

Interview with Wayne King

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is May 5, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm in Jacksonville, talking to Wayne King. Good morning.

Mr. King: Good morning.

DePue: We are here with Wayne because of his experiences as a Marine during the Korean War. But, as with so many people in that generation, obviously, there's a little bit of a Depression story and what it was like growing up in World War II, as well. So, we're going to spend quite a bit of time on that. But Wayne, let's go ahead and start with when and where you were born.

Mr. King: When and where I was born?

DePue: Yep.

Mr. King: I was born in Scott County, Illinois, between Winchester and Alsey.

Mr. King: Nineteen thirty, April twenty-third.

DePue: Right after the beginning of the Great Depression.

Mr. King: Right.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about your parents.

Mr. King: Well, I can't tell you too much about them, because I lived with my mother a little while, and then I lived with my grandparents. So, my story don't start until about the fifth grade, somewhere along there.

DePue: I guess I didn't realize this before. By the time you were in fifth grade, who were you living with then?

Mr. King: Grandmother.

DePue: Where were you living at the time?

Mr. King: Between Aalsey and Winchester, in the country.

DePue: On a farm?

Mr. King: Farm, right.

DePue: Your grandfather wasn't living at that time?

Mr. King: Yes, they were. I lived with them.

DePue: Tell me a little about the farm then.

Mr. King: Well, I mean, we farmed back then, when I was this age. We farmed with horses. We didn't have tractors or any, what I'd call modern equipment that we have today. We used all horses as far as planting corn, plowing and everything like that. We had hogs, and, of course, we raised cattle and milked cows. That's about it.

DePue: How many acres?

Mr. King: I think, on the whole farm, it was around two hundred acres.

DePue: Was it pretty good farmland?

Mr. King: Crick¹ bottom. [It] Had a lot of crick bottom to it. A lot of years, you'd get flooded out.

DePue: Now, you said you were about ten years old at the time.

Mr. King: Somewhere along there, yes.

DePue: Did you get to do some chores, then, on the farm?

¹ Local parlance for "creek."

Mr. King: Oh yeah, of course. Two years later, my grandfather died. Ten I had to, more or less, take over. I mean, I was the only one there. My uncle, which was their son, he'd already went to service. So then, I did the milking, before school and after school, and fed the hogs and things like that. Then we eventually got rid of the hogs and cows, over a period of time.

DePue: So, this would have been about 1940. You say your uncle had gone to the war, so that would have been after the beginning of the war.

Mr. King: Um-hmm.

DePue: You said you had horses. Did you have electricity on the farm?

Mr. King: Not until around '42. I think it was '42. They come out in '39 to the rural area, but before we got electricity, it was around '42 or '43 maybe. I can't remember the dates.

DePue: Did you have indoor plumbing?

Mr. King: No. (laughs) Never had no indoor plumbing.

DePue: So, it's a little bit different than lifestyles today.

Mr. King: Right.

DePue: What was it like?

Mr. King: No entertainment. I mean, we eventually got a radio, when we got electricity. We had a battery radio for a while.

DePue: And the radio, what were you listening to?

Mr. King: WLDS *Barn Dance* or whatever they called it back then, WLDS, Chicago.

DePue: WLS, maybe?

Mr. King: Something sounded like that, Chicago. Then, I think there was some stories at night we listened to, but I don't remember what they were.

DePue: Was your family a churchgoing family?

Mr. King: No.

DePue: Where were you attending school those first few years?

- Mr. King: The first few years? Well, we'll say, from the fifth grade on, I attended the Carlton Grade School, which is halfway between Aley and Winchester, out in the country.
- DePue: Was that your classic, one-room schoolhouse?
- Mr. King: Right.
- DePue: And number of teachers then? Just the one teacher?
- Mr. King: One teacher, all we had.
- DePue: How many grades did she have?
- Mr. King: Eight. (laughs) But, if there was crick flooding out, not everyone was there. When they all could get there, I think there was only about ten or twelve kids, altogether.
- DePue: How far are you walking to get to school?
- Mr. King: I only had to go about a mile, but some of these kids that lived across the cricks... There was two cricks on each side. One family lived on one side of the crick—they had big families then—and another one, on the other side of the crick. If the crick was out, they couldn't come, so there'd only be about two or three of us there.
- DePue: Well, you say crick. How big a stream or a crick is this?
- Mr. King: Well, (laughs) I don't know. It's something you don't cross every day. I mean, it's wide enough that, if it gets up a little, maybe a certain place you could cross it or something like that. But if you had a rain overnight... You didn't get across the crick if it rained very much.
- DePue: So, no footbridge, no any kind of a bridge across these?
- Mr. King: No.
- DePue: Tell me a little bit more about what it was like going to a one-room school, with all these kids in the same classroom.
- Mr. King: Oh well, there was just three, actually two big families. Me and another guy is all that was there. I think this one family had five kids, and the other one had about four, if I remember, or five. I can't remember just exact.
- DePue: Did you have the same teacher the whole time you were there?

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: How many grades were in that one-room schoolhouse?

Mr. King: Eight.

DePue: Kindergarten through eighth grade?

Mr. King: Well, you didn't have kindergarten back then. You come in first year of school. There wasn't no such thing as kindergarten.

DePue: Did you get to do some chores, even when you got to school, some things that were expected of you?

Mr. King: Yeah, yeah. We had to go pipe the water from about, maybe, as far as that house over there, down a hill, to get the water.

DePue: About a hundred feet or so.

Mr. King: Uh-huh, and we burned coal at that time. Had to go out to the coal shed and bring in the coal buckets full of coal to run all day.

DePue: You remember the teacher's name?

Mr. King: Mrs. Doyle.

DePue: What do you remember about Mrs. Doyle?

Mr. King: (laughs) She was lazy. That's all I can remember about her. She didn't turn a tap, other than try to teach school.

DePue: Was she a good teacher?

Mr. King: Yeah, I'd say she was a good teacher. But, of course, back then, when you had eight grades...I can't remember whether there was one in every grade at that time. But still, she was busy trying to have eight grades of school during the school day.

DePue: Now sometimes, when you hear about these one-room schoolhouse situations, you hear about the older kids ending up doing a lot of the instructing to the younger kids. Was that the case?

Mr. King: No. Wasn't there.

DePue: How did she keep all of you busy, if she's got people in all these diverse ages and grades?

Mr. King: Well, you had your class of whatever class you had. Then you'd study on the next one, while they was having class, and things like that I guess. I don't remember just how, but we kept busy somehow. You didn't talk, and you didn't get up and run around like you would today, like some of the kids do today.

DePue: I wonder if you could walk me through a typical day, when you got up, what chores you did, what chores you did when you got back home from school.

Mr. King: Well, I mean, a typical day, I got up about 5:30, something like that, and milked seven cows. Then, we had a few hogs. They had what they called slop barrels back there. They soaked oats and poured the excess milk and stuff in that, and fed the hogs, then did the milking and got ready for school and went to school, and then come back and do the same thing over again at night. You'd go to bed a little earlier back then. You didn't have no TV or anything like that.

DePue: But I'll imagine, by that time, you're ready to get to bed.

Mr. King: Well, yeah, probably was then.

DePue: Much homework to do?

Mr. King: No. Did that all at school, see. I mean, we had time to do that in school. They didn't think about bringing home books at that time.

DePue: Did you like school?

Mr. King: Well, I guess, just as good as anything. (laughs)

DePue: Did you like the farm life?

Mr. King: Yeah, it was okay.

DePue: About the time you are at an age where you can remember things, that's about the time the Second World War started, at least for the United States. Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

Mr. King: Yeah. At the time, yeah, I didn't pay much attention to it.

DePue: Do you remember how you found out about the news?

Mr. King: No, I don't really. I suppose, in the newspaper. I mean, we took a newspaper.

DePue: Would that have been before the farm got electricity?

Mr. King: Well, yeah, because see, electricity came out in '39, but they couldn't cover all the rural areas. I can't remember what year we got the electricity, but it was, I'm sure, after my uncle went to war that we got it at our house.

DePue: How big a deal was it when the farm got electricity?

Mr. King: Well, it changed the (laughs) things a little bit. Not too much, other than having lights instead of having to fool with a oil lamp or Aladdin lamp or something like that.

DePue: Did your grandmother get any other kitchen appliances?

Mr. King: Not right off hand, no. All we had was electricity.

DePue: How about some of the farm chores, like a milking machine?

Mr. King: No, never had nothing like that while I was on the farm. You done it by hand, everything by hand. They had electricity put in the barn, at least, to have a light in there. You used to have to take a lantern.

DePue: Well, maybe this is a silly question, but what did you do for entertainment when you weren't working on the farm or going to school?

Mr. King: (laughs) I don't know. I can remember taking two wood lathes, put a cross on it and an old hub off a old wooden wagon wheel and pushed that all over the place, things like that.

DePue: Did you get to town very often?

Mr. King: No, seldom ever went to town.

DePue: How often would you have made it to town?

Mr. King: Well, later years, the last year I lived in the country, and then I'd probably go about once a week.

DePue: Do you remember much, once the war started? Again, you would have been eleven, I think, at the time the war started, so still pretty young. But, by the time it's over, you're sixteen years old, something like that. Tell me a little bit about what it was like to be growing up in this rural area of Illinois during the Second World War.

Mr. King: Well, see, we didn't have as much problem as some people. They had rationing back then. I mean, we didn't have no car. You had a horse and wagon, if you went to town. You didn't have to worry about getting gas or

tires. They had that all rationed. Now sugar was rationed; I remember that. The storekeeper'd only give you so much sugar. I remember that part of it.

DePue: But you didn't have the challenges that people in the city would have had for rationing.

Mr. King: Oh, no.

DePue: Did you participate in any fund drives, like either aluminum or rubber or anything like that?

Mr. King: No. We was poor people back then. (laughter) It was a different situation than a town person.

DePue: Were people coming out and looking for some of your scrap metal that maybe you had laying around?

Mr. King: No.

DePue: Did you have a chance to follow what was going on in the war?

Mr. King: Well, not too much, other than what you read in the paper or something like that.

DePue: What was the paper you were getting?

Mr. King: I don't remember what the name of it was. Got the *Winchester Times*, I know that, every week. But far as a daily paper, I forgot. I was thinking we got a daily paper, but I don't remember what it was.

DePue: Maybe from Jacksonville?

Mr. King: It may have been or Springfield at that time. I just can't remember.

DePue: You mentioned you had an uncle in the war. Can you tell me a little bit about him, where he ended up, what he was doing?

Mr. King: Well, he was in the cavalry, what they call the cavalry, but he actually was in the Army. Well, I mean, on the ground. He never had horses overseas. He ended up in New Guinea, out on New Guinea at that time.

DePue: Well, being in the cavalry at that time would have meant that you were on tanks of some type probably.

Mr. King: No.

DePue: It wasn't?

Mr. King: They had horses when they first went in, when they was assigned to a cavalry unit. I had a buddy here in time. He was a cavalryman. But they didn't use the horses. They belonged to that unit, and they always had a badge up here, with a horse head on it. They belonged to it, but actually, all they were was infantrymen.

DePue: When was it that your grandfather passed away?

Mr. King: I would have to figure it out. He died about a year before I was in seventh grade, so I'd have to figure that out.

DePue: That had to be a pretty tough time for you and your grandmother.

Mr. King: Right.

DePue: Remember anything particular about making that adjustment?

Mr. King: No, we just continued on like we'd been doing.

DePue: But you suddenly had to be expected to fill his shoes, sounds like.

Mr. King: Yeah, did for a while, until I moved to town in seventh grade.

DePue: Seventh grade, you moved to town. Why did you move into town at that time?

Mr. King: Well, we sold out everything. I mean, had a sale and sold the livestock and things like that.

DePue: That would have been after he passed away?

Mr. King: Yeah, it was probably about a year after he passed away, maybe not quite a year. I don't remember all them dates or anything like that, because I didn't worry about that back then, still don't. I don't think much to back history.
(laughs)

DePue: Well, your son encouraged me to do this interview, and it's certainly interesting to hear it. Seventh grade, that probably would have been 1942, '43 timeframe, it sounds like.

Mr. King: Somewhere along there.

DePue: How did your life change when you came to the small town?

Mr. King: When I went to the town? You mean moved to town?

DePue: Yeah.

Mr. King: Well, I mean, I didn't have the things to do back then. I didn't do no chores or anything like that. I might have mowed the yard or something like that. But then, there wasn't too much going on. You played with the other kids some. Then, when I got to I'd say—well, even seventh grade—I helped a groceryman in Alsey. I'd work there in evenings, candle eggs or things like that or help people load groceries and things like that. I did that all through high school at this store.

DePue: So, the town is Alsep?

Mr. King: Alsey, A-l-s-e-y.

DePue: E-l-s-e-y?

Mr. King: A-l-s-e-y.

DePue: I should know this. Where is Alsey?

Mr. King: Six miles south of Winchester.

DePue: How big was Alsey?

Mr. King: (laughs) How big was Alsey, Mother, three-fifty?

Mrs. King: (unintelligible).

Mr. King: Somewhere like that, 300 to 350.

DePue: For a kid who grew up on the farm, it must have seemed like a pretty big place.

Mr. King: Well, I guess. It was different.

DePue: How was school different for you, when you moved to town?

Mr. King: Well, there's just more kids. We got to play ball and things like [that]. When I was in grade school, we didn't have much. We had a recess and went out and done a little something, but this way, you were on a ball team or something like that.

DePue: I assume that everybody in your class is of the same age then, this same class.

Mr. King: Yeah.

- DePue: Did you have more opportunity then? Obviously, living in town, you don't have the chores. Did you get a chance to go watch the movies occasionally or anything like that?
- Mr. King: Well, yeah, they had a movie I'd go occasionally to. But, here I was working again. I was working at the store until the store closed. I could tell you a lot of stories about that.
- DePue: Well, go ahead.
- Mr. King: Just like I'd help this guy, and then, he'd close up the store at 10:00 at night. [I'd] go out to the farmer and load up about 20 chicken coops of chicken and take them to Roodhouse, which is another ten to twelve miles, and put them on a train, get home about midnight, things like that. (laughs)
- DePue: And you still would have been in eighth or ninth grade at that time or into high school?
- Mr. King: Yeah, I was into high school, yeah.
- DePue: So, your whole life, you'd been working hard.
- Mr. King: That's right.
- DePue: And you figure that's just the way it's supposed to be?
- Mr. King: Well, that's all the advantage I had at that time. I'll put it that away.
- DePue: During the war, were you interested in the military? Were you following the war closely?
- Mr. King: No.
- DePue: Were you thinking, at that time, you'd like to be in the military later on?
- Mr. King: You mean in later years?
- DePue: Yeah.
- Mr. King: No, they wanted me to stay, but I didn't stay. They tried to talk me into staying in the service.
- DePue: Well, this is quite a bit ahead of the time, after you got drafted.
- Mr. King: Yeah.

- DePue: Obviously, you're working in high school. Did you have any time for any extracurricular activities? You mentioned sports a little bit.
- Mr. King: Well, I went to school. I played basketball and things like that, sports. I mean, I never was good at anything really, but on field day, we had different things we did.
- DePue: Well, the advantage of a small-town school like that is, if you want to play, you can play, right?
- Mr. King: Right.
- DePue: What position did you play in basketball?
- Mr. King: Guard.
- DePue: Did the team do well, while you were on the team?
- Mr. King: Yeah, I thought we did. (laughs) We had a good team when I was in high school, and we won, clear up to the sectional in basketball and things like that. But I remember one time in the seventh or eighth grade, going to Nebo to play basketball. The score was four to five, and I was the high point man. I made two points.
- DePue: And you won?
- Mr. King: Yeah, we won, four to five. But now, that's quite a game too. That was in grade school, seventh or eighth grade.
- DePue: When you're in high school, what did you think you wanted to do with your life?
- Mr. King: Never gave it a thought, to be right truthful.
- DePue: Did going back and farming appeal to you at all?
- Mr. King: No. I thought about joining the service, I mean, do something like that, at one time, when I was in school.
- DePue: You graduated in what year?
- Mr. King: Forty-eight.
- DePue: At that time, there was a draft, although they weren't taking very many people, necessarily.

- Mr. King: Well, I was called up. I mean, I was drafted. I mean, really drafted.
- DePue: That was a couple years later. What did you do right after graduation from high school?
- Mr. King: Went right into service. Well, no, I worked at the lumberyard for a while.
- DePue: What town was the lumberyard in?
- Mr. King: Alsey, the city of Alsey.
- DePue: When did you get the fateful call from Uncle Sam?
- Mr. King: It seemed like it was around April, but I may be wrong. I don't remember the date.
- DePue: April of 1951?
- Mr. King: I think it was.
- DePue: The Korean War started in June of 1950. Do you remember hearing the news, when the war started?
- Mr. King: No.
- DePue: What were your thoughts, then, about getting the notification that they were interested in possibly drafting you?
- Mr. King: It was okay with me. It didn't bother me any.
- DePue: Now, from the paperwork you filled out, you said you ended up starting your military career in September of '51. Where did you get your induction physical? Do you remember?
- Mr. King: St. Louis.
- DePue: Any memories about that?
- Mr. King: No. I mean, they just took you to St. Louis on a bus. That's all there was to it. [They] Examined you, you know.
- DePue: Was it at that time, they decided you were going to be in the Marines?
- Mr. King: That's when I decided, at that time, yeah. Like I told you, you had a choice of going to Fort Leonard Wood or California, San Diego. Well, winter was coming on, and I thought it would be cold in Fort Leonard Wood, so I went to

join the Marines. They wanted so many to go to the Marines and so many this. So, that's why I volunteered for the Marines, because it's going to be warm.

DePue: You said March of '51, when you first were approached, and now September '51. What were you hearing about what was going on in Korea at that time?

Mr. King: Well, I mean, just the war going on. That's all I can tell you.

DePue: Were you hearing any of the stories about the Marines' experience, especially at the Chosin Reservoir, in the winter of 1950–51?

Mr. King: Well, yeah, because we had one guy that came back here, I remember. Had his feet frozen off. Heard about that, you know.

DePue: You mentioned that you decided the Marines because you wanted to go someplace warm. How far away from home had you ever been before that time?

Mr. King: I just got back from California. When I got home, I had my call that I was drafted. I took a load of cars out there, with a person.

DePue: Before this, then.

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: Was that the one big experience you had to see the United States, before you got drafted?

Mr. King: Well, I guess it would have been, yeah.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about basic training.

Mr. King: Well, I mean, when we left St. Louis, they put us on an El Capitan, which was a nice, nice train back at that time, sleeping cars, and they had special cars for breakfast. They was treating us like kings, until we hit the San Diego boot camp. When we hit that night—we arrived in there at night. I'd say about 8:00, something like that—that's when everything fell apart. (laughter) They was hollering and screaming and telling you you couldn't do this and got to do that and all that.



Private First Class Wayne King's official Marine Corps photograph, 1952.

DePue: Was all of that a surprise to you?

Mr. King: Well, yeah, a little bit, because I didn't think it'd be like it was. I mean, I thought they'd be a little kinder, but they weren't.

DePue: Any stories that you remember, especially from basic training, from boot camp?

Mr. King: No, not too much. There was always somebody fouling up. The way they had it set up, if somebody did something wrong, the whole eighteen guys had to do something special. I mean, they'd get us up in the middle of the night and run us or something like that.

DePue: Were you ever in the cross-hairs, the guy who did something wrong?

Mr. King: No, I tried not to do that.

DePue: Did you try to keep a low profile then?

Mr. King: Pretty much so.

DePue: Remember your drill sergeant?

Mr. King: Yep, Sergeant Bean.

DePue: Sergeant Bean. Tell me about Sergeant Bean.

Mr. King: Well, you didn't have to do nothing that he couldn't do. I remember that. When we was out training one day, we had to crawl through culverts, things like that. But, if he couldn't go through them, if they wasn't big enough for him to go through, you didn't have to go through. But, he could do about anything there was to be done.

DePue: Was he a World War II veteran?

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: Pretty tough guy?

Mr. King: He was tough.

DePue: You think he was fair?

Mr. King: Yeah. That's what I say; he was fair because he didn't ask you to do anything he couldn't do.

- DePue: Basic training, I understand, was just eight weeks long.
- Mr. King: Nine, I think it was.
- DePue: Nine weeks?
- Mr. King: Um-hmm.
- DePue: What kind of things did they have you doing during those nine weeks?
- Mr. King: Well, mostly, in the nine weeks, a lot of it was drilling. I mean, formations, you know, like for keeping step and all that. I mean, that was basically a lot of it. Then we went and fired rifles at the rifle range, things like that. But basically, that was the main thing. They didn't want you to be idle at any time. Like in the evenings, you had to do something, write letters home or be doing something, doing your washing. They didn't want anybody standing around idle.
- DePue: Did they have a lot of calisthenics, as well?
- Mr. King: Yeah.
- DePue: Did you feel like you're in pretty good shape?
- Mr. King: Yeah, I thought I was one of the best. (laughs)
- DePue: And was that the case, once you got there?
- Mr. King: Well, I thought I was pretty good in shape.
- DePue: Held up pretty well to it all, then?
- Mr. King: Right.
- DePue: From what you saw, were there some of the other kinds of kids that had more problems with it than you did?
- Mr. King: Oh, there was some people we had, because some of them was drafted. Some of them—well, I shouldn't say this—some of them couldn't do a lot of things. Calisthenics, I mean, they'd try. They tried and everything like that. They'd try firing rifles and things like that, but they wasn't quite... I can't say that they wasn't capable, but they wasn't used to it. Like somebody out of New York, they was different.
- DePue: The big-city kids, then.

Mr. King: Um-hmm.

DePue: Did some of those people wash out?

Mr. King: No. No, they made it all through boot camp.

DePue: But they were the ones who were giving you opportunities to do extra things, because they screwed up, huh?

Mr. King: Right, that's right. They was, the whole time, stealing your clothes. There was other companies, other platoons, around. If they needed something, if you hung it out, they'd steal it. But they didn't actually steal it. They always borrowed it, with the intention of bringing it back. (DePue laughs) They told us that. They never steal nothing. They always borrow it, with the intention of taking it back.

DePue: Where did you go after that first nine weeks of training?

Mr. King: To Camp Pendleton.

DePue: And that's just down the road.

Mr. King: Yeah, that's not too far from Camp Pendleton.

DePue: What did you do at Camp Pendleton?

Mr. King: More training. But, then we did a lot of walking over mountains and things like that, training for how much you could pack and all that stuff. Then, at the same time, that's when we went to amphibious training, on the ocean. If you was docked on one of these amphibious boats, we were trained how to get off if they was firing on you and things like that, you know. Then, we got into tanks there. They had some tanks. And then, we had to learn how to shoot a .45 weapon, I mean, a pistol. A lot of people can't even hit that wall there with one.

DePue: I would think that the .45 meant that they had in mind that you were going to be a tanker, because, otherwise, I don't know that the average Marine would have been worried about the .45.

Mr. King: Yeah, they trained them, whether they ever used a .45 or not.

DePue: Where was your training on amphibious training?

Mr. King: Oceanside. Well, I mean, actually, it's right there at Camp Pendleton. Well, I mean, it was out in the ocean there.

DePue: Before, when I talked, somebody mentioned Camp Del Mar. Is there a Camp Del Mar?

Mr. King: Yeah, there was a Camp Del Mar. It was between Oceanside and... What was the name of that town? I can't think of the name of the town. But anyway, it wasn't too far away. All that was out there was just a rifle range. I mean, they taught you how to fire your M1 rifle.

DePue: Did they put a lot of emphasis on marksmanship?

Mr. King: Yes.

DePue: So, it wasn't just pulling the trigger. They expected you to be able to hit the target where you're shooting at.

Mr. King: Just, the target's so far away. But they wanted you to be good at it. If you did, then you got a medal for being so good. And, one thing, you didn't have to do KP duty if you done good and things like that.

DePue: Did you?

Mr. King: Yeah, I got out of that.

DePue: Had you had a lot of experience, growing up on the farm, hunting and working with firearms?

Mr. King: Yeah, with a rifle or shotguns though.

DePue: Um-hmm. What was the weapon you were training on for the rifle, M1?

Mr. King: M1. But, I mean, we fired machine guns and .45s and all kinds of weapons.

DePue: This all sounds like it's basically infantry training. Were you thinking that's where you're going to end up?

Mr. King: Well, I didn't know.

DePue: Did they ever ask you what you wanted to do?

Mr. King: No, they didn't ask you. They'd tell you. They told you.

DePue: (laughs) At that time, when you're going through the training, you know there's a nice hot war over in Korea and a nice cold war over in Europe and some other places, like Okinawa in Japan, where the Marines oftentimes headed to. Where did you think you were going, and where did you want to go?

- Mr. King: Oh, it didn't matter where I was going. I knew I was going somewhere.
- DePue: Were you kind of anxious or eager to go to combat though?
- Mr. King: Well, I knew I had to do it, so I guess I was eager.
- DePue: How much more training did you have, before you shipped overseas?
- Mr. King: I'd say it was about three months, something like that.
- DePue: Altogether?
- Mr. King: Um-hmm. Plus the boot camp, you know.
- DePue: How well do you think you were trained, once you got to combat? You think they gave you the right kind of training?
- Mr. King: Yeah, I think so.
- DePue: You mentioned some maneuvers and bivouacs...it sounded like that's what you were talking about. Did you have a lot of opportunity to do squad- and company-level things?
- Mr. King: No, not overseas too much. Well, once in a while they would. On Saturday, you had to have a parade, I mean, formations, and let the colonel come out and see how you're doing and things like that. Then, when I got back to the States, why every Saturday you had to be dressed up.
- DePue: Were you assigned to a unit your last month or so, while you were in the States, or were you still assigned to a training company?
- Mr. King: No, I was assigned to a training company, because I went back out to Camp Del Mar. That's all I did, until I got out of service. From the time I got home from overseas, I went out and taught them how to shoot an M1 rifle.
- DePue: Now I see you've got your records here. Do you know when you shipped to the Pacific, shipped to Japan and Korea?
- Mr. King: No, not the exact date.
- DePue: It sounds like it would have been early in 1952, sometime in the spring of 1952. Does that sound right?
- Mr. King: Yeah, spring. Yeah, early spring.

DePue: Tell me about the trip to Japan and then to Korea.

Mr. King: Well, that's one thing I cannot remember, what ship we went over on, but it was a troop-carrying ship. We had nineteen days, going over, and landed in Kobe, Japan. Is that the name, Kobe? Yeah. And from there, we went on to Pusan.

DePue: How long were you at Kobe?

Mr. King: A little over a day and night. We were supposed to go on leave that night. We could have went on leave, if you had any money. But, I didn't have any money. They stole my money.

DePue: Who's "they"?

Mr. King: My buddies. (laughs)

DePue: Your fellow Marines did that to you?

Mr. King: Fellow Marines. They just borrowed it. (laughter) But I got to go the next day for a little while.

DePue: So, you did get off the ship for a little.

Mr. King: Yeah, I got off the ship.

DePue: What did you think of the Japan that you saw, as briefly as you saw it?

Mr. King: Well, it was a little different than the United States, where they had the urinals and things right out in the streets, you know. And everybody traveled by rickshaw. There wasn't very many cars at all that I ever seen. But, they just go to that urinals, right along the curb of the street, you know. That was the main thing I remember. They had a lot of gift shops and things at that time.

DePue: Now, this is a peculiar question for you, but I know that the Marines are famous for the derogatory terms they call their recruits and their fellow Marines, especially early in the training. [Do] You remember the colorful names they had for you guys?

Mr. King: No. (laughs) Hard to tell what they called us. No, I don't remember that.

DePue: You arrived in Pusan...this would have been late winter or early spring of 1952, I would think.

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: What was your first impression of Korea?

Mr. King: Well, it was at night, so we didn't get to see it until the next day, until we got up on the front lines. Because we rode on a truck all night, and it was dark, you couldn't see much of anything. Then, the next morning, why, of course, you'd join the other guys in the company you was going to and all that. As far as the climate and weather and things, it's pretty much like here. When it rained, it rained; when it got hot, it got hot; when it got cold, it got cold. But the seasons was just pretty much like here.

DePue: Any particular smell or sight that really sticks with you?

Mr. King: Yeah, they have a smell over there that I still think that I can smell it. I don't know what it is about that country that smells, but it's some kind of a smell.

DePue: Well, you're a farm kid. You grew up around all kinds of different manure and things like that.

Mr. King: Yeah, but this was a different smell altogether.

DePue: I'm assuming it wasn't a pleasant smell.

Mr. King: Well, it wasn't too bad, but, I mean, it was something different. No, it wasn't bad, but it was a peculiar smell. I can still smell it, or think I can. I don't know what it was from, whether it was from the country, the cleanliness of it or what. I don't know.

DePue: What unit were you assigned to?

Mr. King: Baker Company.

DePue: Baker Company of?

Mr. King: First Marine Division, First Tank Company.

DePue: Baker Company is a tank company. First battalion?

Mr. King: Well, they called it, I thought, the First Marine Division. Wasn't it?

DePue: Well, yeah, the Marine Division would have been the highest-level unit. I don't know if it's on your form here or not. (pause) It was a tank company. So, when did you find out you were going to end up working on tanks, while you were there? Mr. King: When I got there.



King in front of the M-46 Patton Tank he was assigned to during his tour in Korea with the 1st Marine Division in 1952-1953. Note the .45 caliber pistol.

I think, when we got on the truck, you're going to Company B of Baker Company, the tanks.

DePue: Were there other tank companies in the unit, as well, or were you guys pretty much it?

Mr. King: No, the Marines just had this one, as far as I knew, just this one tank company. Now, the Army had several. See, Marines just got everything the Army didn't want, as far as tanks and things like that.

DePue: Well, the traditional concept of the Marines is, you guys are the ones who are landing right on the beach. Most people are surprised that the Marines had tanks at all.

Mr. King: Yeah. Well they had tanks, back before that. All we did, when I got over there, is what I'd call police duty. That's all we did.

DePue: What do you mean by police duty?

Mr. King: Well, I mean, we were just there. If anything happened, we took care of it.

DePue: Were you not sitting on the front line someplace, holding your piece of the front line?

Mr. King: Well, yeah, in one sense of a way, but what I mean, maybe at night there'd be something going on or something like that. The tanks were just sitting ducks.

DePue: But were they a little bit behind the front lines or right, incorporated in the front lines?

Mr. King: No, I mean, they'd be fairly close to it. I mean, they wouldn't be over a mile or two from it, I would have thought.

DePue: So, you would be back a little bit, and the infantry would be between you and the enemy?

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: What was your specific duty in this tank company?

Mr. King: Well, started out loading shells in the tank. I mean, that was my first job. I never did get to drive the tank. Always had the same driver, all the time. Then I become tank commander, there at the end.

DePue: What was the tank?

Mr. King: What do you mean?

DePue: What was the nomenclature of the tank?

Mr. King: Patton 46.

DePue: M46 Patton?

Mr. King: M46. Then I had a ninety-millimeter gun and a fifty machine gun and a thirty machine gun.

DePue: So, it's got a lot of firepower.

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: Did you get a chance, when you first got up there, to train on how to fire that weapon?

Mr. King: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, we didn't train. We just got on the tank, and they told us what to do and how to aim it and things like that, the tank commander did.

DePue: At the time, I'm assuming you were arriving in a unit that was already there on the ground.

Mr. King: Oh, yeah.

DePue: So, you were the new replacement.

Mr. King: All we were doing is just replacing people every month.

DePue: What was it like being the new guy in the unit? How did they treat you?

Mr. King: Good.

DePue: Don't think there was any resentment on their part of the new guy?

Mr. King: I don't think so, or I never did feel it if there was. They was all good guys.

DePue: Did you think that was a logical way of doing it, that individual rotation policy, rather than rotating units in and out?

Mr. King: I thought it was.

DePue: Did you like working on the tanks?

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: Did you ever think about, “Man, I’d like to be in the infantry instead of this.”?

Mr. King: No. Well, yeah. I didn’t care about being in the infantry there. (laughter)

DePue: So, being a tankerman was an okay deal, as far as you were concerned.

Mr. King: Right.

DePue: I don’t know if there is such a thing, but tell me about your typical day, when your unit was on the front.

Mr. King: Well, you stayed in the tank and keep watching. I’d say that was your biggest thing, making sure there wasn’t nothing moving out there and things like that. That was the biggest job. Then, every once in a while, they’d come up with the idea that they was going to make a push. Come from headquarters, and they’re going to make a push. They’d fire everything they had, just lob them over the hills and things, is about all it amounted to.

DePue: Were there artillery units close to you, as well?

Mr. King: Yes, but they were behind us. Of course, they could go further, shoot further, you know.

DePue: So, they’re firing over your head.

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: I know, for a tank, it’s got a gun, which gets kind of technical. It’s not a Howitzer, where it’s got a high arc over it. A gun is a pretty flat-trajectory weapon. How often would you fire on the enemy?



Crewmember Albert Kidd mans the tank's .50 caliber machine gun while King spots for him.

Mr. King: Well, just (laughs) occasionally. I mean, I wouldn’t say that often. It’d be varied. Like you seen something out there moving on the hill, some guy shoveling dirt or something. Well, that’s when you fired. I mean, there wasn’t never no certain day, time or when or how much you fired.

DePue: Did you go for days on end without firing the gun?

Mr. King: Oh, I'd say there's some days, yeah.

DePue: But, more often or not, you'd have an opportunity to fire the gun?

Mr. King: No, I'd say you'd fire some. Because, see, those people was dug in those hills.... You could just lower that hill with bombs and shells and things, and in fifteen minutes, he'd be out there digging out the hole, where he was at. Then you'd fire it again.

DePue: "Those people" being the Chinese.

Mr. King: Um-hmm, or the Koreans.

DePue: Did you every actually see Chinese soldiers?

Mr. King: Well, I wouldn't know them from the Koreans or the Chinese, really.

DePue: It sounds like, in your unit, the tanks are close enough to the front line that you can take some incoming as well.

Mr. King: Oh, yeah.

DePue: How often did you have incoming?

Mr. King: Well, I think I told you a story here the other day. When it really got bad is when these Koreans went to town that did the washing for the colonels and the captains and all that. It seemed like that's when it was always the worst.

DePue: The Koreans that went to town, were they in the military?

Mr. King: No, they just done the washing for the guys and done things for them, you know.

DePue: What was the buzz about those guys, then?

Mr. King: Well, the officers let the Koreans come back. They'd come back maybe the next day or two, and they'd still let them do their work and things. But the officers finally learned, there at last, that was what was happening, that the Koreans was telling the enemy where we was at, you know.

DePue: Did they do anything with those guys?

Mr. King: Not that I know of, because they worked for the wheels. (laughs) They didn't work for the peons. They worked for the captains and the sergeants and all them and higher. They had certain tents they stayed in and all that. Then, we

always had a place to stay. We had bunkers. I mean, we built a lot of bunkers. I've got some pictures of what they look like, with me.

DePue: In other words, when you're not sitting in the tank watching, you're sleeping in a bunker someplace.

Mr. King: Um-hmm.

DePue: What did it feel like to be sitting out there, knowing that the enemy can see you and take shots at you every once in a while, whenever they wanted?

Mr. King: Well, I don't know. (laughs) You just sit there and wonder what's going to take place.

DePue: Did you figure that maybe the military knew what they were doing, or did you have doubts about that sometimes?

Mr. King: Well, no, I didn't have doubts about it, because, like I say, it wasn't like you was pushing to go take the whole island. So, you was just sitting there. That's why it was more or less like a police force, standing by in case they need you.

DePue: Yeah. For those who aren't all that familiar with the Korean War history, the first year, there were all kinds of movement, back and forth, big movement. The second two years, it was very much a static line, like you're talking about.

Mr. King: They backed them off, you know, and they had to come around on the other side to come get back on.

DePue: What part of the line was the First Marine Division holding, while you were there?

Mr. King: Well, I don't remember what part of it. It was close to the Panmunjom tent; that's all I can tell you.

DePue: Which would have been the western sector of the line, not too far of the 38th parallel, north of Seoul, then.

Mr. King: Um-hmm. North of Seoul, I believe.

DePue: Were you close enough to be able to see Panmunjom itself?

Mr. King: No. See the light? Well, I mean, I'd say the light looked like it was maybe a mile away, maybe not that far. They kept a light coming up in the air the whole time.

- DePue: The Army units, I know, had KATUSAs, KATUSAs, Korean augmentee, United States Army. In other words, Korean soldiers who were incorporated into the unit. Did the Marines have that, as well?
- Mr. King: No, not that I know of. They could have, maybe, in the higher offices. Your officers might have had somebody. The only time I got fairly close was, they took some high generals or something up to the Panmunjom tent, and we were pretty close to it then, for protection, more or less, and get them out of there, in case something happened. That was about all that amounted to.
- DePue: Do you remember, roughly, what timeframe that would have been?
- Mr. King: No.
- DePue: Nineteen fifty-three, you think?
- Mr. King: Probably early, early.
- DePue: Now, you said the weather patterns are pretty much like here. What was it like in that Korean winter, sitting on these hills?
- Mr. King: Well, like I say, about all the time we was actually out in real cold weather was standing guard. I had to stand guard. I mean, everybody had to stand guard at night. But other than that, we generally had a place to sleep, you know, had these bunkers we stayed in.
- DePue: Do you remember any specific combat experiences that you had?
- Mr. King: No, other than, one day we was going to move out across the parallel, and we did. Went a little ways, and I forget, we lost a tank. I don't know whether we lost any guys or not, probably did some, the infantry did.
- DePue: Would this have been crossing the Imjin River, perhaps?
- Mr. King: No.
- DePue: Well, I know you were injured over there. Tell us about that experience. How did that happen?
- Mr. King: Well, like I said, we was on a hill, and this one round came in. This is daytime, and we had the hatches open, because it had rained all night, and we were letting it dry out inside. Well, this one round came over, and we heard it, and then we shut the hatches. We didn't lock it. The next round hit the tank and set it on fire, because we had some, I don't know, tanks and things. They had racks out on the outside, and it caught that on fire. It blew the hatches open, because they wasn't locked, see. Like I say—I told you the other day—

we all got out to put the fire out. If they'd put one more round in there, it would have killed us all.

DePue: But you did get out to put the fire out?

Mr. King: Yeah, we got out, put the fire out. Then, this guy was bleeding, like a hog out of his head. All he had was actually a scratch, and I had seventeen pieces. The worst one was there, but most of them was just stuck to me. But they was hot.

DePue: You said "there." In your belly region?

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: That penetrated the skin in the belly region?

Mr. King: Oh, yeah. It took a long time for it to heal. They say that metal, whatever's in it, it won't heal fast.

DePue: You were in the tank when you got hit?

Mr. King: Yeah.

Mr. King: The shrapnel went in the tank, see.

DePue: So it blew the hatch open enough that the shrapnel came in?

Mr. King: Yeah. It came in, yeah.

DePue: Where exactly did the round hit the tank?

Mr. King: Well, on the side of it.

DePue: The side armor of the turret?

Mr. King: Uh-huh, of the turret, because we had all kinds of cans and stuff sitting on the outside. However, we didn't have gas sitting there. We'd be dead.

DePue: Gas and not diesel?

Mr. King: Yeah, they was gas burners. There was twenty-four cylinder Cadillac motors in those tanks.

DePue: Wow.

Mr. King: Took five gallons of gas to drive it a couple days.

- DePue: (laughs) Which makes it a little bit more flammable too, doesn't it?
- Mr. King: Yeah.
- DePue: Did you learn to do a lot of maintenance on that tank?
- Mr. King: Well, we always had to do maintenance on it, yeah.
- DePue: Now, that's tough work.
- Mr. King: Took everything off. We had to always take everything off, clear down to everything. Then, of course, we had a mechanic tell you what to do or something like that. If we had a track that needed replacing, he told you just how you do it. Of course, you did the work.
- DePue: When you say, you take everything off, did that include busting track, taking the track down?
- Mr. King: No, we didn't take it off, unless it was necessary. I mean, a lot of times they had bad parts, and we had to take them off.
- DePue: Well, let's go back to the injury. What happened after you're injured? Did you get sent to the hospital?
- Mr. King: Yeah, I went to the hospital ship, the *Hope*. I remember that ship was the *Hope*.
- DePue: I assume that was cruising off the west coast of South Korea.
- Mr. King: Yeah.
- DePue: How long were you there?
- Mr. King: Stayed there about a week, I think.
- DePue: They take good care of you there?
- Mr. King: Yeah.
- DePue: See some nurses there?
- Mr. King: I probably did. I wasn't paying too much attention to them at that time. But I was there. You didn't do too much on there. I don't remember even doing anything, as far as a movie or anything like that. There about a week, and then I went back to the front lines, the same unit.

DePue: You recall when it was that you were wounded?

Mr. King: No.

DePue: It says here 4 September 1952, so you probably would have been in Korea for a few months when that happened.

Mr. King: Oh, yeah, I'd say half the time I was there.

DePue: We're looking at the DD 214 for you. Was your expectation you'd be sent back to the same unit?

Mr. King: Um-hmm.

DePue: That's what you wanted?

Mr. King: Oh, yeah.

DePue: What was the morale like in your unit then?



Wayne King's tank crew proudly stands atop a newly constructed bunker near the front lines in late 1952. From left to right, unknown, Private Flood, Albert Kidd, and Private Kubeck

Mr. King: Good, I thought.

DePue: You have any memories of some of your other Marine buddies?

Mr. King: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Any in particular?

Mr. King: Well, I had one good buddy. I visited him a long time. But all the tank crew—there was five of us—I've seen them after I got home and things like that. We had a reunion and things like that. But, I remember all of them, you know what I mean? You live with them for a year, same guys, well, you get to know them pretty good, where you're close, you're knit.

DePue: Now, this was the first war that the military was really integrated. Did you have blacks in your company?

Mr. King: Um-hmm. I had an assistant driver; he was black.

DePue: In your tank?

Mr. King: In my tank. And he was good as gold.

DePue: Do you remember where he's from?

Mr. King: Virginia.

DePue: So, you had an Illinois farm boy and you had a black from Virginia. Where else were the men from, in that tank?

Mr. King: One from South Carolina, and the other one was in, I want to say Minnesota, and one in Kansas.

DePue: Any friction that you can ever recall, between the young man from South Carolina and the young man from Virginia?

Mr. King: No, they all liked each other. I mean, it was just one knit five people. You did everything together; you're bound to.

DePue: Who was the senior person?

Mr. King: At that time?

DePue: Yeah, in the tank. Would that have been an E-5 sergeant?

Mr. King: I don't know what they called it back then. They didn't have E. It was either staff sergeant or sergeant, back then in the Marines. He was a sergeant, what I call a three-stripe sergeant. There wasn't no—

DePue: No rockers on it?

Mr. King: No, that's what I had when I left.

DePue: Was he a veteran Marine? Had he been over in the Pacific in World War II?

Mr. King: No, everybody was just young bucks, I guess you'd want to call it.

DePue: What'd you think about the NCOs that you did work with, when you were in Korea, quality-wise?

Mr. King: Well, they was okay. Never was around them too much. Once in a while you'd see them.

DePue: Well, it sounds like your world was pretty much defined by that tank crew.

Mr. King: Right, that's right. It was like a family.

DePue: How about officers? Did you have a lot of experience, working with some officers?

Mr. King: No, no.

DePue: So, no opinion, good or bad, about the Marine officers?

Mr. King: No, they stayed to their selves, and we stayed to ourselves.

DePue: Well, there's one point in time, though, you're talking about these Koreans who were doing chores, laundry and things like that for the NCOs and the officers. Now, maybe I'm reading into it, a little bit of resentment that they had those kind of luxuries that you didn't have.

Mr. King: No, we didn't care what they done. (laughs)

DePue: How about the Koreans themselves? Did you have many dealing with the Korean people?

Mr. King: No. Seen them, a few of them. There was a few farmers around us that grew rice. But as far as I had any dealings with them, no.

DePue: No impressions of them one way or another?

Mr. King: No. The only thing, where I was actually close to any of them, and I felt sorry for them, was kids and old people. When we'd take what I'd call the garbage run—always had to do a garbage run every day—they were out there. You'd have to fight them off with shovels and things to get them out of the way, to get the truck unloaded. But I've seen women take their aprons, gather up that stuff—what I'd call hay, but I don't know what they called it—put that old slop and dough and everything and take off with it. But the kids, they were just pitiful. It's what I hated about it.

DePue: You grew up in a rural area. You grew up without electricity, having draft animals, things like that. How would you compare their living conditions to what you grew up with?

Mr. King: Not too much different, I don't think, back at that day. They



Korean children were frequent visitors to the front line units

had an old ox they plowed their ground with, to put in this rice. Of course, they did most of it by hand, but they had a thing made out of wood they worked the ground with when they, what I'd call, plow the ground.

DePue: Did you say it was an ox that they had?

Mr. King: Pulled it with an ox. Pretty primitive back at that time.

DePue: How about the opinion that you and your fellow Marines had about the enemies that you faced?

Mr. King: Well, I don't know how they felt. I know it didn't bother me any, to be right truthful.

DePue: Didn't have an opinion, one way or another, about the enemy?

Mr. King: No.

DePue: Didn't have any hatred for them necessarily?

Mr. King: No, I don't think I did.

DePue: Just the other poor schmuck on the other side of the line, huh?

Mr. King: Right, just like I was, probably.

DePue: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but did you know what was going on at Panmunjom?

Mr. King: No.

DePue: You hadn't heard too much about that?

Mr. King: No. Every once in a while, like I say, the officers from our side would go up there, and they'd talk a while, and that'd be about all it'd amount to.

DePue: Were you hoping that they'd finally end the thing?

Mr. King: Well, yeah, but they practically had it ended when I was there, in one sense.

DePue: The war ended towards the end of July of 1953, ended when they signed the armistice—not a peace treaty, but an armistice—basically, called a truce for a while and stopped shooting at each other. But I know, for the last couple months before that time, the intensity of the firing on both sides and the combat on both sides really increased. Do you remember that being the case in your sector?

Mr. King: Well, I don't think too much, no.

DePue: Do you think that might be a factor, that you were too close to Panmunjom, where they didn't want to have things going back and forth?

Mr. King: That's what I think. I mean, I don't know that for sure.

DePue: Well, tell me about keeping in touch with the family back home.

Mr. King: Well, we wrote letters back home—that was about all—to my grandmother. She was about the only one close that I wrote to.

DePue: Did you look forward to mail call?

Mr. King: Yeah, I guess.

DePue: How about the chow? How well were you fed?

Mr. King: Good.

DePue: Eating American rations?

Mr. King: Never had much of that, except in cold-weather training, here in the United States.

DePue: Were you eating hot meals most the time?

Mr. King: Most the time.

DePue: You didn't have C-rations or anything like that?

Mr. King: I was just on a police force. (DePue laughs)

DePue: Did you ever feel like you had a shortage of ammunition?

Mr. King: The only thing we had short of was gas. You always had plenty of ammunition; the gas is what was short.

DePue: How often did your unit come off the line, and how long would you stay off the line?

Mr. King: I'd say a couple weeks, maybe, off the line, something like that.

DePue: How far back would the unit move?

Mr. King: Well, just back far enough they couldn't hit us, unless they made a push over the 38th parallel, you know, out of the range of guns, more or less. I'd say, fifteen to twenty miles.

DePue: That far?

Mr. King: Well, maybe not that far, either. It didn't take us very long to get there, maybe six or eight miles in the tanks.

DePue: Which means you would have still been north of Seoul, it sounds like.

Mr. King: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Did you ever get a chance to see Seoul?

Mr. King: Yeah, went to Seoul there one time. It seemed like we went down to pick up some trucks or something. I can't remember. We went to pick up something, I don't remember what, and I got to see Seoul and see what it looked like. It was pretty well shot up then, the buildings were and everything. One thing that amazed me, what I seen, they was tarring the street, and it was all done by hand. They had no modern equipment, whatsoever. They had wheelbarrows and things like that, putting tar on the street.

DePue: Tar buckets and just slopping it around, huh? Did you get a chance to go on leave while you were there?

Mr. King: No. Well, I had a chance. I could have went, maybe. I didn't much want to.

DePue: Other guys in the unit were going on leave?

Mr. King: Yeah, one of my buddies went.

DePue: Why didn't you want to go on leave?

Mr. King: I didn't care about it.

DePue: Would that have extended your stay in Korea?

Mr. King: No.

DePue: Sometimes units have a chance to see some of the USO entertainers. Did you have that experience?

Mr. King: We had one. I can't remember who it was. I've got a picture of her, but I don't remember who it was, but it was one lady we had one night. But that's the only one we ever had that I knew of.

- DePue: You remember something that makes you chuckle today, when you think about it?
- Mr. King: I doubt it. I haven't even thought of that. Well, it wouldn't make you chuckle, but I'll never forget building a backhouse on Easter Sunday. I thought that was funny.
- DePue: A bathhouse?
- Mr. King: A backhouse, a toilet, you know. (laughs) I thought that was unusual to be doing that.
- DePue: On Easter Sunday, of all days, huh?
- Mr. King: Yep, Easter Sunday.
- DePue: What was the worst part of the experience in being in Korea when you were there?
- Mr. King: Well, I'd say standing guard on a cold night was about the worst thing I did. It got pretty cold, and you'd hear things. I mean, there was mice and rats out there. They had tin cans strung on a wire, so, if the enemy hit that, the guards would hear it. But a lot of times, it'd be some animal doing it, instead of some person.
- DePue: When they heard that, did they light them up?
- Mr. King: No, but we finally figured out what it was, you know. I mean, there was some kind of an animal, instead of a person. We'd find out what it was. But that's what they was doing, eating out of them cans. Man, they'd really make a noise, like there was a whole bunch of people out there.
- DePue: Do you remember when you came back to the States?
- Mr. King: About two months before I get discharged, something like that.
- DePue: Okay, your effective date of separation here is September 4, 1953, so that would have been in July.
- Mr. King: Somewhere in there. It was hot. Man, I remember the guys got sunburned, out at the rifle range. Man, they'd get burnt. They hadn't been used to being out in the sun.
- DePue: It looks like, right before you came back home, you got promoted to sergeant, as well.

Mr. King: Um-hmm, right.

DePue: You were tank commander then.

Mr. King: Um-hmm.

DePue: Did you like that experience?

Mr. King: It was all right. I couldn't see I was any better than the other four. They didn't think so either, I don't think.

DePue: How about the experience of seeing some of the guys, who you formed pretty strong relationships with, leaving one at a time. Was that bothersome to see new guys coming in?

Mr. King: Well, see, we didn't change. See, I was there twelve months. The same guys was there twelve months. We left together, see? We didn't have no actually new guys, until the twelfth month was up. And then, we didn't care who they were. There was a new guy took my place, new guy took another guy's place.

DePue: You remember much about coming home, then?

Mr. King: What do you mean?

DePue: Well, the route back to the United States?

Mr. King: It was about the same deal, except we left out of San Diego, and we landed in San Francisco coming back. I remember we had a storm, just before we landed, and, of course, we had china cups. Everything else was metal, but them china cups was all over the place, broken. I mean, it was so rough.

DePue: On the troop ship.

Mr. King: Um-hmm.

DePue: Wouldn't you think the Navy would figure it out, (laughs) that they want to have something that's not breakable?

Mr. King: Yeah, but they didn't. They always had a china coffee cup. Everything else was metal.

DePue: Now, most people talking about those troop ships going up and back say how miserable that experience was.

Mr. King: I didn't think it was bad. I mean, I didn't worry about it, or didn't think too much about it, but it didn't bother me too much.

DePue: You never got seasick?

Mr. King: No.

DePue: Did you see other guys getting seasick?

Mr. King: Yeah, seen one guy going over. He laid in bed for the nineteen days. They took him food, but he couldn't stand up, without being sick.

DePue: (laughs) He had to be one miserable Marine.

Mr. King: Had to be miserable, yeah. But 90% of the time, we got to go see a show or something like that. Most of the time, we ate breakfast, and that would take quite a while. Then, we'd get back in line for dinner. They'd be lined up, see. I don't know how many thousand it'd be, but you'd be lined up in one line, curve around that ship. Get on the noon meal, ate that, and then you'd get back in line. That's about all we done.

DePue: (laughs) Eat and stand in line to eat, huh?

Mr. King: Right.

DePue: When was it that the Marines started talking to you about, "Hey, how about signing up and reenlisting?"

Mr. King: Well, they did that right after I got back, before I got out, really, a month before we got out.

DePue: Did they put a hard press on you to convince you to sign up again?

Mr. King: They offered you so much money. I think it was \$8,000, which was a lot of money back at that time, for four years.

DePue: That was your reenlistment bonus?

Mr. King: Um-hmm. Then, I wanted to go to school of some kind, to mortuary school. They never did offer that, so I just come home.

DePue: You mean, if the Marines had offered you an opportunity to go to mortuary school, you'd still be in the Marines?

Mr. King: No, this was before I come out. I wanted to go to school in the service, and they wouldn't offer that.

DePue: What were you thinking you're going to do, then, when you got out of the service?

Mr. King: I didn't know. Well, I had a job when I got back.

DePue: With the lumberyard?

Mr. King: Lumberyard, um-hmm.

DePue: Is that what you ended up doing?

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: How long were you there then?

Mr. King: I was there... Well, I don't know how many years I was there, quite a while. And then, I went to work for Illinois Rural Electric after that. I was there about thirty years, maybe something like that.

DePue: Did you take advantage of the GI Bill?

Mr. King: No, I should have, but I didn't.

DePue: When in this process did you get married?

Mr. King: When did I get married? April twenty-third. I got married on my birthday. That way, I wouldn't forget it, in 1954.

DePue: So, about a year after you got back.

Mr. King: Right.

DePue: Did you know her before you were shipped overseas?

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: Were you corresponding while you were over there?

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: You mentioned your grandmother before. So, you're getting a letter from your sweetheart too, then.

Mr. King: Yeah, once in a while. (laughter)

DePue: Well, she's sitting over there, so we'd better be careful, huh?

Mr. King: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: What's her name?

Mr. King: Joyce.

DePue: And her last name, at the time?

Mr. King: Northrop, at the time.

DePue: Northrop?

Mr. King: R-o-p instead of r-u-p.

DePue: Where did you meet her?

Mr. King: Well, in the small town of Alsey. Did we go to that dance?

Mrs. King: We had a date, but we knew each other in school.

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: Knew each other in school?

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: Well, we're about at the end of this. What I'd like to ask you now is just some other, more general questions here. You know, the World War II generation and your generation, ten, fifteen years down the road, saw the Vietnam War. What did you think about the different way Americans were reacting to the Vietnam War than they had reacted to what you experienced when you grew up and when you went to war?

Mr. King: Hmm, I don't know whether it'd be much difference or not. I never had too much complaints about the Korean War. People did more complaining, I guess, at the Vietnam War. Didn't think we should be there or something like that. But, of course, they probably thought that in the Korean War too, so I don't know.

DePue: Even in the last twenty or thirty years, the Korean War has gotten the name, "the Forgotten War," because Americans, for whatever reason, kind of ignore Korea. They focus a lot on World War II. They focus a lot on Vietnam. Has that ever bothered you?

Mr. King: Like I say, I look to the future. I don't worry about these things.

DePue: So, you roll with the punches.

Mr. King: Right.

DePue: Play the cards that were dealt you, huh?

Mr. King: That's right.

DePue: Have you managed to stay in touch with some of your buddies? You mentioned a little bit that you had.

Mr. King: Yeah, I had two of them, until real recently. One of them died about a year and a half ago. So, I always contacted him. One of them's still alive, in Montana. I went to see him. And one's still alive in Texas. I hear from him every once in a while. He wasn't even in my outfit, the one from Texas. He was either in A or C. I can't remember the tank company.

DePue: What was it that attracted the two of you to each other, over in Korea?

Mr. King: You mean the one from Texas?

DePue: Yeah.

Mr. King: Well, he'd come over and visit some nights, something like that, talk to everybody. He was a talker.

DePue: A sociable guy.

Mr. King: Right, he was a sociable guy. If you was asking, he'd tell you everything about Korea. He was that type of guy; he took an interest in everything he did.

DePue: Did you join any veterans' organizations, coming back home?

Mr. King: No.

DePue: Well, Wayne, just a couple closing questions here for you. Do you think the experience of going over to Korea changed you...being in the Marines, has that changed you?

Mr. King: Well, to a certain extent, yeah. I'm proud to be a Marine. I guess that's the way you'd put it.

DePue: Sometimes, if you've seen some more rugged combat, it maybe has a different impact on you, but it sounds like, what you've explained here, you didn't really see any heavy combat.

Mr. King: No, that's right.

DePue: What were the things that you took away from that experience, that you learned, that helped you mature?

Mr. King: Well, I would say one thing is—I don't know how to say it—to like your friends that was with you, more or less. I think that the experience taught me that, more so than anything.

DePue: That it's worth making the effort to stay in touch with these guys?

Mr. King: Yeah.

DePue: Do you think we were there for the right reasons?

Mr. King: (laughs) In the Korean War?

DePue: Yeah.

Mr. King: Well, I guess. It seemed like they, at least, got the fighting stopped, because the Chinese might have took the whole island, you know what I mean? So, I think it was worthwhile.

DePue: Did it make sense to you, while you were there?

Mr. King: Well, yeah. We, I thought, were doing our part, making sure they didn't run over the whole island, you know. That's what they would have done, if it hadn't been for the Americans.

DePue: What advice would you give to future generations? I know your son's looking forward to listening to this.

Mr. King: (laughs) Well, I don't know what the future brings, to be right truthful. I hope that they don't have too big a war, but if it is, it won't be with people. It'll be with technology. Everything'll be done with planes and ships, and there won't be no infantry guys, I don't think.

DePue: Well, we're in Afghanistan and Iraq right now, and the infantry, both the Army and the Marine infantry, are right in the thick of it. So, that part hasn't changed too much.

Mr. King: Yeah, that hasn't changed yet, but I think in time it will. I may be wrong.

DePue: Any final comments to wrap things up here?

Mr. King: No, not that I know of. Doing fine.

DePue: It looks like you're doing very well here, Wayne.

Mr. King: Well, thank you.

DePue: I appreciate the interview. Thank you very much. It's been fascinating to talk to you, and that pretty much finishes this thing up.

Mr. King: Okay.

(end of interview)