

Wisconsin Public Television  
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
CLEMENT L. BAKER  
Infantry, Army, Korean War  
2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Madison, Wisconsin

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**Baker, Clement L.**, (1928- ). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 30 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

**Abstract:**

Clement L. Baker, a Chicago native, discusses his service in the Army during the Korean War. He talks about being called to service from the inactive Reserve in 1950 and shipping to Korea after a refresher course at Fort Hood (Texas). Baker talks about driving a truck through a combat zone and convincing a scared soldier to leave his foxhole during a retreat. He tells of being wounded in the shoulder by grenade shrapnel, being brought out of shock by coffee at the aid station, and returning to Korea after having surgery at Camp Drake (Japan). Wounded in combat a second time, he details getting hit in the side, being carried off the hill by South Korean stretcher bearers, getting treatment at an aid station, trying to keep his shrapnel fragment as a souvenir, and returning to the hospital at Camp Drake. Baker touches on foot care in the cold weather, a typical day of moving through Korea, and using shell holes as foxholes at night. He touches on some of the men from his unit who were wounded or killed. Baker reflects on the effectiveness of his issued winter gear, and he states there wasn't really time to make friends in the field. He comments on making sure not to leave usable weapons behind in a retreat, fighting through attacks when the enemy troops would come in "doped up" and yelling, and being ready to wake up quickly. Baker discusses generally not talking about his experiences. After being wounded, he talks about sending telegrams from the hospital that his wife received before she got the official government telegrams, and he portrays the reaction of his family to the death of a cousin who was killed in Korea. He discusses his homecoming, his wounds, and their long-term effects on his health. When he is told that it was only a police action in Korean, Baker states his response is, "I didn't know that the police used artillery."

**Biographical Sketch:**

Baker (b.1928) served in the Army Reserves from 1946 to 1947 and in the Army during the Korean War. After the war, he settled in Madison (Wisconsin).

**Citation Note:**

Cite as: Clement L. Baker, Interview, conducted September 10, 2004 at Studio C, Wisconsin Public Television, Madison, Wisconsin by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Korean War Stories, for Wisconsin Public Television.

**Context Note:**

Raw footage interview filmed by Wisconsin Public Television for its documentary series, "Wisconsin Korean War Stories." Original WPT videocassette number was WCKOR040.

**Related Materials Note:**

Photographs of this narrator's military service can be found in Wisconsin Public Television. Wisconsin Korean War Stories records (WVM Mss 1389).

**Videotape Note:**

There are missing audio segments! The WVM copy of the interview is missing the last three paragraphs at the end of the interview. Wisconsin Public Television should have complete audio of the interview, but there was a problem during the reproduction of the tapes for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. The missing parts are italicized as a means of identifying them in this transcript and the actual tape end and start in the WVM copy is clearly noted.

Interviewed by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Public Television, September 10, 2004  
Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.  
Transcript reformatted and edited by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2010  
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, WVM, 2012

**Transcribed Interview:**

- Mik: --how you first got involved with the military.
- Clem: Well, in 1947 I sold the filling station, and went in after they canceled the draft. And I was in from forty--'46 rather, '46 and '47 and got out in '47, went back to south of Chicago and they called me up in 1950 and I had to go back in.
- Mik: You stayed in the reserve?
- Clem: No, I was in the inactive reserve. And then they called me back in and I went on our--my physical was on our anniversary. So then I got back home, I was home about a week or so, then they shipped me out. I went Japan--now--in Fort Hood, Texas first, for a refresher course, then over to Japan, then Camp Drake, where I ended up at. Then they sent me from there to Korea.
- Mik: Now, when they called you back to active duty did--had the invasion happened in Korea?
- Clem: Yes, it was already, just--
- Mik: So you knew why?
- Clem: Started, yeah. And then, went over there, was over there--went through a road block, had to drive a truck through, and I told the sergeant, I says, "This truck isn't running right--a flat tire or something." He said, "No, you're pulling a 105 behind you." Plus 13 wounded. So we got to the aid station, the lieutenant took and--.
- Mik: I'm sorry, I've got to a--[pause for audio trouble]
- Clem: Carrying an M-1, and then I got up to this roadblock, the sergeant says, "Can you drive this truck?" I says, "Yeah." So I got in it, took off and I told him, I says, "You must have a flat tire." And then he told me that he had a 105 behind it, and 13 wounded.
- Mik: What's a 105?
- Clem: Howitzer. Cannon. And then I got over to the aid station, the lieutenant says, "Well, you've done a nice job bringing the 105, the howitzer in." And I thought to myself something else, but I wouldn't say it. And I helped the wounded get off the truck, and he took his flashlight, and run it up and down me, and says, "You got hit yourself." There's blood on my leg. I says, "No, that's just helping getting the wounded off." He says, "Well, give me your name and that." I said, "I just want to get out of here." So then we got back and come up to a--they had us blocked off, they were coming down--a gully, down like that, and then I was in the foxhole there. And another guy who was younger than I was--and he had just come in, and I was in

charge of it, he wouldn't get out, I says, "You better get out! They'll shoot you right in there!" So he finally got out, he said he was cold, but I said, I am too but, he got out. And then I told him that about oh--one hundred yards there's a--some head coming around the telephone pole down there. " No, I don't see it." And I did, I let it go. Moving around and I--we went and finally got where we get, leave there, there he was down there. A North Korean.

Then, was up--going up--was up on a hill, and they were going across, the North Koreans were way up there, they was firing down at us. And when we left there I was cutting across a rice paddy where they bury their people, sitting up. And was right there, and I got hit in the right shoulder, but they were firing from us, I got hit in the right shoulder, there was a piece of grenade, 'bout like that, I don't know who threw it, but somebody didn't like me or something. I got across there, and went over the hill there, and I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. Shock. So someone helped me down, got down to the aid station there and they gave me a cup of coffee--that brought me right out of it. So then they did surgery on that and I went over to Japan, to the hospital over there, Camp--well, I can't think of the name of it now--And then, after I got out of there, I went back to Camp Drake, and then back over to Korea, for my outfit.

Then, was going up a hill, got hit in the side here. Just like a car back fire, when the old cars used to backfire and flash of light and that, that's when I noticed it. I grabbed my side and another guy from the south, he come down, he had a dent in his helmet and he says, "I'm going to stay here with you." He says, "I'm going to be a live coward instead of a dead one." And he got, hit his helmet and it just rang his head and he had a headache. But then they finally took me down on stretchers, those South Korean people, and they made their own stretchers and they got down there a ways and they ripped the bandage off my side, cause they were short and hitting rocks and that. So, then I couldn't talk their language and I just took my foot and kicked one of them and he went rolling. So then, the medic come over and said, "What's the matter?" I says, "They just ripped my bandage off!" He tore the poncho he had made out of the stretcher, and he made something else and finally got me down. I went into the aid station and I told a doctor before he put me out I says, "I would like to have that piece that went in me." Because I had the one in my shoulder. And when I come out of it, there was a string attached my dog tags. I said, "Hey, that didn't do that much damage." But I never did get it. And I went back to Camp Drake and the sergeant over there says, "Oh, you've been here before, haven't you?" I says, "Yup." Then he says, "Well we gotta go do KP." I says, "Sorry sir, I can't do it. Can't bend over." So I lift up my shirt and showed him. "Yeah--just follow me around." So I did. Then they told me that I can't lift anything over 15 pounds--on account of this. Went down put a hole in my diaphragm big enough to put a baseball through it. But ah--then I come home I went to, what was it? Colorado. And then I come back Ma--Wisconsin--or Illinois. Then we moved up here and I've been up here ever since.

Mik: How long were you on the line before you were wounded that first time?

Clem: Oh--probably about two months. See, I got hit the 14th of February and it--maybe about three months something like that. I went back, 25th of May I got it on the left side.

Mik: What, what do you remember about that first two months on the line?

Clem: It was cold. And it was damp--at night you'd have to take your socks out, put dry ones on then put the socks in your uniform to dry them out, next day you can put them on again. You didn't get a chance to wash them very much. So that's about all I can say on it. It was cold out there and that's it and I don't like the cold air either, too well.

Mik: Were you moving a lot?

Clem: Yeah we moved, we was over the 38<sup>th</sup>, and back, and forth a few times. I don't remember any of the hill numbers or towns or anything like that. I think we went in, at Inchon or Pusan when I first went over. So, come back and the ship was the Walker, coming back. We went out to California, went under the Golden Gate Bridge when I left. Had to come in at Washington, I think it was. But, no, I didn't mind it. I wouldn't want to go through it again though--somebody had to do it.

Mik: Well, well tell me what that was like, I mean what would a day be like when you were on the move?

Clem: Well, we were just walking and kind of watching to see where they'd go and that, and in case we ran into any enemies or something like that. Then we didn't want to--we didn't have any air support at the time, cause it was so darn cold they couldn't get out I guess. But no, it is an experience to do.

Mik: What would happen at night when you--

Clem: Well, we'd get in a foxhole and kind of stay in there, but one guy had to stay awake. So long and the other guys take off and that. But--back at the aid station I didn't know what was going on at the hospital.

Mik: Did you--when you would stop for the day would you have to dig foxholes or would they already--

Clem: There'd be shells where you could jump into--where'd they'd been shelled and that where you can jump in and you don't have to dig too hard, too hard to dig anyway. Ground was froze so you couldn't dig, you'd have to go that way and find a--where shell's hadn't been jumped in yet. 'Cause I don't think they ever hit the same spot twice. You was hoping they wouldn't [laugh].

Mik: Was that in mountains?

Clem: Yes this is mountains and flat land, but there's a lot of mountains there that, you had to go up and over. But, it was kind of hard gettin' up with the snow on there, slippery and that.

Mik: And it didn't make any difference to you where you were, you just had to--

Clem: Do my job and walk and try to make it so I could get home.

Mik: And watch--

Clem: Yeah, and watch what you're doing.

Mik: When you were on guard duty at night--were there ever any firefights or anything?

Clem: No, not at night, not in our area there wasn't.

Mik: And what was the situation that day you got wounded the first time?

Clem: Well it was--we were starting to pull back, and my platoon sergeant, supposed to pick up the first sergeant's knapsack and he raised up and he got it, right between the eyes. And I went down, and the sergeant says, "Where's my knapsack?" I says, "It's up there." I says, "Sergeant Mitchell just got it." And, I wasn't about to go get it either. And he didn't either, so we didn't go back up, we went back and then went to the aid station. There was a few hit there. This one kid I had in a foxhole with me, he got it in both legs. Didn't even touch a bone. I'd seen him at the hospital. But he's was lucky there too. Some of them didn't make it.

Mik: And was that from rifle fire, or mortars, or--

Clem: Rifle fire mostly. But I don't know what this was when it hit me in the side. This here one on my shoulder was a grenade because it had the little square of it. But I had it for a while then I lost it before I could send it home.

Mik: And it was--you don't--could it have been an American grenade?

Clem: Could have been an American throwing it from down farther and didn't get up high enough or what.

Mik: And they were on the high ground above you?

Clem: Yeah. They were walking on the ridge and we were down a ways. We were shootin' at them from down there. Then we had to get out of there, then we pulled out and that's when I--cutting across that rice paddy, is when I got hit.

Mik: What's that like to be in a firefight?

Clem: Well, you know if you go deer hunting, somebody is shooting at you, and they know you're there, that's about the same thing. He's shooting at you, you want to shoot back at him. But, I wasn't--if any of those guys was shooting at me I was going to try and get them. The only thing you could do. They're over there fighting for Korea and that--but you want them over there instead of over in the United States to do it. I--like I said, I don't regret being over there, but I don't want to go through it again.

Mik: Especially the cold?

Clem: Yeah, the cold especially.

Mik: Where you properly outfitted, do you think, for the cold?

Clem: Yeah. You had your snow packs and that on it. But they weren't that warm either and you change them over. And every night you'd change your socks and that, like I said. Try to keep your feet warm, well I got mine froze. Cause they don't have it on my record, but I can--right now, sometimes I'll be sitting and my feet will get cold. I've got good circulation. That's what the doctors out here said.

Mik: Do you have any memory of that? What's that like walking on frozen feet?

Clem: Well it's kind of hard to walk, but I don't remember too much on it. But it ah--you want to get someplace where you can get 'em warm and that. You didn't make that many fires at night. Or else they could see you. But--

Mik: How about your fingers, did they get cold?

Clem: They got cold too, but they're pretty good now. Fingers and feet were the worst things.

Mik: Did you have insulated gloves, or--

Clem: No. Just had those old wool gloves that the Army used to give out and that. No, they got cold. Kind of while you was walking you'd have one in your coat and change off and put it in the other side to warm them up, even with your gloves on. Tried to get somewhere where it was warm. You stop someplace and see something you'd probably use and grab it, but otherwise you'd go with what they give you.

Mik: Did you know any of the guys in your unit before you joined it?

Clem: No. I didn't know any of them. When I went in '46--'47 there were some of the kids that never did go in after I went in--that I went to school with and they never did go in. They still haven't gone in. We had one guy that went in, he had a steel plate in his head. He was in for a while, but then they let him out. So--No it's--I don't what else to say.



- Mik: Did you make friends in that unit at all?
- Clem: You didn't have time to make them. You know, you kind of made a little few friends in the hospital and that but right on the field and that you didn't have much time to get acquainted with anybody. And I didn't know anybody in our outfit. I never did get in touch with anybody when I got out either.
- Mik: How about the--let's see you were in November and December and got wounded in December?
- Clem: February. Well, '51.
- Mik: January and February you were on the front? Got wounded.
- Clem: 14<sup>th</sup>.
- Mik: You were back in--when did you get back into Korea?
- Clem: Well, I think I was off two months. On the 25th of May I got in again.
- Mik: So how long were you back that time before you got hit?
- Clem: Well, let's see--about a month or so. Then I got it again. And that sent me home.
- Mik: And you remember that situation, what was going on that second time you got wounded?
- Clem: I remember going up the hill, and seeing a flash. And then a guy come down and help me down. That's all I can remember.
- Mik: When you were there the first time and the second time, was your unit taking a lot of casualties?
- Clem: Yeah they had quite a few casualties. But when I first went over, they went on a train, and they, other than the first cavalry, and they took us off and the rest of them went out--on the train, and we heard later on that they got blown up. So I missed it three times, gettin' it. They told us that ah--the train had gotten blown up later on.
- Mik: I can see why you just wanted to get out of there. People shooting at you, people getting hit.
- Clem: The only thing I was afraid of was my hands and my eyes. Where I couldn't use my hands or see. Cause I was a mechanic, went to school for that. Then they got these newer cars--I had--the heck with that noise. Got to bein' too much of it. But ah, no they treated me right over there in the hospital and that. I can't complain of that.

- Mik: Did you, encounter any of the other UN troops?
- Clem: No I didn't see any of them. Nope. Maybe out of their way or something. Didn't see any guys from different outfits and that either. I think we was just settin' out there by ourselves, to tell you the truth.
- Mik: So in January and February the Chinese had already come in, were you thinking that's who you were fighting, the Chinese?
- Clem: Yeah, yeah, fighting them all. Chinese and North Koreans.
- Mik: Could you tell the difference?
- Clem: No. They all look the same. They probably thought we all looked the same too [laugh]. No, we, you couldn't tell the difference between them.
- Mik: Were there any of those attacks when they would blow the bugles?
- Clem: Yeah we had a few of 'em--. a couple times like that, they'd blow and holler "Banzai" and all that stuff, yelling and that. But we never run like some of them ran and left their weapons. That's the way they got their weapons. Some of the guys get scared and they take off, leave there weapons instead of taking 'em with them, and that's how North Koreans and Chinese got their weapons. They didn't get mine. I kept mine with me. When I got hit in the side I pulled the trigger housing out, threw it one way and threw the rifle the other way so they couldn't use it.
- Mik: What's that like to be attacked?
- Clem: It's scary. And you, feel like running and that. But our outfit didn't run. We stayed right there. They didn't go very far, there wasn't too many of them that did it, but a few of them, enough of them. We just started firing back at them. They were doped up so much, they didn't even know when they got hit.
- Mik: On what?
- Clem: I don't know what they were doped up on, but they were doped up. Cause I hit one up there and he was still walking the ridge line, I "Geez, I missed him" after using a BAR, 20 rounds, finally he fell over. I don't think he knew--he was too cold or something--but no, it's scary when they holler that. And they usually holler that early in the morning--everybody kind of tired and drowsy and that, otherwise everything went okay.
- Mik: I take it you probably wake up pretty quick then.

Clem: You ain't a kidding, you wake up pretty quick. You jump out of that sleeping bag awful quick too [laugh]. You usually have your sleeping bag so you can stay warm, still had to stay awake sometimes too. No, I don't say too much on it, not to anybody you know. I'm just glad I am home with a wife and kids.

Mik: Do you prefer just not to even think about it? Not to talk about it?

Clem: Well, I do like a lot of them. A lot of them think about and they have nightmares and that. I did at first, but I got over that. I talk to some. Grandson, he wants to know about it and that, I talk to him about it. But otherwise I don't say much about it.

Mik: It's pretty hard to communicate with people who just don't have an idea.

Clem: Well, I been in a couple places now, in a restaurant, and one lady seen my car license, and got the purple heart on it and she says, "What's that Purple Heart on it?" I says, "Wounded vet." She didn't even know it, what it was about. Then I was at the gas station, and a guy seen my plate, Purple Heart, and he come up and thanked me for it. Was out having coffee one Saturday and, and guy come in and says, "Is that your car out there?" I says, "Yeah", he says, "Thanks a lot." So you got some people who know what it is and some of them don't.

Mik: Hey Tom, are you hearing that?

Audio: Yeah

[Faint woman's voice]

Mik: Yeah I wanted to ask you about, that.

Clem: Nobody talked about it.

Third Voice: Forbidden subject.

Clem: Well you know how they treated everybody when they come home from WWII and that. Korea they didn't even do anything like that. Just, you're home and that's it. Nobody asked you if--bothered or anything. They didn't talk too much about it.

Mik: Why do you think that was? They didn't know or they just didn't care?

Clem: I don't know, tell you the truth.

Third voice: --

Mik: But you have to be quiet now [laugh] [Talking to the third voice who may be Baker's wife].

Clem: For once she shut her mouth [laugh].

Mik: No, when we send you that tape, she'll see that--[laugh]. Nice, tight shot on you. [laugh]

Clem: Nobody talked too much about it. Even since we moved up here, you don't hear anybody talk about it.

Mik: Did you write? Or get mail from her?

Clem: Yeah, I got mail from her and I wrote when I could. Not very often, but she got letters from me. She got the telegrams, and I got hit before the government sent them to her.

Mik: Well, tell me about that.

Clem: Well, when I got hit the first time I had the nurse send a telegram. Then she got it and then later on the government sent her one. She knew about it, and then when they brought the telegram to her, I think it was the cab company who had to take it down to her. He had to stay there right there with her until she read it. Well, he handed her that and she says, "Oh, I know what happened, he got hit." The guy looked at her and wonders, "What the heck?" he says, "I still gotta stay here until you open it up." Then she got the other one the same way. I had a cousin, if you don't mind, I had a cousin who was on the rotation plan. And he was the sixth one. Well they only sent five that time. And he had money sent home to his wife and that, when they found out and he got killed, they sent the telegram to the chief of police, and the chief of police cried just like a baby. It was his son-in-law. That hit kind of hard too. And I--when I got home and went and saw his mother and I made the mistake by saying, "Well, if I got hit and killed, I didn't want to come home, because you didn't know if you were going to get the right body or not." That was the worst thing I could say to her. She just chewed me up one side and one down the other [laugh]. But she got over it.

Mik: Cause she wanted to believe that she had the right body?

Clem: Yep. You don't know, they put you in a bag, you don't know if you are going to get the right one or not. They--the chief got the telegram and it just hit him hard.

Mik: So how big was that hole in your side?

Clem: Big enough--well it went in here, it was only about that long. Went, down, put a hole in my diaphragm big enough to put a baseball through it. And when they did surgery, they didn't use those nice stitches, they just used 6 wire stitches going across. And now it's grown like this. I'm trying to fill it in, but it don't fill in [laugh].

- Mik: Did it cause you any trouble?
- Clem: When I bend over, yes. When I first got home and that and working on cars and that, bend over and get it right in here, in the rib there. But it don't bother me too much now. I'm 60% disabled from the service--from it.
- Mik: That's pretty amazing that something could go in and do that and didn't do more damage internally.
- Clem: Well, when this here one went in, could have been up an inch and a half higher and caught me in the neck. This one hit, went down instead of goin' across and hittin' me in the heart. So I was lucky there, both times. I feel it once in awhile, but it's not only what worries me anymore.
- Mik: What do you remember after the aid station? Do you remember, did they put you out or anything?
- Clem: Well, they put me out when they--no. When they did the surgery and that, they put me out then, yeah on both times.
- Mik: When you first went off the line, to the aid station do you remember that whole process?
- Clem: I remember them helping me down to the hill, down to the aid station, where I couldn't see my hand in front of my face, like I said. Then they gave me a cup of coffee, it snapped me out of it, must have been shock or something. No, they had me taped on the shoulder here, they had me taped clear like this, all the way around the back. When they would--tore that tape off it--[whistle]--'bout ready to go through the roof. He wasn't nice at tearing it off easy. Takin' it easy to tear it off, they just yanked it off. Then they--later on, started growing like that. Flesh come, up. Had to go back in, then they started poking around there, they found a piece that was in there, they thought they was gonna do surgery here. They found it and got it out. That's when they gave it to me. But then I lost it, I'd like to have it, but you don't keep things in your pocket very long running around like that.
- Mik: So what was the next step after the aid station?
- Clem: Back to--over to Japan, Nagoya.
- Mik: How did that happen? Was it like a truck or a jeep from the aid station?
- Clem: I think it was a truck that took us over to the boat then we took a boat over.
- Mik: Both times?

- Clem: Yeah. I was back at Camp Drake three times. I says, "I am going home this time and the heck with it."
- Mik: And was the boat one of those hospital ships?
- Clem: Yeah. Then the Walker was just a regular ship that I come home on.
- Mik: What were those hospital ships like?
- Clem: They were just about like a regular ship but they got a lot of doctors and that on it. And, where they can watch you and take care of you. It was just a regular boat, merchant ship, or they can ah--.different compartments and they got ones that's real bad and they kind of watch them more than the other ones do.
- Mik: I understand that one of the reasons there weren't more deaths in Korea was because they were better at getting the wounded out.
- Clem: That's a police action, I didn't know how the police used artillery. That's what I always said.
- Mik: Do you take offense to that when people say it was a conflict or a police action?
- Clem: No. I don't even pay too much attention to them anymore. They say that, and I just say "Well, I didn't know that the police used artillery." They kind of shut up then [laugh].
- Mik: When you are on the line and people are shooting at you, not much difference from a war is it?
- Clem: No. It's not. You just want to stay alive as much as you can. And the shells that they'd drop in that you don't see that's the one you get.
- Mik: Yea, you better have a good answer to this. What was it like the first time you saw your wife after you got back?
- Clem: I was happy [laugh].
- Mik: Do you remember that moment?
- Clem: Yeah, got home and her sister [**End of Tape WCKOR040**] *and her come up to Chicago, I was on the train. They both come up and got me. Her sister had to take off of work and she says, "He can't drive or anything like that, so I've gotta go get him." So she got her, boss told her that. We got home and I was happy.*
- Mik: *What kind of shape were you in when you got off that train?*

Clem: *I was--still had a bandage in my stomach area yet. Otherwise--and the sergeant, who I knew, he a carried my duffle bag off, because it was kind of heavy and that, put it in the car, in fact we took him down to some place in Chicago, where he wasn't too far from the train station, we dropped him off there. And then we went on home. Back down to Hazel Crest.*

Mik: *How long was it before you were able to bend without a lot of pain?*

Clem: *Well I could do the bending then, but if I leaned on anything, I could feel it then. But then it didn't bother me too much.*

**[End of Interview]**