

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
Carl P. Hermes  
Rifleman, Army, Korean War  
1996

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**Hermes, Carl P.**, (1931-2005). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

**Abstract:**

Carl Hermes, a De Pere, Wisconsin native, discusses his service in the Army with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry during the Occupation of Japan and the Korean War. Hermes describes his early life, explaining his father was a farmer turned commercial fisherman. Hermes states he joined the Army in 1949 at age seventeen because he could not find work in De Pere. He covers his basic training at Fort Breckenridge (Kentucky) and touches upon regional differences among the troops. Hermes illustrates a change in his perceptions of Kentucky as he grew to like “hillbilly music” played there, and he mentions the troops in his unit all got along. Hermes also discusses segregation. In 1949, the Army was not yet fully desegregated. Hermes states that, in the Occupation Force in Japan, the 25<sup>th</sup> Division was all Black, but he served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry, which was all White. Hermes describes his voyage to Japan on a crowded troop ship and tells how the ship survived a typhoon. As part of the Occupation Force in Tokyo, Japan, Hermes was in a heavy weapons company with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry, 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion. He describes going through advanced training in Japan, which involved driving up Mount Fuji and hiking back down, a ninety-mile trip. Hermes mentions he was a squad leader and operated 81-meter mortars during this training. He discusses witnessing the rebuilding of Japan and changes in Japanese culture, which happened relatively quickly. Hermes addresses changes in gender equality in Japan, explaining that when he arrived he saw women walking behind their husbands, but by the time he left Japan in 1951, he noticed more women being treated equally and walking beside their husbands. Hermes characterizes the Japanese civilians as friendly, although he admits some people in rural areas distrusted the Americans. Hermes comments on shopping in Tokyo for silk smoking jackets, silverware to send to his mother, and fishing equipment. Hermes recalls hearing about North Korea’s invasion of South Korea on the PA at the USO club on his Army base in Japan. By July 1950, his unit was invading Korea. He lists the types of weapons used by the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry, including mortars, machine guns, .75 recoil rifles, and .45s. He mentions his unit “had to carry the front just like a rifle company” even though they were a heavy weapons company. He estimates his unit first made contact with the enemy four or five days after landing. The combat was difficult, and Hermes lost his platoon leader, radioman, and six others in his unit of nine men. Hermes admits it’s hard for him to discuss these losses as but that the memories are still vivid. Hermes reveals he was wounded after only two weeks in Korea, near the Pusan Perimeter. He was hit by a burp gun while manning the mortar, which exploded, leaving shrapnel wounds in his arms and legs and a burn across his chest. Hermes outlines how medical stations were organized in Korea, explaining he was treated by his company medic then sent down to a medical station in Pusan and finally back to a hospital in

Japan. Hermes states his wounds healed and he was sent back to Korea in October 1950, shortly after the Chinese joined forces with the North Koreans. He mentions that new equipment was sent on his second tour in Korea but that they did not have warm winter boots. Hermes describes how the Army retreated back to Seoul in fall 1950. He comments that he did not have many interactions with South Korean civilians because they had fled their villages in anticipation of the North Korean invasions. Hermes depicts the Korean countryside as very rural, stating, "All you had was rice paddies." In January 1951, Hermes was pulled out of Korea; because his brother had died in World War II, Hermes was a surviving son and was not supposed to be in a war zone. He states he was stationed in Kobe (Japan) and reenlisted in 1951 for another three years because "my dad had died and there was nothing left for me in Green Bay." In Kobe, Hermes explains he worked in "ration breakdown" and had twelve Japanese men helping him distribute food supplies. He speaks positively about Japan, mentioning he reenlisted so he could stay there. In January 1951, Hermes returned to the United States on points and worked in the quartermaster corps at Fort Riley (Kansas). He mentions that in October 1951, he was shipped to LaRoche, France where he worked in the Commissary, running the cash register at the PX. He touches upon family life in the military, opining that he did not want to raise his own family in the military. Hermes comments that he did not see the same kind of rebuilding in the south of France that he had seen in Japan or Germany. Hermes briefly addresses relations between the French and Americans, claiming that "75% [of the French] were Communists in that area" and "they would throw stones" at the soldiers on guard duty. Hermes served in France until 1953 and left the Army when his contract was up in January 1954. He explains he married a woman he'd met while on furlough in the U.S., and he critiques the military family lifestyle because "you're pushed around too much." After the service, Hermes returned to Green Bay (Wisconsin) and worked at Proctor and Gamble Mill for thirty-six years. He states he joined the Disabled American Veterans and donated money to veterans groups but did not participate in meetings or parades. Hermes describes ongoing medical problems including a bout of malaria that began in Korea but came back after he returned to the States. He also describes having recurring nightmares about combat in Korea. Hermes criticizes politicians who called the Korean War a "police action," and he approves of the Korean Monument, erected in Washington D.C., stating, "It's about time that they start doing something" for Korean veterans.

### **Biographical Sketch:**

Hermes (1931-2005) was born in De Pere, Wisconsin. He joined the Army in 1949 and served in Japan with the Occupation Force and in Korea during the beginning of the Korean War (1950-1951), where he was wounded in combat. After the war, Hermes served as a quartermaster in France until he was discharged in 1954. Upon his return, he got married and worked at the Proctor and Gamble Mill (called Hobarts at the time) for thirty-six years. He was a member of the Disabled American Veterans.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996

Transcribed by Karen Emery, WDVA Staff, 1998.

Transcription edited and abstract written by Darcy I. Gervaiso, 2010.

**Interview Transcript:**

Mark: With the date and everything and then we'll just start in with some questions.

Hermes: Okay.

Mark: Okay. Today's date is, what is today's date?

Hermes: Today is the 27<sup>th</sup> ...

Mark: 27<sup>th</sup> of February — thank you — 1996. This is Mark VanElls, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning, via telephone, with Mr. Carl Hermes of Green Bay, a veteran of the Korean War. Good morning.

Hermes: Good morning.

Mark: Thanks for taking some time to talk to me today.

Hermes: Uh hum.

Mark: I suppose we should start at the top, as they say. Why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to your entry into the military in 1949.

Hermes: Okay. I was born in West DePere in 1931. My dad had a farm there and when I was about 8-years-old my dad sold the farm. After that he went into commercial fishing so I helped him with that. I went to school up to the eighth grade, through the eighth grade, at Duck Creek, Wisconsin. In 1949 there was no jobs around for somebody who was seventeen, so there was two of my buddies and myself, we decided to go into the Army. That's, we optioned to go into service.

Mark: So, at seventeen you had to get your dad to sign, didn't you?

Hermes: Yes, my dad signed for me because you just couldn't find no work for somebody that age, you know. So he signed for me and, yeah, I went into service three months after I was seventeen.

Mark: Wow, that's pretty young.

Hermes: Yeah.

Mark: Why don't you describe your actual entry into the military. I went into the military about 40 years after you did and some of the things I remember very

clearly getting on the bus and going to Texas and all this sort of thing, so why don't you walk me through the steps. From the recruiter to basic training.

Hermes: Well, okay. Well, the recruiter got the three of us and we were sworn in and he give me all the papers for the three of us. He says, "You're the youngest one. You can handle it." So I was, we were put on a train and we went to Breckenridge, Kentucky. Fort Breckinridge it was called. And we had eight weeks of training there. And from there I was sent to Japan.

Mark: At Fort Breckenridge, what kind of training?

Hermes: It was just basic training was all it was. Eight weeks of training.

Mark: Uh hum. And this was ...

Hermes: Learn how to march. We didn't do-- we went out for one week on what they called bivouac. That was you did problems out there but not that much.

Mark: Yeah. Now, before this time had you been out of Wisconsin and out of the Green Bay area?

Hermes: Nope, not that I can remember. I never was out of Wisconsin before that.

Mark: So basic training was the first time that, perhaps, you ran across people from the South or the East Coast or something like that.

Hermes: Well, yes, yes it was.

Mark: Was there a bit of culture shock? How did these people from all different parts of the country get along?

Hermes: Well, it seemed like we all got along real, pretty good, you know. It was kind of hard to go down there and, well, it was quite "hillbilly" music down there. You get used to that. It was funny. I kind of like it now.

Mark: Uh huh.

Hermes: But, no, most of the people came from all over, there was quite a few of them that came from Wisconsin into that cycle of training. There was people that came from Freedom which is a little ways out of Green Bay. They came from all over in Wisconsin and Illinois mostly.

Mark: Now, President Truman signed an order that desegregated the military in 1947. But the actual process took a lot longer than that. So when you were in basic training, was the Army still segregated or were there ...

Hermes: Yeah.

Mark: ... Blacks in your ...

Hermes: No, no. No Blacks with us when we took basic training. In fact, if we go on farther, when I went into, went over to Japan, I was with the 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary. That was all White. There was a division over there called the 25<sup>th</sup> Division. That was all Colored. There was three divisions in Japan when the Korean War broke out. There was the 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary, the 24<sup>th</sup>, and the 25<sup>th</sup>. The 24<sup>th</sup> was all White. The Calvary was all White and all the Blacks were in, on the 25<sup>th</sup>. There was Whites in there people but there was mostly Black there.

Mark: Yeah. Okay. So after training, you went right to Japan.

Hermes: Yes, I did.

Mark: That's half way around the world.

Hermes: Yeah.

Mark: Describe that voyage to me.

Hermes: Well, it was kind of, it was crowded, crowded troop ship is what it was. I don't know, we had over 3,000 people on the ship that went over there. We were pretty crowded but I used to eat my meals and then just lay up on the deck because it was in the summertime. The only time it was bad was when we got, just before we got to Japan we went through a typhoon and everybody had to stay down in the holes then because it could have, the water, the waves were going over the top of the ship. Otherwise the trip was real nice.

Mark: Now, some, a lot of guys I talk to tell me about seasickness on these trips.

Hermes: The biggest problem with that is that people didn't eat.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: I went down and ate all my meals, you know. Never got sick a bit. Not on the trip there but when I came back from France, that's when I got sick.

Mark: We'll come to that then.

Hermes: Yeah, later on.

Mark: Um, so you were part of the Occupation Force in Japan.

Hermes: Yes, I was.

Mark: Where were you and what were your duties and what was it like?

Hermes: Well, we were, I was with a heavy weapons company in Tokyo, right in Tokyo. There was three battalions in there. There was 5<sup>th</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup>, and the 8<sup>th</sup> battalions and I was in the 7<sup>th</sup>. There was four rifle companies, a heavy weapons, and like a motor pool thing. That was our company then. I was a squad leader in the heavy weapons outfit. I was in an 81-meter mortars, is what I was in. I got to be a squad leader. But our training was just to train. We'd go out on Mt. Fuji for sometimes a couple of months at a time, and then there was always 90 miles back, we always had to walk back from there then. It was what they called advanced training is what it was. That's what I did until the Korean War came up.

Mark: Now, was Japan still fairly devastated from World War II at this point? Or had the rebuilding pretty much begun?

Hermes: They were building pretty good. If you got way back in the "boonies" what they call, there the people were still a little bit afraid of you yet but most of the people were pretty friendly. They knew what happened and, you know, they just, it took a little while I guess. When I first got there, yes, it was, they were still a little backwards. But when I left in, towards the end of '51, by that time they were starting to go to the point where the women would, well, walk with their husbands, otherwise they would walk in back of them, you know, always. Women were always back, pushed back and everything like that. By the time I left they were getting so, what should I say, commercialized or whatever you want. Now it's, the women are just as important as the person is, you know, the man is.

Mark: So in that small amount of time you were there, things were changing fairly quickly it seems.

Hermes: Oh, absolutely. It was changing every, should I say day? Yeah, a little bit every day, I would say it was changed a little bit.

Mark: Now, when you weren't on duty I would imagine you had some free time.

Hermes: Well, there wasn't too much. I'd go shopping and go to, they had a lot of shops. You could get stuff, you know, and cheap, you know.

Mark: Yeah.

- Hermes: They had some beautiful smoking, what they called “smoking jackets,” you know, that were made out of silk and were just beautiful.
- Mark: Uh huh.
- Hermes: And I sent my mother some silverware that was really good. And they had good fishing equipment that they had too because there was so many fishermen there. Go out and see the country, you know, and take the train and go out so far and then turn around and come back, go out and see different things.
- Mark: I suppose it was pretty exciting for a 17-year-old kid, huh?
- Hermes: Yeah, yeah.
- Mark: Or, perhaps, you were eighteen by this time.
- Hermes: Yeah, I turned eighteen, yeah, over there.
- Mark: Yeah. Um, so as it, you know, you’re a young enlisted man in Japan. Did you have any idea what was going on in Korea at the time?
- Hermes: No.
- Mark: Did you have any inkling that you were going to be sent there?
- Hermes: No, no, nobody did, you know, because we, in fact, one of the guys that was in my squad, he was on the ship going back and they were almost half way across and they turned the ship around and brought them back, all the people. I only had, at that time, I only had about six more months to go and I’d have been going out then, too. But then the Korean War came up and that changed everything.
- Mark: Yeah. So when you first heard of the North invading the South, do you recall this incident?
- Hermes: Yes, because we were having, at USO Club there that was right on our base, they always had dances and they would have bingo and stuff like, they were having bingo and all of a sudden they come over the PA that Korea had attacked South Korea. That’s how I heard about it and we knew what was happening then and we knew in time we would be going, you know. What they did first was, the 24<sup>th</sup> went to Korea first, and what they did was, none of these divisions were up to full strength over there, and what they did is they took certain people out of our division and put them with the 24<sup>th</sup> and then they went over there, and then we had to wait until the replacements came



from the States which was about two weeks, and then we had to train them for about two weeks, then we went to Korea.

Mark: So it was about a month after the actual invasion.

Hermes: It was pretty close to the end of July because I was only there 14 days when I got wounded and I got wounded on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August.

Mark: Really, really early in the war.

Hermes: Yeah, I was only there for a couple of weeks.

Mark: So I would imagine they must have just rushed you right up to the front then.

Hermes: Oh, yeah.

Mark: Would you describe ...

Hermes: There wasn't any front, really. See, we were a support outfit. We were supposed to be in back of the front line but we had to cover the front line with our weapons that we had, too, plus take care of the mortars and the machine guns and the 75 recoil rifles that we had. See, that was the heavy weapons company. And we had to cover our front just like a rifle company and we don't have those kind of weapons because we carried .45s and carbines. That's what our weapons were, you know. We didn't have the M-1s. We got them later on because if we could get one we always got one, you know, because otherwise we had to carry the front just like a rifle company.

Mark: So, from the time you left Japan, how long was it until you had contact with the enemy then?

Hermes: Oh-h-h ...

Mark: Sounds like just a couple of days.

Hermes: No, we landed and they took us up front. I would say the first time we had con..., we had casualties with my outfit, I would say had to be, I'm kind of guessing it's probably four or five days after we got there. And then we, I lost, I was, out of nine men, we come out of it with only three of us. We lost my platoon leader and my radio man and everything in one shot there. It's kind of hard for me to talk about. It's that many years ago but I can see it just like now, you know.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: It's kind of hard to talk about it.

Mark: Well, I don't want to press you.

Hermes: Yeah.

Mark: So it wasn't more than two weeks or so before you got hit.

Hermes: Yeah. I was in Pusan Perimeter, what they call. I don't know if you ever heard about it.

Mark: Oh, yeah.

Hermes: That was where MacArthur said, "That's as far as we're going to back up." Well, that's where I got it.

Mark: I see. And what happened to you after that? Were you unconscious or do you remember going to the hospital and all that sort of thing?

Hermes: No, I wasn't unconscious. I was hit with a—see, I was firing the mortar at the time and they got around in back of us and they start firing their, they had what they called "burp guns." They had that. And they had bullets that when it hit something it would explode. Well, it must have hit the mortar with it because I got shrapnel all over my arms and my chest and had, my dog tags were cut right off. I had a burn mark right across my chest where they cut my, bullet went through and knocked my dog tags right off of me. And I got a couple of chunks in my legs. But I had little pieces of metal in both of my arms. It was just like I had pepper on them. See, they had some bullets like, would explode when it hit.

Mark: Now, I've spoken with some Korean War veterans who were there later. And they describe that there really was a M\*A\*S\*H and all that sort of thing. But at this early point, I don't imagine that there were terribly many medical facilities there to take care of you. How did that all transpire? And how did they get you out of the theater finally?

Hermes: Well, they had a medic guy with each company.

Mark: Uh huh.

Hermes: And what not. Each company, he was with, yeah, he was with our whole company, one guy that could take care of your wounds. And then they had what they called a battalion aid was back of that. And behind that was division quarters. And then back of that was way down to, oh, I'm trying to think of that last little, that town. Is it Pusan that's way down?

Mark: Yeah, I think so.

Hermes: Yeah, the one that was way down there. That was the ...

Mark: The port.

Hermes: Yeah. And that's where they would, if you got down to there, most of the time you ended going up over, back to Japan 'til your wounds healed up, or you were sent back to the States. See, I went back to, I was sent back to Japan.

Mark: Uh huh.

Hermes: And I rejoined my outfit in October.

Mark: Oh, really.

Hermes: I went back when they were going back up, when they were up on the, north of the North Korean capitol there. That's when the Chinese came in. That's when I got back up there with them.

Mark: Yeah. So you're in the hospital in Japan.

Hermes: Yeah.

Mark: Are you able to follow the course of the war and the progress of the war?

Hermes: Oh, yeah, you could. Because you got papers and you had the radio, you had radios, you know, in the hospital. They kind of let you know what was happening with your outfit, you know.

Mark: And what was going through your mind as you're watching the war progress? As the North Koreans come farther towards Pusan and then as you push them back. I mean, are the guys in the hospital sort of rooting and cheering? Or what's the ...

Hermes: Oh, yeah, they were, we were happy when they made that Inchon landing, and MacArthur, and then with the Marines and then, boy, they knew that they were going up there. But I think the mistake they did is they went too fast.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: They bypassed a lot of people and they got shot at afterwards then, so. But that was something that happened. Yeah, everybody was happy, you know,

'cause they figured, when I went back there, I figured, boy, in another couple weeks or just before Christmas we'd be all done and we could get out of there, you know.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: But the Chinese came in and a new ballgame then.

Mark: Yeah. So when you rejoined your outfit, how had it changed?

Hermes: Uh, ...

Mark: Or had it?

Hermes: It hadn't changed much, you know. You were in a war. Well, they say it wasn't a war but that's.... But, no, just different people because you had replacements. A lot of people I didn't know. There was only, original guys, there was only, when I got back there, there was just the three of us were still left.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: And they were still there when I left.

Mark: Now, in terms of getting equipment and that sort of thing? Was it any different? I mean, you were on the move going forward now, as opposed to going back.

Hermes: Yeah, well, they would keep up with the equipment but, see, all the, when we first went over there all the stuff we got was all stuff from World War II.

Mark: Right.

Hermes: All equipment was all [unintelligible]. But now, later on, well then they start getting the new stuff coming up there, you know. They kept up pretty good with everything.

Mark: Yeah. And was it helpful?

Hermes: Oh, yeah, to have better stuff, you know. The only thing they didn't have for the cold weather, winters that they had there, they didn't have anything, they only had the combat boots yet. They didn't have anything, 'cause two of my big toes got frozen out there one night.

Mark: Yeah. So you rejoined your unit and you started going north.

Hermes: Yup.

Mark: Then the Chinese intervened then in November, early December I think is when it was.

Hermes: Yeah.

Mark: So you were on the line then when that happened.

Hermes: Yeah, yeah. Then they started pushing us back the other way. I know for, there was a whole week in there and at one time when they were pushing us back that they couldn't even get any hot food up to us. Everything was cold, you lived off the land is what we did.

Mark: Uh huh.

Hermes: Because it was just, you'd shoot, you'd fight for a little while then try to get out of there because at night they'd be there again.

Mark: Yeah. Now you eventually left Korea sometime in 1951, you said?

Hermes: Yes, in January. What happened was, again, I wasn't even supposed to have been there. My only brother was killed in World War II and I was supposed to get out of there on this surviving son, you know.

Mark: Uh huh.

Hermes: And when the paperwork come through they just, we were all the way back to Seoul again and we were digging in 'cause that's where they were going to stay they said, and all of a sudden somebody called my name and it was a guy with a jeep. He says, "You get in the jeep. You're leaving." Well, I left. They put me on a plane and sent me back to Japan and I, I could go back to Japan. I was out of the war zone then.

Mark: Yeah. So upon leaving the unit, how did you react to that emotionally?

Hermes: Well, it all happened so fast, you know, 'cause we had pulled back there in the night. It was in the middle of the night. And we were digging fox holes, you know, and all of a sudden this guy says, "Come on. Let's get out of here." And I just picked up my stuff and I left. It was kind of, I couldn't say good-bye. I just, the guy that was digging a fox hole with me, one of my buddies, I said good-bye to him and that's the only one I got a chance to say anything to. The rest of the squad probably didn't know it until the next morning or something, what had happened.

- Mark: Yeah. I've just got a couple of questions about Korea itself, although it sounds like you were pretty busy.
- Hermes: Yeah.
- Mark: Did you have much contact with Korean people at all? Korean Army, or Korean civilians, or anything like that?
- Hermes: No, only when we went through their villages and a lot of times, well, most of the people had left the villages when the Chinese and that were coming. Didn't have much contact with them 'cause most of the people were gone.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Hermes: Had already gone south, you know.
- Mark: Right. But you did get to, but you did go through some of the countryside.
- Hermes: Oh, yeah.
- Mark: Now, Korea, South Korea today is a modern, industrial country but it was very different back then, wasn't it?
- Hermes: Oh, yeah. I didn't see much of anything that was industrious there. They were so far back with everything. It was rice paddies. All you had was rice paddies.
- Mark: Uh huh.
- Hermes: But I would say they were just, they were 20 years behind us I would say, or more.
- Mark: Yeah. Now, a lot of Korean War vets I've spoken with describe the smell of Korea. Was this something that was impressed upon you? Or were you too busy to notice?
- Hermes: No, I didn't, it didn't bother me because I don't know, I didn't bother with that because I was thinking of trying to stay alive.
- Mark: Yeah. That's what I was wondering about actually. So you left Korea and you went back to Japan. How much more time did you spend in Japan?
- Hermes: Oh, I got back there in January and I was put into where the big earthquake was a couple of years ago. In Kobe.

Mark: Kobe, yeah.

Hermes: Yeah. I was stationed there.

Mark: Oh.

Hermes: And that's where I re-enlisted because Truman was going to give us an extra year, you know, for everybody and I was going to stay in because my dad had died and there was nothing left for me, you know, in Green Bay. So I was going to make the Army my career, you know.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: So I re-enlisted.

Mark: Another four years? Or two years?

Hermes: The first time I went in for two years. When I re-enlisted it was for three more.

Mark: I see.

Hermes: So then, that's when I re-enlisted because I wanted to stay in Japan. I really liked it. I had good duty there. I had 12 Japanese men that worked with me. I worked in what they called "ration breakdown."

Mark: Uh huh.

Hermes: Take care of all the food for all the people in our area.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: And I really liked the duty and I wanted to stay there. But then come, what was it? I came back in October. October I came back from Japan to the States. I was, when they started going through the camp, they had a point system.

Mark: Uh huh.

Hermes: How many years that you, if you were wounded, you got so many points. How many points for how many months you had been over there and all that. Well, when they went through, I had the second highest one. I had 56 points so on the second shipment that they started going I was on.

Mark: I see.

Hermes: So.

Mark: I've just got one last question about Occupation Duty in Japan and then we'll go back to the States I guess. Now, you were on Occupation Duty before the Korean War started and then while the Korean War was going on. Did the war affect your duties in the occupation? For example, an important city like Kobe, were there a lot of supplies going through? And were you dealing with that sort ...

**[End of Tape 1, Side A]**

**[THIS SECTION REPEATED ON SIDE B, FROM SIDE A]**

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**[NEW – FROM SIDE B]**

Mark: ... of thing? Did it either increase your duties? Or did it change your duties at all?

Hermes: No, the duty didn't change that much. It was just that, taking care of food for, where we were plus from the island of Honshu where the air outfit would leave, every week we would load up two boxcars of stuff and then the train, they would take it over there to them. That was just the kind of duty I had, you know. But it was called "ration breakdown" and we'd get, from the cold storage, we'd have the meat come over by us, or whatever food we had to have would come out of there, then we would break it down for each company.

Mark: I see.

Hermes: That's all it we had to do.

Mark: I see. Um, so you went back to the States.

Hermes: Uh hum.

Mark: To Fort Riley, is that where?

Hermes: Well, I went into Battle Creek, Michigan is where I went first. And then I was only there for a short while, then they sent me to Fort Riley. I was in duty down there, and I was in ration breakdown there. I was in the quartermaster corps. The duties was the same thing. Ration breakdowns. See, it was a training company is what it was. A training camp is what it was.

Mark: Right.

Hermes: And they had, I forget how many companies they had. They had quite a few of them.

Mark: Uh huh.

Hermes: And we'd break down the stuff and then we'd put the stuff on a truck and we'd take it around to all the mess halls.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: And we had to ride, somebody had to ride on the back-end and give each company their stuff off of it. We just blow the horn that was driving and they'd send their KPs out and get their stuff.

Mark: I suppose Kansas isn't quite as exciting as Japan was.

Hermes: (laughter) A lot of sand, and a lot of wide open. You don't see much of anything.

Mark: Yeah. So how long were you at Fort Riley?

Hermes: I was there from January 'til October.

Mark: And then you went back overseas then?

Hermes: Yes. They sent me back overseas. I was sent to France.

Mark: And where were you and what did you do there?

Hermes: Same thing, in there I worked in the Commissary. I was in the quartermaster corps yet because that was my MOS was after I got changed from being a rifleman.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: There I run a cash register for the PX what they had there, where the people would, or Commissary I should say, where the people come and bought their food, dependents.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: Well, I run one of the cash registers there. That's what I did.

Mark: Now, where in France where you exactly?

Hermes: LaRoche they called it.

Mark: That's uh ...

Hermes: Southern part, way down. Pretty close to the Italian border, in that area.

Mark: Were there a lot of Americans there? It sounds like there was a considerable population.

Hermes: Uh, in the, well, see, the Commissary covered all the southern part of France. The people would come from all the other towns with buses to get their groceries, and then a bus would take them back home.

Mark: Uh huh.

Hermes: They bought everything there because that's the only Commissary they had for all the people there.

Mark: Uh huh.

Hermes: And we did a pretty big business. I can remember one, the biggest day I had and there was four registers going, I took in over \$1000, \$3000 in one day. That was a lot of money for, at that time.

Mark: Yeah, it's still not a bad amount of money today.

Hermes: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: What was I going to say? Oh, did you get off the post much? And did you get around in France at all?

Hermes: Oh, there was a place where you could go play pool but there was only one pool table for 1500 men. And they had one place where we could go see movies and that would hold about 500 people at a time. And there was a couple of places where you go do some dancing if you wanted to. But I played a lot of cards with the, there was four of us used to play cards. We played, oh, I'm trying to think of the game. I haven't played it for so long I wouldn't even know how to play it anymore but you use two decks and, you know, we played a lot of cards. There was four of us that did that a lot.

Mark: Yeah. I was never much of a card player myself so I can't help you out there.

Hermes: Well, we'd go out once in awhile. Go downtown and have a couple of beers. The thing was, there was, the four of us would go out on Sunday, almost every Sunday we'd go out for this one restaurant out there that would have steak and french fries and bottle of wine. That was our meal then because we always had cold cuts on Sunday there and we didn't like cold cuts so we'd go out and have a steak. And we'd get a nice big steak and everything for about, less than \$1 at that time.

Mark: Now, of course, the French eventually booted the Americans out.

Hermes: Yup.

Mark: Did you pick up on the sense of French attitudes towards the American troops?

Hermes: Oh, it was very bad. Especially where we were, about, outside of our compound there, it was roughly, I would say, there was 75% were Communists in that area. They would, when we would pull guard duty around the compound, they would throw stones at us.

Mark: Huh.

Hermes: We could not go outside the compound with a, in fact, we couldn't even have a round of ammunition on you when your duty. It was use your rifle, that was it.

Mark: Huh.

Hermes: No, no ammunition though. If we want to have a parade, they had to get okay from the French government before you could have a parade or anything. It was bad, it was bad. And they didn't build up anything there. They just, I seen people living right in the dumps and everything. Not like the other countries. Germany built everything back up and as soon as you hit France you would tell a line where it was because places were still bombed out from World War II and they never, they didn't do anything.

Mark: Yeah. Did you get to travel around? Did you actually get to Germany?

Hermes: A little. I went down to as far as the Italian border. And I was, oh, I'm trying to think of this beach that's, is that Nice or something like that? Was on that beach for awhile.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: A couple of days there. But it was the same thing. Some of us would play cards. The same ones. And we'd go out and have a couple of beers together. But mostly just played cards. There wasn't that much to do either.

Mark: Yeah. How long did you spend in France overall?

Hermes: I got over there in the end of November of '52 and I left there right around Christmas time of '53 because I got discharged on the end of January of '54.

Mark: Uh. And so it came time to re-enlist and you didn't.

Hermes: Oh, they were after me. They wanted me to re-enlist and they promised to give me another stripe or that-- but at that time, when I was home just before I went to France, I met my present wife ...

Mark: I see.

Hermes: ... and I, it was time to get out.

Mark: I see.

Hermes: I got home in January and that following October we got married.

Mark: Hm.

Hermes: It was no place to be a married person, I'll tell you that. You moved around too much.

Mark: In the Army.

Hermes: Yeah. You're pushed around too much.

Mark: So I suppose in Japan and in France, and even in Kansas, you did see military families and that sort of thing.

Hermes: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. There was different families that had kids and everything. Especially over in, well, you didn't see too much of it in Japan. There was quite a few there I know but you seen more, I think I seen it more over in France and Germany than at, you know, 'cause a lot of them had their families there.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: From corporal on up they could have the transportation paid for by the government. If it was anything below that, you had to do it yourself.

- Mark: And so that's not something that you wanted to do in your married life.
- Hermes: No, no, no. I figured that isn't the place to be if you want to be married.
- Mark: I see. So you got out, went back to Green Bay?
- Hermes: Yup.
- Mark: And so when you got discharged from the service then, what did you do when you want to get the rest of your life back on track here? You got married for one thing.
- Hermes: Yeah, well, I got out on a Saturday, I got my discharge papers and everything, got back to Green Bay, on Monday I went down to Proctor and Gamble Mill but at that time it was Hobarts, it was called Charmain then. I went there on Monday. The man that hired me said, "Tuesday you go see the doctor." Give me where I had to go to take a physical and I started work on Wednesday night.
- Mark: Uh huh.
- Hermes: And I worked there for 36 years until I retired.
- Mark: And so you had no trouble finding work after you got discharged or anything.
- Hermes: No, no, no.
- Mark: Um, now you were involved in combat so I'm wondering if you had any sort of medical problems related to that after the war? And did you have much contact with the VA?
- Hermes: I got a 10 percent disability. I get a pension every month. It's not that much. It's a little bit. But I lost, as far as the grip on my left arm, fingers and that, I've lost about a quarter of it, that's all.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Hermes: But I've, the last, shortly after I retired, which is almost, it was five years ago last September, I had a slight stroke and that's why I talk slow and I've got to think everything out first.
- Mark: I hadn't noticed.

- Hermes: Yeah, well, thank you. But I've lost a little feeling from that, too. It's hard to say. I've still got some chunks of lead in my arm that they can't take out. They took some out but when they operated on it, I was in Japan at that time, after I left Korea ...
- Mark: I see.
- Hermes: ... and he, when I come out he had taken some chunks out but he said, "I can't take anymore," he says, "'cause they're laying right on the nerve." He says, "If I go fooling around, you might lose the use of your whole arm so we're going to leave it alone."
- Mark: Yeah.
- Hermes: So that's where I'm at.
- Mark: I see. So in the years right after the war at least, there were no trips to the VA and follow-up surgery or that sort of thing?
- Hermes: Well, I had to go because, see, while I was over there I got malaria.
- Mark: In Japan. Or Korea.
- Hermes: In Korea. And it came out of me when I was back in Japan that following, see, I left there in January, Korea. The following May I had a bout with it, put me in the hospital. I had a temperature of 106 and I was in the hospital for about a week and everything got good and never had any more problems after that until after I got out of service. That following May after I got out, I had a little bout so I had to go down to the VA Hospital and they give me some pills and took care of it and I had no problem since then.
- Mark: Yeah. Well, good.
- Hermes: I feel pretty good right now.
- Mark: Yeah. Now, after your combat experiences, did you have any sort of nightmares or something like that? Some kinds of veterans report that.
- Hermes: I still do.
- Mark: To this day?
- Hermes: I can wake up sometimes with a cold sweat. I know one thing that happened when I was at Fort Riley, 4<sup>th</sup> of July, they were having this separation, you know, they were shooting off rockets and everything out there. There was two

of us that came out of Korea and when they shot off the first one, both of us dove under our beds. It was just a reaction, you know, to do. Not so much anymore. When I first got out, I thought a lot of it. Once in awhile I get in that mood, you know, and I shouldn't say it's a mood, but I start thinking about all the things that happened over there. Most of the time I don't like to talk about it.

Mark: Yeah, okay. Again I'll stop with that.

Hermes: Yeah.

Mark: Now, in terms of other sorts of veterans' benefits, did you use like a veteran home loan or something like that? Or did you not?

Hermes: No, no. The only thing I ever done after that was I got this disability that's 10 percent. That's all I ever got.

Mark: I've just got one last area of questions and it might not even apply to you, and that involves veterans' organizations and reunions and that sort of thing.

Hermes: I am a member of the VFA.

Mark: What's that?

Hermes: Disabled American Veterans. I joined that. I'm a, not a charter member, but I'm a member of that.

Mark: Now, when did you join that?

Hermes: Oh, golly, it's got to be, oh, ...

Mark: Was it soon after discharge?

Hermes: Twenty years ago or so.

Mark: I see. And why that group in particular?

Hermes: Uh, I don't know. Some stuff come in the mail and I thought it would be a nice organization to belong to, the national one. I pay, oh, I don't know, so much towards it, and I've got a lifetime membership on it now.

Mark: So, when it comes to like going down to the Post and having a meeting and that sort of thing, you don't normally do that sort of thing?



Hermes: No, I don't go to any meetings and that. It's just, I don't know. I'm just not that much for meetings and stuff like that. I don't mind belonging to it, you know, and I send them money when they need some money for certain things and that but go down to the meetings, no. And to get into uniform or something and go for parade, no, I'm not for that.

Mark: Yeah. Now with Korean War veterans it's interesting, 'cause so many people didn't consider Korea a war. And you hinted at that before. Perhaps I'm imagining it but I sense a little bit of perhaps resentment or that people misunderstand the situation and that sort of thing. When you came back, did you have people not believe, not understand what you have been through and not appreciate what was going on in Korea?

Hermes: Well, the only comment that I would have with that one is a lot of people said that was a semi, oh, what do they call it? Police action?

Mark: Police action, yeah.

Hermes: And my thing was, I never seen so many policemen get killed.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: Or wounded, or maimed for life, or whatever you have, you know. I had a cousin, who was married to my cousin, who was a prisoner for three years over there with the North Koreans. He come out of there almost a vegetable.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: So that's, it was definitely a war but they say no. But it was a war.

Mark: Yeah. Now, there's this new Korean War Memorial in Washington.

Hermes: Yeah and that brings my heart up.

Mark: Well, see I was going to ask what that meant to you. Why don't you describe what that means to you personally.

Hermes: Yeah. I say it's about time they do something for the Korean veterans 'cause there is a lot of them.

Mark: Yeah, there are.

Hermes: There was a lot of them. There was a lot of people were killed over there. It's about time that they start doing something for them, too. You know, they did

so much for the Vietnam but they never done anything for the Korean. I say it's about time they start doing something for them, too.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: That was my personal feelings. That's the way I feel.

Mark: That's all I can ask.

Hermes: Yup.

Mark: Now those are all the standard questions I have. Is there anything you think we've left out? Anything you'd like to add?

Hermes: Not that I can see here. Let me just take a look at some of these questions here. No, I think that pretty covered, and all I've got, you want a copy of my discharge, and all I've got is a copy of it. I don't have the original one and the only one I have is from the last three year one. I don't have a discharge for the first two years.

Mark: Yeah, it's okay. It's not required. It's just ...

Hermes: It's got all the stuff on here of, it's got like five years and 11 days and that's how much time I spent in there.

Mark: Yeah.

Hermes: But they've only got one year and ten months, I spent more than that overseas than what it says.

Mark: Yeah. If it's not a problem, just send me a copy. That's fine but don't go out of your way. It's not necessary.

Hermes: Oh, okay. If you don't need it, fine because that's all I've got is this one copy and I'd like to keep it, you know.

Mark: Oh, no, I understand completely.

Hermes: Because it's got everything on it. When I sent you that first one, it's all decorations that I had. Well, I missed a couple of them that I got. I don't think I got them all down but that's alright, too.

Mark: Well, there's quite a few on here.

Hermes: Yeah.

Mark: Well, I thank you again for taking some time to talk to me this morning.

Hermes: Well, okay.

**[End of Interview]**