

INTERVIEW

**James Kyle Lacy**

YEAR

**2006**

**GRAY COUNTY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW**

**NAME:** (James) Kyle Lacy

**DATE:** March 6, 2006

**PLACE:** Cimarron, Kansas

**INTERVIEWER:** Joyce Suellentrop

**PROJECT SERIES:** Veterans Oral History Project for Gray County

**BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:**

Kyle Lacy was drafted into the Army in 1941 and sent to North Africa and then to the China-Burma-India Theater. He served as a sergeant in motor pools throughout his service career and over a long period had unusual experiences. His troop ship was bombed in North Africa and he spent a long night in the water in the Mediterranean Sea. Nearly half of his shipmates did not survive the sinking of the ship but Lacy lived to go on to Burma where he trucked supplies over the mountains to the troops. He came home from that war and due to being in the reserve was called up for service in the Korean War where he worked with big equipment repairing bridges, overpasses, trellises etc. He left the service in 1952 and worked in several jobs, finally coming to Cimarron, Kansas, where he operated his own shop for 40 years. At 90 years of age he has a remarkable recall of his wartime days and many stories to tell.

**SUBJECTS DISCUSSED:** Training and life as a part of the World War Two Infantry with action in the China -Burma-India Theater where he worked in a motor pool. He continued that work later in Korea during the Korean War. His troop ship was destroyed by a guided missile in the Mediterranean Sea while he was on the way to CBI and the memories of that experience were discussed. The Korean War and his opinions were discussed.

**COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW:**

**SOUND RECORDINGS:** 2 - 60 minute tapes

**LENGTH OF INTERVIEW:** 1 3/4 hours

**RESTRICTIONS ON USE:** none

**TRANSCRIPT:** 30 pages

**ORAL HISTORY**  
**Lacy, James Kyle**  
**Interview Date: June 6, 2006**

**Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)**  
**Interviewee: (James) Kyle Lacy (KL)**  
**Tape 1 of 2**  
**Side A**

---

**JS -** How old were you when the war started in 1939? You were born in 1915?

**KL -** I went in February of '41.

**JS -** Do you remember when the war started in 1939 and do you remember how you heard about it?

**KL -** I was a truck driver so I heard it all up and down the road.

**JS -** And you were driving trucks here in Western Kansas, hauling what?

**KL -** Everything. I worked in the oil field, worked in construction, hauled meat, just general for Stinson Transportation out of Kinsley. It was Andy Kindsvater's father-in-law.

**JS -** Do you remember what you thought when you heard about the war starting in 1939?

**KL -** Nothing. We could tell it was coming.

**JS -** Were people talking about the war?

**KL -** Not much talk. Didn't have much talk about it.

**JS -** Until 1941?

**KL -** Wasn't much going on then.

**JS -** And you joined up?

**KL -** I didn't join, I was drafted.

**JS -** In February of '41? Did you ever think of enlisting?

**KL** - No, I didn't mind going. The Army didn't pay anything, but they had a crew going all over the country in '39 trying to recruit. They would give big money, Twenty-one dollars a month, I think

**JS** - You were making more driving that truck?

**KL** - When I got drafted, I got paid three pieces of money, a ten, a two and fifty cents. They paid us in cash.

**JS** - When you were drafted, where did you go for your physical?

**KL** - Most of the people won't believe it, but I did it in Wichita in Henry Leavitt Arena. I hate to guess how many hundred it was at the time.

**JS** - Did you ride the train down there?

**KL** - I must have rode the train down because I didn't leave anything there.

**JS** - You were in Kinsley at the time. Were there other young men from Kinsley that went?

**KL** - Four or five more. I can't remember just who they were.

**JS** - You passed your physical?

**KL** - Anybody could have passed that.

**JS** - What did they do?

**KL** - Just observed you. They didn't have any medical stuff there at all. A stethoscope was the biggest piece of medical equipment they had. The report said, "Appeared all right." If you heard them say anything, your hearing was all right.

**JS** - Were you then inducted?

**KL** - Inducted right there. A guy got up on the stand and he swore in 5 or 6 hundred at once and he had no idea whether they said, "I do," or held their hand up.

**JS** - You were inducted into the Army?

**KL** -Yes.

**JS** - And then what happened?

**KL** - I was sent to Little Rock, Arkansas. I can't think of the name of the camp. I was put with a National Guard outfit out of Holton, Kansas. The National Guard outfits were short-handed when they picked them up and I think we had about twenty-five or thirty going with that one.

**JS** - That was for your basic training?

**KL** -Yeah, basic training.

**JS** - Could you describe your basic training?

**KL** - There wasn't much to it, an ordinary farm boy like me didn't have any trouble.

**JS** - Because you were used to physical work?

**KL** -Yes.

**JS** - How long was that?

**KL** - Thirteen weeks.

**JS** - Was it difficult to learn to obey and follow orders?

**KL** - Nope, I did that all my life.

**JS** - What about living in a barracks with others?

**KL** - That didn't bother me because I did that, too. The thing about it was that I was older than the average person drafted in there at that time.

**JS** - Do you know why you weren't drafted earlier?

**KL** - I was drafted early, I just was older. I was twenty-four or twenty-five years old when I went into the Army. Most of the kids were nineteen or twenty, something like that.

**JS** - Did that make it better?

**KL** - Made it awful easy for me. I was already past being homesick about anything. I was out on my own, anyway, when I was real young so it was no trouble for me at all.

**JS** - Was that the first time that you'd really been away from Kansas?

**KL** - Oh no, we hauled to St. Louis all the time.

**JS** - So you were a man of the world already?

**KL** - Most people won't believe it, but I hauled beer when I was fifteen years old--legal. Somebody said you couldn't even get a driver's license. I said of course you couldn't, they didn't even have them. If you could drive it you could just drive. I ran around with Stinson's kids and just automatically went to work for them. One was the same age as me and it was nothing unusual for two sixteen year olds to haul beer out of St. Louis.

**JS** - What kind of truck did you drive?

**KL** - Chevrolet, mostly, and our trailers weren't as big as some farm trucks now.

**JS** - How many days did you haul from St. Louis?

**KL** - Whenever there was a load. See, he was general freight so you might be pulling beer today and cattle tomorrow or a load of furniture.

**JS** - The beer out of St. Louis was Busch?

**KL** - And we hauled Pabst Blue Ribbon out of St. Joe.

**JS** - Say you were hauling beer west, how did you find out what you were going to pick up?

**KL** - We usually deadheaded. Just went with one-way hauls. Right soon after 3-2 beer was legalized they went to throw away bottles and cans. That made us go empty one way. Used to, it would take about 3 loads for us to get one load of empties. We hauled from a lot of places, Golden was Coors and down at Trinidad they had Century Beer. They don't even have that now.

**JS** - So you had been around a lot?

**KL** - We went everywhere. I was out in California fooling around when I was fifteen or sixteen years old so it didn't bother me a bit to be in Little Rock.

**JS** - When you finished your basic training, what area did you go into?

**KL** - I was in the infantry.

**JS** - Did you want to be in the infantry?

**KL** - It didn't make any difference and you didn't have any choice anyway.

**JS** - So you went into training for the infantry?

**KL** - Everybody took training for the infantry.

**JS** - So what did you do after basic training?

**KL** - By that time they had declared war on Japan so we were shipped to the West Coast to guard the West Coast. They scattered our division from way up above San Francisco to Los Angeles.

**JS** - Where were you when they bombed Pearl Harbor?

**KL** - I was at Little Rock.

**JS** - Do you remember hearing it?

**KL** - Oh yeah, we started loading our equipment to go to California the next day.

**JS** - You knew where you were going?

**KL** - That automatically made them know where we were going.

**JS** - Did you travel by truck?

**KL** - Train, we had a lot of trucks, but we hauled them on the train.

**JS** - What kind of equipment would you have had to load?

**KL** - In the infantry it is mainly your clothes and weapons. Most companies had at least two weapons carriers. I don't remember how many trains, but it took quite a few trains to haul the 35<sup>th</sup> division from Little Rock.

**JS** - As a member of the division, did you help with the loading or did they have particular people to do that?

**KL** - Particular people, and sometimes, later on, I would be on the detail to help load.

**JS** - So you got to the West Coast and your division spread out and what were your duties?

**KL** - Just guarding the coastline. We had men scattered all along the ocean.

**JS** - And you just sort of patrolled?

**KL** - Yeah, in certain areas. We were at Morrow Bay at first and then we went to Los Angeles.

**JS** - What were you looking for?

**KL** - Japanese.

**JS** - Ships?

**KL** - No, people. They thought Japan might invade the West Coast. They had Army, marines and navy scattered along there. Nobody had enough people to cover a place like that. They had to wait to get them drafted.

**JS** - Did you have a certain shift?

**KL** - Division goes down to regiment, then companies and I was 8<sup>th</sup> company, 137<sup>th</sup> infantry, but it is operated out of the division headquarters. They send the artillery certain places, trucks certain places. They even have transportation in each one of them.

**JS** - When you weren't patrolling and had free time, what did you do?

**KL** - Just went to town.

**JS** - What did you when you went to town?

**KL** - Drink a little and run around.

**JS** - This would have been a nearby town?

**KL** - Either that or the closest big town we could get to.

**JS** - By bus or train?

**KL** - They ran regular buses, but you could hardly get on them because they were always so full. A soldier had it easier getting on than a civilian, but it still wasn't very easy.

**JS** - As you look back was it an exciting time?

**KL** - No, I didn't think so.

**JS** - It was just a job you had to do?

**KL** - It was kind of like I had always done. I have a different opinion than a lot of them. I say the Army just cultivates what you already are. If you are pretty good when you go in, you will be pretty good when you come out. Lots of people say

the Army ruined them, but I don't believe that. I think you just kind of cultivate what you already were.

**JS** - You met people from all over and made friends. Is there a particular friend you remember?

**KL** - Yes, I was in with a bunch of Indians from Holton, Kansas, but I got separated from them in Alabama so beyond that, I never made many friends, or lasting friends, because I knew we wouldn't be together very long. I knew I wasn't going to see that many people. I said there was no use taking my name because I am not going to see anybody anyhow.

**JS** - How long were you in California?

**KL** - About two years, I think. Anyway, in '43 I was in the Mediterranean. Maybe a year and a half, then they transferred our whole division to Duncan, Alabama, for more infantry training. Then I went to several camps to get to debarkation. I went from Hampton Roads to Oran, North Africa. We were just a bunch of Non-Coms being shipped to Burma to be replacement for Marauders. We were all sergeants or above, no officers. Of course, we never got there, they sunk the ship.

**JS** - Let's go back. You received more training and then you were shipped out to the Pacific Theater?

**KL** - No, actually, Burma. It was the CBI, China, Burma and India.

**JS** - And you docked in North Africa?

**KL** - Oran, North Africa; they built up a convoy. Some of them were from England and I don't remember where all, but we were from Oran, North Africa and we trained there. The fight was still going on there, but the convoy was going to be the first one to go to India by way of the Suez. That was the first troop bunch being transported that way, but we didn't get there.

**JS** - So they sank your ship?

**KL** - Yes.

**JS** - The Germans?

**KL** - Yes, they sank it with a guided missile. People think guided missiles were more in the '70s, you know. We got sunk by a guided missile the day after Thanksgiving in 1943.

**JS** - Were you in the Mediterranean?

**KL** - Yes, headed for the Suez to go to India.

**JS** - What were you doing when the missile hit the ship?

**KL** - I was on guard duty with the gun crew. The ship sank in thirty minutes. Imagine a 600 foot ship sinking in thirty minutes.

**JS** - Had you had training in what to do?

**KL** - No, we had no training.

**JS** - What did you do?

**KL** - I went over the stern. There were probably thirty back there with us in that gun crew. We just threw a line over the back and went down to the water and swam away from it. It was about dark when I went in and got out after sunup. I got picked up by a seagoing tugboat.

**JS** - So you were in the Mediterranean all night, just sort of paddling around?

**KL** - Yeah, we lost most of our men because the water was cold and they wouldn't try to swim. There was a Czechoslovakian sailor in the crew that I was in and I credit him for making me make it. He said, "Lacy, if you want to see that sun come up in the morning you better still be swimming." You didn't have to swim to stay up because you had these things that were around you like an inner tube, but you had to swim to stay alive because you would die from exposure. Most of them that died in the water, died from exposure. It was quick. The other ships just took off, nothing stops.

**JS** - The other convoy ships?

**KL** - Yes, they never slow down.

**JS** - Why not?

**KL** - Because they are setting ducks then for a big air attack on us. That's how we got sunk. Our ship was in what they call the coffin corner, in the back and on the right. We were the slowest ship in the convoy then the rest of them took off. That left us just sitting there. The planes were protecting the convoy, not just one ship.

**JS** - The guided missile came from what?

**KL** - A German bomber. They hold them till they get in position and guide them in like these guys play with these toy airplanes. That's how they guided it.

**JS** - It must have been a large missile to sink a ship?

**KL** - It was about the size of a fighter plane. You take a ship with that size of a bomb and it hit the engine room which had a steam engine. When it hit, it blew up the boilers and the boilers were what tore the ship up.

**JS** - How many were on the ship?

**KL** - About three thousand.

**JS** - How many survived?

**KL** - We had 900 and some. We had 1011 that got killed.

**JS** - What did you think when you were in that water all night?

**KL** - Not a whole lot. There was nothing to do.

**JS** - Did you think that some other ship would come and pick you up?

**KL** - We could see that a mine sweep and several others were picking up some. We could see land, but it was quite a ways away. Some ships came out from the harbor and the one that I got picked up with was a tugboat and it was in Buji, North Africa helping clear out the ships that had sunk in the harbor, there. When the fighting started, it came out in case the ship got to where it wouldn't move they would tow it. That's what they went out for, but there was nothing there to tow by the time they got there.

**JS** - You said it took about thirty minutes for it to go down. Did you see it go down?

**KL** - Oh yeah, I wasn't very far from it.

**JS** - How far were you?

**KL** - I'd say about a couple of hundred yards, but it wasn't any danger to suck you down with it because it was an old model ship and it didn't have any water-tight compartment. It just filled up like a tub and the front of it reared up and it went back down into the water.

**JS** - So you had a kind of life preserver?

**KL** - Yeah, they furnished those. They were not very good. You just put it around you and it stayed folded up like pleats and it had a couple of hand levers and you pulled them and two bombs inflated it. It didn't have air in it before that.

**JS** - Did you have it on at all times?

**KL** - Just kept it near. I put it on after we got hit.

**JS** - When the tug picked you up, where did you go?

**KL** - Back into Buji where he was stationed. They put the ones he picked up in a British hospital there.

**JS** - Were you injured at all?

**KL** - Just where shrapnel had hit your face and legs. I was with the British for probably a month. That screwed me up the rest of my life. They can get me to North Africa and then pick me up in Bombay, India, but they have no record of me being in the hospital in Buji, North Africa. They have tried and Senator Moran's office has tried and they can get me to North Africa and pick me up at Bombay, India, but no record of the missing month.

**JS** - When you were in the hospital?

**KL** - Well, the war was going on full blast there and the paper work probably got lost or something. My service record started in Bombay, India. They told me if I told anyone I was on a ship that was sunk they would deny it. Our papers went down with the ship. We weren't a company of men, we were just a replacement and didn't even have any high ranking officers so when it sank, we were just excess baggage. These other companies formed on land and even if they had lost half of their men, they could still operate as a company.

**JS** - Because they had an officer?

**KL** - Yeah, everything was already built up for them so they didn't lose, but two and a half or three days, but they never started my record again until I got to Bombay.

**JS** - How did you go to Bombay?

**KL** - On another British ship.

**JS** - With other men?

**KL** - With other men, most were from other ships, not the one that sank. It was another old British ship.

**JS** - So, you went through the Suez?

**KL** - And went to Bombay.

**JS** - When you got to Bombay?

**KL** - They restarted me a service record and shipped me to the American Army in Calcutta. I was there awhile and I didn't want in any outfit that was there if I could keep out of them because I didn't like them. I should have taken them as one of them was in the postal department. That would have been a good one to come out on, but I didn't want to. Finally, they shipped me to Karachi, India to work there. There was a Quartermaster Truck Company in there from Arizona. I was on loan to them and they finally just transferred me over to them and I spent the rest of India time in the 145<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Truck Company.

**JS** - Were you there because of the experience before the war driving trucks?

**KL** - Yeah, that's why. I never went to an Army school. I made sergeant right off, there weren't many things I couldn't run. That was an advantage over a lot of them.

**JS** - In that Quartermaster Company, what did you do?

**KL** - I was a truck driver. I drove a weapons carrier that went around and picked up groceries and everything.

**JS** - Where did you go?

**KL** - Just in Karachi and the warehouses around there.

**JS** - And you would take them back to base?

**KL** - We lived in Karachi right on the docks. We unloaded ships. Our job was to haul stuff away from ships.

**JS** - And you would load the supplies and take them?

**KL** - Load them on to trains and ship them across India.

**JS** - To our troops?

**KL** - Yes, see the Japanese controlled the water around Calcutta so we couldn't ship in there so we had to ship into Karachi. Karachi is up on the northwest corner of India. Not India any more, it is Pakistan. It was India, then. We loaded it on trains and they took it to Burma by train.

**JS** - This would be food, weapons, etc.?

**KL** - Everything that the Army runs on.

**JS** - And you did that for how long?

**KL** - The rest of the time I was there. I must have left there sometime in '45.

**JS** - Before the war was over?

**KL** - Well, I was still there when the war was over in Germany. One time I got a discharge out of the Army mailed to me up in Burma with mustering out pay and everything else, from Bombay. I rode the train back down to Calcutta and told them I might look like an Indian, but I don't belong over here. That was where my service record started so they just discharged me in Bombay. It took another month for them to decide that I belonged in United States.

**JS** - You said you were up in Burma?

**KL** - We had trucks running into Burma.

**JS** - So sometimes you would go up there?

**KL** - Oh yes, I had been up there lots of times.

**JS** - When you said you lived on the docks?

**KL** - We just had a big motor pool there and tents.

**JS** - You had people who cooked for you?

**KL** - It was a regular company with cooks, just like a family, and some who took care of KP and the private had to do that. KP was kitchen police. Each company is like an expanded family. It has everything it takes to survive on its own.

**JS** - Were the tents large?

**KL** - Seven-man tents.

**JS** - Were you able to soak up some of the culture there?

**KL** - I was, because India was never at war and, as motor sergeants, we had to get permission from India to run our trucks. We had a lot of trouble getting paper work done.

**JS** - So you had to deal with the Indian officials? Was there danger as you were taking the trucks places?

**KL** - Not really, kind of like now, but they didn't use land mines because they weren't at war, but they were the same religion and still are. See, Karachi is the Mohammedan part of what used to be India. They just put a line through there. When I was there they were trying to mix, but the west was Mohammedan and the east was Hindus. Somewhere about '46 they divided up and Karachi is in Pakistan and New Delhi is in India. The Hindus predominate in New Delhi and the Muslims predominate in Karachi. I hate to say it, but I don't think there is a way we can get out of Iraq, decently. When you start fighting a religion, you have a hard time fighting them. That's what we are into right now.

**JS** - Were you able to eat Indian food?

**KL** - We had our own. Quartermaster delivered the food. There was very little you could eat there. You could have the prettiest tomatoes and vegetables, but you couldn't eat them because they gave you dysentery because they are fertilized with human waste.

**Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)**  
**Interviewee: (James) Kyle Lacy (KL)**  
**Tape 1 of 2**  
**Side B**

---

**JS** - Were the sergeants that were with you, were they older or younger than you?

**KL** - Most were younger than me.

**JS** - Do you know why you became a sergeant?

**KL** - I already knew what I had to do. I never did even go to an Army school. Ordinarily you have to go to an Army school to get to be a Motor Sergeant. I had already worked with that stuff so much that I didn't have to go to the school.

**JS** - Did you work on your trucks?

**KL** - We had a big shop.

**JS** - And there were mechanics?

**KL** - Yeah, and in Karachi I had as many Indian mechanics as American. I had as many Indian drivers as I did American.

**JS** - And they knew English?

**KL** - Yes, Karachi, India, was the headquarters of the British Army for hundreds and hundreds of years. In the process of the British Army in India their tour of

duty was six years so they married the prettiest one they could find and Karachi was a town of what they called, Anglo-English. Of course, they had lots of poor there too. They had one street down through town that the poor couldn't cross. They had to stay on their own side of town. The others could go where they wanted to, but the poor couldn't. Just a little way from our camp was the biggest leper camp over there. The Catholic Church ran it. I was talking to one of the nuns one day and she said that she thought if anybody, but the poor had it that they would find a cure and it turned out that way. She said a couple could have a baby and the baby doesn't have it. It isn't a blood disease because if they take the baby away when it is born, it doesn't get it. Now they can come nearer curing it than they can the common cold. They don't even isolate them anymore. Here in the United States they don't even isolate them.

**JS** - You were in different part of the world and everything was new, what were you thinking?

**KL** - I just took it in stride. It never bothered me.

**JS** - What kind of trucks were they?

**KL** - They were regular Army trucks. They would give a contract of a certain type of truck. They all had that same look. We had mainly GMCs that were six-wheel-drive and the Marines had Internationals, I am pretty sure. Another bunch had Studebakers, but they were all the same truck. They just let each outfit build so many. Like the Jeep, you know, some said Ford, some said Willys and every part interchanged on them.

**JS** - They just let contracts out?

**KL** - Yes with certain specifications. Whoever built it had to build to that specification.

**JS** - Where they good trucks?

**KL** - Oh, they were good.

**JS** - Did they have a covered bed on them?

**KL** - We had lots of different beds on them. We even had machine shops in some of them. We had a bunch of them where I was in Karachi that the beds were about as big as our farm trucks. Some were fourteen feet long and they had a stock rack and it had solid sides part of the way and one piece was made to fall down as a bench the full length of it.

**JS** - To haul troops. And some had a machine shop?

**KL** - We had lathes and welding equipment in some of them. On my bunch there at Karachi one had two kitchen trucks. When we caught up to them they would be already there and have meals prepared. When they would get through feeding they would take off and we would wait to follow and they'd get to the next spot.

**JS** - The food that they fixed had come in on the ship?

**KL** - We hauled that around with us.

**JS** - What kind of food was it?

**KL** - Just like you get here, like canned food. One spot over there in Buji they had a bunch of gallon cans with no markings and they had to open them to see what was in them. The boxes had disintegrated in the water. It didn't hurt the food so they would have to take pans down to the docks and pour it in them.

**JS** - You never knew what you were going to get. What kind of meat did you have?

**KL** - We had ships come in there with refrigerated meat in them. We had hamburgers and steaks and we didn't ever eat local meat because most of them were sacred and they didn't eat them.

**JS** - For special holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving, did you have a special meal?

**KL** - Yeah, we had that. We had a special meal for Thanksgiving on that ship and they sunk it the next day. It wasn't very good. It was canned chicken and canned biscuits. Did you ever eat any British food?

**JS** - No.

**KL** - It is real bland and has not got much flavor. That's what it was, a British ship. To their standard, we had a good meal.

**JS** - So you were carrying supplies. You did not actually see or be engaged in fighting?

**KL** - Not there. My worst place was in Korea. I spent two years in Korea.

**JS** - During the Korean War?

**KL** -Yeah.

**JS** - Let's finish World War Two and then we will get to that.

**KL** - I came home in '45.

**JS** - When the war ended, you came home. What did you do when you came home?

**KL** - I went to work driving a truck.

**JS** - Before we get to the Korean War, was there a specific person or incident from World War Two that made an impression on you that you tell other than the ship sinking?

**KL** - Nothing much. This war might be different, but the biggest percentage of soldiers does not even shoot at anybody else. Probably only thirty-percent or so actually shoot. Everyone else is in a support group.

**JS** - Did your feelings about the war effort change?

**KL** - No, that is what it was and I accepted it.

**JS** - The end of the war came?

**KL** - I came home and got out, temporarily. They insisted I join the reserve because my record was not up to date.

**JS** - So that is why you wanted to get your records?

**KL** - Yes, they sent me a letter and said would I consider being a recruiting sergeant for six months and I threw that one away. The next one said the same thing. I threw it away. The next one said, "You will report for active duty with the 10<sup>th</sup> infantry headquarters."

**JS** - So you should have been a recruiter?

**KL** - That would have been better.

**JS** - When you reported for active duty, when was this?

**KL** - It was in '50.

**JS** - And we were already over in Korea?

**KL** - Yeah.

**JS** - What did they say?

**KL** - They weren't doing much fighting yet. When the Japanese surrendered, they had an armistice to defend the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Anything north of the 38<sup>th</sup>, the Russians got. Any thing south of the 38<sup>th</sup>, we had it. We had people there from the time the war was over. I guess there was no time we didn't have people south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, but they didn't do any fighting. They were kind of like Germany when they drew a line threw it. I don't think they fought until '50. We went up and down through there. We had very poor command, in my opinion. It was probably politics, a lot of it.

**JS** - When you were told to report for active duty, you were sent to the West Coast?

**KL** - No, they put me with another National Guard outfit and they were from Vicksburg Mississippi. They hadn't had any training so they assigned me with them and I went over with them. They should have never been there that way because they had never had any service except down along the Mississippi River by Vicksburg and New Orleans and they put them in the mountains over there. They weren't worth anything.

**JS** - Again, were you driving a truck?

**KL** - No, I was foreman. I was a Sergeant First Class and I drove a Jeep or rode a motorcycle. That was kind of a bad deal. The whole outfit had never been trained for anything, but waterways down along the Mississippi.

**JS** - So they didn't know how to march or anything?

**KL** - You didn't do any marching much, in any war. That's just hearsay. I forget when we went off of garrison duty, but I think it was sometime in the '40s or '41. When I first went in they set tables in a barracks. There were ten to a table and you had regular china and silverware. Sometime around Pearl Harbor we went to what they called Field Rations and we had a mess kit and went through a line and got your meal.

**JS** - And over in Korea you were in command of these people from Mississippi?

**KL** - No, I was a Motor Sergeant and I was in charge of the motor pool for the big equipment. They ran the office. The First Sergeant was from Mississippi. 90% of that bunch was and we never did get along. They turned me in and were going to demote me to a private and 8<sup>th</sup> Army Headquarters was at Soule. They sent my papers in and I saw the letter that was sent back to them. It said it would be easier to transfer him.

**JS** - Because you didn't get along?

**KL** - Yes. They didn't get along with me and I didn't get along with them. They didn't know any Army and we had to run it like the Army. They just thought it would be like an office and we didn't do it that way.

**JS** - So, you were transferred?

**KL** - No, they gave up on it. I had won that one. I didn't stay at the camp very much. I stayed out where the jobs were. I had my next-in-command in charge of the motor pool and I was out with the equipment. I did that for the rest of my time over there. I came home when they quit. They didn't sign any treaties, but they did quit firing at each other. I came home in '52.

**JS** - You were over there about 2 years?

**KL** - Close to two years, yeah. Then, I don't know why, but I got out of the Army on my birthday in '52.

**JS** - How old were you?

**KL** - I was born in '15. I wasn't young. Over in Korea, they said, "Sergeant, you are too old to be over here." I said I knew it and they knew it, but somebody didn't.

**JS** - Earlier you said you thought the command was not good in that group.

**KL** - They didn't know anything. They were smart enough guys on hydraulic and waterways and stuff, but they were in the mountains. They didn't know a thing about mountains.

**JS** - What was the climate like there?

**KL** - About like ours. We are in the 30<sup>th</sup> something and they are in the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

**JS** - It got cold in winter?

**KL** - Yeah, it snowed and that was another thing, we never had anything, but summer equipment. We never had winter equipment. We even had a summer sleeping bag.

**JS** - Then you got cold?

**KL** - Yes, when I left over there, I had to leave everything I had, but what I had on. Your shoes, underwear and uniform that you had on were what you shipped out in. We never got anymore clothes until we got to Fort Lewis, Washington. Can you imagine riding a ship for five days in the same clothes?

**JS** - Why did you have to leave the rest of your clothes?

**KL** - So they could wash them and give them to the ones that stayed there. There was that much of a clothing shortage. They reissued them.

**JS** - In your duties, were you armed?

**KL** - Yes, I was armed all the time. I was down where they were fighting all the time in Korea. Stationed so close to the front, you don't have to pay for any PX stuff and I was always close enough I didn't pay. I thought that would be a good thing for me because I got on heavy equipment, but come to find out the combat engineer's equipment was too little and they couldn't do the job. That put us right on the front line. They were building railroad bridges and bridges.

**JS** - By heavy equipment you mean bulldozers?

**KL** - Combat engineers step up to size B6 Cat. That's a medium size Cat. We went up to D9s and we had cranes with us with eighty-foot booms on them.

**JS** - That's what you were in charge of?

**KL** - Yeah, one time in Korea we got hit where we were and it knocked a pillar of the river bridge out. They tracked us from Southern Korea up to where we were and they came up to me and asked how big a crane I had. I said I had one that could put those beams up there, one end of it. We just have one big one and there wasn't another as big in Korea. A Korean was standing there looking at it and he said, "Why don't you let me put it up?" I asked what made him think he could and he said he had put that one up. I went and got our officer. They hired him to put that up there and he put that up for practically nothing. They put forms up and had a catwalk and guys carried that sand and gravel and cement on their heads and put in pieces of bamboo and filled the forms. They didn't have anything to work with, but they did it.

**JS** - That's an interesting story.

**KL** - I got to the point in India that I didn't even doubt what they could do. One time they came up to me. We had two big generators that we were going to haul out in the desert. I said I could load them here at the docks because we have big cranes to load with, but we wouldn't have any way to unload them. Each one weighed twenty-ton. They said for us to get them out there and they would get them off. I took two semis down to the docks and got them loaded and took them out. They had dug a big hole in the desert as deep as the transport trailer was and they had me back down in there so it was level with the ground. They crept up under it with rollers and pulled it off by men. There must have been 200 of them.

**JS** - I guess that is how they used to do it.

**KL** - And that's how they still do it.

**JS** - So you learned to trust that if they said they could, they could do it?

**KL** - Yes, I can do my part by getting it out there so you do your part. They did and they even drove piling by hand for the bridges. They put the tower up and had a big rope up to the top and they would let big weights fall and hit the piling and a lot of men would walk pulling the rope to pull it back up and drop it again.

**JS** - How long did it take them?

**KL** - Not much longer than ours.

**JS** - That was pretty smart of you to trust that they could do things.

**KL** - We had to because we didn't have any way to do some things.

**JS** - So, you would build bridges?

**KL** - And railroad trestles. We built one that we built all up on the ground in line with the railroad and it was on railroad cars. The engineers figured how much of an arch and they put this part up and decided what the sag would be on the other end. They put it up high enough that it would set on the right spot on the other side. We put the stands across in one piece and it worked just perfect. It set over there just exactly where it was supposed to. We put it up there in probably a week and it would have taken them six months to put it up there one piece at a time.

**JS** - So your experience in the Korean War was different?

**KL** - Oh yes, all together different.

**JS** - I don't want to ask which was your favorite because war is war.

**KL** - There wasn't any favorite.

**JS** - Did you do different things in the Korean War that made it more interesting?

**KL** - No, because it just got so much more screwed up. Every time I was in the Army it got worse.

**JS** - Why do you think that was?

**KL** - I don't know.

**JS** - When you look back at your experience?

**KL** - In World War Two, we were really organized better, but in Burma and China we weren't organized much. When we got to Korea it wasn't organized that much. Vietnam was worse. They tried to get me to stay in and I could have done that and retired fairly early. I said I have been whipped everywhere I have been and there I would have been right in the Vietnam deal

**JS** - Good thing you didn't stay.

**KL** - I'm glad I made that choice.

**JS** - That's right. I want to go back to World War Two. Do you remember when the bomb was dropped?

**KL** -Yes.

**JS** - And you were where?

**KL** - I was in India.

**JS** - How did you hear about it?

**KL** - It came on the radio in our headquarters.

**JS** - Do you know what you thought or other people thought?

**KL** - We had heard that they were making it down at White Sands and I wasn't surprised that they had it. I wasn't surprised that they dropped it. Some people were, but that was something they could have had for years if they wanted to spend enough money and kill enough humans. Like in World War One, we had gas and Germany had gas and the only ones with nerve enough to use it was Germany and it backfired on them. That worked for quite a while because gas warfare is terrible. Look how long it has been since a big war by the big countries since the bomb. The atomic bomb has stuck for a time, but it isn't going to do it forever.

**JS** - When you were growing up, did you know anyone who had fought in World War One?

**KL** - Oh yeah.

**JS** - Did they talk about their experience?

**KL** - Not much. The ones that did much didn't talk about it.

**JS** - Was your father in the war?

**KL** - No, I had a lot of relation in the Civil War and ahead of that. The Lacy family came here in 1680 in Virginia. They came from Boylston and they were all military guys. War is bad no matter how you do it. The worst thing that bothered me was women and children. You get a war going on and here are some people that can hardly walk. Some of them are in terrible shape. There is nothing you can do about it, that's just the way it is going to be. Women and children take a worse beating than the soldiers.

**JS** - You clearly, have thought about war more than some people.

**KL** - Yeah, they moved the women and children out in Korea and put them on some islands there when we were down south. A lot of the kids never knew where their mother or dad was. They were in a big camp. As long as he is fighting, a man can kind of take care of himself, he is equipped to be there. The person that has the best chance is the soldier because he has weapons and is trained for it. The ones taking the beating were the old folks and women and children. They tried to get out of the way, but some of them were in such bad shape they could hardly walk, much less, get away.

**JS** - Are there other stories about building things and using equipment?

**KL** - That's about all it was. We built the Burma Road and I went over it a couple of times, but it wasn't feasible. It was too hard to get over it.

**JS** - Because it was so high?

**KL** - And too crooked. They built a road which beat Burma Road and was much better. It was Leto Road. They ran a lot of trucks over it. It wasn't so bad and was south of the other one. By then they had got big airplanes that could get the vital stuff over and they would fly them over the hump just like running a bunch of trucks. The C47 would haul about five-ton, I think.

**JS** - I think Brice Ramsey talked about going over the hump. In building the Burma Road or the other road, those were supply roads leading into China?

**KL** - Actually, into Burma.

**JS** - Because we had bases in Burma?

**KL** - Oh yeah.

**JS** - And you had heavy equipment for building the roads?

**KL** - Mine was for bridges. You couldn't have gotten that machinery up across there. It was too big. We had an awful time getting it around in Korea. Sometimes we would load them up and take them not a hundred miles and load them on a ship and go to another port and take them back off again because you couldn't get across the mountains with them.

**JS** - What happened if the machinery broke down?

**KL** - We would just rebuild it just like a contractor would here.

**JS** - So you had all the tools and equipment?

**KL** - Yes.

**JS** - Did you ever have to wait?

**KL** - Yes, we got most of our stuff out of Japan in Korea. Say we would run short on D8 Cats, we could just call up and they would send three or four over or whatever you ordered. The Japanese government would rebuild them over there.

**JS** - I know your job wasn't a twenty-four hour job, but were you on call?

**KL** - You were on call all the time.

**Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)**

**Interviewee: Kyle Lacy (KL)**

**Tape 2 of 2**

**Side A**

---

**KL** - If a bridge, overpass or mouth of a tunnel got hit you had to clean that mess up before a train could get out.

**JS** - So you had what?

**KL** - Cats, cranes, big cranes and we had a lot of big cranes with what they called draglines on them. Biggest one we had picked up eight yards at a time.

**JS** - What is a dragline?

**KL** - A big crane with a bucket on it that was about five feet wide and about six feet deep and they would just drag it along on the ground. Then you could raise it up and swing it around and let it out.

**JS** - Was that work dangerous?

**KL** - Not really, not anymore than it is here, although once in a while there was some fighting going on around it, but not usually. In Korea you didn't know where the fighting was going to go. They could be fighting both directions from you.

**JS** - What would be the altitude of the mountains? Would they compare to the Rocky Mountains?

**KL** - The mountains there would make the Rocky Mountains look like a wheat field. The tallest one in the world is there by India.

**JS** - Mount Everest.

**KL** - We went right by it. We could see it from the convoys. We had a rest camp up there at Ro Pendi, India. That's where they think Ben Laden is hiding out. They think they ought to be able to go find him in there, but you couldn't find nothing in there. That is so rough you can't believe it. There must have been a lot of volcanoes and earthquakes there because there are millions of tunnels and caves. They live in those caves and it is hard to find them in there and get them out of there.

**JS** - You said you had a camp there?

**KL** - A rest camp, ever so often they would send guys up there so they could rest awhile. They had them all over, everywhere. They still have things like that. They send them to Hawaii and stuff.

**JS** - Like an R&R. Did you ever go to those camps?

**KL** - Oh yeah, a lot of times I had to take the payroll up there and sometimes take the mail. The sergeants pulled that extra duty, too. The stuff came into Karachi and we had to see that it was taken up there.

**JS** - Were there tents?

**KL** - No, they had regular houses and buildings. They had a lot of tents up there too, but mainly their headquarters was in the big buildings.

**JS** - When you were working in the mountains, did the altitude bother you?

**KL** - No.

**JS** - You just got used to it?

**KL** - I guess. It never bothered me.

**JS** - During World War Two, did you have sufficient clothing?

**KL** - Yeah, we had plenty of clothing and everything in World War Two. I don't know why it was different in Korea and again in Vietnam. It really gets down to politics and I am afraid they are trying to do it again. They always take too many people out and then you can't hold your own. One of the generals in the Civil War was asked who was going to win. He said, "The man that gets there 'firstest' with the 'mostest' men." That is how it is, yet. You can harass them from the air, but you can't take nothing. You got to have them on the ground.

**JS** - During the Korean War, when you were there, you had sufficient support and equipment for what you were doing. Did you work with engineers?

**KL** - In Korea, I was engineer and mine was the equipment part. You needed them as much as the surveyors. I knew how to keep the machinery going, that was my part of it and they knew how to blueprint it.

**JS** - You would work with them?

**KL** - They were in our same outfit. We had all types in ours. We had our own engineers who had to decide where to put what and we put it there.

**JS** - So there was a vast number of people working to fix things?

**KL** - In our unit, I think there were about 300, counting engineers, maintenance and cooks, etc.

**JS** - In the Korean War as you were repairing bridges and so on, were you aware of what was happening with the fighting?

**KL** - Oh yes, we had good information and we were real close to it all the time because the enemy was who had bombed it out. One time I was moving a bunch of heavy equipment from one place to another and an MP stopped me. I had about ten pieces of equipment going down the road. I told him where I was going and he laughed and said I could go up there and work on it if I wanted too, but the Chinese took it over yesterday. I had to turn around and go back.

**JS** - There was some talk during that war that thought we should have marched into China.

**KL** - The average guy where I was thought that was politicians. Truman and MacArthur never did get along. One time in a speech, MacArthur said Truman had enough ability to be a Captain, but nothing higher so Truman took it out on him. We got to the Yalow River and they stopped us. They didn't send us anymore supplies. We could have finished that war in a month if we had had any supplies. We couldn't cross the Yalow River.

**JS** - Were you aware of what was going on?

**KL** - Yeah, and we were shook up about it, but there was nothing we could do about it. We had to leave most of our equipment up there because we didn't have any fuel to bring it back with. That was politics.

**JS** - Was MacArthur ever around where you were?

**KL** - Not where I was. I have seen him, but not where I was there. Anyway, it was kind of a mess and Vietnam was worse. When the French Foreign Legion couldn't whip Vietnam, I don't know why we thought we could go in and do it. They took a beating there and turned and left it.

**JS** - In '54, I think.

**KL** - Just like nobody has ever ruled Iraq, Afghanistan or China. A Catholic priest once told me when all is over, we might not be one of the super powers. Unless Russia or China destroys themselves within themselves, we are going to be in trouble. See Russia destroyed themselves. China may be getting close to it. Maybe we will come out a super power.

**JS** - Have you always been interested in politics?

**KL** - No, never did pay much attention to them. When I was first in the Army, you couldn't even vote. He would have had to vote for the president because he was the Commander in Chief. I don't think a soldier could vote in the American Armed Forces till after Pearl Harbor.

**JS** - I didn't know that.

**KL** - I don't remember just when it was, but you couldn't vote against your commander.

**JS** - I hadn't thought of that.

**KL** - There was good ones on both sides. It's a shame we can't get all the good ones together.

**JS** - These tapes will be read in the future by people doing research. Do you have other information that you think people should know about your experiences?

**KL** - No, I don't. The worst thing you can have is a religious war and that is what we have got. There is no way to predict how it will come out. Probably we are going to try to get out gracefully, if we can. I think the smartest thing they did was to get rid of Hussein and stop before they got into Baghdad. A lot of people

didn't think that, but you haven't seen the bunch of body bags that would show if you tried to go in there. I am not smarter than they are, but I have been around some of it and I was skeptical when we got into this deal.

**JS** - When you came home from Korea you were officially out of the service?

**KL** - I got clear out on my birthday of '52, but it isn't together yet.

**JS** - Then did you come back to Kinsley and drive a truck?

**KL** - I started working in a shop. I never drove a truck much after that. I came out here to work for Dee Cox in the Ford Garage and then I worked for Ross Miller and my brother worked for Ross Miller for years.

**JS** - When you look back at your experience in World War Two and in the Korean War, do you think that experience changed you?

**KL** - I don't think it changed me any. Someone, here the other day, had a son that had been in trouble and they were trying to get him in the Army, but they won't take them anymore if they have had a certain amount of trouble. They wanted him to learn to take orders. I said there wasn't a place in the world that they come nearer to telling you what to do than the armed forces. You don't have to know anything and you aren't going to learn anything, really. If you go in there that kind of guy you are going to get worse. If you go in pretty good, you'll stay about the same. I don't believe in the idea that the armed forces ruined anybody. I had about the same habits when I came out that I did when I went in.

**JS** - Did you smoke when you were in the service?

**KL** - I didn't smoke much any of my life. I never smoked any in the service.

**JS** - But most people did?

**KL** - Yeah, they were really after those cigarettes.

**JS** - Were they given to you?

**KL** - You had to pay for them most of the time. You could buy them cheap.

**JS** - You mentioned the PX. What would you buy there?

**KL** - Your shaving equipment, deodorants and they sold anything that you really had to have.

**JS** - Do you remember how much you got paid?

**KL** - No, I started pretty low and went up pretty fast, but I don't remember how much it was.

**JS** - Would you save that money or spend it?

**KL** - I never saved money outside.

**JS** - What would you spend it on?

**KL** - Whiskey and cards. I never saved any money, period.

**JS** - So you didn't send money home to your parents so they could save it for you?

**KL** - No.

**JS** - Did you buy souvenirs to bring home?

**KL** - I never bought any souvenirs. I didn't think they were worth what they gave for them.

**JS** - Anything else you can think of, any other thoughts you have?

**KL** - Only like that ship when it sank, to show you the difference in people, when I got ready to go on guard duty that night. His name was Sergeant Large, and he was that big, I said, "When you come up to relieve me, bring my billfold to me from in my barracks bag." It was in the top of my bag in the hold. After we got hit, a man by the name of MacClanahan and Large got up on deck. They had to crawl a pipe to get out of there because the stairs were broken out. Large told Mac, "Mac, I left that damn Lacy's money down there." Mac said, "The heck with Lacy's money." And he went over the side. Sergeant Large went back and got it and still made it off the ship. He had it.

**JS** - My gosh, and he had your billfold?

**KL** - Yeah, and he was in Prairieville, North Africa and I was in Buji and he hadn't spent a nickel of it because it was my money. He was going to send it to my next of kin. It was four or five hours before I got to camp and he found out I was on that shipping order so he spent about half of it. He said he knew I wouldn't care if he got drunk on it if I was alive.

**JS** - What a story! So, he went back down to get your billfold?

**KL** - Yeah, I wouldn't have gone back after it myself.

**JS** - But he did, and made it out again, climbed the pipe again?

**KL** - Yep, he crawled out again so he was a little rougher than some of them. I had to laugh about it cause he didn't spend any of it until he found out I was alive.

**JS** - Did you keep in contact with any of the people?

**KL** - No, I met so many guys. If you were in a regular unit where you stayed together it would have been different. I was transferred around a lot. I never looked anybody up.

**JS** - Were you lonely?

**KL** - No, I didn't think so, anyway. I just was taking another day at a time. It must have been good for me, I am ninety-years old.

**JS** - You are doing quite well, don't you think?

**KL** - I think I did about right.

**JS** - You certainly have good health?

**KL** - Pretty good. I take aspirin now and then.

**JS** - You have got a good memory.

**KL** - Yep, I just live one day at a time. I didn't think about having to eat anything next day.

**JS** - You certainly have seen a lot of changes. What is the most significant thing that you have seen?

**KL** - I don't know. I did it so gradually, you know. I can remember when we got our first car. It was a '21 model Ford. You bought what you wanted on it. It didn't have a top or side curtains and we drove to town in it and didn't think anything about it, it had a windshield. It was a touring car. Now you couldn't get anybody to drive a car with just a windshield on it.

**JS** - What if it snowed? Did it just snow in on you?

**KL** - Yeah, it did. We went to town lots of times with my two big brothers. If it would get stuck they could just pick that Model T up and set it over in another rut.

**JS** - Did either of your brothers go into the service?

**KL** - No, they were too old, in a way. They were twins and Kenneth worked in the oil fields with Continental Oil Company and was considered essential. The other one had had osteomyelitis and the bone was showing so they wouldn't accept him. They were nine years older than me so they didn't take many that age.

**JS** - You were always mechanically inclined?

**KL** - Yes, I worked as a mechanic off and on since I was fifteen years old.

**JS** - You went to school in Kinsley?

**KL** - Yes, but I didn't graduate. That is one of my pet peeves. They kept me eligible to play football and basketball all the time, but not to graduate. I always had good enough grades. I just might not go sometimes. They figured a way that I could be eligible to play.

**JS** - You were good?

**KL** - Yeah, there would be two subjects that you had to have one before you had the other and not many could pass One and Two English at the same time. I finally just quit. It hasn't really hurt me much. I've made lots of money.

**JS** - It doesn't sound like it. So then you went on the road, driving trucks?

**KL** - I made a dollar an hour in the depression. That is not bad. I was a Cat skinner then.

**JS** - In the oil fields? Where were the oil fields?

**KL** - Down in Oklahoma and up around Great Bend and Hays.

**JS** - Did a lot of young men do that?

**KL** - Yeah, they still do it. Oil fields kind of stopped for quite a few years, but they are drilling pretty strong now.

**JS** - What's a Cat skinner?

**KL** - Those big Caterpillars with dozers on them, they operate those.

**JS** - What did they do?

**KL** - They dig slush pits, make roads and knock hills down where they want to put something, etc.

**JS** - Was the money good?

**KL** - Yeah, a dollar an hour in the depression. I was single and couldn't get on WPA. The companies were allowed to use ten percent their own men and had to use ninety percent WPA. They took the ten percent to run the graders and the Cats and things. It was thirty cents for common labor.

**JS** - And you spent all that money?

**KL** - Oh yeah, I had a good time on it I think. I thought I did, anyway.

**JS** - Were you living at home then?

**KL** - Sometimes we worked too far away. We didn't have fast transportation in those days so if you worked seventy-five miles away, you didn't drive to work. A lot of these oil people drive seventy-five miles everyday to work. Then they move someplace and drive to work.

**JS** - Did you like working in the oil fields?

**KL** - Yeah, I worked at quite a few things, in fact I ran a shop here in Cimarron for forty year. It was right across from the courthouse, Lacy and Toothaker. I started that and I don't think he ever worked for anybody else, but me.

**JS** - You have been retired a long time?

**KL** - I retired in '80, I think it was. I didn't want to, but I got over there and they kept talking to me about it and in about a month, I got a check where I had retired. I called them and they said just deposit it and keep it because they will catch it and want it back. That went on for a year and they wanted it back and said I could pay it back at once or have them take it out of my salary without interest so much a month. That was the smartest so I had them take some out of my salary each month. It was their mistake, but at one time I was paid in under two names. That's bad. My name is actually, James K. Lacy, but I went by Kyle Lacy most of the time. Dee Cox didn't know my name was anything, but Kyle Lacy so he paid in under that name. It was the same number, but it took a long time for them to find it.

**JS** - You have had problems with records your whole life, haven't you?

**KL** - All my life and brought it on myself by using different names. See, I have got a lot of relation around Great Bend and Kinsley and every Lacy family has a Jim or James in it. You got over around Great Bend when I was young and there must have been five or six of us with the same name. Some of them weren't the best pay in the world and one time I was working for International in Kinsley and a receptionist called me up and really ate me out for not paying my bill. I told her I had never been in that place. She said, "Everybody tries to pull that on me." I

asked her if she was here in town and she was just down the alley from me so I said I would come over. When I went in the door she said, "Could I help you?" I said she had been talking to me and she said, "You are not the one I am talking about". I said, "I tried to tell you that on the phone."

**Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)**

**Interviewee: Kyle Lacy (KL)**

**Tape 2 of 2**

**END**

---