

INTERVIEW

(Wm) Raymond Hargett

YEAR

2006

GRAY COUNTY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

NAME (Wm) Raymond Hargett

DATE: June 19, 2006

PLACE: Montezuma, Kansas

INTERVIEWER: Joyce Suellentrop

PROJECT SERIES: Veterans Oral History Project for Gray County

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:

Raymond Hargett joined the Merchant Marine soon after graduation from high school in Montezuma. He trained in New York State and was hired by an independent shipping company to transport, mostly coal to power plants, up and down the Atlantic Coast. He worked as a deckhand until 1948, when he returned to Montezuma and joined the Army Reserve. He was drafted into service and sent to Korea where he was a sergeant in the motor pool until his discharge. He returned to the Montezuma area to farm.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Merchant Marine life as a part of a ship's crew that moved freight from Virginia to the Northeast area. His experiences in wartime Korea and return to farm life at Montezuma were discussed.

COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW:

SOUND RECORDINGS: 2 - 60 minute tape

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 2 hours

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: none

TRANSCRIPT: 27 pages

ORAL HISTORY
(Wm) Raymond Hargett
Interview Date: June 19, 2006

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Raymond Hargett (RH)
Tape 1 of 2
Side A

JS - The first question that I ask is in two parts. World War Two started in 1939. There had been a build up in Germany and we got in after Pearl Harbor. Do you remember anything about either of those events?

RH - The start of the war, not necessarily, but I definitely remember Pearl Harbor. I know we went to school and had no school that day. We listened to the radio all day long.

JS - Do you remember what you, your parents, friends or relatives were thinking about that?

RH - I think it was a shock that you just can't quite understand why. I know at school that day everybody was more or less walking around in a daze.

JS - How old would you have been at that time?

RH - I was a sophomore.

JS - Did you have thoughts about maybe you would eventually have to go?

RH - I think every boy there had that thought in their head. Of course, the older ones went quickly.

JS - This was in Montezuma?

RH - Yes.

JS - Pretty soon there were young men from the community that joined up?

RH - Yes, between volunteering and the draft, it was almost immediate, it seems like when they started going in.

JS - The war progressed before you went in. Did you read about it? How did you find out what was really happening?

RH - We would get the Hutch paper and we had radio and we kept in close contact with everything that was going on.

JS - Were there relatives that were in the war?

RH - No, we didn't have any uncles or anything that were in. I had an older brother that went in just before I did.

JS - You graduated from school then?

RH - I graduated in '44. It was in September of '45 that I went to the Merchant Marine. I went to Kansas City and took an Army physical and on the way home, I signed up for the Merchant Marine. By joining the Merchant Marine, you didn't have to go to Armed Forces. But at that time, Merchant Marine was not considered military service. Later on they changed and made it a military service because there were Merchant Marines lying at the bottom of the ocean all over the world.

JS - You were drafted?

RH - I served in the Merchant Marine and John L. Lewis was head of the Coal Miners Union. We had on a load of ground coal going into Boston. The coal miners went on strike so the dock workers wouldn't unload it. We sat there for thirty days and I got disgusted and I told the captain I was going home and volunteer for the draft, which I did. That was my first time in the Army.

JS - How long were you in the Merchant Marine?

RH - I was in almost two years.

JS - Can you describe what the Merchant Marine was?

RH - They're the freight train of the ocean is about what it amounts to. The Merchant Marine hauled anything. I hauled mostly a lot of coal. I sailed up and down the east coast and hauled a lot of coal to electrical companies. Merchant Marine is a civilian transportation on the ocean.

JS - Did you have to receive training for that?

RH - Yes, I went to training in Sheep's Head Bay, New York.

JS - What did they teach you?

RH - They teach navigation and how to steer a ship. It is pretty involved. I went as a deck hand. Engine room training was a little different. I was taught how to read compasses and maps and maintenance on deck.

JS - How did you know about the Merchant Marine?

RH - I just heard about it. They had a recruiting office in Kansas City and I just stopped there. I was just an old country boy wandering around to see what was going on.

JS - Were there other people from Kansas in the Merchant Marine?

RH - Yeah, there were a number from Montezuma that wound up in the Merchant Marine.

JS - You trained in New York and you were assigned to a ship?

RH - You went to a union house and took a job on a ship. You were hired by a steamship line. Actually, it was a civilian job.

JS - When you said you mainly transported coal, did you go to Virginia or someplace to get it?

RH - Right, we would go to Newport News, which is right at Norfolk. We would load with coal and take it north to New York; Boston; Fall River, Massachusetts and up in Maine to a generating plant. We did haul a little bit of grain, but once you got a ship full of coal dust, you didn't want to get anything else on it.

JS - You lived on the ship. How was that experience?

RH - I loved it. I really like the ocean. I have taken several cruises and I can sit on deck and stare at the ocean day and night.

JS - When you were going up the coast, were you off shore a certain number of miles?

RH - Yes, it would vary, but most of the time we were well out to sea. We would get out there and get a pretty straight line so that you knew about where you were going. We had one hell of a storm. We were east of New York about a hundred miles and a steam line cracked and caused the steering to turn us broadside to the storm so the waves caught us sideways. We went three times and you learn to pray pretty quickly. How in the world those guys in the engine room got that welded shut, I don't know, as rough as it was. You can't imagine how hard those waves hit.

JS - The danger when it is hitting that way is what?

RH - You could capsize. There is no need even getting lifeboats out because you couldn't have survived. The waves would have swamped the lifeboats, immediately.

JS - About how many men were on the ship?

RH - I think around thirty or thirty-five were on there.

JS - You each had your own duties?

RH - Yes.

JS - As a deckhand you kept the deck clean?

RH - Yes, you painted all the time. Of course, you steered the ship for four hours and then you were off for eight. You did maintenance at different times for four hours. You might steer four hours each shift. It just depended how things worked out. Somebody could be sick or something. You were four on and eight off around the clock.

JS - Did the same men stay there or were they transferred in and out?

RH - There were people coming and going all the time, but generally there were the same men all the time.

JS - Did you get time when you left the ship and went ashore?

RH - Oh yeah, when they were unloading, but when they were loading we generally didn't get time off. Unloading could take a couple of days and we would go ashore where we were.

JS - Was this your first time away from home?

RH - Yes, imagine that, Montezuma, Kansas. How I ever got to Sheep's Head, New York, I don't know, all by myself, by train.

JS - What were some of your impressions as you left home?

RH - I don't know. You just were amazed at what the rest of the world was. Wichita was as far from home as I had been until then, or Topeka. The difference in people, the country itself and all the buildings were something.

JS - What were some of the differences in people? I assume that you got to know other young men fairly well.

RH - Some of the people in the northeast part of the United States didn't seem to me they were very friendly. I felt like I was considered like somebody that didn't know anything because I was from way out here where they thought it was desert. After time went by and people mixed more and more, you got to know

that for the most part, people were pretty good. Thinking back, I enjoyed all off it. Maybe not at the time, I didn't.

JS - Was it hard to obey orders?

RH - No, I grew up in a disciplined family and went through school. Nothing was ever harsh punishment anyplace, but you did your job like it was supposed to be done and it was appreciated by whoever your superiors were. There were never any problems.

JS - So when you were unloading in New York and you had some free time, would you go into the city and do things?

RH - You would go eat and go to shows. When I took the training at Sheep's Head Bay, it was clear at the south end in Brooklyn. We would go into New York and take in the Broadway shows and any of that stuff.

JS - Did you like the city?

RH - I enjoyed it. It had a smell to it. There were hotdog vendors out on the street on a cold night and it was good.

JS - Did the Merchant Marine only do domestic things or would they take things across the sea?

RH - They hauled about all the war materials; men, equipment or all of it.

JS - You never had to do that?

RH - No, I never was on a ship that hauled anything overseas. I started once with a load of bombs about when the war was getting over there. They called and turned us around because they had more over there than they needed to use. That was maybe, three or four months before I decided to come home. We brought those bombs back and unloaded them in Maine. Up some river, they had a cave that they were storing them in.

JS - Did you think that what you were doing was part of the war effort?

RH - Oh yeah.

JS - You knew that?

RH - You were aware of it all the time and had men on there that had sailed to foreign countries. We had a first mate from Virginia who had made the Murmansk run to the North Sea going into Russia. You had people like that who kept you well aware of what was going on.

JS - Did you have uniforms?

RH - Just in training was all. They looked almost identical to the navy uniform. Once in the Merchant Marine you wore whatever you wanted to wear.

JS - What would that be jeans, etc.?

RH - Yeah, you would go to Virginia where it was warm or up North where it was cold and you would need warm clothing.

JS - How long would one trip take?

RH - Usually it was about a week going up and a little less than that coming back. We would pick up a load; it would take nearly a week by the time you got up there. Going back you could go two or three knots faster when you were empty and that shortened it quite a bit.

JS - So you made a lot of trips?

RH - Yeah, I made lots of trips up and down the East Coast.

JS - You probably got to know the coast very well?

RH - Not really because we were far enough away, you might get to recognize certain lights. Generally, we were far enough away in the ocean.

JS - Were there a lot of ships out there?

RH - Oh yes, there were a lot of ships. You had to have bow watch all the time and the captain would chart a course that you had to vary on account of wind, currents or other ships. It was really an interesting life and I could have made a career of it.

JS - Like you said, you were in two years?

RH - Well, we tied up to a dock and got unloaded and I got disgusted sitting there and left.

JS - You could leave?

RH - Yes, but when you got back you had to tell the draft board that you weren't there anymore. They knew I was back and they didn't get in any hurry to draft me because they knew they had me. I was ready to look at something, too. I got adventurous.

JS - What was it like on board: the food and the sleeping arrangements?

RH - The food was the best and so were the sleeping arrangements. Life was good aboard ship.

JS - Did time ever get long when you didn't have anything to do?

RH - No, it never did to me.

JS - Would you read or play cards?

RH - You always had something going. Almost all those guys on the ship were from the East Coast. They had these western dime novels and they asked if I could ride a horse. I told them I sure could and would keep it going and one day they were talking about throwing a lasso. I said, "Man, I could rope a cow." I was spreading it on deep. There were several of them standing there. One of them was the third mate and he was a good friend of mine. He said I was just feeding them a line so I showed them how to make a lasso and he walked off. I threw it and caught him right around the neck. I never had anymore people say I wasn't a number one cowboy. Any other time I couldn't have gotten close. We had a lot of fun with different cultures.

JS - That is a good story.

RH - When I was in the Army I was stationed at Fort Eustace, Virginia, for awhile. My old first mate's home was in Hampton, Virginia, so one day I called him to see if he was home. He was home for thirty days and he came and got me and took me home. His dad was an old bay fisherman and had an old wooden boat with a Model-A engine in it. We went out to fish and stole crabs out of some guys crab pot and brought them home. His wife was really a nice lady and she cooked up crab and fish for us. So I got to see him again after being with him in the Merchant Marine. I spent the weekend there and he took me back to Fort Eustace in the car. As a whole, I found the Virginia people along the coast to be really nice.

JS - Did you keep in contact with anyone else?

RH - Not very much, it seemed like I lost track of them.

JS - Anything else that you remember? I know you kept up with the war news.

RH - It was just daily life aboard ship and I earned a little money.

JS - How much did you make?

RH - That was the good part. It probably would have averaged \$250 a month. Back then, that was big dollars.

JS - What did you do with the money?

RH - Most of it I sent home. It didn't take much money to go into New York or Boston or something and eat and have a few beers. A lot of times you got free tickets to different things so we got by pretty cheaply.

JS - When you sent it home your folks would save it for you?

RH - Yes, they would just take it to the bank for me. It was real inexpensive at that time because people knew you were in the service of some kind and they helped you. Even though you hadn't asked, they would give you freebies.

JS - Were you technically employed by the government?

RH - No, by the Steamship Line.

JS - You came home for thirty days?

RH - I was tied up there for thirty days and then I came home and notified the draft board and waited to be drafted.

JS - When would that have been?

RH - That would have been sometime in '48.

JS - You were in the Merchant Marine when the war ended? Do you remember where you were and how you heard that news?

RH - I am sure I heard it on the radio.

JS - What about the dropping of the atomic bomb?

RH - I wasn't home yet. I thought it was a good thing.

JS - How long were you home before you were drafted?

RH - It must have been six or eight months.

JS - Did you have to go through basic training?

RH - Oh yes, I went through basic at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, and from there to Fort Eustace, Virginia, and from there to Fort Lewis, Washington. I was assigned to the second division and it was a heavy mortar company. I don't remember just

when it was, but they offered to let you out if you joined for five years in the reserve. A bunch of us did that. I got out and came home and wasn't home too long before the Korean War started. I guess that was one of the luckiest things I ever accidentally did in my life. One of the guys in the second division wrote me a letter. He and one other guy survived out of that division because the second division got slaughtered over there. The company I was in had only the two guys who lived. That was luck or chance, whatever you want to call it. If I had of stayed in, I would have gone over there and it was not a good place to be. I got called back in and went to Camp Carson and was put in a construction engineer company. I was motor pool sergeant. We went to Japan for a couple of weeks and then to Korea.

JS - What were your responsibilities in Korea?

RH - Our battalion was a construction battalion and we maintained and built roads, railroads and telephone lines.

JS - For the forces there?

RH - Yes, because you have got to have supplies. We were kind of on the east side of Korea. There was a road, kind of a cow path. There was a railroad, but most, or, all the bridges were bombed out. As we went along, we tried to repair them to where supplies could get through.

JS - Where did you get your supplies to do all this construction? Was that shipped over?

RH - Most of it had to be shipped in. I was in the motor pool and my job was to keep vehicles running. Anything that burned gasoline and had wheels, I was in charge of. The other side was heavy equipment with diesel and on tracks. Most supplies had to come from Stateside, I imagine.

JS - Were you stationed at one base?

RH - No, we went north and then east is where we started. Mainly the railroad right there and we worked our way north as the war went north and south. We went north and south with it. How in the world those Infantrymen survived those winters, I don't know.

JS - It was really, really cold?

RH - Oh my, you don't know what cold is. We had to sleep in cabs of trucks and stuff like that. Those guys in the Infantry were just out there in Mother Nature. It was horrible that first winter. Thirty below was not uncommon. It was a wicked, wicked way to try to survive.

JS - Were you issued certain clothes?

RH - Yes, but some of that wasn't the best. They gave us some boots. Gosh that was nice. We put those on and our feet were warm. You would think all the money and minds behind things you would not have a problem like that. The boots were waterproof and sealed up to where your feet would sweat and you got frostbite.

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Raymond Hargett (RH)
Tape 1 of 2
Side B

RH - There were times that you would sleep on the ground.

JS - Would you have tents?

RH - We finally got tents. After things kind of got straightened out, we had tents. One time, they called it a schoolhouse, but it was a dirt floor, and we would sleep in there. We finally got squat tents and that helped considerably. We would take fuel barrels and get some diesel fuel drained into them and make a stove. It was better than nothing. A lot of times we had nothing and we slept in the cab of a truck or whatever you could get for a little protection. They have a rainy season over there and I don't remember exactly where we were, but they took bulldozers and leveled off a big area and set tents up. They no more than got the tents up when it started pouring down rain and we got inside there. First thing you knew water was running up out of a hole and here came a big old rat. We had to sit there and shoot the rats. It wasn't uncommon that you would get your tent in the wrong place and everything you had on the ground was floating the next morning. You learned to get by the best you could.

JS - While you were there, did you have regular food?

RH - We had pretty good food there, where I was in the engineers. We had really good bread. They had a truck with a bakery. I guess they used diesel fuel, but we had the best bread, or at least it seemed like it. They were with our service company at all times. Normally, we had pretty good food.

JS - As our troops moved from place to place, you just went after or before them?

RH - Right after them.

JS - And you would just construct what was necessary to get supplies to them?

RH - Right, we were close enough to them most of the time that we were within artillery range. At nights we had blackouts all the time. At night, they would have recognizance airplanes out and if you even lit a cigarette they could see it. They could give your position to the artillery and they could lay you low. You were very careful at night so there was no night life.

JS - I assume you had no time off?

RH - No.

JS - How long were you doing this?

RH - I was in Korea for sixteen months.

JS - How did you get through that?

RH - You just learned to live with it. I applied for R&R two or three times and never could get it. There were a few who got R&R, but not many.

JS - When they got R&R, where did they go?

RH - Japan. They would fly into Japan. Most of the time, it was just for three days, so you didn't gain much anyway. It would have been a change.

JS - Were you able to write home? You were still single?

RH - Yes.

JS - Your parents were able to send you stuff?

RH - Yes, mail was pretty good, it was surprising how quickly the mail got back and forth. It was pretty good.

JS - What was the Korean countryside like?

RH - You had everything from desert to Rocky Mountains over there. They farm anything that is farmable. I would like to go back. They have subways and all this. Pusan was a tin shanty town when we got over there. Seoul is all built back up, now. I was only in Seoul as I came home. It had been the most modern city, I think.

JS - Was it the capitol?

RH - Yes it was the capitol. Rice paddies in the summer time had bad odor as they fertilized with waste. You had very little contact with the people. You had the starting of what they have to put up with, now. They called them insurgents;

we called them guerillas. Really, you could not trust the civilian population. If you did, you generally paid for it somehow or other.

JS - How would you come in contact with them, in the countryside?

RH - Oh yeah, they were always there. Of course, we had workers, a lot of men. They did hand work mostly. For building roads or bridges we employed a lot of men. The guerillas were constantly around and, of course, now I have a different attitude than I did then. People were so poor and so hungry with no food and no clothing that they would do anything to get food or clothing. It wasn't all their fault. Now, I even feel sorry for some of the things I did. At the time you felt you had to because there would be an old woman and a little kid. If you tried to help them, the first thing you knew they would be stealing from you. Like I say, I would probably have done the same thing if I had a little Korean kid.

JS - The conditions of war are such that sometimes things are done that you normally would not do. How did you cope with that?

RH - You just had to learn to live with whatever happened. I guess you had to harden yourself. I can remember one night, I was sergeant of the guard and it was in the middle of the night with no moon. A guard came and said, "We have a problem down there." A colored outfit was hauling ammunition and had got in our compound for the night. I went down there and one of the drivers had a little old girl who looked ten or twelve years old. She probably was fifteen or twenty. He was trying to have sex with her and supposedly the little girl's grandmother. I got down there to see what was going on. I tried to hit that guy in the head and the old grandma took after me with a tree limb. She was making money by selling her so-called granddaughter. Things like that, but I never did get a good look at the girl. I had the guard take her up and give her to the officer of the day. I never saw her again. I still can't forgive that woman. She most likely was not even related to the girl. She may have just picked up a little orphan kid and was using her to make money. At the same time, I can't forgive that soldier, even though he was in our uniform. You wonder what happened to the girl. She probably went right back out on the street because that was one of their ways of survival.

JS - From that and other experiences as you look back, was what you learned good or not?

RH - Afterwards, my wife and I were on a bus trip and we were in Seattle at a flower garden place. There was a group of Koreans there. I talked to this one guy. I told him I had been in Korea. He was not even born when I was there, but he struck up a conversation and was shaking my hand and thanking me. I said I had not done anything. He said if it hadn't been for people like me he would not be here today. That made me feel good and that maybe I hadn't wasted two years of my life. When we went on a cruise through the Panama Canal, I said we were going to get up early and go up to the observation deck and get a seat.

Right next to us was a man with an oriental wife. We spent the day with them. She was Korean and he was an American soldier and had met her. That would have been years after I was there. They had met and he had retired from the Army and she told us that when she was about three years old she could remember going back to Seoul, where they lived. All she remembered was walking days and days. When they got there, her parents' home had a wall around it. Her dad opened the gate and the house was all burned down. That is the only time she ever saw her father cry. It made me feel that they were just as human as I was. I haven't had a bad dream since that. I had a lot of them before that. I have three little grandkids adopted from the Philippines so I have a lot of oriental connections. Those people are the same as we are with the same feelings and needs.

JS - The war doesn't let you think that?

RH - Right now if it is an Arab, I have no sympathy for them at all. In time I am sure there are men and women over there that have the same attitude that I had. These men will come home and forty or fifty years from now, I am sure they will have the same feelings toward the average people over there that I have toward the Koreans.

JS - When you came home and had the bad dreams, why do you think you had them and did you talk about your experiences when you got home?

RH - No, I talked more today than normally.

JS - Why do you think that is?

RH - You just don't do it.

JS - The dreams were of the experiences that you had?

RH - Yeah, different things that happened and it seemed like the dream was always worse than what really happened. I would scare my wife. Meeting those two people put me at ease.

JS - That is interesting. Thank goodness.

RH - There are people that never get over it. They lose their minds, eventually, from the experiences.

JS - When you were over there, did you understand why we were fighting the war?

RH - Yes, I did because the communists were just slowly moving like the Islam situation. They just try to eat their way into everyplace. We understood why we were there.

JS - Did you have much contact with the men who were fighting, the Americans?

RH - Not very much.

JS - You certainly knew how things were?

RH - I had one kid. I don't know why I was so lucky or unlucky, but I don't think he was over nineteen or twenty. He was in the infantry and got shot here between the shoulder and neck. For some reason they brought him to me and told me to keep him for thirty days. The only word he ever said to me was, "Sarge" if he needed something fixed like clothing or something. Other than that he just would not talk. I kept him right in my tent and one night the guard came and told me the kid was down in the tent where we did the company laundry threatening to kill them. I jumped up and went down there. They had a kerosene lantern in the tent. It was a big old tent and he was sitting in there with a rifle across his knees and I started talking to him. He never moved and I got there and took the rifle away from him and he didn't really resist. I checked it and all he had to do was pull the trigger. I think about him a lot. After forty-five days or so they came and picked him up one day.

JS - Would he have gone back to fight?

RH - I don't know. I never could find out. Something like that haunts you. He was a nice young man. If he went back to the front, I am sure he was killed. If he went home, he was going to have to have an untold amount of counseling. He was nice and clean and he kept himself shaved and his clothes clean all the time. I'd have him drive my Jeep once in a while to try to get him to talk. He said never a word.

JS - He had probably just seen or experienced too much?

RH - I am sure that wound didn't help. It was a huge scar, but they had filled it in and it was healing. I have always wondered what happened to him.

JS - No wonder you had bad dreams with experiences like that.

RH - Yes, it worked on you.

JS - Was that part of your job?

RH - No, my job was to see that the vehicles were running.

JS - You must have been known as kind.

RH - The position that I had, I could take somebody like that. I didn't have to physically work on the trucks. I had to see that it was done. I could keep him with me and take him different places because we were moving around all the time.

JS - The other incident you told about, when somebody came to you and said this was happening, why would they have come to you?

RH - That night I was sergeant of the guard.

JS - So you had the authority?

RH - Yes, with the little girl. With the boy, the guard knew who he was and came to my tent and got me.

JS - It was Koreans that did the laundry for you and they went around with you?

RH - Yeah, they kept a tent for them and furnished their supplies. We always were by a stream or river of some kind and they washed clothes in the rivers.

JS - Was that where you got your drinking water and things like that?

RH - We would dip the water, but we had a purification plant that we set up. At first we just had to put quinine in the water, which is pretty nasty. Once we got up there and got equipment and stuff we set up our own purification plant. Other outfits would come and get their drinking water.

JS - How often would you move?

RH - It varied. Sometimes we might not be stopped a week and maybe the next time a month or so. It kind of depended on how the war was progressing.

JS - Did you ever have to go back?

RH - Yes, a couple of times we had to go back. When you start hearing and seeing artillery, you know it is time to move. You gather up what you can and get out. We were relatively safe all the time, except for the guerillas. You had to be on watch all the time. Mostly they would set explosive devices in roads. There was a kid that lived here, same age as my younger brother. He was killed when he was driving a Jeep down the road. I was on my way home when he was killed. There really was no defense for it other than hoping you didn't hit a mine that was planted in the road.

JS - We hear so much about the Viet Nam War and the guerilla warfare there, but we don't hear a lot about the Korean War and how it was fought.

RH - No, you don't hear much about the Korean War and it was probably one of the worst for the soldier. In the winter so cold and in the summer it would get so hot. It is below the thirtieth parallel and it is the way it is situated, ocean currents or something. It was a miserable place to work and live and possibly help somebody.

JS - Was there anything good about the experience?

DH - Oh yes, once you got through it. It gives you more appreciation for human life, I think. No matter which side you were on, they were dedicated and so you can't necessarily blame the individual soldier that is out there. He followed his orders the same as I followed my orders. It was an adventure I wouldn't want to go through again, but it is priceless.

JS - Because you were in mechanics, did you have experience with that growing up on the farm?

DH - Yes and when you went into the Army they gave you tests. In Virginia, I went to maintenance school.

JS - What was that?

DH - Basic mechanic work.

JS - What were the vehicles that you were responsible for?

DH - Jeeps, three-quarter tons, six by six trucks, generators and all the big trucks that hauled dirt and sand and the semis that hauled railroads. If it ran on gasoline and had wheels, I pretty well had to do maintenance on it.

JS - These vehicles would have been brought over from America?

DH - Yes, we brought all of our stuff.

JS - About how many vehicles did you maintain?

DH - There were over four hundred vehicles that I was in charge of plus generators, welders, etc.

JS - You had a regular supply of parts that you needed?

DH - You hoped you learned to be a good thief.

JS - Who would you steal from?

DH - If you found a vehicle blown up out there somewhere you'd send a couple of men out to get either the parts or the whole thing. We got a lot of our parts that way. We just couldn't get enough through our military supplies so you had to go out and confiscate some. You would get pretty discouraged when you needed stuff. Not too long before I came home we were pretty close to the thirtieth parallel. An MP told me about a six by that had blown up and said it had been laying there for a long time. He said it was about six miles past the thirtieth parallel. He told me how to get there and stay off the main roads. I got in a Jeep and went up there and it had everything I needed. It had a transmission, transfer case and differential so I didn't tell this guy it was north of the parallel, but I sent him up there. I didn't know if I would ever see him again, but he came back with everything I told him to get. You had all kinds of problems. One time we were by a river and it was muddy season. They had run their equipment down in the river to wash it. It wasn't long till all the wheel bearings and universal joints were going out. I told them, "No more washing vehicle down there" because I couldn't get wheel bearings and stuff. I had this major that wanted those vehicles clean. I told him they couldn't be washed in the river, anymore. He came and told me, "You are going to be a private, tomorrow." Later that day a runner came down and told me the colonel wanted to see me and I thought, "That was fast." I got up there and the colonel said I had done the right thing. I never could understand that major. He had graduated from West Point, but he wanted those vehicles clean so to run them down into three foot of water was the way to do it.

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Raymond Hargett (RH)
Tape 2 of 2
Side A

JS - You were saying about the major?

DH - He was more in construction. I had other run-ins with him, but this topped it off.

JS - What is a six by six?

DH - You have two wheels in front that you steer and four in the back. You can use all of them to pull if you want. It means six wheels can pull like a four by four, means you have four wheels and all four can pull.

JS - These would have been used to haul supplies, but not men necessarily?

DH - Mostly, it was supplies, but not always.

JS - When you moved, did you have a machine shop that you took with you with tools and things?

RH - We had all kinds of equipment, like we had a machine shop in a big semi. We had lathes and other machines. This one guy had worked for Caterpillar, but I am not real sure. He was on crutches and the Army needed him and they gave him his shots and to Korea he went. He was young, I think, twenty-five or twenty-six years old. He could take a piece of metal and make whatever you needed. We had quite a few like that. We had a welder that had worked for Caterpillar and he was fifty-some years old and they brought him over there. He had been in the Army before.

JS - Would he have been in the reserve?

RH - I think he was still in the reserve. This machinist had a metal plate for a shinbone. He could stand, but he needed crutches to walk.

JS - Had a lot of the men fought in World War Two or was this a different generation?

RH - Quite a few, there were a number of them. I had this friend from over at Jetmore. I think he landed on the beach at Normandy and he was still carrying shrapnel. There were quite a few that had been in combat.

JS - When you were in Korea, did you really know what the conditions for the troops were like? You said you didn't have much contact with them.

RH - Not at first, but it didn't take long until you learned because they were moving back and forth and you would talk to different guys. You knew pretty quickly what the conditions were like. We knew the conditions that we had and we had better shelter because they were eating stuff out of a can. How they survived, I can't imagine.

JS - Probably like you, they just got through it somehow.

RH - I have a book that my son gave me. Each page tells a soldier's story in a few short words. The guy who lived across the street wanted to read that, but it wasn't, but a couple of days and he brought it back and said he couldn't read it.

JS - It reminded him too much?

RH - He had never been in the service. That shows what conditions the men had over there.

JS - In some cases it seems like conditions that only animals could survive.

RH - It is unreal what a human can do. I am amazed.

JS - And what they can do to other humans, too. What other specific memories of that time in Korea do you have that you haven't already talked about? Is there a particular person that you could talk about?

RH - There is a person I would like to bring up. General Ridgeway replaced MacArthur. I tell people I knew him on a first name basis. It wasn't quite that much, but one day this officer, you knew it was an officer because he had a driver, came in there in an old dirty Jeep. He came in there and it was a general. I got tongue tied and everything else at first. I could see he had a front spring broken on the Jeep when they drove up there. He wanted to know if we could fix it and I said we could. I had the guys start working on it and they said there were other things that were wrong like U-joints. We wound up changing the oil and putting new sparkplugs and points. He would stop by every now and then when he was out checking stuff. Sometimes he would be driving himself. He always wanted his vehicle serviced. He was one good man. He was upset with the Army because he was a paratrooper and when he took command he couldn't jump anymore. He had fits about that. That is a good memory.

JS - You must have done good work for him that he came back.

RH - We did, he was a general and the old Jeep was pretty badly beat up and we got it up in first class shape in a couple of hours time. He really appreciated it.

JS - Did you keep in contact with people after you came home?

RH - Yeah, the ones around here close, I kind of kept track with. Most of them have died off. It has been fifty-six years. Another little incident, I had told you about this black truck driver and I should have shot him and didn't. The outfit I was signed with out here at Camp Carson was from Vicksburg, Mississippi. You know what the situation was there. They had just started to integrate the military services over there. They would send in a black guy and he would be gone the next day. Finally, they sent two black kids that were both from Chicago. You could tell they were so scared and they were assigned to the motor pool. Neither one could even drive a car. They were from mid-city Chicago. I have often thought, I would have felt just like they did if I had been one of two kids put in a company of over four hundred white guys. I have often wondered about them. They were still in the company when I left. You get mixed thoughts of people. I felt so darned sorry for those two kids, but somebody had told the colonel they were going to stay. They didn't get shipped out. I just wonder what in the world they might have done with them because they had put them in a motor pool and they couldn't even drive. I had them washing parts and tried to think of something for them to do to keep them busy. I could have shot every black guy I came in contact with.

JS - Growing up out here, you just didn't have contact with different people.

RH - We had this family that lived down south here that was colored and Indian mix. My mom went to school with the older ones. They were just part of Montezuma and when you got out in the big world it was a different story. That was two sides.

JS - It seems that you learned a great deal about life and about people?

RH - Oh yes, you get to appreciate people more all the time, I think.

JS - I have a question. Merchant Marine, Army Reserve and you were back into the Army? When you were in the Reserve, what duties did you have?

RH - I was in the Inactive Reserve, so there were none. Like this outfit that was attached to the company from Mississippi, they were Active Reserve and they ran a kind of like a flood control. They were on active duty a good part of the time down there.

JS - Did you choose Inactive?

RH - I chose Inactive when I got out. I could have taken Active, but I think I would have to go through Wichita or some place. I think if I had chosen Active it would have been like two years, but Inactive was five years. You could be called back.

JS - When you came back you moved back into your old life?

RH - Farm life, yes.

JS - You be thinking of any specific incidents. When you were in the Army, what was your pay? Was it as good as Merchant Marine?

RH - It was pretty good in Korea, but when I first went in, I think it was twenty-one dollars. When I went to Korea and got to be a sergeant first class you got base pay, overseas pay and combat pay. I think it was over \$200 a month back then.

JS - When you came home from Korea did you buy souvenirs?

RH - A little, but very little. I bought a little cap and coat for my niece in Japan in the few days we were there and sent to her. I bought a little tea set for myself. I bought a big long opium pipe that I brought home. I really don't have much of anything.

JS - You came back during the reserve period and went into farming and you were called up. Then when you got out that time, you just moved back to Montezuma?

RH - I moved back and farmed with my dad and then Dorothy and I got married. We lived down on Crooked Creek and ran cattle and farmed for about eight years. We had a flood and lost thirty-some head of cattle and farming was bad. A mail route opened up so I got that mail route. I carried out of Montezuma first for about ten years. They combined Montezuma and Copeland so I went on until I had thirty-four years of carrying mail and retired.

JS - Did you know Crooked Creek is the only creek in Gray County? I was doing some research and there was an ad trying to get people to come out here.

RH - It starts from north and west of Copeland. Kind of finger draws to it. We lived a mile west of town and straight south. Back then there were pools of water most of the time. My folks lived on east a little ways and there was some water in the creek.

JS - It wasn't a dry creek?

RH - Not completely, it wouldn't take much for it to run.

JS - Is it still a viable creek?

RH - Oh yeah, if we get good hard rains there is water in it.

JS - Is that were you lost the cattle?

RH - Yes, they drowned in '56, I guess it was. It had been dry and we had about a hundred head of cattle and I got them all in. Wire grass had grown up in the creek and the only time they will eat it is in the spring. I had fenced in a lot of ground to let the cattle run in the creek bottom. May seventeenth or nineteenth a storm came up and it rained sixteen inches plus the hail. All the cattle were more or less in that creek and thirty-two of them drowned. That was a wicked blow. It was a hundred years rain.

JS - Your training that you received in maintenance, was that adequate?

RH - It was, but things mechanically were not near as complicated as now.

JS - You had experience with mechanics growing up on the farm?

RH - Yes.

JS - As you left the United States to go to Japan and Korea, what was the strongest memory of that trip on a ship?

RH - The strongest memory was about the first six or eight hours that we could pick up a radio signal. Some kid had a radio and this station knew the ship we were on. I'll bet they played the song "Harbor Lights" at least once every thirty minutes, maybe oftener. I still enjoy the song.

JS - You were really starting on a new experience in your life.

RH - Yeah, "Harbor Lights" is a pretty song and they just played and played that song. The farther you went, the more guys got sick and the worse it was. It was a disaster. The ship had five or six hundred more on it than they had bunks for, for starters. A lot of them would just sleep up on deck anyway because the smell was so bad down below that you couldn't stand it.

JS - Did you encounter any bad weather or did you have to watch for enemy ships?

RH - No, but it was pretty rough and once they got sick and started throwing up down there it was bad. There was no ventilation. I don't know how they ever cleaned those things up.

JS - You were glad to get to Japan?

RH - I was glad to get out of that. Then we got on a so-called Japanese luxury liner and had rice straw mats to sleep on. The mats were full of body lice. That is another thing you learned to live with. That was my first encounter with those in that four or five days getting around to Korea.

JS - Did you get rid of the lice?

RH - Yeah, they had powder to put on and you kept yourself shaved off and everything. You tried to wash your clothes out well. You got to where lice were common. The main thing was to stay away from the straw mats so you didn't get them in your clothing. You could do pretty well.

JS - What an experience that was. How did the experience from the Merchant Marine on through change you? Or do you have any reflections that you would like people who are looking at these in years in to come to read about?

RH - First of all, for young people, the military isn't as bad as it sounds. Civilian life has almost the same downfalls as the military. I am proud of my service and think I did the right thing. The people at home sacrificed about as much, in a lot of ways. They didn't get shot at, but still the parents suffered mentally. I would like to have young people know it would not be a bad career in any branch of the

service. I enjoyed every bit of it and saw lots of things. You usually talk about the bad instead of the good, but the people you meet and the things you do and see are okay.

JS - Do you think it was a life-changing experience for you?

RH - I am sure it made me more compassionate. I have a hard time finding fault with people anymore, right down deep.

JS - Did you have a religious faith or was that a factor at all?

RH - I am not a religious person, publicly. Privately, I feel that I am quite religious.

JS - I think we have covered all the questions unless there is something else that you think of.

RH - I could talk for a week. One of the biggest problems I had was with pneumonia. I had pneumonia in training for Merchant Marine and when I was taking basic training down in Arkansas. I got pneumonia when I was in Korea, when I first got over there.

JS - How were you treated in Korea?

RH - Two guys came with a big old bottle of what I think was Vicks and aspirin. We didn't have any doctor. Where they got the stuff, I don't know. That is when we were bunking in this school house. I knew I was really sick. They came in the night and they had buckets, towels, Vicks and aspirin. They would get those towels in hot water, wring them out, put them on me and burned me. They rubbed the Vicks on me and gave me the aspirin. By gosh, they cured me. I never had another cold while I was over there. If they hadn't, I would have wound up on a hospital ship.

JS - Were they medics?

RH - No, they were just friends. They knew I was sick and they knew more than I did about what to do. One of them was from Fowler and the other was from Jetmore. Boy, I tell you, they stayed in there practically all night and I didn't get out for three or four days. The only medication they had was a jar of Vicks and aspirin and hot towels. When I was in basic and got pneumonia it was when penicillin had just started. They gave a big old shot in the rear every day and that is when they had mixed it with bees wax. They had to heat that to body temperature so your body would absorb it.

JS - The bees wax was injected also?

RH - Yes, the penicillin was in the bees wax. Their downfall from all that was that you got boils later because your body would not absorb the bees wax. It came out in boils. In the Merchant Marine, I went on sick call and they put me in the hospital where I got good care. I don't know what they used for medicine, but this doctor in training sat there all night and gave me pills and made me drink water. It was a base hospital.

JS - You said in Korea, there were no doctors. What would happen if someone got bad sick?

RH - If they got bad enough, they would ship them to a hospital ship. You had nothing on land to speak of at all. We had a dentist at one time, but he went with one of the line companies. He got scared and made his driver switch outfits. The driver put on his captain's hat and captain's bars and he put on the private stuff. He got shipped out on account of that, which he should have been. If they got caught the officer was the one that would have been killed. It was not very often we would have a dentist. You were just out there. Sometimes you had aspirin and Band-Aids. Most of the time you went and got some black tape that you wrapped wires on vehicles with and wrapped around it. One time we got some dysentery and there were some guys that died from that. Some guys were shipped to Japan to a hospital. One guy, when he came back, had lost a hundred pounds and I didn't know him. It is wicked. I had it, but not very bad. I worked everyday.

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Raymond Hargett (RH)
Tape 2 of 2
Side B

RH - You dig a latrine trench about a foot wide and flies were bad so they took barrels and made a toilet. It had a lid to keep it closed. They hired Koreans to clean them out and burn them out a couple of times a day and that kept the dysentery under control. I don't think they had any medication.

JS - What crew was in charge of that?

RH - They always had some Koreans there.

JS - The Koreans did the laundry. Did they do the cooking for you? '

RH - No, we had our own cooks.

JS - You didn't have Korean food?

RH - No, closest thing I had to Korean food over there was some whiskey I bought for my birthday. Kerosene would have tasted better.

JS - At least you experienced it. Do you have any other interesting stories?

RH - Another thing on the sad side, a couple of kids drowned. They were from our company, but I didn't know them. Our compound was set up right next to a river like we always did and I didn't know we had these collapsible canoes. They worked just like the old Army bunks. They had two-man canoes that pulled out and these two kids found one someplace. They got out in this pretty good river and they didn't lock it so it wouldn't fold up. They got out there. I didn't see it happen, but another guy said the two ends came up and it started taking on water right away. It happened it was in the middle of a whirlpool. I got called. It was about seven o'clock in the evening. It was summertime. Somebody got me. I was right close by and you could see that whirlpool. That canoe stayed on top and just spun around. I knew this one guy had been what they call Navy Seals, now. They didn't have them then, but he had been in there. I sent somebody to grab him. He stripped off and jumped in and he got them both out and we kept them alive. We really pumped water out of them. I called Pusan and got a doctor and he flew up there in a little old Piper Cub, but we didn't save them. There was nothing to do. Everything was quiet. I don't, to this day, know where that collapsible canoe came from or how they got it. At least I didn't have to fill out a death certificate on them because that doctor could do that. I often wondered what he put on there, but I imagine it was, "In the line of duty." That is the only thing you could do. They were just nineteen or twenty at the very most.

JS - They just didn't think, or know, to lock it.

RH - You always had things like that going on that stayed in your mind. If you were walking down the street to pick out a swimmer you wouldn't have picked out him. Real narrow in the shoulders, he kind of had a pot belly and wide hips. He evidently could swim like a fish because he went down there and he said it was eighteen to twenty feet deep.

JS - They were just caught down in there?

RH - Yes, that whirlpool was holding them down, they couldn't get up. They were almost on the bottom and the water was clear so you could see. He got them right out when he got there.

JS - Was he a member of the maintenance group?

RH - He was an engineer and helped with designing bridges.

JS - The average person does not realize what it takes to support the troops with supplies and things.

RH - You don't have anything if you don't have a supply line in any war.

JS - Most people don't think of all that it takes to have war.

RH - I remember when we were packing up out here at Camp Carson there was a huge old box in there. It was probably eight feet wide, twelve feet long and four feet deep. They started filling that with toilet paper. I thought that was dumb, but it turned out to be the greatest thing.

JS - The life you describe seems rather primitive?

RH -Yeah.

JS - What else surprised you, do you think?

RH - The British surprised me.

JS - How would you have come in contact with them?

RH - There were troops from everywhere over there.

JS - Because it was a police action?

RH - Yes, you would listen to the British, they had won every war they ever fought. All the time I had contact with them over there, I would go down to Pusan to pick up stuff. They would be down there in the bars playing Spoons. Have you ever seen Spoons?

JS - No.

RH - They would get spoons in their fingers and whack them on their thighs. Australians were completely different type of guys. We had a fighter troop that stayed with us. Well, we maintained a strip for them to land and take off from. Those Australians were really nice guys. We had a lot of fun with them.

JS - You had experiences with other nationalities?

RH - Oh yeah, and of course, we had South Korean soldiers we were in contact with all the time. Sometimes they were in the same quarters.

JS - Did you pick up any Korean language?

RH - No, mama-san, baby-san and papa-san. Most of them could say enough words in English to get us to hear what they wanted us to know. I think they probably had dictionaries and a lot of foreign countries teach a little English in their schools. They did that even way back then.

JS - They probably knew if they could learn a little English, it would help them.

RH - I am sure they did, but most of us would point had holler.

JS - You have story after story.

RH - There are a million of them. The first mate, that I was in the Merchant Marine with, came and got me and we went out fishing in his dad's old wooden boat. We were out there fishing and he was teaching me all this stuff. We were visiting about old times and all of a sudden he hollered. He said, "We have lost our prop!" Sure enough, where the shaft comes up to the engine, the pin that held the prop shaft into the U-joint on the back of engine had fallen out. The prop slid down and we couldn't get hold of that shaft to pull it back in there. He had to jump overboard and push it back in there. I got hold of it and hooked it back up. We stuck a spike nail in it and made it back. I am glad he could swim because I couldn't swim.

JS - Still, you loved the ocean.

RH - Yeah, most of the time I was only miles from land. It might be straight down.

JS - Growing up in Western Kansas, we didn't have any water to swim in. We had creeks.

RH - You had creeks, but when they were running they were full of trash and stuff. You didn't have enough money to go to Dodge and go swimming.

JS - There were chores to do.

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Raymond Hargett (RH)
Tape 2 of 2
End
