

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

JAMES C. BEGAY

Infantry, Marine Corps, World War II
Tank Driver, Marine Corps, Korean War
Landing Vehicle Tank Retriever, Marine Corps, Vietnam War

2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Madison, Wisconsin

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Begay, James C., (1927-). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 120 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

James C. Begay, a member of the Navajo tribe, discusses his career in the Marine Corps, including service during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Begay talks about enlisting in the Marine Corps and mentions that he chose the Marines because his brother, Cory Begay, was a Navajo code-talker. He details basic training in San Diego, including running everywhere, rifle training, and daily activities. Assigned to the infantry, he talks about marching, lectures, and weapons training at Camp Pendleton (California). After being shipped out, he speaks of brief stops at Hawaii and Guam and arrival at Okinawa near the end of the invasion. Assigned to the 16mm motor section, 18th Company, 5th Marines, Begay talks about seeing casualties on the beach and being constantly moved around. After Japan's surrender, he speaks of going to Tianjin (China) for three months and then to Shanghai for six months. He characterizes the tough Turkish security guards at the naval annex in Shanghai. Begay discusses coming home via Guam and being attached to the 4th Marines at Camp Lejeune (North Carolina). Sent to tank camp, he talks about being assigned to the supply depot and deciding to reenlist. He states he spent the next three years at Naval Ammunitions Depot in Hastings (Nebraska) and then took his discharge in 1949 to find a job. Begay describes finding work as an ambulance driver at an Indian hospital in Fort Defiance (Arizona) and, one morning, deciding that he would rather be helping his Marine buddies fight in Korea. He portrays the excitement at the recruitment office when he reenlisted and being sent to Camp Pendleton the same day. After a month of training and some leave, Begay states he was shipped via Hawaii to Korea and landed using landing craft. Assigned to the 16mm Motor Section in the Anti-Tank Company, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division, he volunteered after a week to transfer to the Tank Company as assistant driver in tank 5-4. After some time north of Wonsan, he describes putting the tanks aboard an LST for transport to Inchon, hitting a typhoon at sea, and having one of the tanks break loose and slam into the walls. After joining a tank battalion, Begay tells of being sent all over the place, including Munsan-ni, Seoul, Bunker Hill, and Panmunjom. He describes his duty on the Main Line of Resistance supporting the infantry at night. Begay addresses the clothes they wore to keep warm during the winter. He recounts the time his tank was hit by a mortar; most of his crew was knocked unconscious and his assistant driver bailed out, so Begay drove the tank down the hill before it could be hit again. After a few days of repair, he reveals they were sent back to the same spot and hit a second time, but took less damage. He reflects on being nicknamed "Chief," stating, "I hate that word, but I just had to go along with them." After returning to the States, Begay speaks of being sent to Camp Pendleton with a Landing Vehicle Tracked (LVT) outfit. After he was married, his unit was sent to the Naval Ammunition Depot in McAlister (Oklahoma). He analyzes tank scopes, steering, and firing distances, and he describes how they would repair tank tracks in Korea. After reenlisting again, Begay speaks of being reassigned to 8th Company, 1st Tank Battalion at Camp Pendleton and going to track vehicle school. He discusses being sent to Okinawa for about thirteen months and travelling to places such

as the Philippines and Shanghai in an LVT. After the outbreak of the Vietnam War, he states he was shipped out as a staff sergeant in charge of an M51 Retriever and an LVT Retriever. Begay talks about recently attending a reunion for his Korean War tank unit and everyone being surprised that he is still in shape. He talks about turning in his papers for retirement while still in Vietnam and, after returning to the States, spending his remaining months at School Battalion at Camp Del Mar (Camp Pendleton). He touches on the difficulty of being with his family while in the service and reveals they are the reason he retired. Begay briefly contrasts the different wars in which he fought.

Biographical Sketch:

Begay (b.1927), a Fort Defiance, Arizona native, served in the Marine Corps from 1944 to 1966. He served from 1952 to 1953 in Korea with an anti-tank company in the 1st Marine Division. From 1964 to 1965, he served as a staff sergeant and tank mechanic in Vietnam. He married in 1960 and had six children. After his service, he worked in San Jose (California) and, in 1991, moved to De Pere (Wisconsin).

Citation Note:

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Context Note:

Raw footage interview filmed by Wisconsin Public Television for its documentary series, "Wisconsin Korean War Stories." Original WPT videocassette numbers were WCKOR005, WCKOR006, WCKOR007, and WCKOR008.

Related Materials Note:

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

Interviewed by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Public Television, May 7, 2004.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.

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

Abstract written by Susan L. Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

Mik: Who were you when you found out you'd be a military man?

James: Well--I joined the Marine Corps in July--July 1944 in Gallup, New Mexico. And I waited about a week before the recruiter called me back. First I had to take an examination, and all that, to go through. And a week later they called me back and they told me to come on in. So I went in and they told me I did pretty good on the test and all that. So--they signed me up and then they told me to stick around--that day when I was there, this is around July when I--forgot what day it was, anyway it was the middle of July. I waited around a whole day and that evening they told me--if I had a place to stay in Gallup. I say, "I came out here with my brother." My oldest brother, he brought me over there. And we live about forty-five miles from Gallup, New Mexico on Navajo Reservation. And he asked me if I could go home or stay in a motel or hotel some place in there--"I think I'm gonna' go home--and I'll come back in the morning." So we went home and--spent the night at--that's the last night I stayed there, with my, with my folks. And the next day about 9 o'clock we took off and we went back to Gallup. They were all set for me. And they told me to--they got the Greyhound Bus ticket for me to go to Phoenix. That's their induction station. Now I thought I was the only one to be goin' on that bus and there was three other guys with me. And we went down to Phoenix, we left about noon I think it was. Anyway, we got down to Phoenix kinda' late in the evening. That's about--over 300 miles from Gallup I think. And--when we got to Phoenix they put us in a hotel--over there. The next day they told me gotta' be downstairs at 7 o'clock in the morning, so we did. Meet down in the lobby at 7:30 and then we got on the--one of the government vehicles came around to pick us up and took us down to the induction station. We eat breakfast over there--feed us down there. After that we took a physical, start takin' our physical. And everybody passed the physical, the guys that were with me. There was a whole bunch of other people were there too, from different areas. So we--when we got done with all that they told, we--passed the physical and we whatever. Branch we wanna' go in, they gave us a choice on that. And two of, three of those guys with me--two went into the army, two of us went into the Marine Corps. So they, they split us up.

Mik: Why'd you choose Marine Corps?

James: Yeah. The Marine Corps, why I choose it? Well, my brother was a Marine in the Second World War. He went in 1942; he was one of the first ones that went in from our reservation. And those days they were asking for Navajo code-talkers, they want to use those people for doing the Radio Signal Corps, things like that. That, that's what Cory, my brother, was. He was already over there when I joined the Marine Corps you see. Been there for almost two years. He'd been all over the Pacific. Anyway, that's how I decided to join the Marine Corps. And to top it off I always liked the uniform too. [Laughs] And--we--the two of us were in the Marine Corps duty, and they got a bunch of other people in there too, I forgot how many there were but it was quite a few. And they got, and the Navy guys were in there

too, bunch of Navy, and we're all going to San Diego to crew depot. The Navy and the Marine Corps, they're side by side recruit--recruit depot, in San Diego. So we went with all those guys and--we took a train from Phoenix, Arizona to San Diego. It took us about, say about 8 hours to get down there. We pull into San Diego and they took the Navy guys off first and leave two of us. And there's a Marine Sergeant says, "You guys are--you guys in the Marine Corps, uh?" "Yeah." "Well, get off that bus, what are you guys waitin' for?" [Laughs] He says, "You're in the Marine Corps now. We tell you what to do, and when we tell you what to do you run. You don't walk." Well, from that day on we start runnin'. Every place we go. And they take us down to recruit depot. I forgot how many Marines there were, there were quite a few of 'em. They come from different areas—like upstate--and they put us all on a bus and we went to this recruit depot and they unload us over there in one of the barracks and--they gave us--a linen blanket. And they took us to one of the Barracks and they--and we all got assigned to the back, to each bunk for that night. So we spent the night there.

The next day they woke us up about 5:30--and then from there we start running, every place we go. We had to go to--we went to chow that morning--they fed us. We had, I forgot what we had, anyway, we had pancakes or something. And--we got out of there after chow and then we went back to the Barracks. We got the barracks chief to dismiss us, and then we start cleaning, the clean-up, cleaned the barracks and everything, you know. Make up our bunk. And we just hang around there, told us to just hang around, nobody sits on the bunk. When you wanna' sit down you gotta' sit on the floor. [Laughs] And--after we got that done in the morning they fall us out again. We went to--dentist and we had a second teeth and everything that were there. And we took some more x-rays and all that, chest x-rays, things like that. After we got that done it was about noon almost. And--we didn't get our uniform until a couple days later I think it was. And many time we--every place we go we marched in civilian clothes. And when they--when they say you march, you march. They teach us how to form your line. Make us into a platoon, they split us up into a platoon, I think there was--45 people into a platoon, I think something like that, anyway--or 50. And so we were, I don't know, one platoon. This one Navajo guy, he came with me, we were in the same platoon. So from there on, after we got our uniform and we start drilling and--everything that, anything that got to do with the military manual, or go to school and learn all about that. And every, like I say, every place we go it's double-time. Learn how to drill, things like that. We do that for about six weeks, and of course in between time, the first three weeks we did all this. And the fourth week, we went to the rifle range. The first week we was out there just snappin', all week. And the second week we were there we start shootin' live ammo. That's when your, your score, you scored everyday with what--and they teach you how to clean your rifle and how to take care of your weapon and things like that. Course we did that all through the boot camp with the rifle too. You took the--they--teach us how to tear it down, you kept doin' that in blindfold, go into it, and pretty soon automatically every little part you pick at you knew just where it's going to go, you do it with the blindfold. And it takes a little while to, to do that. They'd time you, each time to see how long it would take

you to, to reassemble that rifle. We done all that--in that time and the fourth week we were qualification. And the qualification we have to fire the rifle. The--the farthest you can shoot on that rifle range is--I think it was a thousand yards, but the, when you, when you go into recruit training, like we are, you got 500 yards is the limit. 400, 300, 200. And--you start out with a hundred yard, 200 yard line and then a 300, 400. We do this every day. Just--we used to fire, I don't know how many rounds in a day we'd fire, 'til you get, get the hang of it. And when we're not doin' that we'd be--cleanin' our rifle or washing clothes and things like that. You used to have a certain time you'd wash your clothes, afternoon usually. And--while we're doing this an all that--we'd qualify on Friday, the last week we were there, that's qualification day. So I did pretty good, I think I shot expert. And--and they were, the coach of mine, he was patten' me on the back, "You're doin' a good job. Keep it up. You'll be needin' it later on," he said. So, after we got that done and we went back to San Diego again, they took us back--from there on we do some more drilling and things like that for about another week. And this was our last week we were in boot camp.

After we got out of there and--we went to--they split us up, depends on your qualification. Some went Infantry, some went into motor pools, some were tanks, some were--some became clerks, I guess. [Laughs] We went, this Navajo guy with me, he, we went to infantry. They put us in infantry, so we went to Camp Pendleton, that's where they sent us from San Diego. We got to Camp Pendleton and we had some more new-comers come in there from all different areas, I guess, and there were a bunch of 'em. Pretty soon it was a whole company--we waited about almost a month before we start our training over there--'til everybody get together. Some of those people were on leave and when they come back from leave they get their orders to go there. This is Infantry training that we had to go through. We had to learn all kinds of--weapons, tear it down and put it back together, and things like that, machine gun--light machine gun, heavy machine gun. Heavy machine gun, they used to have it on a cart those days--and water-cooled operating, 30-caliber. And we had to learn all that and also a 50-caliber--we have to fire that. Course--hand-grenades and things like that. We did that for--let's see--about two months I think. A little over two months and we was--in Camp Pendleton it's mostly hills--lots of hills. A fifteen minute lecture, you'd go about five miles, you marched five miles just for five minutes of, fifteen minute, twenty minute lecture. And then they sent you to another area. Run into a problem over there, that might take you a half-hour to an hour--after you get that done--we were doin' that for about almost 3 months there. We were pretty good at it, and we're climbing hills like a bunch of mountain goats. [Laughs] We'd do a lot of walking over there. And--after that's over and they put us--well first we got our, our leave, I had fifteen days leave. We went home and--that fifteen days went so fast. And then back to Camp Pendleton again, and from Camp Pendleton we, they cut us our orders, we all was in a company then, put us all in a company with a bunch of other outfits. And we waited around about another--two weeks I guess. And we got acquainted with all the rest of the people, you know, what outfit we're in, what platoon, company, and things like that. And that's all over then, and then we went, they took us down to San Diego

and we went aboard ship. We head west. We were on the ship about over thirty days. We--before we got to the destination, we stopped in Pearl Harbor. And in '44, that ship was still--Arizona, the mast was still sticking out--not the Arizona, but the New Mexico I think it was. Arizona is down, you can't see that. They just got a marker there, where that ship was. And we went right out by it, we went through the harbor there and we--they stopped the ship and we--we sit there for about--three days I guess, three or four days, and then we went on--we went on liberty from there. Gave us two days liberty. And then came on back aboard ship again and ready to take off and everybody's back. And we left for Guam. Guam was secure at that time. When we got to Guam, that place, there's nothin' there. They got tents here and there, that's about all, only thing you see in that area--at Naja. Naja used to be-- the capitol. It was all wiped out, nothing's there, they got one Quonset hut. The Navy was using that one for the command post I guess. More like the area command post in that area. I think there was two Quonset huts there. We were there for about another couple days. And then after that we went back aboard ship again. And we--mostly we circle around a lot, from there on, we don't go anywhere but we just go circle around.

Mik: Did you have any idea where you were headed?

James: No, they don't tell you nothin'. We-- got good idea of where we were going, Okinawa. That's the last island they were going to take at that time. We went--we were out there for about almost a month, I guess. And then at Okinawa the landing started. And then we, we know that's where we're gonna' end up. So we got to Okinawa and--right after the landing's all, almost secure along the beach, you know, all inland, all that by the time we got out there. We were kinda' behind like. And they unload us over there on a small landing boat and we went ashore. As you know where I--I was with the 16mm motor section. They need you, where ever they need you, that's where they put you. 'Cuz--you--qualify with all the weapons they use over there before you leave the States. Also, you don't know what outfit you're going into when you get over there.

Mik: So you were like replacements?

James: Yeah.

Mik: And where ever they had casualties, that's where they would put you?

James: Yeah, they assign you to the outfit. I was in the 18th Company, 5th Marines-- weapons section. [Technical Talk] Up in the 16mm motor section. I--we--we land over there and then we were in the section. From there we, we'd do mostly the fire over the, the, what ever they want us to--where ever they want us, we move around a lot, up and down the-- That's the way we used to live--mostly in pup tents or in a cave, if you can find one. Bunker mostly. Everything was all wiped out already by the time we got over there, the beach is all a mess. We stayed up there 'til it's over. We went through a lot over there. You know, the first--we were there, we seen a lot

of casualties. People layin' around here and there and--it kind of make you sick, the first time you see a human being laying there--being shot up. But after that you get used to it. You don't even think about those things so much. Yeah. Just to get by you say--if you wanna' survive--that's a thing you had to go through. Course, like I say, you get used to it later on--just another day. But you don't know where you're going to be the next day though. You just keep moving all the time. You might stay in one place maybe two, three days and then they ship you to another place. You run around a lot. After that's over, then we went--all secure--then they round us up and we went back to the beach. They left some Marines on there to guard that area I guess, make sure there isn't any enemies still alive some where in a cave. You had to hunt all those people down. Some people like us had to go back aboard ship again. The ship came around to pick us up and--went through the same thing, we circle around, oh, about another--say about a month I guess. We don't know where we're gonna' end up this time, they were talking about going into Japan.

Nobody knows what's goin' on--'til the war's over. When they dropped the bomb and all that, you know, it's--things are all over and they surrendered. And then there was, quite a huge ship was with us, a whole different type of ship, LST. We were on an APA most of the time, a troop ship. The ship we were on we--they say we're heading for North China--going to Tianjin. We got into Tianjin--it took us about a week, I think, from there, to get there. We all got there and we unload what we got and--everything's okay over there, you know, nothin' going on. So--we, they pitched up a bunch of tents over there; Seabees always helped the Marines a lot. They put up the Quonset huts and they do those things in no time. There were some tents up there already and we, we would have to do most of the tent, we had to put it up, after we got there. So we live in there for a while and then, and then they changed it all into Quonset huts. And some of those areas are where there used to be--they had Marines over there one time, before the war. Some of those barracks were still standing, standing and they're not in too bad of a shape. So just clean it out and repair it--where we used to live. We were there for a while and, I would say about three months, I'd guess. And then they need some, our company, they pick our company, I don't know why, they, they want some Marines down south, so we went down to Shanghai. Went down to Shanghai, China, we was over there for, oh, about six months I would guess down there. We was, half the time we docked, we anchored out in the, out in the river, Yangtze River go right by there. That river's pretty wide, so--they got naval annex, used to be old naval annex there before the war that was still in good shape. The Navy using those. Once in a while we'd go and move in--we live in a warehouse over there too. They got bunks in there for us an all that. It's like regular barracks, set it up.

[End of Tape #5]

Mik: Was that pretty interesting, to see China and the Pacific?

James: Yeah, I'd see all kinds of--people you'd see over there. They got some Turks over there too, they used to use for security guards, along the dock, the navy use 'em. Boy, those people are mean. Those Chinese, the way they'd treat 'em. You're not

supposed to go in those annexes, when they'd try and go in there, whoa, they'd club 'em to death almost--keep 'em away from that gate. Nobody goes in there, they got some in there working for, usually they work in the warehouse. If they steal something out of there, they almost kill 'em, sometimes they steal the radio part and things like that, electronic parts. You don't fool around with those people. No they--they're out bad. Yeah, we used to watch those guys when they were in that naval annex in Shanghai. Nobody steps out of line there. [Laughs]

Mik: So then where did you go from Shanghai?

James: Yeah, we were there for a while and then--from, after we're done with that and then--we had to move back to Guam. The ship we were on, it went back to Guam with us and took us back. At the time, when we left there--I think we were going somewhere and then--we had a nice trip back over there. Of course, most of our time is up by then, our overseas tour. We shipped, with us around, they got more people that took our place over there. Went back to Guam, we stayed at Guam about a week. Things was really not so nice down there then. Even those natives, they were living in Quonset huts, some were living in tents yet. The capitol, where the capitol used to be at Naja--that, not in Naja, Agana--that was on top of the hill, that was mostly natives that used to live in that. They--nice area, they built it pretty good for them, nice living quarters. And--that's what we saw on the way back. After that, we head for the States--a week later. We just--we went to Hawaii, we stayed in Hawaii about two more days, pulled liberty there and from Hawaii we went to, went around Panama Canal, I don't know why they did, we figured we were going back to San Francisco, or San Diego. They had to go all the way around to Panama Canal because the ship we were on, their home port was Virginia, Norfolk, Virginia, I think it was. So that's why they had to do that. And it took us about 30 days I think it was, to go around--after we left Guam.

Mik: So this is '46?

James: This is in--40--yeah, '46, the last part of '46. We were in--we pull into the Panama Canal for about three days, we pulled more liberty there and after we went back to ship we went to Moorehead City from there, took us about three days after we left Panama Canal, got back into the States, North Carolina, we, we depart in North Carolina and went to Camp Lejeune from there. We got to Camp Lejeune, this company that I was in, they stayed together--we end up in the 4th Marine area. 4th area, we used to call it, go by area. 4th Marines was just the other side of us, we were in, right by the beach is where we were.

Mik: What were you?

James: This was in 1946.

Mik: No, but what were you? You weren't in 4th Marines?

James: No, we were, we were still in--attached to 4th Marines, yeah. We reattached to that outfit. And after that, we were there for a while. And then they split us up again, the guys--were about ready to get out, like me. They, they sent me down to--tank camp two they called us, right by the beach, right below--Jacksonville. And they got another camp there because tank camp two they called it, that's where I went. I End up out there, I was in the--supply depot over there. Doing the, working with supplies. All we do is just--dishes stuff like that over there. Any orders that comes in, we just send it out. Whatever they want. Any kind of parts you want, it's there. Any office material--things like that. So after--just before I got out, my time is up by then and--I don't know why they did it, they pick us up when we get discharged right there in the--in that area--where I was. But instead of doing that, they sent me all the way back to San Diego, across the United States. It took me about three days to get down there. And I got down there to San Diego--and I was in the Casual Company for about--about three weeks I think.

And then they asked me if I want to get out, and I thought, well, first I took my leave and then--I took a leave, a thirty days leave I got on the book, I took that one. After I came back and--they called me into the office saying they wanna' talk to me about reenlisting. They wanted me to reenlist, I don't know why, but--I thought about it. And I come to say, "Why not?" I could go for about another three years-- [Laughs] That was in 40--'46, the last part of '46 I think. Somewhere around there--anyway. From '46--to '49--so I ship over 'til '49 again. That was about three years. And--after I reenlist--they gave me a choice where I wanted to go. And I figure, I'm going to get away from this infantry for a while, so I went to Hastings, Nebraska Naval Ammunitions Depot, that's a security guard over there. They called a security guard and I went over there. I stayed there about--about three, most of my tour I spent over there.

And then they, I got my discharge this time, I want to get out, that was 1950. '49, the last part of '49 I think. I--somewhere in there anyway. I took my discharge saying I might go find a job. So I went home, I look for a job, couldn't find any job, no--nobody was hiring or anything like that, so. I finally got hired this one, one place--this Indian hospital in Fort Defiance. And they hired me there as--ambulance driver. They asked me if I know anything about emergency vehicles and things like that. Well I never learned anything, but I seen a lot of 'em over seas. [Laughs] So I worked--I think it was a couple of weeks in Fort Defiance--had to learn something about the--driving ambulance and things like that. It's not for the emergency but, taking people home here and there, because that--hospital where I got the job--that's a Indian hospital, some of those patients--when they are discharged they, they got no way to get home, so I used to use, use the ambulance. Like, you know, with the seat in the back, you know, to take those people home--and that--that was my job, so I was doing a little bit of driving here and there and--go pick up a patient some where, I do that. Do a lot of runnin' around. Sometimes--they call me in the middle of the night to go pick up a--a dead body some where--on the road some where, got run over some where or something like that, you know, they go over there and pick him up. [Pause] At night I didn't like to drive those things. [Laughs] One time, this is in

the winter time--pick up a dead body over in--this, from Arizona, I left Fort Defiance, Arizona, I went over across the state line, it's, that's all reservation in that area. A long highway there, Highway 666, it goes from Gallup all the way into Colorado. And I pick up a body over there; he was layin' on the road. Highway Patrol was the one help--loop that body up. Take it back to the hospital. On the way back I come up, look through the mirror, see this hand sticking out like this. [raises hand] [Laughs] He was all stiffened out, you can't put the body down, you know, but I didn't like that.

That's when the Korean War was gettin' going pretty good again. And one morning I was--ready to go to work and I washed up, and sit back in my bed for a while and thought about it, "Hey, what the heck am I doing here?" All my buddies are out there gettin' killed, some of those people I know there, were there already, you know, the outfit I used to be with. I know they were all there already. "What am I doin' here?" [Pause] So--couple days later I end up in Gallup again. [Laughs] At the Marine Corps recruiting depot over there. And--I walk into the recruiting station, and here's a Corporal sitting at a desk, say, "Hey, you guys lookin' for another man? I see your sign out there." "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Come on in, come on in." So I went in. He start talkin' to me and he said, "You ever been in the service?" "I guess so, I just got back from over seas, about a little over a year ago." No more than that--wait a minute, I told him I had just got discharged from the Marine Corps at such and such a time. And he asked me, "How long you been in before that?" "Oh, about six years." He looked at me and he said, "Golly, just the guy we're lookin' for! Grab him!" [Laughs] And the Sergeant came out the--Staff Sergeant came out the other office, he said, he introduced himself and I told him what I did when I was in the service, and he said, "Golly! Sit down, sit down, sit down over here." So sign up. That time I sign up for six years. I don't know why I did it, but I did. Crazy. And--they cut my orders right away. "Make sure he don't get away now." [Laughs] I signed some papers and fill out some papers and all that--got all the paperwork done that day. And that evening I got my--train ticket--to go to Camp Pendleton. I don't have to go through boot-camp anymore. [Laughs] Go right there to Camp Pendleton and--I got off the bus, train over there and there's a--there's a driver waiting for me already, I'm there coming in. Said, "Is your name Begay?" "Yeah." "We got a car out there waiting for you to go to Camp Pendleton." "Where are we going?" "Oh, we're going to take you over to--" They got an area over there, oh, San Onofre. It's a--another infantry area in that area, so they take me over there. They got Quonset huts in there, I couldn't believe it. Used to be all tents, when I left there. So I went back to the same thing again, where we're--climbing hills here and there, I know that area by heart by then, I know just where I'm at. We did that for about--about a month I guess. And after that--we took a, they gave us fifteen days leave. After that--came back from leave and, and then there, we head for Korea. Course they shipped us out in San Diego again. We--took us about--about thirty days, I guess, to get there. Course, we stop in Hawaii again. And--by that time it was 1950--let's see--'52--January '52, I think we left--from San Diego.

When I got to Korea, we end up in, on the east side of Korea, I forgot the name of it. They, they had to bring the ship in close to the shore, not very close--from there we had to use Landing Craft to go, go ashore. And we got to the shore, and then they put us in the area where there were a bunch of tents. And we stay there over night, and the next day they fall us out. Then you go to such and such outfit, from there on, they assign us to the outfit. 1st Marine Division was there at the time--they were the only division in that area at the time, the Marine Corps. So I end up in Anti-Tank Company 5th Marines. Back into the 16mm Motor Section again. But this time--a week later, I was there with that outfit and then they, all of a sudden the word came out and--they must have sent some people home from, they got five tanks in that outfit. That's--the outfit I was in there was, they call it weapons--Weapons Company. They got--5 tanks in that outfit, and also there's a machine gun, mortars--and, let's see, what else they usually have in there? Oh yeah, that recoilless rifle we used to have. I forgot, that thing's a 4-point-deuce or something like that. You got those, and they're the same company. And, I was sitting in a tent in the evening, then the Lieutenant walks in there, he said, "We need a, a couple guys in tanks. Who wants to go and join the tanks?" Well, I look around, I said, "Alright. Time to get out of infantry." So I raised my hand up. "You ever drive any kind of track vehicle?" "Yeah." And he said, "What, what did you drive?" I used to drive a--a bulldozer. That's what I used to do when I was in school, you know. We used to have a little bulldozer, I used to run that all the time. I liked to run that, so I told him what I used to do in school. "Okay. You'll do." And then we got another guy too, he was a farmer--he said his dad owns a tractor. [Laughs] He used to say, "What kind of tractor?" [Laughs] So they got us. We went in there, and then we had to move out of the tent--and go and join the tank--Tank Section. We was in that--that--the same night we move over there. And we got acquainted with all those guys over there and they put me in Tank 4. The other guy, he went in--Tank 5, I think it was. Tank 5 is the command tank. 4 is just another--just--we used to have 5 tanks in that order to go by--5-1, 5-2, 5-3, 5-4, and 5-5, so I was in 5-4, used to be my tank. So they make me Assistant Driver in that one. But it was so simple to drive that thing, everything's automatic. Steering wheel's even hydraulic.

Mik: So you have a steering wheel? You don't have levers?

James: No--there was just a steering wheel, a little-bitty steering wheel on those. These, M-46 is what they had. And--the old M-4 tank, that's the one that used to have that stick on those things. We never had those. Tank outfits are the only ones that got 'em. They used to use them for Safe Tanks and Gun Tanks. But, let's see, what'd they used to use it for, Retriever. Use that 1 and 2 recovery vehicle. They used that for retriever, they got a winch on 'em and all that stuff on there. That's, that's the tank--the tank site there, the company. The tank used to have a, they have a A-Company, B-Company, Charlie-Company, and them. There were four different companies in that--the whole, the whole division. And they scattered all over too. We--out of the 5 tanks I was in, they were strictly working with the infantry most of the time. We were on line with them most of the time on the MLR. And--we--

Mik: What's MLR?

James: When they need us on line we go up there and with fire support we go up there. We spent the night over there, and at night, every night--I got there in the winter time, around February I think it was. It was cold, this is on the east coast where all the mountains are, not very bad but it was cold. When that wind start blowin', watch out. It gets pretty miserable. So I was up north of Wonsan--north, a little bit north of Wonsan was where, what, our outfit was when I joined 'em. We were up there for about--what--a month or two months almost, I think. And then all of a sudden, all of a sudden the word came out they want us to switch over--and go back on the west coast. So--all of a sudden we move out of there. We went south from there. We would drive all day just about to get--where, where we're supposed to, aboard ship. When we got down there, they used this big landing craft, and we had to get on the Landing Craft to get--get to the ship. Because that big ship can't get coming closer to the shore. But we got on that and--they put us on this LST, we got on an LST. They dropped the ramp a little by then, way down and they bring the landing craft and they just drive right in-- [makes motion with hands] And--we all load up and tie down so the next day--we're on our way.

Mik: Had you seen any action on the east side?

James: Oh yeah.

Mik: Yeah?

James: Yeah, we--they'd do a lot of firing up there, and when we left--they just, they just pulled us out of there. And--after that--things were quieting down over there too, when we left. It was--it was pretty quiet. And we went aboard ship, and then about a day, two days out I think it was--we hit a typhoon. I tell you, we bounce around for another two, or three days I think it was. From there we're supposed to go into Inchon. Go all the way around and come back into Inchon. And--that's the way we were heading when we hit that typhoon. It took a lot of time, I guess it was about two days we were out there bobbing around all over the place. Oh, that place is scary. And one of the tanks broke loose and slide too--tied down, the chain broke some where--and that thing was just going, hittin' the wall, back, slide around, back and forth. See, those tanks got a steel track on 'em--and also a steel deck on the LST. When that metal to metal there ain't nothin' like it. Ice! [Laughs]

Mik: Probably sparks flying—

James: Yeah. Anyway we, we had to tow--get twelve, about twelve logs down in the--against the wall, that's how we stop it. Pretty soon we, that thing don't move anymore, and then we tie that thing back down--lock it down all the way around, make sure everything's good and tight. That was--quite excitement. Almost went through the, went, there's two walls--in an LST, one on the inside, one on the outside, it's the double hull all the way outside. That's part of the ship, all the way

round the hull. And it went through this one wall--just push it all the way in. Almost went through--by the time we stop it. And, all that time while we're doing that there, people were getting sea-sick, oh, some people just throwing up all over. Yeah--the trouble with me, I never get sea-sick. When I get aboard ship, I've never been sea-sick.

[End Tape 6]

Mik: Okay, I think you were just coming into Incheon--

James: Yeah, we got into Incheon--after the storm--we got in a little bit. And then, just before we got there, the tide started going out. And next thing you know they say, "We can't go all the way in." So, we had to stay about a mile out and overnight. And the tide come back up then and we--they brought us in--close to the shore and we unload the vehicles. And there's a whole bunch of tank battalions waiting for us over there too, on the flat cars. They say they've been sitting there for two days--waiting. So they put us on flat cars from Incheon all the way into Seoul. We unload at, let's see, we went right through Seoul--and just kept on going about another--ten, fifteen miles I guess, up north of Seoul. And--at that time we, we unload--was Munsan-ni I think they call it. Used to be a village there, was all wiped out. That's as far as the rail-road track goes, so we had to unload there. Everybody did.

Mik: Now, it was a tank battalion?

James: Tank battalion--one tank battalion and we joined those guys, just on a train. Yeah, they, they say they was waiting for us for two days while we're--while we were still floating around fighting the typhoon. After that we unload at our destination. From there, we split up, I don't know where the tank battalion went, they went somewhere. Yes, five tanks I was on and we went straight up to join the--join the company, the company was already over there. They--the all-wheeled vehicles, they went across--Korea, it's shorter that way. I don't know why we didn't go that way by tanks. We had to go aboard ship and then go around Incheon and then come back on the train. I guess there must be a reason for that. Besides, there's a lot of mountains you had to climb too. You're going over there with the tanks--I guess that's the reason why they did it. And, there were all-wheeled vehicles that went that way--and infantry. They, of course, they haul all those guys in the 6-by. And after we got to where we're supposed to go, we set up over there. And they had, we had tents set up. Five tents are set up over there. So that was our area. We stayed there for--quite a while. They put seven Marines on the line then, on the MLR. The rest of the people they were right behind, just quite a ways, about five miles back. And we set up there for about three weeks I guess. And then they pull those seven Marines off and we went on the line. That's when we went straight up through--went up to Bunker Hill. And we stayed there for a while and then we were just running up and down from there, where ever they need us. Go all the way down to--oh God, what'd they call it, there's another--area, can't remember that place. It's south of Bunker Hill, quite a ways. It's kind of a valley like. There's a valley there, there's a hill on the other side.

We always--set up on the hill most of the time. The British used to be in there, they pulled out. I think they moved east. They switched--they switched us around. I know the Army used to be where we're at too, and they, they went to the east coast--where we used to be. So we stayed on the other line, we took over that line. And then from there we operate. Up and down, up and down, all the way to the line there. And--1953, I forgot what month it was--the first--February, it was probably February--I know it was early. January or February. They were talking about peace talks, they gonna' set up in Panmunjom. And that time we were way up in the Bunker Hill, about fifteen miles up the, up the valley. And they pulled us out of there, we had to support those people. Well, by the way we were going--across the river there's no bridge--going across that river, there's a river there. What the name of the river-- they got a pontoon bridge across it, they put it up for us and we're supposed to go--go that way. And we spent the winter up there, and it was cold, I know, when we got there it was a little cold. Course, it was the winter already when we left the east coast. And then we got over there about--I think we spent Christmas on the, on the west coast. It was 1952 then. Yeah, 1952. And we--set up there. They got a hill on the northeast of the Panmunjom that we looked down, and you can see the white tent going up, down there.

Mik: That's where they were they were having the--

James: That's where they were going to have a peace talk. And--that thing was getting started pretty good when I left there. It was in--first part of March, I think it was, 1953 then. That's when I left that place. Well, most of the guys I was with then--they, I think there were six or seven of us, they pulled us out of that tank section. We had--we have replacements already, came over. They picked somebody from the tank battalion to take our place. So--after that--

Mik: Well--

James: We were, went down to Munsan-ni again to where we unloaded the tanks before we come over. They had--tents down there and Quonset huts and things like that already set up. That's the rotation place then. The people coming from the States, they go over there and then from there they assign them where they have to go. The people getting off the line, going home, they go to the same place. They wait around for the transportation, and we, we spent about three weeks there. And after that we went to--took us down to Inchon, I think, again. I forgot, yeah Inchon. We went aboard ship down there again. And we got on one of these transport, big transport ship came in over there to pick us up. Then we head for the States from there on.

Mik: When you were at Bunker Hill, and you talked about being on the line—

James: Yeah.

Mik: What did--tell me how that worked. What did you do when you were on the line?

James: Well, at night, we go up there, every night we go up there, this is in the winter time, we do that. While we're up there we support the infantry. See, those five tanks we got, they got rivets and they, they dug holes for them and all you see is the turrets sticking out on top. So we drive right in there, we usually back it in there--and turn that turret around and point it in the direction where, where they want to fire. So we sit there all night and just support infantry, that's all we're doing.

Mik: So the infantry was--

James: Infantry was on the line most of the time, yeah. There was nobody fighting then--off and on, here and there once in a while, but not too much. And--when they see a target, they usually call us in, and then we go up there and--knock it out. Most of the time we usually go up there to Bunker Hill, we fire on that every so often. Because they rebuild the trench line. You got trench line over there on their side--you knock those things out, all, everything that they did over there and next day you go and look up there--they'll be up there, dirt flying out everywhere [shoveling motion]. [Laughs]

Mik: You fill it up, they dig it out.

James: There, yeah, and then we start throwing some more rounds in there, chase them out of there, you know, keep them down, that's all we're doing. A lot of times with infantry, they go out there, the infantry in that place once in a while, but--not very often. That was our job over there. Sometimes we don't do anything, we just sit there, you know--just sit there overnight. And it's so cold-- and you sit in that tank at night, only thing you got is a, a parka. We used to call them Mickey Mouse suits, because it was suspenders--this, like, old cover-all, not, over-all's what you call them. With the suspenders. It's insulated. And the rubber boots we used to wear, that's all we had to put on. Course, I put more clothes on underneath it too--used to wear two long-johns so I'd keep warm. Sit in that tank all night, just waitin' and waitin' and waitin', you know. A lot of times you wake up in the morning, ready to get off the line, and there's icicles hanging all over the place. That's how cold it gets inside. We were supposed to have heaters in there, but a lot of times those heaters don't even work. It start, when you--start that auxiliary engine in there--that puts out the heat, supposed to. Well half the time it don't even work, so we just leave it alone. And to top it off, it makes a lot of noise too. You can hear that all over the place. And so we'd just sit there. Once in a while we turned that auxiliary engine on to keep our battery charged, about every couple hours or so, you'd just turn it on--run it for a half-hour and shut it off.

Mik: And there were five of you in the tank?

James: Five in the tank, yeah. So we just spent the night in there, almost every night. That's our, and then, once you get out, get out down below, they got bunkers--we'd build those down there too, just like a little brick house. [Laughs] With a big lock

on top, put sandbags on top of that. In the winter time when it gets cold, it gets wet a little bit, when it gets cold that's a good place to be. One time they hit us on the side of the wall on one side, it didn't even dent when the mortar shell hit that. We felt it inside, is about all. And we went out there the next day, just a little hole, like this, a little bit, that's it. All ice. That's the way we used to live over there.

Mik: Did you have any trouble with the engines running in the cold? Was that ever a problem?

James: No, we don't run the engines hardly, unless we have to move out, they make a lot of noise, you know.

Mik: But you never had trouble starting them—

James: No, no trouble, no trouble. We got that auxiliary engine, that's--that's the one that kept the battery, as long as the battery's up--you have no problem. You got that--got magnetos on those things too--for starting. You turn that magneto on and give it a couple, couple cranks couple times and then--crank, turned right over.

Mik: Did--and this was the five tanks the whole time.

James: Yeah.

Mik: Did any of them ever sustain any damage or anything?

James: No, no, oh yeah. We--while we were sitting on the hill one time, one afternoon, we got hit. The tank I was in got hit. We were firing too that day. After we were through firing we were still sitting there. And--all of a sudden a round came in. The loader's hatch was open--and I think the commander's hatch was open too. I'm pretty sure it was. No wait, that was closed because didn't get no damage on that one. The loader's hatch was open. And they hit just before the hole, about, about 2 inches. And around that hatch there's a, there's a lip on there, kind of curve up like this. And it hit just before that one, all the shrapnel went up. Nothing go in. Boy did I feel that one. Almost knocked me out, these guys, the ones that were sitting on that side, the driver, the loader and the tank commander. I look back there, and all you see is flame came in there, and smoke--that was it. Gone. And I look back there and the guy is laying on the floor and the other guy is hanging over the seat and the tank commander's the same way. Oh, I tell you what, the first thing I thought of is--and I looked over at my assistant driver, and he'd bailed out! [Laughs] He'd dropped the hatch and he was gone. He was, I looked through the scope and there he is sitting way [points], going like this. [covers head] [Laughs] I mean, get the thing outa there--well, I was trying to start it, oh that thing, it starts kind of a nervous, start shaking by that time. Hope the next round don't come in, oh I was--fighting with that magneto, I'd turn the switch on and--start right up. I floorboard that thing, I let that brake loose, and I just went straight over that hill. Next thing you know, down, down below that hill another round came in, the same place we were. There were, if

I'd stayed there it might have come right in the hole or it might go a little bit over, I don't know. But we were so lucky on that one. By the time I got down below, there's about--the hill that I went down is really steep, almost sixty degrees, I mean steep. And there's all kinds of brushes, trees down in there, and on the side of the hill there. I just floorboarded that thing and just fly right through those trees. I didn't throw a track or anything like that, I made it way down below. I got down below and--here comes my assistant driver running over [laughs]. I got down below and there--I turned the switch off, and the engine off. And I looked back there and those guys are like, no, nobody moves. So I jump out of the driver's seat--got one, one in the hatch over there--got one out of there, kind of push him out of there. And then bunch of guys showed up, infantry was all around us then, they all came over. They help us get those guys out of there. You know, concussion knock them out. They spent about a week in the aide station. I didn't go, I didn't go because I didn't--I thought I was all right. Caught up to me later on and now I can't hardly hear anything now. And the assistant driver, I don't know, he never talks about that, I never asked him. The last time I seen him was in Korea, when I left there he was still there, he was one of the newcomers. And if what we did, that's the only hit we got. Oh yeah--after we had to have a new turret put on. We had to take this tank back behind the line about, oh, about ten miles behind the line there's a maintenance shop over there. I had to take it down there, they took the turret off, put the new one on. Everything's new in that one, radio--took everything out, they took the, undid the hatch, they just took the whole thing right out, guns and all. So we put a new turret in and a whole new top; takes about four days to do that. After that's done, then we were back on the line again.

By that time we got back, those crew was already back by the company where we were. They were waiting for us. And then, next thing you know, about two days later went back in the same place again. We have to fire over there again. So, we backed in there again and I don't like it, I don't like this, we, they zeroed in already, they know where we're at. And--and I look around, and well why can't I do it? I told the assistant driver, "Jump out and watch over there while we're doing the firing." So he's over there, playing around over there, walking around right below the hill, and watching us once in a while. We fire a few rounds that afternoon and then we quit for a while and then we start firing again. All of a sudden a big noise come out again, they hit the final drive this time, the left side. Right about the engine, just before the engine compartment. And the sponsor box on that side, the fender is all gone. Everything's gone. Good thing they didn't--blast the track out. The track was still on, I stopped, I did the same thing, I went down the same way down. Straight down. That time everybody was okay, because the round had hit was that time below all the concussions on it. I just feel a little bit of jerk, that's all. And I start that thing up and just start right off again, right down there, did the same thing I did before. So that's the second time we got hit. And I look at the truck back there and, yup, it's good and the final drive was, the casing was the only one, looked like somebody hit it with a carbon arc, work on it, like this, all over the place, you know. Scarred up. Everything's okay. Except that we can't find the sponsor box, where all the equipment used to be in there, that's gone. [Laughs]

Mik: So you didn't go back and park there again, did you?

James: We--

Mik: You didn't go back there again, did you?

James: We didn't go back, we just got off of there and we--didn't go back in the same place again. We changed position. We went down the line a little ways from there. And then--the way they were going around, they said, "Don't go back in that area again, go somewhere else." You know, they put us way on the other side at the time--'cuz that place was zeroed in already. And we had to wait there for a while, and that's when that Panmunjom started and then we get, they pulled us out and sent us over there. It was cold then.

Mik: Was there a cease-fire during those negotiations, or were--

James: Yeah, they were negotiating then, and things were slowing down. Everything is quieting down all of a sudden. That's when they pull us out of there. Just the tanks, they leave the infantry and all the other guys still up there. Yeah, and--that's what we did over there and after that we came back to the States. I got back in San Francisco, 31st of March, 1953. We got to Treasure Island, and we stayed at Treasure Island about 3 days, I think, and we were processed. They process us out and then, then they, I had to go back to Camp Pendleton again from there. This time I don't have to go to infantry, I had to go to, go to--LVT outfit. One of those floating tanks they used to use. [Laughs] Landing Vehicle Tractor. I joined that outfit, and I was with that for a while. Still driving those things. Go in the water and just run around the beach sometimes. I was there for quite a while, about three months maybe. That's when we, we got married, me and my wife, we got married right after we got back from, from Korea. We got married and I brought her back to Wisconsin. She went back to work, she was working up in Ashland, Wisconsin there. And I came--after that I went back to Camp Pendleton by myself. I stayed there about, oh, say, about two or three months, somewhere around there. And then I took another leave, fifteen days, she wants to come down there with me, so I come back and pick her up and we went back to California. So, we've been together ever since, after that. Unless I'd go somewhere else again, and then usually--I brought her home in 1960--we had two kids then. Well, when we got back to Camp Pendleton, we were in Camp Pendleton for about, oh, about two months I guess, together. And then I got--got my orders again, to go to Oklahoma this time. McAlistier, Oklahoma Naval Ammunition Depot. That's, that security-- five-thousand yards. You go eleven miles, you high-angle. [laughs]

Mik: Eleven miles--

James: They, you won't do that you gotta move your tank against the hill like this and then raise your tube like this. At a high angle about eleven miles it goes.

Mik: And how, how accurate were they at 5000?

James: Those things are accurate. It's 5000 yards, 5000 yards. Up to maybe two-three thousand yards--just like shooting a rifle with a scope on.

Mik: And how did, how were they aimed? The gunner, did he have a sight?

James: Yeah they got a sight. Everything is--they got a little piece on there, they call it uh--the new one they got a little piece come on there that's computerized. The one we use in Korea, all we had was a crosshair. That's all you use. And then you gotta know the, what the wind is will be, if the wind is blowin' a little bit, just get a little--what we, we wanna' go a little, maybe two or three mils to the right or left.

Mik: And what did it sound like in there when the cannon--

James: When they fire? It sounds pretty loud. Smoke a lot too. Smoke just come right back-- that's where I'm sittin in there-- supposed to go up to the metal blast and shoot up, but a lot of times it don't do that.

Mik: Shot right down on you.

James: When they opened that bridge, that's when that happened, all that smoke comes right back, shoots out just like that. Course it's always smelling inside too--in that turret.

Mik: And then the, the assistant driver has a machine gun?

James: He's got a 30-caliber machine gun right in front of him, and also has got a scope. And he can use the, the wobble stick in there for steering, but he can't start the vehicle on it because there's nothing there. He's got to reach way over to start it. Once he starts it he can drive it. Shift it and everything. The brakes got, he's got his own brakes on his side too--foot brakes. In case something happens to the driver--Something happens to the driver, you know, he takes over. That's how we traveled when we--make a long road march too. The driver might be taking a nap the other guy'd be driving, assistant driver. So don't have to--we'd stop once in a while to check the track, you know, we don't just drive all the time. Every so often we stopped. You gotta check those tracks.

Mik: Did you ever lose a track?

James: Huh?

Mik: Did you ever lose a track?

James: Oh yeah. We'd lose it off and on. Sometimes you would have a hill like this, you might come out this way like this is. One time I slide off. When the mud gets

between the sprocket and the track, they usually push it right off too. Or pick up a rock like that--goes right in there, they'll make 'em come off too.

Mik: Then how do you--

James: Break it.

Mik: Where did you get going again?

James: You gotta put it, put it on a flat ground, if you're able to find, you, if you can't do it get another tank. All you gotta do is cross-cable, we brought tow cable on--one tow-cable per tank. We'd cross-cable that one and you use that for towing. Just get on the flat ground and break the track and--if you can't move the tank where the track is off, then you gotta break it right there. After you break it you--put chain around that track, hook it on the back of the vehicle and then drag the whole thing right off the hill or whatever you're on. And then they put it on leveled ground and then take the truck and put it right in front of the vehicle, line it up with the road wheel, and then you put your brakes on the one with no tracks on, that thing will drive again with one track. Straight line, we get on that track so far and then you put the other one on it, yeah. Once you get on the sprocket, no problem, then you just use the track bar work it up and down you know all the way down along 'til you get in the front then you hook it up.

Mik: Wouldn't it be under something?

James: Then you hook it--you got a jack--two jacks, put that jack on there and just squeeze it together, put the in-connector back on and then button everything up. That's the way we do it, we used to do it, I don't know how they do it now, they got new tanks now, they got that M1-A1 now. Those are big. I never seen one of those. They were talking about coming out when I left, in 1966. Yeah, they were talking about those, we still had forty-six when I left. They'd change it to diesel though. In Korea we used gasoline, gasoline engine. After I got back they start modifying those tanks. They sent those, they, Detroit did all that, there's where they used to build 'em. And they--what they did I guess they just--switched engines, and a gas tank line here and there.

Mik: So you must've signed up again, after your six years were up.

James: Yeah. After Oklahoma, crews I went to Oklahoma, that duty station there. I spent about three years over there. We had two kids while we were living over there, two boys. And then I got transferred from there back to Camp Pendleton. I joined 8th Company, 1st Tank Battalion then. And after I got back, I went to-- went back to school, I wanted to be a mechanic, so that's what I went to school in. And then I was a Detroit vehicle mechanic, they teach us amtraka, tanks, ontos, things like that. Anything with a track vehicle--Yeah, I went to that school and I got back to camp Pendleton, we lived there about another--'til 1960. I think I re-enlist again before,

no I re-enlisted in Oklahoma. My time was out in Oklahoma, so I reenlisted there again. And I reenlisted six years. And then I went back to Camp Pendleton. I went to that school--I stayed in from there on, steady all the way. I went to track vehicle school, I learned all about that in 1960 and--I was transferred back to Okinawa, just me alone, I left, I left the family back in the states. I was, spent about thirteen months over there. From there I used to, I was on the--Marine Expedition there. Course they got a landing team, they got over there. You're gone three months at a time, so this, the first two months I was there, and then the, the other MEB came back and they want some more people to go out so I'll sign up for it. They want a mechanic, that's three of us mechanics went on that one. You got LVT that's all they had. We, we had to take LVT with us. That P5, they said it was a big monster they used to have they're square box-like, that's the one the Marines used to have those. Yeah, and then we--I was with those people for awhile and tracks. We went to Philippine and we went to Borneo, just floating around out there about three months, went to Shanghai, yeah we was in Shanghai one time, and went back to Supic Bay, back and forth. Then we go somewhere else just float around out there and go back in again. Three months and then head back Okinawa. And I got back to Okinawa, I'm gonna stay in that Okinawa about, a few more months and then came back to the States. And I got back and—let's see, I came in San Francisco I think that time. And after that, I went back to 1st Tank Battalion again. No, wait a minute, I went to--I went to School Battalion at Camp Del Mar, Camp Pendleton. I was with those people--for awhile and then the Vietnam War broke out, and then I went to 196--1965, in March I think it was. March or--March. I like what they--with Amtrak. At that time I was in charge of what the, tank retriever, one tank retriever and one LVT retriever so I was assigned with those, I got some six guys with me. So I was in charge of all that crew there at that time. Korean War, I mean Vietnam broke out, we, we had to go back aboard ship again. This time we went on, on one of those big landing tank we used to use those. Forgot the name of the ship we were on.

Mik: What was your rank at that point?

James: Staff Sergeant. And I was in--with that outfit. First we went to Okinawa. Went to Okinawa we stay around there for about--two weeks, I guess, then we catch another ship from there to take us down south. We got on an LST then, it brought us down to that. We, we landed in July, let's see, it's about May, May '66 I think we landed over there, or a little after, somewhere in there anyway. We stayed in Chu Lai for awhile and then, from there we operate all over the place. I had the retriever, M51, M51 Retriever I used to have and then LVT Retriever also. So we--wherever the Tanker or LVT are having problems we go and fix it.

Mik: When, when you were over there, were there very many people that had been in, were in their third war?

James: No. I never meet anybody, I never run into anybody all that time. What I heard after here last October we had reunion in Minneapolis. We got together over there,

there was about nineteen guys showed up, the outfit I was in in Korea. Most of them are tankers. I don't even know who they are when I walk in the, in the hotel where they, where they having reunion. This little reception they have in there, they were sitting in there drinking beer and they were having a good time talking about the old days. And me and my wife, we walked in and they all look at me and said, "Naw it couldn't be. Look at that guy, I think I know that guy." And one guy said, "That's Chief." [laughs] That's what they used to call me all the time. I hate that word, but I just had to go along with them, you know. They called me "Chief." Later on I just had to heckle with them, I was gonna be "Chief" all the way. I put my name underneath my driver's hat, you know, "Chief" on there. I think that tank I had on, it was still on there when I left, I don't know what happened. That's what they used to call me. Yeah I made a bunch of them go, "Gosh." From there we all got on to so and so and so and they all change, they're old people. Some are in a wheel chair and here I'm still running around--healthy and they say, "How do you do it?" Keep exercising is all I'm doing. That's what I be--still all the time, exercise. That keeps me going. I'm still in good shape right now.

Mik: Yeah you look in great shape.

James: 8 years old. Be 79 pretty soon. [laughs]

Mik: You give me hope. [laughs]

James: I hope. [laughs] Yeah, after I got back from Vietnam--I came back to Camp Pendleton, they put me back in School Battalion again. I was there for about, oh, six months I guess, then my time run out again, six years. At that time I was getting, getting pretty close and then I start thinking about, well, "Good thing I did before I left Vietnam." I put my letter in to retire soon as my, my next expiration date is up. And then I took my physical and everything. This was just before I left Vietnam I took that. This one Navy Chief, he's a corpsman, he's a good friend of mine, he said, "Do it that way, they can't they can't touch you if they want you to come back. Put your letter in that record book make sure it's in there. Just take your physical." I did what he told me to do.

Mik: Yeah you might've been in—

James: Yeah.

Mik: Even more time in Vietnam.

James: Yeah. After that I got back here. Guess you know. After four months I was back, I got to work and the Sergeant at the desk asked me, he said, "Hey, Sergeant Begay, there's a Colonel looking for you, he wants to see you." So, Colonel's office was not down the line so much as what two, three doors down. So I walked and knock on the door and "Alright." I walk in and "Oh Sergeant Begay, good to see you," he said. And I walk in there and he said, "Hey, I got a letter," he said, "the other day

and I need a NCO to go back to Vietnam." They wanted to make me Chief over there. "I think you're talking to the wrong guy," I said. "I got a letter in there that said I was supposed to get out in December because my time is up." "December," he said. "Yeah." This is in November I think when he called me in. And he said, "Could you extend another year or two?" I look at him, I said, "No, I better not." I said, "Look at my record book, I got my letter in there, I already took my physical and everything." He looked through there, way down the last page, so he looked and he say, "Yeah, you're right." He look at me kind of funny, he said, "You mean, you can't extend it?" "Nope. I had enough of it," I said. "You know I got six kids now? I want, I want to see them, see them grow up." It's getting, getting pretty hairy over there at that time. Things are going pretty wild. So I just said, "No I don't wanna go back. Enough is enough." I guess my wife liked to hear that. [laughs] Yeah, she used to take care of the family while I was gone all the time. So any time the kids are, go someplace, somebody's bragging about the kids how nice they are, don't tell me about it, tell my wife she, she's the one raised the family. I was gone most of the time. See, in-between time, too, all those times when I'm not oversea, I'll be over here in the United States. They have—problems--all the time. Sometimes you go three weeks a month, and they are always in on it, I was in on it so, I leave the family for three weeks sometimes a month. We used to go to Twentynine Palms a lot, too. That's a, that's a special good warfare for the tanks over there. All desert, drive those tanks for miles and miles. So I used to go over there with those people, and it's a lot of fun doing that.

Mik: Where is that?

James: In uh, Twentynine Palms.

Mik: But where is that?

James: That's--right below Los Angeles. Quite a ways from it. Know where Barstow is?

Mik: Yeah.

James: It's about South--Southeast of Barstow. All that desert.

Mik: I, I wanted to ask you a couple more things. When, when you were in Korea, what, what was your patch?

James: 1st Marine Division. We don't wear patches, but we use a Second World War instead of that so. The Marine Corps never even uses any kind of patch over there. We go by just, the outfit, that's it. But we was still considered the 1st Marine Division, the one I was in. It's got the Guadalcanal on it. That we're number one. Red numbers on it with a blue shield in the back, it was kind of triangle-like.

Mik: And, and when you were talking about being on the line, what were you a MRL, or—

James: MLR.

Mik: MLR?

James: Mmhmm.

Mik: And what does that stand for?

James: Main Resistant - Main Line Resistant, I think. This is as far as you can go in other words. [laughs] The same way we were in the desert as far as they can go. [laughs]. That, they just started that after we, after I got there anyways, or just before. Somewhere, they just started that before they didn't have nothing, you could go anywhere you want. That's the reason why that Marine went all the way almost went into Siberia one time. Back in '51, I think it was. They were way up north for a long time, and then somehow, at that time--let's see, who was the president?

Mik: '51?

James: Oh, Harry.

Mik: Harry.

James: Harry. What's his name?

Mik: Truman.

James: Truman, yeah. He was the president, he pulled those Marines, over there he pulled them off the line. That's how MacArthur got mad. MacArthur's the one put all those people up there. Just kept on pushing until we, they got a lot of Army up there too. Pull 'em back off the line. All the way down to Pusan. Next thing you know, all the enemies back there again. Didn't take, take long. Then they had, that's when Inchon landing start, from there on they start pushing all the way down then back up again. Start all over. Then they put the MLR on there and that's as far as they went. That's how that MLR started.

Mik: You were in both wars, well three wars, but World War II and then Korea, did, as a fighting man, was there a difference—

James: They are, yeah.

Mik: In regards to the wars?

James: Mmhmm. In Pacific it's a lot different because the weather too, sweat, hot, miserable. None of this. In Korea you got--you got--what do they call that, four climate season, got that spring season, summer, and winter, fall and winter, and the

wintertime gets pretty, pretty cold over there. They say it's real cold up north though, way up north. Like Sib-, close to Siberia. They say that's about the coldest, it goes down thirty-five, forty below, most of the time.

Mik: What about what, what the goal was, what you were fighting for. I mean, when you were in Okinawa the end of the war meant that you, that Japan surrendered. Was it different in Korea because you were on that 38th parallel, you weren't--

James: Yeah it's a lot different, mmhmm. Well in the Second War its, once that the Japanese surrendered, it's all over. Nobody else to worry about or anything. But you still got some of these Japanese soldiers still wandering around through the island, in Okinawa, for quite awhile. At one time they--they caught one guy he was in the cave in and out of the, live off the land for, oh, about eleven years, something like that, after the war. The one guy, that Japanese guy he, he's the only one that did it. He was, happened to be a, an officer, I think he was. They finally caught him. What he does, I hear, he, at night he goes out, I guess, he goes a certain place he get these foods from someplace. He goes back in the cave and he eats it over there, I guess. That's how he lived that long. And he's still wearing his uniform too. All raggedy and everything. They had--a picture of it some place, I think it was newspaper. Also that paper that we used to get in the armed force, what was that, "Stars and Stripes". They had him in that too. That happened after eleven years, the war is over and they finally caught him. They caught him down there, down by around, south of Okinawa or some place in that area. Mount Whitebeach somewhere in there. It's all jumbled to me. Amtrak used to be in there. They call it Whitebeach.

Mik: Did--when they signed that armistice in Korea, did, did that feel like the war never really ended that, or that there wasn't any victory--

James: In a way, there's nobody shooting ya. Nobody said, "War isn't so great if all they do--" but they never cross on the line again after that. Of course the Tank Battalion's already on line, but they they're not on line but they sitting right by it most of time, the 1st Tank Battalion. They were on that line most of the time. So, us people like they will fight tanks when we had too, they will pull us off, they put soldiers across the river. We were over there, til I left. And then you see those white tanks going up and all that. And we saw a Weston through a binocular once in awhile. We sit there, day in day out sometimes. Then all of a sudden they said, "Quit what you're doing." Pull the PM on your vehicle and things like that just what we used to do, something to pass time. And while we're living over there too we had to go to the shower, there's usually a truck comes around there once in awhile, pick us up, go down where the shower unit is where I take a shower and come back. Yeah. And then there are sometimes they pull us out of there, go back to our area to sit around there some more and maybe a week later we're back up there again. I know in the winter time we were up there all winter. While we was sitting up there the snow was about four inches, we had one time.

Mik: Forty?

James: Four inches, yeah. About like that. That was about the biggest snow we had in there.

Mik: Well, that's amazing isn't it? For as cold as it was that there wasn't more snow than that?

James: Well, right there it's a--kind of close to the ocean, so that keeps it colder. But when it gets cold the wind starts blowing, oh watch out though, it gets pretty cold. When the sun is out it's nice.

Mik: Tanks ever tip over in those mountains?

James: Oh yeah nice. When the sun is shine it's nice. Just like out here.

Mik: Well thank you.

James: Yeah.

Mik: We really appreciate it.

James: Okay—

[End of Interview]