Interview with Norbert Bentele

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday, August 12, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and I'm in Quincy, Illinois, today with Norbert Bentele. I hope I got your pronunciation right.

Bentele: Absolutely correct.

DePue: It always throws me, because your name is spelled B-e-n-t-e-l-e. I want to say, "Ben-TEEL," and that's not correct, is it?

Bentele: No. That's an old, old German name. And it's pronounced in Germany by our relatives, "Bent-eh-LEE." And it probably should be pronounced, in German, "Bent-eh-LAH," but...

DePue: Do you have to train people to be able to pronounce it correctly—

Bentele: (laughs) No.

DePue: —when you first meet them?

Bentele: You'd be surprised how people interpret that. Oh, it's always "Ben-TELL."

DePue: "Ben-TELL."

Bentele: (laughs)

DePue: Okay, tell us Norbert, when and where you were born?

Bentele: Born in Macon, Missouri—not Macon, but Macon County, Missouri, let's put it thataway. And in 1932.

DePue: And the specific date?

Bentele: November the 9th.

DePue: Okay. Were you born in the city but grew up on the farm?

Bentele: No, I was born on the farm and grew up on the farm.

DePue: What's the nearest town then?

Bentele: The nearest town and our mailing address was Excello, Missouri.

DePue: Excel?

Bentele: Excello. Probably the nearest village that had a store was CoxTown which was probably close to about two miles away from the farm. And that's where I went to school—country school.

DePue: And I confess, I was looking at the map of Macon County. I could not find that. How do you spell CoxTown?

Bentele: It's C-o-x, T-o-w-n. Named after one of the old original settlers. The Cox family was their name. And it was, actually, a pretty thriving little burg. There's still an old church standing there and a few buildings. But it used to have a wagon manufacturing shop and several grocery stores. And when I was a kid, I could remember, there was a general store there that sold gasoline. They had the old pump-up gas out in front. And you went in, and had all the counters. That was the local place. Of course, if you had to do some business or something, you had to go to Excello which was also the telephone exchange. And it was on the Wabash Railroad over by Highway 63. And they had more businesses in Excello. It still wasn't, probably, more than two hundred people lived there. And, of course, Macon was twelve miles up north from us if you went out to the Highway 63 and went up. We lived right down in the south-east corner of Macon County— Middlefork Township.

DePue: Middlefork?

Bentele: Um-hm.

DePue: It looked like it was very much rural—

Bentele: Oh yeah, it still is.

DePue: There just wasn't much population there?

Bentele: No. Uh-uh. In fact, the last dirt road was graveled here less than ten years ago. (laughs) It was back in the woods.

DePue: I'm familiar with that good, rich prairie soil that the farmers in this area—especially you go a little bit east and farther north in Illinois—had. What kind of land did you have over there?

Bentele: It was probably marginal. It would grow and, you know, the bottom land is what the farmers all tried to clear off, and it was their best land, in the creek bottoms. And it was marginal. It wasn't that bad, but it wasn't that good. And a lot of timber. In fact, we operated a sawmill for quite some time. And so a lot of it was timbered. We'd raise everything. You had everything on the farm. Subsistence farming entailed only raising corn to feed the cows and horses. But you had to have ten, twelve cows. Milk them to sell the cream and use the milk. And then you had to raise some pigs so that you have some meat, you know. And we used horses. Never did have a tractor. Well, we did have a tractor—I'll take that back—when we operated a thrash machine in the sawmill. Had an old McCormick-Deering tractor, but not a row-crop tractor. Everybody pretty much worked with horses. And I remember the one neighbor. .Back in the early '40's he had a little Allis-Chalmers tractor. The first one in the whole neighborhood that actually had a tractor that would do work in the fields. So we raised chickens. And we had our own eggs and chickens. You separated your own cream and milk. And you had a smokehouse. It was just like the pioneers lived. I mean, you know, you butchered your own hogs once in the fall when all the neighbors got together. And they'd butcher from, oh, up to twenty hogs. They'd all bring them to one local spot, and then they'd work all day long. All the kids and the mothers would be there cooking. And all the kids had to help. They'd render all the lard, which was very important. Lard was very important to the family, because that's what you preserved a lot of the meat in, and that's what you cooked with.

DePue: These pigs were a lot fatter than the lean pigs we have today. Is that right?

Bentele: Oh, you wanted them fat. And they would cut the fat. They'd cut it up in little squares, you know—about like that—that went in a great big rendering kettle.

DePue: Two- or three-inches-thick fat?

Bentele: Oh, yeah. And all that went in there. And you rendered all the fat out. Then you had a lard press—a screw-down press where you put the little squares in there, and you squeezed all the lard out of them. And then, what you ended up then was a cake of what they called cracklins. And it was just a cake about that size. They were good to eat. You know, people ate them. They were tasty,

just like our pigskins right today, you know? (laughs) DePue: You're making me hungry here, Norbert.

Bentele: That's where a lot of us have come up with heart disease. (laughter)

DePue: How did the family end up in that area of Missouri?

Bentele: Well, actually, my grandparents came from Germany. And they had bought a farm just north of Cox Town about half a mile. My father was a World War I veteran, and then he started work for the Western Union Telegraph Company out of Chicago and worked there for almost ten years until the Depression hit in 1929. He was a foreman on one of the line crews. So they cut him—they laid quite a few line crews off—so that dropped him back to a lineman. By that time, he had married my mother. And I think they had my oldest brother on the way at the time. He'd saved his money, and he had quite a bit of money. And he could see the handwriting on the wall that it was just going to go downhill. And so, being as that farm was fairly close to his mom and dad, they decided that that would be a good place to buy. And it was a size that they could afford to buy it. And he had enough money to buy the farm.

DePue: What was his name?

Bentele: Albert.

DePue: You told me earlier the story about how he met your mother, too.

Bentele: Yeah, it was during the Joplin tornado. In fact, they just had a big deal about that tornado on the news. In 1925, I think it was, that tornado come across from southern Missouri, crossed southern Illinois, into Indiana. Three states, and never left the ground. It killed 634 people, I believe—it's over six hundred, but that number sticks in my mind—and just flattened Murphysboro. My mother was in Murphysboro at that time working as a clerk in the post office. And they sent my dad down with his line crew to pick up, you know, all the lines that were down that Western Union had in the area, which was a lot of them at that time. He picked up his payroll and mail and everything else from the post office, personally. I mean, he went and got his own. And so, that's how he run into my mother. He was thirty-two years old when they got married, and she was nineteen.

DePue: What was your mother's name?

Bentele: Dorothy.

DePue: What was her maiden name?

Bentele: Modglin. And she's a kin to the Pearsons, the Modglin, and Dubois families in southern Illinois, which is a lot of the original settlers that come in there from Kentucky and Tennessee—Scotch-Irish.

DePue: Any other siblings in the family?

Bentele: Yes, I have nine brothers and sisters. Yeah, there was nine of us—eight brothers and—

DePue: So, your dad started at age thirty-two, and then...

Bentele: Yeah, had a whole bunch of kids.

DePue: And where did you fit in there?

Bentele: I was number four. I have two older sisters, and one older brother. All of us were borned on that farm. We was all borned in the bedroom right there in that farmhouse. Had one lady—an old German lady named Mrs. Stropple—that lived about a quarter of a mile up the dirt road; she was the one that mid-wifed every one of us kids except one, and that was my youngest sister. She was born after we moved to town in 1945.

DePue: In 1945 you moved to town. What town was that?

Bentele: Macon.

DePue: That was Macon.

Bentele: Um-hm.

DePue: The big city of Macon at the time, huh?

Bentele: Yeah. That's where we all… —I had one year of grade school—actually two years. It was kind of funny how that happened. I'll have to tell you. In Missouri, at that time, they had a skip system. You skipped from the fourth to the sixth to the fifth to the eighth, back to the seventh and graduated. In grade school The fifth and seventh grade were considered hard grades, so they wanted you a little older. So that's what they done. When we moved to town in 1945, I was in the skip to the eighth grade. I had already started the eighth grade in country school. Well, then when we moved into town, we all went to the Catholic school. My father was a Catholic, so we all was. And so I was in the eighth grade. They just kept me at eighth grade and graduated me. I never did take the seventh grade. I actually missed one year of grade school. (laughs) And, you know, that's the way it turned out. But all of us went to grade school. We walked a mile and three-quarters—truly—across the fields. Just had a big path. Except my two youngest—my youngest sister and youngest brother—they were too little. And my next brother, he got to walk, I think, one year. But we walked it in the weather, and never missed school.

DePue: Tell me more about the experience of going to—is it the one-room schoolhouse?

Bentele: One-room school. Same school my father went to.

DePue: Do you remember the name of the school?

Bentele: Union Grove. Union Grove School, that's it. The building has finally disappeared by now. The original name of it was Bear Thicket. According to legend, the last bear in that neighborhood was killed there, across the road from the school. But my father and his three brothers went to that same school in about 1900. It was built about 1870, I think. And we all went there. At one time there was thirty some-odd kids at that country school. And, pretty much, they still had fifteen, eighteen students when we moved to town.

DePue: One teacher?

Bentele: One teacher, yeah.

DePue: Remember her name?

Bentele: Well, we had several of them. There was a Mrs. Green. And the one that was there the most was Florene Dawsey. And she rode a horse. Well, the roads were in such bad shape. They were all mud except, you know, they had one gravel road that run to Cox Town. The rest of the roads were all mud. And so she rode a pinto pony. Now, she had to ride twelve miles a day, round trip, in all kinds of weather—in rain, and snow, and cold, and everything else. She'd saddle up that pinto pony. She lived with her parents out on the road to Excello—and she'd ride that six miles by horseback. She had to be at school to get the fire started before the kids arrived. So she had to be at that school probably around 8:00, 8:30 in the morning to start the coal stove so the schoolhouse would be warm when the kids all got there Because we was about half-frozen when we got there anyway.

And I remember there was an old barn down about, oh, a quarter of a mile. There was an old farmhouse, and that's where she kept her pony. Us boys used to fight to see who would get to ride that pony (laughs) and go get it—saddle it, and go get it, and feed it while you were down there. It had a stall in the old barn where the pony would stay, and you had to feed it, and take the saddle off and bridle, and then you had to saddle it back up and bring it up. It had quite a honor to do that. Sometimes, she would pick us out, you know, if we got too rough. But a lot of times, she used to, you know, let us fight over it. So... (laughs)

DePue: Well, I was wondering if you had any rambunctious boys, and if she had some discipline for those.

Bentele: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I always remember this one guy; he actually ended up marrying my oldest brother's sister-in-law. And he was about the same age as I am because he was a Korean War veteran too. In fact, he got wounded over there. He was just a little bit bigger than I was, and he beat me every day. But

finally I got big enough that I could whip him, and I whipped him every day. (laughs) It wasn't nothing serious. It was mainly wrassling and, you know... That's what you done in country school. And we played baseball. There were some really old, old kids in there—some of the older ones that were slow, that were held back were probably seventeen years old. They were right in there with the rest of us. You generally graduated from grade school when you were twelve, thirteen. But I can remember a few of them that were, you know, a little bit backward and were still in school at sixteen, seventeen years old.

DePue: Did you feel like you got a good education there?

Bentele: Well, yeah. I think it was excellent. The way it worked was, you all lined up from the smaller kids up, and the first graders were next to the bank of windows. Then you went from grades all the way up to the eighth graders. And she would work with each one of them, and the eighth graders and the seventh graders were supposed to assist the other smaller kids, and kind of help her school. You learned, because you heard what she was teaching. You kind of learned a grade ahead while you were setting there. I mean, you know, you might be doing your work, but at the same time the next grade above you was being taught, all the way up to the eighth grade. So you had the benefit of what you overheard and what they went through. And we all were pretty much close together. Each helped each other. We'd have pie suppers and put on plays and, you know, everything else. I can still remember, she'd set a stage up where her desk was. And they had pie suppers to raise money to paint the school and a community get-together, also.

DePue: A pie supper?

Bentele: That was a big deal in those days, and particularly in the rural schools. Of course, all the women baked a pie. And everybody came. I mean, horses and buggies would be lined up, you know, and the whole neighborhood would come. It was the picnic. And it always happened in the fall, after school got going good and it was cooler weather. Mainly what the deal was, a lot of the single women would bake the best pie they knew how to bake. And they had an auctioneer auction them off. And you couldn't put your name on them. You know, it had to be, more or less, a silent auction. Of course, everybody, kind of knew, and they wasn't supposed to tell us, "That's my pie. Buy that." That was not supposed to happen. Of course, it probably did. But we'd always put on a play. We'd have a Thanksgiving play. You know, the kids would put on a skit. And I can say, I could always remember they had a wire strung from one side to the other, and had big pins.

DePue: Clothespins?

Bentele: No, not clothespins. The metal ones that close together, like diaper pins, on that curtain. And it would screech on that wire. I still can hear that wire screeching when they'd pull it open or pull it shut. We'd put on a play, and,

you know, that would be something that all the kids really got into. But anyway, they'd get back to the pie supper, and there would be pies, some of them cakes,—but mainly it was pies. Come over and watch the kids and buy a pie. Well, some of the young guys that were after some local gal that they was interested in, they would bid everything but their shirt on those pies. And some of them went big money back in the thirties. I mean, you know, when you're talking five or ten dollars back then for a pie, you're talking about, like, four hundred dollars today. But that was always a big favorite contest. The guys would try to outbid the other ones. And, you know, the gal may have wanted the one that didn't have quite enough money to get her pie so they could eat together. And she had to set with them, and eat the pie with each other, you know? Of course, they had to be in the open. They couldn't sneak off somewhere and (laughs) eat the pie. But, that was a big social event.

DePue: Did your father like farming, or was that something he just felt he had to do to make a living somehow?

Bentele: Of course, he grew up on a farm—born and raised on a farm. And, he knew how to farm. He was a saddler in the Army, and he knew animals and horses and everything. That was another thing. .You had to know husbandry. You had to know how to… You didn't call a veterinarian out for... The only time a veterinarian every showed up at a farmer's farm was to take care of the horses because they were so valuable to the farmer. If he had a sick horse, you know, you couldn't afford to like buy a new tractor. You called in a veterinarian. Very seldom, you know, because they cost money. And so to be successful, you had to know how to take care of your livestock, from cows to pigs to chickens to whatever you had. And I think Dad—again, this was in about 1929, right in there when the stock market went down—and everybody laid off a tremendous amount of workers. And, I mean, guys wandered the roads just trying to find a place to sleep or eat. And I think Dad thought, "Well, this would be a good time to do that." And, I mean, it made a living for us. We never did go hungry. We never had to. My mom and everybody else would never take commodities. No matter how desperate you were, never. And commodities were the giveaway food that they'd give to families, you know? They called them commodities, and now they call them food stamps. But never, She would absolutely not do that. And we didn't.

DePue: What was the cash crop?

Bentele: Well, probably the biggest cash crop was the eggs and cream. And, of course, you didn't have soybeans then. That was something that was unheard of. You had corn. And probably the biggest cash crop was, like I said, cream. The truck would come by, or you took it into town to the creamery. And eggs. You didn't sell any meat that you cured because you needed that. And maybe we sawed wood and probably sold boards and planks. You know that would happen. That would be a cash crop. But overall, eggs and cream was your

main cash crop on a farm in those days, that you could take to town and sell. You know, thirty dozen eggs, and buy your staples that you had to have.

DePue: What were your chores?

Bentele: Everything. And I always say this: I had four brothers, and not a one of us went to farming. I mean, we had all that worked out of us. (laughter)

DePue: Well, tell me about what it was like—early-morning chores.

Bentele: Early-morning chores: It had to be about five o'clock we had to get up and head out to the barn. And like I say, you had to milk those cows twice a day. My brother and Dad was milking the cows. I would have to shuck the corn fodder which we'd haul in by the stack, and shuck the ears off, and they went to the horses. And the corn fodder, we fed the cows with. That's what they subsisted on. Plus every once in a while maybe a little grain or something, you know, to help them out. I remember standing out there on many a cold morning, pitch black, raining or snowing on me. And, of course, you couldn't wear gloves and do it very well. And I'd have to shuck a stack of corn fodder higher than my head. And then, after that, help with the milk and everything else. Get it up to the smokehouse where we had a DeLaval separator, where we separated the cream from the milk. And we needed the milk because every morning you had to have fresh milk because you had no way of refrigerating anything. So the milk that you had from the night before, it was throwed out or fed to the cats or the animals, or put in the slop for the pigs. And so you had to have fresh milk every morning that we used for our cereal or drinking or whatever. Raw milk, you know. We filtered it, and that would be it. Take it in and drink it, while it was still warm. (laughs)

DePue: How about the chores when you got back home?

Bentele: Well, the first thing you did when you walked back, we walked right through the chicken yard, and there was a big pile of wood that was there that was sawed up into stove lengths. And we'd always kept a pile split. And there wasn't none of these here log-splitters. You had to split it with an axe. And there was always a big pile there because Mom had to get some during the day too. Or Dad would get it in. And you always knew that you might as well stop at the firewood pile, pick you up a whole armload of wood, and haul it into the kitchen because that's the first thing Mom's going to want to stoke up the kitchen stove for making supper. And so you always carried that in first before you put down your books or anything else. And when I talk about an education, one of my brothers in the next year where I am was president of Mallinckrodt Chemical, out of St. Louis. And, of course, he's retired now, which—

DePue: What was the company?

Bentele: Mallinckrodt, which is a large—

DePue: Mallinckrodt?

Bentele: Mallinckrodt. They processed the uranium for the first atomic bomb. That's how Mallinckrodt Chemical in St. Louis was a—well, it still is a big chemical company. It's part of another concern now. But he had forty-three thousand employees, so he had to learn something. My brother was an engineer for the highway, and all my sisters all worked at very good-paying jobs. All of us did.

DePue: I think I know the answer to all of this. The heating:. Did you have just the heat from the stove in the kitchen?

Bentele: In the evening, mainly, when you sat down to dinner, we had this kitchen stove. And the rest of the heating was one big heating stove in the front living room. And you had to know how to, actually, stoke that up at night—you know, bank the fire. And sometimes Dad would have coal. I mean, we was able to, actually, surface mine. There was a lot of coal over in Macon County. And we could, actually, surface mine some coal. And you could bank it up. Everybody tried to get what they called a warm-morning stove. It was one of the stoves that stood up a whole lot of coal, and you could bank that. You had to really know how to do this, so you wouldn't build a big fire, but it would last all night and keep the house warm all night. You might have had to get upor Dad would—in the middle of the night and chuck in a couple of pieces of wood, you know, to bring the fire up a little bit to make it warm if it was a particularly cold night. But that was the only heat. We grew up living in an upstairs bedroom with absolutely no heat whatsoever. None. And the old farmhouse was not insulated, and many a morning around the windows the snow would be blowed in, in drifts, coming in that room. Not melting either. And that's how you done it.

DePue: I assume there was no electricity.

Bentele: No. I can remember when they—I forget what year it was—but they built a pole line and the power line for the REA.[1] And that had to come after Roosevelt got into office, so about probably 1937, '38. And another thing about how the REA done that was, the farmers got paid for digging the holes for the poles that went alongside their property. And they got paid for doing that. And they could dig the holes, and they got so-much money fordoing that.

And being as my dad worked for the Western Union Telegraph Company as a lineman, he knew how to do that very well. In fact, we had what they called a "crank and cuss" telephone system coming out of Excello. And the wires would come down, and, of course, every farmer had an old crank telephone, ground return. You know what that is? You have one wire, and the ground was used for the other side of the circuit. Worked perfectly

[1] REA: Rural Electrification Administration, a New Deal program which built the infrastructure needed to bring electricity to farms.

until they started getting all the electricity into the ground, which made a lot of static.

But it went down, and our house sat on the corner of three roads—come to a junction right there. So, it was natural that we had a switchboard—a little switchboard in there on the wall in the kitchen. To call our house, I remember, it was three rings and a short. And when Mom heard that, she knew somebody wanted to be switched over to another line, so she would answer the phone, and they'd tell her, "Well, I'd like to get a hold of Myrtle so-and-so down here." Of course, she knew where everybody was. And she would throw the switches that would switch that line over to the other line. And then when the person wanted to end their conversation—of course, now, everybody could hear what was going on; it was a party line—they'd give one long ring that told Mom that, okay, they're done, and she could set the switches back to normal. There was a certain way that they had to have them, so it would be hooked together.

But Dad maintained that rural telephone line. And I don't know if he got paid for it or... I think it was all contributed by the people that used it. They just had to put the poles up and buy the wire and the telephone. And I don't think there was any charge whatsoever for that neighborhood phone line which went all over. Every farmer was hooked to it. And a lot of times it was very important. It actually went to the switchboard that hooked to the Bell Telephone switchboard in Excello. And had an operator twenty—well, she was there not twenty-four hours a day, but it was in her house. She lived right there, so she would get up and answer the phone in the middle of the night if somebody was sick or needed help. That's where they'd call, and they'd call a doctor in Macon or wherever and get them on their way out there. Because a lot of times, that was a life-and-death situation. And that's what, you know, kept the neighborhood going.

DePue: You called it a crank-and-cuss telephone?

Bentele: Well, that's what they used to say, because, well, if the line was down, the linemen always called it that—a crank-and-cuss line The railroad had a lot of these ground-return telephone lines, too. I mean, you know, these branch lines just had one wire, and it was ground return. It worked perfectly. And everybody was cranking on the dang thing trying to get somebody, and you'd be cussing at the same time. (laughter) "This dang..."

DePue: When you mentioned electricity coming about '37—something in that neighborhood—do you remember the changes that that brought with it?

Bentele: Well, that's what I was going to say. You know, the funny thing about it—if you got electricity, you didn't have these appliances you've got today. You couldn't afford them anyway. I remember the first and only thing that you had Dad wired all of our buildings, the barn and the house and everything else

himself. I mean, he knew how to do that—and it was the light. Before that, we used Aladdin lamps, which actually put out a very fine bright light. You ever see an Aladdin lamp—the one that had the mantles in it, that you pumped up?

DePue: Was this kerosene oil it was operating on?

Bentele: Yeah, or the white gas, is what you used in them. And it's like a Coleman lantern, only a lot bigger, and, you know, set in the middle of the dining room. So that's where we all done our lesson, around that kerosene Aladdin lamp. I mean, they really put out better than what the fire would. But that was the main thing that they had was lights. That was what everybody really needed, and that was the only thing you had.

The first thing that Dad bought was an electric motor—a one-horse motor—that hooked up to the Maytag washing machine that was run by a gas engine before. That was the very first thing that he put in. I mean, it took a lot of load off of Mom, because, you know, thataway, she could just turn it on and run the washing machine. Otherwise, she'd have to kick that Maytag engine, and sometimes it wouldn't start. And it was (laughs) quite a rig.

DePue: How about something like an electric milker?

Bentele: No, nothing like that. I never did see anything like that. Nobody could afford it. And it was just not done. You know, we cranked the old DeLaval. But you didn't have control of the machine. You know, I guess you probably could have. But you still cranked the old separating machine also.

DePue: Indoor plumbing?

Bentele: No. All outhouse. And that's another story in itself, about how you went out there in the wintertime. (laughter)

DePue: Well, I'm thinking, especially if you get to be fifty or sixty years old, and waking up in the middle of the night in the winter...

Bentele: Well, what you done, if you didn't have to go big, everybody used what they'd call a thunder mug or a slop jar in the corner of the house, or somewhere that was out of the way. And that's where you urinated. But if you had to go, you had to go. You went out to the outside privy, and that was always an adventure in itself—the Sears, Roebuck catalog—the whole ball of wax. That's what you had. And I remember, being as we had such a large family and little kids, we had a three-holer. One of them was a little one for the kids. (laughter)

DePue: How often did it get pumped out??

Bentele: Well, actually, you scooped it out. And took it out in the field to an out-of-the-way place, and it's distributed out there. You'd wait till it got a pretty good

mess. But here's another interesting thing a lot of people don't realize. Right south of Quincy, in Marblehead, Illinois was the Marblehead Lime Company which produced fine-ground lime. And that's what you used in your outhouse. Every outhouse in the country had a sack of Marblehead lime set down in the outhouse with a cup where you take about a cupful if you went to the bathroom, and you'd sprinkle it over there. It held down the stink, and it helped decompose the feces, and it, you know, kept the flies from swarming it too. But that was very important—the Marblehead Lime Company. I'll never forget it. It always had it on the sack: Marblehead Lime Company, Marblehead, Illinois. And everyplace had it that you went. That's what it was.

But cleaning it out wasn't that big of a chore. You know, you done it in cold weather generally. And it didn't smell. And, you know, you took it and threw it in the wagon, and took it out and distributed it. You wouldn't put that on anything. And of course, we cleaned out the barn all the time—the cows and the horses. And that was always a job. But it was necessary to do it. And, of course, the bedding that you put in for the horses was generally rip grass and stuff like that. Really difficult. And they would stomp it down so hard, you know, you had to... I mean, you had to work to get it out of the barn. But that went on the cornfield. And the chicken house, which I dearly hated to clean out. That was one job I would almost take a whipping before I'd... The dust in there, and the smell of it just bothered me greatly. I couldn't stand it. Of course, I had to do it. But I remember I'd hold my breath while I was in there working and run back outside, because it was just—I don't know. It always did bother me. It bothers me right to this day.

DePue: It sounds like you had more than just one or two chickens.

Bentele: Well, we had a flock. They would start out with baby chickens—at least two hundred or more, because we raised them, sometimes—and we sold chickens when they got to be pullet sized or frying sized. And you sold, also, the old hens for boiling chickens. And you would sell chickens to the people in town, and that was a good market also, besides the eggs. And there was a lot of them. You raised them from the little chickens you got in the mail—you know, little baby chicks. They'd come in the mail—a little box full of baby chicks. And, in the cold weather where you generally started them, a lot of times you had to keep them in the house next to the stove to keep them alive. When they growed up a little bit, they'd withstand the cold a bit better. But they had a brooder house out in one of the chicken houses. We had two chicken houses. And that was one of our main sources of meat, too. I mean, we ate a lot of fried chicken, and a hen— boiled chicken—or whatever it was, we had. That was a good source, because if you wanted a chicken, you just went out in the chicken yard with a hook and grabbed one of them and took it over to the chopping block and whacked his head off. Mom would scald him, pick him, and have a chicken.

DePue: Did she tell you to go get the young ones or the old ones?

Bentele: Well, it all depends on what she wanted to make. You wanted an old chicken for chicken and dumplings—you know the ones that you boiled. Young chickens were fried, you know? And, no, we had a lot of chickens. Now, the chicken manure was the kind of manure that you wanted to spread on your vegetable garden. And you had to be careful with it because chicken manure is very potent. I mean very rich, and you can, what they called, "burn up your garden"' by putting on too much. You had to kind of temper it with the horse manure. Horse manure was another good... It was spread out on the gardens, and then plowed under. And that's how you'd raise your garden.

DePue: I'm assuming you had draft horses and not standard-bred or thoroughbreds.

Bentele: No, all draft horses.

DePue: Big horses.

Bentele: And another thing that we had—talking about this and chores—we had a big garden. A big garden. And Mom would can at least a hundred quarts of everything that we grew. Beans—everything. Beets. And then, on top of the big garden we had next to the house, which was almost a good, acre, and we grew everything in there, and around the sides we had different berry bushes and everything else that we had. Then, on the hillside, a little ways from the house, is where we grew a truck garden, they called it then. That was potatoes and sweet potatoes. We grew a lot of sweet potatoes and melons.

Let's see, what else did we have? The crops that took more space. We'd always have two or three rows of sweet corn. And all that had to be processed. Of course, the first thing you done in the morning—and where a lot of people don't do this, and they wonder why gardening is so hard—you went out early in the morning and worked your garden before the sun got hot. And that was the better time to work it—doing your hoeing and weed-pulling, and picked up what vegetables she was going to have.

And all that processing. You'd set on the front porch and snap beans. All of us kids would set there with Mom and, you know, snap beans or peel carrots or whatever they had. There'd be a whole assembly line of putting together. And, generally, we had a root cellar that was attached to the house. Like I say, a hundred quarts of everything that we raised was put in that cellar along with some meat that was put in crocks with lard on the top of it. And a big rack with potatoes in there. They would try to keep enough potatoes for the year, and you could do this. You'd never wash them. You dug them up. We had a big potato patch. That was another whole-family exercise because Dad would take the horse and a small plow and turn them over, and you would pick them all up. And he wanted you to get all of them. I meanyou had to go through and pick them, because he would check and make sure you got all of them He also picked them up. You never washed them, but generally, in a root cellar where they didn't freeze or anything else, you could put a rack

with slots in it in there, and potatoes would keep, generally, all winter until early spring. You'd have potatoes. And, of course, you had to, kind of, monitor and pick out. If one of them turned rotten, you'd get it out of there. And so, that was another thing. The root cellar was very important to you. Actually, it would keep you from starving.

DePue: And obviously, you didn't have refrigeration, so that was the refrigeration?

Bentele: Yep, our root cellar was about halfway in the ground. And it stayed cool in there. You know, it had a dirt floor, which you had to have in a root cellar. And it would stay cool, but not cold.

DePue: Now, the things you're talking about would have been well into the '40's.

Bentele: Yes, the late '30's and early '40's.

DePue: Do you remember anything about the Depression years?

Bentele: Oh, yes. I was born right in the depth of the Depression—1932 was the depth of it. And, like I say, I can remember very well in 1936 when we had that severe hot weather that killed a lot of people. I was just reading a piece from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch:* four hundred and some-odd people died in St. Louis during that heat spell that we went through here. If you notice, the records were all, pretty much, set back here. And I can remember, we slept in the front yard all summer long. Mom and Dad moved the beds out in the front yard underneath the mulberry tree, and that's where we slept. And it never rained once. Now, you think about the depth of the Depression, and you had to have your vegetable garden to subsist on. If you had any hogs or cattle, even they had nothing to eat. They would cut down trees and brush so the hogs and cattle could eat the leaves. When they run out of that, the farmers had to sell them for whatever they could get, because you couldn't feed them. They would starve to death. And a lot of animals did. And here you are, in the depth in the Depression—no money. And you can't raise a crop of anything, or a vegetable garden. How are you going to feed your family the next winter?

DePue: Did the family have a well?

Bentele: We had a well, but they all dried up. Now, remember, you had cisterns. The only thing we had on the farm, about half a mile from the house, was a small spring that never did quit flowing. But even at best, it never flowed very much. It was a small spring that come out of the hillside. That was the water we used for anything other than drinking. And what you had to do—when you had cisterns and no rain, you run out of water in your cistern—so you had to buy water. A tank truck brought a tank of water out and dumped it in your well. And I forget what it cost then, but it wasn't very much. But that was a big business—hauling water.

DePue: Did you keep the garden going with that water?

Bentele: Not very well. We got some garden, because it was planted early and matured before the hot weather. And we was able to, you know, salvage that. That's what you done. If you got it planted at the right time—if the snow went off, and it thawed out—you'd plant potatoes in the end of March or the first of April. Well, generally, you had your garden pretty much on the way or matured by the time July and the really hot weather hit. Well, we did get that. But anything after that that would come along in, like melons or whatever—nothing. Because it just dried up. Same way with the corn crop. It just dried up. The 1936 drought looked like what we've got in Texas right now when you see those pictures in Texas. That's how this area looked then. And, I mean, it was terrible.

DePue: Was the family close to running out of food, then, in early '37?

Bentele: We had to be careful. I can remember that we had enough put away. And then, of course, you had your meat and stuff. But I think we survived pretty well. It was no glory time. We had to be careful about what we... In other words, you ate everything that was put out there.

DePue: Did you say your father bought the farm in '29?

Bentele: Um-hm.

DePue: And he never rented?

Bentele: No. Well, he never rented at all. He bought the farm—lock, stock, and barrel, by the way. The old German family that was there, Seitz was their name, sold all of it. In fact, there was a horse that went with the farm, and all the machinery. A lot of farmers done that. In other words, he retired. He was an old guy, and so he sold it—everything that was on the farm.

DePue: How many acres?

Bentele: There was ninety acres, and Dad rented another forty beyond in the bottom.

DePue: Well, the reason I'm asking is because this is also the time that so many farmers were going bankrupt and so many farms are being foreclosed.

Bentele: Well, here's what happened. It kind of reminds you of back a few years ago, when they had the farm. It's kind of like this right now. What the farm produced was selling at high prices. Pretty much you could borrow money, and the interest rate was high. You could borrow a hundred thousand dollars in the spring, and inflation would make it 120 by the time fall came. Well, a lot of farmers bought new pickup trucks—it happened right here—and everything else. And they lost their farm. And the same thing in the '30's, if you paid your bills. And after World War I, the government made it very generous, because they knew they was going to have to send a lot of food over to Europe. And it was supposed to boom the farm, which it did for a short

while. A lot of farmers bought land and everything else. But they didn't pay it off. So they're the ones that lost it. The people that bought their farm, and Dad bought the farm outright, so he didn't owe anything on the land.

DePue: So, he was very fortunate in that respect, then.

Bentele: Yeah, um-hm.

DePue: Again, you would have been awfully young as this time, but towards the late 1930s, you know, the world is getting to be a more complicated place especially in Germany, for example. And your father being German, do you remember his feelings about any of that?

Bentele: Yes, I do. In fact, we were the only people in the neighborhood that had a radio—a battery-powered radio. We had a wind charger that would charge the battery setting there on it, and we had one on the radio. And we were the only ones that had a radio. And the neighbors used to come in, particularly on Saturday night, to listen to the radio or listen to the news.

DePue: Did they listen to the barn dance or something like that?

Bentele: Yeah, well, the old *Fibber McGee and Molly* was popular, and the *Grand Ole Opry*. And there were several other old country plays on the radio that people would actually walk several miles to come and listen to it, you know? But Dad would follow the news close, being a World War I veteran. And, of course, his parents just came from Germany, and, well, we've still got a lot of family over in Germany that we know. I can remember that, you know, Hitler would have been a very good chancellor if he hadn't tried to kill his neighbors? (laughs) He actually brought Germany out of the deepest depression that any country ever saw and put everybody to work building superhighways and everything else. But he just couldn't keep his hands off of Poland and the rest of them. That's where he got in trouble. And for a while there I remember Mom cautioned Dad not to be so vocal because she could kind of see the handwriting on the wall, which it did turn out thataway. Of course, then, when America got into the war and stuff like that, well, then it was all the other way, you know?

DePue: Well, let's talk about that. You would have been nine years old, I'm thinking, at December 7, 1941. Can you remember that?

Bentele: Yes, I can.

DePue: What do you remember about that?

Bentele: Well, I remember the biggest thing was shock. I think everybody was just dumbfounded that it happened the way it did. Not that the Japanese attacked us because all of the newspapers and everything else was full of everything where we were embargoing, and we weren't allowing the Japanese to get to

the oil fields and stuff like that. And I remember they were just shocked that it happened there and the devastation that they caused. I mean, they weren't expecting them to sink three-fourths of the Navy. And of course, at that time there was a lot of people that had sons and everything else, you know, in the service because that was one place they could go where they could at least get something to eat and live. And I remember that, definitely. The radio was going all day long and all night when that happened.

DePue: Do you remember when you first heard it? Was it on the radio?

Bentele: Yeah. Oh, yeah. It was on the radio. It had come over the newscast. In fact, the speech that Roosevelt put out to Congress that next day—I remember hearing that.

DePue: The "Day of Infamy" speech?

Bentele: Um-hm.

DePue: Okay. How did life change for you guys, now that the United States was at war?

Bentele: Well, it didn't change hardly at all because everybody was restricted. And a lot of people don't realize this: the wages were frozen. You couldn't ask for more money even though there wasn't nobody to do the work because it was frozen wages. The only thing that the farmers had an advantage of was they got an A-card—the gasoline-ration card—which allowed them more gas. Not a hell of a lot.

DePue: Did the family have a car?

Bentele: Oh, yeah. We had a '32 Chevy four-door.

DePue: Since 1932 you had a Chevy?

Bentele: Well, I don't know when Dad bought that car. I was trying to think the other day. I don't remember any other cars, so he had to have it in '35 or '36, and we still had it when we moved to town. And he finally bought a nice little pickup truck to do his work in. But I remember the ration-card stamp that you had out on the windshield. And they rationed sugar and stuff like that. That made a change. But the farmers could get that because they had to preserve the crops. But a farmer was more or less tied to his farm too. (laughs) If you had an essential job, which they considered the farmers as an essential job, you was restricted. You couldn't sell out and go to something else. But there was no raise in pay. In fact, things did not change until after the war ended.

DePue: Did you have any older brothers that were in military?

Bentele: My brother went in the Navy in 1945.

DePue: So right at the tail end?

Bentele: Right at the tail end. My oldest brother.

DePue: And you said that the family moved to town. When was that?

Bentele: Nineteen forty-five—in the fall of '45.

DePue: Was that because your father found work in town, or something?

Bentele: Well, for years he had already been a carpenter. And my grandfather was a carpenter, also. They built a lot of barns in that part of the country, and houses. And that's what Dad done as a supplement to the farm. I mean he couldn't very well raise all of us kids just with what we produced on that farm. And, so, he was already doing that almost full time. And me and my brothers were actually doing the farm work. And so my mother didn't like the farm. You know, she was a city girl to start out with. Not a big-city girl, but she lived mainly in cities. Her dad was a railroad telegrapher down in southern Illinois and moved around all over Pinckneyville and all of those little towns down there. And she was after Dad hot and heavy about it. And we had several families there that weren't very good either. I mean, neighbors that, you know... And here she had these four daughters growing up. And Mom, she just said, "I'm not raising my daughters for the likes of them. We're moving to town." And she made Dad sell out. I mean, he would have stayed where he was, I think. And he said, "You know, in town you're going to have a big building boom, and wages are going up." My dad was an expert carpenter. And you know what he got paid for it in the middle of the Depression, building houses for people from the ground up? I'm counting the foundation, the plumbing, the wiring, the cabinets—everything in that house. Dad made thirty-five cents an hour. That's what he made for years. And when he moved to town he was very hesitant about raising. He was almost afraid to do it because he was afraid he wouldn't get work. But the union carpenters were making well over a dollar an hour. So finally he raised to seventy-five cents an hour and then moved it all up from there. He was still the cheapest carpenter in town. (laughs) You know?

DePue: Did you personally follow the war pretty closely?

Bentele: Well, from 1936Dad subscribed to the *Life* magazine, and that come weekly. We always kept them in a trunk in the attic. Every issue of the *Life* magazine was in that trunk when we moved off that farm. And we left them in the attic. (laughs) You know, it was something that you didn't think about then. Had every issue from 1936 when they first started publishing. And that was our main source of information about the war. And, of course, *Life* magazine was the premiere magazine. And they covered it, I mean, everywhere. And it was really something to see, those old *Life* magazines. They done a good job. And that's mainly how we did.

Also, one thing else that us kids done: In the wintertime particularly the roads were so bad with the snowdrifts and everything else. You had to shovel your way out a lot of times. And the trip to town was not very often. You maybe got to town three times a winter or less. Or a little more if the weather was good and roads were dry because there was mud holes, and ruts and snowdrifts and everything, you know, going to town. Plus, it cost you a little bit of money, too. I remember Dad would get gas to go home. It was twelve miles away from Macon. He'd buy gas at the last gas station. He'd buy a dollar's worth of gas, and they'd give you five and a half gallons of gas. And that would be enough to run out there, and run around a little bit, and get back to town. (laughs) A dollar's worth of gas. Quite different than it is now. But we had a very good public library in Macon. It's still there in fact. It's one of the Carnegie libraries they expanded on. It's really quite a library right today. And the kids would go. That was our last stop. We'd go to the library, and each one would check out three different books. And by the time we got back, we'd all read everybody else's book. You know, we'd end up with at least twelve books. My oldest brother was a mathematical whiz. He was really good at mathematics. So, we all had our education set around reading books.

DePue: You mentioned before that before the war started, your father was at least admiring what was going on in Germany with the economy.

Bentele: Well, and—

DePue: How did he feel about it after the war started?

Bentele: Well, it was a completely different ballgame. I mean, then he was against Hitler all the way. And I think some of the stories started coming out that they were pretty sure that he was running death camps. And that was all coming to bear. You know, he wasn't a Hitler-lover, but at the same time he liked what was going on. A lot of the people in the United States could look at Germany as a model. They had countered their high inflation rate, and they'd put people to work. Hitler had them building that infrastructure up, and the highways, and everything else that they did. And it was a model country. I mean in 1935 and '36 and '37, that was the best-going country in Europe—probably the world. And so it could be admired particularly when we were back here. People were struggling even to find something to eat. There was people wandering the roads, couldn't find a home or anything else. And they called the wives of a lot of the men grass widows. And a grass widow was one that still had a husband, but he wasn't present at the home. A lot of the men would leave the home so the wife and the kids could get commodities to live on. And, of course, he'd sneak back, you know, sometime during the month and visit. I knew several of them. There were several of them in our neighborhood that done that. And they had to, or their family would have starved. We had an uncle—my mother's uncle from St. Louis—and he couldn't find work, so he'd come up here and helped Dad on the farm. Well, there was two of them two different times. They actually couldn't find work. And they mainly come

up here and worked just for their keep. They helped saw wood and do all the farm work and everything else. I remember Uncle Henry, and after working three months up there with Dad, he finally got a job in St. Louis. Dad took him out to the Highway 63 so he could thumb a ride south. And Dad give him half the money he had in his pocket for helping. And that was fifteen cents. Dad had thirty cents in his pocket. That's all the money he had.

DePue: You mentioned earlier that the family was Catholic. Was it a church-going family?

Bentele: Yes, we did. We went as often as we could.

DePue: And your dad being, I guess, second-generation German, were you guys occasionally going to a church where there was German spoken?

Bentele: Well, not in Macon. There was no German mass there. And Quincy was a large German population. They had several German newspapers, and they had German masses Particularly like St. Mary's down there. They had a German mass. In fact, we had an Irish priest. (laughs)

DePue: A what?

Bentele: An Irish priest.

DePue: Oh, an Irish—okay.

Bentele: From Ireland. Yeah. And that was a time when all the Irish priests were coming over to the United States and operating parishes. Kind of like the Hispanics now. We would try to get to church. I mean, Mom was a convert because she was a Baptist from southern Illinois. But she joined the church. And the funny thing was, my grandfather was a Catholic, and my grandmother was a Lutheran. And she never changed. She always went to the Lutheran church in Macon. And I went with her.. We go back a long, long ways in the Catholic Church. I mean, I've seen records back to the tenth century of our family being involved with the pope that was in Kronenberg.

DePue: Oh, back when there were two popes?

Bentele: And I had several ancestors that were abbots of monasteries.

DePue: Where was the family from originally in Germany then?

Bentele: Well, our branch of the family is around Ravensburg or on the Bodensee, down in southern Germany. And at one time, back in the tenth century, they were around Kronenberg, which is where the Roman Catholics were. They had three popes then. The German pope got in more or less a power grab with the pope in Rome and lost. Well, my family was involved in that, and they

stripped them of their lands, and they had to go down to (laughter) another place to settle. So, anyway, there's quite a history there.

DePue: Did life change for you, personally then when the family moved to town?

Bentele: Yeah, it did. At least I was able to get a job and make some kind of money.

DePue: Now you would have been thirteen at time?

Bentele: Yeah. I worked three different jobs.

DePue: What were you doing?

Bentele: Well, I was setting pins in a bowling alley in the Elks Club in the evening, which was a pretty good job, to tell you the truth. We got ten cents a line for our game, and they had a couple of alleys. Then, of course, if anybody wanted to bowl extra, they had to tip us to get us to do that. You know, they were generous, pretty much, with the pin-setters. And that was before the days of the automatic pin-setters. You set them by hand. And that was one job I had. And another job was delivering newspapers for the *Macon Chronicle-Herald*. And I'd mow grass. I done about everything, but all of us kids worked. We all had jobs.

DePue: You did about everything except clean out the chicken coop, right?

Bentele: (laughter) That's right, I wouldn't do that. But, you know, the funny thing about it, when Dad moved to town after he sold the farm and everything, he actually bought a block right at the south edge of Macon, almost in the country. And he bought a whole square block. And we actually brought one of our milk cows to town with us. We had a barn on this property with a big house. And we raised a big garden the same way as we did on the farm. And we had this milk cow. They had a pasture in the back there by the farmhouse. Of course, that's all been built up now, and the house is gone. But we had a milk cow, and we was practically just like on the farm.

DePue: So, it sounds like your mother didn't hate the farm so much that she didn't bring a little bit of it with her.

Bentele: Well, yeah, we had to subsist, you know?

DePue: The last year of the war—and you were a little bit older by that time—1945. You mentioned before thinking that they had death camps. Do you remember what your thoughts were, or what the family's reaction was when they found out what the Germans had been doing?

Bentele: Well, yeah, it was pretty sad. Truth be known, our family was probably involved in some of it. But I never seen any records of them ever being in there. I think they kind of helped.—

DePue: You mean, your relatives back in Germany?

Bentele: Yeah, in Germany. In talking to a lot of my relatives—and I've been over to Germany several times— I learned that you could not be against the Nazis, but you didn't have to be exactly with them either. You could actually hold back if you were smart enough, so you wouldn't be involved in anything like what they were doing. But still, at the same time, not be against it where you'd put your own self in danger. And there was a lot of that went on. And so I can't really say if they were involved. I don't know. I do know that one of our ancestors that wrote a book about our family where all of this information comes from was the city treasurer of Ulm, Germany, which is a huge city. So he had to be connected to be in there.

DePue: Do you remember the celebrations when we had VE Day? I think that would have been in May.

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: And then VJ Day in August.

Bentele: Oh, yeah. Yeah. In fact, *Life* magazine, again, had all the pictures from all that. And I remember. Of course, I was in town and we had a radio—not a battery-powered radio. Of course, we already had electricity on the farm. But we had radios. Of course, no television. I can remember all of us kids went together in 1947 and bought Mom and Dad a television set. Of course, we watched it, too. (laughs)

DePue: Boy, in 1947. That would have been just when it was getting started.

Bentele: Yeah, it was. You only had three channels. And then, they were not too good.

DePue: Were you pulling them in from St. Louis?

Bentele: And here. You could pull this one in from Quincy, too.

DePue: Oh, okay.

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: Let's talk about getting into high school. That was 1946 when you started?

Bentele: Um-hm.

DePue: Were you involved in any extracurricular activities?

Bentele: Yes, I was a football player.

DePue: What position?

Bentele: The guard. And the funny thing about it—I'm not bragging about this—but it just so happened my two sisters were in school. I never did go to high school with any of my brothers. My younger brothers were too young, and they started a year after me. And my older brother graduated a year before I started. So I had two sisters at the same time. In 1947 and '48 Macon had, probably, the best sports teams in the state of Missouri. We had an undefeated football team. I mean, we scored 270 points against opponents' 18, all told. Nobody ever scored more than six points on us. We were considered the premiere team in Missouri at that time. And we stomped Palmyra and all the rest of these schools. Hannibal. (laughs) Anyway, all of us kids were Depression kids, and I lay it to that fact that we had an undefeated girls' basketball team and an undefeated boys' basketball team and an undefeated track team. And the same way, all in that space of time, we won twenty-four games in a row. And they always compared our team that I served on against one of my younger brother's teams. He had a scholarship to play football when Missouri was the number one team in the nation... Oh, I'll think of it in a minute—a very popular coach in Missouri. But they had another powerhouse team when my brother was playing. I mean, huge. I mean, actually, their stats were a little bit better than what ours were.

DePue: I'm surprised you talked about the girls' basketball team because I'm thinking at this time Illinois doesn't even have girls' basketball.

Bentele: I know it. That seems a little strange. Missouri still has girls' basketball. But that was a very popular sport in Missouri. I mean, the girls all played basketball. And I mean they played a rough game of basketball too. They had a little different rules, but—

DePue: Were they playing three-on-three?

Bentele: No, they were playing five-man teams. And they played almost the same way as the boys. My sisters, they played a mean game of basketball.

DePue: Did you have a basketball hoop at home?

Bentele: No, we didn't. Well, now, I take that back. We did too have one on the old barn.

DePue: Once you moved to the city?

Bentele: Yeah. But, no, I lettered in football. Played all four years. And that's why I've got this crooked thumb.

DePue: Okay. I'm assuming by the time you moved to the city and you're in high school, you've already decided, "I'm not going to be a farmer."

Bentele: That's right.

DePue: Did you know what you wanted to do?

Bentele: Not really. In fact, I had a chance to go to Kirksville College (Truman University) because I went up and tried out for the football team, and I actually got on the team.

DePue: Kirksville at the time?

Bentele: Yeah, it was Kirksville Teachers College at the time and Truman University now. And, of course, I had no money and very few clothes, you know, that were suitable for a college boy. And I thought, "You know what?" And I said, "I don't think I can do this right at this time." They didn't offer you work at that time. You got your room and board, and that's about all. And your tuition. And everything else had to come out of your pocket. And so I didn't take them up on that. I wish I had went back with the G.I. Bill after I got out of the service. And right shortly after that is when I went to work for the railroad and stayed with it.

DePue: How did you get that job?

Bentele: Well, I heard from another guy that they were building the last piece of major railroad line built in the United States. It was between Brookfield, Missouri, and Kansas City. They had a cut-off, they called it, in Burlington. CB&Q (the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy RR) in Burlington built a brand new railroad all the way to Kansas City for eighty miles. And that was then, and I knew some guys that was working on the line crew. And so I just went over to Brookfield, applied, and got the job. I was just a couple of days past my eighteenth birthday. You couldn't go to work before you was eighteen. Actually it turned out to be a good move because when I went in the service a couple of years later counting from my seniority on the railroad, I come out of the service with a foreman's job up in Illinois here. So actually it worked out very well for, you know, the way the union rules were set up. Any seniority you had with the job that you could take at the time you went in the service gave you a chance to bump that guy on the job when you come back.

DePue: That was federal law, or that was union?

Bentele: That was a union and federal. .That was to protect the jobs of people that went into the service at the time of war so that they could come back and have their job back.

DePue: What was the railroad that you worked for?

Bentele: Burlington.

DePue: The Burlington Railroad.

Bentele: Yes. Yeah, CB&Q—the one that runs through here.

DePue: CBQ.

Bentele: CB&Q—Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy.

DePue: Okay.

Bentele: Well, now it's the BNSF. The one that Warren Buffett bought.

DePue: What did you do for the railroad?

Bentele: Well, I started out as a ground man and worked my way up to a lineman in about a year's time. And then was on the line gang until I went into the service. And when I come back, I was a line-gang foreman. Started in right north of Galesburg.

DePue: Okay, tell me what a line gang does.

Bentele: You do all the line work. You build pole lines.

DePue: You're stringing wire?

Bentele: Oh, yeah. Stringing wire. And the railroads all had—still have—their own communications. Always have had, completely. Right now instead of wires on pole lines we have microwave systems that handle all the communication, all the computer work, all the dispatching of trains, and everything else. We have these microwave stations all over the country. The Burlington itself—and it wasn't near the biggest railroad—had over ten thousand miles of pole line. And on the main line that runs from Chicago to Denver, in Illinois we had five full arms of wires up there—the huge pole line that handled everything: all the telephone circuits, dispatcher circuits, the teletype circuits, telegraph circuits. And we even leased some space to oil companies to run their phone systems and control the oil lines.

DePue: Well, I want you to paint us a picture of exactly what it means to be working on this line gang. What kind of work is that?

Bentele: Well, it is very tough and hard work at that time because in the '50's and clear up until, well, probably the '60's, the railroad line gangs were particularly close to the territory we had to go. There wasn't any roads that you could drive some fancy lift truck alongside of and do your work off of that. We went across country. And the right-of-way is not conducive to any kind of a (laugh s) wheeled vehicle. It was all mainly handwork. But we did have a Caterpillar that done our heavy work—set poles—if you could get it in there where you needed it. But all the stringing the wire and everything else was done by hand. You climbed the poles and put it up, and sagged it, and done everything else that you had to do. Very difficult work.

DePue: So, when you're saying climbing the poles, you've got the—what do you call them?—the hooks on your shoes?

Bentele: The hooks? Oh, yeah. All your gear. Our famous saying was, "Even a mule doesn't have to harness himself" Because when you've got your belt and all your gears on, you've got about seventy pounds of weight. (laughs) Climbing the pole was only getting you to where you had to do your work. And they were big pole lines. I mean, when we ran out of Chicago, that was a big pole line up there. And the average height of the pole was forty-five foot on up because you had to clear all the streets and everything else. It was a heavy job.

DePue: So, the kind of job that people would get hurt?

Bentele: Yeah (laughs), they can get killed very easily. Yep. And the old rulebook said you can expect to be injured or be killed on this job. Watch yourself (laughs).Of course, they didn't do that now, but the union rules weren't near as tight as they are now.

DePue: Well, how did people get hurt, then?

Bentele: Well, one major thing was falling. If something broke with him, or he just was not experienced enough that he would, what we'd call, cut out—in other words, lose a hook in a pole—and he would fall. Well, a fall thirty to forty feet will easily kill you, you know? And there's guys that fell ten feet and got killed or crippled. And, of course, you always had the electricity problem that you're going to have if you have any lightning strikes anywhere around. Of course, we were supposed to get down when that happened, but that could be miles away—a storm cloud and it strikes the line, and you might be ten miles away from there, and you're going to get electrocuted just like anybody else right up closer. So you had to kind of keep an eye on all that. And then also you had just the danger of things falling on you. We used a lot of tension on the wires and cables. They could break and snap or get away from you. And you could also be run over by a train. We had guys that got run over by trains. They weren't watching what they were doing, and you had a lot of traffic, or they were standing too close to the rail. And I remember these two guys over in Iowa. They were a wire takedown crew. They were taking some wires down. It was in the wintertime, and they were walking down the middle of the tracks with their hoods up on their parkas. Didn't hear that train at all. Was busy talking to each other. The train run right over them. There was all sorts of things that can take you, you know?

DePue: Did you have anybody on your gang or your crew that got hurt?

Bentele: I was really lucky. Of course, I watched them real close. I mean, you know, I made sure that they were qualified to do the job I sent them to do. And I had one guy I'll never forget. We were taking down some of the old iron wire that they used to use for telegraph circuits. You just cut it one way and then knock

it down; then we'd cut every span to clear the line. Sometimes the cut wires would hang up in the other wires up there. Well, it was always against the rules to jerk that wire down. Well, this kid did. He turned his back like this and jerked that wire down. Well, that piece of wire—now, this is old #8 rusty iron wire—come right over his cap, went right in his eye underneath here, and come out in the roof of his mouth. Went right through his palate. And, in fact, it was cold enough that he didn't even notice it. And when he started to walk away, it jerked him back, (laugh) this wire.

DePue: It wasn't that it cut it? It just pierced the...?

Bentele: It went right underneath his eye socket, right here. And it went right down into his mouth. Anyway, the funny thing about it was, I was up in Princeton where this happened. And so I took him into the hospital. He actually had just a little trickle of blood and just a small cut in his face right here. Went into the hospital and sat there in the emergency room. And the nurse come out and said, "Okay, what's wrong with you?" Well, he was setting there smoking a cigarette. And so he took a drag of his cigarette and blew smoke right out of his eye. And she said, "My Golly, (laughter) what happened to you?" You've got to remember, line crews were a tough bunch of guys. Hell, they were tough. And, you know, we liked to party.

DePue: Did a little drinking at night?

Bentele: Oh yeah. There was all young guys. You know, old guys couldn't do that kind of work. (laughs) I had about twelve to fourteen men all the time.

DePue: Well, I assume you've got no place to go home at night because you're moving all the time.

Bentele: Well, we had the outfit cars—the railroad cars: old converted coaches and everything else, as our living quarters. And I even had cooks. I had a man and his wife that cooked for us. We had a diner—a converted diner.

DePue: Would they feed you pretty well?

Bentele: Oh yeah. Yep, she was a German lady from Terre Haute, Indiana. I'll never forget her. Old Sophia Booth She was quite a gal. And she was in the habit of giving the hobos a little handout down there. All the crews on the railroad, the traveling crews or system crews, lived in outfit cars. You had all your material. I had about nineteen cars in my outfit. You had your digging equipment. You had your tool car. You even had a recreation car where they could set and play cards and, you know, relax. And bunk cars—I had my own separate quarters as a foreman. The cooks had theirs in the cook car. And then we had tenders and water. And then, usually, we'd have half a dozen materials cars where we worked out of. And all of the crews, the B&B [bridge and building], and the welding gangs, and all the gangs had cars. Everybody lived on the railroad then. Mainly, it was cost-effective. I don't know how they look

at it now. They got more mobile now. But you had to be closer to your work. And we'd move right to where it was. We'd move right into that small town and set up. And we'd be right next to our work always. So we didn't waste any time traveling to the work. And it was quite an outfit. And wintertime was kind of rough in those cars too, because you had coal-fired stoves in there to heat them up. And you had the water…I remember one time in Buda, Illinois I had a twenty-five thousand gallon tender, which is off a steam engine, for water supply. Used to fill it up in Galesburg. And it got so cold that winter that we couldn't get any more water in it. It froze the whole twenty-five thousand gallons. Usually you could chop a hole in it and water would always be liquid in the middle. I mean around the edges it would freeze. This winter it got twenty below. Stayed that way. Froze the whole tender. It was full of water. And they had to take it down to the roundhouse and stick a steam hose in it and melt all that ice out of the tender. (laughs)

DePue: Now, did it crack it or burst it open?

Bentele: No. Uh-uh. It was a big, old metal tender.

DePue: What would be considered a good day of stringing wire? How far would you string it?

Bentele: Well, three of us would go down the cut-off where it was all clear pole line—there was nothing else except pole line, and there was nothing in our way.Of course, it was really muddy, because it was brand new right-of-way. They graded it, you know? In the gang, they had to have somebody laying the wire out off of the motor car and the push car, and they had to reel it off of reels. And this is number-nine copper. And there would be two or four guys, depending on the terrain, who would lay that wire. They had rings in their hands that they would run the wire over, and lay it down by the pole line. And then, we always had one guy that had a long pair of rope blocks that he would hook into the pole and snap onto the line. And then, it would even itself out. And then, three of us—usually about three, sometimes four—would carry the wire up on the poles, put it in place, sag it. You had temperature gauges that you had to look at during the day because your wire had to sag so many inches below the arm. You actually sighted it so that in the wintertime when it drew up—contracted—it wouldn't pull in two. However, in the summertime when it got really hot, it wouldn't be so slack that the wires would slap together or wrap up. So that had to be watched. And the way you done that—it was real interesting—you'd look underneath the bottom of the cross-arm and sight down to the next pole where the cross-arm was. And you'd look and see how much sag was in that wire. And it'd tell you from four to three to five or six inches of slack, depending on the temperature. And that's how you done it. And then you would signal the guy that was up ahead—oh, hell, fifteen or twenty spans ahead—he would be pulling on the blocks until you stopped him. And then you made sure that the slack was right, and then he would stub it off, and you would tie it in and move on to the next one. And we would

string six miles—three of us—a day. That's a lot. And you're not wasting any time. We were young.

I'll never forget. We was over at Brookfield, and this one guy worked for the power company. Now they worked different than we do. They can't handle their wires naturally. And their work's a little bit different. The climbing and stuff is about the same. He comes out with his belt and everything else. And we didn't wear nothing but our hooks, and we carried our tie wire in a loop on our belt, period. That was it. We didn't even take a hand line with us because we'd throw that wire on our shoulder, and run up the pole, and put it over there on the cross-arm and put it in place. He couldn't do that. And so he wore his tools. Well, he made one pole that morning, and the rest of the time he couldn't have walked down the track and keep up with the rest of us stringing wire. So he'd come in at noon… I'll never forget this. He wanted to hire out as a lineman because, you know, he'd already worked quite a bit. And the old boss said, "No, I want to see your work first." Of course, he couldn't have hired him anyway because all of us guys would have said, "Hell, you ain't going to hire him as a lineman till you promote all of us." You know? And, anyway, he come in at noon and went over to his car, opened his trunk, threw all of his tools in there. And we said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm quitting." He said, "You guys are crazy." (laughter) And the old foreman actually said, "Don't you want to get paid for your time?" And he said, "Keep it. It was a good lesson." (laughter)

DePue: You'd probably consider that a compliment.

Bentele: Yeah. And we really wasn't trying to work him that hard. We used to have races, just to see who could do the most, you know? You don't see that anymore.

DePue: Well, you graduated from high school, I think, in 1950, right?

Bentele: Right. Um-hm.

DePue: Which would mean that, a couple of months after you graduated—maybe one month after you graduated—the Korean War starts.

Bentele: Yeah, and you know what? I don't remember that.

DePue: You don't?

Bentele: No.

DePue: Well, by that time you were already working on the line it sounds like.

Bentele: Yeah, well here's the deal with the Korean War. There were still skirmishes going on on the island with the Japanese soldiers. The Second World War wasn't really over with yet. And there was a lot of occupational people, just

like my brother and the rest of them; the service was still very active in everybody's mind and business and everything else. And Truman really done us a disfavor when he called that a "police action." We had already had the Berlin crisis. The Trieste deal was going on. And you had all this here stuff constantly going on, so you didn't look at Korea as a full-fledged war. It looked like another hot spot. Yeah, you knew that something went on, and you remembered that, you know, they've talked about, and you've seen a little bit of it. But it really didn't weigh in on people until we started getting a lot of soldiers killed in action over there in the first couple of months when they started pushing everybody down the Pusan perimeter. And then that got everybody's attention. Well, what the hell's wrong with the American troops? You know, here we've got an army over there and we can't hold them back? What is this? You know, that's when it started getting your attention. But actually the day it started, it really wasn't that much thought about 'cause they come across the line. They thought, "Okay, you know, another push by the Communists," and that's about what it was.

DePue: When you first heard about it, did you even have an idea where, exactly, Korea was?

Bentele: Yeah, I knew where Korea was.

DePue: Reading *Life* magazine helps in that stuff.

Bentele: Well yeah. Well, I like geography. So yeah, we knew where it was.

DePue: At what point in the next couple of years did you think, "Well, gosh, this might have an impact on me, personally"?

Bentele: I knew several guys that were already in the service back there. One of my buddies I grew up on the farm with had quit school and joined the Airborne. And he was over there, for one thing. And I knew several other guys that had been in my high-school class that was in the service. And going in the service was what everybody done. I mean, it isn't like now where they've got all this hoopla, you know, that they have. Well yeah, it's something that you can do, and you can go do it. So going in the service was not that big of a deal.

DePue: Was being on the line crew something that was an essential position?

Bentele: Well, yeah, it was. That was another thing, too. I was promoted to a lineman. In other words, I couldn't go any further there until I got more seniority. You know, three or four or five more years, at least—maybe more. It all depended on how fast the turnover. And I needed to learn more about what I was doing. I wanted to be a repairman. You had to know the equipment and everything else. Well, they had no system on the railroad that done that. You had to know that or take an outside course in something like radio or whatever. You couldn't gain that. So I thought, "You know what? The service would be a good place to do that, in the Signal Corps." And I was the right age. Of

course, I could have gotten deferred I think because I was in an essential job. But I wasn't sure. And a buddy of mine, we went to high school together, worked on the line gang then. In fact, I got his job when we needed somebody. And he said, "Why don't we go into the service?" And I said, "Well, I don't care."

dePue: What timeframe would this have been? Do you remember?

Bentele: About 1952.

DePue: Early '52?

Bentele: Yeah. We knew the recruiter there at Macon—the Army recruiter. And I said, "You know what? If we can go in and get in the Signal Corps, I wouldn't mind doing it because I'd like to go to school. And if I'm going to stay on this job, I need to know something more than climbing poles." And with the idea of maybe, you know, even going to radio school—radio repair. And so we went down and talked to the guy. And I said, "Can we just enlist specifically for a branch of the service?" He said, "Sure Now, I can't guarantee you're going to end up there, but if you qualify—pass all the tests—that's where you stay." So I said, "Okay, let's sign up for the Signal Corps." And that's how I got into the service—in the Signal Corps. And besides, it also helped that I was in communication. So that give me another leg up on anybody else that's in there. But you still had to qualify with the IQ test. The Signal Corps didn't take every Tom, Dick, and Harry. They wanted a guy to have enough brains to (laughs) understand what we was doing.

DePue: I would think though that there's plenty of opportunity for people with your kind of skill also in the Air Force and the Navy.

Bentele: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Either of those branches were...?

Bentele: No, I was interested in the Army. Even though my brother was in the Navy, I never thought about it. I wanted the Army.

DePue: Now I think I know the answer to this: Did you have a girlfriend or any attachments at the time?

Bentele: Well not really. Of course I had a lot of girlfriends, you know? But none of them real serious. I always wondered about guys like some of my buddies around here now, that's in this group. They all married their wives when they went overseas when they were drafted.

DePue: You mean right before they shipped over, they decided to get married?

Bentele: Yeah, yeah. Almost all of them I know, they're still married to their wives. They all got married when they went in the service or when they went overseas. When they come out of basic and come home and they were assigned. I always felt that that was a mistake because I'm looking back when I was a platoon sergeant. And one of the things that you always had to guard against when you're in a combat situation was you want to keep people concentrating on what they're doing and where they're at. In other words, live in the moment. And I'd always tell them, "Keep your head here. You live here. You go back home to visit. You live here. This is your home." I didn't want some guy roaming around thinking about his wife back home, or his kids, or whatever. I wanted him to be there. And I made sure they did.

DePue: You had mentioned, a couple of times before, that—

Bentele: And you missed out on a lot of fun, too, if you were married.

DePue: (laughs)

Bentele: When you went on R and R to Japan, those guys missed out on one hell of a lot of fun. (laughs)

DePue: Well, I'm going to ask you to hold off on that story for a little bit, Norbert. What I do want to ask you about—and this might sound a little bit peculiar—but I know that *Life* magazine was important to the family when you were growing up. Did you continue that tradition yourself?

Bentele: Well, yeah, I did. My oldest brother always subscribed to it. I did when I was located or if I could get it. And I always read it, you know, whenever I had a chance. And now I have all the copies of *Life* magazine that was published during the Korean War. I was able to buy one from a dealer down in Missouri that had a whole barn full of *Life* magazines. (laughs)

DePue: Wow. You had told me before that I should ask you about Margaret Bourke-White..

Bentele: Well, she was the main photographer for *Life* magazine. And she took some very good photographs and everything else over in Korea. As long as she was over there—she was famous, by the way—taking her pictures and everything else, the Korean War stayed on the front page. And it was really funny. When she was not over there anymore, the other photographers didn't have the reputation that she did. Yeah.

DePue: Okay. Well, we've got you into the service, at least. Tell us where you went for basic training.

Bentele: Okay, I processed in at Kansas City. Then they sent us down to Camp Crowder, Missouri, which is south of Kansas City. And that's where we took all of our indoctrination—you know, where you'd actually hold up your hand

and swear yourself in, and where you'd take your IQ test, and where they'd decide on what branch of the service you're suited for. And they had some extensive tests. I never have heard too many people talk about their IQ tests. I don't know what they done. But we had a lot of them. And they tested you in a full range. And luckily when I was in high school, I took physics and chemistry and math, but not a full course of math. I'll never forget this:. I took the OCS [Officers' Candidate School] test which I was qualified for with the IQ score I made. There was another guy that said he was an electrical engineer graduated from college in that group. Anyway, he took that same OCS test and flunked it. And I passed it. I always said, "My golly, here's this kid that's... You know, he'd been to several years of college. What did he learn?" (laughs) I'll tell you what his problem was. The only thing he knew was what come out of a book, and what math question or whatever. I mean, he was a whiz on figuring out schedules and everything else. But he did not even know what a crescent wrench looked like or didn't know what any gears or anything like that. He had no common knowledge that you would expect some guy to have. He just simply did not ever see it or do it. So he was a one-subject person. So anyway from there, I'll never forget, I got separated from my buddy—the guy I went in the service with. Frank Day was his name. He got held back for something for a week. And I went ahead on down to basic. I think I was by myself. And they shipped us from Camp Crowder. Anyway, I ended up in New Orleans and had a day to spend in New Orleans which was a real treat for a guy eighteen, nineteen years old. (laughter) And this was back in the old days when Bourbon Street was not a tourist attraction. It was a hellhole. I mean, hell, during the day there was drunks laying out in the street, and there were a bunch of whorehouses and everything else. It was a dirty old dingy alley, really. But it was interesting. I got a big kick out of New Orleans. (laughter)

DePue: As long as you didn't get too big a kick out of New Orleans, huh?

Bentele: Yeah, that's right. And I finally got on the train and got over to Augusta, Georgia, where Camp Gordon is where they trained the Signal Corps. Still do to this day; that's a Signal Corps post.

DePue: Well the significance here is, the Army actually gave you the job you wanted.

Bentele: Yeah, really. And I qualified for it because, you know, there was quite a few guys that signed up for different branches that they wouldn't put them in. And, you know, they had the right to do that. Of course, they always told you that after you swore in. (laughter)

DePue: "Welcome to the Army," yeah?

Bentele: That's one reason why I didn't go to OCS when I went through training. I went through basic, and my buddy was just in the next company, about a week behind me. And so I went through basic combat training. And thenwe went

over to tech school which is telephone installation and repair. That means all the switchboards and all the instruments that they would have with a telephone system. That's what I was in. While I was in there, my buddy and I were both in the same company then, the tech-school companies. And I'll never forget this. The old first sergeant there was, I think, a major in the Second World War. And he was quite a gung-ho soldier. He knew both of us had passed the OCS test, and we were supposed to go from that school over to the leadership company and then to OCS school.

DePue: So Camp Gordon would have been running its own OCS course. .

Bentele: I guess that's where they kept it. I didn't go that far. Well, my buddy went ahead and went, but after looking that over, I said this Korean War was really a hot war. You know, there was a lot of casualties in '52, and I thought about it, and I said, "You know what? Being in the branch of service I want to be in, I know I'll do well in here." I didn't feel like that probably I'd come to OCS at the top grade. The top people get their choices, and then it works on down to the infantry. And if all the top places in the Engineers and the Signal Corps and everything else is filled, you're going to be pushed into an infantry platoon up a hill in Korea. And I thought, "You know, I'm going to let alone what's good." So, I didn't take that course. The old first sergeant ragged me something terrible about that. He said, you know, "You're qualified. You go." But my buddy did. He ended up down in Puerto Rico as an artillery advisor. (laughter)

DePue: And never made it to Korea?

Bentele: No. Anyway, I'm glad I took the choice.

Bentele: I had a lot more fun, and a lot more experiences than the other way.

DePue: Well, for a lot of kids getting into basic training, it's pretty rigorous stuff. But I'm thinking that after growing up on the farm and the conditions you grew under and being on the line crew for those years...

Bentele: Yeah. I never had a bit of trouble. When I went into basic training, I weighed 195 pounds. I come out 195 pounds. And that was down in the heat in Georgia. I mean, I was as tough as they come. And it never bothered me a bit to do all the calisthenics and road work .You know, I imagine some of the guys that was in that platoon thought, "What in the hell?" (laughs) In fact, I was the squad leader in basic training. And I'd go through the obstacle courses the way that you're supposed to go through there, and then I'd challenge anybody to race me backwards through the same course. Go backwards, which is a lot harder than going thataway because the ropes and everything else is on the other side of the board. And I'd generally win. I never got beat, you know?

DePue: Remember any of your instructors you had in basic?

Bentele: I remember this one guy. I'll never forget. There were twin brothers, and they held the calisthenics class—the physical training. They were short, sergeants, and both of them were real stocky. He could stand there and do one-armed pull-ups, and talk to you for ten minutes, and never stop doing one-armed pull-ups. I was always amazed at that. He could stand there and do those one-armed pull-ups and tell us what to expect. But no, I never had a bit of trouble. I was in good shape. In fact, it was easier than the line gang. It was.

DePue: There you go.

Bentele: It was. It was easier, physically, than working in the line gang.

DePue: Well, having all this hands-on, real experience, and a pretty rugged environment out there, what was it like then when you went to the specialty training? Were you learning the same thing you'd been doing for two years?

Bentele: No. Mainly, we went to class. The way the Army teaches—or did then—is, really kind of a neat way. First you went to the laboratory in the morning in a sit-down classroom with the equipment and everything else. And you had to learn how to wire it and how to repair it. They would give you equipment that had stuff wrong with it, and you had to find it.

DePue: Is this telephones and switchboards?

Bentele: Yeah, switchboards and all the related carriers and everything else that's related to communications set-up. And then in the afternoon you would go out in the field and do the same thing in the field. It was applied to the field work. So they really had a way of instilling that in you really well. You learned it first in the lab—in the classroom—and then you went out in the field and put it to work. And actually, they had a good way.

DePue: Did you enjoy all of that, then?

Bentele: I did. Yeah, I really did.

DePue: What was your MOS[2] coming out of there?

Bentele: Okay, that's 3-0-9-7.

DePue: 3-0-9-7.

Bentele: Yeah, that's telephone installation and repair. It was real funny. Of course, I was sent home for a leave between assignments—ten or twelve days I think it was. And the funny thing about that was, if you were coming out of Georgia back in those days you have a hell of a time riding on the highways across country thisaway. To get to Missouri from Georgia was a feat. If you had to

[2] MOS: Military Occupation Specialty, numbered for convenience and brevity.

catch a train, you either had to go north or south or straight west to get it. I wanted to get home as soon as I could, so I hitched a ride with this guy from Warrenton, Missouri; he was permanent stationed down there. And of course, those guys, they'd go home. The training camps were letting out their cycles, and they'd just put a notice up: "Ride to Missouri. Call so-and-so." So I hitched a good ride with him and got up here. In a day and a half I was back in Missouri. But later I got on the train to San Francisco; I was stationed at the Presidio, and that was right in San Francisco. And these three old sergeants that have been on ROTC duty for a number of years, were on levy to go over to the Far East. Here I was, a buck private—private E2 then. And they said, "Where are you going?" And I said, "I'm going to Presidio." They said, "How in the hell did you get assigned to Presidio? Are you a Senator's son?" I said, "No, I just—why?" He said, "Well, that's the premier Army camp in the country. That beats anything else. I've been trying to get assigned there all my career. Haven't made it yet." And it was, too.

It was the Sixth Army Headquarters, beautiful campus there. It's a tourist attraction right today. And you were stationed right in San Francisco, right in the Marina District. And you got a Class A pass when you went in. We worked with a civil-service employee fixing communications generally just right there on the base and around the San Francisco area where they had a lot of stuff going on. I was there for—well, let's see. It was the first of November when I got back in Macon on leave. So I was there probably three or four months before they got a big levy that everybody had to go on levy. They had to replace a lot of troops in Korea.

DePue: "Levy," meaning you're going to a new assignment?

Bentele: Levy—yeah, another assignment. They levied so many stateside.

DePue: So you say you had three or four months at Presidio?

Bentele: Yeah. Um-hm.

DePue: You also mentioned you went home for a while. Did you have any other brothers that were also in the service at the time?

Bentele: No, not at that time. A little bit later my next-younger brother was in Germany about the time I come back from Korea. He had enlisted and was assigned to Germany. He spent his whole career over in Germany.

DePue: What did your parents think about you being in the service and then heading to Korea?

Bentele: Well, you know what? Here's what I done. Of course, my mom had a lot of problems with more or less a nervous breakdown about that time and she was having difficulty. So I assured her that I would never be sent to Korea. Of course, Dad knew different. But for a long time when I wrote home, I would

sugarcoat everything. You know, this is how it is, and it's not too bad. And, you know, stuff like that. But when I left, I just told her, "Oh, I'll be assigned in Japan. And no problem." But I wasn't. But anyway, when I was sent overseas, I remember I gave Mom a kiss and shook my dad's hand and got on the train.

DePue: Tell me a little bit more about what you were doing while you had those four months in Presidio.

Bentele: Well, they had the old shore battery emplacements. At that time, they were putting in rockets and guided missiles. So we put in a lot of fire-control cable in Marin County across the Bay and also, on the peninsula area in San Francisco. I love San Francisco. That's a good town. I've got a lot of good times there in San Francisco. That was a number-one place. (laughs)

DePue: So, what was going on when you were not on duty?

Bentele: Well generally what you would do is head down to the Tenderloin District which they called it then. I think they still do. Probably Haight Ashbury when the flower children got down there. It was about the same area of town. That had all the honkytonks in it. All the gals. It had just about anything that you'd want to see or do. And of course, being eighteen or nineteen years old, they would serve you in the taverns. But you kind of had to play it cool. (laughs)

I'll tell this on myself. Anyway, of course they had the off-limits posted in every barracks. You know, places that you weren't supposed to go to. Well, they just plain advertised the places. Everybody went to the places they said not to go to. So, a lot of the places that were off-limits were the gay bars, and they had a lot of them in San Francisco. But if you watched yourself, and you went in the gay bar and sat up at the end of the bar next to the door, you would get free drinks coming to you almost as soon as you got in there. So you'd drink two or three drinks, and when one of them started up towards you, you just got up and walked out the door. (laughter) All the guys used to do that. That was a way to get free drinks.

DePue: Well, Norbert, you don't necessarily have to answer all my questions, but I'm wondering if you remember any of the VD lectures you might have gotten?

Bentele: Oh, yeah. Those were hot and heavy. You ever see one of those movies?

DePue: No, I don't think so.

Bentele: Yeah, of course, they were all black and white. And they used to show some of the terriblest pictures if you caught the syphilis—and I guess they were all true. You know, there's certain kinds of VD you can catch in this world that will definitely rot your thing off, you know? (laughs) And they had all that that they showed. Come to find out, in the pro-kit that the services always

used then there was an ointment thing that didn't do any good at all. (laughter) They issued them anyway.

DePue: When you were on duty—the artillery sites—was that all you were doing?

Bentele: No, we were also maintaining the telephone system in the private residences there on post. You know, the officers and the first three-graders had beautiful homes there on the post, and they had a telephone system. All that was part of our duty. And also the Letterman General Hospital which was a huge complex down on part of Presidio. Of course, the Sixth Army headquarters was a vast complex also. I don't know how many offices were in that. and there was always somebody wanting their phone moved or changed, or something was wrong somewhere. I think there were six crews, six of us guys working out of the central office, that went around. They didn't rush us any. We generally had everything wrapped up by two or three o'clock in the afternoon. Go down and set at the Bay, and watch the water.

DePue: Well, from working on the line gang, (laughs) this is quite a change of pace.

Bentele: Oh, yeah. Yep, yep. It was.

DePue: You're probably thinking about this time, "This Army life is pretty good."

Bentele: Yeah, like I said, it was a lot easier than the line gang. (laughter)

DePue: Where to after that?

Bentele: Well I come home on leave, and then was sent out to Seattle, Washington, to Camp Lawton—the repo depot at Lawton—which is a hellhole. It should have been burned down after the Second World War, or probably before. It was the same barracks and everything else they had during the Second World War. Of course, this was getting into November and the first part of December and getting cold. Seattle in the wintertime is not a place you really enjoy because it's wet. And those old barracks were only about ten-foot wide. I mean, you could put a bunk on each side—double- or triple-layered bunks. And you had just about this much space to walk between them down the barracks.

DePue: About two feet.

Bentele: Yeah. And these barracks were a hundred feet long with a stove at each end of them. And they had nothing but tar-paper roof and tar-paper sides. Just temporary buildings is what they were. And, of course, you was only supposed to be there like maybe two or three days or a week at the most. You just processed through. And they had a mess hall there which was huge—the biggest mess hall, I think, in any service. They fed on the average of twenty-five thousand guys in that mess hall—one mess hall—every meal. You had four lines that run in it. And if you stood in line for three meals a day, you stood in line all day long because it was no sooner breakfast would get done,

they started feeding the dinner. I mean, just to show you how big it was, besides I don't know how many cooks—fifty, sixty—there were regular-duty people. They would put 210 men on KP in that one mess hall to handle all the rest of it. So that shows you how big it was. It was tremendous. I'll never forget this. I never did pull this duty, but they had six guys with wheelbarrows and shovels that would go outside to a great big coal pile that was put out there. And there would be three on each side. They had coal ranges lined up down through the middle of the kitchen. I don't know how many—fifty or sixty of them—all going. And these guys would do nothing but shovel coal in those ranges all day long to keep them stoked up. It was a nightmare.

DePue: Did you know, at that time, where, exactly, you were headed?

Bentele: No. Unh -uh. You'd know that you were going to go down to Pier 91 which was an embarkation station where you got on your ship, and you knew nothing about where to go. Well, I carried my records from Presidio. I had them with me. Give them to the clerk when I signed in. I said, "Here's my records," because all the guys complained that they wouldn't get their records sent from their previous assignment in time. I carried mine. The guy down at Presidio said, "Take these with you, because you'll process a lot faster." So I did. Well, my name started with a *B*. I was the first rotation out of there, within a couple of days. I go down to get my pay. At that time they had to give you what they call a flying fifty: fifty dollars to spend on your last night stateside. Had to have it. So I come up to get the pay, and they didn't have my records. They said, "Your pay record is missing. Drop out." So that dropped me back to another two weeks.

Well they still hadn't found it. I was actually in Fort Lawton for three weeks. I shipped out the first day of the new year—January 1st, out of Pier 91. In that hellhole, with nothing to do. I mean, you had no duty whatsoever. I went down to the mess hall and told the mess sergeant, "I'll volunteer for KP. Give me a job." Well you know, it was something to do. And besides, you didn't have to wait in line for meals. And so, he said, "Oh, I've got a job for you." The only thing he had me do was at meal time, I would serve the meat in that one line. That's what I done because everybody wanted more. And that's the only thing I had to do. Well, it gave me a job. I had a place to go. And so that wasn't too bad. I even told them. I said, "I don't want that money. I've got money. I don't need it. Don't give it to me. Just mark it off." "Nope, we can't send you out of here without your pay record."

So (laugh), finally, I get down to Pier 92, and here it is, right before the New Year holiday. Everybody in Seattle is going to the big blast. So me and another, I think, two guys—we ended up with these three gals out in some apartment there somewhere in Seattle—I forget where now. You could see Mount Rainier, I know that. And beautiful day, on New Year's Day—yeah, it was on New Year's Day. And we were already down at Pier 91. That's a holding place where your next step is onto the ship. And you can't miss it. In

other words, they court-martial you during war time if you (laughs) miss that. So we're out there with three gals and partying all night. Ended up out there, and I said, "You know what?" We had no way of calling to find out what was going on. I said, "You know, we'd better..." Even though they give us a pass to go out, I said, "We'd better be going back to Pier 91 to find out when we're shipping out." And so we left the girls and went down to Pier 91. And (laughs) the next day, we shipped. I mean, they assigned you a number and lined you up, and you'd go on the ship. And so it probably was a smart thing to do instead of hanging out there because they could have got you.

DePue: So, you shipped on January 2nd?

Bentele: January 2nd.

DePue: Of 1953?

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: Okay, so the war has been going on for two and a half years, by that time.

Bentele: Yeah. With no sight in end. Yeah.

DePue: Well, the peace talks by that time had been going on for a year and a half.

Bentele: Yeah, they had. Everybody had figured that was just a phony bunch of bull, you know. And, generally, it was.

DePue: Okay. We've been at this close to two hours today, Norbert. So what I'd like to do is, to get you over there. So, if you can tell us anything that you remember about getting across the ocean.

Bentele: Okay, well, I was lucky. I was assigned to the *Buckner*, which was a beautiful ship. I've even got a picture of it here somewhere.

DePue: Well, I've got a picture, too. I was really impressed, looking at this thing. This is not your average Liberty ship, is it?

Bentele: No, no, it isn't. In fact, all the officers and their dependents—that's what they shipped over on was the *Buckner*. And there's only about, I think, no more than a hundred troops. And we were only down here, on the second deck.

DePue: That was it?

Bentele: In the middle of the ship. Yeah. That was it. All the rest of it was dependents: kids, wives, officers. That's what the officers went over on, too.

DePue: Well, the kids and the wives are going to Japan. They're not going to Korea, then.

Bentele: Yeah. And dependents, and those rotating back. But there was only, I could say, a hundred or maybe a hundred and fifty at the most that was on that ship—enlisted personnel. Troops. It was the fastest ship on the West Coast. And it could make the crossing in nine days from Seattle to Yokohama. We started out, of course, up through the great-circle route. Real rough ocean—very rough—and got about halfway over there and the *Marine Adder*, which was a Liberty ship—one-stacker.

DePue: The *Marine Adder*?

Bentele: Yep. There was three ships called the *Marine Adder*, the *Marine Serpent*—what was the other one? I can't remember the other one. But they were one-stacker tin cans. The old Liberty troop ships. Very rough—very bad conditions on them. And they packed them full, too. Well, we got out there, and run across the *Marine*—of course, they probably called for the *Buckner*. Their anchor had beat a hole in the bow. And we had to stay with that ship all the way across to Yokohama. That ship would disappear into the waves. I mean, just like this. And they were in danger of sinking, so they wanted the other ship to stay close by. It took us eighteen days to make the trip instead of nine.

DePue: Did you find out if you were a sailor at heart, and your stomach was up for it?

Bentele: Oh, boy—seasick the first three days. And four days on that ship, like to died. You were never really, truly sick until you're really seasick. I can't describe it. You are so sick that you can't do anything. If you lay in your bunk, mid-ship—which we were, luckily—and lay stretched out, you'd do pretty good. But the minute that you sat up, back sick again. You threw up everything. I'm telling you. It's terrible. Terrible.

DePue: Did you get to the mess hall very much, or the galley?

Bentele: No, never got to the mess hall. Well, I did, after I got over the seasickness. But there was one guy, as always, that never got seasick. And he'd bring an orange or an apple or something, you know, for the guys that were in their bunks and couldn't get up. I would have starved to death because I wouldn't have got up, I'll tell you that. It was terrible.

DePue: But after three days you kind of got over it?

Bentele: Yeah, you gradually get over it. And then you're all right. You're fine, you know? It's kind of funny how sick you can be and not die. (laughter)

DePue: Where did you finally make port, then?

Bentele: Okay. Yokohama. Everybody shipped into Yokohama, and everybody went to Camp Drake. Camp Drake is where they had these big wooden barracks that were battalion-sized. An old Japanese army base. And (laughs) in fact, they

had fire patrols all night long in those barracks, just in case it'd catch on fire. They were tinderboxes. Anyway, that's where they split the people apart. If you was going to Korea, you went and got all field gear—winter gear, and your rifle, ammunition belt, a parka. Whatever you could—whatever you'd have. And then, they also posted orders for the guys that stayed in Japan. About a third of the guys stayed in Japan, and three-fourths of us went into Korea. And then we got back on shipboard at Yokohama—the *General Weigel*, which is a two-stacked Liberty ship. Not a bad ship, but they had so many of us crowded on there—about four thousand on that ship. We had all of this gear with us that you didn't have room to hardly set your foot down without stepping on somebody. And we sailed around the peninsula and ended up at Inchon where we unloaded onto LSTs that took us into the shore. And finally got on shore about, oh, must have been—it was getting dark. Took us over to an old shot-up train. We set on there until midnight, with the snow falling and getting colder. And then, by God, that's when you find out that you're in a combat zone, because they bring a box full of ammunition and set it down in the vestibule of the train. Pick out a couple of guys and tell them to load their rifles and stand guard out there. And anybody that comes close to the train that doesn't halt and answer the thing—shoot them. (laughs) So that's all the way—like, "Whoa, here!" You know?

DePue: I think, Norbert, this is probably a good place to stop. So, the next session can be all about what happened in Korea.

Bentele: All right.

DePue: And then, getting you back home. But this has been great. You've got a real skill for telling us, in a lot of detail, what it was like growing up on the farm and during the Depression and during World War II. And it's all valuable stuff. I look forward to the next session.

Bentele: Okay. Very good.

(end of interview #1 #2 continues)

Interview with Norbert Bentele

VRK-A-L-2011-035.02

Interview # 2: August 31, 2011

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Wednesday, August 31, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. And today is my second session with Norbert Bentele. I always have to hesitate to make sure I say your last name correctly.

Bentele: You said it just perfectly right.

DePue: Okay, very good. Last time we had a great conversation about growing up in the Depression and through World War II and working with the railroad stringing wire right along next to the railroad. Got you through your military training, and basically, you had just gotten to the port of Inchon when we had to quit last time. I should mention also, we're in your home in Quincy. So I appreciate you opening it up for us. But if you could start with some of the initial impressions you got of Korea just by sitting in the port before you even make landing.

Bentele: Okay. Well, we moved from Yokohama to Inchon by the U.S.N.S. *General Weigel*, a troop ship. And there was about four thousand of us on the troop ship I estimate, with all of our gear. Very uncomfortable. It took about three days to come around the peninsula and go up to Inchon. Because there were so many guys and so much equipment on there, you didn't hardly have a place to step on the deck. We get to Inchon and, of course, you had to set way off at Inchon because of the high tides in there. And so we were out probably at least a couple of miles at the entrance of the harbor. And right next to us was a big Swedish hospital ship that the government of Sweden had furnished. I forget what it was. I think it was called *Mercy*. They had a helicopter landing platform on there. And all day long and night too, when they could, they was bringing wounded in from the front and landing them on the hospital ship. And we set out there. You can imagine the impression that it made on the new

recruits. We were setting out there on the troop ship waiting to get off, and here they're landing helicopters all day long with wounded on the hospital ship.

DePue: Remind us of what time of year this was and what year this was.

Bentele: Well, this would be in the end of January—

DePue: Fifty-three, then?

Bentele: Fifty-three.

DePue: Okay.

Bentele: Right about in there. Actually, the fighting was there at Inchon because they'd never pushed the Chinese much further than the Imjin River. You could actually see artillery fire on the hills, you know, up north when it was clear. So anyway, we sat out there most of the day, and the Koreans—some of them come around in light boats. They let them come right up to the ship. You could look over and look down in their boat. And now you think about the problems they have nowadays of, you know, terrorists blowing up a ship. I often thought about that. They'd let those Koreans come out, and you didn't know who they were. There were no challenging them. They'd just come out in these skiffs and come up to the ship and beg for stuff, you know? You'd throw them a pack of cigarettes or whatever. Anyway, they would get right by where the sewer spilled out of the ship continuously, all the sewage from the latrines and probably the kitchen and everything else. And they had seines. They would hold it up and let the sewage filter through the seine, and they'd take every bit of everything out of there, even toilet paper and particularly throwed-away cigarette butts. And they'd lay them out on the gunnels of the boat there and have them all laying on a piece of cloth or something, drying them out. So right out of the sewage out of the side of the ship. And anything they could catch, that was there. So you know people were desperate. And so that went on all of the day. Finally, they unloaded us in LSTs [Landing Ship Tanks] that bring us into the shore—because that was the only craft that could come in there successfully—and land you right on the beach. We landed right in the invasion port, right at Inchon; I forget how far, but I know it was darn cold, I know that. And within the first hour after we landed, it started snowing; the first real snow of that year happened as soon as we stepped on land. I mean, before they didn't have any snow. But it become a pretty good snow. We marched over about a mile to the railroad yards and got on a bunch of really (laugh) shot-up coaches. I mean, they had no windows in them, bullet holes all over, holes in the floor. Just wood seats inside and, of course, no heat, no nothing.

DePue: When you say, "No windows," you mean no glass in the windows?

Bentele: No glass in the windows. They was all shot out. And so they loaded us on all those cars. Now some of the guys that got off the ship, they went to units around Seoul. They had trucks there waiting for them. But we were going up to Ch'unch'on which is midway on the front up there, kind of on the eastern side but right up pretty far north. I don't know if we were quite in North Korea, but I think maybe Ch'unch'on does lay right in what was the original 38th parallel. But anyway, we get on there and set down. Of course, like everything in the Army, it was hurry up and wait. And we set there for several hours.

I always remember the first thing that they done. The people that brought us over there set up a case of ammunition in each vestibule of the thing and selected several guys with their rifles as guards. They told them to load up, and anybody who approached the train, just halt them. If they didn't halt, shoot them. And that brings it to your attention. (laughs) Anyway, while were setting there—and this always happens in a situation like this—some old boy from the Tennessee hills managed to keep his harmonica with him. And he started playing those old lonesome hillbilly songs. (laughs) Kind of hard to remember that. Anyway, we set there for what seemed like hours. Finally, they got an engine and a crew there to come and pull us out. The way they worked the railroads in Korea was they had a civilian crew, engineer and firemen, but they also had a U.S. Army railroad battalion. And they also had an engineer. They were double-duty up there the way they done it. We left Inchon, and went through Seoul. The old Union Depot of Seoul is still standing and still in use. It was the main depot downtown. We didn't use it because it was blowed out. It was unusable. But it went on by, and then we kept going north, kept going north, kept going north. And I said, "My God, how far are going to go up here because, you know, it ain't that big of a country?" (laughter) But we ended up in Ch'unch'on. That's where the big repo depo was, and the units would send trucks over there. I don't know if they done that every day, or maybe they knew when the shipment was coming in.

DePue: "Repo depo," meaning replacement depot?

Bentele: Yeah, replacement depot. And so you just had to wait till a truck came from your unit where you was assigned. I was assigned to the Fourth Signal, X Corps. Then finally—I will always remember this—right before that, the "Triple-Nickel" Artillery—the Five-Five-Five Artillery—that backed up the 65th Infantry Regiment, the Puerto Rican regiment, had just been overrun the second time. They were overrun three times in the space of several years. They had to act as infantry. In fact, a lot of those guys were killed or captured because the Puerto Rican regiments broke and ran, and the Chinese jumped right down their throat. Anyway, there were several trucks there almost begging for replacement for the Triple-Nickel. And they'd say, "Anybody for the Triple-Nickel? Anybody for the Triple-Nickel?" There was a few guys that were being assigned to that artillery unit. But they had a rough go of it.

And anyway, finally a truck from X Corps showed up, and we get on it. And that was at least about another two hours or better over really bad roads to get to the X Corps area. And in from the X Corps area you had to get another truck to take you over across the creek—the Poham River—to where the X Corps headquarters was.

All of this was in the bitter cold weather. When you come out of Camp Drake, they didn't issue you your parkas. Those were hard to come by—the mountain parka. You had an O.D. [olive drab] wool overcoat and not even those new slick overcoats in gabardine that they have now. But some of them were issued back, I think, into World War I. They were wool overcoats. Fairly warm, but not anything to have like a parka. They give you, of course, a field jacket and a pile jacket to go underneath that. But they give you two wool blankets. No sleeping bags. And so when you slept, you always wanted to get you about three guys or four guys because we also slept on tent floors or wherever. And you'd pool your blankets—overlap them together, you know—and you had to lay on as much as you had over the top of you. It didn't do any good to put all your blankets over the top if you're laying on hard, frozen ground. You needed the insulation underneath of you also. So you had to kind of split things up. And usually, about three guys with six blankets could make out fairly well. You know, but it was close sleeping.

But talking about those parkas again. The only way you got one was wait till the guy you was replacing would have a parka—the mountain parka, you know, with the hood and everything else. And hopefully he was close to your own size. And you just asked him for his parka. And that's how you got it. The same way with the sleeping bag. The mountain sleeping bags had to be willed to you, in other words. Some guy had to leave, and you had to be a good buddy and say, "Man, I need your sleeping bag" The thing that you really needed in Korea was a sleeping bag, one of those mountain cold-weather sleeping bags. Because that was the only place you could get in that really kept you warm.

DePue: I know the troops on the front lines, many of them, would be in the trenches or in bunkers on the front line. That's where they would sleep. That was not the case for you? It was the tents?

Bentele: No, we had bunkers. But we had tents at the corps headquarters. We had bunkers for protection, but we slept in tents.

DePue: I think maybe we should make just a comment or two to explain to people who don't know as much about an Army organization. Your organization belonged to the X Corps—your particular Signal battalion. There were usually three to five divisions within a corps, and there would be Signal personnel that would be assigned to the division level as well. But they were was always a little bit farther forward, and the corps personnel would be a little bit farther back providing service.

Bentele: Well, the way we done it in our company is that you rotated in platoons. We had several places up close to the front where we had switchboards and where the communication would come in to those switchboards. We'd repair them in the field, and they would go up there for a month at a time. And one of them was called Jade-Able, I remember, up in the Yangu Valley, they called it.

DePue: What was that?

Bentele: Yangu Valley.

DePue: And Jade-Able?

Bentele: Jade-Able, yeah. Jade was a code-name for X Corps, and this was Jade-Able.

DePue: Okay.

Bentele: And we'd send two guys at a time from each platoon that had done different things. And they would stay up there for a month and then rotate back. They'd be replaced by two more guys.

DePue: When they were pulling that duty, how close then were they to the front?

Bentele: You would go up and work at the front. And you probably would be five, six miles back. But you would go up and work at the front. You'd go right up there .We had the carrier vans with the equipment in them. Those had to be up there close to the front. You had to have one in every division. And what you would have up there depended on how many artillery outfits, how many other outfits you had, how heavy the communication was. And the carrier vans is one that had what we called carriers. In other words, here comes a hundred lines into this carrier. They're condensed down and set at different frequencies, so you would have probably a dozen channels on one carrier instead of one. You'd feed down to the X Corps headquarters with spiral four cable. It'd be four wires in one cable. And you could send and receive on that same cable. And all the messages coming out of the X Corps where you had the big bunker in the mountain and the six-position switchboards. And we had carrier rooms there, and it had banks of carriers. And each one of them would have a designated cable. And they were called mod and de-mods. You'd modulate down to a certain frequency, like compressing. They still do it. We still do the same thing. And then at the other end, they would de-mod. The message would be stepped back up and go back to the individual lines.

DePue: Okay, you've already blown past my expertise on this subject. (laughter)

Bentele: But anyway—

DePue: It sounds like it's all wire, but then you talk about frequencies which I connect to radio communication.

Bentele: Well, the telephone communication used frequencies, also.

DePue: Okay.

Bentele: It's not just voice frequencies that you hear. We call it the physical circuit that you're talking on. Just like getting the internet right now on your phone line. Okay, you never hear that, do you? On your phone? Okay, well you're on the physical side of the line. In other words, your voice frequency of about three thousand cycles is going out on the physical side of the line. And the other person is hearing you that way. Your internet signal comes in on all kinds of different frequencies. You never hear that, but it's the routers sending the internet signal. All the information you get off your computer comes in over your two wires on that telephone line. And when it hits your computer, it's separated out and brought in to the voice and pictures you see. And that's wire communication.

DePue: I wondered what your specific job was then?

Bentele: Okay, mine was installation and repair of telephone and telephone equipment. We used a lot of teletype then. You know, the keyboard teletype that run over the wires also. And we had high-frequency long-range radio. But really in the hills in Korea, radio was pretty damned ineffective. Even today, unless you had satellite you couldn't have used them.

DePue: In other words, it was pretty much the line of sight?

Bentele: Well, yeah. And walkie-talkies were large and bulky, and they eat up batteries real fast.

DePue: Especially in the cold.

Bentele: Yeah, particularly. The telephone was much more reliable, and that's exactly what, you know, we done.

DePue: Well, here's my question for you then, speaking of how reliable the telephone landline would be. This is an artillery war by the time you got there. It had to be that the telephone lines were getting cut a lot.

Bentele: Yeah, they did. The main thing we had to worry about in the front when you're in the Signal Corps was that you had a lot of land mines laying out there. To get them away from the roads and damage from vehicles and tanks and everything else, we tried to take everything through the back country if we could. It was shorter a lot of times. And it just made it easier—safer. And some roads in Korea had cables and stuff strung in there. Because if one them went back, and you was in a hurry, you had to get it going; instead of trying to find the cable a lot of times, you just strung out another one.

DePue: Were you laying it on the ground or stringing it in the trees?

Bentele: There wasn't any trees out there to string it. (laughs) A lot of times we laid it right on the ground as best we could. And where we had to go up near it, we had to be very careful with what we had in the way of poles or material. It was a difficult deal, but we managed to keep it done. But we had test units and everything else that we looked at. That was the guys' jobs, to keep that wire going. And we kept it going.

DePue: I don't know if I had asked you this before. What was your specific MOS?

Bentele: Mine was 3097. And that was a telephone repair and installer.

DePue: And the unit that you were assigned to was the Fourth Signal Battalion?

Bentele: Fourth Signal, and it was a T and T company. I was in the I and M platoon, which is the installation and maintenance.

DePue: The "T and T" stands for telephone and telegraph?

Bentele: No, "T and T" stands for telephone and teletype. (laughs) We didn't have telegraph at that time.

DePue: Okay.

Bentele: The I and M platoon was the installation and maintenance platoon. And all the different platoons were set in their specialty. Well, actually I converted my MOS to 1238 which would allow me to get more rank when I was a platoon sergeant. That was pole line-building and stuff like that. It'd give you more opportunity. One would be master sergeant. If your MOS started with two, it'd be sergeant first class. Three was staff sergeant. So, you couldn't hold the same MOS and gain any rank from it.

DePue: What was your rank when you first got to Korea?

Bentele: I was a private E2.

DePue: Well, it sounds like you didn't stay a private E2 over there.

Bentele: No, I didn't. In the first month I was a PFC. And two months later I think, I was probably the corporal. And then in July, August, right in there, I was promoted to platoon sergeant.

DePue: Which was the E6.

Bentele: The I and M platoon.

DePue: Staff sergeant, at the time?

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: Okay. Tell us about your typical day then when you were there during the time the war was going on.

Bentele: Well okay. During the time the shooting was going on, we'd keep a team of men over to X Corps headquarters. Let me describe what we had in the bunker, which the engineers built in the side of this mountain. It was an eight-room bunker. Now the corps general had his war room where he had the big maps and everything else, just like you see in the movies where they have a big sandlot table and have the terrain, and they plot all their moves. Then we had a crypto room which had all the cryptography machines in it. And that was another thing we had to do. (laughs) We'd hook those up. Us guys would wire them up, but we couldn't see the machine. They would shroud the machine—very secretive. And the crypto room had to be guarded by MPs. The popular legend was that if we got overrun, the first thing the MPs were going to get out was the crypto men. But if they couldn't, the MPs had the duty that they were supposed to actually kill them. (laughs) It's what they claimed. Because they didn't want the crypto men to fall into enemy hands. But generally they were pretty well taken care of. We had the crypto room for that.

Then we had a teletype room. The bunkers were made out of twelve-by-twelve-foot beams; each room was twelve-foot wide and twelve-foot long inside this hill. And then we had a com center with all the messengers and the guys picking up messages and taking them. They dispersed all the information and messages there. Next door to that was the switchboard room which had around-the-clock operators, and these were six big switchboards—they called them BD-110s—and they were big switchboards. They had, probably, oh, I don't know how many. They had a chief operator on duty, and they had six men on that switchboard twenty-four/seven. That's how busy this place was. Then next door to that was our room. This was called the frame room where the wire chief and all the wire come into and distributed out to these places. And next door to that room was our X Corps carrier room. And next door to that was the Eighth Army carrier room. Now that's how big that bunker was.

DePue: So, Eighth Army headquarters was in the same bunker as you?

Bentele: Eighth Army Carriers was.

DePue: Oh, okay.

DePue: So in other words, the link to the Eighth Army headquarters.

Bentele: Yeah, we had to link up to them, and the Eighth Army used their own equipment to send the messages back south or wherever the Eighth Army headquarters was. And you see, at that time—even though they had combined after they come out of Ch'ongch'on Reservoir—the X Corps had their special privileges taken away from it. It wasn't a separate command anymore even

though General Almond stayed with it. It was integrated into the Eighth Army, supposedly, on paper. But it never did, really. I was there until the end. It never did, really. We still wore only the X Corps patch. And we had an Eighth Army carrier that we hooked to our carriers to send what messages we had south. In the war room and everything else, the X Corps general made all of his decisions. He may have passed them off to the Eighth Army commander, but they were still separate. We never saw any Eighth Army people of any sort. It was still all X Corps.

DePue: Let me explain that real quick. X Corps was on the east. This was in the late fall and winter of 1950. And that was the Marines and, I think, the Seventh Division was there.

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: And perhaps the Third Division.

Bentele: The X Corps was the one that landed in Inchon and took Seoul and everything else.

DePue: Well, then they evacuated, and they went up around the eastern side.

Bentele: They went in Hungnam and Wonsan.

DePue: And they ended up having to evacuate when the Chinese came in, in late November/December of 1950.

Bentele: Right. That was the big battle of Ch'ongch'on.

DePue: —of 1950.

Bentele: But X Corps was set up by General MacArthur as his strike force. And he put Ned Almond, his Chief of Staff, in charge of it to get him another star. And there was a big controversy about splitting the commands. But the X Corps was a completely separate command. It had its own air force which was a Marine air wing. It had its own navy which was the landing ships and everything else that was assigned to the X Corps. It had, like I say, the Seventh Division and the First Marine Division. But they had everything that an army would have, only it wasn't an army. It was a corps.

DePue: Now you're saying that even two years later, the Marine division was no longer with that corps.

Bentele: The Marines had left. Yeah, they had pulled the Marines out and put them north of Seoul. And they took the Fifth RCT [Regimental Command Team], about the time I got over there, and pulled it out and put it over in the middle. They were, more or less, a fire brigade. And we started getting more ROK [Republic of Korea] divisions. We had some of the best ROK divisions. But

we had the Forty-fifth and the Fortieth. And actually, the Third Division was part of the X Corps at one time when they were still up at Ch'ongch'on.

DePue: Um-hm. I'm looking at the map, and this is at the very end of the war. But at that time, the Twentieth ROK and the Twelfth ROK divisions were part of the corps.

Bentele: Yeah, we had three divisions. And we still had the Fortieth—or the Forty-fifth—I forget now which one they had. They replaced each other.

DePue: Well, according to this map, the Fortieth and Forty-fifth. But I know I read just recently that, I think, the Forty-fifth replaced the Fortieth, or *vice versa*.

Bentele: Yeah. I forget now exactly how that worked because we got some of the guys from the Fortieth. I know that.

DePue: Okay, so sorry for the interruptions. Now that you've done a great job of describing where you were, what was a typical day?

Bentele: Okay. Anyway, we always kept a team—a squad—of repairmen over there at the X Corps because everywhere you set very long, the communication just kept expanding and expanding. Everybody wanted something different and everything else. And so we had about—what would you say—a town almost the size of Quincy. That's how many telephone repairmen we had actually out there working. I mean, we had a big operation, not counting up north. I mean, this is the X Corps and the surrounding units. We had engineer battalions. We had ordnance battalions. We had artillery battalions. We had medical corps. Everything scattered up and down that valley. There was a lot of separate divisions that made up the X Corps headquarters. And some of them were Eighth Army, these other units. We had the big airstrip there which was the only airstrip in that part of the country. We had that wired up with a lot of communications also. And so we had a lot of work to do. We kept a squad of men at the X Corps constantly because there was always trouble. Some colonel would want his phone moved, or it wasn't suiting him right, or something. So you had all that all the time. Just like AT&T or Bell Telephone did here.

DePue: Except your customers are even more impatient to get things fixed.

Bentele: (laughs) Yes, they are. And every colonel that ever set down at this desk when they moved him wanted his telephone ringing as soon as he sat down. I mean, they were sticklers. If you didn't get it when they walked in their damn headquarters, they'd just raise hell. You know, they wanted that phone. You know, they're the most important work. In other words, it made them feel unimportant if their phone wasn't working. You know, "Maybe the general wanted to talk to me." (laughs) It was one of those kinds of things. But that was true. Anyway, we kept a squad of men there. Now, there had to be a squad or two back at the battalion resting, getting their sleep because one

squad would get off in the morning and be up all night. So you had a squad of men over there always sleeping in the daytime. And of course, that rotated. You had to have a squad of men doing the normal household stuff like KP and guard duty. You know, we had to walk guard post; they had a twenty-four-hour guard post around the battalion. We had a perimeter wire that goes around, but you didn't know what was coming. You had to keep the Koreans out of there.. They weren't supposed to be there.

DePue: Was that concertina wire that you were using for the perimeter.

Bentele: Yeah, it was concertina, and anything that they could string up—barbed wire—it was a menagerie of wire. But that was your perimeter. So you had to have that many in there also. You generally had a squad of men pulling guard duty, KP, or whatever. And then each platoon had its own supply. And it was set up that way. I had my own supply sergeant and repair shop where they would repair the equipment that they could. And we had two or three big squad tents full of equipment that we would use out of and put back into, just like you do anywhere else. And then we had a motor pool. We had our own motor pool which we had to have a man or two there that either drove trucks that hauled people or whatever. And we also had to assign a man or two down there to help the motor-pool sergeant. So I had, I think, about forty men. You used all of them up every day. And then you had some men up in Jade Able on the left-hand side, looking north. And I can't remember the one that was up with the Fortieth on the Punchbowl side. So anyway, that was about a normal day. And we done the normal things what a telephone company would do. We repaired telephones, repaired lines, strung new ones, took them down, put them back up.

DePue: And that's the kind of work that never ends does it?

Bentele:: That's right. Talking about that—this is really a sore spot—we also had, on top of this bunker where all of our cables come out of the bunker up through a tunnel up to the top of the hill to what we call a cable head. Had a house up there where all those cables started going out on up to the front and also down into the corps area. So it was, I mean, major bundles, you know? And setting right up there was the ASA Army security van so they could select trunks that we was using. They had a van full of equipment and recorders. In fact, in the morning they'd have to notify the wire chief, "We want to look at so-and-so." You couldn't pass any information on either. So we'd wire them up to that particular circuit so they could set with their recorders and listen to see if anybody was not using code words or was passing information they shouldn't have been or whatever. And they would set there and record. If they found somebody doing that, he was up for court-martial, just like that.

DePue: Was that because there was a concern that the Chinese or the North Koreans would infiltrate the lines and tap into the lines?

Bentele: Right.

DePue: Did that happen quite a bit?

Bentele: Well, you don't know whether they did or not. We never did find too much evidence of that happening. But they could have done it, as sure as the world. But the ASA van kind of knocked our transmissions down quite a bit because it just was another piece of equipment setting there. And first thing when we had a line that nobody could hear on, we'd go up there and look at the ASA van. (laughs)

DePue: Any specific incidents that you recall, just in the matter of doing your day-to-day business, that really stick with you to this day?

Bentele: Well, like I say, you were so busy with so many small details. One thing that stuck with me was that the only time I really had to pull any guard duty was when I first got there. It was in the middle of the winter—really cold. And there was some Mickey Mouse boots assigned then. They had just started to come out with those. But they were so hot on your feet that a lot of times, you were better off not using them. We used shoe packs which I liked a lot better.

DePue: Mickey Mouse boots. Were these big heavy, rubber boots?

Bentele: They were rubber. As long as they stayed with no hole punches in them, they were fine. You'd never freeze your feet in them. They had insulation in between two rubber layers, and they were vacuum-sealed. So they worked if you just stood or set or whatever you was going to do. But if you were walking, your feet just sweated like everything in them. And so anytime you got your feet wet, you're causing yourself problems. And so the shoe packs were a lot better I always thought. I never did wear them.

DePue: Well describe a shoe pack for us.

Bentele: Well, they wore the shoe packs during the Second World War too. The bottom part of your boot was rubber. They were like the L.L. Bean hunting boots. The top part was leather, and it had a twelve-inch boot. They breathed, and they were lace-up, and I always liked them a lot better. But anyway, talking about the guard duty. And, like I say, I pulled guard duty about three times when I first got over there. You went on duty for twenty-four hours a day; you'd be two hours on, four hours off. Well, you know, if it was really cold, you went one hour on, and then went back on,—I can't say exactly how they worked that out. But you had to walk the guard perimeter. And that's a lonesome cold damn shift, I want to tell you. (laughs) I'll never forget this one guy that was in our platoon, and he sticks in my mind like you wouldn't believe. They were from down South somewhere, and he was a draft protestor. You know, they drafted him, and he was over there. But he claimed the Army food ruined his stomach. He couldn't eat it. And he never went to the mess hall. Everybody was saying, "Well, what the hell is he eating?" because there was no

hamburger joints around there. Nothing.. That was it. And he claimed he couldn't eat it. His mom sent him a can of some kind of malt mixture that he mixed with water or coffee. And that's what he lived on supposedly. T

his went on for quite a while, and everybody was saying, "Well, what the hell is this guy doing?" Well, I was on guard duty down alongside the Kwandae-Ri, or they called it the P'ohang River. We called it the Kwandae-Ri. It was about two o'clock in the morning, and I hear this splash, splash, splash—somebody walking across the creek. It wasn't that deep, you know, about six to eight inches deep. In the cold weather, part of it was froze over anyway. And across the way over there, the Eighty-eighth MP Battalion had an all-night mess hall. In fact, the MPs was touring all the time, and they'd stop by there and eat or get coffee. Anybody could stop in and get coffee or a light breakfast or whatever you wanted. They just kept a twenty-four-hour mess hall going all the time alongside the main road. And so I halted whoever was coming across the creek. It was this damn guy. He had been over there at that damn Marine mess hall. And he claimed he couldn't work because he couldn't eat. He was a slacker. In other words, he would try anything in the world to get out of doing his duty. And so when I stopped him and found out who he was, I said, "I want to tell you, you son-of-a-bitch, if you ever come across here again..." Of course, you had ammo with you, but you also had a bayonet on there. I says, … "I'm going to stick this bayonet up your ass." I never seen him again. But finally, they shipped him out. Oh, God. That's one thing I remember.

DePue: You'd mentioned when we talked earlier about shuttling ammo up to the front.

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: That sometimes you guys got to do that.

Bentele: Okay. Now if you had trouble on any circuit going towards the front, you sent whoever was available. You'd be sent up there. They didn't pick somebody out. You just went. So I know I was on that ammo run at least twice. And you'd go up and work all day pretty close to the front. Of course, we always had jeeps or three-quarter tons. We never did have to stay if we didn't want to. And, in fact, there was no place to stay anyway. So we always drove and come back down to the battalion. Now, when they was having these big pushes that they had, you know, a big battle going on like at Heartbreak Ridge or the Punchbowl, they would always come over because the Transportation Corps would need extra drivers to run more ammo up there. They'd come over and get drivers from the Signal Corps or some other unit. You'd go over to the ordnance depot; it was right down in the bottom and they'd load you up with whatever. You didn't know whether your had C-Rations or grenades or mortar rounds or what. And then you followed one of the guys—and he was a

black guy. You had desegregated Army, but they put most of the black guys driving trucks.

DePue: Did you say that it was desegregated at the time?

Bentele: Yeah. Desegregated. But mainly, you ended with the black guys driving all the trucks. And anyway, you'd always end up following the guy from the Transportation Corps that knew where he was going. And of course, you had no lights, and it was dustier than hell. I mean you were right up next to the bumper on the other one. You couldn't see those little peeper taillights that they had.

DePue: Cat lights?

Bentele: Yeah. And that's what you tried to keep in sight. Well a lot of times you couldn't even see them because of the dust. Now there would be ten, fifteen trucks in a line going over from X Corps up over the pass to Yangu Valley—it was called Yangu Pass. Now it's closed. It was closed in '93, and they done away with it. It was an old part of the road—a cow path—that the engineers dug out of the side of the hill. Now this went up over a pretty good ridge of mountains. And it was about eighteen miles long. And you went up and zigzagged all over the country going up there. It was one of those switchback roads, you know? And just wide enough for a deuce and a half [two and a half ton truck]. If you saw those pictures of those roads down in Bolivia and stuff, that's about like it was.

DePue: You got one foot off the road and you're down a thousand feet?

Bentele: That's right. It was about three to four hundred, maybe five hundred feet, down off the ravine. Now you're driving a truck loaded with ammo, and you're right in the other guy's ass-end. If one guy stopped—(claps)—everybody stopped. And the road was single-lane. You didn't know whether you was on the edge or not. Anyway, that's how it was driving up over there. Very nerve-wracking. Anyway, I remember this one time we went up to the Punchbowl, which was a lot better because you didn't have the Yangu Pass to go over. But you did have two or three rises that you went over with the signs right there that said, "When you reach the top of this hill, you're in view of the enemy, and they have it zeroed in." In other words, within three or four miles of the front, they could see you. The Chinese were good with their artillery. I mean, they had those places zeroed in, and you had to take your chances. You'd set on this side. One truck would go up over and get out of sight. And a lot of times, they wouldn't fire. But you'd just kind of think, "Well, okay. I'm going to take a run at it." So you'd throw her in gear—zoom! Up over the hill as fast as you could and down the other side before you got out of sight. Sometimes they fired. Sometimes they didn't. And they'd be right on that road. So you had to run your chances. Anyway, we'd get up in this blackest coal mine. We're setting there, waiting. I thought we were as far as we were

supposed to go. We're setting there waiting for them to unload us or tell us what to do. No lights. No nothing. And all of a sudden, all hell breaks loose. I mean, we were setting right in the midst of this artillery battery. And they were starting firing. And you couldn't even see them. And I mean, we were setting right there, and all of a sudden—blooey! God, you talk about scaring the crap out of you (laughter).

DePue: Well, your story illustrates that a lot of this driving was done at night. And, obviously, you don't have your headlights on because you don't want to reveal your location.

Bentele: Yeah, that's right. And then I'd say it was a little more dangerous in the daytime because when you got close to the front where you had to take it, you were exposing yourself to the enemy artillery.

DePue: What kind of vehicles were you doing this with?

Bentele: Two and a half—deuce and a half.

DePue: Two-and-a-half ton trucks.

Bentele: Yeah, straight shift. Finally, about the middle of March or April we gave all those old World War II vehicles to the ROK.

DePue: Were they gas?

Bentele: Gas, yeah. And all were jeeps. In fact, all of our vehicles were World War II vintage. Most of them come off the islands and were stockpiled in Japan. And some of them were still over in here. We gave all of our old trucks and jeeps to the ROK army. And then they'd take about, oh, at least seventy of us by truck to Seoul, and we'd pick up new vehicles. They had fields full of them, these new automatic-shift trucks, the ones that had the rounded hood instead of the square. And the new jeeps with the rounded hood. And new three-quarter tons, they were like Cadillacs. Boy, you had a shift lever on those automatic transmissions. Well, you didn't have to double-clutch anything. With those old trucks you had a hard time getting them in gear a lot of times.

DePue: I assume the three-quarter ton is essentially a pickup truck.

Bentele: Yeah, and that's what I liked to drive. Anyway, that was good. Anyway, after we give them to the ROK army, it wasn't safe to be on the road because those Koreans didn't know how to drive. They went right down the middle of the road. If you was anything smaller than a three-quarter ton, like a jeep, they would run over you or run you off the road. You had to dodge them. It was dangerous, (laughs) with one of those people driving. Anyway, I'll always remember this coming back. I went down there one time to Seoul. We stayed in an engineer outfit because it was all down by truck. And we stayed overnight in an engineering outfit. I'll never forget it. Of course, we'd been up

there since February. This was probably April. And we hadn't seen anything. The MP's wouldn't let you take your weapons with you. They had a curfew in Seoul at six o'clock at night. All the military personnel that wasn't authorized had to be off the streets. Because there was a lot of things in Seoul that could get you killed (laughs) real quick. And you weren't that far from the front. So probably a lot of infiltration too. And somebody had a pistol with them. All of us had hunting knives, you know, the long knives. Down the road a piece was a place called Pig Alley. That's the part of Seoul where all the cathouses and entertainment was at that time. Seoul had thirteen million people in it, counting refugees. People had no place to go. They would walk the streets until they fell over dead or whatever. And, I mean, people were packed in there. No lights. Nothing. So of course, we had to go down there, you know, all of us guys. So we trooped down there. You know, it was interesting, (laughter) I'll say that. Now that's the name of it: Pig Alley. And it was, like I say, pretty cold weather. They had fire underneath the houses, you know. Really warm—sleep on the floor.

DePue: They called it ondol heating where it's all piped underneath the floors.

Bentele: Well, they just built a wood fire, and the flames and the hot gases would go underneath the floor and exit the chimney on the other side. It would draft it through there. Actually, that was toasty. You know, as long as you didn't get up and you was laying on the floor, it would be pretty good. (laughs)

DePue: It's better than sleeping on the frozen ground, huh?

Bentele: Yeah. Anyway, we had a hell of a time in there. Actually some of the guys set one of the buildings on fire, and they run us out. Anyway, about two o'clock in the morning—I'll never forget it—I said, "I'm getting out of here. I'm going back to the engineering outfit." So I'm by myself, you know? We went down there in a group of about six or eight of us, and I'm going back by myself. Now it was so dark you could just see pieces of people, you know? I walked with my knife in my hand, and, you know, let people know that I didn't want anybody close to me. We was about a mile and a half I guess from the engineering outfit where we were staying. Well, here comes an MP jeep. And he says, "What the hell are you doing out here in the middle of the night?" And I told him. Well of course, they knew we was all down there in the Pig Alley, you know? And I said, "Yeah, and you bastards wouldn't let us take our weapons with us." And of course, they knew what would happen if we took our weapons with us too. And of course, we were all from the front, so they were pretty generous with the guys, you know, coming down and doing that. They knew what we was going to do anyway. Anyway, so, "Well, get in here before you get somebody killed." So I got in their jeep, and they run me back to the engineering outfit. So the next day we were driving these jeeps back over to X Corps which is a hundred-mile trip counting the road in there. Because you couldn't make it, you know, like it is now. You go (makes sound of "smooth sailing").

DePue: But there were no straight lines to anywhere in Korea at the time I'd suspect.

Bentele: No, and you had to go up the Han River quite a ways till you got a little bit south of Wonju where you turned north and went back up the one road there. Well, I'll never forget this old master sergeant. Now the U.S. Army in the field is just as mean and nasty as any other army in the world. (laughs) I mean, a lot of people think everybody is good, you know, but they're not.

DePue: These aren't a bunch of saints.

Bentele: No. And the old master sergeant was riding along.. Now he wasn't from our outfit. I don't know what he was from. He was probably from one of the transportation outfits. And the Koreans were carrying their A-frames [back-pack frames]. They walked along the side of the road in just a regular footpath. Of course, they wouldn't be on the road. (laughs) They'd get run over and killed, you know? Anyway, he delighted in it. He had like a pool cue, almost. A long-handled club. He would delight in driving by these old Koreans in their A-frames and shoving them off the road. He'd laugh his ass off. They'd roll down the embankments, you know? Yep.

DePue: When you guys were making the ammo runs—and that was a pretty harrowing experience, as you described it—did you lose any vehicles ever doing that?

Bentele: Well, not where I was at least. I mean, you'd see vehicles that was down in the gulch that didn't make it. But I never did see any myself go over.

DePue: Now you talked also about carrier trucks. Those are the ones with all the wiring nodes, for lack of a better term. Did you ever lose any of those?

Bentele: Yeah, we lost one in the last big battle of the war there, in June and July, when the Chinese come through a hundred-thousand strong. And that's when they overrun the Triple Nickel again.

DePue: For the third time, then?

Bentele: Third time. They were behind the main line of resistance. We had another line called the Kansas line. They set these lines where you were supposed to advance to. But the Chinese come right through the main line of resistance. Come through the Kansas line; they actually penetrated about fifteen miles. And by that time they lost steam in their assault because our artillery and Air Force was just slaughtering them. I mean, just slaughtering them. Of course, this here says a hundred thousand, but I always heard about eighty thousand. And I don't think five thousand of them ever got back because they were just completely slaughtered. But in that battle we lost contact with one of our carrier vans up there that was handling that communication. They were an important van because they were doing the connecting between the X Corps

and IX Corps. I mean, that was how they was coordinating their offensive. And so we had to get that back online.

I was a sergeant actually in charge of the platoon at that time. So myself and another two sergeants went up to Kumhwa Valley to locate this van. Well, we found the van. The tanks had either run over their cables or whatever. But in the melee, the moving, they just didn't get hooked back up, and they had damaged cable and stuff like that. So we got a team up there and found them and got them hooked back up there as soon as we could. But the sight of those in that valley…they had bodies laying everywhere.

DePue: And you were on that trip going up to get that van?

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: So you saw all of this destruction?

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: What was the closest you ever had to actually seeing the enemy—a live enemy coming at you?

Bentele: Of course it all depends on what you call close. When you're within two or three miles of the front, you're close. You don't have to be right at the point up there because they were scattered all over. You know, you don't have a solid wall that you can look at even though there was trenches pretty much over there. But it was probably about three miles. In other words, I never did see anybody actually, you know, coming over the hill.

DePue: I wonder if you can tell us about some guys that you were especially close with while you were over there, and any stories connected with that. Some very good friends perhaps that you were with.

Bentele: Well, like I say, I had some of the guys that I went over with that were still there when we rotated back together, one or two of them. And some of the guys that I promoted, you know, that were good guys. No one particularly. I had three or four of them. You kind of lose out when you're platoon sergeant. (laughs)

DePue: When did that happen?

Bentele: Let's see. I was promoted in September. I'd have to look at my records. Right in there somewhere in September.

DePue: So it sounds like after the main fighting was over.

Bentele: Yeah, after the main fighting. But actually that is a misnomer, because when the ceasefire took effect—I'll have to describe that last night, by the way—

there was still the same combat operations going on that you had before. Everybody stayed in place. You were still up there eyeball to the enemy. And there were still some skirmishes, I'm sure, that weren't reported. I mean, where the enemy was probing, you know, to see. And we were doing the same thing to them. I've talked to a lot of the guys, and other than a hot firefight that never developed, things were still about the same. It was almost the same damn thing as you did before for several months until things were ironed out.

DePue: I wanted to back up just a little bit here. I want to hear your impressions about how the war ended and the armistice talks *et cetera,* especially during June and July, but even the months before that. Your particular corps has got a fair number of South Korean troops in there as well. Did you have an opportunity to see them in action very much?

Bentele: Well, I can name this one old boy. In fact, I met him on a revisit trip to Korea in '93. He was a commanding general, a really tough old boy. He had the First ROK Division which was a crack division. I mean, they were good. And he was the kind of general that if he sent a lieutenant out to do something and the lieutenant failed to do it, he shot him himself. Their discipline was a lot different than ours. Their sergeants would carry a little baton, and if he wanted to discipline his troops, he just smacked them over the head with his little baton. Hell, yeah. The Koreans respected that type of force, you know? And they expected it, you know? It was kind of funny, you know? But they were blood and guts right down to the bottom. I wish I could think of that old boy's name. He was still alive in '93.

DePue: And you say he was the division commander during the war?

Bentele: The division commander, yeah. I'll think of it in a little bit. I never did actually see him in battle, no.

DePue: What was the reputation that they had at the time?

Bentele: Well, we had to depend on those three ROK divisions because we only had one American division left there at the end of the war. It was the Fortieth or the Forty-fifth—I forget which it was. But the rest of our territory was defended by ROK divisions. And at that time they were a good army. Of course, they had no support troops whatsoever. Frontline soldiers was the only thing they had. We furnished everything else. You know, their communications and everything else—we furnished it. In fact, we started training them right after the ceasefire.

DePue: Okay. Let's talk about the armistice talks. By the time you got there, they'd been going on for, I don't know—

Bentele: Two years.

DePue: —close to two years by that time. What was the thought that you and other GIs had about this?

Bentele: Well really, we were busy enough that we didn't even hardly think about it. We never got the news from what was going on over there. And it was kind of a subject for derision, really. "They're just talking," you know?

DePue: Did you have a sense of what it was about the peace talks—what the issues were that were really dragging this whole thing out?

Bentele: Well yeah, we knew that the prisoner exchange was really holding everything up. Syngman Rhee, mainly. And of course, he wouldn't sign it, and he wouldn't send his prisoners back. I have another story to tell about that also. But we really didn't pay that much attention to it. Like I say, we were busy with our own duties and everything else. You didn't have time. The only time we did was the day it was signed. We did get word just almost as soon as it was signed at ten o'clock in the morning, and it was going to take effect at ten o'clock at night—twelve hours later. So everybody was just saying, "I'll bet you whatever that next week we'll be back fighting them again." Because we didn't believe it would hold at all, much less get even started. So the word was passed to all the units and everything else to stop firing at ten o'clock that night. I thought, "Well, I'd better see this." So there was a couple of us had a real high knob on a hill where we had a high-powered radio set up. I said, "That'd be a good observation because you could see the front for miles." And about dusk, when it got dark, our artillery started firing. And I guess theirs did too. I didn't see any casualties from that. But they fired every round that they had. I often wondered if the cease fire hadn't taken effect, what the hell would we use for ammo? Because they fired and continued to fire for four hours straight. And I mean, you could almost read a newspaper. I mean, the whole front was lit up. And then at ten o'clock—boy—she went BAM! Just like that. Just like you turned a switch out, and not another gun fired. Where I was, there was none of them firing. I heard some say that they did fire off a round or two after that. But there was none of that where I could see it. And then it was just deadly quiet. And everybody set there. And we set there. And we said, "You wait. It'll happen." And pretty soon you started to see truck lights come on, you know? And wherever they had power you started seeing lights come on.

DePue: That was July 27, 1953. You'd been there, well, six and a half months by that time. Before that time the peace talks had been going on, as we mentioned before, for a long time. I don't know if you remember this or not, but April 20th was the start of what they called Operation Little Switch, where the two sides were exchanging those who had been hospital cases and severely wounded.

Bentele: Yeah. Ones that were dying, really.

DePue: Yeah. Do you recall that at all?

Bentele: Not really. I knew they was going to take place. But they were going to do that Little Switch without signing the truce. You know, they wanted to exchange those type of prisoners that were near death and they couldn't take care of. And the idea was that, you know, they had had that big riot down at Wolmi-do Island, or Koje-do.

DePue: Koje-do, yeah.

Bentele: Yeah, where they had send the Airborne troops down there to quell it. And so they had the attention of the people—these prisoners did. This Little Switch was going to take place whether they signed the truce or not. It did take place, and they signed. I don't know whether the truce was signed before or after that.

DePue: No, the truce was signed several months after that.

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: But as I understand it, both sides knew they were getting closer, at least the people who were doing the negotiating knew it.

Bentele: Yeah, but they also wanted to get those sick prisoners off their hands. There wasn't much said about that. Nobody knew that was going on.

DePue: Well, this is the portion of the Korean War that I'm especially fascinated on. I've talked to people who were there on Koje-do Island when they had to storm into the compounds because the North Koreans and the Chinese, but especially North Koreans, had taken over the whole compound.

Bentele: They took it over. Yeah, they captured the commanding general. He was stupid enough to walk in there. (laughs)

DePue: You had already alluded to this. I know you remember this date: June 18th. Syngman Rhee, who was the president of South Korea, issues instructions to his South Koreans in the middle of the night, and twenty-seven thousand North Koreans—

Bentele: They opened the gates.

DePue: —just slip into the countryside.

Bentele: Right. And you know, at that same time the South Koreans, by the urging of Syngman Rhee, was demonstrating against us, having marches in the roads and the streets. I got pictures of them in here. I can show you that the South Koreans were out in the roads and the streets and everything else demonstrating against us. And then he opens up the gates and lets twenty-

seven thousand prisoners behind us. We didn't know what the hell happened to them. They had to send teams of people in there, MPs and everything else, to try to round up as many as they could. They rounded up quite a few of them, but there was a lot of them that got away. And where they went, I don't know.

DePue: What's the rationale of Syngman Rhee suddenly releasing twenty-seven thousand prisoners?

Bentele: He told them that he would not sign that truce. And he did not want them to sign it, and this was his protest. And another thing, the Chinese and the North Koreans wanted all them people to be returned to them forcibly. And they pretty much knew that they was going to kill every one of them when they returned. And this was another reason, I believe, for the big battle on Koje-do Island. The ones wanted to prove to their leaders that they were still with them. In other words, "Don't shoot me when I get back because I'm demonstrating." And I think that was one of the reasons that urged them on there. Syngman Rhee didn't sign that truce, and he urged all of his people to protest against it. One of his ways of not returning any prisoners that didn't want to go back was to let them all go.

DePue: So these are people who never wanted to go back?

Bentele: These were all his prisoners. And it wasn't just one prison. It was several prisons that he just told the guards, "Open the gates and disappear." And they did. So...

DePue: What does that make you think?

Bentele: And at the same time, we had that big battle going on up on the front; Heartbreak Ridge was going full-blast, and we had our hands full. And you know, you didn't know how these people were going to survive. Were they going to attack small units, or somebody on the road, or whatever to get weapons and food or whatever?

DePue: Were you given instructions? Were American troops given instructions what to do?

Bentele: Yes. They said, "Tell all the guards that they need to keep a very sharp eye." And everybody was on alert for roving bands of guerrilla attacks. You know, it would be four or five men in a bunch. It wouldn't be no large engagement. But they would be wanting to come in anywhere they could and steal food, weapons, whatever. And you know, they made sure their guards were doubled up.

DePue: Did any of that happen?

Bentele: Never seen it. I still to this day have never seen anything written on what happened to those people. Where they went.

DePue: Well, my understanding—

Bentele: Because they didn't make it back. They couldn't make it back. There's no way in hell they could have went back north. Now I know they caught about probably eight, nine, maybe ten thousand—the MPs did. Because they sent units down there to round them up wherever they could get them.

DePue: What I've read about it is that the South Koreans knew that these prisoners had no intention of going back. They had already been screened and declared their intentions that they didn't want to go back.

Bentele: Well, that might be true, but all of them were released. Even the ones that didn't declare that. And there were some North Koreans. I'm not too sure there wasn't some Chinese in there.

DePue: As you were mentioning before, here's a chapter that very little is known about.

Bentele: Yeah, and you know, it's just like the idea that I always said. Eventually, the two countries would go together just simply by intermingling across the MLR [Main Line of Resistance]. And undoubtedly over the years they have crossed over and back. And families that were separated, they're not sealed off completely. And you know, eventually if left alone, they would assimilate to each other.

DePue: Did you understand at the time why Syngman Rhee and so many of the South Koreans were so adamantly opposed to the armistice?

Bentele: Well, Syngman Rhee wanted everybody to do his battle for him. In other words, he wanted to reunite his country. And you know, Syngman Rhee and Kim Il-Sung was cut out of the same cloth. Kim Il-Sung wanted South Korea, and Syngman Rhee wanted North Korea. Kim Il-Sung attacked first is what happened. Because we wouldn't give the South Koreans any weapons of any extent, or heavy weapons, before that war started. We kept them down because we knew Syngman Rhee would attack.

DePue: What did the Americans think? Did you know Americans who said, "Yeah, we need to finish this war by attacking north and occupying North Korea"?

Bentele: Well you know what? I think everybody by that time knew damn well you'd never stand a chance against all them Chinese of taking them. And to this day, any damn general or politicians who want to get into a land battle in Asia would be nuts. And MacArthur knew that too. You know, he was an intelligent man. And you know, the idea of attacking China on the mainland is stupid. And you know, there was no one that I ever knew that was interested

in attacking. And I'll tell you the truth about the matter. In August and September we were making arrangements to go north. We had already set up another corps area about ten miles further north. So that told me one thing: We were figuring on moving north. If there was any recurrence of the battle, this army was going to go start on the march going north. It wasn't going to set still anymore. And that was going to be the whole case in a nutshell. Because we was already making arrangement for communications further north.

DePue: You mentioned MacArthur. And of course, MacArthur was long gone by the time you got there. He'd been gone for two years. But what was the general opinion of the soldiers that you knew about MacArthur? Favorable?

Bentele: Well, no. Now remember most of the guys I was over there with went through the McCarthy—you know, the—

DePue: McCarthy era?

Bentele: And also, MacArthur had already been back and had all his glory and done his speaking and everything else. We all heard that before we ever went in the service, you know? But he was back by that time. And so pretty much our opinion of General MacArthur was that he was way past his prime. He should not have been in command. And the only reason the Joint Chiefs of Staff left him in command, I believe, was they were afraid of him. But I think he was way past his prime. There was a lot better generals than MacArthur at that time.

DePue: By the time you get close to the end of the war, the whole thing was so politicized. I mean, the POW thing was very much part of that political struggle as well. It's kind of an interesting, weird way to get to this question, but do you recall seeing things like propaganda fliers that the plane was dropping on you? That kind of stuff?

Bentele: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I've got several of them here. You know, that's what Bed Check Charlie was good for.

DePue: Bed Check Charlie?

Bentele: Yeah, there was a lot of aircraft that would buzz. In fact when I first got over there, he was pretty regular. At least once a month, or maybe two or three times a month from the north. He was a light aircraft. It sounded like a Piper Cub or a bi-wing. And he would fly over in the middle of the night and sometimes drop mortar rounds and small bombs that he could probably throw out. It reminded you of World War I aircraft. It's what it sounded like. And you'd see him, you know. And mainly propaganda leaflets. And I've got several of them here. It says, "Here you are freezing your ass off, over in Korea. And here's Mr. Moneybags making all the money off of this war, living the high life down in Florida." You know, a lot of them said that and

showed pictures of them, you know? But here's what happened. Anytime they got an air-raid siren going at Bed Check Charlie, you never knew where it might have been a MIG, too. What the hell. You know, everybody had to fall out and get down in the bunkers and the foxholes and spend an hour there until they give you the all-clear. So that disrupted the Army. That was another reason why it was done, too. You know, he only flew at night just when everybody was in there. That night's sleep was gone, you know? (laughs)

DePue: Was there anybody who was convinced by the propaganda leaflets?

Bentele: I don't think so. There was some grumbling, but not really. Like I say, in my end of the woods over there everybody was kept damn busy. You know really, you didn't have any time to sit around. What news you got was through letters from the home front. We had the Armed Forces Radio network that anybody had a radio could pick up. They played music and different things going to keep the morale of the troops up. But they didn't pass out any news other than what they had already been told to pass out. There wasn't any opinions. You know, there wasn't anybody on the news telling that the corps general was a rotten apple. That didn't happen.

DePue: The next war, maybe fifteen years later, the GIs that were in Vietnam—a lot of them starting thinking, "What in the world am I doing here?" Did you have any of that when you were there?

Bentele: I didn't see any of that. In fact, I didn't see the drugs and everything else they talk about. Undoubtedly, there might have been somebody. Of course I mean, you know, marijuana. But I never seen any of that either. And I wasn't blind to it because that was part of my duty. There was a lot of drinking went on. But none of that. I mean, none. I don't remember anybody ever, you know, taking that and saying, "Well, this war is unnecessary," or whatever. Nothing. No.

DePue: Okay. Some of these are much more general.

Bentele: Well I think one of the reasons why that is, too, is a lot of people overlook the fact that we were raised during the Second World War. And a lot of us were the little brothers of guys that were in the Second World War. So I think we learned early the way that the military was supposed to act. We didn't have the opportunity to pick up all that trash that the Vietnam veterans did. You know, they were indoctrinated before they ever went into the service. You know they were already indoctrinated. The culture at that time was anti-military right down the line. And being that they were drafted, they thought they had the legal right to protest. You know, even while they was in the military. Now, there was a lot of good soldiers in Vietnam. And they weren't all veterans from Korea or anything else. We had a lot of veterans from the Second World War. (In fact, I'll tell you about one.) But they didn't learn discipline like we did in the service when they went through basic training.

They must have slacked off from them because so many of those guys don't know any kind of military discipline. They're just at a loss. I mean, just from watching them as veterans. There's a difference between night and day. I always wondered, "What the hell did they teach them?" Because, you know, we had to learn the book. In other words, when we went through basic training, they had classes on what was the proper etiquette and what you were supposed to do as a soldier. And I don't think they had that.

DePue: You mentioned this one World War II veteran?

Bentele: Okay. He was a World War I veteran also. At one time when I first got to our company shortly after I got there, they arrested our captain. And in fact, I've got his name in here. (laughs) He was a stickler about guys going and having any of the whores coming in there or anything else, you know? There was always some washer women that they always wanted to... And anyway, he would court-martial guys for doing that. Well come to find out, I don't know what else they had going on, but the mess sergeant would keep the captain's gal down in his tent. The captain was court-martialed in his own company. I mean, placed under guard by his own men. (laughs) I'll never forget that. They had to walk him to the latrine, you know, under the gun until he got his court-martial or until they relieved him. Yeah, Captain Remove. Remove. He had a funny name.

DePue: But this guy was both World War I and World War II?

Bentele: No. Anyway after that, they took the first sergeant and the captain out. Well, the one we got to replace him was called Sergeant Edmund Brown. I'll never forget him. He was a World War I veteran. Spent six months overseas during the combat in World War I. Now of course, he was a career Army. He spent all of World War II in the South Pacific. And he was with an ROTC unit as a trainer in the state of Washington. Some way or the other he got on the levy to go to the Far East Command. Well when he got over to Japan, they was going to leave him in Japan. He said, "Oh, no, you're not. You're going to send me over to Korea." He said, "I'm an artillery man." And he said, "If you're going to send me overseas, you're going to put me where the fighting is." Anyway, when he got over there, well he was sixty-two years old. And when he got over there, they needed a first sergeant in our Signal Corps, so that's where he ended up. He used to keep by himself pretty much. And I used to go on R&R, and I always claimed they'd send him with me. Send me with him so he could keep watch after me over in Japan. (laughs) And maybe they did; I don't know. But anyway, I went on two R&Rs with Sergeant Brown. A good old boy. He liked Old Forester right out of the bottle. And he was a strict old boy, but he was a number-one first sergeant. His Ike jacket[3], from all the

[3] General Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower's standard uniform used a waist-length jacket with a tailored band around the bottom. It became something of a civilian fashion standard, though most military officers wore standard length jackets.

campaigns he'd been on, would put MacArthur to shame. I mean, he had ribbons that went up over his shoulder. But he was a dandy old boy. He really was. I really enjoyed old Edmund Brown. Three wars.

DePue: Yeah, that's hard for most of us to comprehend today—that kind of service. Tell me how you were managing to keep in touch with the family. Or were you?

Bentele: Well, yeah, I was. Of course, I had eight brothers and sisters and Mom and Dad. And generally, I would write once a month usually. Or write one of my sisters or something a small note or whatever. In fact, I bought some china that my oldest sister I'm sure still has at home. When I was at my last R&R in Tokyo, I done shopping then, and she wanted a set of Noritake china which I bought for her and sent to her. But mainly I kept in contact. But I wasn't a prolific writer. But I, you know, sent letters. And they would send me letters—my brothers and sisters would. And not a great amount. We didn't do that too much.. Of course, the guys got boxes from home, you know, particularly at Christmas. But I'll never forget my mother sent me a bunch of walnut cookies. Now the only thing I don't like in this world is black walnuts. And guess what they were: black walnuts. And, of course, like I say, with nine kids she lost track of whether we liked black walnuts or not. Because I never did like them. For some reason, I mean, I grew up on a farm and everything else. We had all kinds of walnut trees. I just never did like them. I've got a picture of a little Korean girl eating one of those black walnut cookies because that's how I got rid of them. (laughter) One guy particularly who was in my platoon had an Italian wife. Man, she would send the best care packages you ever saw. The first time I ever seen pepperoni and salami. Of course, the Italian cheese would be moldy. We would just carve the mould off of it. Whenever old Schumer's (he was from Pennsylvania) package showed up, everybody went to his tent. They'd say, "Let's see what you got." (laughs)

DePue: How important was mail call to you then?

Bentele: It was all right. But I mean, mail call wasn't that important to me. I wasn't homesick. I had already spent my time away from home, you know. I worked on the railroad. I always wondered about this. A lot of the guys I know are Korean veterans. Now they married their wives before they shipped overseas. I'm not saying that's bad. But it is when you get to the other end of the line. One of my biggest things when I was platoon sergeant and the squad leader and I would always tell my guys, "You guys, get home out of your head because you live here, and you're going to visit back there. This is your home now. You keep your head right here." In other words, I didn't want some guy wandering around in a minefield thinking about his wife back home or his kids or whatever. I wanted his head to be in the work. And I always thought that wasn't a good thing. I mean, I really did. I thought, you know, "That puts a drag on a guy over here."

DePue: Most of the time you were not on the front line, a few miles back. Did that mean that you got a few hot meals occasionally?

Bentele: We always had a mess hall. Of course, we ate a lot of C-Rations too because any time you're working out, we always had C-Rations. But we did have a mess hall. It was Army rations. We didn't have any great big feasts or anything else. (laughs) I've got to tell this story too. This guy was from East Texas, and I knew him down in Fort Gordon, Georgia, when we was going through basic. Great big guy. Hell, he had to weigh at least 300 pounds. Big old muscle farm boy. The only thing from East Texas that grows out there is brush, and the only thing that old boy ever seen in his life was the ass-end of a mule. I know it. He was as dumb as they come. Everybody kind of, you know, mistreated him, and I always kind of watched after the old boy because he just didn't have too much smarts. (laughs) Anytime he had a problem, he'd always come to me. Anyway, he couldn't do anything, and he was always dirty. He was assigned as a grease monkey down in the motor pool over there in Fourth Signal. About the only thing he could do was work with the trucks. And he was so greasy. They never required him to clean up. Any time they'd have some official come around—this was after the war ended—they started to align up all the tents and get them back the Army way. The captain would say, "Where's (name deleted)?" And they said, "Hide (name deleted)." So they'd send old (name deleted) out in the brush somewhere waiting till the inspection team (laughs) went through, and they'd bring him back out. Anyway, when he first got over there, the first month or two, he told the captain, he says, "I'm starving." He was a big man, and he said, "I'm not getting enough to eat. Those cooks are throwing away food." And they were taking those big old gallon cans of old C-Ration food.—that's what it was—and dumping it in those big containers and then heating it up. And that's what you served out of. He said, "They're throwing away food you know. The scraps that was in there I could eat." So the captain went down to the mess hall, and he told the mess sergeant, "He goes through the line just like everybody else. Give him the same portion. But after the mess is over and you've fed everybody, he gets everything that's left over." Well, those cooks put all the scraps in those big old pans, you know like big old square pans, and dumped everything in there. I mean, if they had somebody that didn't eat all their food, it went in there too. They'd set it front of (name deleted) and give him a big spoon, and he'd sit there and gobble it down. (laughter) Now, that wasn't the only thing that happened to (name deleted). No, there was a black guy about the same way as (name deleted). And he worked in the motor pool also. I can't think of his name. Anyway, he had some musume out there in the brush somewhere that he was screwing. (laughs)

DePue: "Musume"?

Bentele: Yeah, that's what we called them: Mooses. (laughter) And anyway, there was all kinds of slang words besides "gooks." Anyway, he got the damnedest case of venereal disease you would ever see, I guess. Hell, they even had to send

him back stateside. But after he left, (name deleted)—being the dumb bastard he was—he took up with her even though he knew his buddy got the worst case of something you ever seen. I mean, it was the stuff that would rot your dick off. And anyway, he took up with her, started shacking up with her. Well naturally, he come down with that. Well he come up to me and he said, "Sarge, there's something wrong with me." And I said, "Well, what's wrong?" He said, "I'm bleeding." And he said, "I've got, you know, pus and everything else." And I said, "For God's sakes, get down to the medics." And I took him down there, and I said, "Here, treat this man." And so they looked at him like a horse. They really did. They give him as much penicillin as it would have took for a horse to get well. (laughs) They cured him, I guess. But man, I'll tell you what. They treated him just like he was a big gorilla. (laughs)

DePue: Was there one C-Ration that you particularly liked, and one that perhaps you didn't like?

Bentele: Well, to tell you the truth, everybody tried to get the pork and beans. They would fish around over at the repo depo, over at Ch'unch'on where they had the main truck route. Well, they had a rest stop for the truckers, I mean the guys that run supplies. And they had to have rest stops every now and then where they could pull in and rest and get something to eat. (laughs) Otherwise, they wouldn't. Well, they had this great big, like a rendering kettle. I don't know where the hell they got it. They found it somewhere. And set it on a wood fire out in the middle of the parking lot where everybody would come in. They'd issue you a case of C-Rations when you was out in the field, and you'd get a pack every day, morning, noon, and night with your little cigarette package and everything that was in them. You know, they give you free cigarettes so you could learn how to smoke. (laughs) Yeah, the tobacco companies done that.

Anyway, everybody just dumped their C-Rations in there. You'd take a can out, and you'd throw a can in. And everybody would fish around that son of a bitch. I always liked the corned beef hash. That was my other favorite. I liked the pork and beans and corned beef and hash. And they had a big stick with a strainer on it, and that way you could strain out a can. And if you liked it, that's what you kept. You know, everybody fished out of this same great big old pot where this boiling water was. The corned beef and hash was good. I didn't mind C-Rations. I liked them. And a lot of guys didn't know what to do. They'd get that hamburger packed in lard. Well, hell, you're supposed to take it out of the damn can and throw the lard away. It was packed in there for a reason. And then heat the can up with the hamburger patties in it. They were pretty good. I found nothing wrong with C-Rations.

You had like a coffee can you could find wired onto your manifold of your jeep or your truck, just setting right on the exhaust manifold. And then if you didn't punch a hole in the C-Ration can, it would explode on you. Well,

you'd have that can full of water—or half-full of water—and you'd set your C-Ration can down in the water. And hell, it wouldn't be five miles and that sucker would be hotter than blazes, you know? It would be boiling. You'd take it out, and you'd have your hot food. That's how you got hot food. Every vehicle there had a can wired on the manifold. That was an old trick from World War II, and that would be the way that you done it.

A lot of guys would set around, and you'd build a fire and heat your C-Rations up. Well, these little packets of jam or jelly—you know, those little round cans that fit down in a C-Ration can. They'd always have a cracker with them—hard as this table. And the guys would be setting around, have a little fire going. Somebody would sneak one of those little cans in the campfire. That son of a bitch would explode like a shotgun shell. It'd scare the crap out of you. It'd blow fire everywhere. I seen a lot of guys get their head knuckled for that, too. I mean, I seen fights start over that. (laughter)

DePue: I know you've got a story for this next question. You guys were in Korea when the line was relatively stable. And then of course, you were there after the war. Did you have any entertainers come over for you?

Bentele: There were several USO shows come into X Corps area. The platoon sergeants and everything would pull duty when the USO show was in so our men would be able to go to the USO show. So I never did get to see a USO show. Never saw one. Of course when I was a private or a corporal, there wasn't no shows. You know, they just didn't show up in that part of the country. You know, that was pretty remote over there on the east side, and they just didn't make it. Anyway, we had this one USO show that Terry Moore—the gal that wore the mink bikini that caused such a stir back here stateside—was in the show. They had it at Inje, which is up the river just a little bit, where they had a pretty good sized stage up there—an old theater in that town. Inje was a little bit bigger than where we were. And so after their show, we had a makeshift NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] club at the battalion. And we was able to get booze directly from Inchon. Actually, we had a truck that the corps general would send over to Inchon under orders and pick up steaks because it was an open port. You know, we had an NCO club that had drinks and everything else in it. Well they showed up, and Penny Singleton, I think, was in that group. I may be wrong on that.

DePue: Penny Singleton of *Blondie*?

Bentele: *Blondie*. Uh-huh. I think she was in that troupe. But anyway, there was about five: a couple or three women and two guys if I remember right, from the USO show. They come over to our makeshift NCO club which was a couple of squad tents put together to tell you the truth. It had a bar in it. Drinks were like, oh, twenty cents a drink. We had San Miguel beer, and Pabst. San Miguel was MacArthur's brewery down there in Manila, you know? And that stuff looked like it was made out of maple syrup. You know, the caps were all

rusted shut. Anyway, they stayed there for, oh, a couple of hours. And during the course of the evening Terry Moore had to go to outside to the bathroom. Well, all we had for a toilet was a piece of canvas strung around a couple of little short poles with a hole, you know? It wasn't really an outhouse. (laughs) Guys went down there to drink. They didn't really go down there to... And so anyway, myself and another sergeant, we said, "Well, we'd better escort you out there to show you what you got." So, we did. We took her outside and of course, it's blacker than hell. And we get out to the toilet and explain it to her. And I think she had a flashlight or something. And anyway, she couldn't because they wore jumpsuits that had a zipper that runs across them like this, down to their waist.

DePue: From the shoulder to the waist.

Bentele: From the shoulder across. Every USO show person or woman that I ever saw, when they were not on duty, they wore that. It was almost like a uniform. I guess maybe the Army made them wear it. It covered up everything, you know? (laughs) So she couldn't get that zipper undone. So I said, "Here, let me." So I unzipped her all the way down there and helped her peel off her shirt. So I can actually say I undressed Howard Hughes's girlfriend in the middle of a Korean night. (laughter) And I'll tell you the truth. I was at a convention in Washington, D.C., a few year back, and she was one of our speakers. Terry Moore is one of the people that, you know, identifies with the Korean War veterans. We were in this dining hall or reception room, and she had spoke up on the main dais, and I was back about the middle of the crowd. We was packed in there real tight. And when she was talking about her experiences in Korea, she mentioned the fact that it was difficult and she had to have help to go to the bathroom. And I'm setting back there at this table. I said, "God dang, she remembers that!" Anyway, by the time I struggled through the crowd and everything like that, she had already gone out the door. So I never got to see her. So one of these days I 'm going to have to get ahold of Terry Moore and, you know, see if she still remembers. She mentioned it on the stage. I said, "Son of a bitch! Here I am," you know. (laughs)

DePue: One of the better memories you have from Korea, huh?

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: I think you also mentioned you had a chance to go on R&R. Tell us about that.

Bentele: Yeah, well actually I was real lucky. I went on three R&Rs, and a lot of guys didn't even get one. But most generally, all the guys that wanted to go on R&R, they got one R&R. And sometimes two if you were over there an extended period of time, which I was. Very few guys got to go on three. I'll tell you how I got to go on three. Well, my first R&R was to Kokura, Japan, which is kind of on the middle way of the main island there in Japan, south of Yokohama. It's not called Kokura now, but the Kokura Province. But that's

where we went. Flew out of Ch'unch'on. And you went by truck over to Ch'unch'on. They could land the bigger aircrafts there at Ch'unch'on like a C-47. And the funny thing about flying in a C-47—of course the war was still going on—they give you parachutes and told you how to use them and everything else, and you wore a parachute. I guess they figured if they got shot down, you could bail out.

We go to Kokura, and of course, I went with two other guys in my squad. One of them was named Matthews, and he was from Green, Alabama. A big old lanky boy. Another guy was from Springfield, Missouri, named King. Well, King had been over there once before. He said, "Don't get in any cab when you come out on that main drag." Of course when you first get over there, they feed you a steak dinner. Now you've got to remember, we'd been over there several months. We'd never seen anything as big as a doghouse. I mean, there's no buildings where we were at. It was really strange. You know, you think, "God, look at this." In Japan, it's better than stateside, really. And of course, the first thing they do is take you into the mess hall. You get to eat as many steaks as you want. A lot of guys ate two. A few of us ate three. They were small T-bone steaks. I remember that Japanese boy looked at us guys that was eating three steaks like, "My God, don't get close to them. They'll eat us, too."

DePue: Were you one of those people?

Bentele: I ate a good part of that third steak. (laughs) The only fresh meat I'd seen since well, when we shipped out of Seattle. Because they don't have fresh meat on the troop ships and none in the mess halls. So that was the first fresh meat that you actually had seen, you know? Anyway, they actually give us our uniforms. You got five days. And they cash your money and change it into yen. Three hundred and sixty yen to a dollar is what the exchange rate was then. You could buy a quart of good beer for about fifty yen. So you see you didn't have to have much money. You know, the exchange rate was fabulous.

We made Japan rich, by the way. We spent a lot of money over there. Everybody spent everything they had. I knew guys that come back from R&R—didn't even have their uniform. They had sold it too. Your shoes and everything else. What are they going to do to you? Send you to Korea? (laughs) You know? They come back wearing a towel or a kimono. I've seen them do that. And anyway, after we got our uniforms and money and everything else, they didn't allow any pimps or anything else on the main street coming out of the R&R camp. But boy, once you hit the main drag out there, it was like a swarm of flies. The cabs, the rickshaw boys, the pimps, whores—everybody just descended on you like that. "You've got to come to my place." They was all trying to get you to go to their place. King said, "Don't get in one of these cabs. They'll take you right to a whorehouse." Well I said, "Well where in the hell else do you want to go?" (laughter) So anyway, we got in the cab. The shoeshine boys would sneak up behind you and smear a

bunch of shit on your shoe and then say, "GI, GI! Dirty shoe, dirty shoe! Me shine!" Well he just put the shit there! They would pick your pocket—do anything, you know, that they could get by with.

Anyway, so we got in the cab. Sure enough, bingo. Right over to the nearest cathouse—a big bar. They had as much as a hundred gals in there. And they unloaded. Here they all come. All crawled in the car together, and they'd actually drag you out. Just drag you into the place is what happens. You ain't got much choice. We set down there. Well actually, everybody had something to drink, and King would send every gal the old gal sent over to him away. "No, no." He was married, by the way. "No." I mean, me and Matthews wasn't married. And so the old Japanese madam, thought he didn't like any of them. So she brought out her whole troupe of about fifty girls and lined them up. Said, "You pick! You pick!" Well, he got up and walked out of the place. (laughs) So we did too. So anyway, we ended up in this little R&R hotel which you could rent for a week's time for a little or nothing. And the fun started. So I won't go any further than that, but we had a hell of a time. (laughs) Then I go back from Kokura.

My next R&R was Tokyo. That's when Edmund (the old master sergeant from World War I) went with me, the first one. Now he knew where to go. He'd been over in Japan many times. And he had a little R&R hotel called the Moray. I'll never forget it. It was right downtown in Tokyo and it was a Japanese prince's home before the war. Beautiful landscaped gardens. A small hotel. I think only about thirty or forty guys stayed there. He had some way of getting in there, and that's where we stayed. But you could walk out of the main gate, and you were just almost downtown Tokyo. And you never knew it. Beautiful place. They took care of you and everything else. You needed a good place like that to go to and keep your stuff, and you went out on the town otherwise. That was my twenty-first birthday, and I spent it on Ginza Street in Tokyo. You've heard of Ginza Street, haven't you?

DePue: Right.

Bentele: Well it was the main thoroughfare for everything, just like Broadway or Times Square. And anyway, the day started out on my twenty-first birthday with the first thing Brown always wanted to do. We had to go down to Rocker 4 Club which was the NCO club PX.

DePue: The Rocker meaning the stripes on the insignia?

Bentele: Yeah, Rocker 4. And you had to have four stripes that were three up and one down to get in there. And they had a big PX that sold everything. I mean everything that you would want. Well, Brown had to go down there. We'd always buy a case of Old Forester and take it back to the hotel room. Now of course, he's in his sixties. He's not interested in chasing the girls. Well you didn't have to chase them over in Japan. (laughter) You had to run from them.

We always took a case of Old Forester back to the room so we could have something to nip on back there. Anyway, so we go down on the morning of my birthday. They had another place called the Tokyo Onsen which was a big family Turkish bath. Have you ever had one of those Turkish baths with the Japanese girl that gets up on and walks on your back? Have you ever had one of them?

DePue: No.

Bentele: You've got to do that. Put that on your bucket list. Anyway, (laughs) we went to the Tokyo Onsen. And it was actually a family hot bath, and a big pool. I mean, you had to ease down there because the water would just about boil you. And it'd be whole families. I mean, completely naked. You went in and there wasn't no screwing around there. You went in, and they massaged you, and the girls that took care of you—they took your clothes, hung them up, and everything. They'd press them and clean them for you if you wanted them to, while you was in there. And then they would put you into a steam cabinet. Now you're completely naked. Everything gone. And you set in the steam cabinet for a while. It really feels good, by the way, those old steam cabinets. And then you went out to the pool. There were several pools. And there would be Japanese families with their kids and everything else in there, all of them completely naked. And you'd ease down into the pool. The temperature of the water had to be well over a hundred degrees. I mean it was damned near boiling, let's put it that way. But once you got in it, it was really great. After you got through soaking in that for a while, they took you out and you got on the massage table. Now these gals were expert on massaging. I mean they would massage you, and then they had a rail on the ceiling above you. Of course, they're small. We're big. They would get up on the table and use their feet to walk on you and massage your back. Oh man, I'll tell you what. I'd almost walk to Tokyo to get that. But that's what they would do. And then when you got done, they would do everything for you. If you had a mustache or anything else, they trimmed it all up. Trimmed your hair if you wanted it. You didn't even have to dress yourself. They done a manicure on your nails—trimmed your nails. Done everything. I mean, you were like a new dollar when you come out of there. And they would dress you. I mean they'd put your clothes on you. Put your sock, tie your shoes, tie your tie—dress you completely up, completely. I think all for about twenty bucks.

DePue: I don't know if you can get much of a contrast from living up front in the cold—

Bentele: Oh, God.

DePue: —and then going to something like that.

Bentele: Anyway, that started the day out. And so then we went over to the beer hall. There was a big old beer hall there at the head of Ginza Street that if you

knew about it, everybody went to that beer hall because the beer was cold, and it was cheap. It had three floors. I remember that. Well, I run into an Australian soldier, a soldier from Scotland, and one from New Zealand. And of course, they don't get money, hardly. You know, we were wealthy compared to them. And they always had to stay back at their camp because they couldn't afford to stay in a hotel. They had a camp near Tokyo. They all bussed out to it and everything else. Well, they decide to help me celebrate my birthday the right way. So we started drinking. I could drink Nippon beer. Now it was 18 percent beer. And I could drink Nippon beer all day long. I'd get to a certain level and never get drunk, or it didn't seem like it. You know, some guys just went (makes sound of falling flat

So about middle of the afternoon I called up the old sarge, and I said, "Bring a couple of bottles of Old Forester down here and give these guys a good drink of American whiskey." So he come down to have a few drinks with us and celebrate my birthday. Of course, by that time we were well on the way. (laughter) I mean, well on the way. So they decide they was going to take me to every joint on Ginza Street. Well that's impossible. There's too many joints. (laughs) Anyway, we start down Ginza Street, drunker than shit. Now GIs on R&R during the war, you could just about do anything you wanted to do in Japan. They didn't say anything to you whatsoever. I mean, you could do anything. And guys done anything too. They thought it was a big sport at one time. They would grab these Japanese businessmen that would be all dressed up, and they had a lot of canals in downtown Tokyo. You know, they cross the street, they'd grab them on those bridges and throw them over in the canal. (laughs) I'm telling you, it was like a Roman orgy. That's the only way I can describe it. Mixed up with a Woodstock, you know? (laughter) I mean, guys just went nuts. But they put a stop to that. I think one of those guys drowned, and, you know, they put a stop to that. (laughs)

The time I was over there on the second R&R, the war was over. And they were tightening down what you could get away with. They still left you alone, but you couldn't rampage, in other words. (laughs) And anyway, so we started down Ginza Street, and where I lost these guys, I don't know. But anyway, some little Japanese gal got a hold of me. Anyway, I ended up out in the outskirts of Tokyo in the residential district. Of course, it's probably all different now. But these were places with the little huts and the little narrow streets just about this wide between them.

DePue: Just about three feet wide?

Bentele: Oh, yeah. Just like you was in a maze. I mean, hell, I didn't have any idea where I was. You know, I woke up in the morning—"Where in the hell am I?" I mean, I still had my billfold, and I was still alive. (laughter) Anyway, they took care of me. Took me out to the bus stop. Got me on the right bus to downtown Tokyo. So I survived it. But I'll tell you what, No one's ever had a

twenty-first birthday like that. I guarantee you. (laughter) A lot of it I don't even want to mention.

DePue: You mean, they didn't hear some of the stuff? Holy cow!

Bentele: Oh, God, no. The way I got on third R&R was, they had a slot open. And nobody was going to take it up. Well, you had to have money for one thing. And so I said I'll take it. And so I got on that third R&R. Going to Tokyo, you flew out of Yong Dong Po on a C-124, and you ended up in Tachikawa Air Force Base in Tokyo where you landed.

DePue: And the Yong Dong Po is Seoul's airport?

Bentele: Right across the Han River from Seoul. Big airport. Now when I talked about the C-47s and the parachute, a C-124 even to this day is a huge airplane. I mean, if you're in the Wright museum over at the Air Force Museum in Dayton, take a look at it. It's as big as that Globemaster is now. I mean, triple decks in it. I mean, a big clamshell front. That sucker had four engines and stubby wings. Didn't look like it would fly. But that was a workhorse airplane. It hauled tons of stuff in there and still put two hundred men upstairs. And no parachute. Well you couldn't have gotten out of the damn airplane anyway. I mean, this plane was humongous. But anyway, you never got a parachute. You just got on there and rode. So anyway, anytime you went to Tokyo, that's what you went in. Anyway, I went on this R&R. Now I didn't do any messing around because if you was within three months of rotating back to the States, you didn't get to go on R&R in case you come down with (laughter) some kind of disease. You know, there wasn't time enough to cure you. They didn't want to send you back to the States in a diseased state. That's the reason.

Anyway I was within a few weeks of rotating back. So I went on R&R, and this time I never done anything but sightsee. Bought my sister the china. Made a call home. I actually put in a call over in Tokyo and called the house. Now the way they done that then was the overseas Trans-Pacific Telephone Service. And they way they done it is, you went down to the telephone office, and you placed your order and your telephone number, and you was calling the States. And they informed you when to come. You had to wait maybe a day. Then they would get ahold of you and say, "Come down. We're going to have your call at such-and-such a time." Five dollars a minute, and that was a lot of money back then. I think it was sixty dollars. In order to get my brothers and sisters and everybody there at the time I was going to call, Bell Telephone called ahead of time and said, "You know, your soldier is going to call at this such-and-such a time." And they were all there, so I got to talk to my parents and brothers and sisters. And I think I spent sixty or sixty-five dollars for that one phone call.

DePue: That would have bought a lot of beer at the time.

Bentele: Oh, yeah. Anyway, I wasn't partying on this trip. I was sightseeing. I went through the Imperial Palace, the parts you could. Went to the Imperial Hotel. Went around and saw Tokyo sober. (laughter) And I actually had a good time. But anyway, flying back to Korea, I had another little escape at Tachikawa Air Force Base. They were still flying B-17s out of there. You'd see a B-17 every now and then take off—a real odd sight. You know, it looked like it was all propellers. And anyway, we was flying back in this C-124. (laughs) Me and this other sergeant was setting there, and we was discussing whether that damn thing would fly on two engines, you know. He said, "Well, we're going to find out, because that one's quitting." We looked out the porthole, and sure enough, one of the engines on the starboard side had oil running out of it, and the pilot was feathering the prop on that engine. So we had just got over the coast of Korea. And then, what he done, he killed the other engine on the other side to balance the airplane up so he'd have an engine on each side. Well, I'll tell you the truth. Time we got to Seoul, which is about a hundred miles further, we was down in the Han Valley. If those bridges that's there today were there then, we wouldn't have made it. He'd have hit those bridges. We were coming in on a real long glide. And he landed that up on the upper end of the Yong Dong Po airstrip which is probably a mile long. It's a big airport. Man, we rolled the whole length of the runway because he reversed propellers, but he didn't have enough power there to actually slow it down that much. And he actually ended up dropping the nose. We would have lost the end of the runway into the sand. You know, and we was kind of laughing about it. You know, we wasn't worried. Hell, here's the damn airplane. Let's see. I know he had a jeep down in the lower hold. He had at least ten tons of mail throwed on there. And a bunch of us guys in the top layer. And I'll never forget this. There was a major flying the airplane. And when he opened up the hatches, well they all come out in the jeep. This one guy hollered up to him. He knew him. And he says, "Hey, you didn't do so good, did you?" And this major was flying this trip to get his air time in. You know, they got extra money if they flied so much. And that was his airtime. And I said, "You know, you damn near ditched us." You know, but those things happen. Yeah.

DePue: Well, you're here, sitting here, talking about it today, so...

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: Did you get any injuries while you were there?

Bentele: Oh, just the usual bumps and scrapes that you get when you're climbing poles, you know? But other than that, no combat injuries.

DePue: How about any special medals or citations while you were there?

Bentele: Well now, I did get several letters of commendation and citation. One of them in particular had to do with an installation. I'll describe this. The airstrip at X Corps was redone and widened and lengthened to get bigger and better

airplanes. And this was after the ceasefire. Of course, they was realigning all the tents—putting them in nice rows and policing everything up. Well, the commander of the airstrip wanted a speaker system put in and new telephone service. Of course now, our central office is over this way, and the Han River is over this way, and the airstrip is between the two. So the way I had to get cable in there—and this is a true story. (laughs) It's real funny. I've got a picture of this little dog in here too. One of the guys had a little puppy he had picked up and kept. And anyway, there was an iron pipe about eight inches thick that went underneath the airstrip all the way to the other side. And I had to get cable over there to improve the commander's communications. I couldn't go around the end of that airstrip. And all they were running over there was field wire buried kind of in the ground in the runway. So I had to put some cable over there. It was—hell I don't know—a hundred yards through this tube over there. So I got the little puppy dog. Got this guy that was his master down at the other end of the pipe. And we tied a real thin cord, like fish cord, around the dog's collar and shut him in the pipe and had this guy start hollering for him over at the other end. (laughter) And actually, that little dog run right through that pipe, the first run. He went straight through it, just like an arrow. And he actually ended up running out over there. And then we took the fish cord, and we pulled through a rope, and then we pulled through the cable. (laughs) Anyway, we get over there, and I rewired this guy all up. Fixed him up with a fancy phone service and everything else. And put his speaker system in and the whole bit.

Well, he sent me a nice letter of commendation to the company commander. And the company commander gave me another commendation. And I got one when I got out of the service down here when they have the corps general. I'll tell you, this was after the war ended. Of course, the Army has to rebuild. I think it was General White. The engineers and him built this mess hall where he wanted to be able to welcome dignitaries. The Senators started popping up over there. You know, the war was over and they wanted to get their overseas trips in. And they had a lot of dignitaries, so he wanted a nice place to feed them, you know? They had plenty of those round rocks in Korea, and they built everything out of them. The engineers and the Koreans built this nice big rock mess hall. I mean, it was elaborate with a big, big conference table down the middle of it—dining table. Well, they wanted communications put in there—telephone particularly. So I devised this jack box, and I'd seen this before so it wasn't anything I'm inventing. It was just that I had to make the damn thing. Had a woodworker. A carpenter made me some boxes and put telephone jacks in it. And so I had those installed in the wall all the way around the dining table—about four on each side. They had Army stewards, the cooking people, in white jackets and everything else, you know. I wired it up so that all the stewards had to do when a call come in for whoever was there—the general, or colonel, or whoever—was just take the phone with the cord with the plugging end of it, and go around to where the officer was, and set it down in front of him, and reach over the wall, and (makes sound of plugging in) jack it into the telephone system. They'd get

their call setting right there. Boy, they thought that was really nice. Well, it was. (laughs) That really impressed the hell out of them. And I got a nice commendation out of that there.

DePue: You had talked about this a little bit before, but Korea is really the first war for the United States military that you had an integrated Army. Any reflections on how that went?

Bentele: Well, I'll tell you. I had a black platoon sergeant when I got over there. Damn, I can't remember his name—Peterson, or something like that. Anyway, he was a good guy, and he was a career sergeant. He done his work, and he was a good guy. And when I was a platoon sergeant, I selected a black kid from South Philadelphia named Roosevelt Palmer, and he was my assistant platoon sergeant. I've got pictures of him in here—a tough guy. I mean, a really tough old South Philly black guy. In fact, there was a guy from Georgia that challenged him up there after he got his sergeant. He was an old Southern hillbilly. And Palmer said, "All right, let's go." Took him out, and they went out in the brush behind the camp and had at it. And Palmer beat the crap out of this guy. And next morning when I heard about him (his head was swelled up and everything) I went up around to the guy from Georgia and said, "What do you want to do here?" You know of course, Palmer took his old classic: "Take my shirt off. I'm no longer a sergeant." And the guy from Georgia said, "Nothing. He beat me fair and square." But I was lucky. And one of the reasons I picked Palmer was that he had the respect of all the black guys that knew him, and the white guys too. And he was pretty much fair with everybody. The blacks had a tendency at that time to group together, and they would play their music and what we'd call (laughs) the old slang word "jungle bunnies" then, you know? And when they got all grouped together, they reverted back to their black neighborhoods. Sorry to say, but they did. I mean, I'm just speaking the truth. But Palmer would never let that happen. Once he found out that there was a bunch of them got together in the tent by themselves, he wanted them to stay dispersed. He would actually go in there and tell them, "Look, you guys break this up. Get back in your own tents with everybody else. I ain't going to have any of this." And he wouldn't let them do that. And he would spread them out, so that was about the only thing I would say. And like I say, there was only a few of them that were trained as operators that could do it. I don't know whether they didn't take the effort in school to do it, but there was not too many of them that were technicians. And so we used them as guards, truck drivers—you know, stuff like that. But there was a few that could do it, but I don't know whether that was their fault, or the schools didn't take the time to train them.

DePue: You didn't have any direct dealing with the enemy it sounds like. But what was the general impression you and other soldiers you served with had of the Chinese and the North Korean soldier?

Bentele: They were good. I mean, let nobody kid you. It was a popular saying, "They weren't laundry men." They were good soldiers, particularly early on. The Chinese wasn't volunteer. They sent their best troops over there. And it was a good training ground for them. And they were fearless. You know, they'd give up their lives. And the North Koreans were vicious. You know, none of them were pantywaists, let's put it that way. I think that's what surprised a lot of the American soldiers. They had this idea that, you know, we were best. So I had a lot of respect for them.

DePue: How about some of the civilian population? Compared to the guys who were in the frontline units, you were moving around in the countryside quite a bit more and probably saw some of the South Korean people more.

Bentele: Well, yeah. Of course at that time they were still a very Third World country. And I remember this one area back behind us there where we used to go to make radio tests. It was as primitive as you could get. You very seldom ever seen a piece of iron in the farm grounds. And this is where the houses and the barns were together. Animals and people lived in the same building—very primitive. And they had areas like that all over. And of course, we had contact with a few of them through the KSCs, that's Korean Service Corps, you know, where they put the men that were too old to combat or too lame or whatever. They put them in the Service Corps, and you could go down there, and you could check out a hundred men just like you would slaves. I mean, you know, "I want a hundred men." Load them up and take them. And you work them all day long doing whatever, and, you know, that was how they served. I actually had a Korean houseboy that was part Japanese—his mother was Japanese—that I used as an interpreter. He could speak pretty good English. Our chaplain picked him up with some other war orphans about 1952, and they stayed with the battalion all the way through to the end. And I used him as an interpreter. He could speak Japanese and English pretty well. Mainly it was cuss words he used. (laughter) And naturally, Korean. But he was a real sharp kid, about twelve years old. And he could just about do anything. Best poker player I ever saw. (laughter) And in fact, I was lucky enough when I made a return visit to Korea that I was able to get a hold of him and met him in Seoul for a reunion. He was living in Seattle, Washington, running Korean tourist groups. I think that's where he still is. Can you imagine that? Twelve years old when I left over in Korea, and I've got pictures of him also. And I was able forty-three years later to find him.

DePue: That is amazing.

Bentele: I think I was the only one that ever done it.

DePue: Did you have any KATUSAS working with your unit? Korean augmentees?

Bentele: No, unh-uh. See, like I told you, there wasn't any Koreans in the support troops. They didn't have any. They had no Signal Corps, engineers—you

know, they didn't have anybody like that. So we had to train them. In fact, that's what we started doing right after the ceasefire. We set up a training camp and selected South Korean soldiers that wanted to learn the communications. And we run regular cycles through our training camp. I had two sergeants and two corporals over there as instructors. And they went through a training camp just like we went through. We tried to set it up just like the training schools in the States to teach them the basics about wire communications.

DePue: Did you find them to be receptive students?

Bentele: Well, we kind of picked them. I mean, we went to the units, and there were guys that would volunteer for that. Well then I had Little Joe [the Korean interpreter], and I'd say, "Ask them this question." And we would ask them questions: What kind of schooling did they have? How far did they go in school? Did they have arithmetic? Did they have any science? We actually found out, and we selected the ones that had went to school, and we found a few of them. And that's how we done it.

DePue: How well did they take to the training?

Bentele: Well, they took real good to it. And I used to take them down in the villages and have them wire up villages for telephone service. And then we'd just leave it. They liked that. That was working in their own country. I had all kinds of material left over at the end of the war I had to get rid of. So I'd just go down to these villages and have them wire up a whole village and run wires everywhere. We would put in a telephone and leave them.

DePue: You were there for several months after the armistice started.

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: How did conditions for you and American troops change?

Bentele: Well, they changed a lot better. Like I said, they started to align up all the tents and make it more military. And we had all new vehicles at that time. We had better food. I mean, you know, they started getting a little more different kind of food. We had more shows. Of course, you're getting more Army way.

DePue: How quickly did the Army start sending American troops home?

Bentele: Well, there was continual rotation. That never changed.

DePue: There would be troops who were arriving and leaving?

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: But were they sending some divisions home?

Bentele: Well now, I didn't know of any divisions leaving there when I was there. Not whole divisions—parts of them were sent. But they still had the replacement system and the pipeline from the States. And there were still troops coming over to replace the ones that were there—maybe not as many. And there was continually troops going back through the repo system. In fact, when I rotated back, you didn't know exactly when you was going to go. One day the truck showed up, and they said, "Your name's on the list. Get on that truck." And so you had enough time to go around and say goodbye to everybody. And I remember I had a working Russian burp gun I'd picked up on the battlefield. I had a Russian carbine that was issued for the Chinese because it had a short stock. And I had one .45 pistol and another .45 nickel-plated pistol I'd picked up from somebody that rotated. Couldn't take them back—or at least they said, "Don't even attempt it. When you get to Ascom City, they'll take them away from you." I really thought about trying to take them. I would love to have had that Russian burp gun. I would today. They're worth thousands of dollars today. (laughs) I had fired it. It was, you know, in good working order. And had the drum, you know? And when I walked out, well, I put the burp gun, the two rifles, the two pistols—threw them down on my bunk and turned around and walked out the door and got on the truck. So whoever found them, got them.

DePue: "Ascom City"?

Bentele: Yeah, that was up by Inchon.

DePue: That sounds like an acronym. Is it?

Bentele: No, it's not. That's actually a Korean name. Ascom City. A-s-c-o-m. And you can look it up on the map. It's right there at Inchon. Anyway, that's where everybody went, and we'll start there on the way back. Anyway, we knew that the X Corps and the Fourth Signal was going to go back stateside soon. I mean, I didn't know exactly when.

DePue: So the entire unit then would be redeployed?

Bentele: Yeah, well, the flag.

DePue: Okay.

Bentele: They left the unit, the people over there, and dispersed them out. What they called moving the unit. Just the flag of X Corps goes. It's in Fort Riley, Kansas. And Fourth Signal was disbanded after a while. In fact, talking to the guys that was there, that happened about two months after I left. But I had to turn in all my TO&E, which is Table of Organization and Equipment. And so I had turned in everything that I was supposed to have that was on my TO&E list, all the equipment, all the weapons. We also had four Browning shotguns—automatics—in our weapons arsenal. A lot of people don't know that we used shotguns over there too. A lot of troops did. In trench warfare,

they're the best thing you could have. (laughs) And anyway, we used them to shoot birds. There was a lot of pheasants over there. Yeah. Anyway, we had all the weapons we were supposed to have. All the equipment for telephones, switchboards, repairing them, everything that we had in there. I turned it all in. I still had two tents full of material setting there. (laughs) I even asked the commander, "What am I going to do with this?" Of course, there was a black market where you could have sold it. He said, "Whatever." I had two tents full of stuff, and I just walked away and said, "That's the next guy's worry." (laughs) You know, "The hell with it."

Anyway, we just had a big beer party. The whole battalion had a big going away party, more or less about, oh, two or three days before I rotated. And I mean, a big party. Everybody, you know, was there. And we had ice. Very seldom you would ever get ice, but we had ice from down in the engineer outfit. Beer, everything. Music. And so we had a big party. Had beer left over too. We had four of us rotating back. Two of the guys I had come over on the ship with. One of them was Schumer, the motor-pool sergeant. And so we took one of the duffel bags and took all of the clothes out of it and put the clothes over in everybody else's duffel bag. And we took beer cans, and we lined them up in this one duffel bag. And I don't know how many cases you could get in a duffel bag, but it was so damn heavy you could hardly pick it up. A lot of beer. So we started drinking beer when we left, and we left a trail of beer cans all the way across Korea, because you had to go clear across Korea to get to Ascom City. And we still had a little beer left when we got to Ascom City.

When you get to Ascom City, you end up going through the clothing exchange. Of course, they didn't want you taking any bugs back to stateside with you. And the hemorrhagic fever was carried by a parasite—very dangerous. (laughs) It's almost like the Black Plague. You ever study hemorrhagic fever? Oh, boy. You get that, you either do two things: You die, or you get better. There ain't no in between. And generally, you died. You would hemorrhage on the inside. Blood would come out of your ears, your eyes, your skin. You'd just hemorrhage to death. They figured it was borne by living on the ground and by vermin—mice or rats—just about like the Black Plague. And so anyway, in Ascom City you stayed in the barracks up there. In the morning you'd go down to process. You roll your bedding up. Now you could have left any amount of weapons up there. I don't think they inspected it because there was some guys went down and didn't come back. And they were there when I come back, and they said, "Nobody's been around." I could have stuck my burp gun in the mattress and carried it out. Anyway, we go down. They've got a clothing exchange, a big building, and you started at one end. Your cap goes in one bin. Your shirt goes in another. Your pants in another one. Your shoes in another one. Your socks in another one. When you get to the end, well, they start giving you your clothes back—the fresh clothes. They took everything—even your duffel bag which you never get rid of in the service. I had the same duffel bag I went in the service with. You know, it

went all that way. In fact, I even argued. I said, you know, I had my name painted on that, and everything else on there. I said, "I want to keep that." They said, "No, you can't." I had one little cartridge case (I've still got it) that my dad had in World War I. That's how I kept all these loaders. I kept them stacked up in that little leather cartridge case. And they took even your shaving gear because guys would hide stuff in the bottom of the shaving pouch. This cartridge case was made out of leather, about that thick. And I said, "I'm going to tell you: You'll have to fight me for this." And I told them the story behind it. And they let me keep it. (laughs) Anyway, when you come out the other end, you had all new gear—everything. Shaving kit, everything. Duffel bag, new clothes, the whole bit. They sewed your chevrons on. Everything else that you had. And you went back up to your barracks to wait for shipment out to the ship.

And so anyway, that's when I found out, hell, I could have kept a weapon up there because they never looked in your gear again. Never. All the way back—clear back to Macon, Missouri. Nobody ever inspected you again. That was it. One inspection was it.

Anyway, it processed pretty fast because they had the ship waiting out there—the *Weigel* was the name of it. No, the *General Pope*. I'm sorry. It was the *General Pope*. The *Weigel* was the one when we went to Inchon. And we done the same thing. Only by that time they had already built a wharf way out into the mudflat, clear to low tide, that you walked out on. I mean, that damn wharf would float up during the high tide, and you would walk about, oh hell, at least a quarter of a mile or further to get to the LST, then you loaded onto the ship. And coming back, it was the quietest ride you ever saw. The whole Pacific was just as calm—just a slight swell in it. I was thankful for that, because I didn't get seasick. But I forget exactly how long it took from Inchon. It seemed like about fifteen days—something like that.

DePue: Was the *General Pope* your standard troop ship?

Bentele: Yeah, it was a two-stacker—a pretty good ship. And knowing the trouble the guys from Vietnam and the guys from Iraq and Afghanistan now face when they come back I always have maintained that they don't have that transition time. You fly back. You fly everywhere you go now. You get picked up, and within a few hours you're back stateside. That's too quick for combat guys. One thing, you have to learn how to adjust your thinking and your language and everything else. And riding back on a troop ship gives you that time. I think that's the best thing in the world. You're a different person when you get off than you was when you got on. And I think it all has to do with that long ship ride. I really think that there was a lot of benefit to that.

DePue: Where did you make port?

Bentele: In San Francisco. Now you got to look at the other side of the bridge. Coming back, they landed us at Treasure Island. Of course, we had a bunch of Marines on there too. And they got off on Treasure Island; that's their base. They got off on the starboard side of the ship. And they had bands and all sorts of hoopla. You knowhow the Marines do. And I mean the families were welcoming them and everything else there. Of course, that was a Marine base, you know? And the soldiers we unloaded on the other side in ferries. And then they took us up to Camp Stoneman. And of course, when we got off at Stoneman, it was getting pretty dark and pretty late in the day. They processed us at Stoneman, and it was just another repo depot where they processed the troops. There was nothing. I mean, nobody there. (laughs) Nothing. You know, even the people that was going to stay in San Francisco, they didn't meet their people there. They processed us through there real fast and put us on a Southern Pacific train, a passenger train.

I had to go to Fort Carson, Colorado. And I remember one of the first stops. We had Pullmans. Of course, it was two nights over there. The black porters on there, they come prepared. All of them had two or three cases of half-pints of whiskey they were selling. And they weren't holding us up on it. I mean, they made a buck or two off of each of them. But they had two or three great big cases of half-pints setting in each car. And they all sold it for—I think it was less than five bucks. You know, pretty reasonable. You could buy them then for about a buck and a half a half-pint. And so everybody had a drink. And we welcomed that. Anyway (laughs), the funny thing about it was the Southern Pacific goes through Las Vegas. Of course, Las Vegas at that time was just a little dusty out-of-the-way place. Well, they stopped there for either a crew change or something. And we were out of booze. Right across the way was a liquor store. So they said, "Who will run over there and get it?" I said, "Give me two or three guys to carry it. Give me your money." And away we went over to the liquor store and bought as much as we could grab out of there and loaded back up and headed back to the train. I told the porter, "Don't leave." (laugh) It was Las Vegas where we done that. Yeah.

Finally we got back to Camp Carson, and that's where they put us on our thirty-day leave. And then I had to go back to Carson to get orders where we was going to be stationed. They gave you a choice of where you can go. If you'd left an outfit, regular Army guys were supposed to get first choice of going back to that original assignment that you got levied out of if there was a space for you. So I said naturally, "Send me to Presidio, or San Francisco." They looked at me like, "You've got to be nuts." (laughter) I said, "That's where I came from. That's my assignment." They said, "Well, pick out something in the Fifth Army area because you're not going to Presidio." (laughs) I said, "What the hell?" And anyway—

DePue: You gave it a shot.

Bentele: Yeah. And so anyway, when I got to Fort Carson, they said, "Well, pick out any camp in the Fifth Army area, and if there's space, you can go there." Well, I picked out every camp except Fort Leonard Wood, and that's where they sent me.

DePue: But that's the Army way, isn't it? (laughter)

Bentele: Yeah. But anyway, I get on thirty-day leave out of Colorado Springs and take the train to Kansas City and take the train home to Macon. Now I hadn't written home for probably, oh, at least three months because I was busy. There was nothing to write about, and I knew I was going to be rotating. I didn't know exactly when. So I didn't want them to think I was being back. When you're a rotation back, you ain't got time to write. I mean, hell, you're moving all the time. So I get off the train in Macon. You ever been over to Macon, Missouri? It was about four or five thousand then, a small town. Grew up there. Anyway, I take a cab. Of course, they were all excited. I'm in full uniform. I go home and walk in—about the middle of the day. Nobody's at home. I mean, Mom didn't work, and Dad's, out working. But with nine brothers and sisters, there was always somebody home. Of course, there was not that many of us at home then, but there was still half a dozen at least. And it was summertime. School was out. Not a soul. So the lady across the street was good friends. Her name was Frances Creek, I think. Yeah. Anyway, she come running over, "My God, you're home!" You know, and everything like that. I said, "Well, where's everybody at?" And so she said, "Well, your mom's up at the hospital with Carolyn" (my youngest sister). And she says she's got nephritis or something serious, and Mom's up at the hospital with her. I said, "Okay. I'll call a cab." She says, "Oh no, I'll take you." So she got her car and away we went up to the hospital—same hospital still standing. And I walk in the door, and of course, everybody in Macon knew who I was. Like I say, in full uniform. So I said, "What room is Mom in?" They told me up the stairs and to the right. So I go up there, and all these nurses follow me up. (tearfully) This is hard to say. (laughs) Anyway, I walk in, and Mom was over on the other side of the room with Carolyn in bed. And I say, "What's going on here?" Mom turned around and looked at me, and she said, "Well Norbert, can't you see that Carolyn's sick?" (laughter) And then she caught herself. (pause) Anyway, then she, you know, welcomed me home. I've got a mental picture of the neighbor and the nurses behind me saying, "What the hell?" (laughs)

DePue: Well, that's a funny story as well as a very moving story for you.

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: I imagine that was quite a night too, once you got everybody home.

Bentele: Yeah, it was. Sorry about that. Anyway, and then I get back right after my thirty-day leave. I buy a car and drive out to Fort Carson, Colorado, and they

assign me back to Ford Leonard Wood, so I drive all the way back here to Fort Leonard Wood. Well, I'm assigned to the A Company, First Platoon Sergeant of the 314th Signal Battalion. The story behind that is that the 314th was the signal battalion for the Eighty-ninth Division in the First World War which my dad was in. So anyway, I'm down there as cadre. And the first duties I get was I'm supposed to take about twenty-five of our guys from battalion (of course, there's other guys too—the engineers and stuff like that) down to the State Fair at Sedalia and put on an exposition. We lived right there. Put up the tents. Had a mess hall. Had mess cooks. That's the only time in the Army I ever had a bugler. We had a bugler even. You know, played mess call and all the other bugle calls none of us paid any attention to. And you know, we showed the equipment off and how the Army lived and stuff like that. Well, that lasted for about two weeks.

I come back to the company, and we aren't there a week yet, and we get notified that the whole company is going to convoy out to Camp Hale, Colorado—which is right on top of the Continental Divide—all winter long for the Mountain and Cold Weather Training exercise. Camp Hale is where the Tenth Mountain Division trained during the Second World War—ski troopers. And so they sent me and all the rest of the sergeants to take a crash course in convoying. And there was a lot more to it than you realize when you're going to move a hundred vehicles and two hundred men across this country. (laughs) It takes some planning. Also I went to demolition school so I could learn how to blow holes in the rock up there. So we was to build communication for this big ski-trooper exercise. They were afraid the Russians were going to come over the polar ice cap at that time, and they wanted to have troops trained for Mountain and Cold Weather Training. So we get all loaded up. I mean, we convoyed out there in segments of twenty-five vehicles at a time. The cooks even had a big range in the back end of a deuce-and-a-half, and they cooked on the run and made sandwiches and everything else. And we had fuel trucks. We had a trail officer that paid the claims that might be put against us. And in fact, my job was laying the damn route out. I had to find places to park all this stuff at noon and refuel and eat, and generally keep them safe. That was a hell of a job.

DePue: That sounds easy, but that was, I'm sure...

Bentele: Oh, God. I had a truckload of about thirty guys and a jeep. I'd head out about thirty minutes ahead of time, and wherever there was a railroad crossing—like Wichita, I had to get the police to escort us through town. And if there's a route change at an intersection, I had to put a guard there to direct the traffic. Otherwise, those guys would just drone off into the distance, you know? Your troops would be scattered everywhere. And that was a job. And I had to find a place at noon where we could drive the fuel trucks down the line of trucks to fuel them. And then also for the cooks to distribute food and water and whatever. And trying to find a place for a hundred trucks and that many men

to go to the bathroom. You couldn't just pull into a residential area and say, "Here, park here." (laughter)

We even camped out. The first camp out was in Kansas. It was in a school football field. We pitched pup tents and stayed in pup tents. The next night we stayed in Lamar, Colorado, in an old Air Force hangar—inside, but we still had to sleep on the concrete. And the next night we was in Camp Carson. Now Camp Hale had no buildings except a field house which we played basketball in. It got to forty-two below zero. The average temperature out there was in the thirty-below-zero range every day. You're up at fourteen thousand and some-odd feet. And you're working stringing wire, setting pole, and everything else you had to do. It was so cold in the mess hall, they couldn't even wipe the tables off. The rag would freeze on the table. Where they would keep the bread from really freezing like a rock, they put it in the cooler. That insulated it a little bit. Now we stayed in the field twelve hours at a time, and they'd feed us at noon out of thermite cans.

Now amazingly, you're up at that altitude, it's that cold, but you're not cold. I mean the sun is so warm on you, you're actually sunburned. And, you know, as long as you don't get wet—don't sweat, don't fall in the creek, because you'll freeze like a rock. And by the time you ate that sandwich, you know, the fresh bread would be froze by the time you got through eating it. That's the truth. You couldn't even boil water. Your mess kit, you know, had the burners in the fifty-five gallon drums that they have for sterilizing your mess kit. Usually you've got to have that water boiling. You couldn't boil water up there. There's no way you could boil. You could have fire on it all day long. You could stick your hand down in that water, and it'd be warm or between warm and hot. You couldn't boil it. No.

We had the only two horse outfits left in the service at that time—the Forty-Fifth Quartermaster pack and the Fourth Field Artillery pack. And they were up there training also, with pack mules. I actually served with the last two cavalry units.

DePue: Did you get any time off while you were there?

Bentele: Well, we worked eight days in a row, twelve hours a day, and they'd give us three-day passes to go anywhere we wanted to go. Now we'd pick out one of those ski resorts like at Glenwood Springs. Only rich people skied then. It was too expensive. And I mean, the gals in those ski resorts were wealthy. We'd show up over there with our uniforms on. Hell, we never had to buy nothing, you know? (laughter) You had to push them off of you, you know? Yeah. And that was the third winter now that I spent in a tent.

DePue: Which place was the coldest of those three places?

Bentele: Colorado. By far. And we worked up there. We worked hard. That was the only Mountain and Cold Weather Training command exercise they ever had. And the snow. When we got up there on the 3rd of September, it snowed three foot, the first snow up at the top of the mountain. Cooper Hill is a ski resort that's there now. It's about, oh, fifteen miles north of Leadville, Colorado, where Camp Hale is. Three foot of snow. And I said then, "You know, this is a pretty good snow." And they said, "Nah, there ain't nothing yet." Well, they were right. Ten foot of snow was nothing. It snowed. I mean, you couldn't believe the amount of snow that fell up there. Or course, they taught us how to ski. We learned the rudiments of skiing. You know, that was kind of fun. And we would go up with the vehicles as snowcats. We was building these lines up over Resolution Pass, another area up there, and we would take the snowcats where we was doing our work. We'd always take a couple of pairs of skis with us, and it would be a fifteen-mile run back down to the camp, and we'd ski down the road as we went back. So that was kind of neat, you know?

DePue: Well, for some reason I'm thinking I'm supposed to ask you about tending bar.

Bentele: Oh, yes. Well anyway, we were talking about R&R over in Japan. Leadville, Colorado, in the wintertime at that time of day was just as bad or worse. Of course, all of these troops that was up there were specialized troops. We had the cavalry units. We had what you call Special Forces now, but we didn't call them that back then. They were just specialized airborne, infantry, and everything else that were up there taking part in this exercise. Well, these are hot-blooded lads anyway. Well, then we got the cowboys that live up there. They ain't got anything else to do in the wintertime except come to town and drink. Then you got the local establishments and the miners. They were still doing a lot of mining in Leadville, particularly Climax, which is right north of town there—big moly [molybdenum] mine. I don't know how many thousand up there. Had miners, cowboys, and soldiers. (laughter) And whores. Now can you imagine? You'd get in the tavern—there were three of them we went to quite often. It was called the Silver Dollar. I'll tell you a story about the gal that owned that. I was running around with her a little bit. Her jealous boyfriend shot her right through here with a .38 pistol before he went to prison.

DePue: Right through the ribs?

Bentele: Right below her ribs. Didn't break any ribs. She had a bullet hole right through here. And she owned and operated the Silver Dollar there on the main street in Leadville, named after that old silver king: Taylor Street. Anyway, as a warning that she had better not mess around on him. Well, he was in the Carson City Prison. Well, I run around with her. I didn't know that. And she showed me that damn bullet wound, and I said, "What the hell?" And she said, "Oh, he shot me before he went to prison." You know, and I thought,

"Son of a bitch. Here I am..." (laughter) This guy, I know he's going to get out.

Anyway, you'd have to fight your way into the tavern. I mean actually, they'd be fighting. The cowboys, and the miners, and the soldiers would be fighting right outside the damn bar. I mean, in the street. And you'd have to push your way through the fight. Somebody would just walk up and smack you. And you fought while you was in the tavern and fought to get back out of the tavern. And there was two taverns down there together called the Pastime and the Pioneer. The Pioneer Club had a beautiful French rosewood bar and back bar that was taken up there during the Gold Rush and silver days, about 1870 or 1880, by horseback—by mule pack. Beautiful. I mean, it had big old round rosewood pillars clear to the ceiling. And it had all the wings and attachments that went with a fancy bar like that. She was offered almost a million dollars for that bar. Some guy down in Denver wanted it, and she wouldn't sell it. The legend was that the miners used to stand there, and there was about that big a gap from the ceiling down to that big round pillars that was the back bar.

DePue: Just a couple of inches.

Bentele: Yeah. And they'd throw gold coins up there. Everybody done that. You'd throw coins up there and bounce them into that gap. And don't tell how much we (laughter) throwed in there. Anyway, I got to know that gal that run that place too. And being as I was pretty husky, I didn't have nothing else to do. I'd help her tend bar, more or less to keep the soldiers in line too, you know? (laughs) They didn't mess with me too much. And anyway, I got to know her pretty good. And she'd pay me. And here's the funny thing about it. That place right there had a cathouse upstairs. It had about eight girls working in the cathouse. When they weren't whoring upstairs, they'd be downstairs waiting tables or setting there drinking with the soldiers and miners and everything else. Had a good friend of mine named Harvey Myer; he was off the Rosebud Indian Reservation. Big old Indian. And he was a good old boy. Anyway, we would run around together out there. You know, you pretty much had to take a buddy with you, (laughs) to pick your bloody remains up. Anyway, I remember when we had parked across the street, and we was walking into the bar. And these two miners—I'd estimate their age now at probably in their early thirties. Real good old husky boys. And they were whipping the shit out of about four soldiers right there in front of the place. I mean, two of them were taking on four easily. But when they got through with the four soldiers, we kind of watched them for a little bit. They dusted their hands off and walked into the bar to get a drink. And Harvey says, "We can take them. Let's jump them." I said, "You've got to be crazy. (laughs) I ain't about to." He says, "Jesus Christ. You want to buy those guys a drink." (laughter) Say, "Hey buddy," you know, "good fight," you know? Yeah, so the police out there did policing only when it really got serious. They all carried .45 revolvers on their hip. Now they weren't supposed to shoot you,

but surprisingly, if you run from them... This one soldier did. They had a trial going on for this one police officer. And instead of shooting at the soldier's legs, the officer plugged him right in the middle of the back and killed him deader than hell with the .45. But they all wore cowboy boots and carried .45 holstered, you know. One of them gave me a ticket for something—parking wrong, or something. Anyway, the gal who worked at the Silver Dollar Bar said, "Go over there to the miner's bar to that old judge." The municipal judge. She said, "He'll be over there drinking. Just go over and buy him a couple of drinks and tell him what your problem is." So that's what I did. I went over to the miner's bar, which was a smaller bar off the main drag there. And the old judge was in there about three-quarters drunk. So I bought him a couple of drinks and pulled out my ticket. And I said, "Your Honor, can you do me a little favor here?" I said, "I just got this ticket, and hell, you know soldiers don't make much money." And he looked at it and he said, "Aw, that goddamn guy is doing it again." He said, "Give me that goddamn ticket." So he wrote on there "paid and released" and everything else and handed it back to me. (laughter) That was the lives and times in Leadville.

DePue: Well, this sounds like right out of a 1950s western in fact.

Bentele: It was. It actually was that way. That's an old story. It was a donnybrook. It really was.

DePue: Well, let's get you back to Fort Leonard Wood.

Bentele: All right. After we done our stint up there, it was middle of March or late March when we left Camp Hale. Now we'd been up there all winter. We convoyed back the same way as we went out, laying the route out. Of course, it was pretty cold then coming across Kansas. And the funny thing about it, it's surprising how much in these small towns word gets around. When we pulled into, I think Limon, Colorado, which is not even today very big. It was a little bitty town. We pulled in there, and we were staying at the hangar out there. And sure enough, the bar owners had already transported a bunch of prostitutes in to set up camp. Just like that. They knew a hundred soldiers were coming and staying overnight. And they set up camp. It's amazing. Yep.

DePue: How much longer did you have after you returned to Fort Leonard Wood then?

Bentele: Well, here's what I did. We come back to Fort Leonard Wood. Everybody looked like they had been down in Florida all winter because we were burnt brown from the snow and the sun. And everybody was in damn good shape because the high altitude cuts every bit of fat off of you up there when you're working. I mean, it's really labor just to walk. And so everybody's in damn good shape. We get back to Fort Leonard Wood. We had missed the Army field test that the Army gives units to qualify them—the Army qualification test. So, guess what?

DePue: Just a physical-fitness test?

Bentele: No. The whole company goes out in the field and sets up camp and stays in the field for a week. And they assign you projects like building. My project was building a mile of pole line. And they just give me a coordinate on the map and the material, and say, "Here you go." And they judge you by the speed that you get it in how good it is. You know, it can't be just put together for speed, but it's got to work when you get done. And they have referees. They have the guys going around, you know, with the armbands and judging you. And they take part of your troops as wounded, and you can't use them. You know, it's a regular Army readiness test. And so the Captain Barr told me—he said, "Now, you're getting out at the end of this month." He said, "You don't have to go out there." But he said, "Boy, I'd sure like to have you." And I said, "Oh, I'll do it."

So we go out in the Army test, and like I say, my project was building this mile of pole line with everything in it—all the transpositions, the wires, the cable—everything had to be done complete. Well, I had a little trick up my sleeve. I had these line trucks then with a platform on top of them. But the platform on top of them with the railing would be just about the height of the cross arms on the poles. Well, I set my reels up and pulled the reels out with the vehicles in front of there. Run them up over the top of these big Army trucks, line trucks. And the guys wouldn't even have to climb poles. They could just stand right up there. The cross arm on the pole was just almost waist level. Had to do all their work while at the top of the truck. Had two of them going down each side of the pole line like that. And we finished that pole line in under four hours from start to finish. From the time they give me the coordinates, and I found where it was supposed to go—because I had to find it on the map—and started, and had these hole diggers. And by the time I got it in there, I built that mile of pole in less than four hours. And the inspectors come by, and they said, "Yeah, this guy just slopped it together." Well, they looked it over, and they could not find anything wrong at all except…

There was already two sergeants that had been assigned to the platoon to take over when I left. And I put them to work ringing up the cable. We used to ring cable. We used to have these tension rings. The cable used to lay in them. You still see some of them hanging around. And when they started ringing this couple of spans of cable they were supposed to put in, they put the first four rings backwards to the rest of them. There was nothing wrong with it. It's just that you could either start that away or start the other way. Well, four of them at the first pole was turned opposite than the rest of them. And it was the two sergeants (laughs) that was in charge of it. They gigged me four points—one for each one of those rings. In fact, the old officer told me, "I've never seen one built better." And he said, "I normally would never look at that." He said, "But I've got to find something." And he said, "They won't believe—I can't give you 100 percent." So they give me 96 percent. And it

was the best that had ever been done. He told me that. He said, "That's the best I've ever seen." The next day, when we get back down to the post I had one day left. And I started processing out that very next day. It was the 30th of March. They worked me every day except that last day. And I'll never forget, that's when Bowman Barr, the captain, told me, "You know, I'll do the same thing for you as I will for the first sergeant." He said, "I'll transfer you with me if you want to do it. If you'll reenlist." And he laid out sergeant first class stripes on the table, and he said, "There's your promotion. Come back in thirty days and pick them up." So...

DePue: And what was the captain's name, again?

Bentele: Bowman T. Barr.

DePue: Bowman T. Barr.

Bentele: Yep. Double-R—B-a-r-r.

DePue: But you didn't take him up on that.

Bentele: No, I already had a job. In fact, all the guys in the platoon were betting like crazy that I'd reenlist. They knew I would. But I said no. Not that I didn't like it. I liked the service. I really did. I got along good in the Army. And I had, you know, rank, and I knew a bunch of guys in the Signal Corps then, like Captain Barr. And I had had an easy go probably.

DePue: You'd have an easy go until twelve, fifteen years later in Vietnam.

Bentele: Yeah, here's what bothered me. I could not see spending your time in the service and hanging around some military post on garrison duty. That's a lonely place, really. And I just couldn't do it. Not when I knew I had a good job waiting for me, and I had to go out and take it. You only had so much time. Here's another thing, too. The unions had this rule. You couldn't just hold that job open. You had to take it up after so much time out of the service. But that was the only reason. I would never have liked to have been in the service. Not that you couldn't maybe get stationed over in Germany or somewhere like that that would be interesting. But I think the idea of being in garrison don't appeal to me for some reason. (laughs)

DePue: Okay. We've spent quite a bit of time already today, and I wanted to at least give you some time to talk about getting back into connection with some of your military buddies afterwards in either reunions or VFWs—things like that. And kind of finish off with your trip in 1993.

Bentele: Okay. Well you know, here's what the Vietnam veterans done for the Korean War veterans. They woke us up. It was kind of like Japan attacking America. They woke up a sleeping giant. Anyway, after the Vietnam veterans got their monument in Washington, D.C., on the mall, I think most of the Korean

veterans said, "Well, what the goddamn hell? You know, we had a much tougher war. I mean, maybe not quite as long. Maybe not quite as many killed. But in the time that we were over there, it was a hell of a lot bloodier." And it was. Korea was the bloodiest war the American Army has ever fought. Even during the Civil War, there was more people killed in both sides in a shorter amount of time in Korea than any other war. There was constant combat in Korea. And I think what most of the Korean veterans, when they seen the Vietnam monument , they said, "What the heck are we doing? We'd better get going here." So the old boy that founded the Korean War Veterans Association was a tanker sergeant, a World War II veteran, and a Korean War veteran. His granddaughter was going to go and write a thesis for her grandfather's war. Well, when she went to the library, all she could find was about this big a paragraph in the history books about the Korean War. It made him so mad, he said, "By God, I'm going to do something." So he called about thirty-five of his buddies and said, "We're going to start an organization to correct this." And that's how the Korean War Veterans Association got started. And then it spread like wildfire across the nation, particularly because we wanted to build a memorial in Washington, D.C.

DePue: Had you been involved in the VFW or AMVETS or anything like that?

Bentele: Yeah, I belong to both of them. In fact, I joined the VFW off of Ginza Street in Tokyo.

DePue: Oh.

Bentele: Yeah. (laughs) I never did make a meeting.

DePue: Well, you were too busy while you were on Ginza Street (laughter) to do that.

Bentele: Yeah, I know. But anyway, that's how I joined. My number is 1567. So I was in the first two thousand that joined. And I heard about it because we were building a Korean War memorial here in Adams County. And that's how I got involved in raising money and building this one here at the veteran's home.

DePue: You know what year that would have been?

Bentele: Eighty-five I think was when we started the process of getting it put in. Then it was dedicated, I think, in '86 or right in there. But that got me involved. And then there was a couple of guys who said, "Well, you know, we've got a national organization just starting up. And there was only about two or three thousand members at that time when I joined. But they were very intense and very active and very, you know, wanting to get with the program. We had a lot of Medal of Honor recipients—Scooter Burke and General Stilwell and General Davis. And you know, that Medal of Honor winner that was in Vietnam—oh, Colonel—he wrote books. He left the country and went to Australia. He's dead now. But anyway, he was involved in it. We had a lot of high-powered people that was involved in that and raised the money and

everything else. I got involved with that and went to a reunion and joined up, and got involved in building the national memorial and raising money. We built this one, and then I helped build the one over in Springfield. And so that got it going. That's when I was actually state president when we built the one in Springfield.

DePue: Do you remember what year that was completed?

Bentele: Ninety-three, was when we dedicated it. But that got everybody involved, and that's how I got involved in the Korean War Veterans Association. I served two terms as the state president, when we built the memorial, and when we had the fiftieth anniversary in Springfield. I was the state president then and planned that out. And it actually really intrigued me. I kind of hate to see it waning now because all of us guys are getting close to eighty years old now, or already are in their eighties. It's very difficult now to get people to head that up, you know, with the health issues there and everything.

DePue: I know you went to Korea in 1993. How did that trip happen, and what was that experience like?

Bentele: Well, Korea is the only country that we have ever fought for that actually repaid their soldiers by inviting them over to their country, paying for all their expenses while you were there and paying part of the soldiers' airfare. If you were in combat in the combat years in Korea, you could take yourself and one other person—your wife usually, or you could take a grandkid—and you'd pay your airfare, and they would pay all your stay over there and tour you all over the country and have banquets. You got to meet the South Korean president. They'd always give you a medal, give you watches, all kinds of gifts and everything else. And really, really treated you wonderful. Now I could go back for a second trip if I wanted to do it. I'm thinking about it. But it was really a wonderful trip. That's when I was able to establish contact through the *Korea Times* newspaper with Little Joe and got him to come over to Korea and have a reunion. And they run a big article in the *Korea Times* newspaper about me (laughs) finding this houseboy and had a reunion over there.

DePue: Well, the obvious question is how did you find Korea different from when you were there before?

Bentele: Amazing. It was really amazing. Now this is another story in itself. Before I got this trip over to Korea—I mean, I hadn't signed up for any yet, because it was a pretty good expenditure. But I had actually ended up winning a contest in a promotion here in Quincy about going anywhere in the world. This travel agency—it was their contest—gave five thousand dollars for anywhere in the world I wanted to go. I won it. It was a (laughs) trivia contest, which I'm pretty good at. Anyway, then I said, "By God, I'm going to try and get on that trip." Because I had already bought my airfare. We already had rooms

downtown in Seoul for the hotel. And I was going to try and get on the trip over in Korea. So I got ahold of—we called her "Lieutenant Honey." She was a Korean War-era nurse. Her husband was an air force combat pilot and got killed within the first few days in Korea. She was the one that was running our trip. So I called her up. I knew her real well. I said, "Get me on that trip that's coming up." She said, "Boy, I don't know. I'd have to call over there. We're full-up right now, but I'll try." So I said, "I'm going to be in Seoul. Here's my deal. I've got this trip. I want to go to Korea. I want to see this. But I want to be able to go with the guys on their tours, you know? And partake in part of that. Just shoehorn me in on that." Well, me and my wife fly over to Seoul and end up in the Seoul Royal hotel downtown, which was a very nice hotel. Well, the other veterans were out at the Ambassador Sofitel, right down in the southern part of Seoul. So I call out there, and I get a hold of Lieutenant Honey. She said, "Where you at?" I said, "We're downtown in Seoul." She said, "Well, cancel out there and get out here. I got you on this trip. You've got a room out here." So we cancelled out of the Seoul hotel downtown. Went out to the Sofitel—a very nice hotel.

DePue: Sofa?

Bentele: Sofitel. They're all over the world. Really exclusive hotels. And they had the room. So we go out there. and we take care of this tour. The tour over there is a week long. Do all of this stuff—the banquets and everything else. Well, we still got a week's stay at the Seoul Royal downtown. So me and my wife stay in Seoul. By that time, I had met this Mr. Park that had done the advertising for Little Joe. He worked for the *Korea Times* newspaper. Really a nice gentleman. Beautiful cards he used to send me. He passed away here seven years ago. And so I told him, "Mr. Park, I want to go up to Inje Valley. I want to go up to Quan Dy Ri where I was stationed. Can you get me a car?" He knew a cab company, and he said, "Yeah, I'll get you a car and a driver." So I said okay. And Little Joe was supposed to go with me because he said, "I've been up there. There's only been one soldier up there where we were. Nobody goes up there. It's all North Korea, and just the South Korean army is there. You know, there's nothing up there but a few civilians." And at that time, that's all it was too. And very rough roads, just like it was back in the day. So anyway, the morning comes, and we was going to get an early start. We packed a lunch because Mr. Park said, "Now, you'd better not eat the food. Make sure you get a lunch with you. Buy food here and take it with you so you won't have any problem. You're going out in the rural part of the country."

So anyway, the cab shows up with the driver. I paid that driver a hundred and twenty thousand won. I mean, I had to pay the driver—I don't know what the exchange rate was then, but pretty good money—a hundred bucks or so. And anyway, Little Joe didn't show up. Waited for a while, and he didn't show up. So I said, "God dang, I need somebody with me that can interpret." So I talked Mr. Park into going. He didn't want to go, but I said, "I've got to have you

with me so I'll know to tell these people where I want to go and everything else." There was a waterfall up above our battalion area that come down out of the mountains. A fifteen, twenty foot waterfall and this pool. I knew that geological feature was there because I didn't know how much that changed. Anyway, so I get Mr. Park to go with us.

Now we drive an all-day trip. We get up there, and it's a little Korean village right where my tent and the Fourth Signal was. Was about three or four houses, just a little cluster of houses, setting right there alongside this ravine. Now there's a whole valley now where X Corps was. It was underwater. They built a new damn and flooded that whole valley. Where our bunker was I was telling you about? That's underwater. So (laughs) anyway, I had no interest in going over on the other side. I stayed on the south side. Man, I had Mr. Park ask the lady, "Is there a waterfall up this creek?" She said yes. So I knew I had exactly the right place. I got pictures of that waterfall. Went up there and sure enough, there it was. The South Korean army had a nice teahouse built out over the edge of it where they would go up and have their tea and watch the water. Very beautiful peaceful place. It hadn't changed a bit in forty-some years. And so we had all day up there.

We ate our lunch at the store. We brought our lunch in, and Mr. Park bought his, and the lady at the store picked us out a very nice area to eat in. I asked her, "How many soldiers have been up here—U.S. soldiers?" She said, "Two—you and one other man. And then one Korean man." That was Little Joe. That was all that ever had been up there at that time. Because the South Korean army was the only thing that was there, plus a few civilians, because you're above the 38th parallel. There was also an invasion route down through the Punchbowl. So the South Korean army had fortifications all over place.

Anyway, we get back to Seoul and here's this message at the office. Little Joe wrote me a note. He said, "I went to Taegu to visit my sister and got sick." I said the way he acted at that banquet, the Korean CIA probably got him. (laughter) Anyway, that's the last I heard from Little Joe. I called him once before. Yeah. That was quite a trip. I always wanted to see Honolulu. So coming back we flew into Hawaii, and spent a week in Hawaii. And then checked in. I liked that. That was a good trip.

DePue: Take it back to Seoul, though. Difference between Seoul in 1953 and 1993?

Bentele: Very, very—in fact, Seoul was fought over three times. It was pretty well blowed apart. I mean, you know, buildings were still standing. The only building that a soldier would recognize is the old rail terminal which is still there, still used. Been rebuilt and everything else. Set down in downtown Seoul. It's still there. That building is still exactly like it was. All the rest of it is a modern metropolis with high-rise skyscrapers. Underneath the city streets there's all kinds of shopping malls that you can wander forever and shop.

DePue: Now, were the Korean people, when you were there—

Bentele: Very congenial.

DePue: I think you would say the ones in ’50 to ’53 were...?

Bentele: Oh, they bowed to you.

DePue: But they were in desperate straits at that time.

Bentele: Oh, yeah. But we were treated very kindly.

DePue: When you went back?

Bentele: Well, in fact, me and my wife walked everywhere when we were there that extra week. We walked all over. And you know, we’d take a bus out to the old temple. You ever been out to that old temple?

DePue: Unh-uh.

Bentele: On the north side? We spent a day out there touring through that old temple. I didn’t even know that was there. And seeing all the different shopping areas and touring through that temple. Then we walked back to downtown just to, you know, take the walk. Everybody treated us very, very well. Very well. Looked out after as—everything.

DePue: Did it surprise you that it went that way?

Bentele: Not really. I expected it, really. The young people in particular were very generous. I mean, you know, there was—none of that animosity that you see that’s publicized so much. That’s a very small segment.

DePue: Well, this is kind of an aside to what we have been talking about, but World War II in the American memory and American imagination has been so dominant. And then you get to the Korean experience, and it’s called the forgotten war—the Korean War. You ever have any resentment over that?

Bentele: Not resentment, but I can explain why it is. There were so many World War II veterans called back in. All the generals were World War II generals, even the high-profile generals like MacArthur and—oh, the one that—the Air Borne guy.

DePue: Ridgeway?

Bentele: Ridgeway. They were all high-profile. The only general we didn’t have over there that was higher was Patton. The only reason we didn’t—he was dead. But there was so much of it that I think people kind of looked at it as just an extension of World War II. And then, of course, Truman in his political sense

really done us a disfavor when he wanted to keep it contained and called it a police action. I think that really changed everybody's mind. Well, that's just going to be another skirmish. Well, that skirmish changed like hell when the Chinese entered the war. then it come a full-fledged battlefield war. The American public had a hard time grasping that. And again, it was not publicized. They didn't show the things like the horrors of the prison camps. You know, we knew these prison camps where they kept our soldiers which are supposed to be protected by the Geneva Convention were worse camps than Dachau was. The only thing they didn't do to our soldiers was burn them. They probably done some of that. But they were worse than the worst camps in Germany, not counting the prisoner of war camps. The prisoner of war camps that the Germans had for us were country clubs compared to what they done over in Korea, and that has never been rectified. Those same guys that done that torture to our soldiers are still alive and walking around heroes over there in North Korea. Never been punished for their actions, you know?

But I think what happened was that that was underplayed to a great extent. You can look in these magazines, and you can see the first part of the war up until about 1951. They had quite a bit of coverage, but it was negative coverage. You know, they were talking about the brainwashing and showing the troops being marched through the cities. Well, that's a ploy with anybody. But they did not force the issue of saying, "I want the international Red Cross to report what they seen in those prisoner of war camps." They never publicized that to the United States because the administration did not want the American public to get so agitated that they would want to go full-blast and maybe cause a third world war with Russia.

DePue: Before we started today, you showed me one of the *Life* magazines that you had saved. And this is the *Life* magazine that reported the end of the war—the signing of the armistice. And I wonder if you can talk about that real quick.

Bentele: Yeah, this was real interesting because, like I told you before, we all grew up with the *Life* magazine in our hands with World War II. And when I come back, I said, "You know what? I'm going to try and find every *Life* magazine I can lay my hands on during the course of this war and see how it was reported, particularly in this area when I was over there." And I did find a guy that had a museum (laughs) of *Life* magazines, and I bought a bunch of them. This right here is August the 3rd, a week after the ceasefire was signed. It shows the picture of Eisenhower and some of the chief of staff and his staff back here. A very small crowd. And they've got a little ceremony going on here. And it says, "No whistles, no cheers, no dancing." And I have a banner that says that on there. I took it to Washington, D.C. when we had our dedication to our national memorial. I had a big banner made up with that on there and hung it up in our hospitality room. And a lot of guys signed that. And a lot of guys had never seen that.

DePue: Well, it's not even a half-a-page article that they've got on the armistice.

Bentele: Yeah, a very small article.

DePue: Then there's a few pages of pictures.

Bentele: Yeah, of the queen's coronation. And we're right into Vietnam—Indochina as they called it then. The main thrust of the *Life* magazine was not the end of the war in Korea. It was the French and what we were doing in Vietnam at that time. And talking about that, I knew in Korea a lot of our supplies were being flown to the French and dropped over there to supply the French army in Indochina.

DePue: Well, about the time you left in '54 was Dien Bien Phu.

Bentele: Yeah. And that's when the Air Force was flying supplies to Dien Bien Phu. It showed pictures of them dropping the stuff right here. I always figured that a lot of us guys over in Korea at that time, particularly guys that had time to go, would just be shipped over to Indochina. And probably at that time in history, if Eisenhower had just looked a little further ahead and said, "I'm sending the field army that we have in the Far East now to Dien Bien Phu," and actually sent them to South Korea—

DePue: You mean Vietnam?

Bentele: I mean South Vietnam. I don't think that war would have ever happened. I don't think it would have.

DePue: I'm going to get back to Vietnam here in just a couple of minutes. But do you think in retrospect what the United States was attempting to do—what you did as an American soldier—was worth it in Korea?

Bentele: Oh, yeah. Now you look at the South Koreans, and they're very appreciative. They've got a wonderful country. In fact, if you ever want a vacation or go shopping, go to Korea. And I think it's one of our best allies. A lot of people don't realize that the Koreans were in Vietnam too. They had combat units in Vietnam alongside of us, and they've been over in Afghanistan and Iraq too. So they're our staunch allies; in fact, probably more so than the Japanese. They're the only anchor we have in the Far East. In particular with China coming on board here, we're going to be very lucky that we have Korea.

DePue: What did you think about the Vietnam War? One, about whether or not we were right to be there. And two, the way the public reacted to all of that.

Bentele: Well again, it's just like this war in Afghanistan. And besides, there was no clear-cut call as to why we was in there. There was a lot of conjecture about whether this was a put-up war. And you know, LBJ and the Gulf of Tonkin proved out that it really wasn't true. It was kind of like Bush in Iraq. And I think people had a sour taste in their mouth when it started going wrong on them. And again, fighting a land war on the continent of Asia is not the thing

to do. I think they were politicized before they ever got in the war. And I think they should have quit that war way before they did.

DePue: What did you think about all the protests going on in the United States?

Bentele: Well, I always said if there was ever going to be anarchy, they missed their chance because it was back during that era when we had serious protests going on here. With the war going on over there and they way it was going and people to support the protestors here in this country, I think we were close to anarchy, you know, and it never happened. That was no fun. I think it was terrible.

DePue: Just a couple of more questions to kind of finish up here because we've been at it for over three hours now, Norbert.

Bentele: Jeepers!

DePue: Yeah, well it's been fun. It goes fast when you're listening to somebody who's got the interesting stories that you do. You were in at the end of the war, but you saw enough combat, and you saw enough serious things going on. Do you think that whole experience changed you?

Bentele: Well, undoubtedly. I think it changes everybody. I think, you know, you see things that you know went on, and I think that changes you. Again, we were so inoculated to World War II stories and what went on there and everything else that the military really wasn't that big a surprise. But we believed that people in a Third World country had to live and everything else. I think that makes you realize how much better off you are. And I think it changes everybody.

DePue: Are you a better person because you had that experience?

Bentele: Well, maybe. (laughs)

DePue: If you were to offer some advice to people who are listening to this interview down the road, what advice would you offer?

Bentele: Well, I'd say one thing: I wouldn't hesitate to go in the service. You know, a lot of people have doubts about whether to or not. But if you're needed, I think wartime service is a high calling if the military is run right, and I hope to hell that they are. I mean, sometimes I look at the way that these social mores are corrupting the military. That's the reason the Marines are probably doing better than the Army. And I'm not talking about the female soldiers or anything else. But I will say this—just knowing the rigors of combat and the training and everything else, there is no way that they could expect a woman to do the same thing. Young men have the *esprit de corps.* I'm not saying young women don't either. But it's a different level, I believe. And I often

wonder, being as how I was an old cadre sergeant too, how in the world those guys ever get those guys trained in any degree.

DePue: Well, we're just about done here.

Bentele: But I think the guys that went in the service, and I notice in most of the veterans groups, they're talking about the sergeants, are the main backbone of the veterans groups. I've talked to some veterans that were bitter about their service. And I think they didn't apply themselves. And they didn't take it up, in other words. Just what I was saying before—I always wanted my men to live where they're at, accept the service as their home, and keep it that way until they get out. And I think they're the ones that were bitter with their service—the ones that did not take it up. They didn't make it their home. They weren't proud of the uniform they were wearing, or anything else. And I think that was their main problem. And I see that even in the veterans groups. I'd almost bet you—I've never taken a poll—but I bet you that almost 90 percent of the veterans groups are made up of the first three graders or officers. I really do. I don't think you'll have too many privates or PFCs. A few.

DePue: Well, officers and non-commissioned officers.

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: Are you proud of your service, then?

Bentele: Yes I am.

DePue: How would you like to finish up our conversation today?

Bentele: Well first of all, thank you for taking your time. And I hope this is something that will be useful to somebody down the road. I hope I was able to describe the experiences well enough. A lot of the things I talked about, it's just kind of like my old buddy Gene Putman and his pictures. I tried to convey what it was like to be in the service and some of the experiences you have. I stayed away from the combat part and the stuff like that: everything I've tried to describe was another part of the service that very seldom gets talked about. Like the trip over, the trip back, and the service troops that done a hell of a job. For every one man on the front, you've got to remember there's nine men behind him. The tip of that spear is only one person. There's nine men that has to back that guy up in all the different services, or he wouldn't be able to do his job.

DePue: Well I think, Norbert, what you've been able to convey in this interview is how challenging that job was and how important those jobs were as well.

Bentele: Absolutely. I always tell the guys that say, "Oh, well, you had it easy." I said, "You know what? If it hadn't been for us guys, you all would have been shooting at each other." Which is true. You know, the fire control that the

Signal Corps is involved in is the main backbone of the Army. They wouldn't be able to form any kind of an attack or set any kind of a barrage or get supplies if it wasn't for the Signal Corps because they're the ones that convey that message and get all those things done. Now they do it by computer. But it still takes a guy to do it.

DePue: I think that's probably a great way to finish up for today.

Bentele: Yeah.

DePue: Thank you very much, Norbert. It's been wonderful.

Bentele: All right.

(end of interview)