

Veteran: GACE, G. S.
Service Branch: ARMY
Interviewer: Gace, Michael
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Transcriptionist: Terry Moore
Highlights of Service: Served in Korea during the final months of the war; PFC; Truck driver

{Audio begins with Interviewer in mid-sentence...}

Interviewer: ...interview with Mr. Gace on his experiences in the Korean War. We are sitting here in Mr. Gace's home in the city of LaMarque, Texas.

Mr. Gace, for the record can you tell us your full name and your regiment.

Veteran: G. S. Gace, 24th Division, 34th Regiment, U.S. Army, US54200122.

Interviewer: Mr. Gace, where did you live at the time of your military service?

Veteran: In Galveston, Texas.

Interviewer: What was your previous employer before you went in?

Veteran: Santa Fe Railroad.

Interviewer: What was your title there? What did you do at Santa Fe Railroad?

Veteran: I was called an apprentice.

Interviewer: Do you think any of your previous jobs prepared you in any way for the military?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: Describe to us the process that you went through to go into the Army.

Veteran: They'd send you a letter, and you report to the bus station, and then they'd send you to Houston, and then they'd send you to San Antonio. You'd stay there for a couple of days, and then you went to Camp Roberts, California, for basic training. Only took about two weeks.

Interviewer: So, you were drafted?

Veteran: I was drafted, that's right.

Interviewer: What was your opinion at the time about the draft?

Veteran: Well, everybody was going, so I didn't have any opinion on it.

Interviewer: Did you think the draft was necessary?

Veteran: I guess it was or they wouldn't have drafted me.

Interviewer: What was your initial reaction on entering the military?

Veteran: I really didn't have none.

Interviewer: Please recount leaving your family. How did that feel being taken away from friends and family and going away?

Veteran: It didn't bother me.

Interviewer: And how did your family feel?

Veteran: Oh, they were scared.

Interviewer: Where was your training?

Veteran: Camp Roberts, California.

Interviewer: What kind of training did you have to do?

Veteran: Infantry training.

Interviewer: And that consisted of what?

Veteran: Marching, shooting, hiking, staying up all night, running.

Interviewer: On your runs, did ya'll do full-dress runs?

Veteran: Yes. Full packs.

Interviewer: And what was in ya'll's backpacks?

Veteran: Everything you wanted and needed to survive. Rations and an extra pair of pants and shirts, toothbrushes, and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Did they train you in any way in first aid?

Veteran: Yeah, they did.

Interviewer: And what did that consist of?

Veteran: If you got shot or seen somebody get shot, where to put a bandaid or a wrapping where they wouldn't bleed to death.

Interviewer: What was bayonet practice?

Veteran: It was hand-to-hand combat.

Interviewer: Describe the hand-to-hand combat. What did ya'll have to do?

Veteran: They showed you how to hold your rifle with a bayonet on the end of it. If anybody'd come up behind you, showed you how to wheel around without losing any steps, and then using the end of your rifle to hit somebody in the head, and then you'd twist around and hit somebody else. I kind of liked that.

Interviewer: What were your experiences while undergoing training? Anything that sticks out in your mind?

Veteran: No, it's been a long time—it's been 45 years ago.

Interviewer: Did you ever think about entering any kind of officer training?

Veteran: No. I just wanted to get in there and get my two years over with.

Interviewer: Did your training prepare you for going overseas?

Veteran: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: What did that consist of?

Veteran: How to take care of yourself over there.

Interviewer: How was the equipment and stuff they provided you?

Veteran: It was good.

Interviewer: If something broke, how easy was it to get replacements?

Veteran: You'd get a replacement right away. Wasn't no problem with that.

Interviewer: Were they reliable weapons?

Veteran: Yeah.

Interviewer: The climate conditions—were the clothes suitable for the climate?

Veteran: Yes. Seems like the winter was a little bit harder.

Interviewer: Did they provide ya'll with any special clothing for the winter?

Veteran: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: What did you think about the leadership in the Army—your commanders?

Veteran: They were good.

Interviewer: Did they all show leadership abilities?

Veteran: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Do you remember any one of your commanding officers that really was not a true leader?

Veteran: No, they had to be trained good, and they were all pretty good.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of their names?

Veteran: No, I don't remember any of their names.

Interviewer: Did you ever see an officer discipline an enlisted man?

Veteran: No. They'd carry you to the orderly room and talk to you in private. They didn't put you out in the streets. But I did see a South Korean.

Interviewer: How was that?

Veteran: They was over next to us. There was a wire fence between us, and I don't know what he did, but he did something BAD or something, because about fifty people come up to him and hit him in the belly and hit him in the face, and he just stood out there. He'd fall down and he'd get back up or they'd pick him back up, and they'd hit him some more, so I don't know what he did, but I know he did something bad.

Interviewer: Did you think that they were beating him too severely?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. But let fifty people come up to you and hit you in the face, and slap the hell out of you, and hit you with fists in the face and in your stomach. I don't know what he did, but he did something BAD or they wouldn't be hitting him like that.

Interviewer: Was there heavy drinking involved in you unit?

Veteran: No. We didn't have that kind of drinking over there.

Interviewer: Any drugs?

Veteran: No, no drugs. I didn't see none.

Interviewer: What did you think about the special services that they provided for ya'll, like the USO shows?

Veteran: I went to some of them.

Interviewer: And was there much opportunity to go those?

Veteran: Yeah, if you wanted to go to them they'd broadcast it and put it on the bulletin board.

Interviewer: Describe one of the shows.

Veteran: Well, Terry Moore was one of them. She sang a little bit, and they had Miss America and all them up there, and they did a little singing, a little talking, and stuff like that.

Interviewer: And did you feel that lifted your spirits?

Veteran: Naw. I guess it did a little bit.

Interviewer: Was there adequate medical care?

Veteran: Yeah, if you were a little sick, it was good. If you got sick, you'd report to the orderly room when you'd get up or during the day if you were sick or something like that, and they'd carry you right on down to the hospital. In other words, they had a tent hospital but it was still a hospital, and they'd carry you down there and check you out. Then they brought you back and put you back in your tent. You lived in a tent with cots and a sleeping bag that you crawled in when you got ready to go to sleep, and you'd zip it up. I did that for thirteen months.

Interviewer: And when the weather turned bad?

Veteran: You wouldn't get cold with that sleeping bag zipped up. That was feathers, kind of like a feather bed—good and thick. Summertime you couldn't sleep under it, you had to sleep on top of it, but you slept in a tent. There wasn't no heat in there.

Interviewer: Did it pretty much protect you from the rain?

Veteran: Oh, yeah, we was warm in it. If you needed some clothes, they'd give you clothes.

Interviewer: Do you remember any popular songs at the time?

Veteran: I wasn't worried too much about songs.

Interviewer: Or any slang words?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: Did you notice any instances of ethical or racial discrimination?

Veteran: No. Everybody had a job to do, and they wasn't worried about nothing like that.

Interviewer: When did you first learn that you were going overseas?

Veteran: My buddy that worked at Santa Fe with me, me and him went in together, and they told us at the orderly room that we were going over to Korea. So we took two weeks vacation and came home and went back and caught an airplane that flew us to California. Then we got on a boat. We was on that boat for about ten days before we got to Korea. On it, it said “The best soldiers in the world pass through this port.”

Interviewer: How was the journey over there on the boat?

Veteran: Oh, I was sick all the time. Oh, Lord, I was sick all the time. Every time that damn thing would rock, I had a stint in the bathroom.

Interviewer: So you really didn't see much of the trip?

Veteran: Hell no, I was in the bathroom most of the time. I was sick—seasick. That's when you sit there and you can't gag no more and there's nothing come up. You just have to lay there. Some people got sick and couldn't make it. And I was kind of dreading coming back on that boat, but on the way back I was alright. I didn't get seasick on the way back. I don't know why I got seasick going over there.

Interviewer: Do you remember the name of the boat?

Veteran: Naw. It was just a big old blue ship.

Interviewer: Do you remember the name of the port that ya'll docked at when you arrived in Korea?

Veteran: Yeah, SASSIVO(SIC?) Had a big sign up there that said, “Best soldiers in the world pass through this walkway.” It could have been Puson, but it was SASSIVO or Puson, but that's been 40-50 years ago.

Interviewer: What information did the military give you about the country?

Veteran: They gave you a little information about it—what to do, what not to do to not get yourself in trouble.

Interviewer: What were some of the do's and don'ts?

Veteran: Don't shoot somebody, or rape somebody, or chase their women, and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Did you and your comrades get along with the local civilians?

Veteran: Oh, yeah, we got along with them.

Interviewer: Was there much fraternization with the local women?

Veteran: No. Some of those guys, but not me.

Interviewer: Did you see any of the other guys get a little rowdy, do a little looting?

Veteran: Not any looting, but some of them got a little rowdy.

Interviewer: What sort of things would they do?

Veteran: Fighting with each other downtown or something like that. The Army and Navy would start fighting, and get picked up.

Interviewer: Army and Navy didn't really get along?

Veteran: No, they'd just get rowdy and holler at each other and everything.

Interviewer: How was the morale in your unit?

Veteran: Morale was good.

Interviewer: Other than the shows and stuff like that, what other things did they do to help morale?

Veteran: They had picture shows outside, and generally I went to all the picture shows.

Interviewer: And do you think that helped to keep the morale up?

Veteran: I guess so. It was something different to do.

Interviewer: Did you get any letters from home while you were over there?

Veteran: Oh, yeah, I got a letter nearly every day. I wasn't married then, so I wasn't worried about no girlfriend or nothing like that. I had my mother, and she wrote me every day.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel when you got letters from your mom?

Veteran: It felt good. At Christmastime, she'd send me a little tin of cookies and stuff like that, and the Santa Fe Railroad sent me a \$5 check in a gift card.

Interviewer: So it made you pretty happy getting that stuff then?

Veteran: Oh, yeah, I got \$5, and I didn't have that much money to spend. I didn't make but \$92 a month, and I sent \$45 a month home, so I didn't have but \$40 dollars left.

Interviewer: What kind of things would you get with that extra \$40?

Veteran: You had to buy your toothpaste, and toothbrush, and soap, and stuff like that. You'd look at the PX for stuff you wanted—a little radio or something like that. But on the weekend somebody might want to go to town to go see something, and if they had KP or something like that they'd give you \$5 or \$10 to pull their KP, and so I stayed around and picked up money like that. I knew I didn't have that much to spend.

Interviewer: And your main officer didn't care that this was going on?

Veteran: Oh, no, as long as they had somebody covering.

Interviewer: So when you got to Korea, was there any additional training or anything that you had to go through?

Veteran: No. You pretty well knew what you were gonna have to do.

Interviewer: What was your job once you were over in Korea.

Veteran: I was a truck driver.

Interviewer: How did that come about?

Veteran: They said, "You nine people over here, ya'll go over to the motor pool...you so & so, ya'll go to this company...ya'll go to this company."

Interviewer: How'd you feel about going to the motor pool?

Veteran: I guess I didn't like it too much, because I didn't know how to drive. I never even had a car. I wouldn't get no car until after I got out of the service, because I knew I was going into the service, and I didn't want to buy no car and spend money and leave a car home, and have somebody wreck it up for me.

Interviewer: So if you didn't know how to drive, how did you...

Veteran: Well, I learned. I got in there and started learning.

Interviewer: Any particular incidents that you remember?

Veteran: Yeah, in a jeep—that was a standard. That's where you had to shift first, second third, and all that kind of stuff. When you go down a road doing third, you better put it in second when you start up that hill, and before you better get to the top of that hill, you better have it in first or if you don't, you'll roll back down. So, the captain had to drive it the first time. Captain said, "Private, you don't know how to drive it do you." I said, "I sure don't. I ain't never drove one of these things before," so he said, "Let me show you how to do it." I pulled it over, and he started showing me, and when we got back to the motor pool he said, "Give this private here some more lessons on how to drive a jeep."

Interviewer: How did that make you feel?

Veteran: Well, if you don't know, you don't know. If you don't know something, you don't know something. Like I said, I learned.

Interviewer: So, I take it that that general [captain] was pretty nice about it?

Veteran: Oh, yeah, yeah, he was a good guy. He came from someplace in Indiana, and his dad had a used car lot or a new car lot, and they had a lot of money because me and him went to Japan one time, and he bought a bunch of suits and stuff and sent home. So I know he was kind of a businessman before he was drafted.

Interviewer: Can you remember his name?

Veteran: Naw, I don't remember his name now. That's been fifty years ago, but I do know his dad had a car lot—sold new cars and stuff. Had a dealership.

Interviewer: Was there a lot of people coming and going from your unit?

Veteran: Oh, yeah, they come and go. After you'd be there so long, you'd keep moving out. A lot of 'em would get "Dear John" letters.

Interviewer: How did the old-timers, the veterans feel about it?

Veteran: They didn't care if they ever went home.

Interviewer: How did they receive you young kids coming in?

Veteran: They'd give you a little harassment and tell you their life history—how long they'd been over there; they'd been over to Korea two or three different times; they'd been in the service twenty years. I knew I wasn't going to be in there no twenty years.

Interviewer: What did you think about the newspapers and the magazines during the war time?

Veteran: I didn't see none of them. After I left here, I never did see nothing. While I was over there, I didn't see no papers.

Interviewer: Nobody had any papers?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: Did the Koreans have any English papers?

Veteran: If they did, I didn't see any of them.

Interviewer: Did ya'll have a military newspaper? What was that called?

Veteran: *Stars* or something like that?

Interviewer: *Stars and Stripes*?

Veteran: *Stars and Stripes*.

Interviewer: What kind of articles would they have in there?

Veteran: Just different things.

Interviewer: What did you think about the paper? Was it useful for you?

Veteran: I guess it was. I looked at it and read it all the time, but I couldn't tell you what was said in it, because I can't remember that far back.

Interviewer: Did you take part in any combat action?

Veteran: It was getting over when I was going over there. I was on a boat going over there when they stopped it, but we still had to take people up to the 38th Parallel and all that kind of stuff, but when we got on the boat it wasn't over with. On the way over there they announced that the war was over with, and that they were setting up the 38th Parallel.

Interviewer: Describe a typical day for you.

Veteran: Getting up at 4:30 in the morning and report to the motor pool, and they'd tell you to go so and so places. At 7:00 or 8:00, take people out to the fields— security guards and stuff. You ate your breakfast at 4:30 in the morning, because you don't know when you're going to eat again. So you'd take them out there, and then about 10:00 or 11:00 in the morning you'd get back and eat, and then you'd go back to the motor pool. Then about 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon you'd have to go back where you took them to and take the new ones out there and pick the old ones up and bring them back. That was just about an every day affair.

Interviewer: Did you see any soldiers or know any soldiers that were killed by "friendly fire."

Veteran: No, no.

Interviewer: Did you see or hear about any accidents, like people getting shot when they cleaned their guns?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: So you took the guys back and forth. Did you experience anybody upset, becoming shell-shocked?

Veteran: Yeah, we had a couple of them. They just wanted to get out and get home. There wasn't nothing wrong with them, but they acted crazy because they wanted to get away from there.

Interviewer: Did you think the stress had anything to do with it?

Veteran: Naw. They just wanted to come home, because they got a "Dear John" letter.

Interviewer: I know you weren't on the front lines, but did you ever had to carry medical equipment?

Veteran: Oh, yeah, I did that, too. About once or twice a week I'd go down there to the rail head where they'd bring all the supplies in, and they sent me with a list. I'd have to pick up so-many dozen eggs and bacon and all kind groceries, boots, uniforms, and bring it back where we were staying at. When you'd get there, you'd have to go to each different regiment and take their supplies. One time a North Korean got in back of my truck. He was helping us load everything, and he got in there, and he wanted to eat one of the eggs. "Yeah, eat one, you can have one." And he cracked the thing open and ate it, cracked another one open and ate it—raw. He must have ate about twelve or fifteen of them. I didn't have any left in that box, and I told him, "I don't want to get in trouble. That's enough eggs—you ate enough already." I don't know how many he'd of ate if I hadn't stopped him. Raw eggs, too.

Interviewer: Since this was in Korea, the U.N. was there. Did you get an opportunity to see them?

Veteran: I sure did. The captains, sergeants, and majors at our place, I took them up there. We had a car then, and we took that car up there. Indians—they was there, too. I don't what they was there for, but they was there. They all went in this building and talked, and we stayed outside and sat in the car. I talked to some of those Indians, and they wanted a cigarette and I didn't smoke. Somebody had a cigarette, and they give it to him. He really appreciated it. That's when they was discussing about the POWs. Some of them didn't want to go back to the

communists, like the Chinese and North Koreans. They didn't want to go back to the north, so they were taking them to Taiwan or someplace on that boat, and I was on that, too.

Interviewer: How was that?

Veteran: We had to load those _____ mats, and they loaded them up on those black and white trucks, and we carried them down there to the boat. Made a big, old barge. They got out and they marched 'em in there, and one of those guys must have been a major or something in there, and he gave me a letter, and I've still got that letter. It was in Korean or Chinese. Some woman told me it was half Chinese and half Korean. He was a well-educated man. That's all she'd ever tell me. She never said what he said, but said whoever wrote that was a very, very educated person.

Interviewer: Did you ever think about giving this letter to your commanders?

Veteran: No, I wanted to keep it myself. He give it to me. I put it in my wallet and kept it in there until I come home.

Interviewer: So you never really knew what the letter said?

Veteran: No. Like I said, most everybody I talked to said it was in Chinese or Korean, and them Koreans couldn't read Chinese. Some of 'em could read a little Chinese, but I don't know what the letter said. But I've still got it, at least I think I've got it around here someplace.

Interviewer: Other than the Indians, did you see any other countries?

Veteran: Not other than those Indians.

Interviewer: What was the opinion of the Indians of the United States?

Veteran: They was just like me. They was truck drivers, probably a PFC like me, and they just talked.

Interviewer: So ya'll got along pretty well.

Veteran: Yeah, we talked to 'em. We wasn't there that long. We was there about four hours.

Interviewer: How well-trained do you think the Indians were?

Veteran: They wasn't fighting, they were just there to take the POWs to Taiwan. They was negotiating a way to get 'em out of there.

Interviewer: How was the POW camp? Was it well maintained?

Veteran: We didn't see that part. We knew where it was at, but we didn't go around it.

Interviewer: When you saw the POWs coming out, did they look like they'd been well-treated?

Veteran: Yeah, they was well treated. They got back in the truck, and on the way to where we were taking them to, there was tank companies and guards out making sure nothing happened, and nobody interfered with them, because they didn't want to go back to the communists. The roads was well guarded with tanks and stuff like that along the road, and soldiers with their guns and bayonets.

Interviewer: Did you see any of the U.S. forces harass the prisoners as they were going by?

Veteran: No, you didn't see anything like that.

Interviewer: How did the Army treat the civilian population?

Veteran: Pretty good. Everybody got along pretty good.

Interviewer: Other than Korea, did you get an opportunity to go to any other countries?

Veteran: Yes, sir—Japan.

Interviewer: What did you do over there?

Veteran: I had about three or four more months before I'd get ready to get out of the service, and so our battalion went to Japan, because when you got out of Korea if you still had time to serve, they'd send you to Japan. I stayed over there about three or four months before I came home.

Interviewer: How was it in Japan?

Veteran: It was alright.

Interviewer: Did you get an opportunity to see anything?

Veteran: Yeah, I went to Tokyo, and I went to the big PX they've got over there—it's a big old PX there. They had a big movie theater for the service people, but I couldn't go too often,

Interviewer: Why was that?

Veteran: Because I didn't have no money—I sent it all home.

Interviewer: What did you think about the country of Japan?

Veteran: It was good—I loved it. It had a lot different scenery. It was nice and clean.

Interviewer: Describe your welcome home.

Veteran: They got a list of names there, and we went out there and they called us and told us to lay everything that we had out on the ground, and laid it out. Extra stuff we didn't need they picked up, and we put the other stuff in our packs. The next morning they sent us down to the ships, and they shipped us back home. We ended up in San Francisco or Oakland, California, then we caught a train out of Los Angeles to Camp El Paso.

Interviewer: How was your boat right home this time?

Veteran: Good, just a little joy ride. I enjoyed it. I didn't get sick on the way home.

Interviewer: They brought ya'll to El Paso?

Veteran: Yeah, that's where my little brother was stationed at.

Interviewer: What was it like seeing your brother again?

Interviewer: It was alright. They drafted him, but he was going to England. When I got to El Paso, I called home, and my mother said, "Well, your brother's there in El Paso." So she gave me his phone number, and I called down there and they told me,

“Yeah, he’s here. We’ll send him down there.” So he came on down there, and while everybody else went out on the town, I stayed on the base and talked to him the rest of the night, and the next morning about 12:00 they discharged me.

Interviewer: What was it like when you got back home and saw your mother again?

Veteran: Good. We traveled all night. There was six of us, and we give some guys \$100 apiece to drive us to Houston and Galveston. That’s what they did. They went back and picked up people at the train stations and stuff like that and carried them to El Paso, and the ones at El Paso they brought down here. They charged us \$100 a person.

Interviewer: Did you think it was worth \$100?

Veteran: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: What did your mother do when she saw you for the first time?

Veteran: She was out there hanging clothes on the line outside. We lived upstairs and somebody else lived downstairs. “Lady, some Army boy just went up your steps,” and she said, “Oh, that’s my son.” And so she ran up there and gave me a hug and stuff like that. Meanwhile, Daddy was over in LaMarque having a house built, and he was over there with these contractors watching them build the house.

Interviewer: When you got back home, how was the Veterans Affairs Administration? Did you have dealings with them?

Veteran: About four or five months after I got home they sent me a letter and told to stay advised because we was having trouble with one of those Arab countries over there, and told me stay advised because they might have to give me a call to come back to active duty, but they squashed it before they needed me.

Interviewer: When you got back, did you take advantage of the G.I. Bill?

Veteran: Yeah, I got it for awhile there, and after I got married I dropped it.

Interviewer: Did you take advantage of any of the loans for your house?

Veteran: No, I had plenty of money for my house.

Interviewer: Did they even offer grants or stuff like that?

Veteran: When you got out of the service they'd give you \$600. For a year and a half or so, you didn't get to come home, so they'd give you so many days out of a year to get home, and I didn't use them because I was overseas, and so after you got out you got \$600—they called it mustering out pay. In those days, \$600 was plenty of money.

Interviewer: Did you think about joining the National Guard or any other reserve organization?

Veteran: Yeah, I joined the VFW.

Interviewer: How was that?

Veteran: It was alright.

Interviewer: How did the other vets treat you?

Veteran: OK. I knew all of them already.

Interviewer: Are you still a member of the VFW?

Veteran: No, I dropped it years ago. After we had a bunch of kids, I didn't have no time for that.

Interviewer: Now that you're older and retired, do you have any plans to go back and rejoining the VFW?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: When you got back home, did you read any stories or articles about events that went on in Korea to keep up with what was going on over there?

Veteran: No. I was a single man then, and I wasn't worried about that.

Interviewer: What is your feeling today about the draft?

Veteran: They ought to draft everybody. When you get out of school at eighteen years old, they ought to draft you, and there'd be better people in this world.

Interviewer: So you think it wasn't correct taking the draft away?

Veteran: Yeah, they should have kept the draft. Let everybody go in the service for two years and it'll make a man out of you. {END OF TAPE I, SIDE A—NOTHING RECORDED ON SIDE B}

{END OF INTERVIEW}