

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with

WILLIAM G. SIEBERT

Military Intelligence, Army, post-World War II;
Instructor and Prison Guard, Army, Korean War.

2003

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Siebert, William G., (d. 2004). Oral History Interview, 2003.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

William Siebert, an Oconto, Wisconsin native, discusses his post-World War II service with the 77th Ordnance Depot on Guam and his Korean War service with the 96th Quartermaster Battalion, the Career Record Analysis Branch, and as a guard at the Koje-do prisoner of war camp. Siebert comments on growing up during World War II: the death of local soldiers, collecting materials for the war effort, and the effects of gas rationing on dating. He talks about his ancestor's civil war service, enlisting in the Army, and basic training at Fort Knox (Kentucky). Assigned to the message center with the 77th Ordnance Depot in Guam, Siebert tells of transporting classified documents and the mail. He recalls being in a typhoon while on duty in a Quonset hut and the work of his unit on Saipan to destroy ammunition that had been stockpiled for the invasion of Japan during World War II. Transferred to the 96th Quartermaster Battalion, Siebert discusses intelligence briefings and his awareness of tensions with China over Formosa. He characterizes Sammy Black, a West Point graduate he served with. After a thirty-day leave at home, Siebert talks about assignment to the Career Record Analysis Branch at the Pentagon pulling officers' records. He reports he tried to volunteer for overseas duty but was ineligible because he'd recently served in Guam, and he states his roommate, who was sent overseas, was killed in Korea. Siebert speaks of graduating from armored school at Fort Knox, assignment to Fort Monmouth (New Jersey) training new recruits, and doing summer training of ROTC and West Point students at Camp Leonard Wood (Missouri). He comments on the roles in a tank crew, having a troublesome student, and continuing to request transfer to Korea. Sent to Korea in 1951, Siebert talks about being stationed at Koje-do prisoner of war camp and details the riots between communist and non-communist prisoners. He recalls knowing that his cousin was a prisoner of war at the time. Siebert describes the Korean prisoners' being in control of the island, having a United States general taken hostage for two days, and the battle to retake control of the island. Siebert mentions trading with a Navy ship for lettuce and having his equipment destroyed in a fire. Sent back to the States in 1952, he discusses his homecoming, having problems with being overly aggressive, and feeling cowardly for being discharged while the war was ongoing. Siebert mentions serving as commander at the American Legion post in Oconto (Wisconsin) and at the VFW post in Sturgeon Bay.

Biographical Sketch:

Siebert served in the Army from 1948 to 1952. He eventually settled in Ozaukee (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Laurie Arendt as part of the Ozaukee County Veterans Book Project, 2003

Transcribed by Katy Marty, 2010

Edited by Joan Bruggink, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Interview Transcript:

- Laurie: —And we are in Grafton, Wisconsin on February 4th, 2003. The interviewer, myself, is Laurie Arendt. Please state your address.
- Siebert: We're at 1004 Beech Street, Apartment 316, Berkshire Building
- Laurie: Okay, and your hometown, where were you—
- Siebert: My hometown is Oconto, Wisconsin
- Laurie: Okay, good, because they will catalog this by our project and your hometown.
- Siebert: Mm-hmm.
- Laurie: So my first question for you is what branch of the service were you in?
- Siebert: I was in the Army.
- Laurie: And what years did you serve?
- Siebert: I was in the Army from 1948-1952.
- Laurie: Okay. And what was your MOS [Military Occupational Specialty]?
- Siebert: My MOS was clerk.
- Laurie: Clerk. All right. Were you drafted or did you—
- Siebert: Oh no, I enlisted.
- Laurie: Why did you enlist?
- Siebert: Because we were the children that came up during World War II.
- Laurie: Mm-hmm.
- Siebert: And I always thought—it's kind of corny today, but I thought we owed this country something. That was one of the main things I enlisted for. But I didn't enlist; the way it happened, the way the war ended up, I thought we were going to put three years in and we were satisfied.
- Laurie: Now you said that you were the children that came up through World War II; do you have any memories of World War II?
- Siebert: Oh, absolutely.

Laurie: What do you remember about it?

Siebert: Oh, so many of our guys got killed in Oconto, you could see the death things, and a lot of the fellows would be graduating—my cousin, in fact. The day they graduated from high school, the next day they're drafted in the Army. They were needing bodies so bad in 1945. We used to collect milkweeds for life preservers. We'd collect rubber, tin cans, go out and find iron.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: The only thing wrong was if you had a girlfriend, you didn't have any car, so you mainly went with the farm girls [laughs] because their father had bigger allotments of gas. [both laugh] It's the truth though, you know.

Laurie: That's good. Okay, and you mentioned before I turned the tape on, you have stuff from your great grandfather?

Siebert: Yes.

Laurie: Tell me about that.

Siebert: You can go to the archives, see, and Bob Borig[?], my friend again in Sturgeon Bay, Korean veteran, worked for the government for years; he knew all about this.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: So I knew my great grandfather—great, great, great—had marched with Sherman to the sea. So we checked all the records and there he was.

Laurie: Okay, and what was his name?

Siebert: Lenhard, his last name was Lenhard.

Laurie: L-e-n-h-a-r-d?

Siebert: H-a-r-d, yeah, it's German.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: He was seventeen when he went—he, he was, had a farmer deferred, so the farmer could stay on the farm and he got, I don't know, so many, a couple hundred dollars or somethin' to go in.

Laurie: Oh, okay.

Siebert: Yeah, the man was just amazing. He settled back in Door county, the black diphtheria showed up, wiped out his wife and five kids.

Laurie: Wow.

Siebert: So a lot of these farms were [run] by maybe one woman or one man.

Laurie: Mm-hmm.

Siebert: So apparently he married this other woman over by Luxemburg and apparently they didn't get along because they got a divorce. I've got the papers at home, right from the court. [both laugh] My aunts always say, "You know, his second wife fell in the well and drowned." Bull, it was a divorce. [laughs]

Laurie: [laughs] Okay.

Siebert: So then he, after that he married my grandmother—it would be my great, great grandmother—from Brussels.

Laurie: Oh, okay.

Siebert: They moved around and settled up over at the Oconto area and they had four daughters and she died probably in the '30s and he married another older woman.

Laurie: Oh, my.

Siebert: Oh yeah, four marriages. He was a dude. [both laugh] I think he died in 1937, but I contacted the fellow that takes care of the cemetery in Peshtigo.

Laurie: Oh, okay.

Siebert: "Oh God, yeah," he says, "Peter, we got Peter's monument. We got a five foot monument up there because he was the last Civil War veteran that died in Marinette county."

Laurie: Oh, wow.

Siebert: Yeah, yeah.

Laurie: Okay, good. Now was your father a veteran?

Siebert: No.

Laurie: Or your grandfather or—

Siebert: No.

Laurie: So it kind of skipped?

Siebert: Yeah, on my Siebert side. Lenhard would be on my mother's side

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: And no, there wasn't—when I think back, there weren't any veterans that I can remember.

Laurie: Okay. Good. I always try to ask about that too, because I have no clue—well, my family immigrated, emigrated in the late 1800s—

Siebert: Mm-hmm.

Laurie: —but for someone my age it's—we don't know that stuff.

Siebert: Mm, yeah.

Laurie: Okay, good. When you enlisted, did you have any expectations at all about the military?

Siebert: Yeah, I was pretty, I was pretty hot to trot in the military.

Laurie: Really?

Siebert: From the time I was a junior in high school, I was going to join the military and I knew that.

Laurie: Okay. Why did you pick the Army?

Siebert: Because they were so damn tight on people; we couldn't get in the Navy or the Air Force. That's why. [laughs]

Laurie: You didn't want to be a Marine?

Siebert: The guy that joined—it was so bad we were called recruits; you weren't even a private. Recruits. And then they come out with those little stupid—the stripes were about that wide, I'm not kidding you. A corporal then would be like a buck sergeant today.

Laurie: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Siebert: He would make a PFC, which would be like a corporal. We wouldn't sew the things on, it looked like somebody spilled mustard or something on the sleeve, but oh, it was so bad. [both laugh]

Laurie: Okay, good.

Siebert: But yeah, the fella that joined with me, Jerry Beekman, stayed in the Army and retired as a full colonel in the regular Army.

Laurie: Okay, how do you spell his name?

Siebert: Beekman, Jerry Beekman. B-e-e-k-m-a-n. He was wounded in Korea and then went back to OCS [Officer Candidate School] and he had flown aircraft—when we were younger he used to fly a lot. And he made helicopter pilot and he really made it. Quite a unique person.

Laurie: And he's from your hometown?

Siebert: Yeah, yeah.

Laurie: Terrific.

Siebert: We joined together. But we were—that first morning, I'll never forget, we were laying upstairs and it's so beastly hot at Fort Knox. All we got is a pair of shorts and I say, "Jerry, what in the hell did we do?"

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: And the next morning we were on KP. And all of the sudden this bug went across the floor and I said, "What is that?" "It's a cockroach." First time I ever saw a cockroach. [laughs]

Laurie: Ahh, that's good.

Siebert: Yeah, yeah.

Laurie: Now when you went in, did you test to become a clerk, or was that sort of an automatic—

Siebert: Well, you had different qualities. My cousin, that was my older cousin, advised me when he was in the Army, World War II, he said, "Whatever you do, take a damn typing class because you never know what you'll run into." So I followed his advice and I said, "Well, I don't plan on ending in a war. I think I'll take a clerk thing." And that's how all the things opened up on Guam and that.

Laurie: So did you take a typing class or did you fudge your way through?

Siebert: Yeah, oh yeah. No, no; in high school I took a typing class, sure.

Laurie: Because—did you read the first book at all?

Siebert: Yeah.

Laurie: There's a man in there name Paul Tuitus who in high school got a negative typing speed because he had so many errors.

Siebert: Really? [laughs]

Laurie: And he ended up being a clerk.

Siebert: [laughs] Yeah, that's about it.

Laurie: And he said that he actually, when he went to college, he had to cheat to pass typing. He knew that they did typing tests in rotation so he stole one, typed it and then waited for the rotation to come up and then he'd turn that one in.

Siebert: No.

Laurie: And he's the commander of the Port post.

Siebert: Oh, God. [laughs]

Laurie: So now, okay you went in, in '48. At that time were you guys aware of the conflict simmering in Korea?

Siebert: No, no, it was mainly China. China was trying to come in to take over Formosa.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: I'll tell ya about a little story about that when we get to Guam.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: Yeah, but we were aware of it and also aware of how Europe was. You didn't know which way that thing was gonna go. You know, I always said that they should have kicked Harry Truman in the butt and the Senate for cutting the military budget the way they did. We were down to nothing.

Laurie: Good. Sometimes I have to catch up.

Siebert: Mm-hmm. You got the *Gone With the Wind* tonight.

Laurie: Oh, is that what they're watching?

Siebert: They're watching *Gone With the Wind*.

Laurie: Because it's kind of nice out.

Siebert: Yeah. There's that lady right there. Look around. That's her husband I told you about that's giving—and that poor little dog is just lost. That's not nice. Sorry to interrupt.

Laurie: No, that's fine. I don't want to spend a whole lot of time on basic training because everybody goes through it.

Siebert: Yeah.

Laurie: Was it what you expected? Was it harder, was it—

Siebert: Oh yeah. It was, it was—we had eight weeks then. Eight weeks, and there was a—the thing I enjoyed mostly was firing an M1 in the villages. The targets would pop up. I love that; I'd knock 'em off like crazy. You know, most of those kids, we lived in the woods. We hunted, you know. And ah—no, it wasn't that bad, except KP

Laurie: Okay. Good. So were you a hunter as a teenager?

Siebert: Oh yeah. Most of us guys up there would hunt, you know. You had a .22 by the time you were twelve.

Laurie: Oh sure.

Siebert: And by fourteen you got a single shot shotgun.

Laurie: Well, I don't know if you read my introduction, but my great uncle who's still alive, he lives in Dorchester. And one of the stories he told me, which I wish I had a tape recording of—actually he told my husband and I just happened to be in the room, because they're both Army guys. He was over in the Battle of the Bulge and he had a shotgun and apparently you weren't supposed to have a shotgun or they upgraded to rifles at that point and he wouldn't turn his shotgun in. He said, "No, I'm comfortable with—I'm from Wisconsin, I'm a deer hunter. I'm—no." Well, General so and so, you know, came walking down the line, you know, and said, "Private, is that a rifle, or is that a shotgun?" And he did all the stuff and he proceeded to explain that, you know, he had been deer hunting since he was four and he was much more comfortable and a better shot with his shotgun. General kind of looked at him and said, "Well, carry on then." And he kept right on going. And he kept his shotgun through the whole—

Siebert: I never heard that.

Laurie: Yeah.

Siebert: Everybody was brought up with the M1 Garand, you know.

Laurie: No, somehow he got a shotgun. And oh, he saw a lot.

Siebert: We used to have—in tanks we used to have that .45 burp gun, you hadda put the cover up. It was a stamp piece of weapon.

Laurie: Oh wow.

Siebert: You couldn't hit nothing with it. [Laurie laughs] But if your tank was hit—you know, when you go down below a tank there's a trap there, to get under there. And you'd go out and you'd fire. It had .45 slugs in it, but you couldn't hit a damn thing with it. [both laugh] Sure it was all stamped out of metal. Yeah. Burp gun. Mm-hmm.

Laurie: Okay. So at the end of basic training—would that still be in '48, or 1949?

Siebert: '48.

Laurie: Where were you sent?

Siebert: I was sent to Guam.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: And I was very fortunate. I was in the Headquarters Detachment of the 77th Ordnance Depot.

Laurie: Did you know anything about Guam before you went?

Siebert: Not a word. Nothing. Nothing. [laughs]

Laurie: Okay. And what did you do in that detachment? You were a clerk, but—

Siebert: Where I was, I was very fortunate. I got put in the message center. After I was there a little while I was made classified messenger. I would go to the main headquarters and get all the secret information and bring it back to Colonel Grubb.

Laurie: How do you spell Colonel Grubb's name?

Siebert: G-r-u-b-b.

Laurie: Okay. Okay.

Siebert: If we stop for a minute I'll tell you about this guy. He— [pause in tape]

Laurie: Now when you were a classified messenger, the messages that you would deliver, were they encoded, were they decoded?

Siebert: They were decoded, yeah.

Laurie: Did you ever read them or was it just a matter of you taking them from A to B and—

Siebert: No, no, because you had a paper they were slid in, you know, and this little string that goes back and forth and no, you never, you never took a peek at any of that stuff.

Laurie: Okay. Good. Did you ever want to?

Siebert: No, because—

Laurie: That was serious?

Siebert: You're in the service and everything got the stockade. You just don't want to be in that thing. [Laurie laughs] I mean, it's bad. No. No.

Laurie: Okay. How often did you—was it once a day?

Siebert: Every day I went twice a day.

Laurie: Twice a day. Did you travel by foot, by Jeep?

Siebert: Jeep. There I am, an eighteen-year-old private, got my own Jeep. [laughs] No KP, no guard duty.

Laurie: You had that pretty good.

Siebert: I had it made. Yeah. I also carried, I also took care of the mail for the 77th. I also went and got the mail.

Laurie: Okay. All right. Was that your only job at that point, or did your job duties change while you were there?

Siebert: After a while—I gotta tell you about the ordnance first before we go on to where I was transferred.

Laurie: Sure.

- Siebert: I told you that story about Colonel Grubb?
- Laurie: You need to tell me that a little more.
- Siebert: Okay, this is so good. With my duties as messenger we had warnings like forty-eight hours, twenty-four hours, twelve hours, eight hours, four hours, and on those different times you had assignments. You go check these guys, and go check that guy and make sure everything's ____[?]. So I and Ray Goodberlet, which ended up as a POW in Korea and won a bronze star there, he and I were in the Quonset hut with Colonel Grubb and Captain May, and these huge Quonsets had big cables over the tops to hold them down.
- Laurie: Mm-hmm.
- Siebert: So the wind started rising and it's gettin' a hundred and twenty, a hundred and twenty-five, hundred and thirty, hundred thirty-five, and all of the sudden this Quonset started moving a little bit. And Captain May looked around and he said to Colonel Grubb, "I think we should evacuate, Colonel." And Grubb says, "Where in the world are we gonna evacuate to?" [both laugh]
- Laurie: Good. What did you end up doing?
- Siebert: What's that? We stayed right there.
- Laurie: Stayed right there.
- Siebert: Oh, yeah. You couldn't—and then ah, our outfit, our ordnance outfit was the outfit that went over to Saipan and blew up all that ammo from World War II.
- Laurie: Oh, really?
- Siebert: See, they'd stored a lot for the invasion of Japan, and the first time one of our captains and a master sergeant went over. You know from the rust—all of a sudden "boom, boom", you hear something in the jungle. The mains[?] are blowin' up. And they get in the middle of this damn ammo depot and the stuff starts goin' off. [laughs] So they hadda get into this Jeep, see.
- Laurie: Okay, good. How long did you stay with the 77th Ordnance before you were transferred? Do you remember?
- Siebert: I was there about fourteen months with that, thirteen months probably with that ordnance deal. Yeah.
- Laurie: Did you apply for the transfer?
- Siebert: No, no. Just out of the night we were transferred, four of us.

Laurie: Tell me what the name of that one was.

Siebert: The name of the outfit was the 96th Quartermaster Battalion.

Laurie: And how many people were in your battalion?

Siebert: There was thirteen of us. [Laurie laughs] Ken Tolemen, my dear friend, my dear, dear friend, went with me and he said, “Where the hell is the 96th?” Because, you know, Guam is like twenty-some miles long.

Laurie: It’s not that big.

Siebert: And it’s cut in half because the natives live on the south end. We couldn’t figure where—so we get there and oh my god, we’re in intelligence.

Laurie: All right. Can you tell me what you did?

Siebert: Yeah.

Laurie: Can you tell me what you did? Didn’t do a whole lot?

Siebert: We did little spying things and we would write up reports of what they thought was gonna happen in the Pacific.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: But the time that really shook me up was we would go over to the Officers Club, the colonel and I, and put the charts up and they would describe everything. The last time I can remember he said, “Siebert, get the Jeep.” We went over there and he would put the charts up and I would stand in the background, of course, being a PFC. He says, “Well, here’s the latest communiqué from the emperor in Tokyo,” referring to MacArthur. He says, he said [laughs], “If the Chinese invade even the islands off of Formosa, we are going to attack China.” [laughs] And I looked around and I thought where in the world is he gonna get the troops?

Laurie: Ah ha.

Siebert: Yeah. I was on the very last ship that left Guam before the war started.

Laurie: Wow. Is that because you were part of this battalion or—

Siebert: No, time element. Time element. Yeah.

Laurie: Okay.

- Siebert: I was supposed to leave two months earlier, and I guess they kind of figured I'd better stay with the colonel for two more months so—
- Laurie: Did you find it—did you feel privileged or was it interesting to know this stuff?
- Siebert: Oh yes, oh yes.
- Laurie: You were nineteen?
- Siebert: I'm nineteen years old, you know.
- Laurie: You were privy to stuff that—
- Siebert: I was privy to stuff yes, yeah. And oh, God, we had a second lieutenant that just came out of West Point, Sammy Black. I'll *never* forget Sammy Black, the nicest kid, and the colonel would say, "Lieutenant Black, "and Sammy would snap right out of his chair, you know. So one day he says, "I'm paymaster today, okay?" He says, "You still got your .45?" I said, "Yeah." So you gotta stand next to him with a .45 on as if the guys are gonna steal the money
- Laurie: Going to charge you, yeah.
- Siebert: [laughs] So I often wonder what happened to Sammy Black. West Point, ya know, good kid.
- Laurie: The first man I interviewed for the second book talked about how they get guys from West Point that have to come out in the field for so many months as part of their schooling.
- Siebert: That's what I did. [laughs]
- Laurie: And he said, you know, we just can't stand them, they're like teenagers who know nothing about the military and military life. He said the last one we got we taped to a cot in our motor pool and we left him there.
- Siebert: [laughs] Oh. [laughs]
- Laurie: Okay. How long were you with this battalion in Guam? Do you remember?
- Siebert: Oh, let's see, from—probably about four months, probably about four months, yeah.
- Laurie: Okay. And then what happened when you left Guam?
- Siebert: I left Guam and I was given a thirty day leave and then I went to the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

Laurie: Oh wow. Did you go home on your leave?

Siebert: Oh, yeah. Thirty days, yeah.

Laurie: What was it like coming home at that point?

Siebert: Oh, fantastic. Well, the girl that I was supposed to be with, she had got pregnant already. So you know—and then I made up my mind I'll never get serious about a girl as long as I'm in the service because we didn't know what was gonna happen, you know. But, yeah, I had a lot of fun. Make your own fun. But I couldn't—I had a—after two years you get programmed to the Army. And my dear grandmothers, I couldn't talk to them because they would talk such idiot things about third cousins, brothers, uncles; I don't give a damn about that.

Laurie: Yeah, oh yeah.

Siebert: But it's true.

Laurie: My husband went through that. When we were dating—we were high school sweethearts and then he went in the Army because he thought he'd flunked out of college. So while he was in the Army I was in college, and he would come home and his relatives would talk about the most inane things to him.

Siebert: You've seen that then.

Laurie: You could see it on his face that he didn't want to be rude, you know. Who the hell cares about this? It's like they were trying to fill up the space and they didn't know what to talk about, so they decided to do that.

Siebert: Then they talk too much.

Laurie: Yeah. You could just see he was back in Korea.

Siebert: Good lord, somebody else got the same thing.

Laurie: So you went to the Pentagon? Why'd you go to the Pentagon?

Siebert: I was transferred to the Pentagon.

Laurie: Wow.

Siebert: I went to work for CRAB, Career Record Analysis Branch.

Laurie: Okay, CRAB.

- Siebert: Career Record Analysis Branch.
- Laurie: And what was that?
- Siebert: Well, we were taking the officers' records and seeing who should get promoted and we would go through who had been a good boy and bad boy and then we'd grade 'em according—you know, generals, colonels, and things like that.
- Laurie: What rank were you at this point?
- Siebert: I was still a PFC but I made corporal, oh, two months later, which would be like a buck sergeant.
- Laurie: Did you find this interesting, or was it dull? Was it monotonous?
- Siebert: Well, it was interesting for the fact that I had access to these officer records.
- Laurie: Okay.
- Siebert: I've actually looked into Audie Murphy's records. Did you ever hear of Audie Murphy?
- Laurie: No.
- Siebert: The man was the most decorated man in World War II. He had—every medal the Army had to give he got. Yeah, it's—see, the war had started right after I got there.
- Laurie: Okay. At the Pentagon?
- Siebert: At the Pentagon.
- Laurie: Okay.
- Siebert: And some of these guys, they say, "Oh my God, it must be terrible overseas." I said, "No, it's worse in the States. So if I had to go overseas, I'm gonna do something." I was so disgusted with a lot of these guys. Four of us came from Guam were into the Pentagon. So we all got together and went and saw our sergeant major, one of these old guys, you know, that's in charge of the unit and says, "We want to go overseas. The Second Division is just about getting ready to go back to Korea and we want back with our old friends." And he says, "You guys ain't going nowhere." He said, "You just came back; you're not eligible."
- Laurie: Okay.
- Siebert: Well, they had the first draft out of the headquarters company.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: Thirteen guys. My roommate, nicest guy you ever met, World War II, Brooklyn, two kids.

Laurie: He went.

Siebert: One month, fall over, dead. Thirteenth one, we went up to Walter Reed to see him. He had both legs cut off at the knees. Ahhh, that was so hard because I liked this guy so much, you know. Christ, he's got kids and yeah, so—

Laurie: Wow.

Siebert: So finally, after a lot of begging and stuff like that, a friend of mine got his commission back then, was CIC [Counter Intelligence Corps] in Japan and then became a staff sergeant. But he got his commission back. He was going back to Fort Knox and he said, "Put in for school." So I put in and I got it, so I went back to armored school.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: At Camp Smokey, they call it. Fort Knox was Camp Smokey.

Laurie: Why do they call it that?

Siebert: Because they use soft coal. And it's just terrible. Do you know what a butt can is?

Laurie: Uh-uh.

Siebert: In the post and the barracks they have 'em.

Laurie: Oh, when you walk in?

Siebert: You put the cigarettes in? There'd be ice in there in the morning.

Laurie: Oh.

Siebert: Oh yeah, really. [laughs] So graduated out of armored school, and when I'm gettin' my diploma the general says, "Where you want to go, corporal?" And I says, "Well, I've been asking for Korea." "Well, we'll see what we can do." The damn orders come up; I go to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

Laurie: Okay. That's not Korea.

Siebert: No, that's the Army.

Laurie: So why'd you want to go to armored school?

Siebert: Because I like tanks, the tanks. Like the tanks.

Laurie: You weren't nervous about being in a tank?

Siebert: No, no, no. They had the 26s then. Them 26—see, they had a .75 millimeter, that's the big thing that sticks out the end.

Laurie: Ah ha.

Siebert: And they were shootin' them things at the Russian tanks, the P-34s and they were bouncin' right off them. Then they switched them to 90-millimeters and then they really start knocking the P-34s off. So I get to Monmouth and pretty soon—we're sittin' in the barracks, waitin' for orders, and these two MPs show up. "Siebert, come with us."

Laurie: What'd you do?

Siebert: What did I do now? They take me into this building and I see "atomic." This captain is sitting back there and he said, "We'd like you to work for us." I said, "What is it?" "It's high frequency radio stuff." And I said, "Tell ya what. I just came through armored school. You've got a signal school where guys have gone a year to school." And he said, "Aren't you interested?" and I said, "I don't think I'm qualified."

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: Well boy, from that day on my name was mud in the Army, you know. So I went out to Camp Wood and trained ROTC for the summer and also the West Point guys.

Laurie: You trained them?

Siebert: Yeah. On signals.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: Yeah, trained them.

Laurie: I have a question about your tank training, though. How many guys were in the tank?

Siebert: In an M-26 you had five guys.

- Laurie: Is it like a crew for an airplane? Did you have specific jobs? Tell me a little bit about that.
- Siebert: Oh, yeah. You've got a driver, then you've got a tank commander, then you've got a gunner and you've got a loader and you've got a radio man, sometimes four.
- Laurie: Did you cross train?
- Siebert: You could actually do it because they got levers [unintelligible] tank, sixty miles an hour. But anyway, this commander would sit up and he'd hit the shoulders on the driver, which way he wanted him to go.
- Laurie: Okay. Okay.
- Siebert: And then the loader, you couldn't be left handed because you'd have to pick the shell up, slide her in, and get your hands out of the way for the recoil.
- Laurie: Ah ha. Otherwise you wouldn't have hands anymore.
- Siebert: No more hands, yeah.
- Laurie: What job or jobs did you do?
- Siebert: I was mainly on the .30 caliber machine gun.
- Laurie: Okay, so you were the gunner?
- Siebert: Yeah.
- Laurie: I think tanks are just fascinating because I'm kind of claustrophobic when it comes to that sort of thing.
- Siebert: See, we were—our basic was—we were in the 32nd Medium Tank Battalion in basic, so we started off with this.
- Laurie: Okay.
- Siebert: And we'd see these different—the biggest thing I ever saw was—who's the prime minister of Britain?
- Laurie: Churchill.
- Siebert: Churchill, Churchill Tank. So we'd bring that thing over to the States 'cause that was the big place for tanks.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: Oh, and they'd just churn down the road, you know.

Laurie: Okay, now that summer you trained the ROTC and the West Point guys. Did you like that?

Siebert: I didn't mind the West Point boys, they were good. I liked those guys, but I started giving clothes out one day and I said to the kids, "What size pants you wear?" "I don't know; my mother buys all my clothes." Oh god, we're in trouble. So here at the end of training I had a lot of problems with one kid. He says to me, he says, "Corporal, if we ever get to Korea and you're in my outfit, I'm gonna be all over you." And I said, "Sonny, if you don't shape up, when you go to Korea somebody's gonna shoot you right in the back of the head." [laughs]

Laurie: Yeah. [laughs]

Siebert: It was frustrating.

Laurie: Okay, so after that summer, did you continue doing that or did you not?

Siebert: No, no. Then, then the neurotic lieutenant colonel of the post asked me where I wanted to go and I said, "Well, where I always wanted to go: Korea."

Laurie: They keep asking you that; they're not listening.

Siebert: They're not listening. But he listened. I said, "I want to go to the Korea where the real Army is."

Laurie: Oh-oh.

Siebert: Takes three days to ship out of a unit: it, it took me eight hours. They were moving me. [laughs]

Laurie: Wow. You were trouble.

Siebert: I was trouble. I was trouble.

Laurie: So was that about 1950?

Siebert: '51, the fall of '51.

Laurie: Okay. How was fighting at that point in Korea?

Siebert: Very bad, very bad.

- Laurie: And you still wanted to go?
- Siebert: Well, you know, when you're thinking—I was twenty-five then, but it's a family. Nobody can understand what—when my friend come over to see me in Sturgeon Bay after fifty years, my wife said, "How do you know you'll like him?"
- Laurie: There's no question.
- Siebert: There was no question. No question. Yeah, like I said, I was really super RA Army. I mean, I was getting my hair cut—every week I'd get a haircut. It's laughable now.
- Laurie: My husband used to do that. I remember him telling me I spend so many dollars a month on haircuts. "You what? Why?" "I've gotta keep my—" Oh, he had all these terms for it.
- Siebert: You see how I've got mine now? I'm going back to nature.
- Laurie: My dad—he's in the book, but he can't stand his hair long.
- Siebert: Your dad's in the book? Really? [brief interruption in tape]
- Laurie: All right.
- Siebert: We finally got to Seattle. Before that my—**[End of Side 1, Tape 1]**—where they have a lot of water for all these people. And they would go up there and start fires and all that. So we'd be up in the boonies at night gettin' these guys out of there. As soon as I would get a call that something had happened, I would get a call and call Pusan and tell the operator I'm taking over the communications. And then I would call the MPs because anybody up there at night that moves is dead. And so this went on until this one time about maybe in February. And I think it says in one of those papers, civilian intern[?] or something. Oh, I know what it is; the noncommunists and the communists got together and the big fight started.
- Laurie: Okay.
- Siebert: So the first time the 27th Wolfhound Regiment—
- Laurie: 27th what?
- Siebert: Wolfhound. Wolfhound Regiment—wonderful outfit of the 25th Division—came down and helped us because we didn't have enough people, and of course, in the riots—I mean, they were starting to come over the walls and everything. You'd hold off as long as you could and then you'd start shooting. The second time the riots got bigger and we, in fact, had tanks come in from the 702nd Tank Battalion, the 2nd Division. That was bad. That was bad. That was bad. I think that's the one

when we lost one of our guys—you probably see it in the paper in there somewhere—and thirteen were wounded.

Laurie: So when these riots were going on, was it chaotic for you soldiers?

Siebert: Oh yeah. See, the thing was, we had—the figures moved between a hundred-seventy and a hundred-ninety thousand prisoners.

Laurie: Oh wow.

Siebert: If we knew what we knew after we left—a guy wrote me, the prisoners made their own stockades. When they finally got into these things and started takin' 'em—they could pull it right out of the ground, the concrete was that poor. [laughs] Yeah. So it was—yeah, you know, and we had a Quad .50, Quad halftrack sitting between us and the compounds, and I was started figuring, boy, I'm going to choogie[?] like crazy right out to that bay. I'm getting' me a boat somewhere. [laughs] Yeah, a lot of, a lot of guys didn't think we'd ever get off of that thing. They more or less ran the damn island, you know.

Laurie: Did you ever have a moment—this is something that always fascinates me. Most of the people I interviewed for the first book are from Wisconsin, are from small towns. Did you ever have a “What the hell am I doing here?” kind of moment? Because you came from a small Wisconsin town and you're in the midst of chaos and the war.

Siebert: It goes back to the brotherhood again.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: It goes back to the brotherhood. I got a cousin that's a POW and I know what they're doing to him.

Laurie: At that time did you know he was a POW?

Siebert: Yeah, yeah.

Laurie: Did you know where he was at all?

Siebert: No, not where he was, no. Not where he was, but I knew he was a POW.

Laurie: Now when he was a POW, did they allow—I know they were barbarians, but did they allow any contact? Did they provide a list of, you know, we have these serial numbers?

Siebert: A lot of guys weren't listed until they came out. They didn't even know they were alive.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: But yeah, I think Arnold, I think Arnie wrote about two letters. I think he wrote home [pause] guy says _____. This is about like four days to go before I go home.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: This corporal in the Marine—uh, MPs called me up one day and he says, “We’re going home, Bill.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “The president has just knocked the Truman year from twelve months to ten months; we’re goin’ home.”

Laurie: Oh.

Siebert: Get ready for this now. The next thing we hear the general is captive.

Laurie: Oh.

Siebert: *Our* general. [laughs]

Laurie: You’re not going home.

Siebert: The POWs wanted to talk to him. So this—no, I’m not gonna say it—but he walked—.

Laurie: Oh, you can say it.

Siebert: He walked over by the gates and they came behind him and pushed him into the compound. So here we are with a standoff. We got everybody out there with guns. So two days later his friend come in, another brigadier general, and wrote to the Korean POWs that they would do so and so and so and so, got the other general out. Then the other general says, “We’re renegeing on this agreement.” Well, the Army found out about these two dudes. Broke ‘em both down to lieutenant colonels. Kicked their butts in the States. And the day before I was supposed to go home, we got a little short guy, major general, Second Division, and he said, “This is enough of this bullshit; these guys are prisoners.”

Laurie: Yeah.

Siebert: Went up in the hills and put huge spotlights up that would reflect off the clouds and put water, lights on. Tanks came in, we followed the tanks in. We had flamethrowers, anything you can think of, went right straight through their buildings. And in fact, it’s so strange because a friend of mine took something off of TV and it shows our last battle.

Laurie: Really?

Siebert: Yeah, yeah, it's on TV. And he straightened it out. Well thank god, the next morning, he said, "You guys can go home now." I was so glad. I was so glad. Yeah, so glad.

Laurie: Okay. So from there—was that 1952? How long until you separated and got home and—

Siebert: We went real fast. We were only in Pusan one day and then they took us to Sasebo, Japan and then we got deloused and we got the showers of disinfectant. And then they really got me mad. [laughs] Nice little fatigue cap; I had this thing all my Army days.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: They said, "We've got to take all your clothes." I said, "The cap's staying." "Nope, you can't go home with anything." [laughs] I wanted that cap, you know. We were only there about two days and we were on the ship and then we were in San Francisco probably a day and we were put on trains for Camp McCoy. It was great; we had a car all by ourself and we had a young lieutenant with us and he said, "I don't care what you guys do, but when you go up with the civilians to eat, for godsakes put a shirt or some shoes on." [laughs] Yeah, then we get to Camp McCoy on Friday. "We haven't got time to process you guys," this young second lieutenant says. "We ain't got time; you guys'll have to wait 'til Monday." "No," so we got him in a corner. [Laurie laughs] We were discharged that Saturday afternoon.

Laurie: Oh wow.

Siebert: Yes. Oh, I had a lot of problems. I had a lot of problems when I got home. I was very, very aggressive; you couldn't say two words to me. I got into more damn fights.

Laurie: Really?

Siebert: Yeah, yeah. Well you know, you leave and you think you're a coward because you're leavin' guys over there. The war is still goin' on, you know. And then my other cousin was in for how long? For two more months.

Laurie: The cousin that was a POW?

Siebert: No, no, the other cousin. He was in the transportation corp. No Arnie, Arnold, my one that was a POW, didn't come home 'til—let's see, we were married in September of '50. He came home in October of '53.

Laurie: Oh wow.

Siebert: So he was one month short of three years in a prisoner of war camp.

Laurie: I actually have a POW who is going to be in the second book.

Siebert: Really?

Laurie: I have two in the first book and one—

Siebert: Yeah, I saw that. Did you see that guy with the skeletons?

Laurie: Mr. Dunmore.

Siebert: Oh, my god.

Laurie: You should see him now. He's kind of overweight, kind of healthy. For what he's gone through he's one of the nicest. He's almost—he's very quiet, but he's kind of jovial. He has a very good sense of humor.

Siebert: I don't think I'd have the guts to go through what these guys went through. I went to a reunion with my cousin down in Tennessee. They look at the nameplate: visitor. "Siebert—are you that Siebert?" "No, I'm not." But I gotta tell you a story. When we were in Koje-Do, LSTs came in.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: And we'd always trade with the Navy.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: So three of us guys went up to the chief's galley, and the guy said, "Now if you want anything to eat we got steaks, whatever you want." And we said, "You got any lettuce?" [both laugh] "Yeah." "We ain't had no greens in a long time."

Laurie: And you crave that when you haven't got that.

Siebert: Yes, no lettuce, greens, no vegetables.

Laurie: Because we've gone on vacations, like when I was in high school my dad went to Florida with the high school band; it was fast food the whole way

Siebert: Sure.

Laurie: And the whole way back we didn't have no money so we'd eat at McDonalds, then I got home. My mom said, "What you want?" "I just want a salad."

Siebert: Salad. We went down to that Korean memorial they made down in the middle of Wisconsin.

Laurie: The High Ground or whatever it's called?

Siebert: Yeah. It's in the middle of Wisconsin.

Laurie: Neillsville.

Siebert: Yeah. So this guy's sitting in front of me has this LST jacket on. And I said to him, "Did you guys ever go to Koje-Do?" "Yeah." "Do you remember three guys?" "Oh god," he says, "you aren't one of them guys?" It was his ship. He said they laughed for so long about these three Army guys going on board eatin' lettuce.

Laurie: That's good. When you were in Korea did you have any leave time?

Siebert: Oh, no.

Laurie: Nothing, you were just—that's very intense.

Siebert: See, when we got—we got all our equipment burnt up a few days before Christmas.

Laurie: Because of the riots?

Siebert: I think it was planted by the POWs right across the street from us. All our food, all our clothing, and so we went over there and I was doin' the watch, takin' messages and things like that. And I got my kids making coffee, my Korean kids, making it as hot or as strong as you can.

Laurie: Sure.

Siebert: And I'd ship 'em over and give to the guys some coffee. So General Jim VanCleave[?] came in, big Jim.

Laurie: Okay.

Siebert: He says, "How long you been on duty?" I said, "I don't know." I'm trying to think it over. I know the night before we were up on our raid and then I was up that day, and then that fire started yet last night and I'm up today.

Laurie: Wow.

- Siebert: I think I've been up around fifty-some hours. He got on the phone and he called the company commander up at this—because we'd had no _____[?] He said, "You get some boys down here right now. These guys are just about _____[?] on their feet." So we ate Dinty Moore stew for about a month. [laughs] We had an old major and he found Dinty Moore [unintelligible] and that Australian bully beef.
- Laurie: Eew. Somebody else told me about that stuff.
- Siebert: Yeah, yeah. Oh, yup.
- Laurie: That was one of the women talked about bully beef.
- Siebert: We had George Eaststreet was a Japanese POW was in our outfit. And he was having a ball, this kimchee and all that. He was used to this, you know.
- Laurie: Oh yeah. Okay.
- Siebert: We would get so damn hard up for food and he'd take off—he was a scrounger; we always ate. When George would go up, he'd find it somewhere.
- Laurie: Oh, that's good. So you came home in '52? You were done with the military?
- Siebert: Done with the military.
- Laurie: No recruiter?
- Siebert: No reserves, nothing. You know, I think we're from that group, and they're probably a lot, but that hair still goes up in the back when they start playing the songs, you know. I ended up as being Commander of the Legion in Oconto, Wisconsin and then I was Commander of the VFW in Sturgeon Bay.
- Laurie: There is a man that I'm going to be interviewing who lives in Sturgeon Bay and I'll find his name out and find if he knows you.
- Siebert: Lives in Sturgeon Bay?
- Laurie: He was born in Waubeka and now he lives in Sturgeon Bay, and for the life of me, I can't think of his name.
- Siebert: Oh, really?
- Laurie: But his brother goes to the military history club and he said, "Would you be willing to interview him if he's interested?" And I said, "Oh, yeah, I'll even drive up there some weekend and do a live interview."

Siebert: We had a lousy service officer, but when I left we got a great guy. He was Air Force Reserve. Got everything taken for the guys.

Laurie: Good.

Siebert: We had no awards or nothing, you know. We didn't have any clothes given to us.

Laurie: Yeah.

Siebert: I wasn't thinking much about it and then all of a sudden these grandkids start bringing it up. "Well, don't you have something coming, Grandpa?" I said, "Yeah, I guess so."

Laurie: I think so.

Siebert: So then the VFW magazine said, "Write in for your awards" and that. I just got two the other day again.

Laurie: Did you?

Siebert: I don't know where they're coming from.

Laurie: So you're a member of other VFW here? The Cedarburg-Grafton?

Siebert: Well, I've been to one meeting.

Laurie: I put you're currently a member of this, so you belong to this one.

Siebert: Yeah.

Laurie: Do you belong to the Legion here?

Siebert: No.

Laurie: Oh, you should.

Siebert: It's twenty-four dollars a year, you know.

Laurie: Well, come to Vegas Night. I'll be selling garlic bread.

Siebert: Vegas Night, yeah.

Laurie: My husband is going to be—last year he was a blackjack dealer, but I don't know what he's doing this year.

Siebert: That's over in Cedarburg, right?

Laurie: No, it's in Grafton at the Legion post.

Siebert: Oh, at this Legion?

Laurie: It's a lot of fun.

Siebert: Did you ever go to fish fry there? Somebody told me they got—

Laurie: Oh, in Cedarburg?

Siebert: No, in Grafton.

Laurie: No, they don't have fish fries at the Legion.

Siebert: You know any people from the Ozaukee Bank?

Laurie: Yeah.

Siebert: You know Chuck Mauer?

Laurie: No. I think I've met him.

Siebert: Senior Vice; that's my son-in-law.

Laurie: Really, oh wow.

Siebert: And Sherry, my daughter; she works over at the St. Mary's, Ozaukee.

Laurie: Okay. Yes, the Cedarburg Legion post has fish fries.

Siebert: That's who's got it.

Laurie: 'Cause the kitchen is not big enough in Grafton.

Siebert: No. Yeah, I was very surprised how nice they've got it—

[End of interview]