

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
RICHARD G. SMITH
Tank Loader and Gunner, Army, Korean War
2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Madison, Wisconsin

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Smith, Richard G, (1930-). Oral History Interview, 2004.
Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 60 min.); ½ inch, color.
Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).
Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Richard G. Smith, a Superior, Wisconsin resident, discusses his Korean War experiences in the 72nd Tank Battalion. Smith mentions being drafted while sailing on the Great Lakes, basic training at Fort Riley (Kansas), and landing at Incheon with the 2nd Division in June of 1952. Assigned to Able Company, 72nd Tank Battalion, he describes duty as a cannon loader and, later, as a temporary sergeant and gunner. Sent by train to defend T-Bone Hill, he talks about getting the tank stuck in mud. Smith describes supporting a Republic of Korea (ROK) division, probing no-man's land, and scouting coordinates to hit from the Main Line of Resistance (MLR) whenever the peace talks would break off. He recalls being told to make the ammunition count after supplies were interrupted. Smith states the infantrymen didn't like the tank companies because retaliatory enemy fire would overshoot the tanks and hit the infantry units behind them. He touches on taking turns manning tanks stationed on the MLR, bivouacking several miles away, sharing eggs with the South Korean soldiers, and, on guard duty, being unable to visually distinguish between South and North Koreans. Smith relates a close call when his tank was knocked out right after his crew had been relieved. He describes the "Easy Eights," the reconditioned, World War II-era Sherman tanks they used. Smith comments on padding the outside of the tanks with logs and sandbags and once fixing the tank track on the battlefield. He recalls an incident of a South Korean soldier getting caught and beaten for stealing. Smith describes the camp, using the periscope to sight the tank guns, and using tank batteries to light their bunker. He characterizes a couple of his tank commanders. Smith relates having ice cream in Needles (California) upon his homecoming and mentions getting leave to visit his wife and daughter, who had been born while he was in Korea. Assigned to duty as a barracks sergeant at Fort Carson (Colorado), he states it was difficult to enforce military discipline on the "short timers." Reassigned to Camp Atterbury (Indiana) as a cadre, he talks about training recruits to arm and disarm mines and demonstrating urban combat before being discharged three months early. He reflects on the strangeness of having to periodically stop fighting during the peace talks, lacking a real end to the war, losing men while taking hills only to give them up again, and having the tanks used like artillery. Smith states that because the crews were constantly changing, he never served with anyone for long and hasn't attended reunions.

Biographical Sketch:

Smith (b.1930) served in the Army from 1951 to 1953. After the war, he worked as a teacher for forty-six years, coached high school and youth hockey, and volunteered at the Richard I. Bong World War II Heritage Center.

Citation Note:

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Context Note:

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Related Materials Note:

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

Interviewed by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Public Television, November 22, 2004

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.

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Transcribed Interview:

- Mik: Go back to who you were and where you were when you thought you might be a military man.
- Dick: I was sailing on the Great Lakes when I got drafted. Went through infantry, basic training down Fort Riley, Kansas and had an MOS of a rifleman, and I went to Seattle, Washington, Fort Lawton, an old Army base condemned during WWII—tar paper shacks, floor boards or wooden floors. I went over to Japan, got assigned to the 2nd Division, and landed at Incheon.
- Mik: What year was that?
- Dick: Pardon?
- Mik: What year was that?
- Dick: It was in 1952. The June of 1952. And I landed at Incheon, joined the 2nd Division, and then got assigned to the 72nd Tank Battalion. I thought, "Uh oh, here I am an infantry man, going in a point man for the tanks." Never been in a tank before other than a few problems in basic training, where we ran along side of them, climbed on board and things like that. Now I am assigned to a tank company, Able Company 72nd Tank Battalion. Started out, of course, as a gunner, or I mean a loader and a—
- Mik: What does that involve?
- Dick: That's a loading the seventy-five millimeter shell into the cannon. And that was about it other than cleaning the equipment after we're through.
- Mik: Tell me about the layout inside that tank. Where the loader is and everybody else?
- Dick: Ok, the loader, well first of all, the driver and the assistant driver who is a bog man, they're down in front, down lower than we were. We were up in the turret, and I was located behind the driver and the shells were underneath me. So I had to lift the floor up, section at a time and get the shell out of there and slam it into the cannon there. The loader was sitting over to the right of the cannon and looking out his periscope. And then we had the tank commander, who stood up behind the gunner, and he exposed out top of the turret at times, and he had a fifty millimeter machine gun up there. Anyways, I was the loader to begin with, and then they tried me at driving the tank and that was kind of a failure. [laughs] So they thought I was better loading rather than driving the tank because everybody had to get experience at every position. Eventually I became the gunner, and I was a temporary sergeant, all of our ranks were temporary.
- Mik: Why's that?

Dick: Well, we're in service for such a short period of time that we weren't given a permanent rank of that. After joining the 72nd Tank Battalion Able Company, we moved from the East Coast—I don't know how close to the coast we were, but we were [in the] east part of Korea and traveled by train over to more the central part near a hill they call T-Bone. We traveled by train there. Looked like a carnival because we had all our tents and our footlockers and everything piled on top of the tank, looked like a bunch of gypsies.

Mik: Okay so you are a bunch of gypsies, traveling—

Dick: Now we get to what they call T-Bone, the hill that the 2nd Division was supposed to be protecting, and we relieved another division over there. When we went to get to the base of T-Bone, we had to go through a swampy area, across the river, and of course, our tank got stuck. We were mud up, over the tracks of the tank. We had to carry all our stuff from the tank over to the base of T-Bone Hill there, which was probably about half mile and a very exposed area to the North Koreans there and Chinese. We were there for a short period of time, and then they decided to have the 72nd Tank Battalion Able Company go and support the ROK Division, which is a Korean outfit. That's where I spent the rest of my time, in support of the ROK Division. We would make probes out into no man's land and fire directly into some of their bunkers. Otherwise, we would sit up on the MLR, the Main Line of Resistance and fire over at whatever we saw moving around. Then they would have their truce talks. South Koreans, North Koreans, and the Americans, and the U.N. people. Then we couldn't fire, so we'd just sit and watch. We would spot places—coordinates—so when we could fire, we'd aim at those particular spots where we saw a lot of action or a lot of people moving around, equipment coming up, reinforcing their troops there. They would break off the talks and then we could start shooting again. Another time I recall there was a strike on the West Coast, so there were no supplies coming into Korea. They say, "Whenever you fire a shell, you got to count for it." Especially the armored piercing shells that we'd fire at tanks, so that went on for a short period of time and we were back in action, off and on the rest of the time I was over there.

Mik: When you say "back in the action," what is action like?

Dick: Well, it was incoming rounds from the Chinese, and a making our probes, and firing on their different positions that we would lay out. It was an experience.

Mik: When you wrote down the coordinates while you were just sitting there, when the opportunity came to fire, how accurate were your coordinates? Did you have line of sight?

Dick: Oh, yes.

Mik: To where—

Dick: Yeah. Right. We'd look across the valley and could see their chohi [?] trails and bunkers, things like that.

Mik: Do you feel like you were a pretty good gunner?

Dick: I thought so. [laughs] I had that position for quite awhile, most of the time when I was over there. When we were up on the MLR, the Main Line of Resistance, we'd have our tanks like artillery. That's what they used us as, so we would back off the top of the ridge whenever we weren't firing. Then when we would go to fire, we would pull up on top of the hill—it was just maybe ten feet—and do our firing, and then we would back off and the incoming rounds would come from the Chinese. The infantry didn't like us very well because a lot of times, they would over shoot us and hit the infantry outfits behind us. We weren't too well liked in that respect. And we would leave our tank right up there, and another five guys, another crew would come up and relieve us and then we would go to our bivouac area, which was maybe five, ten miles back. That's where we would stay.

Mik: Did they bring ammunition up to you, or did you go back to refuel and reload?

Dick: Depends on how much action there was. They would bring up to the tank and bring us meals everyday, fresh eggs. One time, we would share some of these rations with the South Koreans that were around us there. We would give them an egg, and they would crack it and suck the egg out of the shell. We thought we would pull something on them, so we hard boiled some eggs [laughs] and gave it to a Korean. He took it, and he broke it, peeled it. He knew it was hard boiled. It was a joke on us so to speak. [laughs]

Mik: Was it any different supporting a South Korean unit than an Army unit?

Dick: The big difference was, how could we tell the difference between North Korean and South Korean? We were never overran, fortunately, but you just never knew because their trenches ran right along behind our tank. They would be moving around, and you wouldn't know. Because at night, you would sit on your tank. You'd be up there maybe a couple hours, and then you would get relieved by one of their crew members, and you would sit there for a couple hours. We always had somebody awake on the tank. Like I say, I don't know how to ever tell the difference between the North Korean, South Korean, or Chinese.

Mik: When you were—when you say sitting on the tank, you were outside of the tank?

Dick: Oh yeah. We'd sit up in the turret. If we did get overran, we'd be right there ready with the machine gun.

Mik: When you were taking incoming rounds and firing how hot does that get? I mean was it like fierce battle or—

Dick: No, sometimes a dozen rounds would come in and of course, we were—the sooner the rounds start coming in, we were supposed to get in the tank and go up and see if we could see where the firing was so we could shoot back over there. One time, when we got relieved, this new crew that was up, they just got up there. In fact, we were on our way back to our bivouac area and got back there, and they told us our tank had gotten knocked out. We thought, "We just left there. How could it get knocked out?" And they said, "As soon as you left, the rounds started coming in, and one hit the top of the turret between the deck and the turret itself, knocked the turret off the rollers, and broke everything loose on the inside. Artillery round came in and hit it just right and knocked it out. Fortunately, the crew—they were still in the bunker. They didn't get out and get into the tank because the rounds were hitting so close there, so they couldn't get into the tank. If they had been inside, they all would have been killed. Or maybe the tank matter would have—maybe a loss of legs. Everything broke loose in the inside. So that tank was done for.

Mik: Did it feel like—were the tanks pretty much interchangeable? It didn't really make any difference which one you were in?

Dick: No.

Mik: Or did you have your own tank that you were pretty comfortable with?

Dick: They were all the same in our company. They did have a new tank that another division had. They were newer. They had a hydraulic system to them that would break down, so we'd always ask when we got relieved, what kind of tanks—or we'd relieve a division—what kind of tanks did they have if we had to exchange tanks. We didn't want those—the new ones—because of the hydraulic system on it. We had the old WWII tanks, the Sherman. We called them Easy Eights, and they had been left over on the islands after WWII and then brought to Japan and were reconditioned and sent to Korea. But we had a bigger caliber cannon on them than what they had during WWII.

Mik: What was wrong with they hydraulics of the new ones?

Dick: Their lines would just break. I don't know why. When they were under a strain, the lines would break and they just couldn't move around. So we liked our old Easy Eights.

Mik: What's it like—did you take anything besides artillery fire? Was there ever like small arms fire hitting the tank?

Dick: On probes we would. We had some holes in the tank. Didn't pierce because they didn't have armored piercing shells in the rifles that they had. From the depth of the hole and the diameter of the hole, they figured it was from the American recoilless rifle. We had taken some hits on the front of our tanks, but when we went up on the probe into no man's land, we would have logs and sandbags and everything we

could put on top of our tanks to explode the shell before they hit the tank itself. They would blow the logs off and sandbags. One time, our battalion commander didn't like the way we got together because we come from different areas into this no man's land. The next day we did the same thing again. All over. First one was a dry run. [laughs] Right back out there again, and they were expecting us. That is when we got hit, the second time.

Mik: Got hit in terms of knocking off the logs and the sandbags?

Dick: Yeah right.

Mik: What does it sound like inside the tanks?

Dick: It's just thunder. [laughs] Hope and pray that it wasn't a recoilless rifle or shell—armored piercing, I mean.

Mik: Hope you didn't lose a track.

Dick: Yeah, right. We had that happen one time. We had to jockey the tank around, get it back on sprockets, and go out and put the links together again, get out of there.

Mik: Under fire you had to do this?

Dick: At the present time, no. I don't know why. I guess he was looking out for us from above, but after we got going out of there, the rounds came in again. It was odd. I felt I was very fortunate—came out of there without a Purple Heart.

Mik: Who had to get out of the tank to put the pins back in?

Dick: We all got out and helped, yeah. Using a crowbar, pinch bar, things like that.

Mik: Did you feel any motivation to work as fast as possible?

Dick: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. [laughs] We didn't want to stay outside of that thing any longer than we had to.

Mik: How many tanks were in your unit?

Dick: In our company, I think we had twenty-five all together if I am not mistaken.

Mik: When you did that probe, were all twenty-five involved in that?

Dick: Yeah. We come from different ways, and ah—I forget what they call it when you come together again. Re-coordinate?

Mik: Converge?

Dick: Yeah. [laughs] The old military had a word for it. [laughs]

Mik: And did you have infantry with you?

Dick: No. No, no.

Mik: So this is just tanks going out there to take fire?

Dick: Right.

Mik: Somebody wanted to see what they could throw at you?

Dick: Yep. And [wanted us to] get close to their bunkers and blow the bunkers apart. They were built right into the hills.

Mik: Was it a successful probe?

Dick: I don't really know. It must have been because they didn't have us go out a third time. [laughs]

Mik: At least they thought you came together in the right way. Did you lose any tanks on that?

Dick: No.

Mik: When you talked about your tank being knocked out, how often did that happen?

Dick: Well, that was the first one—the year that I was there.

Mik: You talked about your interaction with the ROK soldiers. Did you have much interaction with them? Besides—

Dick: Oh yeah, yeah. We got along with them. Most of them talked a little bit of English.

Mik: Did you think they were pretty good soldiers?

Dick: Uh, not as good as ours. But they were doing the best they could to defend their country. We did have a problem one time. One of them came in and stole some stuff. And he was severely beaten by his—I don't know, his superior officer. We never saw him again. I don't know if they shipped him out someplace else or shot him, or what they did. But they wouldn't stand for anything like that. It just happened once.

Mik: Did you have—you said you couldn't tell them apart, but did you have any problems with infiltration?

Dick: No.

Mik: Any other of the U.N. soldiers that you interacted with?

Dick: Uh, no. We would see some of them come in from out in the field, especially when I was with the 2nd Division near T-Bone. There was a French outfit there, and we would see them come in from their probes.

Mik: But that was all? You would just see them? And go to their camp?

Dick: Yeah. Right.

Mik: Were you doing the same kind of things at T-Bone, up to the MLR and—

Dick: Well, we just sat at the base of T-Bone and waited for them to attack us. We had tanks up at the top, but I was at the base of it, so we didn't do any firing at all there. The only time [there was] incoming rounds is when we were going from the base of T-Bone Hill to the MLR. There was a stretch there that the Chinese could see. In fact, one French half-track got knocked out in there. When we took our tank off of the base of T-Bone, we had to go around this spot where they got knocked out and got back to our MLR.

Mik: When you were coming back from your tank after you had been relieved, what was your camp like?

Dick: We had pretty white painted rocks, and all our tents were in line, and if plane ever came over and strafed us [laughs] it'd get a lot of tents. We would have just one plane come over and sound like a piper cub flying up there, and they were just observing I guess to see where we were and how much we had there, and no leaflets, nothing. Not like M.A.S.H. [laughs]

Mik: And you had—in your camp, there was a mess tent?

Dick: Oh yes, yep.

Mik: So it was pretty well outfitted?

Dick: Oh yes, sure. We had good size tents, the five of us sleeping in the one tent. We made wooden doors and a wooden floor in there and [had a] stove in the middle. We were pretty comfortable, considering.

Mik: I just think of this camp full of young guys. You guys didn't have any—giving each other a hard time or pulling pranks on people or anything like that?

Dick: No.

- Mik: You were pretty serious about the job you were there to do?
- Dick: Yeah, yeah. We all got along. I mean there were a few times you'd get into some arguments, but—like one time we got our PX rationed when we were up on the line. And these two fellas were sitting watch together, and it was all kinds of candy bar wrappers and crap down inside the tank, and our tank commander told them, "Get up there and clean it out." They said, "No." [laughs] They started arguing. Wasn't all theirs, but I know I didn't throw anything down in there. Tank commander didn't, and finally they did go up there and clean it out. Not very happy about it.
- Mik: Tell me what it's like looking through your—how do you sight as a gunner? What do you see through that periscope?
- Dick: Okay, you are looking straight out, and it's just like a telescope. Probably the worst time looking out [of] that was traveling from one area to another and going through the mountains. You'd look out and you wouldn't see the road. It was just all space in the valley and you wondered if you're going to go down into that valley or stay on the road. It's just—nothing out there. Couldn't see anything close to you because you are looking coaxial with the cannon there and your machine gun. You didn't see much.
- Mik: But with your fire—**[End of Tape WCKOR079]** So, I'm still curious about what it's like to be a gunner. You know, it's not like shooting a rifle.
- Dick: No.
- Mik: Tell me how you would sight in on something as you were firing rounds.
- Dick: Well, you had, of course—just like a scope on a rifle—you had the crosshairs, and you'd sight in on something. Hopefully, it would hit what you got in your crosshairs there.
- Mik: Would that sight adjust? I mean, just thinking of the further it would go, it would have more of an arch to it.
- Dick: Yeah.
- Mik: Would you watch where it hit and then adjust?
- Dick: Yeah. Elevate your cannon.
- Mik: And how do you do that? How do you do the lateral and the elevation?
- Dick: We had the wheels there—the wheel to swing the turret. And like the artillery, they'd say one over, one short, one in the middle. It takes three shells to hit it.

Mik: Was there any, did the tanks ever—I mean, did you usually, have the same targets?

Dick: No.

Mik: Each individual tank was picking and then shooting at its own target?

Dick: Right, yeah. Sometimes you'd zero in on the same one, but mostly, you had your own.

Mik: Well, I suppose especially when you're on—

Dick: On a probe, yeah. In the MLR, another tank is way over here. You don't even see him. They're crossing this way, and you're here and another one is firing over here and they're looking some of the same targets as you are and some that I can't see.

Mik: Were the tanks in communication with one another?

Dick: Oh, yeah.

Mik: Through the tank commander?

Dick: Tank commander, yeah. My worst experience was probably having a Shave Tail as a tank commander. They set up behind you. We had rounds coming in, so he'd batten down the hatch—in fact, it was the probe that we made, and we got our track knocked off. He called the battalion commander: "I want rounds, I want some artillery, and we're getting rounds on this." The battalion commander says—told him to get out of there, and he says, if you think you got rounds coming in there, I'll send you where there are rounds coming in. This guy is right on my shoulders, breathing down my neck, panting, scared. [laughs] Worse than we were because he was new. That was the only time he rode with me. I usually had a sergeant up there, tech sergeant. In fact, the last one I had was a fellow from Brooklyn—DeLuca. He wound up in Korea. He had been in Germany, and he got in a fight with somebody there—no, he was back in the States, down in Fort Knox, Kentucky, and he got in a fight with a guy. He says either take a Court Martial or do a tour of duty in Korea. He chose Korea. He was my tank commander. DeLuca, he was quite a guy.

Mik: You liked him okay?

Dick: Oh, yeah. [laughs] When he spoke, he meant it.

Mik: Now, the fifty millimeter on top of the turret, did that pivot as well?

Dick: Oh, yeah.

Mik: So he wasn't totally at your mercy for turning the turret?

Dick: Well, he didn't turn the turret.

Mik: You did.

Dick: Yeah, but he could swing that fifty caliber around. You could get outside of the tank and—

Mik: That's the way to go 360—he's usually behind you.

Dick: Yeah, right.

Mik: Were you there in the winter?

Dick: Oh, yes.

Mik: Was it cold in the tank or warm?

Dick: It's warm. In fact, when we were up at the MLR, we'd have the tank running and we'd stand behind it and let the exhaust come out and keep us warm. We had electric lights in our bunkers, which we weren't supposed to—we buried the cable that would run from the battery of the tank into the bunker—and then when the lieutenant would come up, the captain would come up, we would take our light down and hide it. [laughs] Because you could run that battery down and not get going when you'd had to, but we would run the tank every once in a while and recharge the battery and give us a little brighter light inside.

Mik: Whose idea was that?

Dick: I don't know. [laughs] It kind of got handed down from one tank crew to another, but we only did that up there in MLR.

Mik: You don't think the captain knew?

Dick: Oh, yes. Yeah. [laughs]

Mik: But you still had to take it down—

Dick: Oh. Yes! We don't do it— [laughs]

Mik: That photo behind you, is that on the train?

Dick: Okay, yes, that is going from the east side of Korea over to the central side. The whole 2nd Division moved over there and relieved another division. I don't recall which one it was now.

Mik: What was that—had you seen any action at that point on the east side?

Dick: No, because we moved shortly after I got there.

Mik: Were you apprehensive at all about where you were going?

Dick: Oh, yes. Definitely, yeah.

Mik: That doesn't matter.

Dick: No.

Mik: You went anyway.

Dick: No, you gotta go. You gotta go. [laughs]

Mik: Tell me about your discharge and coming home.

Dick: Okay, we landed in Japan from Korea, left Seoul or left Incheon. That's where we boarded the troop ship, and this is going to be May 1st—May Day. They had a lot of problems in Japan the year before because that's a big Russian day—Communist Day, May Day—we were kind of concerned about getting in there and now really seeing some hand to hand combat, but we didn't get there on May 1st but a few days later when I turned twenty-three. Then we were there for three days, turned in all of our old equipment and got new uniforms and clothing. Then we went to Pittsburg, California. I never heard of it before. It's off the river from San Francisco. We went under the Golden Gate there and up the river. Then we stayed at a camp there—I don't even recall [Camp Stoneman?]. I wasn't there long enough to know the name of it, and then I got assigned to Fort Carson, Colorado. We went there by troop train, and I remember we got off in Needles, California. Never forget that—we got ice cream. Reminded me of sailing in the boats where we had the bumboat—the grocery—where they had like a store. They sold ice cream and gloves and things like that. Well, they'd come with carts and sold ice cream and candy, and we loaded up with ice cream. [laughs] Never forget Needles. In fact, I went through there about six years ago, drove out to Las Vegas and went down through Needles, California.

Mik: And did you feel an urge for ice cream?

Dick: Yes. [laughs] So then, I was a barracks sergeant at Fort Carson, Colorado, and I finally got a leave when I was there about two weeks and went home for ten days [to] see my wife and new daughter that was born while I was in Korea. So then, uh, when being barracks sergeant, I had all kinds of fellows that were short timers. They only had two, three days left in the service—to get those guys up for reveille, clean the barracks up—forget it. [laughs] "What you gonna do? Court martial me?" [laughs] Well, our barracks wouldn't get a weekend pass, but they didn't care because they weren't gonna be there. I met a guy from Wisconsin there, you know,

got along great. I went from there to [Camp] Atterbury, Indiana. I was a cadre there—that's where you take the fellow through basic training—and we would—I can't think of what they called that. It's like a test to see what the soldiers had learned. One of the things was to arm and disarm a land mine. Well, that was my position. They'd come and one guy would arm the mine and then the next guy would come running up there and he would unarm it and then he would run off to another position. Another guy would come up. He would arm it again and another one would disarm it and so on. That was what I did all day. Then we had to demonstrate to these recruits taking a town—where you went from one building to another. You had to be about two, three guys on one side of the street and two, three guys on the other side of the street. You would go up to a house, throw a grenade inside. After it had gone off, you would go in, see if there was anybody left alive in there. The guys on the other side of the street would do the same thing. Then you would shoot into houses—ahead of them—live ammunition, and we were in one of the buildings when they were shooting into it. That was the closest I ever got to—[laughs]—to getting shot at, by my own fellows. The officers that were with the new recruits, they were all shook up because they could see the rounds tearing up the part of the building, and they knew we were in there. They started screaming over the P.A. system, and finally, they had to discontinue it at that point.

Mik: That would have been a heck of a thing to get out of and—

Dick: [laughs] Yeah, and get shot! [laughs] So I was there until September and I was due to be discharged. My day came up, but I wasn't on the roster so wanted to find out why? I didn't ask my first sergeant. I went above him, and he didn't like that. [laughs] They found out why I hadn't been on the roster because at the headquarters there, they were checking off the fellows as they were putting them on this discharge roster, and evidently, they took a break after the fellow ahead of me, and so, then they come back and checked off on the tail of the check, went through my name, and they thought I was put on the roster. So I was couple extra days in Service because of that, but the sergeants told our company. He says, "When you want any information, you see me! You don't go over my head." Well, I didn't care because I was getting out. [laughs] Oh, then I did get out. I got out three months early. I didn't serve a full two years. Three months for good behavior. Everybody that served in Korea was let out three months early, especially those of us that were drafted for twenty-four months.

Mik: How did feel about being drafted? You were married?

Dick: No. I got married after I got drafted.

Mik: Oh.

Dick: Yeah, when I came home on furlough after basic training, and before going overseas, I got married because there was a little extra pay for married people and I figured, as long as I was going to be in the Army and overseas, and I knew that I

was going to go to Korea. Cause all the rest of my buddies went to Germany—that was where I wanted to go, to visit my mother's hometown—and I figured I was going to get everything I can out of the service, so we got married. But ah, I uh, I wasn't ready to go when I first got drafted. I tried to prolong it as long as I could in a way. I was supposed to go down to Minneapolis, take my pre-induction physical, but I was sailing on the Great Lakes. So they say, "Okay, you take your pre-induction physical in Detroit." When we went through Detroit on the ship, I got off on the mail boat, went ashore, took my physical, and the next day, I got on a mail boat—caught the ship coming up to Duluth. I got that out of the way. Well then, just before probably during that same month, another Richard Smith in Superior got married, and I suppose they figured they were gonna draft that Richard Smith before he had any kids. So they sent me the pre-induction physical. [laughs] That's what I figured out, [laughs] but maybe it wasn't that way. [laughs] Then, I got off the ship at Thanksgiving and spent the rest of the time with my fiancée. December 7th, 1951 is when I got sworn in to the Army, ten years after Pearl Harbor. I'll never forget. [laughs]

Mik: Do you actually think that was a good sign?

Dick: Uh, I don't know. [laughs]

Mik: Did you get, did you trade a lot of mail with your wife while you were over there?

Dick: Oh, yes, yeah. I tried to write just about every day. It wasn't very long, and then I would send her pictures and I'd get mail from her regularly. Yep.

Mik: Did it seem like a long year when you were over there?

Dick: Oh, yes, yeah. Yes, it did.

Mik: Counting the days—

Dick: Yeah, especially, when you got near the top of the number one. [laughs] I never did hit that. I think I was about number two or three, and they took two or three of us at that same time to rotate back to the States. I went, I got over there in June and left there in May of the following year, but I didn't see it as rough as the fellows that were there before me. That's when they really, really took it, the big push from Yalu River back down to Seoul. They're the ones that really fought the battle of Korea.

Mik: What did you think about the peace talks as they were going on? Did you think it was ever going to end?

Dick: No, especially, after a couple of them where they had just had their peace talks for a few days and then they'd cut them off, and we couldn't fire during that time they were talking. We figured it was just a ploy—they could bring more ammunition up and supplies, which they did. We didn't have to—we had all our supplies right there.

- Mik: So they didn't fire either—it was a total cease fire on both sides.
- Dick: Yeah, right, but sometimes you didn't know that the peace talks broke off but the rounds started coming in and then you knew and fired back.
- Mik: How did you feel when it finally ended? Did you feel any good at all about it?
- Dick: I didn't feel that it really ended there. There was no real end to it—it was strange. We would—another strange thing was that we would take a hill and lose men taking a hill, and then we'd back off. Why they did that, I don't know because it seemed strange—
- Mik: Sort of plays at war.
- Dick: Yeah. [laughs] Another thing, like I say, they used us as like an artillery or an artillery piece, and we supported a probe by the ah, infantry and we were supposed to shoot over them, ahead of them, and of course, some of the rounds were landing short, and uh, we were knocking out some of our own infantry with our shooting. And that was a sad one—
- Mik: What makes a round land short?
- Dick: Ah, either the gunner didn't have it elevated high enough, or I don't know if it was faulty equipment or ammunition, but you would see them. Yeah, very sad—
- Mik: When is there a limit to how much you can fire with your cannon barrel overheated or anything, or did you just—
- Dick: No, mm-hmm.
- Mik: Just shell after shell as fast as you could load.
- Dick: Yep. Use up all your ammunition if you had to. And of course, when we made those probes, we would use everything we had except for the machine guns.
- Mik: You'd come back empty.
- Dick: Yep.
- Mik: Hate to get into it on your way back.
- Dick: Well. We didn't figure on running into anything coming back because we're just getting back to our MLR, and uh, we had the machine gun.

Mik: Now, when you're on a probe like that and you start pulling back—this is a silly question—but did the tank turn around?

Dick: Oh, yeah.

Mik: And then, do you turn the turret back around so that you're pointing behind you or did you just—

Dick: No. We just turned the tank around and headed out as fast as it could go.

Mik: And how fast was that?

Dick: Oh, I don't know. It's twenty-four miles an hour maybe. I don't know.

Mik: Seems faster inside, I'm sure.

Dick: Yep. [laughs] Yeah.

Mik: I was gonna ask you how you drive those tanks, but you told us.

Dick: Yeah, with laterals.

Mik: That just didn't come natural to you, huh?

Dick: No. [laughs]

Mik: Having trouble holding a straight line?

Dick: Or trying to make a donut, do a donut. [laughs] Got to hold back on one and forward on the other.

Mik: So your crew, was it pretty constant? Did you—were you with the same drivers for a long time, or did that constantly change?

Dick: No, that was constantly changing. Guys would rotate back to the States, yeah, and then you'd get somebody, maybe from another tank in our outfit, or we would get a new recruit.

Mik: I'd think you'd want to be confident in your driver.

Dick: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Mik: Did you ever have bad drivers?

Dick: Oh, yeah. Yeah. But the best driver I had was a small guy like me, and he could move that tank around, and he was really a cowboy with that tank. Yeah, a guy from down South—couldn't understand him. [laughs] Didn't speak English. [laughs]

Mik: Not your brand of English, huh?

Dick: [laughs] Yeah.

Mik: Do you ever think about those guys?

Dick: Oh, yeah! Yeah. I've never gone to a reunion. A friend of mine in Duluth, he goes to all of his reunions, but I never have. I've looked up some of the buddies. There's some from down in Eau Claire that I went through basic training with. I've never come across anyone that I was in Korea with—they were from all over the country. I think I was about the only one from Wisconsin.

Mik: And once you shipped out, just no contact with them—

Dick: Mm-hmm.

Mik: That's a strange world, isn't it—that you're there and you're living together and spending all your time together, in harm's way together, then it's over.

Dick: But you're not together for that long a period of time. If it was something like sailing on the Great Lakes where you're with the same crew just about for the whole year—almost like a family out there, especially the ship that I sailed on. The ones that fitted out in the spring of the year usually were the same ones that layed it up at the wintertime.

Mik: Is that what you did when you came back?

Dick: Yes, I couldn't find a job around town here. I tried to work down the shipyard, but they weren't hiring. They kept telling me. So the ship came in to Duluth to load ore, and I went over to see them. The captain asked me if I was interested in sailing again. I says, "Yeah." He said, "I'll have a job for you when we come back up next week." So he did. I went back decking on the ship. I did that for—well, from October to December. Then I never went back after that. I got a shore job, and I got letters from the company. I'd tell them I quit sailing, got a job here, because when I went back sailing in September or October, I was married and I had the daughter. We'd come up here—be here for ah, two-and-a-half, three hours, and then I'm gone for another seven days. It just was not the life for a family man, I felt, anyway. We did have fellows that were married, especially officers that had families and that—but not for me.

Mik: I'm sure you're wife appreciated having you around.

Dick: Oh, yeah, and I think that was the main thing. [laughs] Because I don't know, I enjoyed sailing. I enjoyed the Army, too, but I just didn't know how to make a life of the Army.

Mik: Sort of similar command structure.

Dick: Yes. Mm-hmm.

Mik: You had no problem with that? Were comfortable with it?

Dick: Yeah, worked as a team, and you had your superiors.

Mik: Well, thank you.

Dick: Well, thank you.

Mik: Thank you for your service.

Dick: Yeah. [laughs]

[End of Interview]