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The Korean War Through the Eyes of Ray DeWeese

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Student Interviewers name: Yulissa Lara

Interviewee name: Ray DeWeese

Time and location of interview:

The interview was conducted in three sessions on November 4, 2016, November 10, 2016, and November 13, 2016. The first interview lasted 15 minutes, the second interview lasted 25 minutes, and the third interview lasted 35 minutes, making a total time of an hour and 15 minutes. It was conducted at Bradley Healthcare & Rehab Center in Cleveland, TN. Only Mr. DeWeese and I were present at the table.

About Ray DeWeese:

Ray DeWeese was born in Cleveland, TN on May 10, 1928 and has lived in Cleveland most of his life. He enlisted in the Marine Corps at 17 years old and fought towards the end of World War II and went off to be a pilot and officer during the Korean War. This interview depicts Mr. DeWeese's experience during World War II but digs deeper into the difficulty of being a pilot during the brutal Korean War. As Mr. DeWeese recounts his traumatic experience he emphasizes how his diligent training, hardworking comrades, and his Faith in God got him through the ordeal. The interview was conducted November 4, 10, and 13 at Bradley Healthcare & Rehab Center in Cleveland, TN.

Interviewer: Yulissa Lara (YL)

Interviewee: Ray DeWeese (RD)

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First Interview November 4,2016

YL: Okay, so why did you decide to join the war Mr.DeWeese?

RD: eh?

YL: Why did you decide to join the war?

RD: Well, five in my family had enrolled in the Marines but ,uh, I went; we were all officers. I went in and enlisted, and ,uh, we were in the Army, the Navy, in the Air Corps. Five out of seven in our family was in service. We were volunteers.

YL: Thank you for your service.

RD: Pardon me? Sorry, I'm hard of hearing because of the war and being in combat.

YL: Thank you for your service.

RD: Why thank you, I'm a survivor. Got a lot of steel to prove it.

YL: Okay, why did you pick the service branch you joined?

RD: Why'd I pick the Marine corps? Well, as in four or five in my family was in the Navy, Army Air Corps, so I decided to join the Marine Corps, and I did. Twice (chuckles). Volunteered and enlisted.

YL: Do you recall your first days in service?

RD: No, I put over four years in.

YL: Four years? Oh, that's a long time.

RD: Yeah, World War II and Korea.

RD: Close to World War II, at 17 I joined.

YL: 17? That's very young!

RD: We were a bunch of volunteer idiots. (chuckles) We're civil patriots.

RD: You're Spanish or Filipino?

YL: No, I'm not. Many people say I look Filipino, but I'm actually Mexican.

RD: Comprendo Español?

YL: Si (laughs). How do you know spanish?

RD: I spent some time in Mexico and South America in different countries speaking different languages. I use to be pretty good at Spanish. I speak German. I enjoyed the Spanish, I enjoyed the German. *Starts speaking Dutch* (laughs). Sieg heil mein fuhrer (Mocks Nazi salute). Don't send me to Russia! (laughs)

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YL: (Chuckles) Okay, do you remember your boot camp or training experience?

RD: Yes, Parris Island, South Carolina; United States Marine Corps ma'am. Country of origin, Cleveland, Tennessee reporting. As a first time as a Marine, I went back in the Marines a second time as an officer. Had experience and also a college degree. Went to King College and then to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

YL: How did you get through your boot camp?

RD: Parris Island, South Carolina. Twenty hours a day for sixteen weeks, seven days a week. For sixteen weeks back then they could knock you down; it was brutal. Out of our platoon, thirty-percent flunked, they kicked them out. They broke them; they couldn't take it. Yeah, it was some serious training. We fought hand to hand, you couldn't quit until one of you drew blood, and I was a captain of a basketball team. I was quick, always got their nose bloody, nose in a hurry (laughs). And I dared them to kiss me (laughs). All you see is a cloud of dust as I pass (chuckles). Singing the Marine Corps hymn of course (laughs).

YL: Okay, so you said you served in World War II and the Korean War, correct?

RD: I got late into World War II, and Korea was really a rough duty. Went from eighty-five above to over forty below in two days. And the Chinese came in and the North Koreans and Marine division was twenty-two thousand. We have our own air wing, and ,uh, they came down there too. We wore some greenish yellow leggings, and they'd never fought Marines before. And asked that if they run into us, they'd throw our weapons down: "no fighting us yellow leggings, I'm going to kill you if you don't leave me alone." (chuckles)

YL: Where exactly did you go?

RD: Where did I go? I tell you, in World War II I went to the South sea, and then I went to Korea.

YL: Can you be more specific?

RD: I got sent in World War II to the South Pacific and went back in for Korea. I went back in as an officer, I retired as a Major. As I retired, I didn't make a career.

YL: Do you remember arriving, and what it was like?

RD: Oh, I'll never forget that (chuckle). I got late into World War II; the war was about over. I stayed in Marine Reserves and I went to ,uh, King's College in Bristol. I was a big basketball star up there, and then I went to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville; and I had one quarter left for finishing, and I was in the Marine Reserves and they put me out there, in two days, ADIOS (chuckles).

YL: Do you remember what it was like in Korea?

RD: Well, uh, I've been trying to forget for a while. It wasn't fun, we were outnumbered, about twenty to one, but uh they found out that twenty to one against a Marine, we had the advantage. We also had the firepower and air cover, we have our own air wing, we have

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first division, first airwing, so forth, and then we had off shore artillery from the Navy gunfire, which is deadly, and then we had planes off the aircraft carriers. So, we had a total air control, which makes a big difference when you're fighting, knowing you got eyes in the air and on the ground too.

YL: What was your job or assignment?

RD: My job? Well, at times I went in as a pilot, and then all Marines are trained for groundwork, and of course I was an officer, I ended up on the ground, and we had the first and second Marine division has twenty-thousand. The first and second Marine division was in Korea, and that was forty-thousand of us against 180,000 of those idiots. And they were idiots to attack a Marine (laughs). They found that out too (laughs). And we wore kind of a greenish yellow leggings, no fighting yellow leggings (chuckles). But the weather, it went from like eighty-five above to 140 below in three days, and that is brutal. They came down there in tennis shoes and summer clothes, and 120,000 against one Marine. What we didn't kill, hundreds died and several thousand surrendered because they had summer clothes, they were freezing to death. They found out quickly they didn't want to fight US Marines, "no fight yellow legs". What they didn't realize we had off shore the US Navy, and we had our aircraft carriers and our battle wagons and a battleship can have a hundred-pound bomb or eighteen to twenty miles right on the target, and Navy gunfire is also. It's really, they didn't know where it was coming from. Of course, we had total air cover, and they didn't want to find Marines or the Navy in the air because they couldn't win. But it was ,uh, it was a tough war.

YL: Okay, so this is the first part of our interview. I'll come back for a second part if that's okay with you.

RD: Okay, is that a threat or a promise? (laughs)

YL: (laughs) It's a promise. Okay, so I think that's all for today and next time I'm going to come back and ask you different questions and things like that.

Second Interview November 10,2016

YL: Okay, so which war were you in?

RD: The end of World War II and Korea.

YL: Where exactly did you go?

RD: I went to the South Pacific, and then Korea, several islands down there and went back in to Korea, pretty rough.

YL: Do you remember arriving and what it was like? Arriving to Korea.

RD: How can I forget (laughs) It went from eighty above to forty below in three days, and we had summer clothes. They parachuted, landed, and gave us winter clothing.

YL: Do you remember going overseas, the experience, and what it was like?

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RD: Yes ma'am, how can I forget. Once you've been there, you'll never forget it.

YL: What do you remember from it, like the people, your friends?

RD: Well, all of us were very well trained, and I worked with very fine men. We all got along well. I'll never forget them, many of them didn't make it. It was a life and death situation. I got in when I was 17 into the end of World War II then I went back into Korea as an officer, and it was quite an experience, I'll tell you, pretty rough. I had nightmares for a long time.

YL: If you don't mind me asking, what caused the nightmares?

RD: Yeah, the ,uh, Korea really, some pretty bad experience; and ,uh, certain things it's hard to get out of your mind. And I'm barely getting out of it, it's a long time, but it takes a long time.

YL: Okay... What was your job or assignment?

RD: As a Marine? Well the first time I was a Browning Automatic Rifle Expert, the second time I went in as an officer, and uh I'm a pilot, and I flew fighter jets. It's ,uh, pretty exciting (laughs). If you live through it. If you live through the nightmares, it is not easy sometimes.

YL: What do you remember from being a pilot?

RD: Well, let's see, I flew a P-51 Mustang, I didn't fly jets. It's a good plane, and ,uh, it was very fast, and a lot of fire power, and most of the communists, and enemy that we encountered, we won. Our equipment and our training paid off, pretty exciting to say the least, nightmares!

YL: How did you learn how to fly planes?

RD: I started flying lessons when I was seventeen, in Cleveland, and then in Chattanooga, a little field. I did pretty heavy planes, and then I went back in and flew a P-51 Mustang. It's not a jet, but it's a powerful plane and carried a lot of firing equipment, really a tremendous plane, and it would go about six-hundred miles an hour. If I had a nose bleed, it would have bled (laughs).

YL: Do you remember your friends?

RD: Oh yeah, yeah some aren't here, a few didn't make it. In Korea, I flew a P-51 Mustang, I had flown jets, the P-51 was a heck of a good plane, and it was very powerful, probably one of the fastest planes in the world. It would go five-hundred miles an hour, back then that was a tremendous advantage and it had a lot of fire power. One of the few planes that had 20mm cannons in the nose, 20mm cannons and 50 caliber machine guns and about four 20 mm cannons, and they are very accurate.

YL: Did you ever see combat?

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RD: Yeah, quite a bit (laughs). I survived.

YL: How did you survive?

RD: We had superior equipment, our planes were superior, and our training was superior. It was a very intense part of my life.

YL: How did you stay in touch with your family?

RD: Well we had special mails. I think they called them e-mails now, but I wrote letters, and they were sent by air, and the people that I wrote to was basically my family, my mother and dad, my wife, and it was a pretty good communication. It helped them a lot, but you know, you're over there, you know, and a long way gone over a lot of stress. Fighter pilots go through a lot, yeah, and in combat especially. We had an advantage, our P-51.

YL: What do you remember about Pearl Harbor and how did you feel about it?

RD: Well, I was not in service then, but I followed history, and I thought it was a terrible thing, but it united our country, and the enemy found out that we didn't forget, and our training was superior to anything we ran into, and we had a big advantage there.

YL: Okay, well thank you so much for making time for me, I will come back in a few days and ask you different questions based on different research but once again thank you so much for sharing your story.

RD: Thank you, for coming down and asking. I've enjoyed talking to you.

Third Interview November 13, 2016

YL: Okay so to start off, how did it feel like being in Korea war?

RD: It's very intense. I mean, things happen, and you have serious trouble sleeping. It just really a life or death situation. We lose some men, but we had superior training and superior equipment. In our P-51 we had about 551 miles per hour. Back then it was almost unbelievable, and it had four 20mm cannons in the nose, and then it had 50 caliber machine guns in each wing, four. So we had superior equipment and superior firepower, so it was a big advantage.

YL: How did you guys entertain yourselves?

RD: There was not much entertainment (laughs). There was enough excitement, you know, you're fighting life or death, its intense! Sometimes you have serious trouble sleeping at night, and sometimes they give us stuff to help us but if they give you too much stuff, it affects your flying the next day. So, it's just something you live with and its very intense! Extremely (chuckles). And you're way over there, almost three-thousand miles away from America, and it was a lot of stress, a lot of stress. And we flew night and day and different times. We'd fly at night, and it's a different experience, it's really scary.

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YL: How was the scenery in Korea?

RD: Well, you're in a war zone, everything is intense including the rest you have. Sometimes you didn't rest at all, and if its real bad, they'll take you out of combat, put you on a thing where they give you something to help you rest and sleep for some time five or six weeks, and then you know, you gradually come out of it, but I still have some pretty bad nightmares, even today. It's something you don't know unless you've been there. You'll never know when they'll say your number up. We have superior equipment, but they outnumbered us, and they had a good plane, and they outnumbered us about ten to one. And the MiG was a jet, the P-51 is not a jet, but it's an excellent plane, over five-hundred miles an hour. It's a tremendous plane, with tremendous firepower, then we have the Corsair, that flew off of the aircraft carriers about five miles off the shore, and it's a great plane. Huge engine, it can cruise over five-hundred miles an hour, which made us the fastest plane in that area. A tremendous plane, it can land on an aircraft carrier or on the land. Landing on an aircraft carrier is very exciting, exciting experience, you got to be really keen and alert, you just got so much to do, and if you don't make it then you go around again; and that second time around is even worse (laughs).

YL: Did you ever experience any troubles with the crew?

RD: No, we were a really close knit, and the people who worked on the plane were excellent. It was really like family, everyone helped everybody you know. But the best situation is not good in combat (chuckles)... you never know. Their big plane was an actual fighter, and they had us outnumbered probably ten to one, and they would fly back across. We weren't allowed to go over into China or North Korea, which limited, we couldn't chase them, and they knew that, they knew that if we crossed a certain point, we had to go back. It was, you know, pretty stressful. Sometimes you had serious troubles sleeping. They got to a point where they would give us these things to help us sleep at night, but if they give you too much it affects your flying the next day, and sometimes we'd stagger our flights. People that flew night missions was really unreal. I mean that was serious stuff, flying at night off of a carrier, and landing on a carrier at night it is like you make one mistake, and you're dead. It's taken me a long time to recover from the nightmares. I don't think I'll ever really get out of it. I have to live with things that I did and saw for the rest of my life. Sometimes it's worse than others and you would not know it unless you went through it. Very stressful! A lot you don't get out of your mind, and that's not good, but I don't sleep on the top bunk. I've left it more than once, hit the floor, and wake up, they'd put me on the bottom bunk. You never know, you do it in your sleep, having these nightmares, it's about five or six feet in that top bunk to the what we call the deck. That's a pretty good wakeup call (laughs). It'll wake you up. Somethings took me a long time to be able to live with it, and I'm a believer and that helps. It's a very intense, life and death part of my life. Landing and taking off a carrier, it is unbelievable. You better have enough power to get air speed, because if you go over the front end of that, they'll run over you, the carrier will run over you because that aircraft carrier is a huge thing and they can't maneuver it like they can a Destroyer or something. We all flew, and they started giving us

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angles, so we'd fly off to the sides or to the right and not in front of it because it was safer. It was still quite an experience. You'd have to do it to believe it. I'll never get that out of my mind. I'm a believer, and that helps. In my family, it's a big family, we're Baptists, and we had five of us serve, we lost one, but we's in the Navy, in the Marines, those two branches, and one of our brothers was in the Army Air Corps. We all made it back except one. It's a very stressful thing, believe me. The carrier will turn into the wind, and you're taking off into the wind in front of that carrier, and if you make a mistake you're dead. We'd take off with angles, we had a left lane and a right lane. On one side, they'll take off one or two and on the other they'll land one or two.

YL: Were you a believer when you were in war?

RD: Yeah, there's saying, there's no non-believers in a foxhole. It's the same thing. I never met anyone who didn't have strong convictions because it is life and death and eternity. You got to be prepared for death and you can't imagine the stress it puts on you because you never know if you'll make it back. And if you fly at night, you'll fly over here, two-hundred miles, the carrier is going, you intercept way over here and land. Night landing is serious stuff. The carrier will go about thirty knots, which is a little over thirty miles an hour, and so you got some advantage but you're still in a very stressful job, very rough. The experience is almost unreal, night landing and taking off on a carrier is hard time, and its black out. You better get down there when they got the lights on.

RD: Fire can affect your flying, your plane, and you might not make it back, but it also effects your landing seriously because you don't have full control, and it's a very stressful job, extremely at night, unreal. And the carrier they don't turn their lights on until we're approaching for security, and then they'll turn their lights on, and when the plane has landed, they'll turn their lights off because aircraft or submarines can spot easy, but it's a very stressful job. Life and death is very stressful when you know you might not make it back, it's very intense to say the least. You want me to sing the Marine Corps? (laughs)

YL: Please do (laughs).

RD: I know it though (laughs).

YL: Okay, how was it when you were in boot camp?

RD: Well, we go through a boot camp in Parris Island, South Carolina, and then in San Diego at Pendleton. We go through a similar thing out there. Most people from half the country went to Parris Island, the other went to San Diego, both basically the same training. It's serious training because you're learning about your plane and weather. There's a lot factors in that make it intense. Sometimes you have a hard time sleeping. I'm here though, thank you Lord (chuckles). You know, five of us left, and it was tough on our parents too. And we're believers, but there's a breaking point, you know, and our doctors realized, that and that's why they would stagger our flight time. We'd fly different flights at night, and then wed fly the next few flights in daytime. Night time flying and landing on a carrier is intense, believe me. A carrier is a postage stamp out on the middle of the ocean

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at night, and they only put the lights on for a short time to get the planes down and turn them off, but because of the enemy, they would love to sink a carrier. You can land a plane in about three minutes. Most time during takeoff, they wouldn't turn on the lights, but on landing yes. And then we had some submarines out there on alert, we had some Destroyers protecting the carrier, but it's still a high intense stressful job. I still have nightmares, and I'm trying to grow out of them. I may grow up one of these days (laughs). Once a Marine, always a Marine. We flew a Marine squadron and the Navy squadron, but on a carrier, there's always a marine squadron, and we probably got the dirty work. The Navy, they treated us good, but we probably got the most dangerous assignments, and most of their flights were during the daytime. Our Destroyers are very fast, highly maneuverable, and a lot of fire power. Our aircraft carrier had four or five or six Destroyers stationed at the front, side, and the back. To try and find an aircraft carrier, you leave that aircraft carrier, you fly at night, you go and fly for forty-five minutes at five-hundred miles an hour. Stay with the target fifteen to twenty minutes, come back and intercept that carrier way over here, in total darkness, and we have Navy and Marine pilots. On our planes, we have excellent navigation system.

YL: How many crewmen did you have?

RD: Just one, a pilot and a copilot. Actually, there was not much room for anything else but you have the copilot. He's just as trained as you are and if I got hit, he takes over, and if he got hit, I take over. We had such bad nightmares, that when we went to sleep, they'd put most of the pilots on the bottom bunk.

YL: Did you ever get hurt during combat or was your plane ever hit?

RD: Oh yeah, occasionally we lost some. They wouldn't, they had stations that were ready to intercept, and they knew it was an area that would intercept our planes on radar. They'd notify one of their airports, and it was a game of life or death. They had the advantage, they were on land, and we were on a carrier. They're stationary but we're moving.

YL: Well, I'm just curious but do you happen to have pictures?

RD: Well, we took combat pictures and most of them the Marine Corps and the Navy kept them. Those are classified. In Pensacola, they'd train at night off a carrier. The pilots are trained and go to Pensacola first, down in the gulf there. It is totally different when you get out in the big Pacific Ocean you know, the stress is much greater; and you're way out there, away from everybody (chuckles). You, and the Lord, and the stars. It's very stressful. We have psychologists and M.D.'s working together, and they recognize when a pilot needs to take a rest. They'll stop his plane, and ground him. He'll usually leave a carrier to an airport inland and try to recuperate. Something you can never get out of your mind, as long as I live.

YL: Did you ever have any good times while you were in service?

RD: Are you kidding? (laughs) No ma'am, that's why it's such an ugly intense stress.

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YL: Were the enemies brutal?

RD: Oh yes, they were brutal. They were highly trained, and they were also suicidal. They wouldn't hesitate to hit their planes in the air, and we knew that. We had planes that scout out ahead from where they were coming and they'd try to shoot those planes down. Some of them were like a Kamikaze, they would actually fly the plane into the carrier and die. It'd have these big bombs, and then all that fuel. Its horrifying, really something, but they had a few that did that. They were suicidal, and that takes a really brave person, they know they're gonna die.

YL: Do you recall the day your service ended?

RD: Oh yeah, I certainly do, it was one of the greatest days of my life. You go from that world to another world. You get adjusted to a different world when you come off a carrier. It takes a big adjustment to come in. You won't believe it, but it does. The high stress you go through to land a carrier at night. Imagine a postage stamp, finding that thing at night takes a tremendous navigator, and communication; but Navy and Marine pilots, we are highly trained. Most of us are college graduates, I am.

YL: What was the difference between World War II and the Korean war?

RD: World War II was a major war globally. The Korean war was a small area compared to WWII, but it was highly volatile because the veteran Chinese had Russian pilots, and veteran Korean pilots, but they also had Russian pilots. Quite a few Russians, they would be leaders; we always made it important to get him.

YL: Do you think you would ever go back again?

RD: (laughs) No, it was a very stressful period in my life. I am proud to be a Marine, but you don't know until you've been there and experienced it. It's a different world, but I'm a believer and God helped me through many long nights.

YL: Well, this concludes our interview Mr.DeWeese. I'm glad I found you, and I greatly appreciate the facts you've brought to me, the service you've done, and the poignant story you've shared.

RD: I've enjoyed this interview too, and I've enjoyed getting acquainted with you. It's been a long journey but I'm glad it's over (laughs).

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Original Questions

Why did you decide to join the war?

Okay, why did you pick the service branch you joined?

Do you recall your first days in service?

Do you remember your boot camp or training experience?

Do you remember what it was like in Korea?

What was your job or assignment in Korea?

What was your job or assignment in World War II?

What was your experience in Korea?

What do you remember from being a pilot in Korea?

Did you ever see combat in Korea or World War II?

Do you remember your friends?

Do you experience any type of trauma now?

How did you contact your family?

What was the scenery in Korea?

How do you feel about Pearl Harbor?