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INTERVIEWEE: John P. Maclean

INTERVIEWER: Mike Charrier

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Transcription of Interview Number 31D 2 MACLEAN

John P. Maclean

Interviewed 22 January 2002

By Mike Charrier

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History Program Interview with John Maclean on the 22 January 2002 at his home in Merrickville, Ontario. Could you give me your full name and date of birth please?

MACLEAN: I'm John Maclean. I was born in Windsor, Ontario. My father was with Bell Canada and we moved from city to city in Ontario. I went to UTS, University of Toronto Schools in Toronto and then London Central High School.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have military background in your family?

MACLEAN: No, but as is obvious I was in the war years as a teenager so we were all excited and hot to go to war.

INTERVIEWER: Did you join the military?

MACLEAN: Yes, in high school in London I joined the London Fusiliers as a boy soldier and got to be RSM of the school of cadet corps. But because I was too small and too young I had to go to university in 1944, but in 1945 I was able to join the army.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get overseas?

MACLEAN: No I didn't. I got to be a reserve paratrooper when the war ended and they discovered I was under age and I could go back to university.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do after the end of the war then?

MACLEAN: At the end of the war I travelled through the States and I ended up as a journalist with the Toronto Telegram.

INTERVIEWER: Did you rejoin the militia then?

MACLEAN: Well, after the war I didn't want to join the COTC at the university because they had wooden rifles and I had already had battle training experience in training camps. So I went down to the reserve army and joined the Irish Regiment of Canada as a soldier and when they discovered I had some experience and was at university they suggested that I apply for a commission and I got that.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you end up volunteering for the Korean Conflict?

MACLEAN: Well, in the late spring/summer of 1950 I was teaching or helping to teach a battle training course at Petawawa on leave from the Telegram. On June 25th when the

Korean War broke out I was there, right on the spot helping to teach the course. I ran across the parade square to General Volke's office, which is not the thing that a lieutenant does normally, and said "Hey, there's my war. I want to go." And he said, "Lots of time. Come back in the morning, nine o'clock." So the paperwork started and they accepted me and I, because I was on the spot partly and because I some experience, I was accepted as 1st lieutenant platoon commander and put to work.

INTERVIEWER: In the new 2nd Battalion?

MACLEAN: In the new 2nd Battalion.

INTERVIEWER: Where there a lot of militia people in the 2nd Battalion, a lot of reservists?

MACLEAN: Later I found out, much later, about 20,000 people volunteered for the war altogether so it was a mixed bag. There probably was militia but none of the people that I knew from Toronto. Mostly off the street and from reserve regiments here and there, I suppose, and from people who just wanted to go.

INTERVIEWER: Were there many who were Second World War veterans?

MACLEAN: Yes, Hugh Hutton was a platoon commander with me, but he was 34 years old and didn't last all that long. That was considered pretty old for a platoon commander but he had World War II experience. So he was representative of the ones who were from the Second World War.

INTERVIEWER: But in the ranks there were several World War II veterans?

MACLEAN: Not that I recall. I think we were all fresh off the street.

INTERVIEWER: With no combat experience of any kind?

MACLEAN: No none.

INTERVIEWER: And how old were you then?

MACLEAN: I would be then 23.

INTERVIEWER: Did you give me your date of birth at the beginning, I'm just trying to remember?

MACLEAN: Christmas day 1926.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. What did you do? The battalion went off to Fort Lewis?

MACLEAN: The battalion was formed up at Petawawa and trained at Fort Lewis in September or early October of 1950.

INTERVIEWER: For how long?

MACLEAN: Four months.

INTERVIEWER: Before you went to Fort Lewis, the battalion and your platoon in particular had not trained very much had they?

MACLEAN: We began training. The thing I haven't said before, we had to learn how to throw a hand grenade, for example. Go out on a range and shoot and see whether the rifle was zeroed in or not. Whether you could throw a hand grenade. We were all taught the British system like a cricket ball player but most of us jettisoned that kind of throwing. We threw it like a baseball.

INTERVIEWER: Then you went off to....

MACLEAN: .... and gas mask training and all that sort of stuff.

INTERVIEWER: But Fort Lewis was just an extension of that basic infantry training at the platoon and up to company level?

MACLEAN: I'm guessing, but I think it was a lot of practice for the company commanders and the battalion commanders of how to manoeuvre and take charge of their people and accomplish certain tasks. But from a platoon level was all the same thing, day after day, being a platoon, knowing each other, knowing the corporals, knowing the sergeant. Practising when the sergeant was there or when I was there. The sergeant would be LOB in Korea. We were told that in case I got killed and the sergeant would have to take over all the nitty gritty on a very small platoon level.

INTERVIEWER: LOB being left out of battle?

MACLEAN: Left out of battle.

INTERVIEWER: By the time you finished your training in Fort Lewis you felt comfortable with your platoon and you platoon felt confident in you?

MACLEAN: Partly because of our age and attitude we were always comfortable. We could hardly wait to get going. The little things that we kept learning day by day by day were so much extra material that we could use eventually but we were gung ho, ready to go, ready to fight. We knew our weapons, we knew our corporals, we knew our sergeant, we even knew our officers. So that we were ready, we were ready.

INTERVIEWER: Did your training gear itself specifically to Korea and what was expected of you in that geography in Korea?

MACLEAN: Not that I recall. We were just trained as a fighting force. Don't forget the Patricia's Regiment went over in November so that left the Vandoos and the RCR to continue training in Fort Lewis. But mostly it was a familiarization with what we were supposed to do no matter what the conditions, whether it was hills or swamp or forest or what it was.

INTERVIEWER: So it was just basic infantry and adapted to the conditions, what ever they happened to be.

MACLEAN: Yes, if a platoon is well trained, well organized, it will adapt very quickly. We found that out in Korea.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get any feed back from the PPCLI in Korea while you were still training in Fort Lewis?

MACLEAN: There may have been some feed back from senior type officers amongst themselves but it didn't translate us to us down at platoon level.

INTERVIEWER: Assuming your platoon was an average platoon, what was the average age and education of the members of the platoon, NCOs and the men?

MACLEAN: The average age would be late teens early twenties, they'd all have to be 19 to start with so probably 20, 21, 22, 23 in there. I was not the old man I was the same age as most of them. I think there may have been one or two 27, 28 years old. But they didn't last long because oddly enough, just like hockey players, they tend to age very quickly. Hugh Hutton the chap that I mentioned before, 34, he didn't last very long because he couldn't run up and down the hills like we could.

INTERVIEWER: He was your fellow platoon commander?

MACLEAN: Yes, he had another platoon.

INTERVIEWER: What about your NCOs? Were they any more experienced or older than the rest of the people in the platoon?

MACLEAN: Well the junior NCOs, the lance corporals and corporals, were trained as we were. But my sergeant turned out to be paratrooper from the British Army who had been in the Middle East and actually had deserted from the British Army and ran across to Canada and joined up and was accepted. The Major, my company commander, (Medland?), knew that my sergeant was a deserter but he was a gung-ho type and he knew his weapons and he knew what should happen and he was a great help to me.

INTERVIEWER: At some point towards the end of the training period in Fort Lewis you became a public relations officer, how did that happen?

MACLEAN: Well, I think some body must have been looking over the records of different people and discovered that I'd been in journalism and they needed a PR officer for the battalion. The unit was a major who was in charge of PR. A captain to help him. And a lieutenant for each of the three regiments. Jean-Pierre Bone, whom we can talk about later was the PR for Vandoos. Joe Levison who blew himself up on a jeep in Korea was the PR for the Patricia's and went with the Patricia's when they went in November. And I was the RCR PR.

INTERVIEWER: And who was the OC of this little unit?

MACLEAN: Colin MacDougal.

INTERVIEWER: So you physically moved from the battalion to this little unit. But did you still feel yourself as part of the battalion?

MACLEAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned something about a batman. You had a batman when you were commanding a platoon?

MACLEAN: Well, a platoon commander always has a batman from the very beginning. Depending whether they are good or not in training in Canada he has to be adept at polishing brass and pressing pants and things. But in war he has to be able to use the radio and be much more than valet. He's got to be an assistant and familiar with his weapons and probably, usually, the radio of the old 88 set that we used to have.

INTERVIEWER: Was your batman, was he a good assistant?

MACLEAN: Yes they were. Because that was my choice. I would pick somebody. And he had a number of perquisites sometimes because, as an assistant to an officer, he could get fresh socks and clean uniforms and so on and the average guy couldn't.

INTERVIEWER: So after Fort Lewis you boarded ship with your PR unit and off you went to Korea. And what happened then?

MACLEAN: We assembled in Korea, the little five man PR unit. We were there about ten days. But in that period it became known that the PR officer in Tokyo was being sent back to Ottawa, given a promotion. He was a major and promoted to be colonel in Ottawa and they needed somebody to go and sit at the desk in the Radio Tokyo building until they could send out another major or senior captain from Ottawa. They looked around, I guess, and said "Maclean's expendable so he can go over there." So I was sent over to Tokyo to the Radio Tokyo building to sit there for a week until they could send somebody else over.

INTERVIEWER: And you were the only PR Canadian representative in Tokyo at the time?

MACLEAN: That's right. The major had a secretary and warrant officer as part of his staff which I inherited, but he was the only the Canadian officer in the Radio Tokyo building.

INTERVIEWER: So you got to Tokyo as the only Canadian PR Representative and what happened then?

MACLEAN: Well, the first night I was there. I was at the door way of the correspondents' club in my Irish bonnet, handle bar moustache, gorgeous paratroops' boots and bleached pants, olive drab shirt and I was mistaken by General Bill Knuckles of 5th Air Force for a two star Turkish General. He sent a colonel over to buy me a drink. As soon as I sat down he saw what he had but he said "What you doing here?" I said, "I'm the new PR in Radio Tokyo". He said "Be in my office at nine o'clock in the morning and I'll show you what has to happen because your PR system here is fouled up." I think as it turned out our major in Radio Tokyo was working for an Australian colonel who knew nothing about PR and that's what the foul up was. Anyway, I re-organized the thing according to what Bill Knuckles told me. We circumvented the legation, the mission. We radioed to San Francisco. We telegraphed to

Detroit, to Toronto, to CP and it started to work. Some days we could today's news in Korea in tomorrow's paper in Canada. So they left me there.

INTERVIEWER: For how long?

MACLEAN: For three months instead of a week.

INTERVIEWER: So you said that in the past the Canadian press releases would go through the Canadian legation in Tokyo but you circumvented that?

MACLEAN: Well, don't forget this the pre-TV age so we had radio and press. Bill Boss used to mail a lot of his stuff because Canadian press budget wasn't very strong. So a lot of his stuff was mailed. Whether he mailed it through the legation I don't know. But what ever came to me was almost instantly transmitted right through to Toronto.

INTERVIEWER: And who was Bill Boss?

MACLEAN: Bill Boss is the current retiring chairman of the Canadian War Correspondent Association. He was a magnificent reporter in World War II. He has many talents one of which was conducting the symphony in Italy, in Rome. But he did mailer after mailer. Typed out little things in his tent all through the stages of the Korean War.

INTERVIEWER: Now was he the only consistent Canadian War Correspondent there?

MACLEAN: No we had a variety of people including Pierre Berton, Bill McBain from CBC, Bill Herbert from CBC. Different other people from different Canadian newspapers would come through my office and on to Korea. So there was a wide variety of people but Bill Boss was a stand out journalist in those days.

INTERVIEWER: All their products went through you?

MACLEAN: As far as I know much of it did.

INTERVIEWER: Then you routed it back to Ottawa?

MACLEAN: Yes. I changed the system from a very slow pack mule kind of system to a jet age system. The trail would be jetted from Korea to Japan and radioed to San Francisco and then to Toronto and that's why we got the advantage of the 13 day change from a 14 news release to a one day news release.

INTERVIEWER: Did you, in any way, edit or manipulate or censor the material that was being passed to you?

MACLEAN: No. I didn't touch the material. That was the responsibility of the censor bureau which was down the hall from me run by American majors and colonels. They would vet the things there. But most of the experienced Canadian journalists knew what to put in and what not to put in. There was no sense putting things that are on the border line which may be cut out by the censor which may distort the news release or the story of what actually happened. So that wasn't really a problem. In hind sight I don't suppose much of or most of

what we did was classified anyway.

INTERVIEWER: So the material came to you as it had been written by the reporter and then you gave it to the vetting staff or the censors?

MACLEAN: Yes. I would have a fast look at it out of curiosity as much as anything and I would physically take it down the hall to the American censor system and give it to them. Having set up the new system, they would forward it according to my instructions which I had got from General Bill Knuckles and away it went.

INTERVIEWER: So you wouldn't see it again after it had gone into the American system?

MACLEAN: No. I wouldn't see it. It may have been edited by CP in Toronto, for all I know, for length or context or pictures added or not added or whatever in the normal editing fashion but I wouldn't touch the copy at all that wasn't my responsibility. Nor would I even think of doing that.

INTERVIEWER: In your experience did the censors ever cut anything out? Did you ever get any feed back about stuff being cut out by the Americans?

MACLEAN: No, I didn't. I don't think they cut anything out that I ever heard about. I certainly got no feed back from Canada that somebody was meddling with the copy. So that it was a very smooth functioning operation and as I indicated very little or any that would be classified.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever hear any complaints from the reporters that their copy was being meddled with?

MACLEAN: The reporters wouldn't know, even Bill Boss probably wouldn't know. He might have got flimsies sent back occasionally of what was actually used. But nobody ever complained of their copy because most of us, having been in the media for a while, know that editors do what they want to do and the rim or the copy desk does what it wants to do and you don't have any say about that. You submit the material and away it goes and that's it. Complaining might be if you inadvertently put down a location and the enemy would be glad to know where you were. The routine was the beginning was always somewhere in Korea and then the story would flow from that.

INTERVIEWER: So it was very fast then, when you turned the copy into the censors, very quickly it would come out of the censors and be on its way to Canada?

MACLEAN: I would get something delivered by taxi or a staff car or messenger, whatever, on to my desk. It wouldn't be on my desk for more than 15 minutes before I was down the hall with it to the censors. I presume, as fast they could, they would radio to San Francisco and on to Detroit and Toronto.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever get any feed back in the way of newspapers coming into you and seeing the copy a few days later, or a couple of weeks later, of what you had seen flow across your desk?

MACLEAN: Not exactly. What I did find out eventually, because somebody sent me a clipping, Defence Minister Claxton got up in the House, shortly after I had changed the system, and brandished a copy of the Kansas City Star -- a picture of Canadian tanks in action which was obviously taken by our photographer Bill Olson in Korea. He was pleased because the news was one or two days old at the most and there was the picture. Prior to that we had been getting almost nothing in American papers as far as we knew or found out Americans didn't even know we were there. This was a delight, at least to Defence Minister Brooke Claxton at that time, but I didn't hear anything about it. I guess nobody realized that the system had changed, or who was responsible for it, or know.

INTERVIEWER: How were photographs handled? We know about copy. We've heard about copy from you but how were photographs handled?

MACLEAN: Photographs were handled in two or three ways. They would be raw material right out of the speed graphic camera or the Roliflex. I had one of those. The film would be developed either in Japan or sent back through a system which I don't know about right to Canada and some body would approve it there. But as far as pictures were concerned, I don't think there would ever have been anything classified about pictures. The enemy knew that we were there. A picture of a tank is a picture of a tank. Nothing classified about that.

INTERVIEWER: I was thinking about who took the pictures and how they got back through the system.

MACLEAN: Well, I don't really know about that. Bill Olson would take the pictures. Bill Olson was a sergeant, a photographer in the small PR unit that we had. He died of cancer a couple of years ago and a lot of his stuff is in the Archives. How exactly he delivered his material I don't know. But if it came to my desk, I took it the censor and they dealt with it.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Were there any non military photographers taking pictures and the pictures going back through you? In other words press photographers.

MACLEAN: I'm trying to think. I don't think so. Oddly enough, Rene Levesque was a radio person. He was not a photographer. I don't think we had any photographers. I think a lot of the journalists had their own cameras but no one was particularly a photographer.

INTERVIEWER: While you were in Tokyo and you were running the PR system for the Canadians, did you get any direction or policy directives from Ottawa about the way the PR system was working?

MACLEAN: No, there was no direction because such directions I got was through the American system from Bill Knuckles, the general. And it was a good system. I simply changed it on his instructions and made it work. I think there was mild complaint from the legation that they weren't getting any material to put into the diplomatic bag anymore. I simply said, "No, the system has changed" because I didn't work for them. And don't forget I was special force, 18 months. I could do pretty well what I wanted, in a way. In some ways a bad attitude -- that I could do what I wanted and run my own show and do things successfully. And if I wanted to take advice from an American general I would. If I didn't want to take advice from an Australian colonel, I wouldn't. That was the function. That was the attitude of a lot of special force people. Do your own thing, make it work and get on with

it.

INTERVIEWER: From an Ottawa perspective they seemed to be happy because you had no complaints from Ottawa?

MACLEAN: No direction whatsoever.

INTERVIEWER: And no complaints from Korea either?

MACLEAN: No. Rockingham was too busy to worry about me. Major Colin MacDougal was probably up to his ears trying to find a replacement for Joe Levison, who got killed, and for me. Short staffed, so if Tokyo was functioning well, leave it alone. But there was not direction from Ottawa, no direction from Korea but the system seemed to work as far as I could tell.

INTERVIEWER: And you were happy?

MACLEAN: I was happy. I was living the life of Riley.

INTERVIEWER: And you were running your own show?

MACLEAN: I had an American staff car. I had a full time secretary. I had warrant officer. I had an air conditioned office. I had a hotel. I had a dining room. I had a correspondence club. My goodness.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any relationships -- that's maybe the wrong word. Did you have any relationships with the Canadian correspondents, press people in the Far East while you were in Tokyo?

MACLEAN: Not really. Because the system functioned and because they were happy to get to Korea they wouldn't stay long in Tokyo. The only time I would see them occasionally -- I think I recall having a supper with Bill Herbert of CBC and Norm McBain of CBC. Bill Boss stayed in Korea, Pierre Berton went on through and I didn't see him in Tokyo. So, really, the answer is no. Korea was the centre of action.

INTERVIEWER: You were mentioning an interesting incident that occurred to you towards the end of your time in Tokyo about the PPCLI and the Presidential Unit Citation?

MACLEAN: Yes, I was in my office in Radio Tokyo building late one night and a bird colonel came down the hall from the censor bureau or somewhere and he said, "I've got a problem. What do I do?" I said, "What's the problem?" He said," our President, Harry Truman, wants give the PPCLI unit a citation." Sometimes you have a micro second to figure out what you are going to do. Here we are at 9:30 p.m., quarter to ten at night. Rocky has probably gone to bed. It's an illegal thing to do. Everybody will be in trouble. The PPCLI deserved it for Kap Yong. I turned to the colonel and I said, "Yes. Go ahead. I approve it". So somewhere in the bowels of Washington there is an approval authorized by Lieutenant Maclean of Radio Tokyo or somebody. In any event, it was approved without warning to Ottawa. Washington simply announced it. I think it was illegal. Although the Gloucesters and somebody in Australia got a Unit Citation but it was basically, as far as I knew illegal. You

can't award a Canadian unit a foreign decoration without approval. So Ottawa was thunderstruck, but nobody ever figured out where the approval came from, least of all from lieutenant in the Radio Tokyo building.

INTERVIEWER: Just to review what had the PPCLI done to deserve this award?

MACLEAN: Well they had a magnificent battle, which I wasn't party to at all, in Korea in the previous May where they had done a marvellous job repelling a Chinese advance and retaining a very important hill.

INTERVIEWER: I understand you have anecdote about Rene Levesque while you were a public relations officer in Korea?

MACLEAN: Yes, I was over at Vandoos headquarters one afternoon listening to French and trying to pick up some words. I don't know where Jean Pierre was at that time but there was this guy about 30 years old, Rene Levesque, who is know a part of Canadian history. Levesque wanted to go out into no-mans-land and get what he called "live sound". I said, "Okay, let's go". He was absolutely fearless and to a certain extent I guess I'm fearless too. So off we went down into the valley across the other side up the next hill down into the next valley. And around the base of the thing the odd sound of artillery but nothing really important as far as explosive sound was concerned. On the way back there was a little tributary of the Imjin River and we had to go across it. I know that when you see rocks and water gurgling away that that's where you can walk it's not very deep. So I said to Levesque, "Walk right behind me and don't stray off the path that I take and we will be fine". Half way across I turn around to snap a picture. I had my Roliflex camera around my neck along with the ammunition and guns and soon on. And just as I take the picture he starts to fall. I reach back and grabbed him by the hair. Levesque had hair in those days, a shock of black hair. And I grabbed him and I said, "You little bastard. I said follow behind me. Otherwise you will fall off in the deep water and probably drown." So I put him back on his feet or steadied him and he walked across the fjord and the rest is history. I never did find out if Rene Levesque could swim or not. Did I save his life? Did I set back Canadian history a 100 years or what? Who knows?

INTERVIEWER: So after you finished your PR assignment in Tokyo you went back to Korea and back to your regiment and you were assigned a platoon. I understand you had a problem when you went out on patrol. Could you tell me about that patrol please?

MACLEAN: Well, there are all kinds of patrols. But one of the patrols we are going to talk about is a night patrol. The night patrol was designed to capture some prisoners. We hadn't captured prisoners for three or four months. It was a two platoon patrol, which in hind sight was kind of stupid. But I was in charge of one Platoon. So towards dark off we went, two platoons. My platoon went up the hill first. We had a battle. Everybody did their thing. I arranged everybody. I didn't have to fire a shot myself. The men did all the work. The out come was about 12 killed on their side. I was wounded in the arm and shoulder. My Bren gunner was wounded in his left shoulder and we started back with five prisoners. Three of them okay and two a little bit shot up. They apparently we shot up so badly they were dropped on the way side and I didn't bother with that. We had three left. Anyway, at the end of the battle that night I said in effect to my radio operator, "Tell headquarters that we are finished and we are on the way back". Unbelievably to my way of thinking, I got an order

through him, "Go and do the next hill." I said, "Tell that stupid son of a bitch we've got five prisoners, only two wounded. We are the way back. This is crazy. Fuck off." That's exactly what he said, "Fuck off". This went over the radio, I guess through the air over most of the front and it outraged headquarters, which I found out much later. But we came back. Three prisoners lived and I was evacuated and the upshot of it was there was a serious discussion whether I would get an MC Military Cross or whether I would get a court martial. In the event, the army being the army, I got neither.

INTERVIEWER: The wounded -- you said there were two enemy wounded -- you just left them there?

MACLEAN: No, we started out with five and in single file, I at the head of it walking back picking the route. And the prisoners were in the middle. The word was passed up to me that the two were wounded and they were not going to live anyway so we just abandoned them and left and took the three living unscathed prisoners back with us.

INTERVIEWER: So there were no repercussion from the incident on the radio and your disobeying your command and coming back on your own?

MACLEAN: Well, not as far as I know. I was evacuated by helicopter as soon as I walked back. I was debriefed by the IO, the Intelligence Officer, and then evacuated by helicopter. I don't know what happened. I was satisfied that I did the right thing. I wasn't going to get any of my men killed. We'd accomplished our mission. We got prisoners. They should be delighted and everybody should be happy. I think one of the corporals got an MM, which is a Military Medal, which was civil. I didn't' deserve, as far as I was concerned, a Military Cross. There was a chap who got a Military Cross (Ed Masternarny?) who did a great job but mine was just a single patrol and I should certainly not have been court martial even for insulting language to a superior officer. Those are the breaks and luckily I got neither.

INTERVIEWER: You and your Bren gunner were wounded. Was it very serious?

MACLEAN: Well, the way we got wounded is some Chinese must have thrown a hand grenade, a very weak one somewhere between our old 36 which would have killed me if that would have been the kind and our smoke grenade our Bakelite 69 which is almost harmless --but we were bending over. I was directing my different men to different places and I was crouched over his shoulder and he was aiming his Bren gun. There was Chinese or Korean running up the path at the top of the hill towards us and I said, "Get him, he's coming. Make sure you get him." And he let out a burst and he killed him. As it turned out, that was the instant somebody through a hand grenade from the other side and wounded me. But as the enemy dropped at our feet I was stunned and a little ashamed that he only had a wooden rifle and bag of rice at this belt. I felt that he was out gunned and over matched and it was too bad. But my Bren gunner got hit in the shoulder and I got hit in the right arm over his shoulder and the chest, but neither of us too seriously and we both walked back.

INTERVIEWER: So then you were evacuated through the medical system. Where did you end up?

MACLEAN: Well, first of all they knew that I'd been wounded. They weren't sure how seriously. I went to what was then a Danish mini hospital and wiped out with an anaesthetic.

When I came to the next day, my arm and chest were bandaged but I could still walk. So from there I was transported down to Seoul and then flown over to Japan.

INTERVIEWER: And you ended up in the hospital in Japan?

MACLEAN: Well, first of all I ended up in the (Marinuchi?) Hotel having supper and I bled all over the dining room table and it was strongly suggested by my fellow officers that I go to the hospital and get the thing taken care of. So I did that and I wound up in a Kamikaze pilot resort for six weeks in Japan recuperating.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the American hospital system or the Commonwealth hospital system?

MACLEAN: I don't remember. But I remember most, if not all of the officers. I was in a ward with other lieutenants and captains. They were all Commonwealth, New Zealand and Australia and some Canadian so I think that it must have been Commonwealth.

INTERVIEWER: How did you end up at the hotel rather than in the medical system?

MACLEAN: When I flew over to Japan I didn't realize I was hurt badly enough to require something. I was going to get my civilian clothes and have a holiday and probably get some stitches in my arm. I gathered that's were I was wounded. So I got to my old hotel room in Tokyo, in the (Marinuchi?) Hotel, and got my civilian clothes out of the trunk and went down to supper. Then I began to bleed all over the dining room table. A couple of other lieutenants didn't think that was a great idea and they said, "Why the hell don't you go to the hospital and get this thing taken care of?". So that's where I went the following morning.

INTERVIEWER: It must have been quite a serious wound if they kept you six weeks?

MACLEAN: The scar is about eight inches long on my arm and there are all kinds of pellets in the arm and the shoulder but nothing terribly serious.

INTERVIEWER: Was it a painful wound?

MACLEAN: No. As a matter of fact and the medical stuff I've read in the years since, your adrenaline is rushing and it's just as if somebody took a hammer and gave you a bang on your arm or a hockey puck on your foot. There is just a instant of reaction, not even pain just a sudden blow to you, so it doesn't hurt. They tell me stomach wounds hurt but mine didn't.

INTERVIEWER: I wonder if your reaction in Japan, going to the hotel rather than the hospital and so on, I wonder if that is a result of probably drugs that they gave you or something. It doesn't seem normal that you would get out of the medical stream and end up in a hotel rather than the hospital?

MACLEAN: They thought afterwards I'd probably lost about a pint of blood all together, which is probably not all that much when you come down to it. But in any case don't forget that we were all in our early 20s in those days. The picture of health. It's remarkable what a conditioned young body will with stand. In any event it didn't seem to bother me because I don't think I had drugs because I was certainly competent to get where I got. And to take the

train I got myself a train pass and went down to the hospital so I obviously hadn't lost that much blood.

INTERVIEWER: After you got out of the hospital you were sent back to the reinforcement unit. What happened then?

MACLEAN: Well, it was designed that I would go back to Korea so they said, "You might as well take a draft of reinforcements from Canada over to Korea." So I took them and discovered that they were in fact reinforcements with some training. But I took them up in the hills when we got to Korea on the way back to the reinforcement unit and we spent over night on a hill top. I discovered they didn't know much about digging a slit trench and staying warm at night and so on. I told them, I said, "All you guys dig yourself a little trench six to eight inches, ten inches deep, whatever you can, not wider than your shoulders and sleep in it that night and you will be fine. If you don't, if you sleep on the open ground, the wind will get you and you will be freezing and in the morning you will discover that I was right." And of course that is exactly what happened. So some did and some didn't and they learned.

INTERVIEWER: Once you had your reinforcements in Korea and you had done some training with them, what happened then?

MACLEAN: Well, I dropped them off at rear brigade at the reinforcement pool and took myself up to main and in effect said to my buddy Hugh Hutton, who was the camp commandant, "What do I do now. It's not my turn to become a platoon commander again" he said, "I'll find out." So somehow I got made assistant camp commandant. And that's like being the office manager for the Brigade Headquarters. You tell people where they go. I told General Rockingham where to park his caravan. He wanted to park it on a forward slope and I said, "If a mortar shell comes in here and kills you I'm gonna responsible, not you, even though you're dead. Please don't park there. Park on the reverse slope". Which he did and signals caravan has to go here. And the mess tent has to go there and the food supplies gonna be here. The Korean labourers going to be over there and you arrange, with the agreement of senior officers, where each one will be. The artillery, Colonel Bailey would have his tent over there is that okay for you? Yes that's okay so everybody gets organized but the camp commandant is just like the office manager of Brigade headquarters.

INTERVIEWER: And you were the camp commandant?

MACLEAN: Yes I was. This is normally a senior captain's job. So I go to Tokyo and take a major's job and then I come back and I become a senior captain's job. But war is like that. People wind up in crazy spots and they wouldn't normally be there. And because I was Special Force and had no intention of going permanent PF nobody ever thought for a moment that I should be a captain or a major or get in the chain of command.

INTERVIEWER: So you were not a regular officer. You were engaged for limited amount of time?

MACLEAN: We were all engaged for 18 months, World War II retreads and young ones like myself. And during the year that we were there we were informed that there could be applications made for permanent status when the war was over. As it turned out, I was in the Special Force for not 18 months but 24 months exactly day to day. But I had no intention of

going PF and Jean-Pierre didn't. Colin MacDougal was glad to get... he was the major remember, he was glad to go back PF and Phil Pasto, I think, did the same thing. Joe had been killed. So that two lieutenants went back to their respective things. Jean Pierre took law and became a judge and I went back to journalism.

INTERVIEWER: Just to go back to the camp commandant's jobs, you mentioned you had a large labour force?

MACLEAN: As a matter of fact I had a senior warrant officer, WO2, who was eventually an RSM rank, WO1, and he had as many as 400 Korean labourers. We had a very fancy headquarters. We had white washed stones, and tapes and little lights here and there when we were allowed to have them and a proper bar and a sandbag tent and all kinds of things. So it was a Rolls Royce headquarters in a way.

INTERVIEWER: And what did the labourers do, what were their tasks?

MACLEAN: Well, they would landscape the place. Help with setting up tents, with the organization of minor transport of mainly food and clothes and helping the quartermaster and white washing the stones around the officer's mess and all kinds of odds and ends of jobs. And they got fed as well. I'm not sure what we paid them. I think we paid them a 100 wan a day, each. The warrant officer looked after that but they were just delighted to have regular food and have a job.

INTERVIEWER: Interview with John Maclean on 22 January 2002, by Mike Charrier end of side one.

INTERVIEWER: Canadian War Museum Oral History interview with John Maclean on 22 January 2002 by Mike Charrier, tape one side two.

How effective was the warrant officer?

MACLEAN: Well, he was good at he was good at his job but he was not too pleased having to work for a lieutenant, even if it was a 1st lieutenant. I had a senior captain's job and he wasn't going to do this, and he wasn't going to that, and he was going to it on his time and not mine. I told him. I said, "Listen. I'll have you busted if you don't smarten up and look after these Koreans and make sure they are fed and watered and taken care of. And you do what I say because I'm the camp commandant, not you. You will do what I say and you will do it when I say. " And then I had no trouble with him after that.

INTERVIEWER: So your time finished in Korea. How did you get home?

MACLEAN: As the luck of the draw would have it ,I flew home with Colonel Big Jim Stone, who was the commanding officer of the Patricia's at the time. We were seatmates as luck of the draw. Somewhere in the conversation we were talking about the war and our experiences and so on. I said "By the way, you bastards owe me a drink." And he said, "What for?" I said "Because I got you your unit citation." He said "I'll be god damned. I wondered how the hell that happened. I'll buy you a drink." Of course the was no liquor on the air plane that I knew about and I have never to that day got a drink from the PPCLI and I wish somebody would honour their debt.

INTERVIEWER: So you ended up back Ottawa. You mentioned that you had been married at one point during this time you were in the military?

MACLEAN: Well everybody and his dog was getting married. I guess that happens in wartime. I had been corresponding with a nurse in Toronto and I wrote to her and I said, "This is kind of stupid because people going off to war shouldn't do this," but I said, "I would like to and I'm in love and we should get married." But I said, "Fly home from Ottawa to Toronto and talk to your family and see what they say. 'Yes' then we will". As it turned out her aunt lost her man in World War I and always regretted not being married, even if for the short time. So the risk was taken and I flew home to Toronto and got married and then flew back to Fort Lewis.

INTERVIEWER: When you got back from Korea, you were married and you were demobilized in Ottawa?

MACLEAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And you had your final medical in Ottawa?

MACLEAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And you mentioning something about your final medical?

MACLEAN: Are we on now?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MACLEAN: The final medical was probably routine part of the drill on getting out. I said to the doctor, "Hurry up, hurry up, I've got to go. I want to get a job back and back to Toronto or back somewhere but I think I'm going down to Quebec and learn French." He said, "Don't be in such a hurry. I'm putting you in for a five percent pension and you will be very glad. Because if some of these pieces of shrapnel start moving around in your arm or your chest or even close to your heart you will be very glad to get into a military hospital as a result of this happening in Korea". So he gave me a five percent pension and I probably saluted and off I went.

INTERVIEWER: You never had any trouble with that wound since then?

MACLEAN: Yes and no. I think the coordination is gradually slipping away a little bit, at least. I'm not sure whether that's result of just ageing or as a result of the war. In any event, they re-examined me and my pension was raised from five percent to ten percent. So if I fall apart one of these days, so be it.

INTERVIEWER: So when you left the army you were considered to have a five percent disability. Did they actually pay you a pension?

MACLEAN: That's right, five percent in those days was eight dollars a month. And over the years it's gradually escalated to a $100. And they raised it to ten and now I think it's $229 a

month.

INTERVIEWER: That's ten percent in disability is $229 a month?

MACLEAN: Yes. I'm not sure if it's ten percent of a lieutenant's pay or what it is.

INTERVIEWER: I think it's ten percent of your bodily function. Just to go back a point you mentioned a Colonel Dextraze at the time, and the Vandoos, could you go back over that again please?

MACLEAN: Well I was a bit of a, what do you call it - not a rogue but a maverick in my unit along with probably other lieutenants. At one point I came to Dextraze, or JD they used to call him or JDex at one point and he intimated -- he didn't say exactly this, he probably would have been in trouble of he had -- but he said, in effect, "If you ever get in serious trouble with your unit, you can come and join the Vandoos because we just are that kind of guy." I always kept this mind. Here was a bunch of people speaking French. I thought, "By gosh, Canada is full of these guys, that's interesting, I'll have to check into this later on," which I did.

INTERVIEWER: Of course you were brought up in Toronto and were never exposed to the other language in the country. You also mentioned that you had another experience with the Vandoos in Korea?

MACLEAN: That was the Rene Levesque experience.

INTERVIEWER: I thought you said you had gone down to their battalion and were amazed at the French and so on?

MACLEAN: Truthfully, I was trying to learn all the dirty songs because they have a vast menu of dirty French songs and they are gorgeous and they always end in a great shriek of laughter for some reason or other. I was fascinated by these guys. Because I was a Toronto boy in most ways. I had some schooling in French but that was just a foreign language. It didn't apply to Canada particularly. And so when I met these Vandoos and thought, "My God, Canada does not end at Sherbourne Street or at the beaches in the east end of Toronto it actually goes along further than that." I knew my father had gone to see his father in Montreal but that was like a foreign country. I was amazed and I thought I should become bilingual and what I'll do is I'll go see the Telegram in Toronto and say I'll go and be the Quebec correspondent based in Quebec City and I'll learn French. So that's what I did.

INTERVIEWER: After you got out of the military then, you were married, you were looking for a journalist type employment what happened?

MACLEAN: Well, we were on our second honeymoon and we drove down to Quebec and I happened to be driving through lower town where the Quebec Chronicle Telegraph building was and I saw the sign. I did a sharp right wheel into the parking lot and went in and told them I'd been at the Toronto Telegram for a couple of years and I was interested in becoming bilingual and did they have a job. They said, "Yes, we do. Fifty bucks a week, start tomorrow."

INTERVIEWER: What was the work?

MACLEAN: General reporter. I had to learn about Quebec and I had to learn where everything was and who everybody was and eventually I had some events with Premiere Duplessis.

INTERVIEWER: And how many years did you stay at the Quebec City paper?

MACLEAN: I got out in exactly in 1952 and I guess I was there three and a half years.

INTERVIEWER: What did you get out of your 18 months, two years Korean experience?

MACLEAN: Well, from a military point of view I think the most important thing is the platoon commander. Apart from being expendable, has got to be a leader. Or has got to be the kind of person who will imbue in the platoon that here is a guy they can follow, here is a guy that will look after them. He knows each of them. I never got to know all of them in great detail, whether they were married or had kids, and most didn't in those days. Whether they had problems with their food, or their clothing or ammunition or what or whether they were tired or hungry or miserable or what you had to be with them, and you had to know and you had to understand them. That's very important from a military point of view. It's all very well to have regimental spirit and so on but it comes from officers being leaders. And to this day I don't know whether I'm a leader or not but I did have a conversation one time with a corporal at the front line and we were discussing leadership and so on. He said "You know the guys don't like you all that much but they know that they will follow you because you are smart enough not to get them killed."

INTERVIEWER: There are many different kinds of leaders, even at the platoon level. What category would you put yourself in?

MACLEAN: Well, they knew that I would do exactly what they would do. I would endure what they endured and I would lead them responsibly and carefully and whether they liked me or not I didn't give a shit but -- well I suppose in a way I did. But it's essential that you learn leadership and I think I learned leadership. I can now tell leaders from followers. Most journalists I think are followers not leaders. We tend to be critics and watchers rather than leaders. So it's rare that you get a military person who is not a leader. He has to be a leader of some kind. Politicians are leaders. Politicians are very tough people and I think that leadership is important in life and I think that's one of the important things I learned in Korea.

INTERVIEWER: You used the expression "I don't give a shit" I think what you meant was fearless from what we discussed before.

MACLEAN: That's probably right, I think there are categories, there is the coward, we often meet [the] coward. There are the brave people who do it anyway whether they are afraid or not. Then there is the fearless type, the SAS type people, the 101st Airborne people, the paratroop people and I think I'm part of that bunch. Because I don't really care and I don't think I'll get hurt, and I'm not afraid of anybody, and that's probably what fearlessness is. You can't be entirely fearless when you are leading people. You've got to be aware that other people may not share you attitude towards danger but the category is interesting.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that you profited from your two years in the military and your Korean experience?

MACLEAN: Well yes I did. I went in as a 130 lb weakling and wound up a 185 lb. tough paratrooper type of person. Physically I developed in those two years, particularly in those first early months and the training. I put my two sons on a farm, for example to get healthy and work hard when they were boys. But I think the outdoors military travelling experience is essential for the development of young Canadians.

INTERVIEWER: You feel you personally profited from the experience in Korea, the travel, the exposure to combat?

MACLEAN: Yes the travel was important. The combat was important. The attitude towards French, which I like, and I'm reasonably bilingual now, is essential. It's all around development and I think Canada ought to have a system where by young men and women can serve in the military and to learn the things that are available in the military, the leadership, the endurance, and the testing, and the bravery, and the combat and defence of Canada and the loyalty and all those things.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think you contributed to the part your country did in Korea?

MACLEAN: Well, in a very minor way. I was just a platoon commander so I didn't have much responsibility. I was only an instrument in the killing of twelve people and I've had a pension for years and years. So whether I owe or my country owes I don't know. But I may have made a small contribution and I think that I tried to be a good person. I tried to live up to many of the military ideals that I saw and participated in, in Korea.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel you contributed in the public relations part of your duties in Japan and Korea?

MACLEAN: Well yes. General Bill Knuckles should get a lot of credit when he taught me how to do it. Journalism is something you are always learning in and how to ask questions and how to record things and how to be fair and get both sides of the story if there are two sides and there generally are. So the public relations part of the thing was a development of what I'd already begun to learn and I think it contributed. I now understand a bit more about public relations, especially military public relations and to a certain extent commercial public relations, business public relations and so on. Which is essentially the dissemination of information to people who need it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that your military public relations experience helped you in your vocation after your time in the military, your press jobs?

MACLEAN: Yes I think so largely by watching, by observing people like Rene Levesque, by watching people like Pierre Burton. By helping people like Norman McBain, seeing how Bill Boss handled his assignments and so on. I worked with a Time Magazine correspondent and I learned a lot from him. Because I didn't know the first thing about Time Magazine reporting until I talked to him so the technical parts of the business I learned on the job, you might say.

INTERVIEWER: We were discussing about attitude and how you can relate it to your Korean experience, would you tell us a little more about that please?

MACLEAN: Well I think I've always had, genetically a positive attitude, which is extremely useful you can't worry about problems. You've got to have a positive attitude and decide what can be gained from this experience or how you solve this problem. A positive attitude, particularly in medical things too, doctors will tell you that positive attitude makes for better health. The other thing is you've got to stay cool, you can't panic, you can't go off half cocked, you can't worry about something you've got to stay cool. And I find the more serious the problem is the cooler I get. In fact if it is so serious I will fall asleep while I solve the problem. But those two things, a positive attitude and stay cool and I recommend them to Canadians.

INTERVIEWER: This is the end of the interview with John Maclean on 22 January 2002 interview ends interviewer Mike Charrier.

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