Edward P. Curley (EPC)
Veteran

Interviewer: Dominick Favata (I)
Videographer: Andrew Marucci
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I: Today is Monday, November 25, 2002. We're going to be interviewing Mr. Edward P. Curley of the US Army who is a Korean War veteran. Where were you born?
EPC: Chicago, IL.

I: Where did you attend school?
EPC: Rome Free Academy. All Rome schools.

I: Now it says that you entered the service in April of 1950. The war did not begin until late June of that year. Why did you choose to enlist in the Army?
EPC: Well, I was going to get drafted anyhow. So, I said, "I may as well, you know, draft for two years." I said, "I'll just enlist." It was RA all the way. There's a difference.

I: Did you realize that a war in Korea was taking place and that US forces would be required?
EPC: Well, I'll tell you how we realized it. We went in in April of 1950, all of us. We're halfway through basic training. And a little Sergeant, our field first, Sergeant Smith, who later was killed and received a Distinguished Service Cross, he got up and he said, "You little SOBs are going to listen now." That's the kind of way they talk to us. He said, "You little SOBs are going to listen now because war just broke out." We went… [Sits up at attention.] He said, "War in Korea." We all go, "Where's Korea, where's Korea?" I kind of knew it was near Japan, but I didn't quite know where it was. Because I spent a lot of time in the library and I said, "I think it's off Japan." So, we ran back to… They took us and said, "Go get your gear together. We're going to move out." We thought they were going to send us to Korea. Well, the Army in their strange ways took us to the fields and camped us for two weeks and that's how we found out and then we looked it up and we saw where Korea was. He said, "You're all going to war. You're going to ship out tonight." We're only halfway through basic. That scared us a little bit.

I: After enlistment, when did you receive your basic training?
EPC: From April of 1950 to August. It was over in August.

I: Where was this?
EPC: Fort Dix. Sixteen weeks.

I: I'm not exactly sure what the signal corps was – I would assume it has something to do with battlefield communications. Can you explain this?
EPC: You saw the picture?

I: You want to show that to the camera – the picture?
EPC: This is the signal corps. [Holds up photo]

I: And then you can show the other. [Holds up another photo.]
EPC: That's what we did [points to pole in photo]. But we built the pole lines too. We didn't climb the poles. Pole lines had to be built first. Sounds easy, doesn't it. How 'bout dragging that pole a quarter mile across the fields and then setting it in the ground because you couldn't get any vehicles in there.

I: So, did you choose this branch of the Army or were you assigned to it?
EPC: I chose it because I had worked part time for the telephone company in Rome. You had an opportunity to enlist in your MOS. Was it MOS? Military Occupation…

I: Yes. It's MOS.
EPC: MOS.

I: I'm not sure what the acronym stands for - I know that's what it is.
EPC: Military occupation service.

I: Service. Yes. We know what it means. When did you actually arrive in Korea?
EPC: January 1951. Spent Christmas and New Year's on the boat. Let me tell you this. You won't believe this, boys. You ready? On the boat they passed out Christmas presents to the troops on the boat. So, we're standing on line. There's 3500 of us on the boat. I don't know if you've ever been on a troopship. On guy sleeps here, the next guy sleeps here, the next guy sleeps here [moves arm up wall each time about 2 feet apart], eight of them. Now people get seasick on boats. I don't have to tell you any more than that do I? In your bunk you can't put your knees up and that's troop ship. Three weeks. One week, we weren't allowed on deck because in the North Pacific they have winter storms. We would stand by a little door, open like this [spread thumb and index finger about an inch] and you'd have one minute and the Sergeant would be there and give you one minute to breathe fresh air. The line was this long [holds out arm]. There was probably 500 in line. And the door was… My bunk was there and the door was right there. So, I was kind of fortunate and I got a little air. Well, anyhow in line on Christmas Eve they passed out these presents from the Red Cross. You're not going to believe this, you've got to remember the Red Cross has chapters in every city in the US and every state, right? I'm from Rome, NY, right? The present I get is from Rome, NY. Mrs. Ralston, who was my best friend's mother, and my friend got one from Utica, NY. And I look at it and I go, "Whoa!" To think that didn't choke me up a little bit. When I came back, I went over and saw them with my friend and I told her that her energies were not in vain when I was on the troop ship. From Rome, NY. Now what's the chances of that? I mean I'm just going through the line, another soldier, you know. That's weird, isn't it? I'm telling you I went up on the deck and I choked back a few tears. It's hard to believe and it sounds like malarkey but, when you stop and think about it, you know. And plus, we thought we were going over to get killed because the Chinese had broken through in November 1950, so they were saying this outfit wiped out, wiped out, wiped out, wiped out. That's what happened to my friends. I went to signal school but they all went to advanced basic and then they went… There were only two of us out of the company that went to school. One went to OCS and I went to signal school. The rest of them all went over as infantry. The first, I met him later. On the first night they got on the line, the Chinese hit them about 20:1.

I: Well, while you were in Korea, could you describe the conditions under which you served, like the weather.
EPC: From the first winter I got there in January 1950, it was 25 below in the tent. In the tent. And then in the summer, they could grow cotton, so it could be 100 degrees in the summer. That's how the weather went. They really didn't have a really spring or a fall, it just went quick. I spent two winters there.

I: When you did arrive in Korea, what was the condition of the [unclear] and South Korean forces at the time?
EPC: There was no front line. There was no front line. The Army had driven up through North Korea and then the Chinese attacked and then they were driven back to around the 38th parallel. When I got there, we went into a Marine regiment and you know how the old covered wagons used to park their wagons in a circle to keep the Indians off? Well, the Marines put their tanks like that. Only they had this much space between the tanks with a guard on each one, so nobody's going to get in that compound. So, we were very happy because we lived in the middle of that compound. So, I wouldn't be here today except for the US Marines. I wouldn't be here today. So, we, because the North Koreans were all around there. But the Marines were so efficient and so effective that they went out every day and we used to go and watch them, you know like you go watch a football game? Well, we had to go out and do their lines. And all the time I was in the military, was the only people that came and thanked us was the Marines. And I was with ten different divisions. They were the only ones that came in and said, "You guys are doing a great job," and they gave us a case of Hershey bars. There's only 12 of us. There's 3500 Marines. And they invited us into their warmup tents and they fed us. You know when you went in the Army, we would sit in our tent and we'd eat C-rations that were frozen, you know.

I: Pork and beans.
EPC: Yeah. It's frozen. You'd sleep with the cans to get it warm so you could eat it for meals. But the Marines had warmup tents and they invited us in. "How do you want your eggs?" "How do you want your steak?" I go, "Steak, eggs?" "How many eggs you want – how do you want them?" There's an officer standing right there. "Hey, Army, how are you? How many eggs you want?" "How many? 15." "Five." "How do you want your steak? How many steaks you want? Hey Army, you're doing a good job." There are the guys that just came back from the reservoir that had been cut off. There were 100,000. The Chinese cut off 15,000 Marines. The Marines said "Retreat, hell. We're just advancing in another direction." And they brought their wounded out. They brought their dead out. They brought all their equipment out. I don't know how they did it.

I: Now the unit you were assigned to was the signal corps? That was your unit?
EPC: Full line construction, yes. I was into a full line construction. I would have been trained for install and repair. That's supposed to be in the rear echelon like Eighth Army headquarters, you know, like running telephone lines here. They put me in an outfit that did pole line construction. The pole line's not constructed yet. We had to construct it. Then you put the wire on it. There's a big difference.

I: Could you tell me about some of the men you served with in the unit, like people that you remember?

EPC: There's an article in here about one guy that really sticks to my mind but most of them stick to my mind. They were regular Army guys. I wrote an article about it. I tried to fit in. I was the first replacement – that guy came in the outfit. Now I don't know whether you know this, but the first replacement in the outfit and they'd been together for two to three years in Japan, so they were all buddied up. The first replacement gets all the details. And I was a private and for the first six months, I got all the details. Now I didn't go without voicing my disappointment in the military. However, the more I voiced, the more details I got because, in the military, your Sergeant is your mother, your father, your protector, your supplier. He feeds you. He's everything… We had an old sergeant, an old WWII guy, ended up, him and I good friends, but in the beginning... So, I served with wonderful people and finally I broke in and I became part of it, but it took about six months. Very, very hard. Very hard.

I: Were you ever on the front lines in combat, or before, as you said, there were no front lines?
EPC: There were no front lines. Well, we were supposed to be, usually a signal corps running the wires for infantry and like that, be between the artillery and the infantry, but we were attached to so many different outfits that it was going around us all the time. I remember one time I went up on a pole and they'd shoot at us all the time. We're predictable in the military. They would go and cut our lines and then us dummies would go climb the poles, fix the line and then they would wait over there, you know and they'd cut it that night. And then we'd go out. We'd fix the line and then they'd snipe at us and we had guys on the ground. They'd say, "Spray over there, John. They'll go up quick and bail out." The closest I ever had was the first round went maybe about from here [points in front] to the ceiling, the second round went about here [raises arm all the way] and the third one, "chchchhh" when it goes 'chchchhh", that's close because the guy on the ground had been a Marine and had been on Iwo Jima and all the battles and he said, "Those are close. The second one's close." I said, "Yeah, well I almost got it." You know, I said, "I almost got it. They can't hit anything anyhow." They did hit some of us, but very rare. Very rare. Without [unclear]. So, I said, "I almost got it." And when you're 21, nobody's going to shoot you anyhow. They're not going to shoot you. So, I said, "I've almost got it," and I laid out over it and I said, "Okay, I got it," and then I went back like this [raise arm] and the next one… I went, he said, "Get off that [unclear]." I bailed out. About four jumps, I was down. So, he said, "It's your call. Do you want to go get him?" So, about 15 of us went over and looked. It was only about 100 yards away. It was in Taejon. It was all rubble. He said, "It's your call. You want to go get him?" I said, "Yes, I want to go get him. Yeah, let's go get him." So, we went over and searched and searched for him. He said, "You want to kill him?" I said, "We'll see." He said, "It's your call. You know, this little Marine, he was our assistant." I said, "We'll see, we'll see. Let's get him." I don't know whether I would have killed him or not. Probably would have beat him up pretty good, taken him, put him in a…These other guys probably would have. You don't know. I would guess they would have.

I: [Unclear]
EPC: I would guess they would have. But I don't think I would have, but who knows, maybe I would have. And so, we went and looked and looked. We never found him. He must have been down… But we maybe spent five minutes. You're going to go to the next pole. They're going to shoot at you again.

I: Obviously, you must have been frightened while you were in Korea. Were there any other feelings associated with it?
EPC: Well, of course you're… One time, they blew up an ammo dump right next door to us and blasted the hell out of it. It was only like here to the other side of the library – 50 yards. Could throw a football 50 yards, couldn't you? So, it was in the middle of the night, guys going out with their helmets on and their underwear. In this place, usually we slept in our clothes. I think about five months, we never had a bath. We slept in our clothes. January, February, March, April we never had a bath or a change of clothes. Now, nobody smelled, because we all smelled.

I: You're used to it.
EPC: So, you know, those things stick in your brain. The stuff flying all over the place. They had a machine gun sitting up on a bridge and they were firing on to here. But, there's a rule in the military. Don't let your buddy down. And the other thing is, even if you're scared, you can't let your buddy down. I was a loader on the machine gun. We had a 30-caliber and one of the guys was pretty good with it. He said, "You're going to be my loader." I said, "How did I get so lucky?" "You're going to be my loader." I said, "Okay, I'll be your loader." So, I [unclear]. I wasn't that good a shot, but this kid was good with it. You know, there's guys that are really special.

I: Well, the Marines especially.
EPC: I wasn't that great. Let me tell you how the Marines did it. Let me tell you how to watch a football game like the Marines. Watch them. They had a North Korean communist regiment cut off. The Marines were so efficient it was pathetic. They had them cut off and they had them in a valley. We were doing the lines out there, so we're up on the poles and could look down on the valley. So, one of the guys says, "You want to see how the Marines do it?" to me. I had been there about a month or so. I said, "Yes." "You should come out over here." So, I went over a couple of hills and went into this little ridge and it looked down into the valley about a half a mile away. They had Australian Canberra jets. They were a great big jet and the Australians would go in real low. I mean they'd lay that thing right here [points to floor]. Now, napalm will burn about 300 yards long and about 100 yards wide and everybody's dead in there. So, they would go in slow and they dropped the napalm here and the North Koreans were in their holes. Now, the Marine riflemen were in these pits and so the artillery was hitting them in the mortars but the napalm takes them out of the holes. So, they would go in low with the jets. I'll never forget it. I watched them for a week or so. In low like [unclear] the football games getting old. So, they'd come in and jets come in low and slow like this and they dropped that thing. They'd say, "Watch, right on the button," and they'd drop it right where those Chinese were in their holes. You could see their holes. And then the Chinese would get up and start running. And the North Koreans. They had two regiments cut off. It's written in that book, right there, that I gave you – that battle – not, the other one. Yes, it's written in that book. We won't go into that now. But, anyhow, they would get up and they'd be running like this and then the Marine rifleman [bends over and mimics shooting a rifle and makes shooting noise]. Riflemen never miss. Never miss. They're called professionals. And we said we loved the Marines, because when they bothered us, we would tell the Marines, our big brothers and by picking up the telephone …. See, they had aircraft carriers and marine pilots so they could call their own people in, not Army pilots, Marine pilots from the aircraft carriers and that was their job to circle over. Marines would pick up the phone and say, "Hey, flight 906 – we got 5,000, 2,500 gooks on that Hill 906." "Yes, we see Hill 906." See, they

got their map. Marines got their map. It's all put together and they'd say, "Give us some napalm and we'll give you some white phosphorus," so they'd hit it with artillery, white phosphorus, you'd see the white thing [motions blowing up with hands].

I: What exactly is phosphorus?
EPC: Phosphorus is an artillery shell that throws a lot of shrapnel, only the phosphorus, if it lands on your hand, will burn through it. If it lands on your uniform, it burns through it.

I: Didn't they use like disable machines like ether engines?
EPC: No, no, no, no, no. They used it on infantry. It was very, oh very effective. But the most effective was napalm. Phosphorus was just artillery shell. You could, if an artillery shell landed from here on the other side of the library, it would bounce you around a little bit but it wouldn't kill you. But phosphorus, one little piece got on your uniform, burn through it. But napalm was the most effective. You would find hundreds of them, not a dignified way to die. That was the way the Marines did it – very efficient. And I was going to tell you – if they bothered us, we'd tell the Marines and the Marines would say, "Where were they shooting at you?" We'd say, "Oh, on that hill over there." "609, this is Marine air station. We're going to give you a couple of white phosphorus on that hill over there. They're shooting at our buddies." So, they'd call in artillery, marine sharpshooters, and napalm. Big brothers. We'd say, "Hey, thanks, Marines." They'd go, "Okay signal."

I: Now, were you ever involved in the invasion at Inchon?
EPC: No. That happened in September of 1950. I didn't get there until January, but I'd been to Inchon and put lines in there many, many times. I saw the wall they went over. I've been in Seoul when they all… All of that I've been to.

I: Is it a torn-up city? All torn up and everything?
EPC: Very torn. Seoul was captured and retaken twice.

I: When did you hear that US forces had broken through at such a tragically important target?
EPC: Which one?

I: I was thinking about Inchon. Obviously, you weren't there before so…
EPC: [Unclear]

I: What was it like moving throughout the Korean peninsula as Communist forces were beginning to retreat?
EPC: Well, sometimes they would retreat and sometimes they wouldn't retreat and then our military would go past them and bypass them so they'd be there for a year and so they'd be sniping and shooting at us and all that. So, finally after we got stabilized – it took a year to get a front line. In Vietnam, they never had a front line because a front line was 1500 miles long, you couldn't have it. In Korea, it was only 125, after we'd stabilized it around the 38th parallel. But these people that were cut off in September of 1950 were there for about six or eight months. Just stayed right there because they were ordered by the… to harass us in the rear echelon. So then, UN goes past those and then we were driven back by the Chinese, but these people were still there, so we had to put pole lines down through there and they'd say, "Well, there's a lot of gooks on those

hills, you know." And they'd say, "We're going to come and get them," but they didn't come and get them for us. You know, one of these days. So, it took about a year. So, they were always, always, near, around nearby. But we had something that was wonderful. These guys, I loved them. They slept right next to me. Two Korean soldiers. They served with us. So, they would say, "[Unclear]." We'd say, "[Unclear]." [Unclear] meant Communist. They might wear the Korean farmer's clothes, but he could see the uniform underneath. So, Churro and Waygo, I wrote a story about them in there. They were [makes a-okay sign]. And of course, they spoke Korean, so we would capture these guys and they'd interrogate them. Guy says, "I'm from Seoul." And these guys had lived in Seoul. "Oh, you lived in Seoul, what street?" And they didn't know what street.

Now, I'm going to tell you another little story that's just not so good, to answer your questions. We had a couple of Indians, they were Navajos. They'd been in about ten years, two brothers. They worked at headquarters. They were drivers or something. But they had more… One carried a BAR and one carried a WWI Springfield and he had a scope on it. One was a corporal and the other one was a PFC. Now that was big in the Army, corporal was big within ten years. They were very tough boys and they're stoic Indians. Nobody got near, around or by them because they were, I guess they probably had been abused by somebody because they had their fists up all the time. And so, when they would capture some North Koreans, captured them all the time, and I'd say, "Give them to chief." Both had bandoliers of ammo and BARs and they looked like WW III, you know, these guys. They were serious. Well, number one, we had found a lot of our guys that had retreated with their hands tied behind their back. I can't tell you how many I found myself – 50 -100 maybe, hands tied behind their back with a hole right here [points to side of head] because the Communists, if you didn't keep up, that's the way the Orientals are – [snaps fingers]. Life is not worth much. So, the guys said "Eye for an eye, teeth for teeth," these Indians, especially. So, they would give them to the Indians. And then the guy said to me, first time I saw it, it sticks in my lobotomy… First time I saw it, they said, "Now just listen." I said, "Why – they are going to take them back?" "Yeah. But see just listen." I said, "Why?" "Two minutes, just listen." [Makes loud shooting noises.] Come back, "Chief, what happened?" "They tried to get away." Every time. Every time.

I: [Unclear].
EPC: Three words. Tried to get away. Sergeant said, "Chief, what happened?" "Tried to get away." I tried [unclear]. I never did it, but I know guys who did. But I never did it. I don't know. I never did and I'm kind of glad I never did. We didn't need to. We get the professionals – the Marines. We lost 55,000 men in Korea. That's how many were killed. We lost 55,000 men in WWI. We lost about 60,000 men in Vietnam, so it's easy for you guys to remember – all of them about the same. WWI, Korea, and Vietnam. And the only thing is there's 8,000 MIAs from Korea. See, it's the little guys that they… We would find their bodies and bones and tell Graves Registration. I would always tell Graves Registration or tell the Sergeant. I'd say, "Well, his mother wants to know, you know." I don't think his mother ever knew because he's way down in the gully somewhere. I was on a survey team, so I got to places nobody else got to. Go ahead.

I: While you were in Korea, did you believe that the unit's next move was into mainland China? From your information…

EPC: I've done a lot of reading since. MacArthur said that, I wrote an article on it. He said "Our diplomatics are always more successful with a military victory or two."

I: Weren't there rumors that we wanted to nuke all of China?
EPC: They said that some of the South Korean units crossed the Yalu River and went into China. I don't think they did. It's a big wide river. But the South Koreans were, they were a little wild. But I don't think they did. The Chinese had been in before we even got to the Yalu. They came in and they had fought and captured some Chinese in October of 1950 and September and so they had to take probably a month to march in so that was August or July they were coming in. So, it was right after the war started. They were kidding. But let me tell you this – guess how many Chinese and North Koreans we killed?

I: Hundreds and thousands. Millions. In the millions.
EPC: Probably half a million to a million.

I: The Chinese just came in like waves.
EPC: I did see one spot and I remember that the Marines, when they were burying them with bulldozers, it was 5,000, I think, I don't know how many.

I: Mass graves.
EPC: Well, you know. Then after June of 1951 when we had beat up the Chinese so badly, we could have taken all Korea again, but there was no reason to because then we'd have a front line 250 miles wide and we'd be up the Yula again. They'd send another million men down so it would have been see-saw. Well, we could of, general advance – if we'd walked right through them and our guys said, "Let's go get them." Cause they were coming down and giving up – guess who they were giving up to – a signal corps.

I: [Unclear].
EPC: You know Sergeant York captured the 125 Germans, right? He got the Congressional Medal of Honor and movies and everything. A signal… I probably captured myself 200 Chinese – come out of the bushes like this [puts hands up in air in surrender.] First, we're going like this [takes shooting position.] Chinese, Chinese, you know, then finally we're going, "Oh, come on, come on [waves over with hand]." One of the toughest kids we had was a kid from NYC, an Irish kid. Boy, he was a tough old soldier, he was. He said, "If I get any of those…" He was the kind that…He said, "I'll kill every one of those North Koreans." I mean he was mad, yeah. So many Chinese gave up to us signal corps guys that I will never forget it as long as I live because he was always [takes stance – ready to shoot.] He went over to them and they came over and they were all beat up and they were… The clothes were torn off. They were down like this [bends over and rocks.] "GI okay, GI okay. GI good. GI good." We go, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." He went over and gave them a cigarette and lit his cigarette. I said, "You, Castilla, you're giving them a cigarette. Look at the poor ...

I: Geez, I think I should join the Marines.
EPC: Well, I'll tell you something. Everybody changes, don't they? I mean they were pathetic. See what they did is and then we finally found this out afterwards. The Army's idea first was, hold the line, and General Van Fleet and Ridgway came over there and Ridgway said, "No, don't

hold the real estate. Let them earn the real estate and drop back little by little," because they would send ten to one, twenty to one. All they would have is bandoliers or ammo and a weapon and they'd have a rice bag around here [points to waist]. About three or four days, they'd shoot their weapons up and a lot of them were just drafted, conscripted, with a gun right out of the rice paddy, so they didn't have any training, you know. But, hordes and a lot of our regular Army had fought for 10-20 years, too, against the Japanese, so, it's a lot of difference, you know. But anyhow, they didn't have any supply. They didn't have any artillery and they didn't have any air. So, they just said, "There's the position and the Army's got that hill and they want to keep it." A mass 20 to 1. They get in close and throw grenades, at night, always at night. Always at night. Nothing ever happened because we had too much fire power. So, always at night. So, after 3 or 4 days we finally got smart enough and the General said, "Give them the territory, but drop back, drop back but keep hitting them with the artillery all the time." So, if you're hit… Now, to be under artillery fire is indescribable. It's indescribable. All I can tell you is the ground comes up and hits you in the face all the time, even if you're in a hole and the stuff is whizzing all over the place. Now the Chinese didn't have any artillery, but lots of times between the artillery and the infantry they'd have short rounds. It's our own, it's not anybody's fault. It's called the short rounds. It's manufactured with not enough powder. Short rounds. Short rounds killed many a man. And so, the signal would be between the two and the stuff's going over and a short round come in. Boom, boom. The next thing you know, you're on the ground. Short round. So, one place they had about 30 short rounds. We couldn't even work. We're down in holes. That happened a lot of times. So anyhow, the Chinese would be sent en masse and they'd say, "Go that way, towards the setting sun," right, south, right, west? But after three days, they're out of ammo. They're out of food. They had maybe a sergeant. You know what their radios and signal were on their phones? Bugles. [Bupbupbup ba makes bugle sound.] Come together. Whistles and bugles. [Bupbupbup ba - makes bugle sound.] Come together. Whistles [makes whistle sound.] Come together. We still watch them. See them, hear them. But after three days, half your people are dead. You're out of food. You're out of ammo because they fired up all their ammo getting that hill. You're out of support. There's no such thing as a regiment or anything like that. You don't know where anybody is and they're still hitting you with artillery when you go in. Then the UN would drop leaflets and say, "Come in and surrender. We'll treat you good," and so on and so forth… Well, they'd get this and bring this in for a free pass through our lines. They'd [holds hand up and shakes as though holding the pass]. It was written in Chinese. It would say, "Free pass through our lines. Nobody will shoot you." They'd hold it up like this. They'd give it to us like this. They'd go, "Oh, yes. Okay." So, that's why we started beating up and so it's giving us real estate. So, the Chinese in April and May and June in 1950 built up a half a million men and then hit us in the building but we finally got the… MacArthur said… Now, I'm not going to say anything against General MacArthur, but he said, "The old Army's tough. Hold the line." Ridgway got over and said, "Give them the real estate, but make them earn it. Give them a couple of hills." That's what they did. Then you got remember they're napalming them, and hitting them with the jets all the time too. Oh, I had to tell you about that.

I: Napalm. [unclear]
EPC: Napalm was the most effective weapon plus artillery. They called it the Van Fleet, General Van Fleet, load. That's what they called it. And he said, you had to have four times more guns than were supposed to be for each company. [Laughs.] Stuff millions of rounds, they'd shoot, not thousands, millions. If you ever saw 155, 155 shows a shell about like this [spreads arms apart].

But 155 hits out in the parking lot, it'll knock us down. But the barrel would be from here out in the library about 30 feet. But a 155 would knock us down if it hit out in the barn.

I: Imagine [unclear].
EPC: We had a few 155s were short. You shorten your brain. Shorten your life.

I: [Unclear].
EPC: 155 was scary when it goes off. Boom, boom!

I: Now your transcript indicates that you had set up communications for the first peace talks in 1951.
EPC: That's right.

I: Could you tell me what was involved in doing this?
EPC: You know I should write an article on that for the paper because I still haven't done it, but I've been thinking about it. But, it's kind of like braggadocio. We built a line from Chuncheon to Chongchong. It took us about six months. It was over 6,000 poles. And then in June of 1951, they said there's going to be peace talks. So, our line was up by the 38th parallel. They said, 'Run it over this way, to Kaesong." That's the first place they went. First, they went to Kaesong, then they went to Panmunjom. So, we ran it over. Kaesong was in North Korea and it was maybe five miles from where we were or something, but I've been to North Korea 10,000 times. Every day we used to go to North Korea. Every day. No big deal. And the North Korean people were good people. The best diplomat that we have in the world is the GI. You know that?

I: Why do you say that?
EPC: I'll tell you why – because he comes in and GIs are always fooling around and happy and trying to make the other guys laugh – you know.

I: Make it better.
EPC: Yeah, make it better. They're always making the other guy laugh. You know, they're showing off. Right, they're always… Not all of them, but there's always four or five in a squad, kind of like comedians and after we got things squared away, we had candy bars and cigarettes and all that stuff. Now, there's kids. Hey, candy bars for the kids. Goes in North Korea, does the same thing in North Korea as he does in South Korea, doesn't he? Pretty soon the little North Korean kids, "Hey, you got gum?" They're smart, you know, the kids, they're starving. Cigarettes. They give them cigarettes to take it to their mother and father. That spreads, doesn't it?

I: To give you information?
EPC: No, it spreads that the GIs aren't so bad. They're not going to murder us like the Communists. Dilutes.

I: Propaganda.
EPC: GIs a good guy. Hey, look at them feeding the kids. Look at them and they brought cigarettes. "Hey, Mamasan." Go give them some C-rations and word will spread. The best diplomats I ever saw and you will ever see is the GI.

I: Now, when you were in Korea…
EPC: Wait a minute. Kaesong. So, we took the thing up to Kaesong. Now, we're running the poles over there and so the Sergeant says to us, he says, "You know in a week we're going to tie the wires off in Kaesong." And he says, "There's going to be…You guys have to straighten up. You've got to clean up the trucks, clean yourselves up, shave." We still had same fatigues on. We still hadn't had a bath. Well, we did, but…

I: Once every…
EPC: Once every month, maybe. He said, "You know, because they're going to have a whole lot of brass up there." We go, "Why a whole lot of brass?" He says, "Cause we're tying the line off that goes into Kaesong." He said, "There's a cable that runs on the ground that goes into Kaesong and that's what the United Nations is going to be talking to the world on, through our line. Somebody's got to tie the wire off on the last pole." There were two big poles up there like these, only they had four arms on them. Now I had been wire-tie-off man, myself and three or four or five other guys for about, I don't know, three or four months. It was kind of a specialty job. There were certain things you had to do because wires are crossed and you had to know #9 went to #3 and #3 went to 6. Kind of intricate but probably a high school education we could do it. We could do it. But it was… You still had to do it, you had to get it right because otherwise, if you didn't, called crosstalk. They'd call this number and they'd get another number. The military didn't like that. Not like civilian life. A lot different in the military. So, they're all talking and that's the conversation. Now, we've got another team with us, 25 guys. Then all of a sudden, we got 50. I never saw the Company Commander for the first year. You know why? Because we were up with the infantry and he is back 200 miles. We never saw him for the first year. I didn't even know who he was. I didn't even know what company [unclear] was nor did we care. Because they didn't bother of us. There were only 12 of us, 12 of us to 25 of us. You become like this [folds fingers together]. They slept there. Team 11, team 12, right there. So, all of a sudden, all these headquarters and all this brass shows up, you know. We go, "How come?" He says, "We told you that we're going to tie the wire off in Kaesong." So, all these guys, the big conversation was, "Who's going to tie off the wire? This is going to be on film. Signal corps is going to take and there's going to be a general there. The colonels. All the company. You got to clean up." Big thing, you know? Big thing. What do we care? We're just trying to live, right. Meanwhile, they had gotten rid of MacArthur. They fired MacArthur, Truman did. General Ridgway took over who was [makes AOK sign with fingers]. The troops loved him. MacArthur was kind of like a showman. Ridgway was a soldier's soldier. They loved him. And what he did was effective. We won't go into that. So anyhow, comes down to Kaesong. Like I said there's about six of us that tied the wire off. Sergeant Bright comes in to me and he says, "Come here." He says, "I want to give you…" I thought it was another detail. I told you, he's your mother, your father, everything. He said, "Come here." I go, walk out. He said, "I'm, going to give you a job that you're going to tell your grandchildren." I thought he was being facetious. I said, "What?" He said, "You can tie the wires off in Kaesong." He says, "Now you've got to get cleaned up.' He said, "You've got to look the part. There's going to be a three-star general down there. He's going to have 20 colonels, all of signal corps. They have maybe 5 cameras, still cameras, everything." And he says, "I know you," and he says, "You know they… You've got to tie… I know you know what you're doing." I said, "Yeah, I know what I'm doing." He said, "You're going to tie them off." I said, "Geez, I don't know, Sarge, those kind of guys been there… I've only been in the outfit about 6-8 months

now." I said, "Those other guys…" "Don't worry about those other guys. I'm telling you, you're going to do it. When you get up there and you cut and don't embarrass me." "No, I won't embarrass you." Don't fall off the pole [laughs]. So, we get to the last pole, like this. Two of them there. You have your one pole with lines on them and then you have little jump lines so there's two poles there with jump lines over to it and then I had to tie them through. All these guys said, "What do you want? What do you want? Come back." I said, "He said I'm going to tie the wire off tomorrow." Some said, "Hey, congratulations." I said, "Well, I'm just going to tie the wire off." "Yeah," he said, "But, you're going to be… You're going to have the colonels, generals, signal corps, going to have applause, I guess we'd call it, wouldn't you?" So, wires run down. I'll never forget it. It was a beautiful sight and we had seen this many times before. Open wire is – there's eight wires, four on the bottom, four on the top. When the sun's on it and it's wet, it's like gold. It's copper. It's like gold. And I'm looking down the line. This pole's kind of up high and I'm looking down the line and as far as I can see there's guys on the poles. Our guys, you know, stringing the wires. As far as you can see and it's coming, it's coming toward me and I said, "Wow!" And then I see this caravan, maybe thirty trucks. I thought it was the infantry coming up. It was those headquarters people and the three star general, the head of the signal corps and [unclear]. So, I'm up on the pole and the Sergeant, he's down below and he says, "You know," he says, "Why don't I throw a hat up to you with the corporal stripes on it. At least you'd be a corporal up there." I said, "No, I'm still a private." "No," he says, "You're PFC." I said, "Oh, that's right." He said, "We're going to make you a corporal for the movies." I go, "No, that's okay." He was kidding, you know. So, they came down, they got out. So, one of these colonels says, and he says and he goes over and Sergeant Wright salutes him and he says, "Okay, you all set here now?" He says, "[unclear] military above the General's coming [unclear]." "Yeah," he says, "Does that guy know what he's doing up there?" He says, "Curley, you know what you're doing?" "Yes, sir." He says, "Okay." So, I'm tying off the wires and I'm laying out over them and I don't know whether they had sound or not, but I'm just tying off the wires. I didn't pay no attention to what they were doing down there but there was a lot of them down there. And this Colonel says, "What are you tying off to?" I said, "I'm tying off 8 to 7." He said, "Why?" I said, "For crosstalk." He says, "Is he right, Sarge?" He said, "Yeah."

I: Checking?
EPC: Checking. I went to myself, I thought I dropped my 8-inch pliers on him. I didn't want to do that. I didn't say anything. You know, I'd been tying them off forever. Nobody… That sergeant showed me how to do it one time, but I will say this about him. A couple of times when I first did them, he came up on the poles and I'd be on the pole and I'd feel the pole shake and I'd look and he'd be climbing up and he'd belt off the other side of me, "Let's see what you're doing." And I had a Company Commander do this too. The only officer sat out on a pole. One time I'm on the pole and he first got in there. Best guy we lost. We had four Company Commanders and two got killed. And you know what, the good ones always get killed. The last guy was great. He was from Utica, Captain Pitman. Nice guy. And I'm on the pole, doing my wires and I see the pole shaking and I go, "Who the hell's going up my pole?" And I look and I see these bars coming up [points to shoulder], these Captain bars, with the hooks, belts off. He says, "You know what you're doing?" I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "I'm Captain Pitman. Nice to see you. What's your name?" Told him. "Let me see what you're doing." "Tying wire up." He said, "Any other officers ever come up?" "Oh," I said, "They can't climb." He said, "Well, I can." Interesting, huh? He said,

"Well, I can. So, I'll be up a lot. I'm your new Company Commander." [Laughs] Interesting, huh? I'll never forget that as long as I live.

I: It says that you received your discharge a few months before the armistice was signed in June of 1953. What did you do after the war?
EPC: I went to work at the Rome Air Base. I went to school for a while, then I went to work at the Rome Air Base. Then I moved to Syracuse.

I: Do you have anything else you'd like to add on the Korean War and your experiences or anything you feel…
EPC: I'm going to write a book on it. The only thing I could say is the guys I served with, the ones I went into basic training with, about 80% casualties. I know this because one time I'm standing on the road and well, we were always on the road because that's where signal runs are lines, so the war's going past us. The infantry's retreating, ammos going up, went like this [motions back and forth with hand], the war and we were always there, you know. because communications are most sincere and most effective and whether it's for on the ground or lots of times we would run lines through little trees and bushes, you know, because it was just wire or cable. You could have 25 phones on this [makes a circle with finger and thumb]. Just a cable. You know, poles, you couldn't put poles in between the artillery and the infantry so we'd run the cable on the ground and everywhere and often they'd take it up and say, "Well, here it is." Okay, they'd hook it into their Army. They had little switchboards like this. They'd hook the wire into it and then do the plugging in and then they could call, "Hey, artillery. Our lines work." So you go, "It's working." "Yeah, it's working."

I: [Unclear]
EPC: Well, we would test it out first. We'd bring it in and we'd do it. We had guys. But when we hooked it into the switchboard and then he'd say, "Go ahead." "Hey, artillery, hey we're all set." "Hit Hill 609." So, we knew, we knew we did a good job. When we would call on the telephone on an open wire line that took a year of our life to build 6,000 poles in just one line. We had over 10,000 poles, but just one line was 6,000 poles and when they were doing the peace talks from Kaesong, we felt pretty professional. Pretty professional. I'll tell you the guys I served… I'll tell you this. I was on the road one time. An ammo truck comes down, ammunition truck. The guy slams on his brakes. Now, they were always going back and forth. They would go up with the ammo and come back with prisoners. Not North Koreans, but the Chinese, from about April to July, they would go up with the ammo and come back with Chinese. That's when we knew that they were history because they were [puts hands up in act of surrender]. They were giving up to us. [Unclear] in the truck and get a weapon. We had guys, you know, but I mean if the guy comes out of the bushes to me and if I'm here and he comes out of the bushes to me, I've got my hooks on and I've got my belt and I've got my 8-inch pliers. What am I going to do - stick them up with my pliers? But we had guys with pieces guarding us. But anyhow, ammo truck stops. Guy jumps out of the ammo truck. This was about May 1951. He comes racing across at me. I'm standing on the road like this and I'm looking at him like this. "Where the hell is this guy going?" He comes running at me hollering, "Curley, Curley, Curley." Kind of limping when he comes. Runs across the road and he hugs me like this. I looked at him and the guy looks familiar. Then I recognized him. I went through basic training with him. You know.

I: Everything comes together.
EPC: Everything comes together. And in basic training, they took all our cadre, the sergeants in July of 1950 and sent them to Korea so they made us recruits platoon sergeants and I ended up the platoon sergeant of our platoon so I had 50 guys. I'm a recruit still, right, but now I got to tell 50 guys what to do. It was a tough job. So, I go, "Boys, I'm not going to have trouble with you." But I appointed a great big burly to be squad leader. So, I said, "If I have any trouble with your squad, you're going to take care of it." Can't beat up 50 guys. If I have any trouble with these guys… I'd say, "If I have any trouble with these guys…" "Okay, Sarge." So, for the last two months of basic I was the platoon sergeant. Now that meant I could do close order drill. Close order drill is not as easy as you think. You know close order drill?

I: No.
EPC: You know close order drill?

I: No.
EPC: That's where you march around, right face, left face, forward, rear march, rear march. I could give close order drill. Somebody had to march the company to chow. That's 200 men. All the sergeants are gone and you had to go across three roads. Now that doesn't sound like much, but you've got to remember that's 200 guys. Right face. All 200. Forward march. All 200. Call them right. Road guard's out. I still remember. Road guard's out. Road guards got to go over here and over here [spreads arms out wide] and stop traffic because the 200 guys are going to cross the road. Nobody could do it. They'd say, "You're it." So, the first time I had to march the company, I'm still a recruit. I'd only been in two months. Company attention. You know. I mean, "Company attention." Hope, hope they're going to go to attention. It wasn't that bad. But I'll tell you what. I'd give the order on the wrong foot and they'd still do it. So, I had to march them to chow for two months. It got awful old. Finally, I got, from the other platoon, I got some guys that could do it. I taught them how to do it. And I wrote a story in here about guys, I got sick of it and I said, "Why don't you appoint somebody to march them?" So, they appointed this… And I said "I'm sick of it and you're probably sick of hearing me."

I: Not at all.
EPC: Well, they'd be sick of hearing me, the guys you're marching with. You know, I get up in front of them, "Right face."

I: Same old?
EPC: Yeah. "Right face. Forward. Step it up. Pick it up. Look [unclear]. You're bouncing. You're out of step." They got sick of it. So, I went to them one night and I had my own little room and everything in barracks because I'm now the platoon sergeant. So, I went to them one night and I said, "Why don't we get one of you guys? I'll give him the commands and let him march us." [Unclear] last week. I said, "Let him march you and you get sick of me and then it would be good experience." I said, "One of you guys, one of you squad leaders." They said, "All right, we'll talk about it." You know, they always had to… It's a platoon, 50 guys. Upstairs, downstairs. So, we'll talk about it. So, they have a meeting and they come in and they say, "Sarge." They knock on the door. They say, "Sarge." Now they call me Sarge because… I go, "Yeah." I'm still 21. I'm still a recruit. They said, "We got a guy." I said, "Who?" They said, "Bonomo." I said, "Bonomo? He's an 8-ball." He was our… We loved him but he was an 8-ball.

He was from Brooklyn. You know, I wrote a story about him. He got killed. The kid was a tough bastard, tough, tough. We loved him. He almost failed out. You know, you had to have reading, writing and arithmetic. They almost flunked him out. The sergeant came in and said, "Bonomo's going to flunk out." He showed me his test. I said, "Jesus Christ." I mean three and three is not seven, Bonomo. You know, I go, "Jesus Christ." He says, "I can't save him." I said, "Well, Holmes, can he take the test again?" He said, "Yeah, in a couple of weeks." I said, "Well, they'll home school him." So, Bonomo, "Come on in." I called him and three or four of the leaders and I said, "They're going to dump you, Bonomo. The Army's going to throw you out because you've got to pass this test and you failed it." He goes, 'Yeah, I know I did." It was a pretty easy test. I said, "Well then homeschooling's going to give one more try." You know what, they homeschooled him for about a month. They were hollering at him. You could hear them. They were pounding. They were hollering, "No, no." It was Army stuff. And he passed the test. He said, "I can't go back to Brooklyn. I ain't going back to Brooklyn. You guys have got to help me." …to get himself over. Well, he was our favorite. We loved Bonomo. We loved him. And you know they wouldn't have done that for everybody. There were many guys that'd say, "Get rid of the [unclear]." Bonomo, he wouldn't run. You know, you're always looking at a guy and say, "Is he going to run?" you know, like in football. Who's going to stay in and who's going to quit. "You'd stay in." "You'd stay in." But I could tell the guys who were going to… The guys are [unclear] guys and that's the way they'd say it. The regular Army guys, when you'd come into an outfit, would come around and they'd say, "Hey, you're a replacement?" and they did this to me. I said, "Yeah, I've been in a couple of months." They'd say, "They're going to hit us in about a week. Are you going to run?" I'd say, "No, I'm not going to run." You know. There'd be five or six of them. There'd usually be a couple of NCOs in there, sergeants. I remember one time – they came at my bunk. They said, "Are you going to run?" I said, "No, I'm not going to run." They said, "Well, you better make sure because we don't want any yellow livered bodies in this outfit." You know, they were all regular Army guys and they were half drunk from yakju, Korean wine. So, you know, they're flexing their muscles. So, I'm sitting there. Two of my brothers were professional boxers and I was their sparring mate. So, I wasn't exactly a punk. They didn't know that. So, this one big guy, he was a bull. You know those bulls?

I: Yes.
EPC: About 30 years old. He says, "I'm telling you…" Over me like this and all like this and the other guys are all over in the tent there watching. You know, he's over me. "[… your smart mouth [unclear]. I said, "Wait a minute. You asked me if I was going to run. I'm not going to run. These guys know I do my job." "I'm telling you none of your smarts." He was looking for… I said, "All right, I'll tell you what, Sarge. I'm going to prove I'm not going to run." I said, "Let's you and I forget the rank and come outside the tent there and I'll show you I'm not going to run." He goes, "Oooohhhhhh!" He went crazy. [Laughs]. I said, "Come on." They pushed me down. They pushed me down. The other three guys said, "This guy isn't going to run. Never mind. Let's go." I don't know if I could have taken them. I'd have taken them. If he boxed. They said, "This kid ain't going to run, next." That's how they test you, though. Your coach tests you for football. One on one drills.

I: Yes.
EPC: He said you had to block those two guys.

I: Yeah.
EPC: Stay in there. You've got to stay in there. Well, you're not staying in there. Coach, I coached hockey and I played professional hockey.

I: That's when they didn't wear helmets then?
EPC: No. So, you know, they test you and you always get tested and the military always tests you too. The better the outfit, like the Airborne and then the Rangers and that, it's more severe testing. But I'll tell you, you don't fail because you don't want to let the guys down. So, anyhow, the guy runs across the road and he hugs me and I said, "What happened to the guys?" That's what I wanted to know. All the guys. And he said, "We got it." And then he told me, he said, "We got on the line in November around Thanksgiving, about Thanksgiving." He said, "The Chinese hit us the first or second night." He said, "About 20 to 1. And they ran through us." I said, "What happened to Bonomo? What happened...?" "He got killed. He got killed." "What happened to Smith?" "He got killed." "What, what...?" The guy that slept next to me, you ready? The guy that slept next to me in basic training, he got captured. Raymond Barry was from Maine. Tough guy. Best shot in the outfit. You know, those Maine guys, they are hunters. He got captured. When they released the prisoners in 1953, I watched it on TV to see if I knew any of the guys – they released the prisoners. It was about 2,000 of them and I'm watching it on TV because I wanted to see if I knew any of them. Because he told me some got captured, but he wasn't sure. Who do I see come walking off the plane, Raymond Barry, same old famer gait like this. Got his start next to me. So, where they were. Then he said, "I got shot three times." I said, "How'd you get out?" He said, "I was out," and he said, "Then the Chinese thought I was dead," and then our guys came back and he said, "They got me out." He said, "Look." He showed me a hole in his leg. Showed me a hole in the upper thigh and a hole through the arm, but none of them broke bones, so they didn't send him home. They put him in a hospital and made him a truck driver.

I: Wow.
EPC: They I'm standing on the road and another time down the road comes, remember I told you, you have a platoon sergeant. In basic training you have a platoon sergeant and he's your Jesus. His name was Sergeant Hadasick. He'd been in ten years. I'm looking down the road and the second division is retreating by us. I looked and I see Hadasick in a jeep, he's a lieutenant. I go, "Hadasick." "Hey, Curley." And then he pulls over and we have a little talk. I said, "Hey, Hadasick." I was happy to see him, right. And he told me about the guys, you know. Some more, he told me. He said, "Hey, come on down, we're going to be with the 39th regiment. Only going to be down the road about five miles. Come down and see me." I said, "Yeah, You're a Lieutenant." I said, "I'm the Company Commander. I'll be Captain." "I'll put you in my company." He knew I was a pretty good soldier. I said, "Yeah," then I go, "Infantry, wait a minute." He said, "Signal corps. Mickey Mouse outfit. You would be in the infantry." I go, "…" So, I said, "Well, I'll come down." So, I went to the Sergeant and I said, "I want to go down and see my friend, you know, Company Commander Hadasick." "What do you think, this is a goddamn party or something. You could run off and go visit…" I said, "[unclear] run five miles. I'll be back." "What do you think – this is a party? You're not going anywhere." So, anyhow, in capturing it, the guys I served with were really good soldiers. I remember one of them said, Sweet Pea – we're all sitting around the fire one time and this guy had been a corporal and he was the kind of guy that did anything for anybody. If you borrowed money from Sweet Pea, they'd say, you'd go to pay him back… Maybe five bucks was a lot of money, you know, and say, Sweet Pea,

"I brought money." He'd say, "No, keep it." He said, "You're going to need it next month," and he'd say… One time we said, "Sweet Pea, what are your goals after you get out of the military, you know?" He said, "No, I'm a 30-year man and this is my home and you guys are my brothers. If I'm lucky enough to win the Congressional Medal of Honor, that's my goal, but otherwise I'm going to be in for thirty years with my brothers. You are my brothers." Silently, we went for our sleeping bags and thought about it. That was the military. Thank you, boys. I'll keep you boys in my platoon any day.

I: Thank you.