

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Korean War

Personal Experience

O. H. 1222

LESTER R. TRWIN

Interviewed

by

Don F. Baker

on

July 12, 1989

LESTER R TRWIN

Lester Robert "Bob" Irwin was born on June 26, 1928, at Warren, Ohio, the son of Lester M. and Ruth Rowley Irwin. He graduated from Lordstown High School [Ohio], and he earned a B.S.Ed. in 1951 and a M.Ed. in 1958, from Kent State University.

Mr. Irwin married Helen Clabaugh on August 3, 1952, and they have two children: Mark Richard Irwin, thirty-three; and Dean Lester Irwin, thirty.

Mr. Irwin was a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army from July 1, 1955, to September 1953. He was in the Signal Corps, and served in Korea during the Korean War.

Mr. Irwin was employed by the Howland High School from 1955 to 1989, when he retired. He served as a teacher, coach, assistant principal, and librarian.

Mr. Irwin served as mayor of Newton Falls from 1980 to 1987. While he was mayor, South Korea returned Mr. and Mrs. Irwin to Korea, as its guests in recognition of his service to it in the war and because he was an elected mayor of a city in Ohio. This was done in 1986

Mr. Irwin is a member of the Congregational Church in Newton Falls, Kiwanis, and he is a trustee of the Newton Falls Public Library Board. He is interested in photography, boating, and skiing.

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Korean War

INTERVIEWEE: LESTER R. IRWIN  
INTERVIEWER: Don F. Baker  
SUBJECT: Korean War, basic training, OCS training, ship  
voyage to Korea, feelings about the treatment  
of Korean veterans  
DATE: July 12, 1989

B: This is an interview with Lester R. Irwin for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Korean War Project, by Don F. Baker, at 349 Arlington St, Newton Falls, Ohio, on July 12, 1989, at 10:00 a.m.

Do you remember how you first found out about Korea and what you knew about it at that time?

T: Yes. I was in the Army, and I was sent over there in--I believe it was--about April of 1952. I spent most of this time in Pusan until about August of 1952.

B: What were your thoughts about going over to Korea?

T: Well, of course, there was a war at that time. And, I was one of the fortunate ones. We did enter in at Inchon. I was one of the fortunate ones that went South to Pusan. Pusan was a city where there were a lot of refugees and so forth. It was a very dirty place. The people were living under bridges. They were living under . . . in lean-tos, next to houses and so forth, made out of tents. And, it was just at the end of winter time. And, of course, they were telling about people being found frozen to death and so forth. They had open sewers. I saw an open market located

right next to a dusty road, dirt road. The vegetables and so forth, were laying on blankets. Meat, also, was just laying on blankets. And at that time, I said I'd never want to go back.

B: Oh, really? Well, let's go back a little bit. How did you get involved with the Army? And then, maybe you could tell me a little bit about your basic training.

T: Well, I had a deferment to go to college. I had graduated from college. I knew that I would be drafted at that time. So therefore, I enlisted into the Officers Candidate School.

B: I see.

T: And, I went through basic training at Indiantown Gap. I went through Leadership at Indiantown Gap. Basic training was sixteen weeks. Leadership was eight weeks. And of course, they teach you to shoot and get you in top physical condition. Then, I went into a twenty-two week course at Fort Monmouth through Officers Training. And, there they trained me. This was a signal corp, and I came out a Second Lieutenant. My primary MOS was Signal Supply.

B: MOS is?

T: It's your main. . . . I'm not really sure what it means. It means what you are qualified for.

B: What you can do.

T: Yes. And then, I went through Fort Holabird, Signal Supply School, which was about an eight weeks course. And then, I was sent to Fort Monmouth--oh, excuse me--Camp Gordon, Georgia, where I spent about sixteen weeks there as an Executive Officer of a basic training school for pole linemen. And then from there, I was assigned to go to Korea. We had choices. My choices were to go to Germany--I forget what my second choice was--and of course, the only other choice was Korea. That's, unfortunately, the one they selected. Because, my wife could have gone with me to Germany; but of course, in Korea at wartime, why of course, she could not go.

B: Could you give me a typical day in basic training? What kind of things did they do?

T: Well, they usually got us up at about 5:30 a.m. We went out and did our usual morning calisthenics. Then, we would go to the Mess Hall. Then, it was some type of march. We'd march out, which would be probably a ten mile march or more, out to the rifle range. And,

we would spend the morning shooting. Then, they would bring lunches out in big garbage cans and so forth. You'd go along with these metal trays.

B: What was the food like?

T: The food wasn't too bad, if you weren't too picky. They fed you pretty good. Sometimes, the food wasn't too good. For instance, every once in a while, the cook would make a mistake and he would have the eggs--the scrambled eggs--instead of being yellow, would have a tint of green to them.

B: Oh, my.

T: And, their main stay seemed to be hamburger gravy on buns, and we had some favorite names for that.

B: Yes, I'm sure.

T: But, the food was pretty good. Then, we would spend the rest of the afternoon shooting or sometimes we would be in classes and so forth. Then, we'd march in and would have our evening meal. And then usually, in the evening, we were free to do clean up around the barracks and so forth.

B: What about officers? How was it different? Did you go through a typical day?

T: As an officer, again, I would get up early. I was living off-base at that time. I would have to get up probably about 4:30 a.m. to get there at 5:30 a.m. And of course, they would assemble; and then, you had to accept the report that all were there. Then, you would go to, again, breakfast. And, you would march with them out to whatever it happened to be. They were learning to string wires on short poles--they didn't have the real tall poles, because of the danger. They were just learning. They had poles probably about ten foot tall. They had to climb up and stretch wire and so forth. And basically, you didn't do the work. You just sort of stood around and watched what they did and so forth. And then, sometimes, you'd have reports to do . . . and things like that. But as far as training, they had special people there, regular instructors. In other words, the officers didn't have to do any of the instructing or anything. It was your job to see that they got out there into the field. Then, the instructors would take over from there.

B: What did they do to train you as an officer?

T: As I said, at Leadership School, they trained how to

handle certain situations and so forth. In OCS, they did pretty much the same thing. You also took courses. You learned radio theory in about twenty hours of instruction. You know, you're supposed to know how to put a radio together.

B: Oh, really?

I: No, basically, I think what they were trying to do is to get us acquainted with a lot of areas, such as: teletype, radio, how to string wire, you know. They went into a lot of things, not in great detail. It was really a crash course. Then of course, you would take classes on what to do in certain field situations and so forth. I remember the one instance that everybody couldn't quite agree on. They said, "Suppose you were in a certain situation where you had a Company of drivers driving ammunition trucks, and you had stopped at a certain area. And, you were then going through an area where the enemy had zeroed in with their artillery. And for instance, say that the first truck driver refused to get in the truck and so forth. And, you were under fire in enemy territory. What should you do?" And of course, the stock answer was, "Shoot him "

B: Oh, really?

I: If you let him get away with it, what effect is it going to have on the other drivers? You were in a very dangerous situation. And so, that sounds kind of harsh. But, under a situation like that I guess there's not too many alternatives.

B: Do you think your training was adequate for what you experienced later?

I: Yes, I think so. It was kind of a quick twenty-two weeks. Whereas these fellows going to college, they had the four year training. And of course, you go to West Point with four years training. It was minimum, but I think it was adequate for what I had because I had not planned to be a career soldier.

B: You said you were an Executive Officer in one of the camps. What's the duties of an Executive Officer?

I: Do anything that the First Officer didn't. (laughter)  
I was an Executive Officer of a Company.

B: Of a Company.

I: Yes. And of course, you do things that your Commanding Officer of the Company tells you to do. Of course, we got into a lot of things, like we'd get into daily

reports and so forth. You had to send, to the next higher ups, the daily reports of who was there and what you did and things like that.

B: What rank did you have at this time?

J: I had a Second Lieutenant.

B: Second Lieutenant. Okay, after all your training, you went to Korea next?

T: I went to Korea.

B: How did they get you there?

T: We went by ship. I flew to Fort Lawton, Washington. I spent about three or four days there. Then, they took us by boat to Yokohama. Then, they took us by bus to Camp Drake, which is near Tokyo.

B: What was it like to go across the Pacific on a troop ship?

T: Fortunately, officers had it pretty nice, in that we were packed six in a little cubbyhole room. We were only two [bunks] high. We spent most of the mornings playing cards. And then, we spent most of the afternoon, we would be playing bridge, or something like that. Going over, you had to pull duty, I think, two or three times. I think we spent something like eleven or twelve days going over. The duty was, you were supposed to go through the ship and so forth, and I did get down into the hold of the ship where the non-coms and the lower ranks were. And, that was terrible, in that they had bunks five or six high, and there was probably about a foot or fifteen inches between bunks. And, it smelled terrible. For instance, if we hit some very, very rough weather going over, many would get sick. We were supposed to go near the Hawaii Islands, and they were having typhoons there. So, we went up near the Aleutian Islands to miss them. But, the waves were still very large. For instance, it was quite a large ship--I don't know--700 feet long, or something like that. And, I remember sitting up in the dining area, and you would see the front end of the ship go down completely under water.

B: Wow.

T: And, it stayed there for a little bit. And then, after a while, it would come up. The front end would come out of the water completely, and then, bam! It would hit the water again. It was quite rough. And of course, a lot of these people got seasick. Myself, I kept eating Dramamine like candy mints, and I didn't

get sick. I had a violent headache. But, some of the people down in the hold would get sick. And of course, they were in very cramped conditions, and especially, if the top one on the top bunk would get sick. Why, everybody would get splattered down beneath him!

I know you'd go into the Mess Hall there. All it was, was tables up about 4 feet high, or something like that. They had these tin trays that they served their food on. It was funny that they would carry it over--if they felt like eating--then, the movement of the ship . . . the tray would be sliding back and forth.

B: Oh, no.

T: It was quite rough going over. Coming back it was very, very smooth. We had beautiful sunsets coming back. It was a very nice trip coming back, in that you'd see the porpoises way off in the distance jumping and so forth. You'd look where the bow would break the wake and so forth. You'd see flying fish come out of the water, and they'd go skimming across the water and so forth. Shortly after we left Korea, coming back, the water had sort of a green tinge to it, in that at night, these waves would sort of have a bluish cast to it. It was a real nice trip coming back. Going over was different. (laughter)

B: What were your impressions of Tokyo?

T: Tokyo. . . . We were very fortunate. Again, being an Officer. . . . We were stationed at Camp Drake. We went through Tokyo over to Yokohama the first day to get a number of shots and so forth. We came back through Tokyo about ten o'clock in the morning, and the bus driver stopped the bus at a corner. There were probably about twenty-five of us or so on this bus. The bus driver stopped at the corner and said, "Anybody want out? Just get back to Camp Drake by midnight." And then, we go, "How do we get back?" He says, "Just hail a cab and tell them Camp Drake. They understand what that means." So, there were two fellows, two First Lieutenants got off. They had been over there before. And then, there were four of us real green Second Lieutenants got out, and we started walking down the road. And of course, nature's urge hit us, and how do you find a necessary room? So, we looked for what we needed. We tried to find a beer joint or something like that. There was none around. We see this great big, impressive building. And, I think what it was, was a Japanese Post Office. So, we go up to the counter, and this nice, little Japanese girl comes out and says something Japanese. And, how do you tell her that



you have to go? (laughter)

So, finally, a policeman comes up, and we start talking to him. The other two kept talking to the gal, and he says something about banjo. "No, we don't want to play any music. We want to. . . ." You know. Finally, he points down to the hall, and then, motioned to the left. So, we took that clue. We go down the hall, and we line up. [We] go into the restroom there. "Benjo" is what he was trying to say. That is Japanese for restroom. So, we line up. There happens to be four urinals there, so we all line up at the four urinals. And pretty soon, we hear this little click, and--of course the stalls are behind us--this nice, little Japanese girl comes out. Right beside the one fellow standing at the urinal is where the wash basin is. She goes up and washes her hands. We just all about died, because that was our first experience.

But, most of the Japanese merchants could understand English. It was kind of fun, in that, when you would try to buy something there, they expected you to barter. He would say, "This would be eighty yen." And, you'd really talk to them and maybe get them down to thirty or forty yen. It's all they expected. At that time, the Japanese were great imitators. For instance, a Ronson lighter, which would sell for five dollars in the United States, you could get it over there for under a dollar. And, you really couldn't tell the difference. They were great imitators. They were very industrious people. I think they were still a little leery of the U.S. troops, because less than six years before, we had defeated them in a war.

B: Right.

T: But, it was a very beautiful town. The homes were very well kept. They had, you see, these low gardens that they have, they do actually exist. They have these, what are they? The bonsai trees, or whatever. And, they're very, very well manicured and very beautiful. And, I remember seeing traffic was terrible and you would see these people riding bicycles. And, this one fellow had a bicycle, and he was delivering some boxes or something. And, on the back end of his bicycle, it had these boxes stacked sixteen feet high.

B: Really?

T: And, he'd go weaving down through that traffic, and I don't know how he ever kept himself from getting killed. But, you would see that. There were an awful lot of bicycles. Then, they had a lot of three wheeled trucks, in that they would have the one, like a motorcycle wheel in the front. Then, they would have the

two wide wheels in the back with something sort of like a pick up truck. . . .

B: The bed.

T: The bed to haul stuff. But, I enjoyed Japan. I said I'd like to go back to Japan again.

B: Then, they sent you to Korea?

T: Then, they sent me to Korea.

B: And, where did you go there?

T: We went in a ship. We took a ship from Yokohama around to Incheon, that's where they had made the landing, I guess, about a year before. There were still a lot of burned out landing barges and so forth, but you could tell what there were. There had been quite a battle there. Because, there were trucks, and I think I remember seeing a couple tanks that had been burned out. You realize that not all of them made it out of there. But then, from Incheon, as I said, I fortunately went south to Pusan. At that time, they were still fighting up around Seoul. So, I went down to Pusan, the refugee city, and was a Korean Base officer. When I arrived, there was a Major from Massachusetts that was sort of the officer in charge, and I was to be his executive or assistant. What our duty was, if anybody in Korea needed signal equipment, it was our job to get the equipment and get it to them. And of course, being a Second Lieutenant, I didn't know what was going on quite a bit of the time. But, about a month or two after I arrived, the Major left. And, this called for a Light Colonel, which meant, he had time in the Army. A poor little Second Lieutenant like myself, I fortunately had a very good Sergeant who knew what was going on, and he helped me a great deal. I remember a couple of the instances that we. . . . Well, one in particular, the Korean Base Section General saw they were having quite a time unloading. The Pusan Harbor is not too large a harbor, and space was at a premium. So that, what they would do is, they would unload something, like something for the Quartermaster; and then they would notify the Quartermaster to come pick it up. Well, in the meantime, while they were notifying them, they would then be unloading something else and pile it right on top of it. So, when the Quartermaster came, they couldn't get the stuff until somebody else got their stuff. And, what was happening was the harbor was completely clogged. And so, therefore, the General said, "We're going to correct this. I want a hundred and twenty-five teletypes so that when a ship comes in, we're going to have a teletype down in the hold of the ship.

We're going to teletype them that we are going to start unloading. Get down here pronto, and get this loaded up." And then, of course, it was my job to get the hundred and twenty-five teletypes. So what I did, I checked around with all the Companies in Korea. And of course, under T.O.& E., which is . . . again, I don't know what it means, but I did at the time. It's your authorized equipment. If they had it on T.O.& E. and they weren't using it, then they would send it in and I would order them replacements. Well, I think I got about fifty that way. Then, there were about twenty in the harbor area. We had none in the Pusan Signal Depot. I sent to Yokohama, and I think they had fifty or forty in Yokohama Signal Depot. So, I sent a request to get those over, and of course, we were still short about thirty-five. So, what I did, I sent state-side with an emergency requisition, no authorization except the General's word, to airlift thirty-five teletypes from the Washington Signal Depot. Of course, anything like that goes directly to the Pentagon. I didn't know what was going to happen, because ordering stuff without authorization is not permitted. But, the General said, "Get it." So, that's what I did. And then, I don't know whatever happened, because I left [after] about two months--I only spent about five months over there. It was very interesting. But basically, I didn't know what I was doing too much, because as I said, the job called for a Light Colonel, which would have had more experience than a Second Lieutenant. I didn't have the experience, but we muddled through.

B: Yes. Did you have any problems with black markets or anything like that? You hear a lot about that.

I: There were some black markets in Korea. I didn't really get into it, but I know it was there. . . . Again, this was a refugee town. I remember one time I walked up into the market area and--I'd been warned about this--these Korean kids, they were supposed to be going to an orphanage. But, they just walked away from the orphanage, and they really lived on the streets. There would be gangs of them, and what they would do is they would have a little mirror. And of course, a sunshiney day, they would take this mirror and flash it in your eyes. And, as they flashed it in your eyes they would pick your pockets. And of course, there would be probably twenty of these kids all congregating around you. You really had to watch. For instance, my wife had just sent me a pen and pencil set, brand new one, real good-expensive one. And of course, it was gone. They told about one fellow--a British Officer that was up on the front lines--and, he knew he was coming to Pusan. And, of course, booze was pretty hard to get up on the front lines. So, everybody had given

him money. I think he had around nine hundred dollars to come down and get booze. Of course, the British uniform has the big pouch pockets. A gang of kids came around him, and again, flashed him in the eye and so forth. Somebody had taken a razor blade and slit his pocket, and he was out the nine hundred bucks. Another thing that I remember, tuberculosis in Korea, at that time, a very high percentage of the people had it. I remember seeing this one fellow, he must have been old; he looked ancient. But, I don't imagine he was over thirty or forty, and you could tell he had tuberculosis. His chest, the center of his chest was sunken way, way down. He just sort of ambled on. They always sleep on the floor. Koreans sleep on the floor. There in this rather nice railroad station that the Japanese had built when they occupied Korea, he just sort of laid down there on the walkway and opened up his grass mat. He laid down there. He was filthy. I don't think he had a bath for weeks, and there were flies all over him. He just was a real pitiful site.

B: [Were] most of the people were very poor that way?

T: Yes, most of them were very poor.

B: Of course, these were refugees.

I: Yes, yes.

B: So, they basically had to get up and leave.

T: Well, the refugees. . . . See, the war was still going on up north at that time, and so, they were living any place they could find. I remember seeing under bridges, families. The main stream was way, way back because of the Summertime. They [the refugees] were living in under the bridges, and then, you would see lean-tos made out of canvas and so forth, that they've packed up under the eave of the house and just extended it out. That's where they lived. You know, Winter time, the temperature got down there, it would get down to zero. Canvas is not very much protection.

B: No.

T: Another thing that I remember about Korea is, I remember the black widows, the plane. They were a double fuselage, like a P-38, except they were much, much bigger. I remember about five or six o'clock every night, they would just take off in droves. Maybe, fifty, a hundred of them. I don't know. And, they'd head North. You know what they were doing.

B: Yes. I wasn't familiar with those. That's interesting.

T: They're like a P-38, except they're much bigger. They have a lot more fire power, and they can carry quite a bit more bombs and so forth. And, you'd see them going up there on just droves about five or six o'clock. And, of course, they'd get up into and around Seoul. It would only take them probably an hour, an hour and a half. Because, when you talk about Korea, Korea is the size of Ohio. And right now, Korea has--what is it--forty million people, whereas Ohio has ten million people. So, you just take Ohio and put four times as many people, and that's what you have in Korea, South Korea that is.

B: Any other experiences in. . . . You said that two months after your order the teletypes, you left Korea?

T: Yes. I left Korea. I'll never forget the department Army letter number twenty-five that stated anybody, that is, "any officer" that wanted out could quote the department memo and request a discharge. The war ended about the first of August. See, I helped win the war, because I was over there. (laughter) And so, they knew that the war was coming to an end; and when it was over and they didn't need as many officers, they said, "Any officer that wanted to get out could quote department Army letter number twenty-five, and you could get discharged." So, I had a real good friend who was down in the Com Center.

B: What's a Com Center?

T: That's where, the Communication Center . . . where all the messages come through regardless of where it's from. It came through there. And then, it's sent to a Commanding General and so forth. Well, this young Second Lieutenant, a good friend of mine in the Com Center, he came up with this department of the Army letter number twenty-five. He said, "Hey, look at this!" So, we both got on the typewriter and wrote up our requests. We had it on our Colonel's desk, the Commanding Colonel of the Signal Corp, before the Commanding General even got the letter. (laughter) So, we both requested immediate discharge.

So, I went to another camp there where we're supposed to sent out, as I had requested immediate discharge. So, they wrote me up orders to fly home. Some Colonel at the Center there, changed my orders. He said that he noticed I had only been there five months. And he says, "Any short timer, that's only been here five months, is certainly not going to fly home." So, he changed my orders, and I came home by boat. But, had I flown home, I would have been home before my wife would even know that I was coming home. But, it was a very

favorable experience, as far as the Army. I am a firm believer that you make out of the Army what you put into it. Like for instance, if you go in the Army and you say you're not going to like it, somehow the Army just makes it so you don't like it. If you try to get along in the Army and so forth, why, it's not bad. I've often said that if I had been recalled, which they were doing to some at that time, I would have probably tried to stay in the Army.

B: What specific outfit were you with?

T: I was with the Korean Base Section. South Korea was really divided into two areas. The fighting unit, the Eighth Army and so forth was up on the front lines. The Korean Base Section was in the back, and they were more as the supply, like Signal Supply and Quartermaster. In other words, it was our job to watch for infiltrators and so forth. But, the biggest thing was to get the supplies to the front lines where they were needed.

B: What were your feelings about your leadership, the upper officer?

I: Very good. And, I don't remember the name, but the Colonel we had as far as the Signal Section, which included the supply, the Com Center, the whole bit, he was a very fine fellow. Major Cavenau, the fellow that was there in the Supply Section, he had been in the Army for about twenty months, and he was very knowledgeable. [He was] well liked. He knew what he was doing. Most of the officers that I had throughout the Army, most of them were fine gentlemen. If you tried to get along with them, they got along with you.

B: No problem.

T: No problem.

B: Okay. I know that you went back to Korea in 1986 as a guest of the Korean Government.

T: Yes, right.

B: Do you want to give me a little background about how that came about, and what you saw?

T: Okay. The Mayor from Cuyaboga Falls, who taught part-time classes at Akron University, became friends with a Korean professor, who was a friend of quite a few of the upper echelon of Korea. He had graduated with them in college and so forth. So, they got to talking, and the mayor told him a little about being in Korea. The Korean professor said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could

get you back there?" So, he talked to the upper echelons and so forth. They thought it would be terrific. So, there was a little article put out in the Ohio Municipal League Paper that said, "Anybody that was a Mayor at the present time and had been in Korea during the war, should contact this fellow from Cuyaboga Falls." So, I contacted him, and there was some plans made for June 1985. It had to be delayed until 1986. But finally, there were eight of us that went over to Korea, and six wives.

B: Let me note that you were Mayor of Newton Falls at this time.

T: Yes, I was Mayor of Newton Falls at this time. There were seven other Mayors from Ohio, and six of our wives--two of the wives could not go because they were ill. This was all picked up by the Korean Government. After many delays, we get a call at the end of April 1986. The caller said, "Do you have your passport in order?" We had ordered them the year before because we wanted to go. We thought, "Hey, there might be a chance." So, our passports were all in order, and the mayor says, "We're going the last of May." Well, it was delayed until the first of June, 1986. And, they sent us tickets. We had never met these mayors before. We met about four of the mayors and three of their wives up at Cleveland Hopkin's Airport. We flew from there to Laguardia. Then, we had to transfer to JFK, and we met the rest of the mayors and their wives at JFK. We flew, I believe it was fifteen hours, non stop, from JFK. And of course, we made this circle, almost to the Aleutian Islands. We came down across where the Korean airplane had been shot down, and as I told my wife, "If we see the Russian pilots, just wave at him and tell him we're friendly." But, we finally landed in Kimpo Airport, which is right outside the Seoul. . . . We had no idea what we were going to do or anything. We were just going back to Korea. So, we get there, and after being fifteen hours on the airplane, we go through customs and so forth. [Then], we come out into the lobby of the airport. And, there's Korean newspapers, televisions, and so forth. There, some of us are in shorts. After being fifteen hours in the airplane, we're all bushed, and we must have made quite an impression. Anyway, they then load us onto a bus. And finally, Colonel Ahn, who is the Executive Vice President of the Korean Retired Army Group, gets up and he says, "Welcome to Korea." He handed out these booklets, and said, "This is what we're going to do." Before, we had no idea what we were going to do. They really treated us royally, because they put us up in one of the nicest hotels, which happened to be right next to one of the Korean Universities. A couple of mayors were out walking with all the student demonstra-

tions and so forth. This couple of the mayors met a young fellow who was going to that University. They questioned him about all the student trouble and so forth. And he says, "Oh, there's no trouble here. Most of that trouble is North Korean inspired." And, he took them through the University. I was kind of jealous. I wish I would have gone, too. But, he took them through the university, and he says, "There's no trouble with most of the students." He said, "For instance, the North Koreans tried to take over by military force and lost." If you can't take over by military force, what do you do? You infiltrate. He claimed that this is the main thing. Demonstrations at that time were almost all North Korean inspired. They sent all types of people down to infiltrate. Of course, students are pretty impressionable, you know. They [North Koreans, would] get a group of students going, and then they, "Let's demonstrate." But, as far as Korea, there was a great change in Seoul. I flew up to Seoul once when I was over there in 1952. At that time, it was a bombed out city. There was just a lot of rubble and so forth, very few buildings standing. It was really gone. They marched down through it and up through it and down several times. There wasn't much left. This was seven years later, and you just wouldn't recognize the entire city. You couldn't tell it from Chicago or New York, or any place like that, except there were a lot of Koreans running around. It was tremendous. There was building going on everywhere. Seoul is a city of nine million people, and there's just people every place. They were building all types of apartment buildings and so forth. The average Korean could not afford a house. They could afford an apartment.

Another interesting thing is that our guide, even though he was in an apartment, they still slept on the floor. It's just sort of tradition, because we visited several different places. We went to one place, which was an old kingdom. They have a house there with tunnels underneath. We asked him, "What are those tunnels for?" Of course they had no heat. He said, "What they would do is start a fire out at the end of the tunnel. Then, the heat would then go underneath the building. That's the way they heated their house." So, at night, where's the warmest place to sleep? It's on the floor. So of course, they have little grass mats that I mentioned before, and that's what they do. They sleep on the grass mat on the floor, because that was the warmest place. And of course, this has, apparently, just become a tradition. Some of the things that we did, we went to the Korean National Cemetery, which is like our National Cemetery in Washington, where all the dead Korean soldiers and so forth are buried. We placed a wreath there, and it was quite an



impressive ceremony. This was our first acquaintance with any of the Korean school kids. My wife and I, being teachers, are kind of interested. They brought bus load after bus load of Korean kids, and they sort of stood back in the parking lot and watched this whole thing. Of course, the walkway down to the tomb had Korean military men from all services there. You talk about being straight. You know, they're like our men at the Arlington Cemetery. They're the spit and shine part. But, it was a very, very impressive ceremony. These little kids, they were all dressed in uniforms. Some would have, most of them would have blue shorts on. But, some of them would have a yellow shirt or a light blue shirt or a red shirt or something like that. Both the girls and the boys wore uniforms. Then from there, they took us to a dinner, where my wife met her favorite Admiral. Over in Korea, women are second class. I sat next to the Admiral's wife. My wife was across the table from me and sitting next to the Admiral. The Admiral's wife was across from him sitting next to me. So, I spoke to the Admiral's wife. He had mentioned that she was a teacher. I said, "You teach?" And, she shakes her head yes. And, I said something about, "Well, what grade did you teach?" She shook her head "yes," you know, very politely. I found out through that, that she could not speak English. Over there, the men get out; but the women, most of them, do not get out. Of course, it's a very male dominated type of family arrangement. My wife was sitting next to the Admiral, and he was talking to the other mayors that were sitting at the table and so forth. Finally, she was fed up. I forget what she said, but--I know--it was something about a fur coat or something. He says, "You buy her fur coats?" And, she started in on the conversation. But, in a Korean society, that is not common.

[There were] a couple of the other things that we visited. We did go up to the Eighth Army Headquarters. We also went to Panmunjom, where the Peace Talks are held. Technically, South Korea and North Korea are still at war. They have signed a peace agreement, but technically, they're still at war. And, we were always ill at ease at Panmunjom. We drove in with our buses, and you look over at the North Korean side. There's a great big, impressive building on the North Korean side. But, the thing is, they tell you that it's only five foot thick, or, no thirteen foot thick. And, it was funny. They had the curtains on the windows. And you kept seeing curtains move. You knew darn well that you were being watched from the North Korean side. About a week before we were there, they had a group of North Koreans apparently showing them the front from the North Korean side. One North Korean made a break for it, and he ran across the De Militarized line,

through underneath the tower. The South Koreans have an elevated sentry post in the tower. It's sort of an octagon thing where, for twenty-four hours, they have somebody there looking, with field glasses. He ran through, underneath the tower and back into a nice little garden they had, and then, into the bush behind it. Well, shortly later, there were some North Korean soldier came over looking for him. One of the South Korean soldiers found this fellow and led him away. He defected successfully. But, in the mean time, while they were looking through the bushes, and so forth, there seemed to be a little argument. There was a fire fight started, and one of the South Korean soldiers were killed. Of course, there's nothing they could do about it, because they're technically at war with North Korea. And then, down at one of the sentry stations, which was another area about a half mile away, there was what is known as a bridge of no return. This is a bridge across a gorge between North and South Korea. There's a sentry post on both sides--North side and South side. This is where all the North and South Korean soldiers would exchange prisoners of war and so forth. Do you remember Captain Butcher from the Peblo?

B: Yes.

T: He was returned at this bridge of no return. There have been remains, and all kinds of things that have exchanged there. But, they had this sentry post here, and then way off about a quarter of a mile away, they had another sentry post on a hill. But, in between these sentry posts, there was a tree. This tree sort of blocked the visibility of what was going on at the other sentry post. Visibility was important, because this sentry post was right down next to the bridge, and they couldn't exactly see what was going on down there. They wanted to chop this tree down, so they sent a Lieutenant with an unlisted man down to chop the tree down. Well, there were about eight North Korean soldiers, who came across the bridge. They started talking to them. They don't know exactly what happened, but anyway, the Lieutenant and the soldier were killed with their own axes. Of course, again, they can't do anything about it, because they're still at war. So, the powers-to-be says, "We're going to cut that down." So, they brought in a carrier and put it off Inchon, which is about twenty miles away. They brought in a full regiment of soldiers into the "Zone B." And, by agreement, "Zone A," they can only have so many soldiers in there. But, "Zone B," which is back about a mile, they can bring in as many as they want. So, they brought in a whole regiment of battle ready soldiers. They had planes flying from the battle wagon, from the carrier, and from Seoul and Pusan, all equipped with bombs, ready to go. They, then took a Company of

Korean soldiers who were veterans and had all black belts. They were their "cream of the crop." They just stood around the tree. Then somehow, they just were able to cut the tree with no interference. That, they call it the most expensive tree trimming in the world. After the first couple of days where we did our formal type of things, they then took us to a couple Buddhist temples. They took us to a Korean village, which is like the Hale Farm and so forth. It's all the older types of houses. There we were very pleasantly surprised, in that, one young lady with her brother and, apparently, her mother and father spoke to us. Of course, it had been on the Korean radio and TV that we were there. She said, "Are you the Ohio mayors?" And, we said, "Yes." She said that she, on behalf of Korea, would like to thank us for saving their country. So, it was kind of heart warming to have somebody that didn't even know you to thank you. And, she really, I think, felt that way. You know, there are demonstrations against the United States, but there are some Korean people that are very thankful for what we did during the Korean war. The Korean Village was very interesting. One of the things we sampled was green bean pancakes with soy sauce on it. It doesn't sound good, you know, at first, but it was pretty good. They just simply ground up green beans, mixed it in with the pancake batter, and then fried it. Then, put soy sauce on it. They then took us to the Korea House, which is sort of a stage, dinner theater type thing. First, we went into the building. We had to leave our shoes in cubbyholes, and we put on slippers. We went down a little hallway to the room. We then, left our slippers at the doorway, and then we went in with our socks. We sat on the floor. Fortunately, they had little seat cushions with backs to them. But, I understand that, sometimes they don't even have that. But, we had all types of Korean food. We had kimchi. We had pine nuts. We had all types of things that were all Korean type food. And, most of it was pretty good. The hot kimchi was pretty hot.

B: What's kimchi?

I: Kimchi is a Korean dish. . . I remember back in 1952, if somebody is making kimchi, you could smell it for miles. What they do is, they take fish heads, fish, rice, a cabbage and so forth. They cook it, and then they leave it ferment. That fermenting may take as much as three or four months. When it's fermenting, you can smell it for miles. After a Korean has been eating kimchi and if they eat a lot of it, you can smell it on their body odor. It's probably something like garlic, or something. But, you can actually smell it on their body odor. In other words, when we had girls taking care of some of the rooms in the BOQ in

1953, they could not eat kimchi. They were ordered, "Thou shall not eat kimchi if you're going to work here," because you can smell it!

But Korea, the changes in Korea, in the city, it was tremendous the building that was going on. Of course, they were getting ready for the Olympics, also. It just seemed everybody was so industrious and clean. Around here, beer bottles and so forth are all around. There, you saw nothing, because they had people going around cleaning up. I think the Koreans just took a great pride in their country. You would see street workers working around the clock. For instance, in one park, where they were repairing it, you'd see them out there at two or three in the morning. We also did get to go through the Samsung Electronics Plant, and we went through the Hyundai Auto Plant. Again, as far as the auto plant, we've been through General Motors, and it looked very similar, with the exception that these workers did not have relief operators. They were expected to be on the job. If they got sick, that's too bad. They worked twelve hour shifts, six days a week. They would come in to work, and the company then would provide two meals a day for them. If they were on midnight turn, they'd get two meals. If day turn, they'd get two meals. The company would help them buy houses and so forth. It was really quite an honor to work for Hyundai. The wages were much better than the average wage. At that time, they were earning about four hundred dollars a month, I believe. That was real good money for them. They were very, very industrious. The plants were clean. We also went through a steel mill. I've been through Republic Steel, which is dirty and so forth. The steel mill had trees planted down along the driveway and so forth. It was so much cleaner than Republic Steel. They just seem so industrious. The other thing we noticed, Korea does not know democracy as we know it. It's still pretty much a police state. They do have elections and so forth. But, the individual freedoms that we have, they just don't have the freedom over there. It is pretty much controlled. Of course, maybe it's because there's so many people. They have to be this way. They don't seem to have the freedom that we have here. The other thing we noticed is the transportation. With nine million people, the average person cannot afford a car. The highways are still plugged, and they do have a bus system. The buses, they're packed. They are seated two or three in a seat. And, even the aisle ways are so plugged. There are two or three wide standing in the aisle. It must be under the commercial "dial," because they just have so many standing so close. There would be one bus, right after another bus, after another bus. It was just mass transportation. Also, we did get to go to see the Mayor of

Seoul, and the Assistant Director of, or the Assistant Prime Minister. It would be Vice President here in the U.S. They would feed you the drink ginseng. What this is, is a little plant something like a turnip. They make a tea out of this. This tea is supposed to cure all your ills, including your sex ills.

B: Oh, really?

T: The wives were not permitted to go, because, again, this is a very male dominated culture. But, they would serve you this ginseng tea, and they were very cordial. And of course, we received a lot of little trinkets while we were over there. The Korean Government presented each mayor with a Freedom Fighter Award. It was a very impressive. There was so much difference between Korea in 1952, and Korea in 1986. It just was tremendous, the difference. Of course, you have to realize they were at war. They were destroyed several times. Almost all of Korea had been captured, and then, they pushed them back to the thirty-eighth parallel. But, it's a very beautiful country. It's a very rocky country. Technically, they're still at war. When we were talking to the Commanding General of the Eighth Army, he was saying that, "We know that North Korea is making plans to invade South Korea again." At the North Korean Department of Defense, the person in charge said, "Give me the okay, and I'll have all of South Korea within a week." The General said, "We know what they're going to do." He said, "Korea has mountains going North and South and they have valleys going North and South. We know that they have spent 25 percent of their national budget on warfare. A good bit of this is going into tanks. They have tank after tank after tank battalions." And, to compare 25 percent, I think South Korea is spending 5 percent of it on military defense. So, they're spending a large percentage of their national budget on military. And, they know that what the North Koreans are going to do, if it ever comes about, that they're going to take their tanks and run right down South. Of course, the General said, "We have things to counteract this." He said, "We can't tell you what it is. But, this is what we feel is coming. We're taking measures to meet it if it ever comes." I know going from Seoul up to Panmunjom, we passed through a sort of a guard area, in that, for as long as you can look, there's a hill of dirt that is built up. The hill must have been about thirty feet high. Where the roadways go through, there's a bridge there. Then they have little things that look like giant jacks sitting off to the side. What they plan to do is, to throw those jacks in the roadway, in the case there is a tank. They say they know that the hills and the jacks are not going to stop them. All they have to do is, of course, blast away, and they'll

blast a hole through it. But, they said, "At least this is going to be a deterrent, so that if it comes, we can have a little bit of time to counteract wherever they're coming and so forth." So yes, they're still at work over there.

B: One last quick question and then we can finish up. We hear a lot about Vietnam and its Veterans today, and very little about Korea. How do you feel about that?

T: Well, there has been some voice to this, and I understand there is some movement. In fact, the only monument for the Korean War built by the United States, is over in Korea itself. It's just South of Panmunjom. And yes, I feel that there should have been. I understand that there is some method, or some movement, to get a Korean monument.

B: Well, I appreciate you taking all this time to talk to me. If there's anything else to finish up.

T: No, just for my wife and I, it was quite an experience. We'd like to go back to Korea again, because they are very industrious. They are very friendly people. The students are very well mannered, and so forth. Every time you would see them come up and say, "an-nyong-ha-sip-nik-ga," they'd bow and so forth, which means, "Hello, how are you." They're very nice people. However, one last comment. I said earlier that I'd like to go to Japan.

B: Yes.

T: I sort of changed my mind, in that, when we were in the hotel, the--well, Japan is only about a hundred miles across Korea straits from South Korea. So, there's an awful lot of Japanese that come over there for vacation. There was a whole busload of Japanese pulled into the hotel. They come into the hotel as we're standing there waiting on the elevator to go upstairs. These Japanese come up, and they sort of give you a shove, until they were standing either right beside you or standing in front of you. The elevator comes down, I remember this old Japanese lady standing right beside me. She gives me an elbow right square in the chest that knocked the wind out of me, almost. She busts in to the elevator before it even opened the door. Before the other people had a chance to get out, she barged in. The rest of the Japanese did the same way. We saw them at other places, and they were the most ill-mannered people that you could ever imagine. Just from that, I sort of lost my desire to go. It was completely different. The Koreans were very polite, very polite. They can't do enough for you. Maybe, the Japanese were on vacations or something, and want to be

known as a tourist. They were very, very rude.

B: Okay. Thank you.

I: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW