all the rations they had, Cornflakes, mayonnaise, jellies, peas, soup, everything we could get our hands on. We carried it all back, pretty clever how we stole it all but I won't go into that, we got aboard these Q-Boats, went over past the tip of Korea over on the Eastern Shore, then they discovered that the harbors were mined. Wanson, Anhong were all mined. So we went back for almost seven days. With all that food we had stolen we were down to one meal a day. Eating cornflakes and dried milk and whatever we had taken from them. The Japanese crew had plenty of rice and they shared it with us. There were about 80 to 100 aboard each LST, maybe more. When we got off the LST at Hamhong, we were ready to go to war because we were angry, because we were hungry. But they were there to meet us, we got a lot of catcalls from the army and the Air Force because Bob Hope and been there three days before, so there really wasn't any resistance to the landing. There we just boarded trains and went inland as far as we could, we took trucks into a little town called Maejine, which was the hub of the transportation network, the roads all met there. We blocked the road, the entire battalion was there the North Koreans came in everyday by the truck load and surrendered , we had them in a compound, but we just couldn't keep them, there were hundreds of them. Some of them had thrown away their weapons, we interrogated them and learned they were soldiers, we put them on these large trucks and put them in squatting positions and wired their hands together with the only wire we had, COM wire so they couldn't jump off. We put the canvas over them real tight, so the truck wasn't up real high. We had captured some women , one or two per convoy. We sent them back to the beach , where prisoners would be interrogated and sorted out, Very rarely would we get them all back to the beach, because we were attacked by North Koreans, who would shoot up the truck and kill their own people. At this time I had a friend who shot a North Korean officer off of his horse, this was the first report of them using cavalry. My friend Jack Dunn shot him right off from 500 yards. So we drove them off but it was kind of a mess because one of the trucks went off the road and we were trying to get the wounded out of that truck, got the dead, and pulled out of there as fast as we could. We couldn't find two or three of our marines and we hardly ever leave anybody behind but sometimes you can't do anything about it. They came back the next day with a reinforced platoon and a tank and found our dead who had been mutilated by the North Korea, Brady had a Purple Heart in the back of his pack that he had been awarded around Thanksgiving, they had pinned it to his tongue, they put mascara in improper places, kind of made us a little angry, so we weren't too kind too them, as I said we had women, we never got any of them out alive, they either got trampled by their own people or killed in the convoy. I guess the soldiers thought they were doing them a favor, and they were North Korean Women soldiers

After that, we pulled out the entire battalion, we had taken a thousand prisoners of war, we then started out to the Chosin Reservoir. It was a long winding road up, and it was getting

colder by the minute We got up to the top of this plane and it was little plain with two mountain peaks on top of it, what the elevation was I don't know, there was a small stream going through this plateau, railroad and then a berm with a road on it. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> were on the left flank of the Chosin Reservoir and the army was on the right flank, we were the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion and George Company was the last one up there and we came up and we were at the top of the plateau, which was called Koto-Ri, there was one Battalion at Koto-Ri, there was another below guarding the road and the third Battalion, our battalion was supposed to be at Hagaru, eleven miles away. So we were going to go in to reinforce Hagaru-Ri, and we jumped off in the assault the next morning, we took the first ridge line, took the second ridge line and there were plenty of North Korean out there, and my platoon sergeant Jerry Tillman, got shot, by two rounds right in the skull, he was dead but he didn't know it he was gurgling, we pulled him down, brought him to the liter bearers and we got the Chaplin, he wanted to give him last rights and wouldn't let him do it, I knew he was going to live, in my heart I knew Jerry was dead but I just couldn't.... it just bothered my quite a bit. So I went back up to the ridge and the North Koreans were out the quite a ways and we saw a bunker where they were and our First Sergeant Rocko Zulo got a 3.5 Rocket Launcher and he just stood up and fired a round and it was about 700 yards and he popped that damn bunker and they came out of the bunker, I could see them through my telescope, but the Chinese, we didn't realize they were Chinese at the time, had a 6x6 white ground cloth, and they would put it over their heads and because the ground was covered with snow you couldn't see the, but their mistake was when they stood up it just this black square and you knew there was a Chinaman on the inside, so it was just wonderful shooting, just a great day, I was knocking them down left and right, just got tired of shooting them it was so easy, we decided we spent enough time up there and they pulled us off. When we got down, there were almost 100 trucks in that convoy going to what was later called Hellfire Valley .One of the other elements that was on that was the Four One Independent Royal Marine Commando .Their leader of their unit was a Lieutenant Colonel. Our regimental commander who was colonel decided that Lieutenant Colonel Douglas Driesdale would be the convoy commander. He was in charge and it became task force Driesdale with a Royal Marine in charge of American soldiers. That was the second time we had fought side by side with the Royal Marines against the Chinese. But it was one of the first times in history that I can remember that we were led by a foreign officer. He was a competent officer, really great the commandos were fantastic doing their job; they were great people. We also had an Army unit with us which was B Company of the 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry. They had turned around when we met so much resistance after we launched off... we were less than half a mile out of Koto-Ri you could see the CP back there and the Chinese were running up on the road and putting roadblocks behind us but once we turned the vehicles around and were going to go back because there was too much resistance, then we got the word to turn them around again. We were heading back toward Hagaru-Ri and the word was that we had not been told to turn around that the division commander had said to get to Hagaru at all costs. So the marines and Royal marines turned around but the Army did not turn around. We had also amongst us a large portion of Headquarter battalion of the First Green Division, General Smith's staff and a lot of

his officers. There was a Lieutenant Colonel there amongst them and several captains and majors but we didn't know anything about their rank and they just stayed low though one of them could have been in charge. They didn't turn around. We busted through; they stopped and stayed there overnight and surrendered the next morning. Some of the commandos had escaped and got through to us but we made the 11 miles, fought every step of the way with Chinamen running up to the truck. We were shooting them right in the face. It was a really tough stretch – Hellfire Valley. We had started out at 9 AM and made the 11 miles to Hagaru by 1 the next morning. Most of Four one Company was with us and all of George Company but none of the Army Bravo Company (31<sup>st</sup> Infantry) was there and very few of Headquarters' Battalion was there; they all stopped and surrendered. We made it through and spent the night in Hagaru-Ri got a little sleep and the next morning we assaulted what they called East Hill. My company commander was a man named Carl L. Sitter. He led us through those 11 miles and I saw him all the time every time we stopped I saw him. We took the assault to take this hill, a key element of geography, blocking everything coming in or out to Hagaru-Ri. It had open fire on the air strip they were building and both roads coming in; it just was a key critical terrain factor and we had to take it. The night before the battalion executive officer had gone up there with a makeshift company of marines from headquarters and they surrounded Hagaru-Ri but they couldn't hold it. But for his efforts, Bruce Myers got the medal of honor. So Captain Sitter took us up there; we got to the top. We were spread pretty thin; we had a lot of casualties from the day before, squads were down to maybe 4 men out of 12 or 13 men. We did the best that we could stretched so thin. That night we heard the bugles so we put some illumination up and small arms fired and the mortar fire started. We could see down into this little draw, the Chinese were coming 8 men abreast, shoulder to shoulder maybe 2 to 3 deep; they were just coming in little clumps. So it was very easy to shoot at these clumps unless there was no illumination then they just kept on coming. During this battle we got reinforcements; we got three South Korean soldiers who were draftees or just farm boys with no training whatsoever. They didn't no how to work a rifle so immediately put them to work digging a hole. The concrete was frozen; it was 30 below 0. There were all kinds of exaggerations about what the temperature was some said as much as 70 but I didn't believe that. But it surely was so cold that every bone in your body hurt. You couldn't eat or drink. It was painful. Water was frozen in the canteens; you would break off a piece of chicken and vegetables put it in your mouth and hope it would thaw. The core men put their morphine in their mouths hoping they would thaw or in their armpits wherever so that they could use them. It was a hell of a fight; I was wounded at about 2 o'clock in the morning I was firing down the ridge as they were coming and I rolled over, my 03 telescope rifle was of no value at that point in the dark. I had acquired an M1 carbine, a 30 caliber, that had a 30 round magazine in it and I was just firing away with that. And the Chinese started running through us on the flank where we were lightly defended. They were coming at us from the front as well. I rolled over off the hill and sat up and was loading the clips putting more ammunition in my magazine when I took a bullet to the bottom of my foot and it came out the ankle because they had overrun us and now they were coming back out. And they were shooting us, they all had Thomson submachine



guns, 45 caliber Submachine Guns, from Lend-Lease I think, we decided to arm Chang Kai-Shek in China, give him all kinds of weapons in World War II, the weapon of opportunity was the 45 caliber submachine gun, they maybe only had one man carrying a gun but they had four or five carrying magazines for him. So I started down because I couldn't, couldn't move, some marine that had had his arm pretty badly shot off, grabbed me by the collar of my parka, it was like a Toboggan going downhill because It's all full of snow. When he let me go I went "clunk" right into the railroad tracks, men at the bottom picked me up and threw me into a cheap trailer, took me to the aid station, an old barn. They had just moved out the livestock, just oaken slats, a primitive shelter, keep the snow and rain off the animals, but no protection from the wind, I got a shot of morphine, they gave me and blanket and took my weapons, my .03 was still hanging on top of the hill on a tree branch, it's probably in some Chinese Museum. They gave us some hot coffee in the morning, and water for soup, they didn't have much food, later on they got some powdered eggs and made some scrambled eggs and soup, all of a sudden these army folks started coming in, we only had one stove as big as this room, and they just came in and crowded around the heaters, they didn't appear to be wounded, and one of their medical officers through them out. Then the naval officers started crowding around in there, these were the task force from the other side, they left their wounded and dead, they just boogied out of there. While this was happening there were some Marines lying unconscious, I saw some army soldiers go up to them, take their tag, attach it to their collar, go out and get on an airplane. A lot of them did that until they wised up, but they couldn't carry us out because the planes were filled with these army people who were not wounded at all, they might have had frostbite, but they were just cowards who ran away and left their people, and to this day I have no respect for them. After two days in the aid station, a corpsman came in and said the Marines were finally going to retreat, that was typical sailor jargon, we were going to fight in a new direction. We coming out with everything we had, bringing our dead, our wounded, all the equipment, they had to burn some tents we didn't need. I crawled outside to see what the hell was going on, I saw the airplane pilots standing out there, and the corpsman just said to me "go ahead, jist get on the airplane." They helped me up, onto the C-47, I got on a litter, they tied me down, and a Marine Master Sergeant came on board with a cigar in mouth and he said, "this is my aircraft, I'm the pilot, and there will be no smoking on my aircraft" and he walked up and got in the pilot seat, he was one the old Marine Corps pilots, he knew what he was doing. He was just joking about the no smoking, we lit up right away, the navy and army nurses were onboard, right in the middle of it with small arms fire coming down. I was evacuated to a medical evacuation hospital, spent a day there and started to thaw out a bit. I had my first bowel movement in about four days, you just couldn't do that in the cold, you could barely urinate, it took an act of heroism to take your pants down and do something like that. I was evacuated to a naval hospital in Japan, spent some time there, Christmas and New Years, and in February I was taken back to the United States, hopping from California to Texas, ending up in St. Aldon's Medical Hospital in Long Island, where I stayed for about a year and a half, the wound had shattered my Metatarsus and the bone above it, so I took quite a bit of healing. The last surgery, I wore a Shoe Pack which was like something from

L.L. Bean, rubber on the bottom, leather all the way up. It was useless, because it was 30 below, the blood in my foot froze immediately, so I didn't bleed that much, In the bottom of the Shoe Pack , there was a horsehair insert, like a doctor Scholls, insert, and that was a little barrier to keep away the cold but it wasn't very effective. The last surgery they took a big wad of horse hair out of my foot, it had been there for about a year and the wound would never heal, it just drained every few years. I went back to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, doing the same thing I'd done before, than I went to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division in Camp LeJeune again on Infantry company, Dog Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 6<sup>th</sup> Marines, and from there I was ordered to Paris Island, and I did a couple years on the drill field as a drill instructor. Back in the hospital, after that I went to the Third Marine Division in Japan, I've done a little embassy duty, I did a little ROTC Naval Officers Training at the University of Pennsylvania and went back to Vietnam in '65, there was a Master Sergeant and I was working in the operations center of the an Infantry Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. I was commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, I went to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, and instead of being operations chiefs , I became assistant operations officer S3 and at 17 as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant the epitome of my success, I actually became to the operations officer S3 of an Infantry Battalion in the Field, in Combat. That was not a job for a second Lieutenant, but I did the best I could and that was enough.

WC: So I heard you earned two Bronze Stars, do you mind saying how you got those.

GP: Yeah my first Bronze Star, I got from Street Fighting in Seoul, we came upon an elevated train with a tunnel underneath it and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, George Company went through this tunnel and they were ambushed and one of our squad leaders had been shot and Jack Dunn, got a silver star, for a one hand operation of a BAR, took on the ambush all by himself, with the pressure on the second platoon we tried to sneak around and take pressure off that way. We came to a pea patch with a Machine Gun and they were just knocking the hell out of us and I figured I could run around and take that out, I had several grenades, so I ran around and right there smack in the middle of the path was a North Korean Soldier, who stood up and fired he had a white shirt on, and would fire a round and drop back down into his hole. The first shot ricocheted off of the ground and hit me right in the forehead , below the helmet close to the nose, it knocked me down, I thought I was dead. It was a hell of a bump and I felt around the back of my head and there was no blood and I reached up and felt the blood on my face and realized there was no hole and I was still alive. So I crawled into the cover and scoped up, saw the top of his hair and blew him out of his hole. So I killed the guy that shot me, and figured this was as good a spot as any, pulled the pin on my grenade, let the spoon fly and I saw them right there, it was a perfect pitch, they were that close, right into the machine gun nest, it blew up and at that time the platoon sergeant told me we were going back. So I went back to the lines and there was a machine gunner, Calvin New was his name, who hadn't kept his head down. Well Calvin got shot right through the lip, through the roof of his mouth and out through the back of his head, and you just can't image the blood that would come out from a head wound, and he was still on his hands and knees, so I lowered him down , and we all had these wool sweaters, very warm, we cherished

them. I could see that Calvin was going into shock so I took a knife out of my boot, bundled up my shirt and started cutting his sweater and I could see him say, “no, no, no not my sweater, not my sweater.” He was worried about his sweater. Here the man was ready to die, so I cut it off and tied it around his head and lip as a bandage. And here he was, dead weight, but the adrenaline was pumping so I picked him up, put him in a firemans carry and ran back, and they were shooting at us of course, no machine gun fire though, and I felt Calvin get hit again. As soon as I got over the railroad tracks I let him go and a couple of Corpsman took him and the end of the story was Thirty Five Years later I met Calvin New, I saved Calvin New’s Life, and the first thing he says is, “you son of a bitch, you broke my neck when you threw me down!” (both laugh) I couldn’t get over that .

I got my Second Star in Vietnam as a Second Lieutenant, we had a patrol out and the tactic was to ambush the patrol, and it was a headquarters company patrol. The patrols were spread so thin, there were miles and miles between companies that we just couldn’t cover. So we took some people from H and S, and they were out there taking small arms fire, with wounded. The reaction force was everybody in the camp that wasn’t on watch and we would go and rescue them. The method was to get in the truck and drive down the road, get them and put them in the truck. The North Vietnamese knew this so they would just spring the ambush and then wait for the truck and then ambush that too. My Battalion commander was a Lt. Colonel, we called him Buzzsaw behind his back, he had a unique idea, he was going to swim down the river with two landing vehicle tractors which we had assigned to us and swing around behind and get that squad out. So I formed up the reaction force, as I said they were all H and S company people, and they didn’t believe in carrying a full unit of fire, 100 rounds or magazines, and we they were a little light, we didn’t have grenades or anything. So, the first thing you do when you got out on patrol is you inspect your patrol, and the Battalion commander didn’t say anything, so even through time was of the essence, those boys out there were getting hurt, I sent them back to get a full unit of fire. The commandant of the people that were out there was jumping up and down mad because I wouldn’t go right away. We swam down, I got them on radio, they had no compass, they didn’t know where they were going. They couldn’t read the map properly, I was trying to get them to walk towards the sun, and we were down in the water and they were up high so I said pick a spot to your right and just start walking and sure enough there they popped up on the ridge line and I said” ok I can see you now, can you see me?” “No.” “Okay come a little further.” They could finally see us so I said “okay come on down.” So they came down, there was no way we could get in close to the beach because it was the Song Trabong River and it was mostly silt and the tractors couldn’t get through that silt. So I told them to come down and there were a bunch of little coconut and palm branch boats that the Vietnamese would use, there was nobody living there, so it was probably what the Viet Cong would use at night to visit their wives and girlfriends. I told them to get into them and they paddled out by hand, and I took my Thompson Submachine Gun and I sunk the boat they came out in and we swam on back. We took the patrol below deck and got them checked out. I took the reaction forces and said go on back to your assigned duties and I took off my flak vest and I turned around and started walking away and I

heard one of them say, “God Dammit! He’s only a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant; I thought he was a Gunnery Sergeant. If I’d of known he was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant I’d never would have gone out there.” Now I could have gone back there and talked to him but I thought it was hilarious having spent 30 years as an enlisted man, having every rank, I thought it was funny. Every time after that they went out with a full unit of fire.

WC: Hold on a minute I’m going to change tapes. Okay we are rolling.

GP: I mentioned Saipan and half of the 45 as soon as I got back I went to the Colonel and gave him a verbal report. A short while later he came up to me and asked why I cut that boat in half with the 45 Thompson sub-machine gun. I said because it didn’t belong there and we probably didn’t use but a VC and I didn’t want them to have it. The bells went off inside my head he had gotten a report from someone in the troop about what I had done and how I had handled myself. I thought it was odd that they would do something like that.

So the bronze star that I got...I was also a combine action company, we had a squad of marines in a village with popular forces these were South Vietnamese that we had trained how to go out on patrols with us and run ambushes with us and how to fire a weapon. They also had these popular forces (PF’s) regional people and they would come with their own platoon leader. There were a whole mob of people, Vietnamese, all armed to the teeth and I really didn’t have a good feeling and you didn’t know how it would go. So one of my jobs was to round them all up and take them back to district headquarters and then from district take them on up to province headquarters Quang Hi Province. They weren’t doing too well in combat or in operations. They were a motley bunch and... the vehicle in front of us hit a mine and we went around them as fast as we could and I just barreled out. But I thought if we ever got hit and had to get out of our vehicles...I had about 10 marines with me and about 100 of these PF’s in 4 different trucks...that we could probably expect some fire from our own PF’s right on us so I got them there as fast as I could. That and a few other reaction situations that I took out combined got me a bronze star. The colonel after he told me about chopping up the boat with the Thompson told me, “get rid of that Thompson I don’t ever want to see it again”. So I made sure he never saw it again but I didn’t get rid of it. After my tour in Vietnam, I came back and went to Quantico and I was training the young Lieutenants at the basic school, college graduates that were going to become Marine Corps Officers, how to shoot and qualify with a pistol. I was a range officer and I did remarkably well with the young Lieutenants. I had a 98% qualification record with them. I walked them through everything and they understood. One of the 2% who didn’t qualify was General Chesty Puller’s son, Louis Burwell Puller Jr., and he came to me after completing the rifle range and he did not qualify with the M14 rifle and that is a bad mark if a Lieutenant can’t qualify with a weapon if he is going to be a troop leader. I got him on the pistol and he was just doing the same thing. He was just trying too hard. He was trying to do as good as his father and there is no man alive who could do as good as chesty could. I worked on him after the other Lieutenants left with the other X troops in the 2% and I would have them shoot within feet of the target and start moving them back to 15 yards, 25 yards, making a little bit of progress trying to

get him to settle down. I wasn't successful. He did not qualify with a pistol. He went over to Vietnam panicked a little stepped on a land mine blowing both of his legs off at the hip, blew his arm off. Poor young Puller, finally committed suicide. Also at Quantico I went to the Marine Corp Reserve Training Center and helped write and update manuals for the reservists. After Quantico, I had 22 years in the Marine Corp and I asked for my twilight cruise. My last cruise in the Marine Corp would be in Albany, NY at the Marine reserve training center on Washington and North Main. The Vietnam War was still going on; it was the 70's. My duty was to notify families if their sons had been killed in action or seriously wounded. I covered Plattsburgh down to Newburgh and as far west as Cooperstown. I arranged all the funerals and took care of the paperwork to resolve insurance and death benefits. I did that until I retired from the Marine Corp in January of 1971.

WC: How old were you when you retired?

GP: I was 41 years old. But I might also add that I was a 40 year old Second Lieutenant and they usually are about 20 years old. So my colonel called me a mature Second Lieutenant. Why did you go back from being a Master Sergeant to being a Lieutenant people would ask me and I said because I could talk back to officers if I was a Second Lieutenant (laughs). There was this Captain, who should never have been a Marine, I was a liaison officer with the Korean Marines and I'd call back to the Colonel and say "Delta-6 says he's at Objective B but he's nowhere near it and I can see objective B and he's not there." I talked back to that guy quite a bit. I could get away with it because they would go to the Colonel and say "Sir, Lieutenant Pendas was disrespectful with me and spoke in an insubordinate manner." And Buzz would put his hands on his shoulders and say "Captain, you have to understand, Pendas is a mature 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant" (laughs)

WC: What was your favorite weapon?

GP: That Thompson Submachine gun was my favorite weapon. When the battalion went out in the field, and the battalion went out for 30 or more days, you couldn't carry that thing around because it was heavy, about 4 or 5 pounds. But if you're just going in a vehicle or short distance, that was my favorite weapon. I couldn't get near a rifle to try and be a sniper or anything because some officers always who had been snipers always wanted to get their rifle back and we were leaders and we couldn't just be out there shooting. The Thompson... I had seven combined action companies, all spread out over the Palinsong, the Song Trabong Peninsula, Able Company, Baker Company, Charlie Company, Dog Company and we had a couple of other ones. The only day I got to inspect them was when the Battalion Commander made me the PF Training officer. He gave me this job so I could go in there and not look like a spy and I could go in there and find out what was going on and tell my Battalion Commander if the parent company was taking care of them or not. I could only inspect on a Sunday because that was the only time I had a vehicle. The only other guy who went with me was our Chaplain, we would go down to the ferry because that was the only way we could get off the island. We'd take two jeeps and I'd go my way and

he'd go his. He held mass for the rifle companies and the Battalion and I'd go and check on my combined action people. I found out later, that my friend Father Cappagano had been declared A Servant of God at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C, which is the first step on the path to Sainthood, I hope I live to see that happen. I was in Louisiana and the Archbishop and I were talking about Cappagano, and I said he might look down on Sainthood, and he jumped out of his thrones and said, "what do you mean by that?" And I already said Father Cappagano was already an Angel and Saint was just a man-made position. I really believe that he was an Angel, because he was right out there with his men, giving them their last rights regardless of the circumstances, and he died out there. The Colonel didn't want him out there this one time, but he finagled his way out there anyway. It was raining and this creek that we had to cross had swollen up, become a fast moving river, and they had linked arm to cross but the chain had broken and two Marines had gotten swept down, and you have to realize that there were trees and everything underwater. So two Marine drowned, so I sent a message to the Colonel and Cappagano came walking over and asked what was happening and I said what was happening and he asked where they were at and I said they were that way about two clicks, about 2 miles, and off he went. I'm not going to tell him he can't go. Maybe two hours later he comes back, through the mist, leading a trail of marines back. They had ripped the doors off of some houses and they had the dead Marines on the doors on their shoulders and there are 6 Marines carrying each dead Marine and just the mist and everything and Father Cappagano coming out of it like that to me it was like a miracle- how we found them is beyond my comprehension. He might have had divine guidance but he found them. He was a remarkable man. We shared a tent together while we were building a chapel. He was a great fellow and a good friend of mine.

WC: What did you do after you retired in 1971?

GP: It was bad times. The Vietnam War was still going on and SUNY was having protests and the local TV stations would set up their cameras in front of the Marine training unit hoping the students would march down Washington Avenue and try and confront us. But they didn't. But it was bad times and a fellow by the name of Kerry from Massachusetts testified before a Congressional committee that most of the Vietnam Vets were drug addicts and they would kill women and children and they had raped... he just gave us a bad song. This guy had the balls to run for President so when I go to a job interview some 25 year old kid out of college asks me what my drug of choice was...or did I kill any women and children.. of course I wasn't very cool about it. I had commanded the whole infantry battalion back in Vietnam ,if only for 90 seconds still the whole thing, Some of the guys who came back in '71 '72 went underground growing long hair and beards but I didn't I was proud of what I had done and told people I was in Vietnam. I'd do it again. Marines go where they are sent to go they don't choose. but I could not get a good job. The only job I could get was with Fuller Brush Company up on Fuller Road. I went in and took a job as a machine operator. And I showed up for work at 6:30 the next morning. They showed me my machine and showed me what I would be doing. I picked up one block and they said stop and pulled me to the front...I didn't make one broom...and they said

you are going to be foreman of this area up in here. I had leadership experience. Those people realized it and within 6 months I was production manager. I had 6 or 7 departments I was manager of. That was the only job I could get until a want ad for operation manager at the Guilderland Central Schools. I applied and Mr. Charles Casho was the principal of the High School and I'd be working with him. Chuck Casho was a Navy coreman and a WWII vet. So we got off to a good start and I got the job. I served there for 4 years as the operations manager. It involved the jobs the principal didn't want to take care of the insurance, report cards as he was too busy with other things. The enrollment rates started to drop down and they only wanted Guilderland residents working for the school so I lost my job at the High School and took a part time job at the bus garage in maintenance. I took the GI Bill and went back to Hudson valley. One of my jobs in the Marine Corps was an ROTC Unit at the University of Pennsylvania, and one of the captains I had saved, his military career, saw me and brought me in as the gunner sergeant for the ROTC at the University of Pennsylvania, his name was Earl "Papi" DeLong and he said "You're going to school Gunny!" and I said "No, I'm not sir, I didn't finish Highschool." So he enrolled me in the College of General Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and I managed to get an Associate of Arts Degree. Thanks to him, he got me started. By that time I'd picked up the Highschool Equivalency, I worked at Barker City Schools in Barker New York. I decided to back to Hudson Valley, to get another degree, and now I had some Credentials in construction and things of that nature. I was hired by the Rensselaer City School District as the Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds. Until they wanted someone from their city in that position. It became a very political job. Went to work for the post office, retired from the post office. Now, I do a little hunting and fishing, and have the best of both worlds. I have a little cabin in Texas where I spend my winters so I don't have to look at snow, because I can't take the cold anymore. I spend my summers here in New York, after Election day we head back down to Texas. I have a little cabin up on Lake Champlain, I have everything I want, just need the time to enjoy.

WC: Have you stayed in contact with the people you were in the Marine Corps with?

GP: Yes, we have an association called the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division Association, I joined them some 30 odd years ago, and they asked me to be on the Scholarship Committee, and they gather up funds and we were able to raise about \$1.5 and we put about 300 some odd kids through college. That's not a big number, but we're proud of what we've. I relieved him the Chairman, Admiral Hanes, when I resigned and I did that for twelve years and raised the stipened to \$7000 per student. It's not a lot but it helps, and we've helped the dependents of military casualties get through school. I was in that for twelve years, I was elected President and I just left in 2007. The World War II and Korea guys are dying of so we're down to 11,500 members, but we're trying to expand and do good.

WC: Well thank you very much for your interview.