

**Leon M. Gorczyca
Veteran**

**Michael Aikey
Interviewer**

**New York State Military Museum
Connecticut Street Armory, Buffalo, NY
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Q: We're interviewing Mr. Leon M. Gorczyca at the Connecticut Street Armory in Buffalo, New York. It's August 29, 2001. Interviewer is Michael Aikey.

Videographer is Wayne Clarke. Mr. Gorczyca, where were you born?

LG: Born in Lackawanna, New York. May 16, 1932.

Q: And you grew up in Lackawanna?

LG: Lackawanna. All my life. Couldn't wait to come back. Anytime I left Lackawanna, I couldn't wait to come back to it.

Q: You went through all schooling in Lackawanna?

LG: All schooling in Lackawanna. Elementary, high school, and also schooling in Buffalo and Michigan State.

Q: When did you graduate from high school?

LG: 1950. Just celebrated our 50th anniversary last September.

Q: Oh, very good. The Korean War was on the horizon. What did you think?

LG: I never thought much about the Korean war coming out of high school. I started at Bethlehem steel plant. I worked there for a few months. And then I said to myself, gee, never thinking about getting one of those or going to school.

Q: Deferments?

LG: Deferments. I wanted to get more education. Of course, our family couldn't afford college, so I went to ECTI.

Q: What's that?

LG: Erie County Technical Institute. They didn't call it that years back. They called it New York State Institute of Applied Arts and Sciences. On Elmwood in the old Pierce Arrow building. After two years, received an associate degree in metallurgical technology. That was nice. Perfect for Bethlehem Steel. I got into the metallurgy department, went back there to work. And as soon as I graduated in August of 1954, I was drafted for Korea. This is where I thought...

Q: You really hadn't been following things up to that point?

LG: I really didn't. I really did not follow. I wasn't like...I read papers and that, but I never. Nothing about politics or anything like that. I just never followed. Just interested in our ball clubs. We were playing ball a lot and stuff like that. Just trying to make it through. Never thought of it.

Q: You got your draft notice, what was going through your mind?

LG: That I was going. But then I thought back. I actually got a deferment for two years by going to ECTI. In August, I got the notice [to go] in the service, November 13, 1952, with my basic training. Oh, I forgot to mention this. When I got on the Greyhound bus over here at the Ellicott Square to leave for Fort Devens. And I'm not ashamed of it. I totally cried. Leaving my city, Lackawanna, and my family.

Q: Was this your first time away from home?

LG: First time away from home. We got to Fort Devens, and we had screaming sergeants and all that. Pick up this, pick up that, move this. And then Indian Town Gap, where I took my basic training for sixteen weeks.

Q: What was that like?

LG: They called it little Korea. So we knew almost immediately that that's what we were being trained for, the Korean Conflict. They called it the Korean Conflict at that time. Police Action.

Q: Can you remember anything about basic training? Anything stick out?

LG: Yes. Coming in you were sent through a series of physical tests, and I knew I couldn't do pull ups. I did maybe one or two. But when I finished basic training, I did maybe fifteen or sixteen. Prior to that, we had a bivouac, like ten days out of bivouac, which were pup tents and all that stuff. It was cold out there, and we saw thousands of deer. We had to shag deer from the targets or practice targets before we could fire. There were tons of deer out there. So that was interesting. I'd never seen that many deer at one time in my life. Going out, we had to go thirty miles.

That would be running, slow jog, running, slow jog, thirty miles. And I did it. Sixteen weeks prior to that, I couldn't even think of doing that. Let me just say one more thing about basic training. I found out in Korea that the basic training I got in Uniontown Gap, Pennsylvania, US Army, actually saved my life because it disciplined me to a point where I never lost my head. I was totally disciplined, although tired, fatigued, and everything else. I actually attribute that to the basic training I received at Indiantown Gap.

Q: Well, that was going to be my question. That's good. Now, after basic wound up, where did you go?

LG: Came home for a nine day furlough. I knew we were going, although they never told you that you were going to Korea. We knew. So then I had to be in Chicago at a certain time, on a certain date. I could have flown, but I took a Greyhound. I just wanted to delay it longer and longer. I was leaving my hometown. It took me like ten days to get to Chicago, and I got there in the afternoon. I saw Joni James, who was very popular in our time, at the Chicago Theater during the afternoon. Prior to that, coming off the bus at Greyhound, I was going to the Sherman Hotel, and somebody tried to sell me a watch. They pulled their sleeves up and they had watches up here. [gestures both arms wrist to shoulder] I just kept going until I got into the hotel. [laughs] We stayed there, and then I went to the Chicago Theater and saw Joni James. I watched a movie at the theater called *Ruby*, which was really depressing. And another thing I want to say about Chicago, I walked off the street into a bar and I could not get served any alcohol. You had to be twenty-one. And I said, well, how about a coke or something? He said, I can't even serve you at the bar. So I had to sit down. But it was amazing to me coming from New York.

Q: Right? Soon you're going to be shot at, but they can't serve you.

LG: With the uniform, no service. But that was okay. I understood their laws and stuff. So we got on a troop train. It took us six or seven days to get to Camp Stoneman, California. And Camp Stoneman is located in Bethlehem, New York, so I felt a little at home because I worked at Bethlehem Steel. That seemed to follow me through the whole thing as we go on, I will point that out. I stayed there, I think, like, ten days. Drank a lot of milkshakes. I know one thing about California. During the night, it got very cold, but during the day it was very hot. You needed a t-shirt. So we shipped out. I shipped out on the USS [unclear] 8.09

Q: Now, were you with a unit at that point?

LG: No. We weren't assigned.

Q: Okay. All right. You were going in as a replacement.

LG: Going in as a replacement, 1745 MOS rifleman, infantry.

Q: Basic infantry.

LG: Basic infantry.

Q: So you shipped out?

LG: Shipped out. Took exactly nineteen days to go over the Pacific, which is why they called it the Pacific. It was as calm as can be. It was just beautiful, outstanding. We came into Yokohama just before the sun broke. We were called up on deck if we were interested to see the rising sun. It was a fabulous sight. I love stuff like that. I went up on deck, and my description. I was looking at, like, a mountain peak, black mountain peak. All of a sudden you saw a little glow, and in a matter of a second, the sun was right up. I mean, it just took you away. Beautiful, full sun. That was on deck just before we got off. From the ship, we were shipped to Camp Drake. We stayed for thirty-six hours. We didn't get off. We just did continuous processing for thirty-six hours. Then we came out of Camp Drake. We boarded the ship. Am I going too fast?

Q: Not at all.

LG: The ship at Sasebo. I think that took us, like, two days. Then we were taken right to Inchon in Korea. There we came off, unloaded, whatever they called those, the LSTs. We came off that and I looked at Korea for the first time. And I was looking, [and thinking] where are we going to land? Everything seemed to be just coming out of the water. As we came closer and closer, we could see a flattening of the country there. When we got on land, we immediately were given our assignments. I went to the 7th Division, 17th Regiment, Company B. I came over with eleven guys from basic training, and all eleven were from Buffalo. When we split up, I was the only one from eleven that ended up in this outfit, which was, pardon me, but it was a southern hillbilly outfit. And wherever they went, they had their confederate flag. I gave them a lot of credit.

Q: How were you received as a Yankee?

I was not received well. I'm glad you asked that question. [laughs] I came in there and nobody talked to me because they knew I was from New York. So I said, strange. Another thing was, as soon as I went to the first outpost, which was outpost Erie, just like Erie County. The outfits named the 17 regiments. The model name was the Buffalos. So like I said, everything seemed to fit in. So

anyway, when I got to the outpost...oh, I came into the bunk. The guy said, oh, you're six [feet]. Joe's going back home, you take the B.A.R [Browning Automatic Rifle]. That's how I got the B.A.R. They told you in basic, do not volunteer for the B.A.R. because it's an automatic weapon. You're always first, and they always want to knock you out. But that's how I got the B.A.R. And then I got to love it. Very secure weapon they had.

Q: Now, when you initially came in, nobody was really speaking to you.

LG: No. Okay, we will get back to that. So I got the point. They were just southern, completely southern. I called them southern hillbillies. But then I said, look, I just threw it in. I said, I'm actually from a little city south of Buffalo called Lackawanna, and I belong to the 4H. When I was a kid, I used to take ducks, chickens, and rabbits over to the Hamburg Fair. In fact, my brother Matthew was in WWII. He got the championship rooster. We had that big [unclear]. 13.10 I'll never forget that. Once I brought all these other things out, everything sort of fell in line. [They realized] Oh, this guy is not a New York City kid.

Q: So they assumed everybody from New York is from New York City.

LG: Yeah, that's what they did. That's what I am trying to say. It was sort of funny.

Q: So they began to warm up once they realized that you were?

LG: And then, of course, I had the B.A.R. So they had to warm up pretty well. I became a good guy. [laughs]

Q: So in the squad, you were carrying the B.A.R.

LG: I was carrying the B.A.R.

Q: What was your sergeant like?

LG: Sergeant [was] pretty good. But I have to give you a story about him. He was from the south, and as far as grenades, he would love to pull a pin on a grenade. I mean, this is how he threw his grenade. He pulled the pin and let the top fire off. Then he threw the grenade. Most of us, as trained, we pulled the pin while we were holding the handle down on the grenade, and then we would throw it. This guy would release the handle on his grenade. It would pop off. Then he would throw it. He maybe had maybe one second, maybe one second and a half. I asked him, why do you do that? Do you think every grenade is made perfectly? I mean, you've heard of quality control maybe. Not everything is perfect. He said, well,

you know, if I do it this way, they can't throw it back at me. Very good point. I said, why don't you just throw it higher or further? [laughs]

Q: He just had his own way of doing it.

LG: He just had his own way, and he got through okay.

Q: Was he a good sergeant?

LG: Good sergeant. Everybody with us was actually good.

Q: Good squad.

LG: The closer we got to combat, everybody was very cooperative, and everybody remembered Jesus. Everybody had the Holy Spirit about them. Even those who maybe didn't have a religion, but they all felt that way. Everybody couldn't do enough for everybody else. [unclear] It was great. But you always had to watch yourself. [unclear] 15.32.

Q: Now, all right, you became a member of the squad. You were the new B.A.R. man because you're six foot. Where did you go? Where was the first place that you went after? **LG:** After outpost Erie?

Q: Yes.

LG: We just jumped from outpost to outpost. And what we did, I'll give you, like, an itinerary for the day. You got up in the morning, cleaned your weapon. That would be the first thing. You were in an outpost.

Q: Now explain that. What is an outpost?

LG: An outpost is in front of your main line of resistance. It was strictly reconnaissance duty, always on patrol. Every second day you were pulling a patrol. Ambush, combat and you were out there in the valley trying to do your job. But it was very nerve wracking. And you had to be...I wanted to get home. We had a guy that came out there. Could I backtrack a little?

Q: Absolutely.

LG: When we came to the outpost, Outpost Erie, we came off of an army personnel carrier, and there would be new recruits coming in. Around the bend of outpost Erie, there were three stretchers coming in. They brought in three stretchers, guys on them, and that's all I can remember about that. I didn't get a close look, but I can remember the arms of GIs hanging over the stretchers. And I said, gee, what happened? He said they fell asleep out there. The Chinese crept up

on them and slit their throats. All three of them. From that point on, I said to myself, I am never going to sleep. Never. Particularly if I was out there in the valley. No way. So would you believe one day we were out there, we're at a listening post, maybe three, four, six men. One of the GIs brought a poncho. And when we found out that he brought a poncho, first of all, it made too much noise. You don't want to get that relaxed out there. He didn't stay with the unit after that. He was transferred out. Another person fired his weapon while on patrol. He was transferred out. Maybe it was a gimmick on that person's visit [?] but maybe it was just a mistake. They couldn't have anybody out there that gave your position away. That was a little side story. So anyway, from there we went to_____

Q: Excuse me, you were on outpost duty. How long are you out in the outpost?

LG: You stayed in an outpost maybe three to four weeks. But every second day you were on a patrol and you were out there in a valley. You heard them. You heard their burp guns burping. Red flares, which is what they used instead of radios and all that stuff for communication. You were always in a firefight. Not always, but most of the time. And you learned that if you heard any noise, you wouldn't fire, you threw a grenade.

Q: Why is that?

LG: This way they wouldn't know. You wouldn't give your position away. See when that guy fired his rifle he gave his position away.

Q: So you learned these things rather quickly?

LG: Quickly, because I'll tell you why. I wanted to get home. I had that great desire to go home again. I really did. I guess everybody did. But I really had a desire. So I was extra careful. See, I watched my mother go through a very, very unhappy moment when the telegrams came in and I was home. I was about ten years old. One telegram [said] "wounded in action". Three days later, another telegram came in, [it said] "died of wounds". I went through that and never forgot it. And I always felt that I would be extra careful because I didn't want my mother to go through something like that again. I just had to get back. Now, questions?

Q: Okay, so you were up in the outpost for three or four weeks. That was a pretty long_____

LG: That was one outpost. I can't even give you the exact. I'd say two or three weeks. We ate C-Rations. We had a hot meal brought to us every day at five or six o'clock. The army personnel carrier came up and set up a food line. I never missed that [unclear]. 20.31

Q: What were you most concerned about during, say, like the evening?

LG: The most concerned that I was, was going on patrol.

Q: That was when you were the most vulnerable?

LG: Absolutely. The other thing, if you didn't go on a patrol, you were right on the outpost and you had a position to guard. So it was either a bunker or a trench line. You stayed there all night watching, waiting for anything that didn't look right. Say you were on an ambush, you were going to ambush somebody. Not all of them. Or a contact patrol. You had to make contact with the enemy before you came back. That was the idea of a contact mission. So you knew you were going to see some action and it was just nerve wracking.

Q: Now, what was a typical contact patrol like?

LG: You go out with about forty men, break up into two groups. That was also the ambush patrol. And one would back you up. When you found something, you had to go in and make contact and get maybe a prisoner, get anything that they may have, anything they had on them.

Q: Now what was the job of the B.A.R man in the contact patrol?

LG: He was always the first to go out. [laughs] First you had the point man. He went out first and then the B.A.R. man was next.

Q: Why is that?

LG: Automatic weapon.

Q: Why did they put the B.A.R. man second?

LG: Because the point man was supposed to be more less maybe seen or something. The B.A.R. was closer with the rest of the guys on patrol. The point man was set up maybe fifty or sixty yards out there. He would be checking on mines and whatever he could spot. Radio back to us. As a B.A.R.man, I was more with the patrol. I was the first guy out of the squad.

Q: Make you feel kind of special?

LG: Well, that kept me more alert. I knew a lot of people were depending on the B.A.R. So there was your firepower. No question about it.

Q: Heavy weapon?

LG: Twenty pounds. The belt weighed twenty pounds. The guy that carried the other belt weighed twenty-five. He didn't weigh it, the belt did. It was a heavy, heavy weapon, but you got used to it. I went into Korea at two-hundred-ten [pounds]. I came out of Korea at one-hundred-seventy-four [pounds]. Never felt better in my life. Physically, mentally, physically, no aches or pains. I felt great at one-hundred-seventy-four.

Q: How was the B.A.R generally fired, bipod or?

LG: No. They gave us a bipod. I fired from the hip. Most of them are fired from the hip, unless you were maybe in a stationary position where they wanted you a different...and you were going to sit there with the B.A.R. and put it on a tripod. But even then it was just bulky material that you really didn't need. Because you shot from your hip or you aimed it. If you were up on a trench line and you were looking down into the valley, you put your B.A.R. up there.

Q: So you got to like the weapon?

LG: Loved it. Loved the weapon.

Q: In an ambush patrol?

LG: Ambush would be the same thing. You went out with forty men, broke up into two units, one backup all the time, and we just waited for the enemy to come through. They might have information about Chinese patrols going through an area, something like that. So we set up an ambush for them.

Q: What were your platoon level officers like as far as competence?

LG: We had Lieutenant Merco[?] from Detroit. I have to talk about him. He was very competent. He was just terrific with the men. He just knew what he was doing. So we believed him. Very good.

Q: What made a good officer, do you think, [you] being an enlisted man?

LG: What made a good officer, he could communicate with his troops and show a lot of leadership. If you showed a lot of leadership, I think you will get good followers. Eventually when he makes a decision and the decision comes out good, it adds to his popularity. Can I tell you about my story? This is going a little ahead now.

Q: Sure.

LG: [At the] outpost Pork Chop there was Lieutenant Richard [Thomas] Shea [Jr.], second lieutenant, ROTC lieutenant. When he joined the outfit, he came on

with two .45s [pistols] on each side. He was a gung ho lieutenant. We all knew the second lieutenants that came in that way were sort of gung ho. But at the end of Pork Chop Hill, after five days of battle, he was heroic. Heroic. At the end, he received a Congressional Medal of Honor, although posthumously. He didn't make it. But I felt that I was one of the last people to talk to him. He made mad charges up Pork Chop Hill. His face was battered, bloody battered. His hands were all cut up with barbed wire. But he insisted on making charges to clear Chinese from the bunkers from the top of Pork Chop Hill. So that was how I really got to know him. And later, some of our people from our company and from our regiment, were sent to Washington, DC when the family was presented with the Congressional Medal of Honor. And is to this day very important. But anyway, I'll never forget that. Second lieutenant.

Q: Now you were at Outpost Erie for, let's say, a few weeks. And then they pulled you out of line?

LG: Let's say a few weeks. No, we were strictly outpost all the time I spent there. Then when they put us on Outpost Arsenal, which was alongside in that same area, we worked off of that. Then there was a Hill 200, Hill 347. We were directly facing their left, always Outpost Baldy. That was a big [unclear]. 27.50 The Marines were on it in 1950, 1951. And I think the 2nd Division was also in there. When we were staring at it from Outpost Pork Chop that was my main hill. We saw nobody. Our binoculars were always during the day on the hill trying to find somebody. Saw nothing on the hill. So then the last hill, the main hill, the main encounter I had, the most combat I ever saw... and like I mentioned to you earlier, I just can't get in my mind, like WWII, a veteran, jumping from one island to one island in the Pacific and getting out alive. I couldn't see how I could do it because one battle would just do me right in. An Outpost Pork Chop just did me right in.

Q: So when you arrived at Outpost Pork Chop seemed like any ____

LG: Seemed like any other night. You might be in a firefight, you might not. But we went on in July 5, 1953, down in the valley and around the hill, out into the valley, and we got ourselves positioned and everything else. This was an ambush patrol at twelve o'clock midnight. We were out there on July 5, twelve o'clock midnight. On July 6, we received incoming artillery. Prior to that, as we were watching from, say, eight in the evening till twelve, we saw tremendous amounts of people gathering in the valley. Every so often a flare went up and we saw this.

Q: This was unusual? This was something you hadn't seen before?

LG: No, that's right. I never saw it. And you had to feel that they were going to hit a hill. We heard the burp guns, we saw the red flares that the Chinese threw up. And I even spotted a huge white horse in the valley, which nobody else saw. Because they checked back later. I actually saw it twice during this battle. I saw this horse before the battle down in the valley. And you have to remember that the valley was being lit up a little. The hair was just flowing off this horse. It looked like one of those huge [horses] with the big hooves and big shoulders, a Clydesdale. That is what it looked like to me, but it was white. Okay, so that was one thing. Then at twelve o'clock midnight, we got hit by artillery. We were on the patrol. We were told to get cover. Prior to that, the entire valley, which Rich Halls [?] mentioned, was lit up. It was like daylight. So where we were perched, we could see what was happening. The Chinese were coming up the center of Pork Chop Hill. I say about a thousand. I'll say hundreds, but it had to be about a thousand. Screaming Chinese coming up. This was where I saw this white horse again. I say that it was almost like I had a, what would you call it, like a religious experience. Because I felt that this huge animal was in between us and the enemy coming up the center of the hill. Our patrol and the enemy. Later I came to the conclusion that it was like a protector. Or it was maybe something for the Chinese, literally directing traffic for the troops, which way to go. I don't know, but it was riderless, there was nobody on the horse. But anyway, we saw everything coming up. We heard it, we saw it. Now we were cut off. We can't get there. Over the hill within maybe a half hour, forty-five minutes of training over Pork Chop Hill. We got the call to get covered because they were going to put up what they called variable-timed artillery. Airbursts that came down this way. [gestures a pyramid shape] So we got cover or we would have been wasted. We worked our way, I should say, we fought our way back up to the top of the hill. We found, we cleared bunkers, that's where the B.A.R. became very important. We cleared bunkers and we got into these bunkers and then the artillery fired. And believe me, when we came off the hill we were told to exit from a different part of the hill. And we had to run down a trench line, maybe about fifty, sixty yards, maybe one hundred yards, open trench line. I remember the Chinese were in the trench line, three deep. The trenches were over seven feet. When I was running over them to get into the Army [unclear] 32.47, it was like stepping on a lot of pillows. It was three deep and they were done away by our artillery variable timing. If you didn't get cover, you would have been wasted. We would have been wasted.

Q: You were on the patrol. The patrol is told to get back up the hill.

LG: After the battle started.

Q: After the battle started. Who all is on top of the hill at this point?

LG: There was another regiment from the 7th Division and in fact, we were going to occupy that hill. We were going to replace this other regiment prior to this Pork Chop battle. We were supposed to replace them. They were on Hill 200 just in back of Pork Chop Hill, and made the first counterattack after the Chinese took the hill. We were out on the patrol, we couldn't get through. We had to fight our way back to the top of the hill where the bunkers were, where we could get some protection. And so that's where the whole thing ended. Getting through these trenches, working our way back to exit was not easy. Because B.A.R. man, here we go, step forward. You were going through first. They were all covered, you were going through first. And the Chinese were throwing grenades at us. They got situated alongside the sides of the trenches and they threw grenades out. Well, I was the first guy to see a grenade. So backtracking, I tried to get back. You had twenty guys behind you. So you're getting clobbered by small pieces of shrapnel, small pieces of clay off the trenches, you know, so it was quite a thing to get through. But we did get through, and we got off the hill. We had to actually run off the hill because that area was sniped by the Chinese.

Q: So how long were you on the hill?

LG: I was on the hill from July 6 to July 10. I have to mention this to you, whatever you want to do with it, but I have to mention it. When we got into the bunkers...prior to that. I'm not a totally religious person. I went to church with my mother like everybody else did [unclear] 35.14. As we got into the bunker, it was nighttime. We had three in the bunker. I had two other guys from my area, from Lackawanna. One was Lackawanna, who graduated from Lackawanna High School. Bob Thornton [?]. And Peyton Shaman [?]. And [unclear] Chris [unclear] Buffalo. I didn't know him prior. We were together in this bunker. I said to them, wouldn't it be something to see our names in the paper? Three die on Pork Chop Hill. And we laughed about that. We snickered. We were tired. But each one took a rest, and the other two stayed up. The Chinese were talking to us. That was how close we were. They were on top of that, we just had bunkers there. We talked about the Yankees, and we talked about, did you see the movies?

Backtrack a little more. I just want to talk about every time we went on patrol, we heard *Carolina Moon*. The Chinese played these songs to us, and *Carolina Moon* just stuck. So getting back to this. I was awake. I doze off. Peyton Shaman hit me on the shoulder. I said, is it time for church? This was where my mind was. As morning broke, I looked at the bunker wall, and carved in the wall, there was a

psalm. I didn't realize it was a psalm until I cleared the moisture off the clay wall. And it said, now you gotta figure we were pretty well beat out, tired, and we were almost on a give up stage, you know. It said, "Fear not the one who hurts the body, fear the one who hurts the soul." And to me, I was not a Bible reader. I had the Missal when I was in the church but not the Bible. That just...I can't even... the best of my words I can use. It just elevated, untired me. It just gave me a greater desire to make it home. It just picked me right up. It was an amazing thing. It was carved in by probably by a blade. Whoever was there first. And you had to...you had to relate, you know. In other words you felt like you were gone, it was all over for you. But you forgot about your spirit. That's the whole story.

Q: How are you being supplied there?

LG: We weren't supplied.

Q: You weren't?

LG: We were not supplied. You could not be supplied. We just went hungry. We didn't even think of eating or anything like that. Nothing was [unclear] 38.05. In fact, we hit some rainy days, and our weapons were malfunctioning, particularly the M1s. We didn't even have oil. To put some oil in there, but we didn't have it. We had nothing. [unclear] 38.20 It was actually five whole days. So that's how I came out 174 in weight.

Q: How many total were on the hill?

LG: Okay, I can give you one figure that I always was told. Two-hundred-forty men from Company B, 17th Regiment. That was the company I was in. Only thirty-eight of us came off after five days of Pork Chop Hill. July 6 to July 10, that was the battle. We were up there on July 5. And only thirty-eight...not that everybody got killed. Thirty-eight came off that could walk off. Not wounded or minor injuries.

Q: Just a second, we are going to change tapes.

LG: It's called the Buffaloes and all that stuff. It was a little [unclear]. 39.21

Q: Now, who was commanding your group on Pork Chop Hill? Do you remember?

LG: It was General [Arthur] Trudeau. He was the head of that. And I have to give him a lot of credit, too, because he made a decision on the 10th [of July]. Even though we got most of the hill back, we had to just clear out some bunkers. He said, take them off the hill. Because it's only real estate that's going over to the

enemy during the Panmunjom Talks anyway. And why should we lose any more lives? Make them walk. So we got off. And believe me, he saved lives. And I'll never forget his name.

And Richard [unclear] 40.15, [gestures to friend outside camera range] my friend here from Lackawanna in my younger days. He pointed out in the magazine, the latest VFW magazine, where it said, what was it? [asks his friend Richard and he answers] The Twenty Bloodiest Battles in Korea. Yeah. And that was one of them. And he called me up about it. It was right in print. I was telling you that all the time. It was a great experience. It was a hard experience. I never thought I would make it. Maybe through a little intervention, I did. I must bring this up. My mother was widowed, my father died when I was five. She was a buff on the rosary for the Holy Mother. And I know she prayed hard. And I really had to say that helped because I think there was some supernatural thing out there. I could pinpoint it that actually was sort of like either helping me or whatever. Got me out of a lot of tight spots. And another thing, after Pork Chop Hill, we got taken off. Okay, we're up at [Hill] 347. Would you believe I pulled another patrol, but I became a radio man at that point because we lost so many people. I was behind the lieutenant. We came out of another ambush patrol from a different area. And that was when I got wounded. I was wounded off of Pork Chop. But that was merely pieces of shrapnel and facial wounds, little scars and barbed wire. Barbed wire really cut my hands up. We had to go back up the hill. Go through barbed wire that we set out there ourselves to try and stop the enemy. We were on patrol and worked our way back up. I stepped on a landmine and blew up the center of the patrol. Nobody was killed. There were maybe three or four that were injured. I caught a fragmentation in my left thigh at that point. Out of Korea, I went to Busan, a Swedish Hospital.

Q: How was that?

LG: I was only there for surgery. I was there for maybe a week and then shipped right over...one little story about that. When they knocked you out, they gave you the gas. Horrible experience. They knocked you out. [covers mouth like a mask] [unclear] 43.07. Usually they gave you a needle or something to put you out for the operation. This was, they put a mask on you, you breathed in, breathed out, knocked you out for the operation until it was over. It was a horrible feeling. It was like you were racing out there and you never got to where you were going. But anyway, I stayed there a week, maybe ten days, and was shipped to Osaka, Japan, 382nd Buffalo Army General Hospital.

Q: Was the care generally pretty good?

LG: Absolutely great. Another thing, I never felt pain from the injury. I felt more pain, you know, from the barbed wire cuts and little pieces of shrapnel. But when I stepped on this landmine, I never felt anything. Somebody gave me a shot. One of the medics gave me a shot, and I was escorted up the hill. Two people escorted me up the hill, right onto a jeep, right into first, what do they call that? Your medical tent? First EVAC hospital. That place was the first time I had a cigarette. A chaplain gave me a cigarette. He said, light up. He said, have it. I said, I don't smoke. He said, have it anyway. That was when I thought I was gonna lose my leg. I thought bad news was coming. From there, [I went] on a helicopter to Seoul, and from Seoul, a troop train to Busan, and then the 382nd Army General Hospital in Osaka, where I spent three months, Thanksgiving, Christmas. The first time I came in on the ambulance into the hospital, they gave me a glass of milk. And brother, that was like a million bucks. It was great. I can't explain it. Couldn't believe it. It was just terrific. I could have drunk two gallons. Then you started seeing people. You know, people walking on the streets were going through Osaka now. It was just a relief that nobody was firing over your shoulder.

Q: So how long were you on the line?

LG: I was on the line from late April of 1953 to July 18, 1953, when I went into the landmine. In between there, patrol duty, firefights. But my biggest action was Outpost Pork Chop, which was a tremendous experience. I was glad I got off okay. I had other people working around me.

Q: So you were on the line for three months straight pretty much?

LG: Three months straight.

Q: No relief?

LG: No relief.

Q: Is that unusual or was that usual?

LG: No. Once in a while they took you behind for a shower. You wore the same clothes and you had your C-rations on the outpost, and your hot meal came in every day. And they never missed. Like they said, they never missed turkey on Thanksgiving Day. They never missed. So no matter where you were, you got your turkey.

Q: What was the equipment like that you were carrying?

LG: Regular fatigues, Mickey Mouse boots, which were tremendous. They kept your feet so warm that you had to rinse your socks out every so many miles. That was how, from Mickey Mouse boots.

Q: Why are they called Mickey Mouse boots?

LG: They look like Mickey Mouse boots. And the parkas, which were excellent, were very warm. You had your dog tags around your neck at all times. That's all you had to have. You didn't see colonels, lieutenants wearing the bars or anything, stripes, nothing like that on the front line. You see it in movies. You see them having the bars. [But it was] nothing like that went on. You wanted to keep yourself from being really known at all what your rank was or designation. That was about it on the clothes part. Ponchos. Although I've watched on the History Channel about 1950, 1951, everybody seemed to have a poncho and they were wearing it. When I was there, nobody wore their poncho. This one guy took the poncho out there on the patrol. He intended to sleep there, to make himself comfortable. They just discarded their ponchos. It was just extra equipment. It rained, you were in it, you dried off after it rained, it rained again, you dried off. And that's the way it was until you got back somehow to the rear. You got showers, new clothes and stuff like that. The weapon was most important to keep rain off.

Q: Much sickness?

LG: I didn't see anybody sick.

Q: Really?

LG: Nobody was sick. I never felt better in my life. No backaches, no nothing, no headaches. I remember one thing. When we were going over, we got thirteen shots. [laughs]

Q: What was your view of the Chinese?

LG: Well, let me go back to Pork Chop Hill. The first group that came over the hill, they came over without weapons. They came over the barbed wire, into the minefields, protecting Pork Chop. And to me, as close advantage [unclear] 49.28 some of them and the way they were yelling, I thought they were sort of on drugs. I thought they were jacked up. How can you send people into a minefield? Well, that was the first group that came over. Then the second group came over with the automatic weapons, the burp guns. We heard that. You can't get that sound out of your head, the sound of the burp gun. Which is the sound of a toy gun. That's what it is. Then after that group came over, now this is all being done

within an hour. The third group that came up was bringing bags and stuff, supplies, ammunition. They were going to stay there. That was it. And now in the trench line, we were fighting against...there were Mongolian Chinese from Mongolia. But we were fighting the smaller people. They were digging the smallest hole in the trench line along the wood beams. They were tough to get out [of]. Just throw a grenade on it. You spray that area with the B.A.R. It didn't mean you were going to get them. I thought that they were good fighters. But what were they on, I don't know. The ones that came over with the automatic weapons were pretty sharp.

Oh, I got one more thing. He was in the mortars. [points to friend there] The Chinese that fired their mortars, they fired three at a time. They would fire three. They would fire one. If this thing was closer, if the next one was closer to you, you could almost figure that the third room was going to be right on you. That was how accurate they were with their mortars. So that's another thing you got to [unclear]. 51.29

Q: So you had to be very careful_____

LG: Not to give your position away. If they knew you were out there they would mortar you to death.

Q: Looking back on your experience, what is your general impression?

LG: Looking back at the experience. I'm not going to say I enjoyed every bit of this whole experience because there were some tough times. When I got out. I was glad I went through it. Getting back to my brother Manny, who was killed in WWII, he couldn't wait to get in. And that was the people at that time, I remember them three deep around the post office joining up. People of all ages. Fourteen, fifteen all trying to get in after Pearl Harbor. My brother worked in a steel plant in Bethlehem Steel, and he was sort of exempt, but he couldn't take it. He couldn't take it anymore. Everybody going in. His friends were going in. He had to go in. So he went in, and he didn't even last a year. He was killed. That's how it goes. I had to bring that up. It was part of my forming. [unclear] 52.56

Q: When you came back to Lackawanna, what_____

LG: Oh, coming back. The trip back, we came into Fort Lewis in Washington State. Coming back, we took a troop train again, six days to get to Chicago, plane to New York, another train going into Buffalo. When I came home, I came home in a cab. I remember my other brother came home in a cab. I was looking through a window at Franklin school, which was directly across from my house, because

we were all waiting for him to come in. He served five years in WWII, my brother Edward. And as he came in, there was a big yellow cab, and his cab driver still wore their hats. He came out with a duffel bag. And I was watching from the window, and the teacher said... [I said] my brother just came back from the Army. I ran out of the building to meet him. I heard the teacher say, go ahead, go ahead. When I came in, I came in a cab, naturally, I came in a cab, and my whole family was there, and I was just overwhelmed. When you were in the Army, when you were in basic, when you were in combat, when you were two years away from your family, you didn't have anything from the outside, you didn't have a radio, you didn't have anything. And it was just like when I first came back, when I was wounded and I came back to Japan, and I saw people. That big glass of milk the guy gave me in the ambulance, and it was the same thing. And you were coming back home, you saw your home and you saw your neighbors, your parents. [gets emotional] It was an astounding feeling.

Q: Did you go right back to work?

LG: I forget. I think I had a year off. I think I picked up on Army payments. I think they had something there for a year. And then I went right back to work, where I picked up my seniority. They held my seniority. So the two years I spent in Korea, I came back and that seniority counted. Another thing, I joined my department, my original department. I talked to my boss, who lost his son in Korea. Wesley Hoy[?] from Hamburg, NY. And I was accepted by pretty well everybody else. My job was a job [where] I floated throughout the whole plant, watching the process of making steel for the customer. Making, shipping and processing steel. So I ran into a lot of people that I thought I knew pretty well, and they never knew I was gone. I was gone for two years and they said, what happened? Nobody asked me. They thought I was still around. They thought maybe I was in a different part of the plant or something. And other people said I was in Korea. I was drafted. [They said], oh. They never got that.

Q: Life just went on.

LG: Just went on.

Q: And you stayed with?

LG: I stayed with Bethlehem for almost thirty-two years. After Bethlehem...another thing, I went back to school to Michigan state under the GI Bill. Which was another great thing for us. And then I went back to the Buffalo plant. That seniority counted also. That was it. Bethlehem shut its doors in 1983. I was out. And then I couldn't find a job. I was like fifty-one years old and I had a

Buffalo Steel pension. But I needed something more. I was far away from Social Security. So the only one that offered me a job was West Seneca Developmental Center, where I became a teacher, teaching retarded. But prior to that, I went back to school. Buffalo State picked up education courses, and I was also a teacher. Not a full-time teacher, but a sub-teacher from 1988 to 1992. I worked at West Seneca Developmental from 1988 until 1992. I worked a double shift. And then I got hurt at West Seneca Development. And that is when I retired.

Q: Do you look back at the Korean conflict as a forgotten war? Do you think it's a forgotten war?

LG: I think it was forgotten. It was forgotten. This is their anniversary, though. These three years are the Korean War anniversary. Fifty years. It's forgotten because I've heard stories where a post wouldn't even recognize you as a member as a Korean [unclear]. 58.05 You know, I've heard stuff like that. And then everybody, even myself, I think the big one for me was WWII, because there was so much that happened. I was a kid. In the Korean war, I could see that it could be forgotten. But you have to remember they had fifty-six thousand people killed in the Korean War. But I feel that it is forgotten. In print, I see it in newspapers when they talk about a Korean vet, they slack off. And maybe it's because they called it a police action.

Q: Did that bother you?

LG: It never did, because police action, or whatever they wanted to call it, people lost their life there. But I think it was President Clinton. We were there for the anniversary in 1997, or 2000. Clinton said right on the thing there, he said that the Korean War was not a police action. It was a war. And it was official as [unclear]. 59.16 But it is sort of forgotten. You don't have Iwo Jimas.

Q: Coming home, how were you treated when you came home by the community?

LG: Well, did you go up [unclear], 59.32 they probably didn't even know you were gone. The street that I lived on, my family, everybody treated me right. I never_____

Q: No parades or anything like that?

LG: No, there was nothing like that. There was a big band that met us in Washington State, at Fort Lewis when we came in. There was a band playing [unclear]. 59.53 But as far as...my friends were just glad to see me and I was glad

to see them. You just, even myself, you just wanted to forget about it. You just go on and do your other things. And that was it.

Q: Any final comments?

LG: I just want to thank all you people that are responsible. I think it was Governor Pataki's program. Allowing me to come out and say something about it, because most veterans, including myself, did not talk about it. But the idea today is what we see out there in the cities and everything. I think that the young should hear about this. And I'll tell you another thing, when I watched that movie on tv about WWII when they invaded France, I had the impression, but I didn't have it as much as after I watched that movie. When they came off those amphibious carriers, I said to myself, they have to know these kids were eighteen, nineteen years old, maybe even younger. They were going into direct fire. They had to know that they were either going to get wounded or killed. This was their last day on earth, maybe. The young people in high school should be shown this WWII episode. They should be shown because I think it could change a lot of thinking. It changed my thinking. It just added to my education about WWII. What they gave so everybody else could do what they're doing right now in this country. I want to thank Governor Pataki and the whole program, Wayne and yourself for allowing me to do this.

Q: Well, thank you very much. We appreciate it. Now we have a little bit of paperwork.

LG: This organization is called the Dae Han Foundation of Western New York. It's a Korean foundation. Last September, October, they invited Korean vets for a dinner up at the [unclear] 1.02.04 Road, the big place there. It says, I'm just going to read this. [reads plaque] "The Dae Han Foundation of Western New York honors Leon M. Gorczyca, 7th Infantry Division, for your service in the Korean War, 1950 to 1953. Fiftieth anniversary, February 10, 2001." It was a beautiful gift and it was a beautiful dinner they had for about twelve of us. [holds plaque for camera] It was sort of a surprise.

Q: I noticed that there's actually a picture of the psalm that you described in the bunker. Where did you come across this photograph?

LG: Well, what happened? When I went back to school, Buffalo State, I had to take one of the liberal courses in writing. He wanted us to write about some religious experience that you had. It just fell in for me to write about this experience. So what I did. I got clay and I re-fabricated what I saw, at home, and I took a picture of it. There was no way I could get a picture up there. But if you

notice the thin lines and all that, I tried to recreate things. I don't know if I gave you the story that I wrote about that. Maybe I didn't. It was published by the professor. He used it in his teaching manuals or something.

Q: Really? I don't think_____

LG: You don't have that?

Q: I don't think so.

LG: I have a copy of it. I can get you a copy.

Q: Great, great. This was in a local Polish paper?

LG: That's Polish paper? Yeah. They called it the [unclear]. 1.04.37 Your wife might understand that. A daily paper.

Q: Okay, well, thank you.