

**Veteran:** AIKEN, Harold  
**Service Branch:** ARMY  
**Interviewer:** Eakin, Elizabeth  
**Date of Interview:** April 9, 2002  
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**Transcriptionist:** Terry Moore  
**Highlights of Service:** Korea, 7<sup>th</sup> Division, 707 Ordnance—Truck Mechanic

**Important Note: The quality of this tape was extremely poor. The majority of the interview was garbled and almost totally impossible to understand.**

Interviewer: My name is Elizabeth Eakin, and I am interviewing Harold Aiken for the Lee College oral history project on April 9, 2002, at his home in Highlands, Texas. Mr. Aiken, you are aware that our conversation will be recorded and that the tape and transcription will be placed in the Lee College library, and do I have your permission to do that?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you state your full name, the highest rank that you held, your present address.

Veteran: My full name is Harold G. Aiken, Jr. The highest rank that I held while I was in the service was corporal. My address is 414 Prairie Avenue, Highlands, Texas 77562.

Interviewer: Can you give me some background information on yourself, please?

Veteran: I was born in the town of Sutton, Texas, on October 31, 1927.

Interviewer: What was your previous occupation before you joined the service?

Veteran: I was an apprentice electrician.

Interviewer: What was your place of enlistment?

Veteran: It was Houston, Texas—Harris County.

Interviewer: Do you know what date you enlisted?

Veteran: October 3, 1946.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Veteran: I was 18.

Interviewer: And how long were you in the service?

Veteran: Three years.

Interviewer: How and why did you join the service?

Veteran: The main reason was that I thought when I went in I would get the G.I. Bill and get a college education when I got out.

Interviewer: What was your initial reaction to entering the service?

Veteran: It was different.

Interviewer: Please recount leaving your family. When you left your family, how did they react to it?

Veteran: I thought that they were in agreement with it. It didn't bother them that much.

Interviewer: Where did you train as a recruit?

Veteran: Aberdeen, Maryland.

Interviewer: And in what specialties were you trained?

Veteran: I was trained as a truck mechanic.

Interviewer: Were you trained in first aid, signaling, radio, or any of the specialties besides the regular things?

Veteran: I was trained in fire control instrument repair while I was overseas.

Interviewer: What were your experiences while you were undergoing training? Was it hard, or was it easy?

Veteran: There wasn't nothing to it. Just fell out when the sergeant fell out, and fell in line when there was a line forming at the mess hall.

Interviewer: Do you feel that your training prepared you for your service overseas?

Veteran: Yes, I do.

Interviewer: What was your opinion of the weapons you saw or used in the service?

Veteran: They were good. The weapons I had, the M-1, I'd have never made it without that.

Interviewer: Were they reliable?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: What was your opinion of the equipment, clothing, or rations you were issued?

Veteran: They were fine.

Interviewer: Were your clothes, rations, and equipment adequate for the climate and the weather that you encountered overseas?

Veteran: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: What did you think of the quality of leadership while you were in the service?

Veteran: We obeyed what orders we were given and we didn't question it. So, the quality was accepting responsibility of being told what we had to do. I believed that the ones that gave the orders knew what they were doing, so we just followed the orders.

Interviewer: How often did you see a senior commander in your company? Did they come pretty often?

Veteran: Oh, yeah, I saw them everyday.

Interviewer: What did you think of the discipline of the time? Was it lax, moderate, fair, strict? When someone got out of line, did they discipline them right, or were they too hard on them?

Veteran: No, they weren't too hard on them, but they were strict.

Interviewer: Was there any desertion in your unit?

Veteran: I don't recall anyone deserting. I recall a man or two being late getting back to the base after being drunk over a weekend.

Interviewer: What forms of off-duty recreation were common? What did ya'll do for fun?

Veteran: Played volleyball, games, and cards—more cards than anything.

Interviewer: What if any reading material did you read in your leisure time?

Veteran: I subscribed to the *Houston Post* while I was overseas.

Interviewer: How adequate was your medical care in your unit?

Veteran: It was good.

Interviewer: Was there a drinking problem in your unit?

Veteran: There was drinking that went on, but I wouldn't say it was a problem at all. Not to the extent that it caused them to not do their job. I know every night overseas there wasn't a whole lot of activity to do. About all you had to do was drink beer until bedtime and then go to bed.

Interviewer: Was there any drug problems in your unit?

Veteran: I don't know of any at all while I was overseas.

Interviewer: Was there much gambling in your unit?

Veteran: There was some.

Interviewer: What types of gambling?

Veteran: Cards—maybe dice.

Interviewer: While you were in the military, what songs were popular during your service?

Veteran: I don't remember. They had a radio station that played some American songs.

Interviewer: While you were in the military, did you notice any instances of ethical, racial, or religious discrimination?

Veteran: No. When I was in the service, for the most part the coloreds and whites were separate.

Interviewer: OK, we're going to go to overseas service. When you first learned you were going overseas, what was your reaction?

Veteran: I was ready.

Interviewer: At what point in your movement overseas did you learn your real destination? Did they tell you ahead of time?

Veteran: I thought we were going to Japan. We stayed two days and then got back on the ship and headed to Korea.

Interviewer: Can you identify your point of embarkment?

Veteran: In Korea, I think it was Incheon.

Interviewer: Please identify the name of your transport.

Veteran: I came back on the *Buckner*, but I don't remember the name of the one we went over on.

Interviewer: So you remember your point of arrival was Incheon?

Veteran: Incheon, Korea. We first landed in Yokahama, Japan, and then we went to Incheon.

Interviewer: What information, if any, did the military give you about the country to which were to serve in? Did they tell you anything about the history of Korea, or did they just drop you there?

Veteran: I don't remember them telling us anything.

Interviewer: What were first impressions of service abroad?

Veteran: The only impression that I could tell you was it was a new adventure for a country boy. To be out of the United States and see how the other world lived.

Interviewer: How did you and your comrades get along with civilians overseas before, during, and after the hostilities?

Veteran: We didn't have any problem with the people there. At the time that I was there, I was in the occupation forces which was at the end of the Second World War, and the people in Korea had just been liberated from Japan. And so the people there really were thankful that they were out from under that rule. And so basically we didn't have any trouble with the people.

Interviewer: Was there much fraternization with the local women?

Veteran: Very little.

Interviewer: How was the morale of your unit? Was there such things as mail from home and general homesickness?

Veteran: Far as I know, the morale was fine. We got mail every day. Had Thanksgiving dinner, letters from home, and shared boxes of cookies with each other. It was alright.

Interviewer: How were your living conditions there?

Veteran: It was alright. We lived in an old factory building they had converted to a barracks, and other than that it was alright. I didn't sleep in a foxhole.

Interviewer: What enemy propaganda, if any, did you see or hear?

Veteran: I don't guess we did—not when I was overseas, because we weren't exposed to other television or radio stations. All we had was just one radio station that was run by the military, so if there was any, I didn't know about anything like you'd hear in the United States. All that was right or wrong—we were exposed to any of that. If there was a hurricane in the United States, we might hear about that.

Interviewer: How and to what extent were religious convictions expressed to your unit?

Veteran: There was very little bit of talk about that.

Interviewer: Did you observe or know of any newspaper or radio war correspondents?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: Did you receive and read military news publications such as *Stars and Stripes* or your unit newspaper?

Veteran: Yes, *Stars and Stripes*.

Interviewer: What did you think of it?

Veteran: It was just a few jokes and stuff. It was interesting. We looked forward to it.

Interviewer: Did you take part in any combat action?

Veteran: No. The only thing near combat that I was exposed to was when we were Seoul, Korea. The communists in North Korea were about thirty or forty miles from the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, and they came across a few times, and they'd blow a whistle and we'd get ready. We didn't know how far they were going to come down south, and we'd get ready to chase them back across the border if they did, but we never did have any skirmishes where I was at. Now, they had a few up closer to the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. The Korean War hadn't started at that time.

Interviewer: Can you describe a typical day for me in your unit?

Veteran: We fell out at reveille, and had breakfast. It was just like going to work—we had a job. I worked in the shop as a truck mechanic. I'd put in my day working on those old trucks, except when I went to school. At Thanksgiving we'd all get turkey and on Friday you had fish, Sundays we had cold cuts. We had about the same as we did in the United States, except on the weekends there really wasn't any place to go on a pass because of the difference in the cultures. Over in Korea when I was there they didn't have restaurants. The only place you could eat was at the Army base. We were exempt from eating any kind of vegetables they'd put on there because it was a health factor. The way they'd cook stuff it was dangerous to eat.

Interviewer: What time did you go to bed? When they told you?

Veteran: Ten o'clock.

Interviewer: What awards or decorations did you receive?

Veteran: I got a Good Conduct medal and an Occupation ribbon.

Interviewer: Please describe your arrival in the United States.

Veteran: Well, we came into San Francisco, California.

Interviewer: Was your family there?

Veteran: No. We got on a barge and went back to the base there in San Francisco. Then we were there for three or four days, and they put me on a train. They gave me a \_\_\_\_\_, and me and a friend of mine got busted, and so we rode a bus back to Houston.

Interviewer: So when you got home, you were out of the service or you had to go somewhere else?

Veteran: No, I still had nine months. I enlisted for three years, and I had two years overseas, so I still had nine months service to do at Ft. Benning, Georgia.

Interviewer: Please describe your date and place of discharge?

Veteran: It was sometime in September, because I had several days leave that I was entitled to. Basically I had three years of service, but I'm not exactly sure. Seems like it was September 29<sup>th</sup> that I got discharged.

Interviewer: Do you remember what year?

Veteran: 1949.

Interviewer: Let's talk about your post-military experiences. What did you do after you were discharged?

Veteran: When I got home, I helped my dad finish gathering his cotton crop for about thirty days, and then I went to work for Sheffield Steel in Houston as an



apprentice electrician. Then I became a journeyman motor inspector. Sheffield had taken over Armco Steel, and I became a supervisor at Armco Steel and worked there thirty-three years.

Interviewer: How, if at all, did your military skills or your military experience transfer into civilian life?

Veteran: I don't know that they really had a whole lot of bearing on my civilian life after I got discharged. I did what I got ordered to do.

Interviewer: Can you please describe the ease or difficulty with which you readapted to civilian life and the influence your overall military experience had on your readjustment.

Veteran I didn't have any problem at all that I recall.

Interviewer: If you went to college or trade school under the G.I. Bill, please name the school and the dates you attended.

Veteran: I never did go. I spent three years in the Army so I could get it, but then I got a job and I served an apprenticeship on the job. And so I never did take any formal college.

Interviewer: What were your expectations of civilian life upon leaving the service?

Veteran: My expectations were to go to college and become a credit to the United States, but I got sidetracked.

Interviewer: Did you join the National Guard or reserves after leaving the service?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: Please indicate any national or unit organizations which you have belonged to.

Veteran: Nothing.

Interviewer: With whom do you feel most comfortable discussing your wartime experiences?

Veteran: Anyone.

Interviewer: If you have read any histories, articles, or other postwar writings on campaigns in which you participated, what is your opinion of their accuracy?

Veteran: I would have no idea if someone writes something if it's right or wrong. A lot of people write what they want to write, and they ad lib and build it up to make a story. Whether it's true or false, I couldn't guess.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you want to add?

Veteran: No, but you ask me a question and I'll try to answer.

Interviewer: I want to get some more background information on you. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Veteran: One brother.

Interviewer: How many sisters?

Veteran: Six sisters.

Interviewer: And where do you fall in line?

Veteran: I'm the oldest brother, but I'm about fourth down the line from the time.

Interviewer: Did they write to you while you were over there?

Veteran: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: You weren't married before you went to Korea. When did you meet your wife?

Veteran: I met her when she was about thirteen. I knew her a long time before we got married.

Interviewer: And how many kids do ya'll have?

Veteran: Four.

Interviewer: Where did you go to school and when did you graduate?

Veteran: I went to school through the fifth grade in Sutton, Texas. And then I went to school in Crosby for three years. And then I went to Robert E. Lee High School and graduated from there in 1946.

Interviewer: That's the same year that you joined?

Veteran: Right. I joined the Army right after I graduated.

Interviewer: Can you please tell me the battalion, regiment, and division you were in?

Veteran: When I was overseas in Korea, I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. I was in the 707 Ordnance. When I came back home, I was at Ft. Benning, Georgia, and I was in the 7038 tank battalion, and I worked in the office headquarters as a clerk until I became a mechanic.

{END OF INTERVIEW}