

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DALE R. KING
5th RCT Artillery, Army, POW, Korean War
2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Madison, Wisconsin

OH
1009

OH
1009

King, Dale R., (1930-). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 3 videorecordings (ca. 80 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Dale King, an Oshkosh, Wisconsin native, discusses his service in the 555th Field Artillery Battalion during the Korean War and his experiences as a prisoner of war (POW). King touches on enlistment, basic training at Fort Breckenridge (Kentucky), auto-mechanic school at Fort Lee (Virginia), and assignment as a car company clerk at Fort Shafter (Hawaii). Given duty as a driver for the surgeon general, he talks about driving guests around the Island of Oahu and one memorable night when he danced with Shirley Temple. After tensions developed in Korea, he was reassigned to Schofield Barracks (Hawaii) as the battery clerk for Battery B of the 555th Field Artillery Battalion, in support of the 5th Regimental Combat Team. Shipped to Korea, he talks about being seasick and the tight perimeter at Pusan (Korea), where they landed. King talks about his duties as chief of a gun section working with fire control. He speaks of fighting their way to Taegu, near the 38th Parallel, where he developed a hernia. He describes getting treatment at a MASH unit, meeting someone he knew from a Boy Scout camp during his recovery in Japan, and hitchhiking back to his unit at the front. King details the battle during which he was captured: his unit paused to feed some infantrymen, was surrounded by Chinese, his gunner was killed by a mortar, King was wounded, and the front of his unit surrendered after several hours of combat while the rest retreated down a different road. Put in charge of the sick and injured despite being injured himself, he describes marching by night, not having clean water, and arrival at the “bean camp” at Pleasant Valley. King mentions interrogation, a group of prisoners who attempted escape but were recaptured, and seeing another group of prisoners get shot for overpowering their guards. He describes “daily education” where they would hear propaganda about communism and have to sing the Communist National Song; he states they changed the lyrics in English to be anti-communist and the guards never noticed. Transferred to Camp 1, King describes the limited food. Sent to the camp hospital for dysentery, he details getting put on a water-only diet and stealing someone else’s stool so he could be declared recovered enough for the “soft diet,” which had enough nutrients in it to survive on. Separated from the enlisted men along with the other sergeants, he talks about transfer to Camp 4 where they were interrogated more frequently. He says the interrogators often would not believe what the interviewees said, even if it was true, and a good way to rile up the interrogators was to explain how common it is for Americans to own their own cars. King reflects on escape attempts, saying none of them were successful mostly because it is hard to hide a Caucasian among Asians. He describes the lack of dental care and tells of a camp doctor who would knock out bad teeth with a mallet if it really became necessary. King recalls some prisoners with gangrene and frost bite getting their toes cut off. He tells of a small prisoner exchange and, soon afterwards, a supply depot that prisoners knew about being blown up by American planes. After the armistice was signed, he talks about being moved next to the 38th Parallel and finally receiving some goods from the Red Cross. King details the censorship of the mail, stating only about one fourth of his letters got through, and he recalls getting a letter from his

mother while he was sick that helped him decide to survive. He describes efforts to keep warm by sharing blankets with the fattest man in camp, passing the days with work details and card games, efforts to bathe, picking lice out of his clothes, learning some Chinese words, weight loss, clothing provided by the Chinese, and competition to get boots from dying men. King emphasizes the importance of humor for survival; he tells a funny story of a friend who got caught stealing a tomato, and he says his unit could hear a British unit of prisoners singing humorous ditties across the river, which lifted his spirits. He touches on the POWs' lack of control, and recalls trying to organize to protest sour rice. He describes finding figs on a work detail, saving up his sugar rations, and making a cake that he was unable to eat because of an ear ache. King states relationships with the guards was distant, but he recalls one act of kindness when a Chinese nurse gave him an egg. He describes being exchanged in Operation Big Switch: being interrogated by the Graves Registration Bureau for names of fellow prisoners, passing the Chinese and Koreans who had been prisoners of the Americans, buying a watch at a PX, and travel home to Wisconsin. He recalls having trouble getting into a hotel in San Francisco because he had no identification. King reports that adjusting to civilian life was not difficult for him.

Biographical Sketch:

King (b.1930) served in the Army from 1948-1953, assigned first to the 29th Car Company in Hawaii and later to the 555th Field Artillery Battalion in Korea. Taken as prisoner of war in April of 1951, he was exchanged on August 29th, 1953. King attended school at the University of Wisconsin—Madison and was a vice president of finance and administration for Cutler-Hammer, an electronics firm based in Milwaukee (Wisconsin). He currently resides in Colgate (Wisconsin).

Citation Note:

Cite as: Dale R. King, Interview, conducted September 1, 2004 at Studio C, Wisconsin Public Television, Madison, Wisconsin by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Korean War Stories, for Wisconsin Public Television.

Context Note:

Raw footage interview filmed by Wisconsin Public Television for its documentary series, "Wisconsin Korean War Stories." Original WPT videocassette numbers were WCKOR022, WCKOR023, and WCKOR024.

Related Materials Note:

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

Interviewed by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Public Television, September 1, 2004.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.

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

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

Mik: All set and rolling? Right, as I said we'll just start with when you first got into the military, which was pretty early on as far as Korea was concerned wasn't it?

Dale: That's correct. I enlisted in the service in November of 1948. I originally planned on going to college, but being a rather wild hare at the time and watching my brother study, who was in college, study diligently every night, I decided I would take a way out for a while. I reported to Fort Breckenridge, Kentucky in December, and after basic training was transferred to Fort Lee, Virginia, to go to 014 school, Auto-Mechanic School, because I had displayed some mechanical aptitude. And at the end of that period of time, I asked if I could go to Europe, I was a two-year enlistee. And they said, "No, but we can send you to Hawaii. We can't send you to Europe because your term is too short." So I very happily went to Oahu, and reported into Fort Shafter. Fort Shafter was more or less a service location, they handled the administrative details for a large part of the Pacific. And I was assigned initially to be the Car Company Battery Clerk, not the battery clerk, excuse me, the company clerk. And after a while, they decided that I was fit for duty driving the surgeon general. I had taken some roles of driving for people over there for a spell, and after this, was changed to being a driver--I had a good time. I drove around the island many, many times because every visitor to my employer, which was the surgeon general, called for a trip around the island. And, he, one night he had a party for some honored guests including Shirley Temple. And while all the drivers were out on the porch, she came out and asked each of us to dance with her. So that was kind of a high spot of my stay in Hawaii, was dancing with Shirley Temple. Not long after I became a driver, there started to be mumbles in Korea about problems. And after six months as a driver, I was asked to move to Schofield Barracks, the home of the 5th Regimental Combat Team. And all the drivers' jobs were replaced by civilians. And in Schofield Barracks I once again was asked to be a battery clerk in Battery B of the 555th Field Artillery Battalion, which supports the Infantry of the 5th Regimental Combat Team. I wasn't in place very long before we got transferred to Korea.

Mik: Now was—

Dale: By boat.

Mik: Was Schofield Barracks in Hawaii still?

Dale: Yes, Schofield Barracks is also on the island of Oahu, it's approximately twenty miles out of Honolulu. Fort Shafter's adjacent to Ho--to Honolulu. The--we got ready after we got told we had to go, we were ready and on the

seas in about five days. That includes every piece of apparatus we had. Took fourteen days to get to Korea, and, I was seasick most of the way, I'm subject to seasickness anyway, but they were kind of tight conditions there and I spent a good deal of time up on top trying to recover. Some people would bring me crackers once in awhile, but I didn't have much of a trip over there, that was enjoyable. As we approached Korea, you could tell we were approaching by the smell. It's the middle of summertime and it was rather pungent. We--we were supposed to land in a port just west of Pusan, but because the perimeter by that time had gotten very, very small, we couldn't land at this location which was called Misan, we had to go to Pusan. And from there it was only about forty or fifty miles to the front in any direction. It was an extremely tight perimeter. We stabilized the location of the front after a few weeks and we started pushing out because we were only fighting North Koreans and the American Army certainly had much more superior fighting ability than they did in terms of weaponry and in terms of the experience of the people. We had a lot of World War II veterans in our group. So we, we pushed out and moved on up over the next several months to Taegu, and we got close to the 38th Parallel. And, when we were close to the 38th Parallel, unfortunately, I popped a hernia and I had to go back to Japan for--after I popped the hernia I was sent back to a M*A*S*H unit and they did a repair job, rather crude, but they did a repair job, and then I was sent to Japan for approximately a month and a week for recovery. As soon as I arrived there, somebody come running up to me and saying, "Dale King from Oshkosh, Wisconsin." And I said, "Yes," and he introduced himself. He was a Boy Scout that had accompanied me on a mission to chop down a tree in one of the Boy Scout camps, and I wa--he was left-handed and I was right-handed and we chopped down that tree in no time flat. And we were also chastised for having done it, so we knew each other well, we were both trouble makers. But I knew, I knew right away, I said, "You're left-handed," 'cause I could always remember him chopping left-handed and my chopping right-handed. So he took good care of me and made sure, he told all the cooks, "If he wants anything any time of the day give him what he wants." So that was very nice. So, eventually I was put back on a ship and, I was supposed to land at Inchon at this time, but because of the Chinese entering into the fray, it was no longer safe to land in Inchon, so I once again had to go back to Pusan, and I landed in Pusan, and follow the very peculiar routes to get up to my unit. It was very difficult times because you hitch a ride whenever you could. I had the orders in my hand and I kept on showing them to people but there really was no organized way of getting back to the front. But I did eventually arrive back with my unit, and it looked a little bit different because it had had a lot of hard times, and we had lost a lot of people, and from early on we lost people because of mortars landing in command posts and what have you, and, but I was happy to be back there with them and, I met them just south of 38th Parallel and--after a short period of time, the Chinese started to drive to the South, and one of the areas that they hit hard at was the 24th Division which included the 5th

Regimental Combat Team at that time. They overran the forward observers, for the artillery, and--we were in position in supporting the 24th Division and the 5th RCT at that time. We were practically out of ammunition from firing so much to try to keep them at--the Chinese, at bay. Eventually, they said, "We're going to change our line of defense back a few miles because we are not holding here," so everybody was asked to retreat back as far as the field artillery, get on the trucks and we were going to move out, so we had a lot of field artillery trucks that were full of Army people, when we finally got a "Close Station, March Order." And our battery happened to be the one that was in the front of those leaving. Unfortunately, the commanding officer said, "These guys are starving, the infantry men, because it's been a couple days they haven't had any water or food, and so let's give 'em a meal and then we'll go on our way." During that time, Chinese went around behind us, and we were virtually in a trap. When we started driving out again, we didn't get very far down the road, perhaps a mile, when the first vehicle was knocked out by, we think it was a bazooka round that they had captured somewhere along the way. And, we could no longer move. And we blocked up everybody. There was a lot of mortar rounds coming down from the, from the, hillsides. All of us had manned our, our 105's again and were aiming at the hills. But if you know artillery, you know that it takes a while for the shells to arm themselves, they have to make so many rotations before they become live, and it was getting that it was so close, that they wouldn't explode, and in my gun section, we got a mortar round right between the trails of our weapon, our gun and killed my gunner, and severely wounded one other member of my group, and got me as well, with shrapnel in the back. And, the gun was no longer operable. So, myself and some others that were in sort of the same condition, went up to the front of the, very front of the convoy, where the first truck was hit. And went into a drainage ditch there and were firing at the Chinese crossing the road in front of us, and throwing hand-grenades. This went on for, quite a few hours and it was, by that time it was nightfall and, there was a lieutenant with us, who was a forward observer, and he was directing Marine Corsair planes to give us close air support. Unfortunately, one of 'em got too close and got him through two legs with .50 caliber slugs. So, that ended his directing, and they asked them to not, not to fire anymore. The, at that time it was about fourteen of us in a ditch, most of us wounded to various degrees. And, all the trucks were burning and the ones that had ammunition left were exploding. It was, it was like a big pyrotechnic display as, as all those trucks caught fire and blew up. Then about two o' clock in the morning--three o' clock in the morning, the Chinese formed the ring around us with Automatic Machine Guns and started closing in on us. And we all got up and were ready to fire at them, and lieutenant says, "Don't fire." That's the reason I'm here. So we were taken prisoners and put on a hillside that night. And I thought that virtually the whole, the whole 555th had been wiped out, and, as well as those soldiers. I did not know until last year that in fact they found a way out, another road. And then I called my old company commander, I

found out he was liv--my battery commander and found out he was living in Bend, Oregon. So I called. I was very happy about it. So anyway, we started our trek northward, as Prisoners of War. It was very grueling because, I was elected to be--by the Chinese, to be in charge of the wounded and sick group. Which meant that we're responsible, sick people and injured people were responsible for sick people and injured people, which is not a good combination. When we would stop, we'd travel by night, they never took us out during the day time 'cuz they didn't want the American airplanes to spot us, so it was always a night walk. We probably averaged 15 to 20 miles a night. And--the problem was getting decent water, most of us used our helmets and scooped up water from, a stream it looked like, was running out of a rice patty upstream, where we didn't, couldn't see. Causing a lot of dysentery. We also didn't get as much rations as the others who were able to get up there faster, the first ones in the camp seemed to get more food than the sick, and the injured. That was kind of funny but anyway. There was some people who dropped off along the way, that died along the way. It was hard to carry somebody who was, had been healthy and was full-sized and you're injured yourself, but, perhaps on the march to the first camp we probably lost five people out of a group of one hundred. And that was called--the mining camp or the bean camp, or Pleasant Valley, whichever you want to call it. But that is where the interrogation began. We lived in, in--school buildings, next to a large field where they, where they gave us daily education, and that lasted for perhaps a month and a half. There was one attempt at escape by some people from there, although it was fairly well guarded, they managed to tunnel their way out to get, try to head towards the water. They didn't make it and they got, they were brought back. Given punishment for it. Then another group was taken out of the camp and taken down close to the front lines and left there. They were told the Chinese would retreat so the American Army could recover them. Well, the Chinese retreated but the American Army never advanced. And so after 2 or 3 days, the Chinese sent some, sent some people down, they said, to give 'em some additional food. And the Americans, even though they were not in good shape, overpowered these guards who came down there and unfortunately for them they were caught again and they were brought back to camp and shot instantly, in front of us. Wasn't very pleasant. And--shortly after that we were back on the road again.

Mik: Dale, when you said that you received education while in the, what was that edu--daily education?

Dale: Educated, well if you read the Daily Worker you can just about hear it. That Capitalism is no good and the only way to go was to be a Communist, so everybody shares and shares alike and all that kind of stuff. It was endless, day-after-day they'd beat us over the head. And, they had a song as a, that I might recite at this point in time, when the end of the teaching session they would ask us to sing the International, the Communist National Song. And,

we had a person who was very clever, musically inclined, that gave us words that we would understand, so we provided our version which was: "Now take the red flag down from the pole and shove it up Joe Stalin's hole. The working class can kiss my ass I got the foreman's job at last." The Chinese guards smiled knowing that we had fulfilled our duty but not knowing what we had done. It was very good. Anyway we marched north from there to Camp One. It was a combination of train, trucks and marching, and Camp One is right up on the Yalu River, but the Southwesterly most of the camps. They were Turks, French and English and some other UN, maybe some Aussies there too. It was a camp of--it was quite large. It was probably as many as 800 people there. They had--our food was very limited. On the march and in this camp our food consisted mainly of sorghum and a little birdseed. We had very few vegetables. No meat. I became very ill in that camp and had to go to what they call the hospital. The hospital consisted of some Korean huts in a row. Because of the dysentery--when I checked in, there was 2 of us in a room. The gentleman next to me was probably even younger than I was--very young person. He wasn't very coherent. He was on his way out. In fact he only lived one day or two days at most before he died. They took off his hat and his head was all full of lice--masses of lice in his head. That's just a total, unsightly thing. Just cannot believe what he looked like. They hauled him out. Because when you're in that hospital for dysentery, they give you what's called "The Water Diet." Supposed to improve your condition by not having any solids. They boil up a couple of teaspoons of rice in a huge barrel and give it to you. There's virtually no nutrition available. Those who got better would go on to what's called a "Soft Diet," which is to just make it into a soupy thing so it wasn't bad. You got the nutrition. Well it was--I knew that I was gonna be going if I couldn't get off that diet. You're supposed to give a sample of your stool for them to look at to see whether or not you're improving enough. One day when I got up to the outdoor john which they had for the various rooms, there was a black soldier came out who was missing his arm and was all bandaged up. And I thought "Man, he must be here because of that arm." So I went and looked to see what his stool looked like. It was a nice stool. So I got 2 long sticks and I fished out his specimen and put it in my little pot in my room. I got put on the Soft Diet. That was a good deal. I survived. As I got better then eventually they sent me back to my unit. Shortly after that, the sergeants were broken away from the rest of the camp in order not to have any organizational structure within the camp. They figured the sergeants were interfering with the operations of their education. So we were sent to a camp, Northerly most of the camps. Camp Four in Wewan, Korea. At that camp, education was continued. The interrogation started to be a lot more than it was in the first camp. Asking about, "How big was your unit? What did you do in the unit? What do your relatives do?" And things like that. They'd ask what you had done when you were a civilian back home. And if you want to get 'em all riled up, tell 'em that you owned your own car. They would go off the wall to think that American people would have their own

car. Even people in the service, imagine that having your own car. Nobody in China had cars at that time, basically. So there was a lot of dissension between the interrogators and the interviewees. We could be factual and they'd still get mad at us because of the difference in what we had as Americans vs. what they had as Chinese soldiers. It was the truth but not well received. Anyway we had some organization within the camp. There were quite a few attempts to escape. None of them successful. It's hard as a white person and Caucasian to move around Orientals and not be seen. The only chance you had, and we had some good attempts, were to go at nighttime, steal food from the fields that you could, and run down roads and hope that you were headin' in the right direction. Knowing if there would be enough moonlight or stars you might be able to tell which way you were supposed to go. We had some guys get right up next to the coast. They hoped to steal a boat but they never made it. That was the best attempt. I was invited one time and I declined because I knew I wasn't physically in a condition that they were. There's a fellow from Green Bay who initiated the attempt. He did a good job, but he still came back to the camp and had to spend some time in the slammer. He was the same person who, unfortunately when he got home, after being in Korea over 2 years, that his wife had just given birth to a new baby. He went to Wood, Wisconsin for-- not Wood, excuse me. He went to what is now called the VA Medical Center in Milwaukee--and was being treated for alcoholism. But he'd come out once in a while. He'd drive out to my house, stop in and say hello to me. He was going downhill. I never heard from him after his last visit, whether he died or didn't die. But he led a tough life.

Anyway, after some period of time, maybe 3 or 4 months there, we got some inkling that there would be something good happening because they took all the very sickest people and had them exchanged for their prisoners who were sick and ill. One good thing about it was, right next to our camp they had a supply depot. Apparently one of the fellows that was let go was aware of it. It wasn't but a couple of days after this exchange before the ol' bombers all came in and just blew the heck out of it. The planes came in the middle of the day. The planes came over, waved their wings at us and slammed it. The next day the Chinese had a big meeting about how terrible this was. They mentioned how many dogs were killed, how many Chinese were killed and last of all how many Koreans were killed. They had no use for the Koreans. Even when they were down there defending, not the North Koreans, but Communism. The battles that took place in Korea were the first time that Communism was being stopped from expanding. They took Poland and Czechoslovakia and all other kinds of countries. But that's the first time we ever said, "No more." That was our purpose of being there. In about 5 months after that, we got notification that there was in fact an armistice signed and we would be going back home. It took about a month before we finally moved out to an encampment right next to the 38th Parallel. And there they set up some little tents. For the first time we got

something from the Red Cross. They gave us a shaving kit. It was kind of welcome. A little soap for a change, cause we had nothing for sanitation when we were in camp. There was no soap. You were pretty natural in those camps. The other thing that was missing is dental care. One of our fellows we called Doc got himself a little wooden mallet and some wooden pegs and would take out somebody's tooth when you couldn't handle it anymore. When you absolutely had to have something done. Everybody would gather around and watch Doc go to work and hit it one time and the guy'd get white, even sick and in time he'd pass out, but when he recovered hit it again and finally it would come out. Sometimes a little bit of jaw'd come out with it. But he took care of it. If you wanted it bad enough he would do it. There's a few people walkin' around with part of their jaw a little bit gnarled. It was not a pleasant adventure but the camaraderie between our people was great. As I say, I go to a meeting once a year now and, as my wife would tell you, "You guys are alike. You have a good sense of humor and you just let it run off your back." I think that's the way it was. It had to be that way, otherwise you wouldn't survive. If you say "Give Up," you were gone. **[End of Tape WCKOR022]**

- Mik: When you were released, now I've heard of Little Switch and Big Switch, was it—
- Dale: The very first switch was where the very sick and those that had difficulty of various sorts, medically, that they couldn't treat, were exchanged for some Chinese prisoners.
- Mik: And that's what was called Little Switch?
- Dale: Yes.
- Mik: And then was your release—
- Dale: It was in Big Switch. Yes.
- Mik: How many people were released at that time? Do you know?
- Dale: In Little Switch?
- Mik: In Big Switch.
- Dale: All of them. You want a number? Probably about 1,600--from all the camps.
- Mik: Do you know how many camps there were?
- Dale: Yes, there were one, two, three, four, five, six, seven--depends upon--now there's some that were set-up for special purposes. Then say around eight

camps, probably. They had some for those who were--that were collaborating and some that were so anti they pull them out. And they had a camp for sergeants, a camp for officers and they had two camps for enlisted men. They're all described in the book that you have there for your own interest if you want to look. They list them all and what they contained.

Mik: I was going to ask you if when you were in the camp if people continued to come in and if that gave you some awareness of how the war was going?

Dale: No. Once we left Camp One, they did take them into Camp One. Once we left there, there was no more knowledge about anything going on other than when we tried to assume from what way the Chinese were acting. And we knew they were acting a little funny before the Little Switch went on and we knew that something was happening before they told us that there was going to be a total exchange of prisoners. But there's nothing in anybody's mail that could be told us cause they looked at everything. Before you could receive mail they went over it totally. One story about mail that I want to bring up that was kinda important to me is--I received my letter, my first letter from my mother when she thought I was alive that was a result of contacting people that were in my battery that writing to them at the battery location in Korea, even though they weren't there anymore because almost--I was ready to rotate back when I was taken prisoner. I only had another couple of weeks to go. So all these people that rotated back to the United States but the letters that she sent--everybody whose name I wrote on a back of a photo that she had, she wrote to. And one of 'em said that he had heard that I was in prison camp. Now this could have happened because there were people that were left behind because they didn't want to take care of them all, that might know or have seen me or might have heard about it. But she wrote a letter to me which indicated she knew I was alive. And that was when I was in a hospital and wasn't caring so much whether I lived or died. Quite frankly, at that time was really down. But I looked at this letter and said, "Oh hell, I don't want to die on her twice." So--because when she got the Missing in Action letter I knew that she had problems. Then to hear about again that I was dead, so that's when I perked up a little bit and decided maybe I'll keep on going. So it was--and another one of the interesting elements that you remember is that, when we were marched north, after I was prisoner, although I wasn't a party to putting up the sign, there was a sign that said, "You're crossing the 38th Parallel courtesy of the 5th Regimental Combat Team." Well, I was actually taken prisoner south of the— never got back up to the 38th because they had been pushed back. But when we were marched up to camp, the sign was still there. So, I didn't think that was much of a courtesy of my unit to put that sign up. That's one of those things that--it's funny.

Mik: When they censored the mail, would they just block stuff out or--

- Dale: No. If you didn't rate a satisfactory, there would be no mail sent.
- Mik: Or received.
- Dale: Or received. I only--my mother only received 3 letters from me as long as I was prisoner. And part of that was my resentment against what you have to put on the outside of the envelope, which was the Chinese Committee for World Peace and Against American Aggression. And they wouldn't send the letter if you didn't say something nice about what was going on in the camp. Unless you were happy and complimentary to them, no letter. So you had to be very careful, you could go to the edge in your letters but not go over otherwise it wouldn't go.
- Mik: How many letters did you write that she didn't receive?
- Dale: I probably wrote about one a month and there was--the window for writing letters was probably about a year and two months--three months. So maybe one-fourth went through. I wrote one to a girl too, that made my mother unhappy. That one went through. She wasn't happy when she heard she--a female friend of mine had received one. But, I was still young then.
- Mik: She wasn't happy because she didn't get it?
- Dale: Yes, she thought that all letters that you could get out should go to the parents. And in retrospect, I agree.
- Mik: So I would think you must have gotten pretty close to the people you were in camp with?
- Dale: Very close. The closest I got to anybody is one of the people that belongs to my WEWAN group that meets. Jesse Snyder. He's from Pennsylvania. It was very cold there. We had pot bellied stove in our place and we had to go out and get the wood for it and so we didn't keep it too hot cause you had to haul more wood if you could keep it very hot. But it was extremely cold there. It got down to forty below up there. Jesse was the hairiest person in there and probably had the most flesh left on him. So I huddled up next to him and he kept me warm and he's my buddy to this day as a result of the fact that he was the nice, fattest guy in there and uh--we had one blanket, each got one blanket. Put one blanket underneath 2 people and one blanket on top and then you throw all your clothes on top of the blanket, try to keep warm. Then you cuddle too. A little bit to keep warm--because it was pretty cold.
- Mik: How did you pass the days?

Dale: With details, playing bridge, playing chess, going to classes. We did everything. Tryin' to be clean by going down to--once in a while they let us go down to the stream, but not in the wintertime. You try to get clean. They let us go down to a stream, without soap and try to bathe. Pick the lice out of your clothes so they wouldn't expand to more lice. Watch Doc at work knockin' out teeth. It was, I would say it was mainly card games and work details, and some education. The same education that you were talking about--yes, but it continued on into camp four even though it wasn't as intense any more then. We had one fellow by the name of Pachowski, also from Pennsylvania, who virtually took everybody's American money and script money away from them by playing poker. He was a tremendous poker player and he took everybody's money. Well, one day he was assigned to the duty of unloading a boat that was bringing in rations for the guards. And uh--he spotted a basket of tomatoes and he looked around and he put one in his pocket. We never had a tomato over there. The lieutenant that did see him and started yelling at him and pointing to his pocket. This I heard from the other people that were on the work detail and Patch says, "Okay, Dick Tracy, you caught me." I mean, that's the kind of humor that was existed over there. And he had to really have a life.

Mik: Were there interpreters?

Dale: Yes, but mainly they were used for interrogation. And when they gave a lesson to us, out on the parade ground, it was given in Chinese and then the interpreter would say what the commander had said. So if nothing else, we learned a fair amount of Chinese because you hear it in English, I mean in Chinese and then you'd hear it in English. So we knew what the few words were by the time we got done. And we knew what the swear words were in Chinese so we could use that with the guards. So we did. There was also one guy that I wanna remember, and that was a Marine sergeant who was a prisoner in WWII as well. Named ah--there's a guard standing at parade rest. Chinese. And the Sergeant made himself a corncob pipe and he just got through smoking and he walked up to the guard and tapped it on the end of the barrel to clean it off. And there was a lot of cursing but the guard didn't do anything. I'd say that was rather ballsy. But we had some ballsy people.

Mik: Were there any other UN forces in the camp with you?

Dale: In our camp but not in our particular unit. There were three companies. One was all American, one was the British and the French and the Turks and some other UN forces and there was a Black unit that was smaller. It had some whites in it but mainly black. And the blacks were on another side of the river from our camp. The British, by the way, had the best sense of humor and was saying dirty diddies every night. You could hear it over on our side. That was always a pleasure to hear them. [sings] "Mrs. Murphy, she

was there so was Rev. Kits, now Mrs. Kits jumping off the mantle piece and landing on her—” [chuckles]. That was one I remember. That's for you guys.

Mik: I can understand that you would need that sense of humor and laissez faire. You had to just accept, you had no control.

Dale: That's right. That's the bad part, you have no control. Most people, like they have a little control over something but we didn't have much. We'd get organized to do some things we thought for our good, like when the rice was getting sour because they kept on putting back the unused portion. This was later on we got rice. We didn't get rice for the first year at all. The rice would get sour and we'd say okay, today we're all going to take a big portion and bury it. To get rid of it. Sure as all hell we'd get caught and then we'd do without any rations for a day because of doing that. Just couldn't make any progress, you know what I mean? It just seemed as it was never ending.

Mik: Were you all in pretty bad physical shape?

Dale: We all had lost a lot of weight. The most that I know that I was, because we did weigh some things when we were on--there was a scale available to us in kilos in the quartermaster area of their soldiers. When they'd receive goods they'd weigh 'em to see how much they got and distribute it out. And I weighed 124 lbs. the lowest I know of. There's some that went down to 100 pounds--one of us, maybe close to 190 before that. And after I got out of the service I went up to 240. Now I'm down to 180 again.

Mik: What kind of work details were you on?

Dale: Mainly it was gathering wood. There's one long one of building a stone wall between the two companies. They made us erect a stone wall and taking stones out of the streambed and carrying 'em up. But wood detail was very necessary and--because that's where we got our heat from in the wintertime. Usually up a pretty steep hill, though. It was not closely guarded and once and a while we could steal a few peppers from the Koreans. I found a fig tree and I saved enough figs up on these trips to make a fig cake out of various ingredients that the cook gave me. And cooking oil, he gave me a little cooking oil and all that. And that day I got a earache, such a bad earache I could not eat it. I had to give it away to all the people that were in the house with me. I couldn't eat it. That really made me feel bad. I'd saved up sugar rations for a week. We got 2 teaspoons of sugar a week. Yeah, 2 teaspoons and two teaspoons of tobacco. Now I changed my tobacco ration for sugar and I saved this all up for this wonderful cake and then I just was unable to even move.

Mik: What was your relation with the cook? Was the cook Chinese?

Dale: No, they're Americans.

Mik: Oh, I see.

Dale: In fact, we just met him at a meeting, our cook two years ago. Still around.

Mik: What was your relationship like with the guards?

Dale: Distant. The lieutenant that was in charge of our company, we called him Louie, couldn't speak any English. He was sort of everybody's joke. So he was useful. We poked fun at him whether he knew it or not lots of times and Louie was Louie. So there was no close relationship. There was one Chinese nurse at one time brought me an egg when I was in the hospital, which I will always remember one act of kindness in two years and four months and four days wasn't a lot, but it was a lot to me at that time.

Mik: Were your wounds cared for when you first captured?

Dale: Only by a medic that was also captured.

Mik: So basically you guys had to take care of yourselves?

Dale: Yea. I was shot through the arm here and I had quite a few shrapnel wounds. The shrapnel wounds were not as bad as the arm, actually. The pieces kept on coming out one at a time over the next ten--fifteen years and I don't think there's any left now. Used to see 'em in every X-ray or somebody would say, "What have you got on your back?" But they come out and look like little sharp points and they come out. That wasn't so serious. I think they went through my gunner first and then got into me. That's why I wasn't hurt as bad as he--well, he was killed.

Mik: And you just happened to be facing away from—

Dale: Yeah. He was behind me and between me and where the mortar round landed.

Mik: I was wondering that--do you remember that point in time when that was all happening?

Dale: Oh yeah, that's very vivid. Had it not happened, I'd either have been killed or wouldn't have gone to the front of the line and taken prisoner of war. I would have found out that they were moving out, in fact, because I was back far enough so I would have heard. Cause there's only those of us up in front that were actually taken prisoner. In fact, all the rest of 'em moved out and found a road up there. There's a section, one book that I read, that I do read, called--about the 5th Regimental Combat Team which explains what

happened. And that Colonel Stuart, our battalion commander, remembered that there had been a road built there.

Dale: Everybody took off over that--awful lot of them that were wounded as well. The 5th Regimental Combat Team had more combat time than any division or unit ever in Korea. They had a supporting--we supported the 8th Army and the 25th Division, 24th Division. We were all over. But we had the most combat time. It was intense.

Mik: So the people that your mother contacted when she found out that you were probably taken prisoner? Had they already separated from the unit or were they part of those that got out?

Dale: They were part of those that--well, I think it had to be somebody that was left behind as they did with those three guys that overpowered the guards. They did have, I heard since that time, in the fact that, that recruit that replaced me, was one of those. He was down in Florida and who I visited with--and whom my mother had written to. And now I just found out this last week that she had written to my mother as well--so each have letters from the other one's mother. Because he was let go before me and my mother wrote a letter to her seeing how happy she was to hear that he had been set free. But he was only a prisoner for a couple of days and he was set free. All kinds of connections can cause somebody to know that somebody may be in prison camp. We were interrogated when we were let go by the Graves and--Graves Registration Bureau and so on, to find out who was in the camp, and who died. 'Cause they wanted to know who had made it there and whose remains might be in Korea. They spent a lot of time with us asking for names. There are some people who took it upon themselves to write down as many names--every time somebody died, write it down. Some of those got through without the Chinese taking away from them.

Mik: I suppose they try to account for everybody.

Dale: Yeah, but there's still almost, I guess it's 1,800 is the number that are still missing from Korea. And that was about the number of prisoners too, altogether. That's a lot of bodies laying around.

Mik: Yeah, it sure is. What happened, tell me about after Big Switch?

Dale: After we crossed the Big Switch, well, we went back on the *Charles Black*. We were met, first of all, we were met on the truck by a full colonel who welcomed us back. But just before that was a sight that you could not believe. Chinese going north and Koreans, they were prisoners of the Americans, which there were a lot more of those than there were of us--were disrobing and throwing the boots and the suits that they got from us and all their clothes off and throwing them in the road. So we were crossing and

they were throwing their clothes off and we were coming down and they were well taken care of. They were just proving that they still think their system is better than us and tried to antagonize. It was kind of funny in a way. Cause we know better. Anyway, we got down there, got off and they gave us a meal and the Red Cross gave us some additional supplies. There was a little, bitty PX so we could get cigarettes if we wanted 'em or anything like that. I guess the Red Cross actually gave us cigarettes. But they had the cameras and things like that and watches that you could buy. Gave us instant four dollars a day for rations missed. So we had cash in our pocket. I bought a camera and a watch there cause they took away my Rolex that I had, which I had no business buying but I did have, had bought one. Then we just stayed there for awhile til they had arranged--til a boat came in, *General Black*, which took us back and they transported us by helicopter to another encampment at Inchon. Then they bussed us from the encampment to the boat. And my parents met me in San Francisco and my younger brother was along with them and my uncle lived in San Francisco, so we got together with him. Saw another uncle down in San Diego. Then we drove back to Wisconsin.

Mik: Just happy as could be, I'm sure.

Dale: Yeah, kinda happy, yeah. One of the things that happened, the first night we were there, my uncle took us to top of the Mark Hotel in San Francisco. And they wouldn't let me in because I didn't have any identification. That I was old enough. Eventually after being talked to they decided it was okay. But I had no proof of who I was or how old I was. I had the uniform that was given to me. After we--there was an encampment before we got on the boat we all got new Army clothes. It was crazy.

Mik: That is crazy. After all you'd been through and still young enough that they thought there was a question.

Dale: Yeah. But that's life.

Mik: Did your mother ever talk about the roller coaster she had been on?

Dale: I knew about it, yeah. My relatives told me what she went through. Yep, I didn't give you all the telegrams, actually, there's a whole bunch of 'em from people after they found out I was freed.

Mik: All the telegrams from people to your parents?

Dale: Mmm Hmm.

Mik: Congratulating them and telling them how wonderful it was?

Dale: Yep.

Mik: Well that's--how wonderful.

Dale: Yeah. So then, actually, before I ever was taken prisoner, I was supposed to go to Officer Candidate School when I got back. The mayor I talked to in Bend, Washington, had recommended me to Officer Candidate School. And after I got back I decided that wasn't for me so I enrolled to go to school at Madison. That's where I went to school.

Mik: And now you were ready to study every night.

Dale: Well, not quite.

Mik: Why does she laugh?

Dale: She knows me. Leslie has the advantage of being a second wife. She didn't have to put up with me in my wild days. My first wife passed away and we'd been married for five years. I had a very good career path. Worked for a company in Milwaukee, Cutler-Hammer, and eventually became vice president of finance and administration for all the overseas activities. That put me traveling sixty percent of the time overseas for twelve years.

Mik: Back to Korea ever?

Dale: No, we didn't have anyplace, we had Japan was one of ours, and Singapore and Australia, a couple of plants, and New Zealand and India.

Mik: So is that a paper company?

Dale: No, electronics firm. Electrical and electronics firm. Cutler-Hammer was acquired by Eaton Corporation eventually. That's when I left. But I spent twenty-two--twenty three years with 'em.

Mik: Speaking of jobs, I was wondering what your job was as a sergeant in the battery.

Dale: I was the chief of the gun section. What happened was--one of the forward observers was killed, which is a very dangerous job when you're sitting up with the infantry with a radio pack and binoculars out there lookin' for targets. A gun chief who was very, very good was promoted to being an officer and forward observer. Cause those were all lieutenants, forward observers. And you have a radio man with 'em. So I took his place because they had nobody that was already in the gun section that they thought was able to do it.

- Mik: And what did that entail?
- Dale: What did it entail? Well, I was in charge of the crew, telling them what to do. And zeroing in of the gun when--are you familiar with how guns are zeroed in? The howitzers?
- Mik: Whether I am or not you should tell me.
- Dale: Okay. There's a--in these batteries there is what's called a fire control center. And they set up with equipment aligning all the howitzers in one line and so you know what your base point is. That's 180 degrees and that is--they tell you--how many degrees to move in one direction or another and what elevation. And also, what size charge you should use. Because you have five different loads of powder in bags and if it's only a short distance, it'll go further so you get it down to a #1 charge. Only have the one bag left. So you get commands from the fire direction center as to what your azimuth should be, elevation should be and what your load should be. And then they tell you when to fire. I think the idea that somebody should be somewhat mathematical and know something about how this works quickly. And I had been around enough in there to be capable of doing that
- Mik: But not really designed for being under attack at close range.
- Dale: Well, everybody was under attack. I mean you got the--well, for instance, the guy who replaced me is the guy I told you that his mother corresponded with mine. He was taken prisoner but let go. He was taken prisoner so he had two successive battery clerks who you think should be free and clear, both of them taken prisoner--one current, and one past.
- Mik: I was referring to when you were overrun, I can just imagine trying to train those big guns on--
- Dale: You can't. That's the problem and then there was my eyesight. It wasn't directions. You look and see where you can see a mortar round coming up. Those little explosions take place--waiting for that. If you're lucky it will arm and blow. But it was too close range, that's the problem.
- Mik: How disheartening to shoot and then have nothing happen.
- Dale: Yeah. But you have to remember that if one of those little things pops out of the end of your gun, you'd don't want it to go off either. Because they're kind of vicious. I guess there's various kinds. Most of ours were set **[END OF TAPE WCKOR023]** so, not because of just rotations, but they're sending radar signals down to the ground and when it--.proximity fuse, as they call it, they know when they are at a distance which you get the maximum damage by blowing maybe 10 feet off the ground or 20 feet off the ground. Cover

bigger area and so most of them are proximity ones as well. So it was interesting.

Mik: None of that.

Dale: Zero--yep.

Mik: I think that it's sometimes uncomfortable for—we have that in World War Two, you could see that people sort of squirmed when they would tell you this, but in the winter you had one blanket and I've heard that before—one underneath and one on top.

Mik: You didn't talk about the numbers.

Dale: Well, it's in my sport coat dear, if you want to get out my little list for more accurate information.

Mik: Well what was she asking you about your clothes that you forgot.

Dale: As far as the clothes, we were required to give up our American clothes. They supplied us clothes. Summertime was a thin blue uniform, top and a bottom, with tennis shoes. Unfortunately the tennis shoes that they had were not large enough for my feet. I had to cut out the ends in order to accommodate my feet. In the wintertime they had padded shoes to keep warm, padded boots and padded uniform. We got two uniforms. They did allow us to keep our own boots, but they required us to wear tennis shoes going to school and the likes of that. Boots were highly sought after. When somebody was ready to die, there'd be a horde of people around saying, "Did you give your boots away yet?" That's kind of pathetic but that was being done. Because their boots were not very good for climbing up in the hills and collecting wood and so on. So they let us use our boots but when we went to class or something, then it was tennis shoes or their padded boots. They didn't want us to be a mixture.

Mik: When you say it's kind of pathetic, it's only kind of pathetic out of context.

Dale: Yes.

Mik: When you're out of that, it's such a different world that you're living in and surviving that, there are just different rules that you play by.

Dale: Yes. [Wife talks to him] "Tell them about the time your toes froze." Oh yeah there were a lot of those--the people who were up at the--close to the Yalu River, that had to retreat when the Chinese came in, they had the highest death rate and the highest wounded rate and very high percentage of lost toes. You could tell those people who had been up there because the

nurse would be coming in and heading for them and cutting off toes. They had gangrene toes. Lots of 'em. I mean we had a lot of people that didn't have any toes. Wasn't a doctor it was the nurse. Comes in with a scissors and cut them off. Put the bandage on 'em and that was it. Not pleasant, but true.

Mik: So there were people from all different areas of Korea that ended up in your camp?

Dale: In the first camp. Camp 1.

Mik: Oh, that's in the first camp.

Dale: Yeah. Not the second camp. There was a--it's probably a collecting camp. Camp 1 and Camp 2 were the two collection camps up there. Later on it sorted out, anything that looked like organization they would send to the sergeants' camp or the officers' camp. We had officers with us at first too but they took them out first and then the sergeants were taken out.

Mik: When you were first headed for Korea, were you aware of what was going on and did you face that with some dread in your first trip over?

Dale: No. I was too sick. I was seasick. No, we didn't have any dread at all because we were in the field artillery. We're not supposed to have combat. Supposed to be standing back five miles and shooting our guns. Didn't turn out to be that way in the end because we had couple incidents where they had gotten so close that we received mortar fire and in one case they ambushed. For which we paid dearly. So it's--I don't think that any of us were really scared as you think of it. I think we faced the fact that you could die but I don't think there was really much sign of weakness in people at that time. They might say, "What the hell should we do now?" That kind of a thing. But I don't know if any say, "Is there some way we can get out of this?" Nothing like that. I think they're, first of all, there's a lot of people from WWII and enlistees. And I think that that mixture was a better mixture than perhaps they had in places where there were a lot of drafted people who weren't prepared for this. We were all pretty seasoned outfits that went over there. There's a few exceptions. There's one Marine contingent that was Reserve that went over that hadn't been trained yet. And they were trained onboard the boat. I think they felt that they were probably not ready for battle yet. But I think the rest of us had all been out in the field enough that we felt ready. Felt confident.

Mik: I understand that when you are in a firefight and under duress, really, you're so busy then as well, just doin' what you can do.

Dale: Mad at yourself because you brought hand grenades and you shoulda brought a rifle or something else. I guess I was really disappointed when the

lieutenant said, "Don't shoot." But in a way, in my heart, I probably said, "Hmm, probably isn't all bad." But it turned out okay.

Mik: Oh, I would think there would be some ambivalence you're all prepared to [unintelligible] do what you can do.

Dale: Zero chance, the sheer numbers of the Chinese that were there. It was just flabbergasting.

Mik: And how many of you were taken prisoner at that time did you say about--

Dale: About fourteen. Yeah, there were others scattered around, we gathered up a group that was probably as high as forty by the time we started marching.[Interviewer talks to wife] In the Korean War there were 103,000 wounded, 36,000 killed, 7,140 POWs, 8,100 missing. The highest rate of casualties of any time except the Civil War. Tells you something about how mean it was.

Mik: I was telling these guys a little earlier that in three years we lost close to as many soldiers as Vietnam over all those years.

Dale: And the 5th RCT had this one incident where only three killed, fifty wounded and forty-nine missing in action. That's before they found out, oh no, excuse me, what am I doing here? Oh this was the total of infantry and the first number they got, infantry--twenty killed, 289 wounded, 243 missing in action. 555th the Field Artillery, three killed, fifty wounded, and forty-nine missing in action.

Mik: After that when you were captured?

Dale: Yeah.

Mik: Forty-nine—three killed. Are those the numbers from the report or are--

Dale: Yeah, there's one, the Raleigh Report, he did research for it and directly from Armed Forces. You wanna keep these books and look at 'em. His book in particular. I've got 2 copies of that one. If you want.

Mik: As I said, what I'm going to do--I can scan those covers and then I'll obtain those.

Dale: If you can't get 'em, let me know.

Mik: I'll let you know.

Dale: Because I did give some copies to the people up in Wausau as well.

Mik: Before we finish, do you think you were a different person when you got back?

Dale: Am I a different person? Not much. When I got back I started playing every Sunday afternoon, I started playing Hearts with the boys that were in the service also, my old high school classmates and shooting pool again. But I did go to school. I had a different sense of the value of a good education. So I went to the University of Wisconsin and I feel very happy that I did. It was, I had good employment opportunities and I did well and I'm not suffering and still alive.

Mik: Did you feel like you had any trouble fitting in when you first got back?

Dale: No. Not at all.

Mik: You're pretty adaptable guy. That's why you made it through.

Dale: It was helpful to be living right back with my parents and having my same friends. That was probably helpful. And once I got to school it was--I was housed in private quarters on Langdon St. in the building that no longer exists. The 2nd floor, one of the rooms held five students. One of those students called me up last year. I have a place in Florida--condo. He called me up and said, "Are you the Dale King that lived on Langdon St. in private housing in 1954?" I said, "Yes." It was one of my roommates. Called me up and came over to visit us. He's the best provider of jokes on the internet that I have. He's good for about five a day.

Mik: Five college guys in a room probably wasn't too much different from the camp except you could come and go as you pleased. [laughing] Well thank you so much.

Dale: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]