

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

DALE H. ALECKSON

Typist, 24th Corps Headquarters, Army, pre-Korean War

2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Madison, Wisconsin

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Aleckson, Dale H., (1929-). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 56 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Dale Aleckson, a Clear Lake, Minnesota native, describes his experience with the 24th Corps Headquarters, Judge Advocates Division during the Korean War. Aleckson tells of enlisting in the Army in 1947 so that he could become a paratrooper and use the GI Bill. He tells of basic training at Fort Knox (Kentucky) and emphasizes that everything was still geared towards World War II. He recalls being assigned to Korea as a replacement, arriving in Inchon (South Korea), and noticing the heavy Japanese influence in Korea. Because most of the replacements were not high school graduates, Aleckson tells of getting a “plum job” with the 24th Corps Headquarters in Seoul (South Korea). He reveals the colonel was from Minneapolis (Minnesota) and was looking for another Minnesotan to staff the Judge Advocate office. Aleckson describes his duties as a clerk, including processing court martials, and he characterizes the other office staff, including both high ranking officers and Department of the Army civilians. He analyzes the terrible decision to partition Korea and the inability of the United Nations to reunite the country. He discusses being billeted in G-2 (intelligence) and overhearing talk about the uncooperative attitude of the Russians. He reports the Russians were in control of the Korean power plants and would shut off Seoul’s power a few times every week. Aleckson describes his impressions of South Korea: ravaged landscape, poor sanitation, antiquated agriculture, and not enough industry. He remembers wondering what he would do if the North Koreans invaded because the U.S. Army in Korea did not have good equipment. He talks about relations and trade with locals in Seoul, using script instead of dollars, and not being allowed to eat Korean produce because it was grown using human excrement. Aleckson touches on playing with the 24th Corps Headquarters basketball team and travelling to Pusan for tournaments. After applying to West Point and being rejected for having diabetes, he talks about having trouble getting back to the States because all the aircraft were tied up in the Berlin Airlift. At home in Clear Lake, he recalls warning people that a war was building up in Korea, and he recalls being stunned when Truman pulled most of the troops out. Aleckson states he was surprised it was China that supported the North Korean invasion instead of Russia and reflects on the politics and build-up behind the war. He characterizes a couple friends who fought in Korea and who had a tough time adjusting afterwards. He details following the news about the war and noticing a public lack of interest in it.

Biographical Sketch:

Aleckson (b.1929) served in the Army in Korea from 1947-1948. After his service he attended State Teachers College in St. Cloud (Minnesota), received an M.S. in school finance from Northern Illinois University, taught business education for seven years, was a school business manager for thirty-one years, and completed his career at D.C. Everest School District (Weston, Wisconsin)

until his retirement in 1990. Aleckson married, raised three children, and eventually settled in Mosinee (Wisconsin).

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Interviewed by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Public Television, October 12, 2004.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.

Transcript reformatted and edited by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2010.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Interview Transcription:

Dale: I graduated from high school in 1947. At the time the Army was recruiting pretty heavily to fill in replacements for the GIs that were coming outta World War II. Although this was two years after the end of the war there were a lot of troops that were still trying to accumulate enough points to get out. And they came around with a program of eighteen months enlistment, and the carrot was that you could still get in on the GI Bill guaranteed one year, of the GI Bill plus every month that you put in the service. So when I added that up, that was gonna be thirty months of GI Bill. The catch in the whole thing, and I knew about this, was that at any time the Congress might declare the end of WWII, which might seem kinda strange, because this is 1947, but legally and technically the war was not ended by the United States government. So I went in knowing that I was going to get one year plus. And so I joined the Army much to my mother's consternation, I was 17 years old. And she had to sign for me. A couple of my buddies outta the class of Clear Lake, Minnesota joined with me and we got on a train and headed for Fort Sheridan in Illinois. And from there we were shipped to Fort Knox, Kentucky for basic training. The Army was still in the WWII mode at Fort's training, although they were calling it replacement training centers. Everything was set up for WWII training. And the interesting thing, as I think back on it now, we had a cadre that were all old tough bucks that had come back from the European theater and they could care less about these seventeen--eighteen year old kids that they had to train to do something that wasn't gonna be war. And we had a fifteen-week training, which was pretty long for the Army. Really basic was more like ten and twelve weeks. And I was so certain that I was gonna go into the paratroopers at Fort Campbell, Kentucky and I was all excited about that. I was excited about being in the service because I was slightly disappointed that the war had ended, which seems rather strange. As I think back, I didn't know what war was, and really don't yet know what it's like, but it was a glorious, patriotic thing to give back in the service. So I was excited to be there.

And when we finished basic training, I remember sitting on the ground on the company street and Captain Bartholomew got up on the stand and I'm thinking, "Well, I'm going to Fort Campbell," and he announced, "The following soldiers will go to cold Korea." I'm thinking, "Where is that, I wonder what, where that is. I never heard of it." And the first name he called off was Dale Aleckson. Everything in the Army was done alphabetically. And I thought, "Wow! What is this?" because I'm going to Fort Campbell. What I know and understand now was the Army had their department of defense or whatever it was at that time, had a plan, they were taking these eighteen-month enlistees in to replace troops in various parts of the country and the world. And Korea particularly, was looked at as short term. And that's why they sent these eighteen-month enlistees over there. By the time we got our training and our shipping and delay enroute and the things that go on in the Army, we'd probably serve about twelve or thirteen months in Korea. So off to Korea we went--to Stoneman, California and put on an old victory ship which was about as ugly a way to traverse the Pacific Ocean as you could find. But again, our country was still in this WWII equipment and everything was, there was no

transition yet really. And we landed at Inchon. A port that has been written up a lot because of McArthur's landing there many years, or some years later. The tide is unbelievable how the depth of the water changes. So we had to go over the side of this victory ship on cargo nets, which we had no training on. I remember carrying this sixty, seventy pound pack and going over and thinking, "I'm never gonna see that landing craft down below." But I did make it along with everybody else. And then they took us in on the LCI, Landing Craft Infantry--into the shore and the docks of Inchon. Which at one time had been the city, was called Jinsen, under the Korean name, but Inchon was a Japanese name. I just, go back a little history on Korea, but Japan had, in the Russian-Japanese War, invaded and taken over Korea in the early 1900s, about 1904. So they had occupied Korea for forty years before the end of WWII. And so everything there was Japanese, really. The buildings, some of the quasi-modern buildings in downtown Seoul they were all Japanese-built buildings. I think it's interesting to note that a lot of the troops that were in Korea went in in 1945.

Mik: The fact that all the buildings were Japanese-built, let's do that again.

Dale: The Japanese had occupied Korea forty years now, that's a long time and so the culture and buildings and the infrastructure were Japanese. And Japan had many military posts in Korea. In 1945, when we occupied the south half of that country, a lot of our Army troops stayed in Japanese military barracks, which were undersized for people like myself. We stayed in one of the Japanese barracks for a couple of weeks and I just remember that as being--everything was small. But generally, they were smaller people. I was also going to say that on the docks of Inchon when we landed were the troops that we were replacing. And at that time the United States government was trying to move away from this recruitment and draft into a universal military training. And the acronym was UMT. And we came off this landing craft, I remember these, all these guys, and a lot of them had come through the Pacific and then ended up in occupying Korea were yelling "UM-TEE! UM-TEE!" and this was not good for us. And we were yelling back "Not UM-TEE!" Because we were all regular Army guys. Another just comment that I've thought about, I was fortunate in my assignment in Korea, and one of the reasons was that there were very few high school graduates in the troops that I was with. When we went to Fort Knox, I was amazed, I would say sixty--seventy percent of the guys that were drop-outs from high school. And so when we got to Korea and this replacement training center, where they were going to assign us, I got a plum job. And it was a lot to do with the fact that I was high school graduate, had tested reasonably well and I was assigned a judge advocate, which put me in Seoul with the 24th Corps Headquarters. The Army structure--a corps has three divisions. Everything is in threes in the Army. We only had two divisions in Korea. It was undermanned, undersized. We had the 7th Division which took care of the patrolling of the 38th Parallel. And the Sixth Division that was stationed in the Pusan area, which was in the southern tip of Korea and a pretty good sized port city. And we were in Seoul with the 24th Corp Headquarters. There was also military government there, United States military government that when I landed there in '47,

was the governing body and structure of South Korea. At some point I'd like to drift back to the partitioning of Korea, but--

Mik: No, go ahead--I'd also like to have you explain what judge advocate is.

Dale: Oh, well let me go back to that. Judge Advocate is the military justice department and today people know it as JAG, Judge Advocate General. And they fancied it up and called it JAG, we called it Judge Advocate. And it was the military arm of the Army. And as an enlisted man in Judge Advocate, I was really a clerk and handled filing and typing and what have you. And it was pretty good because I didn't know how to type. But I remember the Full Bird Colonel who was from Minneapolis. Kinda like to--I was from Minnesota, and he wanted a Minnesota boy in there with him. I was the only enlisted man. And we processed all the court marshals, from the summaries to the general. And I saw a lot of guys' names come through there for all kinds of misdemeanors and felonies and, it was pretty shocking to me that we would have that many law violations in the service. But it ranged from rape to black market stealing--whatever. And we processed them all and the staff of Judge Advocate had several military officers, mostly high ranking light colonels, majors. And then we had some department of the Army civilians. And some of those guys had previously served in the Army, went back to the States, discharged, got a job with the department of the Army as a civilian--came back to Korea. We must have had five or six women that served as court reporters in our office and they were also with the Department of the Army civilians. I'm sure they got paid a lot more than I did, but I did all the work, of course, in the office.

I was just mentioning my thoughts about partitioning. Well some of this has come since I was there, many years ago. But even at time I found it rather strange that the Russians were sitting just north of the 38th Parallel. And at some point, I don't know if it was the Potsdam Conference or the Yalta. I think it was Potsdam. The Truman administration wanted Russia to declare war on Japan very badly. And he wanted to bring that war to an end quickly. And for lots of good reasons. And one of the carrots was to allow Russia to come in and occupy and pick up the Japanese prisoners on the north half of Korea. Here's this little peninsula country that had been occupied for forty years; one time it was a country by itself. And we didn't seem to learn that all the partitioning that was done after WWI really didn't work very well. And here we were party to partitioning another country. And I look back at it, I look at it now, it's still the same and thousands of men, and I'm sure some women, lost their lives. And nothing's changed. We're looking at a nuclear threat again. It's just like déjà-vu. I just think about the times that we sat in our hotel or billet in Seoul. I happened, because I was the only enlisted man with Judge Advocate, I was billeted in with G-2. Now G-2 is the intelligence arm of the Army. And these were enlisted men of course. And they were doing the undercover secret stuff in Seoul and a couple of the guys would infiltrate into Pyongyang, which was the capital of North Korea, periodically. And when I was present they didn't want to do a whole lot of talking, but they did some and I'm talking about this because of some things that happened subsequent to my moving on at Korea. This was 1947

and '48 and we talked weekly about the North Koreans and the Russians coming south. And about twice or three times a week, Russia would turn off the electricity in Seoul. They had all the power in North Korea, and we'd be sitting there and the lights went out. And the Army functioned with a lot of generators, but they did not have control of the electrical power, which was being generated up in the Chosin Reservoir that we later found out was there. And at any rate ah-- we were reasonably sure there was going to be armed conflict in '47 and '48. In fact there was a saying in, among the Army guys that if you're shipping back in '48, our saying was "Golden Gate in '48, Salt Mines in '49." And that referred to the salt mines in Siberia. And you know, GI's like to get a lot of those things going. But that was a reflection as we as enlisted men saw. And in 1948, when I was there, the United Nations had a lot of representatives in Seoul trying to set up a one-country government, north and south. And the Russians said "Nix, you're not even coming up here into north of the 38th Parallel." I think a reflection of the United Nations really has not been as effective as we all like to think it might be or want it to have. It just doesn't have the power. And I don't know how it gets power, and it hasn't been very effective, wasn't there. It couldn't bring about this unification. Had they not agreed to partition this country, none of this would have happened. I guess we can always look back and see those things, but what a terrible, terrible decision. Those people didn't want to be partitioned, they didn't wanna be communist in the north and democracy in the south. I don't think that meant squat to them. It didn't.

Very destitute, desolate country when I was there. When I'd stand on the roof of my hotel that I lived in, we'd look across Seoul and it was probably a city of two or three million people. And it was all little huts attached one to the other with tin roofs and cardboard. There was a downtown and there were some permanent structures such as the city I talked about before, the Japanese had built. But the city where the people lived were just--it was squalor. No plumbing. You've probably heard these stories, but the people used the corner of their house for their bathroom and dug a hole. And their excrement and waste was put in this hole and in the winter it was fine, it would freeze. The weather was much like Wisconsin. Little sharper winds that would come out of Siberia every now and then, but the sanitation was unbelievably bad. I don't know how, I guess their immune systems must have allowed them to live with that. In the spring of the year, the farmers would come in with what we called honey carts. I was talking about the farmers. And South Korea was largely agricultural. And that was interesting to me too, even at the time, I thought "Gee, that's funny. We gave the Russians all the manufacturing and heavy industry, which was in the North, and we took all the agricultural. The people could subsist of course with their agricultural products, rice and turnips and whatever they had. We didn't have the industry that was needed in the South. But these farmers would come in the spring, hundreds, thousands of them with their honey carts. They were big, wooden, wheeled, wooden carts, where they'd go into these homes and scoop off this excrement that had been collecting all winter and was now melted, and filling the air with odors that, I had never experienced. We used to get out of the office, the judge advocate office at noon to go to the mess hall and we would run and hold our breath for about as many blocks as we could make it, because the

stench was just unreal. And what we would laugh about, is the Korean farmers would sit on the single tree of these carts and eat their little can of rice, right alongside their booty. But they would come in and that was their fertilizer--which made all the food that was raised in Korea off limits to any of the Americans. Our immune systems were not ready for that. Although it produced some wonderful cabbage, and they had some good agriculture, and a lot of rice patties. But even with the Japanese having been there for forty years, their advancement of their agriculture was antiquated. They were still using oxen, which was a pretty good beast to put into those rice patties. But when they wanted to move water from one rice patty to another, they would have two people, one on each end, like you would have a jump rope and in the middle of the rope they'd have a pretty good size bucket. And they would go from one body of water, fill it and swing it on these ropes, and then flip it, and dump it in the next rice patty. I mean, hours and hours, but I don't know why. They didn't seem to advance in their agriculture at least up in 1947-48.

Anyway I spent about twelve months in Korea and decided to test into West Point. I thought that would be a way of getting a college education and I kind of liked the military. And I did test in and then failed the physical exam with diabetes, which was first discovered there. So, I was shipped back, or flown back. And that happened to be at the time of the Berlin Airlift, so there were very few airplanes flying from Korea and Japan flying back to the States. I think it took me three weeks, we just would go from one isle to another, wait a couple days, and until a Navy plane or something came. Most airplanes were sent to Europe to participate in the Berlin Airlift. When I got home, I told some of the people in my little community of Clear Lake, Minnesota, that we're going to be in war again. Well, most of them had never heard of Korea, and what would this eighteen year-old kid know? Probabaly not too much, but I did have enough information. I was stunned, I think it was 1949 when the Truman administration pulled most of the troops out. I think it was part of this whole effort to let the UN establish this new government, they put Syngman Rhee into the presidency of South Korea. At that time, I don't think there was a way of unifying those two nations. That should have happened in 1945. The United States should have gone into Korea, taken the Japanese troops, which had to be done, in the entire country, then we might have had a different situation today. But, at any rate, I was stunned that most of the troops, the 24th Corps, both the 7th and 6th Divisions were moved to Japan. The 24th Corps was sent back to Hawaii, that, it was its basic home. I thought, "Man it won't be long and those Russians--" It was always Russians in my mind because that's who were in the north training the North Korean Army, and they trained an army to fight! We trained an army in the South, but it wasn't really very much. I mean we really didn't put a lot of effort into making a fighting force. It was going to be more of a home security kind of thing. It was not a fair fight when the North Koreans decided to invade in 1950.

Mik: When was Truman's Iron Curtain speech, was that in '48? [Winston Churchill, "Iron Curtain" speech, March 5, 1946]

Dale: Truman's? I can't answer that. My history of that is not--

Mik: But, but your sense of the Russians, was that--I mean, were you thinking Russians? Were you thinking communism, yet? Were--

Dale: Yes, oh yes. We, at the time thought of communism, and it was pretty clear that Russia wanted to use the North Koreans as a means of their--they being Russia, controlling Korea--the full peninsula. And they were going to do it in the eyes of the world as saying: well, we are going to unify it. Because they always took that, they--I'm saying Russians, and their puppet government of, I think it was Kim Il Sung, that they put in charge. Their idea was to take that entire nation over from the start. Now was it a desire to spread communism? I don't know. I think the Russians wanted their own influence and some more warm water ports, seaports, to get close to Japan. That's very close to Japan, Korea is. I think that was their design back when the agreement was made to let them come in and take the Japanese prisoners down to the 38th Parallel. When our troops got into Korea, and got to the 38th Parallel, the Russians were already there. And they were all set up. And they just said, "That's it, you are not coming any farther" and that was somewhere in 1945, right after the Japanese surrender. So, long answer to your question, but there is no doubt in my mind that the Russians were very much interested in spreading communism. The Chinese factor surprised me, when they came into the war because I don't--[End of WCKOR071]

Mik: So you were surprised about China--?

Dale: I was surprised about China because we had always focused on Russia and in our minds, all though I was never in North Korea, it was, described to us, as there was some pretty large numbers of Russian troops up there. But they, I don't think they ever got into the fray. No, they sent the North Korean Army down, which turned out to be, not much, when our Marines came in. They did almost take the entire peninsula, the North Koreans. You are familiar with the term "Pusan perimeter." And I'm going to digress a little bit. I had two classmates that went into the military, about the time I did. One came out of a family of Marines, and the Marines did not have the same enlistment opportunities as the Army. There was no 18 months. You went in for three years, if you wanted to be a Marine. Well this one classmate, he laughed at us; he wouldn't go in the Army, he went in the Marines. And another one decided to go work for awhile, and then joined the Army later. Well both of those men ended up in the Korean War, because of the timing. It's just, as always said to me, decisions you make, and you don't know this obviously, but they impact on your life so. The young man that went in the Army, was caught in this retreat to Pusan perimeter, and walked almost the entire distance, wandering around. Just had a terrible impact on his after-Army life. He just never really recovered from it. And the Marine was even less fortunate. He was caught up in the Chosin Reservoir, and came out of it. But, a pretty battered and torn guy. Because they went through some tough, tough winter up there, freezing. He always attributed his ability to make it, survive because he grew up in Minnesota, and fished and hunted. He said a lot of the

guys there didn't know how to care of themselves in the cold. Just an aside about what happens to people based on their decisions. Yeah, I was saying the Chinese, I am not sure, I understand at one point, we had bombed some of their staging areas for their troops, early in the Korean War. Which was an excuse or an invitation for them to get in. See they didn't really have any reason to be in that war, other than Korea, of course borders on Manchuria, and this is getting pretty close to home. They probably wanted to make sure that the United States troops, and MacArthur in particular, wasn't going to get any fancy ideas that maybe now's the time to take on the Chinese Communists. Who knows?

Mik: Well there was still that conflict going on between Taiwan and China, wasn't there? Chiang Kai-shek, and--

Dale: Yeah, Chiang Kai-shek was still trying to hang on. I think he had moved to Taiwan, by that time and the Communists had pretty well taken over China. But I think some of our military people had the idea that maybe we ought to go in--which would have been horrendous to fight a land war in China. Well, that eventually became a dividing point between Truman and MacArthur, which is another story in itself. But, a lot of these things that happen that take the lives of young men and women, are political decisions. Things that, you wonder why they are made--but like the decision to move the troops out, I just, I have a difficult time, moving beyond that because it just seemed to me that that opened the door to that war, that really went no where, and ended up--Eisenhower saying, "Well let's get it over with and we'll go back to the old 38th Parallel," and there it sits today in 2004. Unbelievable. Over 50 years, and where's it going tomorrow? I don't know.

Mik: Yeah, some of the vets of the war, and I don't know if it's, you know, trying to feel like they were there for a purpose, that, they talk about, you know, you look at South Korea today and how prosperous it is, and they feel like they accomplished something by maintaining that line, but you're right. It's a divided country. It's--

Dale: Well I guess you could put that positive spin on it because it's true. I was absolutely stunned when Seoul had the international Olympics. Because my memory of Seoul was that it was a real dump. I mean it just didn't have much, the poor people were just living in the streets. And that was three years after, or two, three years after the war. But Japan had just stripped that country of everything. There wasn't a dog or a cat. I think they were all eaten, by somebody. And very few trees, it was just ravaged. And, I am sure that those guys that fought over there and died over there, there was ultimately a test made a whole lot better, much better place for the South Koreans. My perspective on it is it didn't solve anything after we divided that country.

Mik: When you were in Korea did MacArthur have much of a presence?

Dale: No. He was big in Japan, and those of us in Korea were kind of like the little orphan. The Army and everything we had in Korea was second-rate to Japan. And

if you were in Japan you were just another level up. And that's where MacArthur was and he was king. He was a revered individual. And, we had General Walker and General Hodges in Korea. But their main task, was at that time when I was there was really just to get this new government going. And the guys up on the 38th Parallel. There were little skirmishes even then, though. The North Koreans would like to do a little harassing, come across and--so, it was building up.

Mik: Did you have much contact with the South Koreans, the civilians?

Dale: A limited way. We had South Koreans living in the, part of the hotel. They were domestic people, you know, working, running the elevators, and working for the Americans. We didn't treat them very well. I didn't think. As a young kid, I thought it was cool to call them by slang. I mean we just thought that was the way it should be. We--I say we, I'll take the blame myself, pretty much felt kind of superior. Somehow or another thought because they didn't speak English they were somewhere below us. I came out of a very small rural community in Minnesota and didn't have a lot of sophistication, but that's how we viewed them. Most of them, I think, kind of liked us, but I am not sure. They got things from us. You could trade, and I did. I traded soap and cigarettes, I didn't smoke and I got all my uniforms tailored, and laundered every week and bought nice boots. They would make the most beautiful leather boots and then they would line them with army blankets. They got ahold of US Army blankets somehow. But we also had script in Korea and not American greenbacks. The United States didn't want the U.S. dollar to be circulated in Korea, so all the military personnel had script. And over a matter of time, that script would infiltrate and get out into the hands of the Koreans. So the Army, what they thought was a surprise, on an unannounced day, would suddenly give you an hour to turn in your script and get new money. Different color or something. I remember this one day, I got my script over to headquarters, went home at noon and the elevator operator who was Korean, had the new script already. So it wasn't very effective.

Mik: But you weren't the Japanese.

Dale: Pardon?

Mik: You weren't the Japanese though, did they feel that the American were better than the Japanese?

Dale: Oh yes. The Japanese, when you talk to the Koreans, were brutal. They were really--had the idea that they were a lineage of people that were superior to the Koreans. And as far as I could tell from whatever I heard and saw was that the Japanese were--had a pretty brutal forty-year reign over that country. And, not good for them.

Mik: How did they decide on the 38th Parallel? Do you now what was behind that?

Dale: I do not know specifically, I could speculate that it was a topographical divide. It was more rugged and mountainous, north of the 38th. It was kind of the geography of that and that's why the agriculture was south. And it's about half way. Those are some reasons, I don't think there was anything else, really. Although they gave up, the Russians gave, well they didn't give up anything, but the United States would have the large city of Seoul, in the south. The 38th Parallel is not very far north of Seoul, 15-20 miles. That might have been a factor also, that we wanted the capitol city. That's my guess.

Mik: So you couldn't eat any of the Korean food at all?

Dale: No. We were told the moment we landed that all Korean produced food was off limits. And they just said if you choose to eat you were going to get deathly ill. And they explained that it was fertilized with human excrement and our immune system was not capable of handling it. That was a small problem because the Army had to ship everything in. All we had--very little fresh food, and milk was all dried milk, and I got accustomed to it after awhile.

Mik: And was all your leisure time spent in military activity?

Dale: Leisure time?

Mik: Yeah.

Dale: Well I was a fortunate guy, again. I was a decent basketball player at that time and made the headquarters' 24th Corps Headquarters basketball team. Which meant they would put me on TDY, Temporary Duty assignment with special services. The Army had an idea all throughout, that they wanted a certain amount of the troops to be in sports and activities to really entertain other troops. Because I know we played in a lot of basketball games and tournaments. And the officers and enlisted men they got to be fans of your team. So I spent about four months of the winter playing basketball. Each day they allowed us to sleep in late, go to practice in the afternoon and play games in the evening. That's not very tough duty. My duty was great. I was just one fortunate guy. As being assigned a judge advocate itself was, I wore a dress uniform everyday, low-cut shoes and you walk on the streets and most of the GIs were in combat boots and fatigues and stuff, and we were walking around in our Class A uniform.

Mik: Was all of the--were all the other teams in the Seoul area, or did you travel to Pusan to play?

Dale: No. They were from throughout Korea. There were teams from Pusan, there was a team from Kempo Airbase, which was, I think the 5th Air Force--or something, out there. I would guess there were probably about six or eight teams. And then there were some that came from Japan. Special Services in the Army does quite a job. In fact, I went from basketball to baseball, in the spring. And then my colonel, the

Judge Advocate, laid on me and he was very upset--wanted to know why I joined the Army. So I gave in, it's not too hard to give to a Colonel.

Mik: Too much time, in the field and not enough time in the office?

Dale: Yeah. Sure, it caused him some problems because he was missing somebody.

Mik: How would you travel to those other places, by train, by truck?

Dale: No, we had a bus, an Army bus. I never left Korea, and Korea is not that big. So we went by Army bus. The gymnasiums and the facilities were pretty sparse, pretty limited. But the Special Services, did quite a job, you now they scheduled it and the troops would come to those games. That was a diversion for the Army, a pretty good idea really. I may be biased because I was the guy playing the game but I think the concept made some sense. It gave them some camaraderie and feeling of home, you know.

Mik: So, traveling from Seoul to Pusan, is that like going from Wausau to Milwaukee? Is it further than that, not as far?

Dale: Not a whole lot further. It would be, it would, yeah, I don't think it would be any further. The thing that you have to realize is that their roads and everything were pretty antiquated. They were mostly one lane, but they did have some railroad tracks and trains. When we came into Inchon, we took a train from Inchon, to an army, a Japanese Army camp, didn't have a name that I know of. Where we were there it was called a "ripple dipple," where you sat until somebody decided they wanted to take you on, and then we were moved by army truck to Seoul, about ten of us and the next morning I remember going into the interviewing with the Judge Advocate. And they held regular interviews. Which is kind of interesting but, if you got it then that's where you were assigned.

Mik: So where were you when the invasion happened?

Dale: I was home. I was out of there. I shipped out in '48.

Mik: But I mean, do you remember?

Dale: Oh at home? I was in college. Oh, yes I remembered very well, as I had mentioned I was kind of distressed with the fact that the news was saying we pulled our troops out, now that was in '49 and then when it happened, I was just really--my first thought was to try to figure out, had they moved the 7th Division back, but they hadn't. They moved some other troops out of Japan. But they didn't do well. Actually, when I was there I often thought about what I would do if the North Koreans came across the Parallel. We were not trained to fight. We had pretty decent training in Fort Knox, but we had no equipment. I had a little .38 Caliber Carbine. Each of had our own Carbine with us in our room. If they had come I

think we would have been overrun, or we'd have retreated immediately, because we were not a fighting force. The 7th Division might have been more ready, but those of us in Seoul, we thought about that. And when the invasions occurred I wondered what happened, but so many of our troops were already over in Japan. This Marine classmate of mine he came out of Hawaii, no, I'm sorry, Guam. He was stationed at Guam and they moved and he told me that they were supposed to land in Japan, and regroup and they needed another battalion of men and then they were going to invade Korea. Well by the time they got to Japan, they never unloaded, there was about 30 miles of land left around Pusan, on the Pusan perimeter. And it was only a matter of days, whatever troops we had there were going to be pushed into the sea. Now General Walker was saying, "Well we are not going to have another Dunkirk"-well. I don't know what it was going to be, but the Marines came and they just ran right over the North Koreans, according to my friend. I guess they pushed them back very quickly.

Mik: Well that first year was a lot of up and down.

Dale: Well it was and then we invaded Inchon. That same friend of mine was on that landing, and yeah. And of course they eventually came back, had to retake Seoul again and it was--

Mik: Well, the way you describe Seoul, and then the North Koreans swept over it, and then they were pushed back over it again, and then came back down a second time before they settled at the 38th. I understand it was really a mess by then.

Dale: Well I guess the refugees and everything, if the armies were going north, the refugees were going south and then the refugees would turn around and head north. They didn't know where the heck to go and a lot of them were getting killed and it was terrible. Absolute chaos. We were not prepared really, to go in there. But again it was, I think, a United Nations action. Militarily, that hasn't worked very well. It just hasn't. I guess conceptually when you think about it, it's pretty hard to say that you are going to make a real strong fighting force out of different countries, sending in--we had some other troops from Turkey, and different places over in Korea, but there was no real cohesion of effort. Because those troops aren't going to sit under the command of an American officer. I mean it is a lesson for the future, in my mind, I don't get too enamored with the UN as a military force.

Mik: Did, did you feel like because you had been in Korea, and really understood the situation that you followed the war a little more closely than the other people around you?

Dale: Oh yes, yeah. I was going to college and there were a lot of young college students, I was a couple years older than others in my same class, and they didn't have any interest in it. I mean there was no interest in it. I remember that, thinking that, "Why wouldn't you be interested in it?" It doesn't hit home until they get a draft notice or something.

- Mik: Yeah do you think that's the, I mean a lot of the Korean vets are pretty bitter about that. That nobody paid any attention to them at all, and to the sacrifice they were making, and suffering they were doing.
- Dale: You know I think to this day the general public doesn't have much appreciation for that. The fact that they, or the media or whomever would call it a 'conflict' just reflects the lack of understanding of what happened. It was terrible, and I could see--I don't have that bitterness because I wasn't there, but I would say if I were laying in a foxhole someplace, getting shot at or marching back and forth, a lot of the stuff these guys went through, you would be bitter. You had put a spin on it before, that some good things came out of it, but that gets kind of thin for the guy that was there.
- Mik: Yeah, I think the ones who feel that way, you can almost feel them searching for some justification of why that was asked of them--
- Dale: My take on it is--there was so much that happened prior, that they could have avoided. That's the way I look at it. I'm a 75 year old guy now, getting to the end of the line. I still look back and think, "Oh, that could have all been avoided." Starting with the idea, I am repeating myself, but to divide a country. We saw after WWI that just created all kinds of problems over in Europe, these nations of people, they don't want to be divided, really. I know that is all hindsight, but that could add to bitterness.
- Mik: But you saw it first hand as well, when you were trying to get home, and everything was going to the Berlin Airlift.
- Dale: Yes, yes I did [laugh].
- Mik: More partitions that didn't work too well.
- Dale: Well that's another one. It didn't work at all [laugh].
- Mik: I don't, I heard or read, that Russia was pretty annoyed that they didn't get half of Japan too, but MacArthur just said 'No, no partition of Japan.'
- Dale: Yeah. That probably was going on--I think Russia had a great desire to get more warm water sea ports, that's a big item. You get up there in Manchuria and Murmansk, that's not a real desirable seaport. And even the Korean peninsula was putting them down in the China Sea. So it doesn't surprise me, that they would have wanted some of the northern islands, at least of Japan. I guess this is obviously hindsight, had we known how effective that atomic bomb was, effective in the sense that it ended the war quickly, we might have had a whole different policy stance of wanting to get Russia into that Japanese war. I remember, as a, I was a senior in high school, and I can remember the news and the desire of the United States to get Russia to declare war on Japan, because that was going to be a big help to get that

war over. I understand what that mentality was. But then we gave away some things to do that, and Korea was one of them. Too bad.

Mik: Well, thank you.

Dale: Okay.

[End of interview]