

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
HOWARD INDERDAHL
Communications, Army, Korean War
2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Madison, Wisconsin

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Inderdahl, Howard, (1929-). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 3 videorecordings (ca. 83 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military papers: 0.1 linear ft., (1 folder)

Abstract:

Howard K. Inderdahl, a Helvitia, Wisconsin native, discusses his Korean War service in the Army as a communications specialist. Inderdahl discusses being drafted in 1946 and taking the option to enlist instead. Sent to Camp Crowder (Missouri) for basic training, he mentions recovering from scarlet fever and German measles before attending radio operator school at Fort Monmouth (New Jersey). Assigned to the 3186th Signal Battalion, Inderdahl talks about duty in Yokohama (Japan), doing heavy construction work, and witnessing the destruction from the war. After his discharge, he states he spent eighteen months becoming frustrated with the civilian job market, so he reenlisted. Inderdahl talks about finishing radio school at Fort Monmouth, being shipped to Camp Drake (Japan), and seeing the ship degaussed in Hawaii along the way. Sent by train from Seoul to Pyongyang (North Korea), he talks about recovering from an illness and reassignment to the 61st Field Artillery, 1st Cavalry Division. He comments on volunteering to drive a supply truck, low visibility due to road dust, and joining his unit near Sunchŏn (North Korea). Inderdahl speaks of duty with the wire section repairing telephone lines, and with the liaison section relaying messages between the front line forward observer and the headquarters battery. He mentions that the British soldiers used telephone poles for bonfires, so telephone lines usually lay alongside roads, where they could be damaged by vehicles. Inderdahl discusses his jobs as a Jeep driver, high speed radio operator, and liaison section chief. He addresses call signs, working with forward observers, and calling a cease fire if rounds fell too close to their own troops. Inderdahl describes the three days he spent in “no man’s land” that earned him a Bronze Star. After five days of R&R in Japan, he tells of being promoted to communications chief, managing a sixty-man section, and tasks like making sure the men had enough boots. He talks about making sure the vehicles were fueled and the engines started and warmed on winter nights to be ready in case of retreat. Inderdahl discusses the different tasks done by Koreans who were working for the Army, such as kitchen duty and communicating surrender terms to Chinese troops. He reflects on promoting his soldiers, receiving his own promotion to master sergeant, and the extra privileges his rank entailed. Inderdahl speaks of corresponding with his family, the mail service, and, years later, using his letters as a source while writing a book about his experiences. He recalls the day he was following the infantry on foot and his jeep driver was killed by a land mine, and he mentions contacting the man’s parents. Inderdahl portrays the radios he used, seeing Australian airplanes do barrel rolls over his unit after an air strike, and hearing about the Greek troops’ use of hypnotism. He tells some stories about a non-commissioned officer who shot a civilian Korean woman and about a man from his unit who was taken prisoner of war on his birthday. Inderdahl comments on road conditions, radio frequencies, driving a jeep, and fixing a jeep axle. He talks about a tank-supported task force sent to relieve the 23rd Infantry Regiment in February of 1951. After being sent back to the States, he talks about teaching field communications to officer candidates at Fort Riley (Kansas) before taking his discharge.

Biographical Sketch:

Inderdahl (b.1927) served in the Army from February 1946 to July 1947 and from October 1948 to December 1952. After an honorable discharge, he worked at Western Electric for twenty-nine years, retiring in 1981. Inderdahl is the author of *In the Hills of Korea*, a book of stories and memories of the war. He currently resides in Scandinavia (Wisconsin).

Citation Note:

Cite as: Howard Inderdahl, Interview, conducted 10/11/2004 at Stevens Point, Wisconsin by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Korean War Stories, for Wisconsin Public Television.

Context Note:

Raw footage interview filmed by Wisconsin Public Television for its documentary series, "Wisconsin Korean War Stories." Original WPT videocassette numbers were WCKOR065, WCKOR066 and WCKOR067.

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).

Videotape Note:

There are missing audio segments! The WVM copy of the interview is missing a couple minutes of conversation at the end of tape WCKOR066. Wisconsin Public Television should have complete audio of the interview, but there was a problem during the reproduction of the tapes for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. The missing parts are italicized as a means of identifying them in this transcript and the actual tape end and start in the WVM copy is clearly noted.

Interviewed by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Public Television, October 11, 2004

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.

Transcription reformatted by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2010

Checked and corrected by Casey Thayer, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Transcribed Interview:

Mik: —very conversational. I think to help make sure we get everything in, we'll just start at the beginning when you first got involved in the military and let the story go from there.

Cameraguy: I'm rolling—

Mik: Okay, he's rolling. So how did you get involved in the military?

Howard: Well, I was drafted in 1946, and by February 20th, I was in service. I ended up in Fort Sheridan, Illinois and after six days, I got an offer for a hundred dollars—they would discharge me and I could re-enlist for eighteen months, which I did. 26th of February, I become a regular army and I was sent to Camp Crowder, Missouri for basic training, and uh, one thing I did down there, I got sick. I had scarlet fever and before I got out of the hospital I ended up with German measles and when I got out of the hospital, the same day I got out of the hospital, I went into basic training, which was kind of a rough deal. But I survived and we finished basic training, and from there I, ah, they sent me to radio operator school at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. I was in school there, and about half way through the school, the armies decided to cut back on their personnel and course, they sent me out with an intermediate speed operator certificate.

Mik: What does that mean, "inter-speed?"

Howard: Inter-speed—that about thirteen words a minute on the typewriter. Approximately ten words a minute by pencil. And that's by CW Code, International Morse Code. And then they sent me out and I ended up in Yokohama, Japan. And I was assigned to the 3186th Signal Battalion. And they did heavy construction work around the Yokohama and Tokyo area. They, also, did work in telephone offices, but I was in the heavy construction. And heavy construction consisted of either building towers for radios or setting up telephone poles and stuff like that. And uh, I had a line truck at first, and later on, they assigned me to a truck they call an Earth Bore, which dug post holes. That was a good job, because we didn't dig too many holes. And uh, then I—

Mik: Now, Howard, when you were doing that, was that for a military operation or were you rebuilding the infrastructure for Japan?

Howard: Well, what we were doing, I believe, we were just setting up, so we could operate as an Army unit and we just built up the stuff and the towers were for the signal cores—sending out messages. And of course, the telephone offices we had were still working and there were people in there. The Japanese, more or less, were taking their side up, and it was a horrible mess there cause

I seen it after the war and the bombings. There was large strips of land there that was just demolished. There was one time, there was a bunch of bombers that come in there and they just ah, bombed the strip there but they missed their object. Of course, they didn't want to de-order any longer than they had. Well, that was one of the things that happened. And then after finishing there, I ended up—they sent me back for a discharge in June of 1947 and I was discharged a little bit early. It was in July of 1947 I come back home.

And uh, after working around for about eighteen months, I got disgusted with the work situation. You work two, three weeks you were laid off or else there wasn't enough work and I just took eighteen months of it and I just decided I'd try the Army again. At least I'd have three square meals a day. [laughs] And so, I went and re-enlisted for three years in the regular Army and then after doing that, I was sent back to Fort Riley, Kansas. I was processed, and for some reason, my code test was real good for em and they liked that. So I went back to Fort Monmouth to finish my school and I finished that. I finished the school at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey on about September in 1950 and that was when the Korean situation was getting out of hand up there. They needed lots of people out there—and I ended up at Camp Stallman, California. They loaded us on a ship and headed out towards—Japan. But on the way to Japan we stopped at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. We had to degauss the ship, because that ship was going be used in some areas where there were some magnetic mines laid. Degaussing a ship, we just come around the—we just cruised real slow around a section in Pearl Harbor, and we went over some cables that degaussed us. They were electric cables and we just went one down—and just like going around the block. And when we got down to the other side of the block we just headed back towards Japan. Got to Japan, we was sent back into Camp Drake, Japan. I got assigned my assignment there, and naturally, it was Korea. We got put back on the ship.

After a few days, we were on the water, and we ended up at Inchon, just out of Seoul, in Korea. And we had to get off the side of the ship. We got on the landing barge and they ferried us over to Seoul. We got unloaded there and we got put on trucks back up to another staging point, which was the center to bring in all the G.I.s that were coming in there. Then I was there for while. They put us on the train, which took about three days to get up to Pyongyang, North Korea. And up on a train ride, it was very cold because it didn't have any heat in these coach cars. Uh, we were kinda fortunate to have a ride, but on the trip up there, I got sick again. I had a bad fever and I had chills but on the—we were lucky enough to have a doctor on board there. I think he was a full bird colonel got caught in the reserves on a call back. He had his bag of tools along. He had some APC pills which is glorified aspirin. And he'd given me some. That took care of my chills and fever, and by the time the train got through, I was okay. The reason it took three days to get up there, we could only run just a few miles, like maybe five miles up the track,

and then they'd have to go off the track and clear the tracks for any bombs or booby-traps or even repairing them. And when there was a bomb they'd come back and we'd go up a few more miles—and this continued for three days all the way up to Pyongyang, North Korea.

Mik: That was the capital, right?

Howard: That was the capital of North Korea. And when I got up there, I ended up in the twenty-fourth replacement center and uh, there was nothing happening to me. I didn't get any orders. I was just sitting around and finally they—my orders come back, and I'd been switched from the 24th Division to the 1st Calvary Division. I guess it is because the 1st Calvary Division was MacArthur's favorite division because the Calvary was stationed around Korea. I mean around Japan. Well, anyway, I got stuck in the 1st Calvary. And well, ah, nobody likes the 1st Calvary. [laughs]

Mik: Why is that?

Howard: I don't know—because it was Mac's favorite division and what they wanted they got. Well, after a while, I got—I had to go up a little farther out of Pyongyang. There a bunch of trucks and supplies that needed to be ferried up North. And they yelled, "Anybody can drive—if you got license or can drive a Jeep or truck, we need you to drive them up there." So we ended up—I took the two-and-one-half-ton truck loaded with supplies, and it was a brand new truck—real beautiful truck to drive—and we had to drive about forty miles in a convoy with that. When started on the trip, the roads up there were just powdery dust. You could see about three inches of dust powder on the road, and when you hit that it went into a dust storm. Driving up there in a convoy, I ah, could see about twenty feet around me, and you had to watch out for the guy in front of you, and hope the guy in the back could see you. We did make it up there but did have a few accidents up there because somebody stopped at the line there and damaged some Jeeps. Also, there was some personnel that got hurt. But otherwise, we made it up to the replacement center. I run my truck right up to where they wanted it and they said, "Stop," and I got out and it was really a nice rig to drive. But then I had to—then I ended up in the replacement center again, and I had to get up to my 1st Cav division—find them up there someplace because, they had the—that was the time when everything was in a real mix-up up there. So, uh—

Mik: Cause they were moving north so fast? and—

Howard: Well, yeah, we moved a little bit too fast north. But then when we got up there, the Chinese was waiting for us. And that's when we got—some places were even over run. I just read a book, *The River and the Gauntlet*, which was written strictly for the 25th and the 26th of November about the 2nd Division. They were really slaughtered there. They lost over five thousand

men in two days. And this is just one division I'm talking about. There was a lot of them over there that lost similar casualties. They lost as killed in actions, wounded in actions, or prisoners of war. I'm kind of lucky I didn't get there as fast as I did because I would have been in there—cause my ah, I found that my 61st Field Artillery was supporting the 2nd Division. And I found out that they had to leave their guns a few times and get out of there, but for some reason the Chinese didn't damage or pick anything up or anything. When they come back, their guns, everything was right there. I think they were just going for a night skirmish someplace. Well, anyway, I got back up to my 61st Field Artillery, which at that time was right around Sunchŏn, North Korea, which is just a few miles from the Yalu and that was up around where the prisoner camps were too after we got out of there. After a while there—after I joined the section, we got lined up. There was seven other radio operators that come up with me. We were all lined up in front, and the communication chief come up there, and he looks at us. He says, "Oh my gosh." He says, "I can only use four of you in the radio section. The other four have to go in the wire section"—well, I was sent to the wire section. And that same night, we had problems on the telephone line. Wire sergeant was out there, and he told [me] to go out and put the wire in my hand. He says, "Follow it out. And when you find it's either busted or bruised, fix it up, connect it up, and make sure—put your telephone on there and call back and forth and make sure the telephone line is okay." That was my first that I spent out there. [he laughs] Who knows what was just a few feet away from me, but we survived and come back hoping that there was no more telephone line troubles that night so we could get some sleep. Well, that was the first night, then eventually, ah, I had radio operating experience—you need procedures and stuff like that to operate them things. They needed some radio operators and Jeep drivers for liaison section. I was—that's the section that operates in between the front line forward observer and the headquarters battery. We're in the middle there to relay the messages that gets—normally everybody's out of range and you need us for a relay. It's a pretty good job but it's still dangerous. So I was picked for going on that crew and uh, it was pretty good, because we'd, in the daytime, operate the radios, and we'd be there. Then at night, we'd pull a, like a two-and-a-half-hour shift. We'd operate the telephone as long as that telephone line was working. If the lines were not, we had to go on the radio and relay by radio. Course we'd like to stay on the telephone line because the radios could be monitored by the enemy. That's why we preferred the telephone lines because the only way they could monitor this—they would cut into the line and listen to you. It was a lot of little trickery going on.

Mik: Tell me about the difference between the radio units and the line units.

Howard: You mean the wire section?

Mik: Yeah, the wire section.

Howard: Okay, ah, the radio units, they more or less operated in a truck, in a radio truck. The wire section was a group of people that maintained the telephone service for the units—and normally, ah, your line of command was—your telephone was maintained from your place down—or no, its from the your place to the higher unit—so if you were in the infantry, you would lay a line from there up to us guys in the middle. Then we would take the telephone line from there and take it up to the headquarters. And the—we all cooperated—it seemed to work pretty good that way. If anybody was behind, we'd help each other out. We needed communications, and that was the objective on our job.

Mik: And when you laid a line, was that strung from poles or just on the ground or—

Howard: Telephone lines were laid along side the highway or the road. And uh, we stayed off a little bit—we didn't want to get off the beaten path too far, and it was mostly temporary lines anyway because we were moving, and uh, of course, we had problems there because when trucks would move off the road or even the tanks would move off the road, they could scuff up your lines and even break 'em—and then we had to go back up and fix 'em. That was one of our biggest problems on that.

Mik: Yeah, I think it would be. They are just lying on the ground and uh—

Howard: Yeah, I never was in the spot too long, but it was—we didn't have many poles to put around. Normally somebody had gotten and burnt them on us—you know, a fireplace or something like that. The British loved them because they had nice fires in their sections, and to make a nice fire they'd go off and grab all the poles they could get. They'd have a nice bonfire at night. You could always tell the British. You'd look for a big bonfire over there.
[laughs]

Mik: What happened when you had to put the wire across the road?

Howard: We tried to stay on the side that—as much as possible. But if you had to go across, you just had to go across. But we used to—as far as I can remember—we normally went right along side as much as we could—along the road. Then after a while, I was in the liaison section for a while, and I learned that job pretty well and then they—we had an officer there. He was Lieutenant Harrison, at first, and later on, he became Captain Harrison. He was in the liaison section because as you say, an officer and a sergeant, which is a sergeant first class, and a corporal and maybe a couple privates, consisted of the liaison section. Well, our officer, Captain Harrison, ended up as Company Commander in our headquarters' battery. He asked for me to be a Jeep driver and radio operator. So I got that job for a while, which is a nice

soft job. [laughs] Just driving around, you know, and stay out of trouble. Shine up the Jeep and make it look good for ‘em. Then after a while, again, they needed another radio operator in the radio truck, and I was qualified to CW, and uh, at school, I was sent out as a High Speed Radio Operator, which means that—taking code by a typewriter at twenty-five wpm and writing them down at twenty words a minute—and these words are considered like five letters bunched up. But at the radio section, we could only operate with the guy who could write down the slowest—your section is the slowest operator in the area is what the speed that you operate on. If there is a slow operator who can only take ten words a minute, well, that was just speed. And that is what we normally operated on over there—cause that was a comfortable thing. It was kind of unique there. We had call signs. We used to learn that call sign, and uh, we could be out of the truck and it was just like—when that call sign come over, it’s just like calling your name out. It had just sort of a ring to it. And uh, it was kind of neat. I was in the radio truck for a while.

Then I got sent back—I believe I got sent back to the liaison section again. Due to ah, guys being sent back to the States, there was lots of vacancies, and they needed whoever they could use—they could get up there, and whoever would do the job and could do a good job for ‘em, they put ‘em up in the positions that they needed. I ended up as a liaison section chief in Korea, and that’s when I got my own Jeep to drive—course, I wasn’t driving it. I had a Jeep driver. [laughs] I had to run the section and make sure the guys all got along and all that stuff. If the officer wasn’t around there, I’d have to run the missions for him and make sure that the forward observer was sending out the right stuff and things like that, but usually, there was an officer around.

Mik: Now, were the forward observers sending the information in code?

Howard: No, they were—they only had boys because they had like a back walkie-talkie they call it. They operated from that. They also had another unit that they could set up at night—another radio. What they did, they would see an enemy on the ground or a spot—something to shoot at. They would get their map out, get the coordinates on it, and then they’d write it down. They send them coordinates by voice to our radio area—the liaison section—and then would relay it back to the battalion headquarters to the fire detection center, which control—from there they sent the mission to the different batteries that we had—we were 105-millimeter howitzer guns out there. When they got the mission ready, they’d come back and radio it up—is fire mission ready—and then get the okay. I’d send it to the forward observer and make sure it was ready. And he says, “Fire when ready.” I’d pass that back up and pretty soon there’s a volley of 105 shells going out to the target. And the forward observer says, “Roger, splash”—meant that was an explosion. But then, there was times when uh, you had to be really on the alert there because once and

a while, the rounds, at first, would—maybe when he started off the first ones, he would shoot it too close to our own troops—and sometimes, they landed real close, and then they would yell back, “Cease fire, cease fire,” and I would just yell, “Cease fire” right back to ‘em. One day we saved a bunch of lives that day. So then I got a mission one day. I was back there, and they couldn’t get any communications or telephones to work between the forward observer and the headquarters fire detection center. So my captain says, “Take a radio, some batteries along to last you for a while and C rations. Take one guy, and go out back up there on the hill there into no man’s land.” No man’s land means nobody claims it. I went up there, and we were up there three days and two nights and was relaying between my other trooper and myself—we were relaying the messages back and forth, and we were the only communication link between the headquarters and the forward observer. That was in August 4th, 5th, and 6th in 1951. When I got off the hill there about a week or so later, I found out they put me in for a Bronze Star for valor. That was awarded after a while there. It was great to get that, but I was thinking that my other trooper should of got the same kind cause when you pass off medals, they always give it to highest ranking guy. But I guess that’s the way it goes. Another thing is that uh, one of the reasons they didn’t pass off too many medals in Korea—to get a medal or something written up, you’d have to have a typewriter and then you’d have to go through—have a bunch of paper along. Everything had to be written up just so, and if it wasn’t, you wouldn’t get your award, and then they’d have to try it again. If you’d get a good guy that can write that stuff, you’re going to have an outfit with a lot of medals. [laughs]

Mik: Did you feel pretty exposed out there in no man’s land?

Howard: Well, I was out there in the pup tent. There was firing going around there, and uh, I don’t remember anything hitting close to me. But the first night when I was there, a guy stuck his head into my tent—my little pup tent I had there—and he says, “What kind of weapons have you got?” He’d sent a trooper up there with a—to help guard me, and I says, “Well, I got a .45, and my other guy, he’s got an M1 carbine.” And he said, “Well, that’s good because I want to know”—I think the reason he wanted to know is that if we did some shooting, he could recognize the fire power that we had, and he would know it was us—I think he was there all three days—I don’t know, but I hope he was. [laughs] **[End of Tape WCKOR065]**

Mik: Okay, so you were out there all by yourself— [laughs] you and the other guy—

Howard: Yeah, well, after three days and two nights, we got off the hill again. I had one guy there that I tell you had a lot of whiskers, and I always said, “I got more than you have.” When I got off the hill, I had three days growth on my face. I went over and I says to him, jokingly, I says, “Now, who’s got the

most whiskers?" [laughs] He says, "You have." Well, that was so much for the joke there. We got along real good. But after that then, I was still in the liaison section. About the middle of August, I was promoted to Sergeant First Class in 1951. Right after that, about a couple of weeks later, I got picked for R&R in Japan. I went over and spent four days in—or five days in Japan. I wasn't five days in Japan, just five days from the time you leave to the time you get back—and of course, we had to fly over. I flew over in a C-47, my first airplane ride. I was hanging on to the seat, but coming back home was okay. We had to leave our weapons in Korea, but that first bunch of R&R guys, they brought 'em along to Japan. Then in Japan, we'd go over there, and we'd get out of our fatigues or dirty clothes we had and we'd leave our weapons and everything—they'd furnish us with a clean uniform complete with our ratings and all of that stuff. Well, we had one guy that he went back and got his—was going back, and he had his weapon and everything, and this guy—they were on a plane, and they were flying back to Korea. This guy didn't want to go back to Korea, so he just took his weapon and pulled the—went up to the cockpit and told the pilot to turn around, let's go back to Japan. Well, I guess that was the last time they had weapons on that plane. They did talk him into putting the weapon down. They just continued on to Korea. That's why we had to leave our weapons in Korea when we left. They didn't want any more pilots being scared off—asked to turn the plane around. Well, after I got back from Japan R&R, I come back there and there was people been leaving us. There was lots of vacancies. I was offered three positions when I got there. And they were all master sergeant positions. One was an S-1, and one was being the motor pool sergeant, and the other one was a communications chief. Well, see, I could do them all but the S-1—I could of done too but that was intelligence. I says, "The motor pool I like, but I'll take the communications chief job." I had that from like the first part of September till when I left—the end of October. Before I left there, I was promoted to Master Sergeant, and I had a section over there had sixty men in it, and I do have a list of them in my little brown book that I mention around in my book and, I've contacted a few of these people—some are alive, some are gone, some are so they can't move any more and they got all kinds of bad things, but there's a lot of us still being able to move around.

Mik: What was your job as communications chief?

Howard: Ah, being communications chief, you were in charge of the radio section and the wire section. Between them, there was total of about sixty people. You just had to keep them going. Of course, being the chief, you had your sergeants and your wire sergeant was usually a sergeant first class and your radio sergeant usually was a sergeant first class, and they had their line of command down. Of course, if anything went bad, the communications chief would have to step in and straighten everything out and get the jobs going again. The main thing is [to] do your job right and that was the main thing

about the communications chief. It was really an easy job. The communications officer, he would tell you what to do. I would tell the wire chief and the radio chief what to do. They would pass it on all the way down. There was times that ah—there was an order that come down we had to have two pairs of combat boots, so I had to go around and check everybody if they had two pair of combat boots. I found about three or four people who didn't have 'em, and we had 'em ordered out, and they got 'em. It was jobs like that that you had. Then you had maintenance on the vehicles and stuff like that. You had to make sure that was done. It was something about vehicles—when at night—when you got done with everything, and just before everything was buttoned up, you would go and fill up your gas tank on your vehicle. This was because we ah, we didn't know when we had to bug out of the area, and you don't go on an empty gas tank bugging out. Cause it's better to drive out then walk out. That was the reason why we filled up our gas tanks in our Jeeps every night and trucks. There was times in the cold winter that we had to go around and start all the vehicles up during the winter. It's like it was twenty, thirty below zero there and every two-and-a-half hours, we'd go around and start the vehicles. By the time we got done, we'd run 'em for about half an hour. By the time we got 'em all started, it was time to shut 'em off again. We had to have 'em warm and ready in case we had to bug out. Some of them vehicles didn't start too good, but they'd sat overnight.

Mik: Was that a pretty common thing to have to bug out?

Howard: Well, I haven't bugged out yet, I think maybe a few before I got there in November of 1950. I think there was a few bug outs going on. But it was not unusual like in the infantry in the front lines that they would be ready. Another thing about talking about a full gas tank, we started off one morning, and we had Korean helpers there. They were in the Army, but we used as fixing up roads and doing things around. They were useful, but they all liked to smoke cigarettes, and they always had this—what looked like a Zippo lighter. Every now and then you'd see somebody flipping it on, and it wouldn't fire up. Well, I seen a bunch of 'em doing that. I knew what they needed, so I opened up my gas tank on my Jeep, and I motioned over there. They took the lighter apart, and they dipped the bottom part of the soaking part of the lighter into the gas tank, and that's how they refilled their Zippo lighters. You should see the smiles on 'em afterwards. They could start their cigarettes or fire for their food or anything like that. That was kind of a way of getting good to 'em, you know. They were very appreciative of that. We used a lot of Koreans right with us there. We had one guy that—he was a number one guy, the number one honcho there cause he could probably whip all of them you know. That's who was the boss. He could control the guys real good. They were promoted along the line there, and we could promote 'em up to car pool or something. For the things they were doing, they

weren't paid much, but they were helping. I think they were happy to be with us because they could get food and stuff.

Mik: What kinds of things did they do?

Howard: Well, ah, they worked in the kitchen, helping the mess sergeant. They did things that would relieve us from doing those kind of duties like cleaning up and fixing up the roads and putting up tents and things like that, and uh, infantry in the front lines used 'em to—I remember one fire fight they just cleaned up a bunch of Chinese. In the morning, the Chinese was trying to get in there and run over us, and they were wiping up the area where they were fighting. This was in the hillside just outside of Seoul. I remember the Koreans in there yelling—they were yelling at the Chinese in their language, so they could find out where they were. Some of these Chinese were hiding on you, you know, and these Koreans, they'd go in there and flush 'em out. They'd tell them to surrender and stuff like that. They were telling them in Korean. They were Chinese that they were talking to, but they understood what it was. They got—I think they got most of 'em, and I think they would rather come up with their hands up than be sitting there as a victim. They were helpful. They did a lot of jobs that we didn't have to do, and help us out.

Mik: So then after you were master sergeant for two months, you rotated out?

Howard: Yeah, I was put in for Master Sergeant, and there was a funny part of it. My orders didn't come out till about a few days before I left. [laughs] But they all knew that I was—that I'd been put in for it and everything. Right after I took it over, my first sergeant said that we got to bring all these people—that you got up to TOE, which was bring 'em up to strength, give 'em some promotions. What I did, I had to figure something out. I had a system that I set up. If a guy come in as a private—thirty days I made 'em a PFC. If PFC for thirty days, I'd make 'em a corporal. Corporal, I'd hold back for sixty days. I had 'em put up a list one day, and I think made a list of over fifteen-some people. I was fortunate to have a typewriter, so I just pecked away the information on the typewriter and handed it to the first sergeant. The first sergeant—the next day, he looked, he yelled at me, and he says, “Hey, how come you don't have your name on there?” That was to be promoted from Master Sergeant. I told 'em, I says, “I can't. That's not my job to put that on there.” “Somebody else has got to put that one on,” I said. “Cause that would look better.” [laughs] But he did put it on, and within just a short while, my orders come through for our master sergeant. Being that was quit a privilege cause you'd end up with more rights than you really realized that you never had. I have a son that's a master sergeant, and he went through the same thing.

Mik: What kind of privileges?

Howard: Well, you're top dog and everybody respects you, and you're the last one they could talk to unless you go to one of the officers. Like, I can give you an instant—when I went back on the ship from Korea. I was boated out from Yokohama, Japan, and on the way down, they give me a section of the ship to take care of—well, I just found myself some sergeants and give the jobs to them, and I just sat back in my bunk and took her easy. At night, they showed movies. I went up to see the movie one day or one night, and there was a section for Navy Chiefs—they always got a section of their own, you know. They sit by themselves, and they get the best spots. Well, when I got up there, I was just like a chief up there. I got to sit with all the chiefs and had a good spot to sit and watch the movie. But that was—that's what I mean that you are given some more respect and better positions and stuff like that. It's things that just normally happen to you.

Mik: So were you starting to leave Korea?

Howard: No, I was ready to leave—I was waiting for it, in fact. My last letter I wrote to my folks, I said that this is my last letter from Korea. Stop writing to me at this address—I won't be there. And I left. I still got that letter, too.

Mik: Yeah, you said that you wrote your book [*In the Hills of Korea*] based on those letters. Was mail pretty regular?

Howard: Yeah, I—letters were very important to send back to your folks or whoever you left behind that cared about you, and it was just as important for us to get a letter as to send a letter out to them. I'd tried to get at least one or two letters off every week, and I expected that back too. But see, we were moving around in Korea. They could come by within the week I could have the letter, and there was times that it took two months to get a letter. That was just the way you were operating, you know. They'd just have to catch up with you. But letters are important. I went through that with my brother—that was in World War II, and I was home. We were always looking for a letter from him. Letter writing was okay then. They never did any checking up on the letters. We just sealed them up, and they were never censored from Korea. And there was always free mail. They went out on like air mail. The mail service was rather good if they could find you. [laughs]

Mik: So those letters made a pretty good document of your time there. You'd just gone through there and see where you were and what was going on and—

Howard: Yes, my letters after I sorted 'em out and got 'em according to dates and stuff like that, it helped me write it—my book. It also, helped find out where I was. For instance, ah, I was talking about the train ride up to Pyongyang. I had no idea that I ended up in Pyongyang on the train, but reading my letters, I got my mind all straightened out. Fifty some years, you know, you forget. I

find out that people had been getting my book and reading it there—finding out that their stories are little bit off on dates because they think they were there earlier or even maybe later—then can find out by what I had documented that, hey, it happened on date so and so. That helps them out too, and they finally agree. That was the right thing—

Mik: I was gonna ask you, when you wrote that book, and you have those little stories, of what happens, do those just come to you periodically, do you remember things about Korea?

Howard: Yeah, I remember. You know, that's fifty years with this in your mind. [laughs] It's ah, what I did. I had a blue lined paper pad, and I think about a story, you know, about ah, oh, the Aussies helped us out on an air strike and stuff like that—I'd write down that as number one thing to do. Then I kept on. I had almost a hundred of these, maybe over a hundred of these little penciled in lines there. Then I looked at 'em there and made little mini stories out of every line on there, and I had put that in my book. They're not in order, but they're in there. You can read 'em, and you can remember and see what happened. This really happened in Korea—it's really true stories. I had one guy in California got my book, and he come back, and he says, "I read your book." He says, "I know about your—the dirt and the cold and the rain and all that stuff and even a few shells running over your head." He says he really appreciated it because it sort of—he says this is it. That's what happened, he says—

Mik: It was dirty and it was cold and it was wet, huh?

Howard: Yeah, I had one friend of mine that wrote to me from Washington State, and I had sent him a picture of my uniform—me in my uniform, my suntans, my shirt—and it still fits me. He got the picture, and he come back with ah, little thing, he says. "Yeah," he says, "That's really great to get into your suntan shirt." He says, "The only thing that I can get into is my combat boots." [laughs] So we get a few remarks, now and then. I did have a tragedy in Korea when I was there. My Jeep driver got killed. Ah, he backed over a land mine. He destroyed the Jeep, and he died too—he was killed by a land mine. And uh, that was bad. I had contacted his folks—after fifty years. They did not know how he died. I told them, and they were really grateful for what I had told them. And uh, they have invited me to come over and see 'em. He's from the State of Maryland. They really appreciated it—we talked on the telephone for a while and sent e-mails back and forth.

Mik: Where were you when that happened?

Howard: Ah, where was I? Well, ah, I said it was a sad day and a lucky day. The sad day was he got killed. My lucky day was—I had to walk where the A Company of the 5th Regiment of the 1st Cav. We were following up a mile

high hill, and there was another mile down the other side. That took most of the day to get up there and get back. I followed the infantry up over the hill with my radio on my back, and uh, when this happened, he was killed—I would otherwise, I would have been in the Jeep—so, that's why I call [it] my sad day and my lucky day.

Mik: How big was the radio that you had to carry?

Howard: Well, that radio, it set just like square on your back. It was square, about fifteen by fifteen, and the heaviest part was the battery you had to operate it on. You'd put her on your back like a backpack. It got heavy after awhile. After you crawl up a hill, you know, it gets heavy. But we managed and uh, rest for a while and keep on going—that's where you go.

Mik: What was the reception of those radios like when you were on liaison—you had to get the coordinates, and I mean, you'd want to make sure you heard it right, wouldn't you?

Howard: Yeah. We operated on FM Radios. The ones that was at the front lines were normally good for about two miles, but you couldn't be down in a hollow because you wouldn't get much reception on that. That's why we were close to the infantry all the time—and they could shoot us up between a mile or two miles signal, and the ones we had would go about five miles. We had to be at least at, well—an artillery gun is good for effective power. Once we had the 105s were good for about five miles for accuracy and that way, our radios were five miles going back to the headquarters and two miles back to there, so we could communicate together.

Mik: And your radios were in the truck?

Howard: Yeah, we had 'em in a Jeep or something like that or else we had—at night, we had a portable radio we set up in our tents, and we could operate from there. Also, with a telephone. We either had a radio or a telephone, whatever worked. If the line was off, we were on the radio. We liked to stay off the radio and stay on the telephone line due to the enemy listening to the radios.

Mik: Now, how did those telephones work? Did you have switchboards, that you carried with you or—

Howard: Well, switchboards, no. Where we were, we had a little, small one that we could probably plug in a half a dozen lines on. These were plug-ins, you know, and they was no switches or anything to 'em. That way if we had three telephone lines coming in, we could save a telephone by just working in one telephone on it—but we'd have to swing the wires back and forth with the plugs in it. Normally, it was just if we had more than one line. We had couple of telephones.

Mik: And do you remember ever not being sure what you're hearing from the forward observers? Was that ever a problem?

Howard: Well, if that was a problem, we would always ask them to repeat. We had to be real sure about the coordinates—that was one thing about being a good radio operator is that you would listen to them and knew what they were saying. Of course, you weren't always alone. There was always somebody maybe—during the daytime there was somebody there to—they could listen to you to make sure everything was right.

Mik: That you're hearing the same thing?

Howard: Yeah—

Mik: So, when you put your book together and as you look at that, do you have a favorite story?

Howard: I got lots of stories in there, and I think my favorite story is when we called in an air strike for ah—one day, we called in an air strike there, and we happened to be [by] a bunch of Aussies. They sent us a sortie in—a sortie is four airplanes. At that time, we had like a similar to a P-51 propeller-driven plane. These Aussies, they'd go over and they'd follow their air strike out. They knew who called in the air strike, and they'd always come over your outfit. First, the one guy coming over, and he'd do a barrel roll and take off to the air. All four of 'em did the same thing. It was really neat. I really enjoyed it. That was [their way of] saying job well done, goodbye!

Mik: Is calling in an air strike any different from calling in an artillery barrage?

Howard: Well, you only call in an air strike once in a while, you know, and they were mostly daytime. Artillery was continuous, and I know I called in a maybe, fifty artillery strikes to maybe one air strike. So they were used very little with us, but if we needed 'em, we could call in the Air Force, and they'd send us a sortie in.

Mik: Did you have any contact with UN troops on the ground?

Howard: Well, we had Greeks and Turks—had a few of them around there—and British. There was a few Australians, but they were down away from them. We were mostly around close to the Greeks. Ah, some people didn't—some of the divisions didn't like some of these ah, different people, you know. If they got to like you, they'd want to stay with you. Of course, that was depending upon the UN command where they'd be sent. That was—I think it was the Greeks. It could be that one of them that used to be—when they went in to attack a position, they would always hypnotize themselves. They

would go in there, and they could get shot at, and they wouldn't even feel being shot at. They kept on going all the way up to the hill, and it was just something that ah, they had done. Just their way of fighting. But ah, normally that was a dangerous thing to do.

Mik: How did they hypnotize themselves?

Howard: I never did see 'em, but I'd seen hypnotism, and there were certain people that could hypnotize you real good—they could take a group and hypnotize you. That was one of their things that they were used to—

Mik: What's another of your favorite stories?

Howard: Well, I gotta think a little bit here—I ah, got a lot of good stories in here—I've got one story here, it's about three or four non-coms. They wanted to—they'd just gotten into this village. There happened to be some locals around and did see this Korea woman around there. Well, you know, they went in there, and they were going to visit her that night—so they went in there, and she had just had a baby. This lady, she got all excited, and one guy took his carbine and shot her and killed her. **[End of Tape WCKOR066]** *They all took off again—there wasn't too much done about them at that time ah, to command, but ah, when I left on rotation that same bunch went with me to the replacement center or back up to division headquarters. All the sudden, they disappeared someplace—I don't know what happened to 'em, but I have found out now that the guy that pulled the trigger and shot, he got twenty years. I believe the other ones probably was demoted and dishonorably discharged.*

Mik: *So it could be pretty rough there.*

Howard: *Yeah, I mean it's—you make it the way you are—things you should do and shouldn't do—survive.*

Mik: *Did you feel pretty close to the people that you worked with there?*

Howard: *With the troopers, yes, I was close to 'em. I was with a bunch of them, you know, but we were like in the liaison section. I was with about four or five guys. You get close.*

[Tape WCKOR067 begins here]

Mik: So we have a reference—

Howard: Reference spots—

Mik: So that you always look the right color. [laughs]

Howard: White.

Mik: But not too white—

Howard: I got a story about a guy got to be POW too.

Cameraguy: Okay, I'm rolling.

Mik: While you're thinking of it, what was that?

Howard: I'll tell you story about a guy that got to be a POW out of my outfit. We were in reserve. We all was cleaned up, and we went in reserve the 12th of May, 1951—on the 14th of May, 1951, I spotted this Jeep going out of the area, and here it was a Sergeant First Class Reynolds. He ah, he was sitting in the passengers seat, and he had a driver along—Private Davenport, out of Chicago. He was really dressed up and cleaned up, and he had nice clean clothes on and everything. I asked somebody along the line, "Now, where's he going all dressed up, all cleaned up like that?" Well, he's going for a ride, I found out it was his birthday that day—so he was just going to take a day off and take a ride down in the countryside. Well, evidently, what happened, he must of taken the wrong trail, and he ended up with a bunch of Chinese surrounding him. That day, he become a POW, and he spent the rest of the time up north in the prison camp. I have ah, the Jeep Driver, he was ah, he died up in the prison camp up in Korea. So it was one day that we should of been doing our job at the battle grounds there, and he would've been saved.

Mik: What did—did you feel safe enough to do that, to just go driving out like that?

Howard: Well, if you stayed in your own area, you knew where you were. But if you took the wrong road, then you would be picked because the Chinese, they would ah, they would come in there and watch you—they had their land, and we had our land. Well, he must've taken a wrong road and got captured.

Mik: What were the roads like?

Howard: All the roads were dirt, and I mentioned there was a lot a dust on 'em at times. Well, the engineers what they did, they run water trucks on the roads all the time. They dribbled water across the roads there, and it kept 'em moist all the time. Normally, they'd do that probably once a day or something like that. It would really help, and it kept the dust down, and it didn't create any dirt or mud or anything like that. It was a lot better then—that was the engineer's job. It was nice to see 'em coming up with that truck that sprinkled water on the ground. [laughs]

Mik: So tell me about that Radio Jeep—

Howard: Oh, yes. That's Headquarters Number Six, that was our liaison Jeep. Being Number Six, that meant there would be—it was the first section. Our call letters were 241242, and if I answered it, a lot of the times, I called myself 241-and-a-half cause I wasn't the boss, but at this time, it was my Jeep. So I was 241. The Jeep consisted of two radios. We had a radio there that we could set up, and we had pretty good range on that one. It was CW and voice—we could use it on either way. Then we had another one—it was FM Radio, and it had different frequencies on it so we could stop. We could talk to different places like headquarters at a different frequency, and the Air Force had a different frequency if we wanted to call in an air strike. We'd get on their frequency—we'd even listen to 'em—that was fun listening to 'em. We had about half a dozen frequencies that we could talk to different outfits.

Mik: What does CW stand for?

Howard: CW is continuous wave. It's a signal that's sent over on the radio and you break it—you break that wave on it, and you make up your own signal out of it like ah, SOS would be three-dits, two-dahs, and three-dits, which that was the signals on the letters. Course, I had to learn 'em from A to Z. Each one had got different dots and dashes in 'em.

Mik: And how is that different from a short wave radio?

Howard: Well, the short wave radio was mostly voice, where you just talk on it. Being on CW, there's a little security in that because there wasn't everybody that understood or could take CW and listen to it.

Mik: So you had to know Morse code to—

Howard: Yes, you had to use Morse code. The Jeep over there at the—it was an old World War II Jeep. Course, everything we had there was World War II equipment—we had very little at my time—when I was over there, we had very little new stuff that was modern, but we had all World War II Equipment. Um, that if you notice, we have a bar in front and a Jeep there that sticks up just above the windshield there, and it's got a hook on it. One of the favorite tricks by the enemy was to string a wire across the road—like a piano wire—and they'd string it across the road, and if you didn't have that bar on there, you would most likely end up with your—cut your head off on it. With that bar on it, that would normally snap the wire and cut it for you. It was a safety thing. Then you'd notice in the front, there's a bar or a bumper there that can be used as a tow bar if you wanted to tow the Jeep, or it got bad, you'd just take the bar down and hook it onto another jeep or a truck and you could tow it anywheres.

Mik: So did you enjoy driving the Jeep around there?

Howard: Well, yeah, the Jeep was real good. I remember one day I was driving the Jeep—that was before I got to become a Liaison Sergeant. I was Private for the officer in the Liaison Section. For some, it was a muddy day that day, and for some reason, we had to get off the road. It was sort of a ditch down there, and we had to get off the road. I think there was some tanks coming at us or something. When I got down there, my rear-axle busted—it broke. Well, all I could do is stop and put it in front wheel drive, and we were operating on front wheel drive. After a couple days, it was kinda nasty to get around there cause the front wheel drive didn't work too good. You was always stuck and all that stuff. We were in sort of a reserve then, and I asked my officer, I said, "Do you care if I fix that Jeep?" I says, "I think I can get an axle for it and put it in." Because I had some mechanics, mechanic work myself, and I could do mechanic work. He said, "Yes, you can do that." I wanted a radio. I went to the motor pool sergeant and asked him for an axle for it, and he dug one out for me. He gave me a wrench, and I went back there, and I fixed the Jeep up. And thereby, we didn't leave it at the motor pool. We had that Jeep right away. We didn't have to wait for it.

Mik: Were mines a big problem?

Howard: At one time, when my Jeep driver was killed, there was mines all over. There was after we had stayed for a while in one place, and the Chinese had time to lay 'em down. The reason I'm saying Chinese all the time is that we had very little contact with the North Korean Army. They were in some other part or behind the Chinese lines most of the time. But they were on the front lines. They were—I think the Chinese were more or less saving 'em for protecting 'em, but the Chinese is what we was mostly up against.

Mik: Did you ever get—how close did you get to the front line?

Howard: Well, I was kinda fortunate. I was never right up there in the front lines. I was always where the officers used to be, you know, like Headquarters Company or something like that or headquarters of the infantry. The officers, they never got too far up. The only officers that got up there was the squad leaders and stuff like that. They were right with the main fighters. Then there was one time there we—in February of 1951, the 2nd Infantry Division, 23rd Regiment was surrounded with several divisions of Chinese, and they were really in bad shape there, and we were sort of in reserve. Then we were—they wanted to form a task force to get in there and help the second division out. So they set up a task force. We'd call it Task Force Crumbess [sp?]. He was named after a full bird colonel from the 5th Regiment. I remember we were sent up there to give 'em artillery support, but we were all lined up in a spot there—I could just see it—we had tanks of all kinds down there. Some of 'em were really scary looking because they always painted some pictures

on their tanks, but I think we had these twenty tanks lined up on the road there. When they got ready to go in with the task force, a lot of the—in fact, the colonel, he rode one of the tanks in and the object was—there was a road block. It was sort of a gully in between two hills and that's where the Chinese were holding out. They was going to go through there with the task force. They started out at four o'clock in the afternoon. They started off with the task force, and the tankers blew the road block apart. They went through and they had—they did receive some small arms fires and all that stuff because I don't know if they knew what we were doing. But the tanks went through, and the whole task force by five o'clock, they were all in contact with the 23rd Regiment already. So it took about an hour to get through there. There was many Chinese that were killed in that operation. Of course, we had tragedy there too. We had a Philippine tank outfit in part of them twenty tanks that were there, and they were the big tanks—they got caught with their hatches up when they went through the road block, and the Chinese jumped on the tanks and threw hand grenades and stuff into the hatch. They destroyed about three tanks that way. Plus, the crew that was on there—I come back—they blew there maybe a day or two later, and I see em still sitting there. They just pushed the tanks off to one side, and uh, it wasn't the nicest sight to see. But that was part of the task force. They didn't have too many casualties otherwise, as far as getting through to the 23rd Infantry Regiment there, 2nd Division.

Mik: So what happened after you got back to the States?

Howard: When I got back to the States, course, I had a thirty day furlough, and after that, I reported back to Fort Riley, Kansas. They picked me to—I got into the headquarters there, and they put me into the communications section there. We was teaching OCS, field communications to the OCS candidates school that was there. I got the job of going out and teaching these field communications to the officer candidates. I had three other personnel plus myself to do that. I believe it was Camp Forsyth, Kansas, which is part of Fort Riley.

Mik: So you were training people who were on their way to Korea?

Howard: Yeah, I was training new officers. They were in there for—that was the OCS of Fort Riley. We just had one small part, but what we did, we just laid a wire on the ground and two telephones in between there. Then we added—shorted the wires out about halfway down, and the candidates who have to clear the line—it was simple one, but there was a lesson for 'em that, hey, there's a short down there, get it? And they had to spread it apart and make the telephones work. Then they go onto to the next unit or whatever they had to do.

Mik: So how do you short a line?

Howard: Well, what you did was you got bare wires. You'd crunch the insulation off the wires and then twist the two bare ones together, and that would short out the telephone. All they would have to do is find where we did this and spread 'em apart, go back and ring on the telephone and call their partner on the other side. "It's okay, guy, let's go!" [laughs] Then after that, I was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia to a school down there—it's communications chief school—I guess they just wanted to polish me up a little bit and make sure I knew what the school was, but I knew just about what the school was doing in the first place because I had already learned all that in Korea. But it was something nice to go to and things. When I finished the school in 1952, I got back in November, back to Fort Riley, and they called me in. They says, "Hey, you're supposed to [have] been discharged." I says, "Yeah, I know that." I tried to tell 'em that in Fort Benning, but they didn't listen to me. [laughs] What happened there, they gave me three choices, and they says, "You can extend for one more year." They says, "You can enlist for three more years, and if you do that, we're gonna send you to Germany." He says and—I said, "Give me my discharge." [laughs] I said goodbye and got out of there.

Mik: So you were out before the war ended?

Howard: Oh, yes. In fact, I didn't know what happened to my 1st Cal. Division till just a year or so ago—when I started contacting my friends around that had been there. I found out that at Christmas of 1951, the 1st Calvary Division was returned back to Japan. They stayed there. They were one of the first divisions pulled out of Korea. I just didn't follow 'em up when I left. I didn't think about nothing—actually, I didn't care about nothing. I just wanted to get out of there. It's just like I said, why don't people talk about this? I think we were too busy raising a family. We didn't have time to think about Korea at that time. But memories are coming back again.

Mik: Were many people thinking about Korea when you got home?

Howard: Well, not too many. It was just an everyday affair, the way it looked to me—and uh, just I say, "a forgotten war." When I was home, the Lions Club, they took me, brought me in for the evening. That was because of my Bronze Star that was in—that they had known about in my hometown. They was gonna—they wanted me to talk about it, and of course, I got a free dinner out of it.

Mik: Well, thank you.

Howard: Yep.

Mik: That wasn't so bad, was it?

Howard: No, no. [laughs]

[End of Interview]