

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRED PLUSHANSKI

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

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FANTASTIC TRANSCRIPTS

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Fred Plushanski on December 18, 2017 in Clinton, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for sitting down with me today.

Fred Plushanski: You're welcome.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

FP: I was born in Glen Gardner in the family home up on Plushanski Drive. We had a farm up on top of the hill, one hundred and sixty acres, I think. There was a lot of hills on it. We farmed that and milked cows.

SI: What were your parents' names?

FP: (Tessie?), Teresa, and Alexander.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, do you know how they came to settle in this area?

FP: He came here, in New York.

[Tape paused]

SI: Let me turn it back on.

FP: The oldest boy was born in New York and three sisters were born in New York. The oldest boy was getting into trouble with some gangs or something, so my father just picked up and moved out here in the country.

SI: Wow. Do you know if he had farmed before that or what he had done for a living early on, before he moved out here?

FP: No, he was a bartender and a bouncer in New York. That's what he did.

SI: Do you know how your parents met?

FP: No, I really don't, but I think they met in New York.

SI: Where was your mother's family from?

FP: Poland.

SI: Both sides were from Poland?

FP: He was from Ukraine. My mother's brother is the guy who invented the helicopter.

SI: Really? Igor Sikorsky?

FP: Yes.

SI: Wow. Was her last name Sikorsky?

FP: Yes.

SI: Wow.

FP: He was an older brother, but they separated over in Europe when they had the [Bolshevik] revolution and they sent him to England because he was a genius, because another guy [inaudible]. So, they separated. We never did nothing together. He moved to Connecticut and we were out here on the farm.

SI: You said your family had four children before they moved out to New Jersey.

FP: I think so.

SI: How many kids did they have once they were here?

FP: Well, it was twelve altogether. One of them died young, but there was eleven. I was number ten.

SI: Tell me a little bit about what it was like to grow up in this area with so many siblings.

FP: I didn't know no different. We grew everything. Didn't buy nothing. Played ball and did what you had to do on the farm.

SI: What was a typical day like for you on the farm?

FP: I was the youngest one, so I had to watch cows. I used to take the cows after they got done milking. I'd take them about a mile and a half, mile away. Then I'd bring them home, four o'clock, and I'd feed them apples and whatever fruit. That's what I ate all day.

SI: How old were you when you started doing that?

FP: Probably eight or nine. Pretty young. You didn't have do nothing. You just watch the cows. They didn't have no fence. So, that's what I did.

SI: How did you occupy your time between when you went out there and when you came home? What did you do to pass the time while you were out there?

FP: Throw rocks. Throw at birds, whatever. I used to throw rocks all day. Come the first day of hunting one time, I killed two rabbits with a stone and I brought them home. They thought

somebody gave them to me, but when they skinned them, there was no shells in there. I used to throw rocks pretty good.

SI: When you would have been fairly young, World War II started.

FP: Yes.

SI: How old were you when the war started?

FP: I was probably thirteen, maybe.

SI: You already had some older brothers in the service then?

FP: Yes. Well, the one in the Navy was in early. The other one went in, in '41, I think, in the Marine Corps.

SI: What were their names?

FP: Charles was in the Marine Corps. John was in the Navy.

SI: Did you have other older brothers who went in the service during the war?

FP: I had an older brother who was the oldest one. He was in Paterson [New Standard Aircraft Company], making airplanes or parts. That's what he did.

SI: When you were about thirteen or fourteen, were you still taking the cows out? Did you have other jobs?

FP: I was taking the cows out. Then I used to set traps. I used to get furs. I used to take the animals to a guy who skinned them and he bought them off me. That was about the first dollar I ever made. Then, my neighbor had a--I must have been maybe fourteen or so. My neighbor smacked somebody's car up. So, he needed the fifteen dollars to fix it. He sold me his skates and a .22 rifle. I couldn't bring the rifle home; I didn't tell nobody I had it. I used to leave it in the woods. I'd pick it up and then look at my traps and go hunting with it, until I shot a deer and then I had to tell them I had a rifle. So, I was about thirteen then.

SI: Where did you go to school when you were younger and a teenager?

FP: I went to [inaudible] and that was about twelve miles away. You picked the bus up on [Route] 31 in Glen Gardner. Then they took us all around to Asbury, Hampton to [inaudible].

SI: What interested you the most in high school?

FP: Playing ball.

SI: What did you play?

FP: Baseball, soccer. I was captain two years of the soccer team. We were undefeated three years. Had the championship two years in a row. By then, everybody was in the service and I had to work on the farm. So, I only went to school once in a while. When they had a ball game, I went to school, on Tuesdays and Fridays. They used to help me out in school. Like these guys go to college now just to play ball, that's the way I went through high school.

SI: Would they give you work to do while you were at home?

FP: I had enough to do on a farm, milking cows and plowing. I did everything there was to do.

SI: What was a typical day like for you on the farm during the war when you had more responsibilities?

FP: I was plowing on the side hill. I turned the plow over. So, I went to see my father. I told him I turned the plow over, it was on a hill. He says, "You turned the plow over?" I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "Well, you go turn it back." It's all steep hill. I ran all the way up and I'm thinking, "How am I going to do that?" So, I got up there. I unhooked the horses from the plow. I rolled the plow downhill until they got up on its feet and then I moved the horses down, hooked them back up again. He was watching me all the time. He must have been laughing. But that's the way it was. I did that and I [inaudible]. I must have been fourteen or something, maybe fifteen.

SI: I'll pause while we eat.

[Tape Paused]

SI: We are back on.

FP: I shot a lot of deer ... I had the biggest deer in New Jersey, when I was--I think I might have been fourteen. Twelve points. It weighed two hundred and two pounds dressed out.

SI: Wow.

FP: The newspaper in High Bridge--there was no deer hardly and so that was the biggest one they say.

SI: You shot that with the .22?

FP: No. I borrowed a shotgun off of my neighbor where I used to watch cows at his place. He loaned me his shotgun. There was nobody hunting then because there was no deer. So, I tracked that deer a couple miles. It got dark and I left it. I went back there the next day after we got done milking. I was sitting in the honeysuckles and the deer come ten foot past me. I didn't see it. I looked around and there's a deer. It was about ten foot away. So, I shot it. I didn't see the horns. I shot it and it fell down. I said, "He ain't going to get away," so I shot it again. My father heard me shoot. I was about a mile away from home. When I started to walk home, here,

my father had come down because he heard the shot. There was nobody hunting at that time. It took three of us. He went home and got the pick-up. Took three of us to put it in the truck. It was big.

SI: Wow. Were you able to hear much from your brothers while they were in the service in World War II?

FP: Yes. The one in the Marine Corps. He was an expert with a rifle. They made him an instructor on the rifle range on Parris Island. He was there for a while. All them other guys went to Guadalcanal. Three-quarters of them got killed. He was teaching them how to shoot. Then, he went to Quantico. Then he was aboard ship.

SI: Do you remember how you heard the news about Pearl Harbor?

FP: Yes. One of the neighbors came up and said it was on the radio. They had a radio. Then they heard.

SI: How long did it take before you learned that your brother was not killed in the attack?

FP: It was quite a while before we got a letter. They cut half of it out, censored it. He was going to go on liberty that day. He got out of the (SAC?), where it was. Started out in the hall. That's when they dropped the bombs. He didn't write that in a letter, but he told us when he come home, a guy's head comes rolling down the alley. That's when they started bombing. He had two bombs on his ship.

SI: Wow. You told me before, but for the recording, can you tell me what ship he was on?

FP: USS *Vestal*. The captain of that ship was named Young. They were next to the *Arizona*. He took the ship out of the harbor and docked it into the sand, out of the way. He got the Congressional Medal of Honor for moving the ship.

SI: You said as people went off, you had more responsibility. Were there other ways that the war affected your life on the farm and in this area?

FP: Yeah. I wanted to shoot every Jap there was. I said, "I'm going to join the Marine Corps. I got to help these guys." That's why I joined the Marine Corps, because I was shooting deer. I shot a lot of deer. So, I said, "I'll go," and I wanted to shoot every Jap there was, but the war was over.

SI: When did you wind up joining the Marine Corps?

FP: '48.

SI: Had you graduated from high school before that?

FP: Yes. I had to go a half extra year because one teacher flunked me. I had to take a half a year. My half a year was up at the end of the year, in February. So, I joined the Marine Corps.

SI: Why did you pick the Marine Corps, as opposed to another service?

FP: Because I wanted to shoot every Jap there was. My brother was in the Marine Corps.

SI: Tell me about signing up for the Marine Corps and your travel down to Parris Island.

FP: I went to Allentown to sign up. A week later, they sent me to Philadelphia and joined up in Philly.

SI: Did you go straight from Philadelphia down to Parris Island?

FP: Yes.

SI: What was that trip like?

FP: It was all right. There was a couple guys from New York, couple from Pennsylvania. I probably shouldn't tell you that, but when we got down to [inaudible], one of the sergeants says, "All right, this is your last chance to buy any pogeys you want." These guys had some money and they bought all kinds of candy and everything. When we got to Parris Island, they said to everybody, "Put the candy in that box." They took all the candy back to the guys. Nobody was allowed to have candy. That's what they did. They had a little racket, but I don't know if you want to know that though.

SI: That's good. What about when the bus pulled up to the station, what was it like?

FP: In Parris Island?

SI: Yes.

FP: Everybody got out, went into their room. It was a wooden barracks. They gave everybody--had the blankets filled up with their name on them. My name was up on top, I don't know how. My brother told me, "If anybody ever hits you, never hit them. Just look them in the eye." They call my name. He says, "Plushanksi, is that the way you say it? Is that right?" I said, "That's right." Well, he slapped me across the face. I know my brother says don't ever--and I looked him in the eye just as hard as I could look at the guy, like I want to kill him. He never gave me a hard time all the way through Parris Island. I didn't hit him, but he knew what I meant. Good thing my brother told me that because I would have hit him.

SI: Was there a lot of that kind of breaking you down from the drill instructors?

FP: No, they were strict, but no. I had two drill instructors. One of them was easy going and the other guy was a wise guy. Never gave me a hard time all the way through boot camp. I thought I was going to kill him. But he was a buddy of mine. He hit him, knocked his tooth out, cut his

chin, and he said if he ever gets him overseas, the first day he ain't going to make it. They don't send the drill instructors overseas.

SI: I know Parris Island can be very physically demanding. What was the training like for you?

FP: I was always working on a farm and sometimes I worked pretty hard. I gained weight at Parris Island. I think I gained seven, eight pounds on Parris Island. I didn't mind Parris Island at all. Just that first day when that guy hit me. He hit me pretty hard, too. He says, "You say 'sir' all the time."

SI: Were the men that you were in training with from all over the country?

FP: Most of them were from New York, Pennsylvania. A couple from Jersey.

SI: Did you get along well with your fellow recruits?

FP: Yes. I got along pretty good.

SI: You had done a lot of shooting on your own growing up. What do you remember about how the Marine Corps trained you to shoot?

FP: Good. I liked that. Best thing there was, was the rifle range. I made expert the day before he qualified and then I missed [sharpshooter] by two points. I liked that. It was pretty good.

SI: How long was the training at Parris Island?

FP: I think three or four months. I'm not sure. I didn't mind. Then we went to Camp Lejeune.

SI: Was that for advanced training?

FP: Yes.

SI: Let me pause for a second.

[Tape paused]

SI: Were you a rifleman or were you given another MOS [military occupational specialty]?

FP: No, I was antitank, 037.

SI: What did you do in your advanced training to train as antitank?

FP: With the bazooka, machine gun, take them apart, put them together. I have to tell you: when I was home, I was a junior in high school, I was pitching in a tri-county league, which was pretty big. We were in last place and I beat the first place team. They gave me the town of Washington because the mayor's son was on the team. That was pretty good.

SI: Does anything stand out about your training at Lejeune?

FP: Yes. [inaudible] I would have a whole [inaudible]. I was good with that ...

SI: After Lejeune, where were you stationed? Was this still 1948 or was it 1948 by now?

FP: '48. We went on maneuvers to Newfoundland, in the cold weather. It was really rough. The storm knocked the three boats off the top of the ship, the boats they have hanging on the side?

SI: Life boats?

FP: Yes. Knocked three of them off before we landed. When we landed, there was a guy from the news, *Newark News*, he was taking pictures. The four of us were the first ones on. They put it on the front page of the *Newark News*. We didn't get the *Newark News*, but some of the guys in town see my pictures and they brought it down, gave it to my brother.

SI: Wow. Can you describe the maneuvers for me, what you would be doing during those?

FP: Yes, we were walking a lot, checking our clothes. It was cold. It was Argentinia in Newfoundland. That's where we were. Didn't do too much. You had to wait until we were able to get back on ship. I think it came back.

SI: Were you part of a unit by this point?

FP: Yes. I was 137th Antitank. When I got back to Lejeune, when I was on mess duty for thirty days, but the mess sergeant was from Jacksonville, and I guess he's seen me pitch or something, he used to pick me up on Sunday and take me to Jacksonville and pitch in Jacksonville. He gave me an easy job in the storeroom because I was going to play ball.

SI: What team were you playing for in Jacksonville?

FP: I don't know what they were. They were in some kind of league.

SI: That's quite a drive, from Lejeune to Jacksonville.

FP: No. Right at the end of Lejeune is Jacksonville. That ain't far.

SI: Okay. I'm thinking of Jacksonville, Florida.

FP: Oh, yes. Then, when one of the captains seen that I was pitching there, wanted me to pitch in the Marine Corps. So, then I start pitching in the Marine Corps. A lot of them didn't like that because I didn't do nothing; I just played ball. So, they run me up. They told me to wash the windows in the head. I told them, "Well, I'm playing ball. I ain't going to do that." They had to get dressed to go down to see the captain. So, he goes down to see the captain. I had to get

dressed. So, I start washing the windows. I had three buddies go in and finish them, wash them all up. So, we go down there to see the captain, Captain [Robert H.] Barrow. He's the guy that made Commandant of the Marine Corps. He says, "We got you for disobedience of orders." He said, "Did you wash them windows?" I said, "Yes, sir, captain." Well, he's about six [foot] four [inches], looked like John Wayne. He slaps his hand on the table. He said, "We'll go see about that." Captain and the lieutenant and that sergeant and me, we go upstairs and we go in the head. The captain said, "Sergeant, they look clean to me." Oh, were they pissed. The sergeant knew that something happened. I don't know if the captain knew, but the captain, he liked me. Anyway, he says, "I'll get you [inaudible]. I'll run you up." He wanted to run me up to the colonel. So, we're playing ball and I'm pitching. I think I struck out twelve that day I was pitching. I told the captain I got to quit playing ball because they're giving me a hard time and they're running me up again. So, the captain walks over to this barracks, gets on the radio or the phone, and he calls the colonel's office. He wasn't there; the executive was there, Major Puatrillo. He walked all the way out to the ballfield. It's like about as far as (Green Rock?) from here. He was talking to the captain when I was pitching. I don't know what they were talking about. Anyway, when we got done playing, he walked to our barracks. Me and two other guys were playing. We didn't follow them, but we stayed out of sight. He chewed their ass out there when they got there. The next day I got transferred. So, that's how come. When I was playing ball at Camp Lejeune, I was going to ship over because I ain't doing nothing but playing ball, eat whatever you want when you want. That was great. Then they decide the [Korean] War was going to happen.

SI: You were at Lejeune for a while playing ball.

FP: Yes. Springtime until May or something. Then they closed everything up and sent everybody overseas.

SI: When you were playing ball, would you play other Marine Corps posts?

FP: Yes, it was a Marine Corps thing. I was playing with Camp Lejeune for a while, but they only had eighteen guys or something and I was the newest guy. So, I played with this captain. We played the Lejeune team and we beat them. I was pitching. I must not have been too bad. I had a good curveball. We beat them. The captain took care of me. [inaudible]

SI: When you shipped out of Lejeune, where were you sent?

FP: By train, went to Pendleton. That's where I seen Chesty Puller in the chow line.

SI: Were you already assigned ...? At that point, did you know who Chesty Puller was?

FP: No. I never even heard of him. I had no reason. I knew Captain Barrow. He was my captain. Then I got transferred to (Tatum?). My nephew was a coach in Maryland University. Then he wanted me to go to Maryland and play baseball. I said, "Hell, I'm lucky I got through high school. I ain't going to play in college."

SI: Once you got to Pendleton, were you assigned to a different unit?

FP: I was in Captain (Tatum's) unit.

SI: Do you remember the number?

FP: Yes. It was (HMS?). It was an HMS with machine gun and bazooka. [inaudible] pack everything. I worked for a living on a farm and these guys couldn't do nothing. So, I kind of liked it.

SI: You were getting ready to deploy to Japan.

FP: Yes, we board ship and we were going to go to Hawaii, and they changed it and said we were going straight to Japan.

SI: Had the Korean war started yet or was this before the Korean War?

FP: I think they had a skirmish in South Korea. We didn't get there until we landed in Inchon the 15th of September, 1950.

SI: Tell me about getting into Japan and what your activities were there.

FP: We were doing exercises, trying to get into shape. Tried to go on liberty at night without a pass, jump over the fence or something. They said, "You can go as long as you don't get caught." You get caught, you're in trouble. Well, I can climb a fence pretty good. [laughter] So, I went on liberty.

SI: Would you go into Tokyo?

FP: No, on the coast. [inaudible] girls, hanging out on the ocean. [inaudible] there.

SI: You'd said you joined the Marine Corps because you wanted to shoot Japanese people. How did you feel now being among Japanese and they're our allies at this point?

FP: I don't care now. I hated them then. As a matter of fact, I fixed my home up that I was born in. I did it all over. I had a Japanese plumber. He was real good. There was four in his family and they were three doctors and him. He didn't want to be a doctor, so he was a plumber. So, I used to take him to lunch when we were working. We met a guy I knew and he's looking at me and this Jap--he's a half Jap--and he says, "How do you know him?" This Jap says, "I finally found my father." [laughter] I thought this guy was going to fall off the chair. He was a good plumber.

SI: Tell me about preparing for the Inchon landing, what that was like.

FP: They had exercises two or three times a day aboard ship. I didn't do all them exercises because I was in charge of the mail at that time. So, I'd get the mail. They'd get it and bring it.

I'd separate some of it, but then I did exercise, whatever it was. They were just waiting to go on the LST [Landing Ship, Tank].

SI: Do you remember the ship you were put on for the invasion?

FP: No.

SI: Was it an LST?

FP: It was an LST. I had a landing craft. I never went to church; it was too far away. So, we got aboard ship. Everybody went down to their respective [services]--Protestants, Catholics, and all--and I stayed up on top. I never went down. The guys were putting a good word in for me. I had ten dollars in silver dollars I was saying. I'd throw them out in the ocean to see how hard they'd skip. That's what I did before [inaudible] because I didn't go down, but the guys said they'd put a good word in for me. If I didn't go to church then, I ain't going to go now when I need it.

SI: Tell me what you remember about the actual invasion.

FP: We all got on an LST. I had the bazooka. I went to land and, for some reason, we landed at the wrong spot we were supposed to be. Anyway, we got ashore. Being I had a bazooka, they put me out in front of everybody along the road where they thought the tanks were coming, and the machine guns behind me, and the all the rifleman. I said, "What the hell? I'm up here in front of everybody. Man, I got to watch out." The tanks came, but they skipped off on the side or something. I didn't shoot none that day. That was that. I was thinking, "If I could live until tomorrow morning, I'll check this out."

SI: Was there any resistance during the initial invasion? Was the landing course bombed where you were?

FP: They were shooting mortars. I've never seen so much stuff right on the ships going over. You would think there wouldn't be nothing left over there. I couldn't believe how much [inaudible]. Every ship was shooting. I said, "Man." I couldn't believe it. I said, "How the hell can anybody live over there?" but they were.

SI: You went ashore on an LCVP [landing craft, vehicle, personnel].

FP: No, an (AMBO?). The landing crafts, some of them, the front go down. This one here [inaudible] had to jump over the side and then climb up the hill. That's what I did.

SI: Was Chesty Puller in your unit?

FP: Chesty Puller was behind us. We were in front of him. We were in the second wave. Chesty was in the second wave, but he was behind us.

SI: You talked about getting into position on the first day. Do you remember when you first came under enemy fire?

FP: Yeah, second day I think. [inaudible] They told us, they said, "Some of you ain't coming back." Right then, I didn't give a shit for nothing. I was going to do what I was supposed to do, and that's what I did. You do whatever they tell you that you got to do. That's all.

SI: The first objective was to go to Seoul.

FP: No, there was a couple towns before Seoul. That's when they were throwing mortars at us. I don't know where we were when they were throwing mortars, a couple mortars at us, and then we had to lay down on the ground. I said, "Well, I'm lucky." Some of them guys got hit. I didn't get hit. Then I did. I got hit in the side--never knew it, never felt it. Years later, when I was out of the Marine Corps, I was running the payloader. I jumped out of the payloader and I landed on my right foot. Boy, did that hurt. I thought because I jumped out of the payloader--I was in there about ten hours. A year later, this thing came out of my--it went down my pant leg and it landed on the floor. I was talking to my mother and she says, "What's that?" I said, "Must have had something in my pocket." I picked it up and threw it in the garbage. From then on, my right foot, I had trouble. I didn't even want to think about the war. I didn't know that was shrapnel that came out. It was pus for a long time, scab on it. Then the VA looked at it. They didn't know what it was. That April is when my right foot gave out and I fell down and cracked my hip. This is how come my right foot gave out. The guy says, "You should get a Purple Heart." I said, "I never put in for nothing. Who the hell's going to believe that?" But the scar is different. When something comes from the inside out, it's a smooth--what do you call it?--scar. If it goes from the [outside in], it's rough on top. One guy knew that. I talked to--they sent me to some officer's recruit--what do you call the guy that takes care of you? Service officer. They said, "They're not going to believe it." I said, "Well, I don't care," because it ain't going to make no difference to me as far as my grandson, who wanted me to get one. So, I put in for one, but he says, "The Marine Corps will never believe that." ... So, I didn't care.

SI: There was about three months between when you landed and when you got to the Chosin Reservoir.

FP: Yes, I didn't get all the way up there, but they sent us up to Hagaru, a little bit past Hagaru, and that was almost to Chosin. Then they brought me back because they had trouble in Pusan, so they brought some of us back. That's where I met Chesty Puller.

SI: Does anything stand out from that push up North, that first push?

FP: There were more people killed in Pusan--there were more Marines killed there than anyplace, than in Chosin. In Hagaru, we were there. Wherever they needed a machine gun, they used to send us. Then we always came back to the CP [command post] to set our machine guns up.

SI: How often would you have to use your weapons? Was it daily that you were running into resistance?

FP: No. No, sometimes we didn't. Sometimes you didn't and sometimes you did. You'd shoot them, they'd be five hundred, a thousand feet away when you shoot. They had the machine guns cross, where this machine gun would shoot this far. This one here would cover that. Whatever we had to do. I didn't give a shit. As a matter of fact, they bury everybody up on top of the ground over there. I was supposed to find a place for my machine and I said, "There looks pretty good." I just took that casket and threw it the hell out and put my machine gun in there. I didn't care for nothing. I figured I wasn't coming home, so what the hell? I didn't care.

SI: Did your unit suffer a lot of casualties before the Chosin Reservoir period?

FP: Yes, we lost a lot. I forget the name of that town. Hagaru was the next one. Then there was the Reservoir. How the hell could I forget that?

SI: Was it Osan?

FP: Osan, that's it. Yes. There were more Marines killed there than anyplace in Korea.

SI: What do you remember about the fighting at Osan?

FP: We had Marines together, moving up. They had the Army alongside of us. The gooks ran right through the Army guys, killed most of them. They come up behind us. We had leggings. When they seen them leggings, they tried to go against somebody else. That's when Omar [Bradley], the Army General, wanted the Army and the Marines, and [Oliver P.] Smith wanted Marines [inaudible] do your own, but they didn't do that. That's where a lot of casualties [occurred].

SI: Where were you when the Chinese entered the war, came across the border?

FP: I think I was at Hagaru. They come right on down the--what was the name of that one you just told me?

SI: Coming over the Yalu River?

FP: No.

SI: Osan?

FP: Osan, yes. They had all along there. They had so many. Every third one had a rifle. When that guy got killed, then the other guy picked it up. A lot of people don't know that the interpreter that was in Osan, Hagaru and Chosin, he talks to the Chinese General with a speaker and told him if they killed all the Marines, Truman was going to bomb China the next day. That's why we got out of there. They could have walked over us [inaudible]. You seen that picture in the office? That line of people? They could have killed every one of us, and that's what happened. People don't even know that. Nobody hardly knows that. I knew because I was one of the interpreters. I think he got the Congressional Medal of Honor, but in a different way

or something. Nobody ever heard of that, because, hell, it was only one path to get out of there. Then, when I came home, I had a bad back, I worked for my son in Sergeantsville. Do you know where that is?

SI: Yes.

FP: It was a doctor's complex there. This guy, his wife was a secretary in that office. He says, "Why don't you go down there and try acupuncture?" I was going to try anything, my back was hurting. So, I go down there to try acupuncture with this Chinese doctor. I asked her, "What are you, Chinese or Korean?" She says, "No," she's Chinese. I said, "I know a little bit about Chinese." She told me the same thing. She says, "You know why you got out of there? Because they were afraid Truman was going to bomb China." So, they put the two of them together, but nobody ever knew that. This doctor told me that right out. That was something.

SI: What was it like being in that area when you were surrounded? What was daily life like?

FP: Chesty Puller made a speech at that time and said, "We want no prisoners. None of us are going to be prisoners. If you can't shoot them, you'll get shot. No prisoners." They never took any Marine prisoners.

SI: Did you have much interaction with Chesty Puller during that period?

FP: Oh, yes. He would always tell you to do something. I had a post. I company was right by Chesty Puller. He says for me to take I company with Lieutenant (Fisher?), go down the road and meet him and post somewhere, where we were supposed to have machine guns. So, his whole platoon [inaudible] maybe sixty guys. Lieutenant (Fisher?) and I took them about a mile and a half, because I knew where it was and he posted them. That was a big thing. He used to check our machine guns all the time.

SI: What were the living conditions like in the encircled area?

FP: You had to try to have C-rations. You try to put them under your arms or somewhere to thaw them out. I knew Chesty's driver and his bodyguard. I tried to stick some frozen C-rations in the jeep on the hood and the motor. I did that once in a while. I didn't care. Captain Barrow, did you ever hear of Barrow?

SI: You told me he became the commandant of the Marine Corps.

FP: Well, he wanted me to come back in his outfit. He asked me three times. I said, "If the captain says I can go, I'll go." I liked him, because he's seen what I can do. Captain, he says, "You're going to stay with us." As a matter of fact, they had--I don't know with what outfit--they had a meeting [inaudible]. I think it was Barrow's outfit. They had a couple days off, so we're eating chow. There's about a hundred, hundred and fifty guys in the chow line. I'm eating chow warm. (Tatum?) called me up to--he's talking with Barrow. I guess they just wanted to test me. So, he says, "Captain Barrow, you lost a bunch of guys. He wants to know if you'll go with him." I said, "If he needs me, I'll go." Tatum says, "You go back down, finish your [meal]." He

wouldn't let me go, because I had the machine gun and move me wherever you had to go. I didn't care.

SI: Did you ever have trouble with supplies at that point? Did you have enough ammunition?

FP: They had three airplanes come over. They brought supplies and stuff, and they pushed them out of the back. The wood plane was so freaking high, half the stuff that they pushed out went over to the gooks. Chesty Puller chewed [them out]. They had a radio. He says, "I'm going to court-martial you the first thing I get a chance." Then, some guy come in, nice, and then one guy come in real low, the freaking things never opened up hardly when they pushed them out. We lost a few guys because you can't run away from them. When they're coming down, you don't know where the hell they're going. We lost a couple guys that way, carrying them, but [Chesty] was pissed. He was something. I tell you, he gives Barrow hell, because he didn't go through that [inaudible] or some town. He says, "Chesty Puller is on the phone. He says, 'Take the town. Go right through. What are you doing?'" He chewed his ass out. I'm standing there. Then, they took [inaudible].

SI: It sounds like you have a lot of respect for your officers.

FP: Oh, yes. They were good. They put me everywhere they needed somebody. One time, the gooks were on the side of the hill. They took my machine gun up on the top of this hill, not quite to the top, because then you could see the skyline. That's what we went by. That was the only machine gun over there. Only gooks were down at the bottom and they were going to come over. They had a truckload of rockets, I guess. I think there's six in the truck. We used to take turns staying awake, because there was three of us. I just got in my sleeping bag. You can't zip it up [inaudible]. When they went off, there was grass, maybe four-foot high weeds, it went right over my head. I come out of the sleeping bag, I was four-foot in the air, straight out. I'm looking over top of these weeds. Holy shit, I couldn't hear for a hell of a long time. They were loud. They were cutting them short because it was right on the other side of the hill. I was up there waiting for them to come over. We were lucky. That was something.

SI: After the Chinese came in, how long was it before you started moving back toward the coast?

FP: Four days or something. Four or five days. They were all over. You were just shooting. You just sit down on top of one, eating your rations, just thinking nothing of it.

SI: You mean sitting on a body?

FP: Yes. We had a lot of bodies. We had to dig a hole, but it was frozen. We tried dynamite, but the gooks had a house and the guy said, "Let's knock the house over because their chimneys go under the floor." So, we pushed the house over and dug that out where it wasn't froze. We started throwing the bodies in there. Chesty was there. Tatum was there. [inaudible], me, and a couple of us throwing them in. We put a hundred and eighteen guys in that hole and the hole wasn't big enough. So, they had to run over it with a tank and push them down. They were

cracking like you wouldn't believe. Chesty Puller says it's the worst thing he's ever seen, the whole time in the Marine Corps.

SI: Were these enemy bodies?

FP: All Marines.

SI: All Marines.

FP: There was an Army Captain laying on the side. The guy says, "Want me to get that?" He says, "He's in the Army. Let him stay there." He wouldn't pick him up. But they really sounded like they were cracking wood. Then they'd put some dirt on them. Four of us had the flag. I finally folded the last fold. You ever see the Marine Corps history book?

SI: Yes.

FP: December 9th, you ever see that in there?

SI: No.

FP: No. That's the only date they left out. Never put that in. December 9, 1950, that's when we buried all them. They left that page out. They go from eight to ten, and they left that out. A lot of them never knew that. But I folded the flag, the last one to fold it. They were filming this whole thing. I think they had an Army guy filming it. That's when they were walking out. On this path they're walking out, they blew up the bridge. Did you ever hear that?

SI: No.

FP: There's a bridge that was in this path. You had to go through that bridge, so we all had a-- everybody was waiting in line, the whole thing was in line, and they had the helicopters. The centerpiece was blown up, so they brought in a piece--I don't know how long it was--but they had to put that in to tie it together, and it fell off and dropped down a hundred feet. But they had two pieces. They went and got the other one and they put the other one in, bolted it somehow. Then we start walking out again. That's when they could have killed them all because they blew that bridge up and you couldn't get back. That was December 9th when we buried them guys. Went from the 8th to the 10th.

SI: You must have gotten frostbite.

FP: I got froze up. When you take your socks off, your skin comes with it. I got one hundred percent disability. I don't know if I told you, they sent me medals one time.

SI: No.

FP: The recruiter took the information. They sent me all Navy medals. Navy Good Conduct. I was so pissed off I couldn't see. I called them up and I chewed his ass out. He was giving me

hell. He said, "Don't you know the Marine Corps is part of the Navy?" What the hell does that got to do with sending a Good Conduct Medal? What the hell? Then, the Korean Medal was just a ribbon. We had three battles. I couldn't get over that. That's when I quit donating to the Marine Corps, because I asked somebody about the medals from the Marine Corps. I didn't get no answer. A buddy of mine knew Senator [Leonard] Lance. Do you Lance?

SI: No.

FP: He's a congressman. He's got an office that presents medals and all that kind of stuff. My buddy, he's good at that. He called down and they sent him a discharge. It's got on it a Marine Corps discharge, everything. He says, "No, that's no good. You got to have the DD214." I don't know. I had to look for one. It's got the same thing on there as there is on the discharge. They said they got to look into getting me the medals. That pissed me off. I said, "This is sixty years later you're talking about that." So, then I was pissed. I told them about the shrapnel I had in my leg. I says, "If it's so hard to get me the regular medals, let them look up where I got hit." So, that's what they're doing. You don't get no more for a medal, a Purple Heart. I got one hundred percent disability because I had cancer in my face. I got a new face. It's all done over. I wouldn't do that again. That was something. My hands get cold. That's why I go to Florida.

SI: How long did it take to get out of the Communist-held territory?

FP: Four days or something. Four or five. It was sixty miles. They had a couple vehicles, but they were carrying some of the dead guys. Chesty Puller was walking. They had room for him, but he wanted to walk with everybody else. He was something.

SI: Where was your final destination?

FP: Pusan, I think it was. Yes. When I play golf in Florida, I've been playing with this guy for three, four years. He got talking about Korea with somebody. He says, "Boy, I really felt sorry for them First Marines when they came onboard." I said, "I was one of them suckers." He couldn't believe it. I knew him four years. He never said nothing. I went aboard his ship. I said, "Some freaking swabby stole my boots." I was laying on the deck and the boots were right by me. I woke up and they were gone. I had to go around the ship looking for some sailor with my size shoe. I took a sailor's shoes and I'm wearing Navy shoes.

SI: Once you were taken out of Pusan, did you have to go back into combat?

FP: Yes. Well, we got taken out before that. After we took Seoul, they said that was it, we were going home. I had a Russian BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] I picked up. I said, "Well, I'll take this sucker home. I'll shoot a lot of deer with this." I put that under my rack. We were aboard ship maybe a week or so and they said, "We're going to make another landing." I said, "Some swabby got a damn good BAR." Been there a couple months, I don't know where we were. We left there in May. We were in Central [Korea] because when I got hit with shrapnel, it wasn't frozen. It was in Central [Korea] somewhere, but I don't know where it was. Up until May, I tried to figure out where the hell we were and I don't know, but it was in Central [Korea] because it was warm. When I was first up there, everything was frozen.

SI: Did you get any leave between coming back from Chosin and going to Central Korea?

FP: No. You had a warm meal once in a while. There was one outfit--I don't know when this was, but we were waiting and there was a line all the way across this building. Two nurses were taking care of these guys, guys looking for a little piece of ass. So, we're waiting in line. I'm in line, too. I said, "Hell." It was two nurses doing this. I got not too far off and the guy says, "We're pulling out. Forget it." That was the end of that. We went somewhere. I remember we were in line. The guys were pissed off because they paid their thirty-five dollars. I don't when that was. These girls were charging thirty-five dollars. Some doctor was in charge of it. I never mentioned that. I hate to say that, but that goes with the routine.

SI: Do any other stories stand out from your time in Korea?

FP: You know when they were dropping all this stuff down to us, some guys came low and they dropped shells and food. They dropped a case of hand grenades in wooden boxes. These guys would take them out and they'd give everybody some hand grenades. Chesty Puller always carried two hand grenades. I always carried two. So, these guys are making a fire and putting the boxes in and there was a [inaudible] hand grenade in there. It went off and killed four guys. You couldn't believe it. Just like that. There was four guys right around the freaking thing. I must have been fifty feet away or a hundred feet away. A couple guys went nuts. One of the sergeants went crazy and they sent him back.

SI: When you say they went crazy, would they refuse to do anything?

FP: He was hollering, going crazy, going nuts. Really bad. I'm glad I never get that shit because I figured I wasn't coming home anyway, but this guy was in the comm. section and they had to carry him out. They gave him a needle and a shot or something. (Tatum?) got shot in the leg. They took him out in a helicopter. The first time they took guys out in helicopter, they had to strap them on the side because there wasn't no room in the helicopter. They strapped two guys, one on each side or something like that. When they got down there, the guys were froze stiff. So, they stopped that. So, they tried to jam them in. They used to take some guys up, they want to find out something about him on the helicopter, and they don't tell them or they tell them, and they push them out of the side. It's just routine. Thank god I didn't give a shit. I was probably better off. I think that's why Barrow wanted me back in his outfit, because I didn't give a shit. I'd do anything.

SI: You left Korea in May of 1951.

FP: Yes. They gave me thirty days leave. Then I went to Yorktown.

SI: The aircraft carrier?

FP: What?

SI: You went to USS *Yorktown*.

FP: Yes, in Virginia.

SI: You went to the town of Yorktown.

FP: Yorktown.

SI: Not the ship.

FP: No. They had the best food there you've ever seen. They'd ask you what you want, how you want your eggs. You just want steak or veal. All the big wheels--generals and colonels, who used to come to Yorktown to go hunting, to go fishing. That's why they always fed them so good. We had a parade every other day. Put your dress blues on. One guy played the Marines' hymn or whatever it was. They marched out because it would be a general coming, somebody. Every other day you had your clothes on the bunk. Some guys used to make it up and then sleep on the floor because they wanted it to look good. That was [inaudible].

SI: How much longer did you have in the Marine Corps after that? How long was your enlistment for?

FP: Three years. Three years and then they give you that extra year, COG, "Convenience of the Government." I got my license in the Marine Corps. I was driving, patrol and stuff. I had the twelve to four watch the last day. I says, "I'm getting out in the morning. I ain't doing a freaking thing no more." So, this wise reserve sergeant, he says, "You're going to take the guard out." "No, I ain't taking no freaking guard out. I'm going home." The son of a bitch, he kept the guys out there for a couple hours. He run me up to the colonel. The last day. So, I go before the colonel. He was reserve, never out nowhere. So, I go before the colonel, had to dress up and everything. He's reading my discharge. He says, "Well, this is one of the good discharges that I have." I had nothing wrong. He's got me, I'm thinking for disobedience of orders. So, the colonel's talking to him. There's a captain in the back. He says to the captain, "Captain, is that customary that the guy off watch posts the next relief?" Captain said, "No sir, colonel." He chewed that guy's ass out. He said, "I know you're a little salty and you want to get out." He says, "If you stay here until tomorrow, I'll give you a discharge." Then we got excused. So, I seen that sergeant and I said, "You son of a bitch." I says, "I'm going to wait outside the gate for you. I'm going to kill you." What the hell? Nobody does that. The new guard has their own driver, but he wanted me to do it just to be--the captain said, "No, sir, colonel. You don't do that." He chewed his ass out. The next day, they gave me my discharge. So, I stayed in four years and one day.

SI: Once you were out of the Marine Corps, what did you do next? Did you come back home?

FP: Yes, came back home. The captain sent me to a team down South to play ball. So, I got out in February and I went down South. I got hooked up with a giant farm team and I played ball for three years. Then I had to go to work. I was getting three hundred and fifty a month and fifty dollars for meals--four hundred dollars a month. I thought that was pretty good. I got into the John Deere business. I did that for about, I don't know, seven, eight years or something.

SI: That was back up here?

FP: Yes. I was on Route 31. Some guy owed me money for stuff on the tractor, I don't know, maybe a thousand dollars or something. He says, "Want to buy some cows?" He says, "I'll give you cows instead of paying you," because he says he's going to sell out. I said, "Yeah, I'll do that." He come with all his papers. He had good cows. I said, "I'd do that, but I got to have a farm. I can't just take them." So, he comes back a couple days later, a week later, and he said, "I got a farm for you," a farm that he was renting. This guy was selling his farm. They were selling all the farms in the reservoir for the reservoir. This guy who sold his farm in the reservoir, he says, "I heard you bought a farm." He said, "I'll give you ten thousand dollars more than you paid for it." "That's all right." I didn't buy the farm yet. Next day, I got in the car and drove all the way to Florida to buy the farm. I said, "I'm going to make ten thousand dollars." So, I bought the farm. It was good for him for paying. I [inaudible] the farm. It was one of the nicest farms around, so I kept it. I put on cows. [Do you know] Ballantine Beer?

SI: Yes.

FP: I bought half of their herd. They got money from the bank. I went to Hamburg, New Jersey. I was going to get a loan. The guy was selling cows up there, so I went into the bank to get a loan. So, I'm in the bank. There's me and two other guys in the bank. So, that one guy, they were doing something on the paper and the guy says, "Well, I'm going to lunch. I'll be back in a half hour." So, he goes out to lunch. The other guy, I don't know if he owned the bank or what. He looked across the street and the apartments were on fire. He runs out of the bank. I'm in the freaking bank and the safe is open. They had one bag of money laying all over the floor. All the windows were open, no air-conditioning. I said, "No, I can't do that. It ain't mine." The big windows are open. My car is right outside the window. The freaking money was--one of the bags was open, laying down. The stacks, I don't know how much in the stacks. I was in the bank by myself. "Man," I says, "I can't do that. I ain't lying." I waited there until that guy came back from lunch. I must have been there half an hour, thinking, "Man, I got to watch this place. What if somebody comes in here?" That guy, he owned that apartment that was on fire and he was up there. That was something. I said, "It wasn't mine." You take that and you get ten years in jail. For what? For a freaking dollar? I said, I've been shot at before. I'm not taking nothing. So, I didn't do it. Anyway, I didn't get a loan there. I got the banks from Clinton, [New Jersey]. They gave me a loan. They wanted to see my collateral. Why? I didn't even have a dollar. My brother says he had fifty cows by the reservoir. He said, "Why don't I give you them cows? Tell them they're your cows." So, they take the fifty cows and they loaned me money. So, I bought Ballentine's half a herd.

SI: I'm curious, why did Ballentine have a herd of cattle?

FP: Well, they had their farm up there in Bedminster. Everybody had some cows. He had all purebreds. That's why they were getting rid of them. That was in '53, I think. It was when I was in [inaudible] playing ball. I had the John Deere business. That's how I bought the farm.

SI: How long did you have the farm?

FP: I had it for years. I had five hundred and ninety acres. Production [inaudible]. Interest went from four and six to twenty-two percent. I had to sell four hundred and fifty acres. I paid off that. I bottled milk for twenty years. I had more trouble with the state. I must have been in court at least a dozen times, fifteen times, because they didn't want nobody to do that.

SI: Bottle milk?

FP: Yes. I didn't want to. I didn't know nothing about it. I was selling milk from Guernseys. I went to the creamery and I said, "I got rich milk. I need a dollar more." Always getting five or something. He said, "I'll give you fifty cents. Come back in a month and we'll talk about the other fifty." I said, "All right. That thirty days up, I went right there, and he said, "I can't do it." I cussed a little bit and I says, "I'll bottle my own milk." Didn't know nothing about it. didn't have a place to do it, but I was young and, like I said, I didn't care. I bought this lot across the highway off of some woman. So, I was going to build a creamery. I didn't get a permit. Somebody asked me, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm going to put a church up." You don't need a permit. Then I seen the guys in (Berwick?) who handled operations, setting up creameries. I called them guys and I got hooked up with them. They set me up with a creamery after I built the building. Then I started bottling milk. They said, "You can't bottle milk because you don't have no cows. You got to have animals where you bottle milk." So, I had a cow truck. I put five calves in the truck and took them over to where I bottled milk, tied them to the tree, [and] fed them. Kids were coming over and they were petting them. They came down from Trenton. They'd seen I had animals there. They didn't know what the hell to do. I said, "If you don't give me a license tomorrow morning, I'm selling milk anyway." So, I start selling milk. Then they tried to make different laws. They said, "You got to have it on your own property." I said, "That's my property." Then they made a narrow law that it's got to be contiguous from where you milk cows to where you bottle. So, the reservoir don't count. The highway don't count. There was one farm in between. I went and I rented that farm. I didn't tell them that until we went to court and I showed them my lease. They were pissed. I just did that. They'd raise their price every once in a while. They'd raise it ten cents, I'd lower mine a nickel. I had a big four by eight sign. They wanted to lock me up. They come down to lock me up. Somehow, Lou-somebody, channel seven, came from New York with their trucks and their speakers and their cameras. These guys from Trenton came down to lock me up. They turned around in the parking lot and went back. I sold more milk like that. I sold six hundred gallons in one day. That's unbelievable. I had to go out and get milk off of my neighbors and buddies. I had a tanker. You weren't allowed to get milk. I had to get milk, but I didn't have enough. They came from Philadelphia, from New York, all over, just to see what's going on because I had rich milk. That was something. I was always in trouble, but I didn't care. I bought a new pickup one time. If you got farm use, you don't pay tax. I bought a new pickup and I put farm use plates on it. Here they come from Trenton. I didn't pay no tax on that new pickup. I say, "You don't pay no tax on farm use." They were pissed. They went back, they changed the law that day. Any new pickup has to pay tax. It was six hundred dollars tax. They were pissed. But I didn't care.

SI: Did you always just have that business? The business we were at today, was that started by you or your sons?

FP: My son. I helped a little bit in a way. He did that.

SI: Your main business was the dairy farm.

FP: After I sold the cows, I put on beef. I had a hundred-and-something beef cows. When I had to sell the farm, four hundred and fifty acres, they wanted me to farm so they wouldn't have to pay all the tax. So, I was farming the same farm that I owned. I'm still doing that. Last year, my kid--I ain't steady like I used to be, and I had a big tractor. I'm four steps in it and he says, "I'm going to get rid of all that stuff. You can't even climb up there no more." I said, "Do what you want." I made him my power of attorney, so he sold all kinds of machinery. So, this is the first year I got somebody to do it for me. But I still got it under my name. I used to do it real good. I'd be done in two months, a hundred and fifty acres. This guy, they got him for me, he still didn't pick the hay up yet; it's in the snow. Everybody says, "It ain't like when I was doing it."

SI: You said earlier that you didn't really talk about your experiences until about ten years ago. Was there anything in particular that changed? Was it just time?

FP: I remember going to the VA and I listened to some guys. They have a meeting twice a month on people from Korea. Some of the guys don't know nothing about it. They were in Korea, but they got there late, didn't do nothing. I knew all this stuff. They got talking to me. We go to lunch or something. Then I started [inaudible]. I said, "I don't care." Just like I never told nobody about my shrapnel I got in my leg. Then a couple guys, they're making Hunterdon County Purple Heart County. The guy said, "You've been in [inaudible] longer than any of us." My grandson wants the medals.

SI: Was there anything else you want to add about any part of your life? How many children do you have?

FP: The one boy there. I had another boy with somebody else. He was lieutenant colonel in the Air Force, retired. He used to work on the farm with me. He's in Alaska now. He's flying private. Flies five days a week. They pay him every day when he comes in. Never had a job like that. He has 5800 hours in the air. He worked for Boeing.

SI: Well, thank you very much. I really appreciate all your time today.

FP: You can cross out whatever you don't want and do whatever you want. I don't care. It was ten years later. If it was ten years ago, I'd say, "Don't call me."

SI: Well, I appreciate you sharing. Thank you very much.

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