

Interview with Steve Hall

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Interviewer: Lee Patton

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Patton: This is Lee Patton. I'm interviewing Stephen Hall on May 7, 2007. We are at the VFW Hall in Springfield, Illinois. This interview is part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember* Oral History Project. You were born in October of 1930. Is that correct?

Hall: That's correct.

Patton: You were born in Chicago?

Hall: Ravenswood Hospital, Chicago, Illinois.

Patton: Did you grow up in Chicago? Was that a...

Hall: I grew up in Skokie, Illinois, which was Niles Center, Illinois at that time. I believe they changed the name from Niles Center to Skokie about 1940. My parents moved from Niles Center in 1938 to Springfield. I was eight years old when I came to Springfield.

Patton: You've lived here the rest of your life except for your service years?

Hall: That's correct.

Patton: How large was your family?

Hall: I have a brother and a sister. That makes three. Three children and my parents.

Patton: What level of school did you go to? Did you go to high school? Did you go to college?

Hall: I graduated from Cathedral High School in Springfield and had one year of college at Springfield Junior College, which it was called then. Now it's called Springfield College in Illinois. I was in the National Guard at the time. We were federally activated and that took care of my college.

Patton: How does that work when you get federally activated? Do they just say “You are in the army now?”

Hall: Essentially, yes. They gave us about six months notice that they’re going to activate the whole division.

Patton: Uh, huh.

Hall: I was playing in the division band at the time.

Patton: When and how did you happen become part of the National Guard?

Hall: November of ’47 when I was a senior in high school. The 44th Division, National Guard was forming its division band. They went to the different high schools to see if there was anybody that wanted to join the National Guard and play in their band. (Cleared throat) Excuse me. I was one of probably ten or twelve students from Cathedral High School that joined the National Guard and played in their band.

Patton: That was because you were really interested in being in the band?

Hall: I was a musician. Or so I thought. (laughs)

Patton: What did you play?

Hall: At that time I played a French horn.

Patton: What did they tell you in terms of possible later duties? Or did they just tell you you could just go in and play in the band.

Hall: Oh, that’s right. World War II was just over. You weren’t expecting any other wars.

Patton: You joined. What kind of obligation did you have in terms of...?

Hall: I had a three year enlistment..

Patton: Three years.

Hall: Yes.

Patton: In 1950 when the war broke out you signed up again?

Hall: No. Let’s see. In November of ’50, I reenlisted. The Korean War was going on for a couple or three months or four. It didn’t matter to me. I reenlisted. I guess it was probably August of ’51; we had just come back from summer camp. That was two weeks every summer of training that the whole Division went to. We just had come back. We found out that the whole Division was activated and was going to go in the federal service in February of ’52.

Patton: What was your reaction to that?

Hall: Big deal, I'm in band. (Laughter)

Patton: Didn't worry about actual combat, huh?

Hall: No. No

Patton: Had you been trained for combat during these summer sessions? (both talking)

Hall: Oh, no.

Patton: During those summer sessions?

Hall: No.

Patton: Summer camp, you just played the horn.

Hall: Summer camp we played the horn and marched around and woke everybody up at 5 o'clock in the morning. We went to play at different Company areas.

Patton: So you presumed that when you were activated you'd still be doing pretty much the same thing?

Hall: Oh, yeah. And we did! We went to California for training. Our training consisted of playing and...

Patton: And marching.

Hall: And marching and waking everybody up. Until, I guess, let's see, February to probably August we did that. Then they said, "Oh, wait, we need some (cleared throat) band people in Japan." They called it a levy. They levied our unit for ten, I believe, it was ten people to go to Europe and eighteen people to go to Japan. The one to go to Europe was about a month before it was for Japan. We didn't know anything about the Japan deal. We knew about the Europe thing so there were about ten volunteers. They were looking for volunteers from the band to go to Europe. I was not one of those ten. I don't volunteer for anything. (Cleared throat)

We went on furlough. We drove back home to furlough for about, I guess, a thirty day furlough. Then we went back to California. Here comes the levy for Japan. They need eighteen volunteers for Japan. The band consisted of fifty-six members. That's the official number of bandsmen who are supposed to be in an Army Division Band. There are ten gone. Now there are going to be eighteen gone. That's leaving about a twenty-eight piece band. There are twenty-eight-piece bands in the service, but not a Division band. Anyway, they were looking for volunteers. They got some volunteers to go to Japan. I went in to see the Company Commander or Band Commander and said, "I'll volunteer for Japan." He said, "You don't have to volunteer; you're number one on the list." (Laughter)

Patton: You were going whether or not.

Hall: Right. Anyway, I went to Japan.

Patton: Now, excuse me a second. By that time were you playing additional instruments?

Hall: By that time I was an instrument repairman. I could play anything. Not well, but I could play a scale on reeds, brass and everything. Just to make sure the instruments worked.

Patton: Do you think that contributed to your being number one on their list?

Hall: Oh, no. Let's say, my leadership qualities (laughs)

Patton: How had they been exhibited?

Hall: By questioning quite a few things that were coming along.

Patton: Leadership is a little bit of tongue-in-cheek?

Hall: Well, no, I was a leader.

Patton: But you weren't going to go along with everything that happened?

Hall: No, I wasn't a yes man.

Patton: Did that get you in trouble some of the time?

Hall: Oh, yes.

Patton: Like what? Can you give me some examples?

Hall: Well, I lived off base. I was married. I lived in Santa Maria, California with my wife. We lived off base. I'd go home every night and come in every morning at 5 o'clock and play reveille and march around. Then during the day we'd either sack out for a while or we'd practice music or do something. One time, I guess, we were, what were we doing? Oh, I was running the baseball game. The Assistant Director wanted to rehearse. I said, "We're going to play ball, we're not going to rehearse, we're going to continue this game." I out-ranked him. Anyway, word got to the Commander and the Commander sort of restricted me to the base over a weekend. It just so happens that weekend that there was an earthquake. I'd never been in an earthquake. I thought somebody was rattling my bed because I'd never stayed at the post or the base. When the Commander restricted me to the base that weekend, that was the only weekend I was ever there. But I was number one on his list after that.

Patton: After that one. (laughter) He thought you'd get a good taste of Japan. Now did they tell you at all that there was any chance of your going into the Korean combat?

Hall: Oh, yeah. But we're going in the bands. See, they needed replacements for the bands that people were rotating out.

Patton: Had you known anybody who had been in the band and then had been reassigned into combat? Or you had a pretty good feeling...

Hall: No, we had some band members that came back from Japan and Korea. Just a couple. But they were in bands over there and they came back and were transferred into our band in the States.

Patton: So you had every reason to believe that that was... (both talking)

Hall: Yeah, yeah, sure.

Patton: That was your permanent assignment.

Hall: But when we got to Korea, I mean Japan, we were there for twenty-four hours. We got back on another boat and went to Pusan, Korea. That was the eighteen fellows from the band plus a lot of other people from the 44th. In Pusan the personnel officers or whatever they call them went through the files to see what bands needed who and what and all that stuff and where we should go. But it just so happened that my secondary MOS, which means Military [Occupation] Specialty. (Phone rings) I was first—primary—Bandsman MOS 1705, I still remember that—French horn player. But up there on the line in the 223rd Regiment, the heavy mortar company needed a Motor Pool Sergeant. My secondary MOS was a truck mechanic. That was my civilian occupation.

Patton: That you had done that while you were in the National Guard?

Hall: No.

Patton: No?

Hall: I'd done that in civilian life.

Patton: That's what I mean.

Hall: While I was in the Guard, yes.

Patton: Yes, Okay.

Hall: Anyway, they saw that. They knew they needed a Motor Pool Sergeant up there. They sent me to this heavy mortar company, 223rd Infantry 40th Division. I got there and the Company Commander says, "Well we've filled that position. But we need a Platoon Sergeant over there in that platoon that's supporting a Republic of Korea Company." Have you ever heard of...? (both talking)

Patton: Yes

Hall: ...that kind of stuff? Okay. Oh, great, wonderful. To backtrack a little bit, when we were notified that we were going to Japan, we got training. We spent a day on the

rifle range and the infiltration course, meaning you crawled under the barbed wire and machine gun fire.

Patton: A day each or a day in total?

Hall: A day in total. Rifle range and infiltration course. Climbing under the barbed wire with the machine gun bullets flying over your head. And the gas mask business. (Phone rings) That was our training.

Patton: Do you need to get that?

Hall: No. They'll get it out there.

Patton: So you had almost no training at all for going into combat?

Hall: Yes, you're right.

Patton: But you were a sergeant at that point.

Hall: I was a SFC, Sergeant First Class.

Patton: Okay.

Hall: A Platoon Sergeant is usually a Master Sergeant. But anyway, over we went.

Patton: Back up for one second. How did you feel when you got to Japan and they said you're going to Korea? You still thought you were going to do it in a band.

Hall: Yeah, oh, yeah.

Patton: Okay. So how did you feel when they said, "We need some other kinds of skills" and off you went to be a...

Hall: I don't remember. (laughter) I don't remember how I felt. That's strange. Anyway, so I got there. I took a jeep ride. Some guy is driving me. We're going down these horrible roads. Here's a green camouflage fence alongside the road. Of course, this guy knew I was green and said, "Well, they put that up there because they can see this road all the way around. You know, they shoot at us occasionally." That's nice. Anyway, I got up there to the platoon. I was an SFC but they thought I was God. The closest rank to me was PFC—about four ranks down. They thought I knew everything and I never told them otherwise.

Patton: You never told them.

Hall: Never told them anything that I was green as grass. I got out my non-com's guide. Non-commission officer: that's what sergeants are. I studied that rascal. I learned the first night what the combat was. It was a heavy mortar company and we fired the 4.2 inch mortars in the enemy's area. We usually did that every night. We got some incoming also.

Patton: Now you said you were there in support of...

Hall: a ROK company.

Patton: Uh huh. But you were doing the firing of the... (both talking)

Hall: Yeah, right.

Patton: ...of the mortars.

Hall: Right. We had a couple of Koreans with us. But there were about thirty or thirty-two people.

Patton: For both groups?

Hall: Pardon?

Patton: Just in your platoon, or in...

Hall: In my platoon.

Patton: You were in charge of everything. (both talking)

Hall: I was in charge of that platoon.

Patton: Do you remember how you felt that first night when combat...? (both talking)

Hall: No. All I know is I learned and I kept my head down. I learned fast.

Patton: Had to learn even how to fire the ... (both talking)

Hall: Oh, yeah, I learned that too.

Patton: ...the mortars.

Hall: Yes, yes. Fire the mortar. We had four mortars. We had four mortars and I was in charge of all four of 'em. We had a .50 caliber machine gun and .30 caliber machine gun that I took care of—cleaned, fired and all that. I found out how to clean them. (chuckle)

Patton: This was definitely learn on the job.

Hall: Field stripped and cleaned. Yes, oh yeah. It was on-the-job training. I never told a soul. There was supposed to be a Second Lieutenant in charge of the platoon that I was, but I was it.

Patton: What made you decide not to tell them? You felt that was, they needed leadership and...

Hall: They needed leadership. They were a rag-tag bunch. I didn't make them shine their boots and any of that stuff. Of course not, but they knew I was in command and that was that.

Patton: Had you had other experiences of being command of anything at all? In high school or on the job? In your band?

Hall: Not really, no.

Patton: You just rose to the occasion.

Hall: I guess, yeah.

Patton: Did you have anybody that you could turn to? I mean a...

Hall: I saw our Company Commander that first day and didn't see him ever again. Didn't see any officers ever again.

Patton: How did you know what to shoot at or what was happening?

Hall: We'd get our orders from the ROK people. What was going on?

Patton: At what point?

Hall: By radio.

Patton: As I understand the war, it sort of, the Americans and ROK would be in Pusan. They'd move forward and then they'd retreat back.(both talking)

Hall: Well, not exactly.

Patton: What point?

Hall: Since we got there in August of '52, all the shadowing back and forth and up and down the peninsula—the peninsula is the country of Korea, North and South—up and down the peninsula. They were settled in on the main line of resistance—the MLR, they called it, approximately the 38th parallel. That's when we got there. So we didn't do any of the digging of the trenches or digging of the emplacements of the 4.2 mortars and that kind of stuff. We didn't move around. It was pretty well set up. Let's say, the bunkers and all the rest of it. (It was sort of settled.

Patton: Were you being attacked? Or was it just...

Hall: Oh, yeah. Patrols would go out. Our patrols. We'd send patrols out. We'd have a forward observer from our platoon. We're probably a hundred yards behind the main line. We'd fire over the main line. Over to the enemy. The enemy would have patrols out. They'd come to see what's going on and see what we're doing. We'd send patrols out to see what they're doing, that's all. But there was firing, yes. There were people getting wounded and getting killed.

Patton: Did you have to take orders from the ROK or they just told you (both talking)...

Hall: ...what was going on and we'd...

Patton: You'd make the decision?

Hall: ...make the decision. We'd decide what to do. Whether to send up flares or use smoke shells or incendiaries, bombs or whatever shells.

Patton: Was there any communication problem? Did they speak enough English?

Hall: Oh, yeah, they spoke enough English. We spoke enough Korean.

Patton: Do you remember how you felt in terms of that combat? Were you afraid?

Hall: (Laughs) Anybody says they weren't, they're lying to you. Sure. It was in the back of your mind.

Patton: Were you the oldest of the group? Or just the senior...

Hall: I was twenty-one years old. I probably was the oldest of the group. They were seventeen and eighteen.

Patton: What did you think of their training?

Hall: I thought they had more training than I did. (laughter)

Patton: But they did seem to be well trained and knew...

Hall: Oh, yeah.

Patton: ...what they needed to do. How about your equipment? Did you have...?

Hall: You know, I keep hearing from my wife. I had her sending me tea bags in the mail because I didn't drink coffee. I still don't drink coffee. My wife would say something about that they heard that they were low on ammunition. I'm saying, "Who are they trying to kid? We got all the ammunition we ever could dream of needing." We were never short on ammunition.

Patton: That's good.

Hall: But the newspapers here in the States were saying we were short on ammo.

Patton: Your guns and your mortars were in working condition and...

Hall: Yeah, yes, we kept them up and clean. There was no problem getting parts.

Patton: Because that's what I had read, too. That the equipment was sort of left over from World War II.

Hall: Oh, it was left over. That's true. But it sure as heck worked.

Patton: What was the feeling toward the war among your troops and among yourselves?

Hall: You mean, why were we here?

Patton: Yeah, what was the point?

Hall: We were there because Harry Truman said to be there. That's why we were there. We thought it was kind of stupid—the stalemate. We were with MacArthur wanting to cross the Yalu River, go into China and clean their clock. You know China—believe it or not—China was on our side in World War II. In fact China was beat up pretty badly by the Japanese during World War II. We saved their bacon. Then they turned around and cleaned our clock. It was the same way with Russia. They did the same thing. I knew when I was in high school that we were going to be fighting Russia pretty quickly. That's what we were doing in Korea. We were fighting Russia. And Russia sent China in. Stalin. Then while we were there, Stalin died. I thought, "This will take care of things. See if it gets straightened out." It sort of did because Stalin died in March of '53. By July of '53 the armistice was signed. The truce was signed. I will say it wasn't an armistice, it was a truce. Just quit fighting. Nobody won. The war was over. The truce took care of that.

Patton: That must have been frustrating for you to ...

Hall: It was. Yeah. It was downright stupid, but there we were.

Patton: You think that you should have continued to press forward and...

Hall: No, because I knew that China would come in and Russia would come in in force. They were just telling people what to do then. They, in Korea, like what's his name (laughs). I can't even think of it now. The father of the jerk who's in there now.

Patton: Yeah, Kim Il-Sung

Hall: Yeah, Kim Il-Sung Yeah, his father. Nepotism's kind of bad, isn't it? (laughter)

Patton: Yeah, especially if they're not good leaders, I guess you would say. Okay, so you're on the MLR and you're head of this platoon. Did you stay there?

Hall: No..Seoul is way over on the west coast. I started on the east, well near the east coast. Originally, I was at the Punchbowl. Then Anchor Hill and then Heartbreak Ridge.

Patton: What can you tell me about those? I haven't heard of the middle one but I've certainly heard of the Punchbowl and Heartbreak Ridge.

Hall: Anchor Hill was as far east as the MLR went; it was right on the coast. Anchor Hill. The mountains are on the east and the plains are on the west. We were up sort of in the mountains. Patton: Were you still with the ROK duty?

Hall: I was still with the heavy mortar company.

Patton: But what happened to the Korean group? Were you still supporting them?

Hall: Oh, yeah. We support... (both talking)

Patton: Okay. So you two marched up the peninsula. (both talking)

Hall: No, we changed places and so forth.

Patton: I understand that Heartbreak Ridge was pretty awful.

Hall: It was pretty awful for the original people: up and down, back and forth. But by the time I got there all we had was people just sort of attacking us and falling back. They just were playing around, if you can say that. That's sort of weak but that's what they were doing. We'd send out patrols too. But Heartbreak Ridge wasn't much different than the Punch Bowl or Anchor Hill to us or to me.

Patton: What about the Punch Bowl? What was that like?

Hall: Punch Bowl was my original place. Punch Bowl was east of Heartbreak Ridge over here. Anchor Hill was east of the Punch Bowl. It was a big round, almost like a football stadium. We were on the north end of it and all the support groups were back in the bowl. Patton: Was that where they would attack and then retreat?

Hall: Yes. They do that in all of them.

Patton: Is that where you were wounded?

Hall: I was wounded in February. That would have been Heartbreak Ridge.

Patton: What happened? What can you tell me about it?

Hall: Just shrapnel.

Patton: Arm, leg?

Hall: Oh, hands.

Patton: Did that incapacitate you? I mean, did you have to go ...?

Hall: I didn't even go anywhere.

Patton: You just...

Hall: I guess because they gave me a Purple Heart they must have known. Did I go somewhere? Did somebody tell them or what? (both laugh) I didn't go to the MASH [Military Advance Station Hospital] if that's what you're trying to find out. I didn't go to a MASH. Battalion First Aid, I guess. Battalion Aid, I guess that's it.

Patton: Was that pretty common to just take a hit and then keep fighting as long as you could?

Hall: Yes, sure. It was no big deal. I wasn't incapacitated or anything.

Patton: What were fighting conditions like? One of the things you think about Korea is how much rain.

Hall: Colder than hell. Is hell cold? In summer it's probably 120 or 130 degrees. The winters, 40 below. It was ridiculous.

Patton: Pretty miserable, huh?

Hall: Um-hm.

Patton: Did you have clothing appropriate to the seasons?

Hall: At first we didn't. But we got something called the Mickey Mouse boots. They were insulated; they were so insulated that your feet would sweat in 40 below zero. Your feet would sweat and get wet. That's not good having wet feet; that produces other things. You'd have to try to change your socks every night if you could, or every day or whenever you had a chance to. Try to dry out your socks. I think all the time I was up on the lines I got back once or twice for a shower. They had tents set up. The Quartermaster set up tents.

Later on –the war was still going on –for some reason or other, I got transferred out of the heavy mortar company to the headquarters company of the regiment. They put me in charge of a Skoshi R& R [rest and relaxation] center. Skoshi meaning small. The R&R center was, maybe, one mile behind the lines. I ran an R&R center for all the troops that came back. They were sent back for maybe a night or even two nights to get some rest and some good food. I ran one of those. You probably had a hundred people at a time. It rotated along.

Patton: Do you know why you were given that assignment?

Hall: No.

Patton: Were you pleased about it? Or did you want to stay...?

Hall: (both talking) Yes.

Patton: You didn't want to stay on the line any longer.

Hall: (clears throat) When we were on the line the ROK companies would rotate their people but we would stay. It was kind of strange. They'd be gone and you'd get new people up there. We thirty people would still be there. We stayed, if I remember, from October through probably March or April. We stayed up there while everybody else was coming and going.

Patton: Your particular platoon? Or were there a lot of others that were in that same situation?

Hall: I would say there were others in our situation. Yes.

Patton: So did you even get an R&R overnight?

Hall: No, No.

Patton: You were up there for almost, like six months or so. How did you feel about it?

Hall: It was my job. I was running a platoon. I was pleased that I didn't have anybody telling me what to do. (both laugh)

Patton: You liked your independence?

Hall: Oh, yeah. We were independent all right. We didn't see anybody in the company ever.

Patton: They just would send word go here or go there?

Hall: Yeah, that's right.

Patton: How did you get from place to place? Did you have to march?

Hall: By Jeep or 6-by.

Patton: What is that?

Hall: They call them 6-bys. They were 6 by 6, meaning 6 wheels are under power. Three axles and they were all under power.

Patton: How frequently would you move from place to place?

Hall: Probably every couple or three months.

Patton: So you'd dig in and...

Hall: Yeah, and get used to the area and then off ...

Patton: Off you'd go again.

Hall: What we'd do is probably is we'd clean up the place, get it straightened out and then we'd leave like the Boy Scouts. (both laugh)

Patton: You received several medals. What were those for? Bronze Star and the Commendation Medal.

Hall: The two Bronze Stars were for administration. I mean, I did a good job, blah, blah. They were passing out Bronze Stars like candy bars. I think that the Commendation was for running the R&R center. That was that.

Patton: The Combat Infantry Badge is just something that everybody got?

Hall: Everybody that's in Infantry thirty consecutive days gets one of those.

Patton: How did you feel about those medals and awards?

Hall: I earned them, right. I earned them.

Patton: Proud.

Hall: Yeah.

Patton: The same with the Purple Heart?

Hall: I earned that. (both laugh)

Patton: Did you have any repercussions from the mortar to your hands?

Hall: No.

Patton: Able to keep going?

Hall: Oh, yeah.

Patton: What are some of the most memorable things about your combat experiences?

Hall: I learned that you can be scared and do the right thing. Just don't fall apart, that's all. Some people fall apart; some people don't.

Patton: Did you have most of the same group of soldiers throughout the time that you were with them?

Hall: On the line, yes.

Patton: And were any of them killed or wounded?

Hall: No. I take that back. When we got some mortar in a few times. We'd send out mortars; they'd send out mortars. That's where the shrapnel would come from. There were a couple of kids that were wounded more seriously than I.

Patton: Did they have to go back?

Hall: They went either to Battalion Aid or the MASH.

Patton: Did they come back then?

Hall: No.

Patton: So you did get a couple of replacements along the way?

Hall: Yeah, yeah. They were trained! (laughs)

Patton: What kind of relationship do you have with the soldiers under your command? Were you close? Did you sleep separately?

Hall: Close. Yeah. I remember I had a problem with one fella. We'd have a forward observer who would radio back to us and tell us where our rounds were going: falling short, change it fifty yards and so forth. We wanted to change the FO. [Forward Outpost] Can't stay up there too long. After four or five days we want to put somebody else up there. So I sent another guy. I was telling the new guy, who was a medic. He wasn't a combatant; he was a medic in our group. I said, "You're going up there with him because so and so, he's wounded, and we have to get him back. He said he wasn't going. I thought, "That's nice. Here, I want to talk with you." So we went around behind the bunker. We had a little talk and he decided to go. (chuckled)

Patton: You were persuasive, huh?

Hall: A little persuasive, yeah. (chuckle) I think I stomped on him. They knew who was in charge.

Patton: You were a strong leader.

Hall: Yes.

Patton: What happened to your band mates? Did they go into combat, too?

Hall: Yes. Towards the end, there were lulls while the negotiations are going on. I'd grab a Jeep and I'd go out looking for my old band members. I tried to keep in contact with them. I found one band member in another line company in the same Division but he was in Headquarters Company. I don't even know what he did. But I found him and we had a talk for an hour or two. Then I found some guys in the signal company that were bandsmen. I took them some pictures. I found a couple of other guys in the Twenty-fifth Division Band.

Patton: So they got to just keep playing music?

Hall: Yeah, they kept playing. (chuckle) That was my running around.

Patton: At least you could see some familiar faces, huh?

Hall: Yeah.

Patton: While you were on the line, what did you think about the tactics that were being used to combat?

Hall: They were useless. It was strange. The stalemate was on the main line of resistance, too. Not only a stalemate at the negotiations. The negotiations are going on and both the Allies and the Axis people wanted to get the highest ground to see –just in case the negotiations ended –they decided that this is where the line’s going to be is where you are now. Every once in a while they’d want to try to take something away from you. That’s how it would work.

Patton: All the while the big shots were talking there was this push and pull of the combat troops. Were you able to move at all during that period? Did you take any higher ground?

Hall: We weren’t after higher ground. We had it.

Patton: Oh, you had it. So you had to keep it. How did that work out?

Hall: We kept it.

Patton: But when you scoffed at the tactics you thought that it was...

Hall: It was kind of dumb. (chuckle)

Patton: You weren’t told to try to advance, you were just told...

Hall: We weren’t going to advance anywhere. No.

Patton: Did they keep you posted on what was happening in the negotiations, or did you just sort of...

Hall: No, No. Scuttlebutt and that kind of stuff.

Patton: What did your soldiers think of about the war and the stalemate, in particular?

Hall: I don’t remember. They were...

Patton: Coming off of World War II with the quote “victory,” was it frustrating to think that you were not winning and not allowed to win?

Hall: Yeah, that was it. It was frustrating, that’s a good word for it. I think most every body felt that.

Patton: Were you surprised that American power was not more persuasive in shaping the war?

Hall: Yes, and just like right now, I’m absolutely dumbfounded at what goes on in Iraq.

Patton: Why do you think it was so ineffectual? As I understand it, there were more soldiers or at least until the Chinese...

Hall: Politics. They just didn't want to. If we nuke 'em, we're in real trouble and we're bad guys. It's politics. It was politics then; it's politics now. It's too bad.

Patton: Did you hear much conversation about the possibility of nuking people?

Hall: Then? No. Sure didn't.

Patton: But did it cross your minds as a possibility?

Hall: Oh, thought of it, yeah, but...

Patton: If you had been in Eisenhower's position would you have? MacArthur—I'm sorry, the guy in charge.

Hall: MacArthur wanted to. Truman fired him because he was a war monger. I mean, what the hell? That's what he's supposed to be doing. (chuckle) He didn't like this fighting a war that wasn't a war.

Patton: How did you stay in touch with your family? You were still married at the time?

Hall: Yeah. Letters.

Patton: Where was your wife? Was she in California?

Hall: No, she went back to Springfield.

Patton: Did you have any children?

Hall: No, we didn't have any children then.

Patton: Your parents still lived here in Springfield?

Hall: They did then. Yes.

Patton: So you kept in touch by letters.

Hall: By letters, that's all. I don't understand this emailing and telephone. (both laugh)

Patton: It is a different world, isn't it?

Hall: It certainly is.

Patton: Did you get mail very frequently? I mean, was that...?

Hall: Oh, I don't know. A couple of times a week.

Patton: So the supply lines were okay for communications.

Hall: The supply lines for food weren't so hot.

Patton: Yeah, what did you have to eat?

Hall: C rations. K rations in the WWII were mostly dried stuff. That was called K rations. Our stuff was C rations. It was in cans. You warmed it up usually on the manifold of a truck or on your oil-burning or charcoal-burning stove in the bunker.

Patton: Did you have three meals a day?

Hall: No. We might have one meal that they would send up from the kitchen way back somewhere. Maybe three or four times a week we might get a meal from them.

Patton: What kind of food would it be if they brought it up from the back?

Hall: Meat and potatoes. That's about it.

Patton: What was in the cans?

Hall: Peaches, pears, cold sausages and stuff like that. Green beans.

Patton: I was going to ask you if the cans were heavy but you weren't moving around a great deal except in trucks.

Hall: The cans were about the size of this.

Patton: Cup size.

Hall: Eight-ounce cans, I guess you would say.

Patton: What did you do when you weren't firing the mortars?

Hall: Clean the weapons—make sure they were all right—and sleep.

Patton: Was most of the fighting in the night time?

Hall: Yes. Most, but not always.

Patton: So you were perennially tired?

Hall: I don't remember. I don't think so. I got some sleep in during the day.

Patton: Did you get bored though, when you weren't sleeping or cleaning?

Hall: No, always had something to do. I found things for everybody to do.

Patton: Sounds like you were a natural leader.

Hall: Well, maybe—necessity.

Patton: Did you ever get any leave during that? You said you were on the line for about six months.

Hall: No. The only time I got away from the line was when they put me in charge of the R&R.

Patton: How did you feel that they did that? Did you want to go back?

Hall: Oh, that was great. I ate; ate well. (talking in background) We had a mess hall. We had to feed the boys who were back that were on R&R. We fed them and fed them well.

Patton: You had a kitchen. What else was in the R&R center?

Hall: Cots and shower.

Patton: Sleep, get clean.

Hall: That's all they were interested in is sleeping and eating and that would be it.

Patton: There weren't a lot of entertainers coming.

Hall: No, No, No. I think one time we had some entertainers. Once. I can't remember who they were. Who were they? They weren't the top stars. They were with the good guys.

Patton: Your job was to keep the food coming and the place clean and the water hot.

Hall: Yes. Also they made me recruiting sergeant. I would sign up people. I'd get a list from somebody (I don't know where it came from) of whose enlistment was about ready to run out. I'd contact them and say, "Where do you want to go?" Anywhere but here, of course. It was cold weather. I'd say, "How about Panama? You want to go to Panama?" Absolutely. I'd send everybody to Panama.

Patton: You could do that?

Hall: I could do that. I don't know if they ever got there, but...

Patton: But that's what you wrote down.

Hall: That's right.

Patton: How did you feel about being a recruiter?

Hall: It's kind of ironic.

Patton: The way that you got into it, huh?

Hall: Yeah.

Patton: Did anybody ever ask you how you got into it? Or did they know you came through the band?

Hall: No.

Patton: How successful were you. Did you persuade quite a few of the...?

Hall: You mean to reenlist?

Patton: Uh-huh.

Hall: I don't know. I did pretty well, yeah. They'd come to me. They'd find out that I was a recruiting sergeant there at the R&R center. They'd come to me. They'd hear that I was able to send people... Oh man, word travels fast. It really did. You want to get out of this place; you want to go to Panama or anywhere. I'd send them to Europe, it didn't make any... Wherever they wanted to go. Because we had armies all over the world.

Patton: But you don't know where they actually ended up?

Hall: I don't know if they ever ended up there or not.

Patton: Did you make any close friends during the time you were either on the line or back there?

Hall: No.

Patton: Why was that?

Hall: I don't know. If you made a friend and he got killed, there you are. I knew two or three people that I thought were decent friends, yeah.

Patton: Did you keep any contact with them afterwards?

Hall: No. But I still kept contact with the band people.

Patton: That was really a close tie, huh?

Hall: Yeah. Well, they were all from Springfield. Or Taylorville or Waverly or small towns.

Patton: They came back here, too?

Hall: They came back too, yeah.

Patton: What was the best experience of being in the service or in that war?

Hall: In the war, or in California? (laughs)

Patton: Korea.

Hall: Oh. Best experience? I don't know. I think I grew up when I was there.

Patton: What was the worst experience?

Hall: I don't know. I didn't really have any worst ones. They were all equally bad.

Patton: When you think back to it, do you think of it as a bad experience?

Hall: No. I think of it as a learning experience. Patton: If you had been asked to stay as a volunteer, would you have done it?

Hall: No.

Patton: Did they ask you? Try to reenlist you?

Hall: Yes.

Patton: The war was over at that point.

Hall: My National Guard enlistment was up in November of '53. I got out of Korea and back home, I guess it was September or October of '53. My National Guard enlistment was up within a month. I tried to get back into the 33rd Division Band which was out here at Camp Lincoln then. I don't know, I couldn't make the drills or something. I was on the road; I was driving a truck then. So I couldn't make their drills. I just was discharged from the National Guard then. That was it.

Patton: During the time you were in combat or even back at the R&R center, did you ever have opportunity to play your instrument or any of your instruments?

Hall: No.

Patton: Music just disappeared from your life. When the truce was signed, how long was it then till you were able to leave?

Hall: About six or eight weeks.

Patton: Was there great rejoicing?

Hall: Oh, yes, yes. We fired all the ammunition we could. (both laugh)

Patton: What was your opinion of the Korean soldiers and the country?

Hall: We were back behind the line, a couple hundred yards behind the MLR. When anybody came running at us, we knew they were South Koreans retreating. The next group would be the North Koreans because the Chinese made them go first. The next group would be the Chinese. The South Korean army was a rag tag outfit. Really bad.

Patton: So they were forced to retreat quite a lot?

Hall: They weren't forced to; they just did.

Patton: They just did. (both chuckle) What was the effect of the war, at least as you saw it, on the civilian population?

Hall: There wasn't any civilian population where I was. Just like there weren't any trees; they were gone when I got there. The civilian population was decimated. They really were.

Patton: When it was time to go home you were more than ready to go?

Hall: Yes. I went home on an attack transport loaded with Master Sergeants. Nobody did anything. Usually on a troop ship the troops pitch in along with the sailors. They pitch in and do quite a bit of the different things that need to be done. Nobody did a thing on that attack transport going back home. (chuckle)

Patton: Because they were all bosses?

Hall: They were all bosses—Master Sergeants. All the time I spent there doing a lieutenant's work, I never got promoted.

Patton: Did you resent that?

Hall: Yes. Yes.

Patton: Did you ask for promotion?

Hall: Yes.

Patton: What happened?

Hall: Oh, I probably stepped on toes.

Patton: So you were still questioning things while you were there?

Hall: Oh, yes. Yes.

Patton: Can you give me an example of that?

Hall: Had never thought of it. (chuckles) I don't remember any but I know I was stepping on toes. Just like I did in my job with the state. I must have ... I stepped on toes.

Patton: Did they ever really answer you or would they just ignore your request for promotion?

Hall: Ignore it. No answer.

Patton: Do you think there was any thing to do with your...?

Hall: Politics.

Patton: Just politics. So it didn't have anything to do with the fact that you'd come out of the band. They didn't have any prejudice against you, or anything?

Hall: No, it didn't have anything to do with that. No.

Patton: So you stayed a First Sergeant?

Hall: I was actually a SFC, but I was a First Sergeant of the Headquarters Company. But my permanent rank was SFC.

Patton: Sergeant First Class.

Hall: Right.

Patton: Just to make sure, the MLR is the Main Line of Resistance?

Hall: Correct.

Patton: So that would be where people actually encountered one another.

Hall: Yeah, right.

Patton: Okay, I just wanted to make absolutely sure. Do you have any photographs of your time in Korea?

Hall: Yeah, I have some. In fact I think I have one right here. (shows picture) Which one am I?

Patton: Which one are you? I don't see any beard on anybody.

Hall: I haven't had a beard. I just got a beard back when I got in the Civil War unit I'm in.

Patton: This one? Are you that guy?

Hall: No.

Patton: This one?

Hall: That one, yeah. I was holding the aiming device.

Patton: So which way is up and out? That way?

Hall: That's right.

Patton: So they're going over your head.

Hall: This is the four deuce tube and it's going out that way.

Patton: Okay.

Hall: Up over the MLR.

Patton: So your aim better be pretty good so you ...

Hall: Oh, yeah. (both laugh). Don't mess up.

Patton: That little aiming device—how did that work?

Hall: That thing right there in my hand clamps on the muzzle of the tube. You get coordinates and you get the azimuth. You set it up that way.

Patton: Would you be willing to share this picture or any of the others? We could make copies of them for the record.

Hall: I'll try to find some more.

Patton: Would you? I'd really appreciate that. Why don't you keep this one as a reminder that you're going to find me some more? Did you keep a diary?

Hall: No.

Patton: But you wrote lots of letters. Did your wife keep your letters?

Hall: I doubt it. She's never said anything about it. I don't think so.

Patton: Would you mind asking her?

Hall: Sure, I'll ask her.

Patton: Ask her if she'd mind sharing them. When you got back, you went back to California?

Hall: No, no. Came to Springfield. Actually, I went to Camp Carson in Colorado. That's where I was discharged or separated.

Patton: You came back to Springfield. What did you do with yourself after that point?

Hall: I went back to work for my father and the trucking company until 1963. What I did is I drove a semi then until '63. That was ten years. Then I went to work for Werner Motor Company, which is a GMC truck dealer, and was their shop foreman until about '65 or '66, I guess. I worked for Mayflower Moving Company for about a year. I was their Operations Manager. Then I contacted Standard Oil and got a service station. I got one of the new service stations and ran it for 20 years until I was asked to take the job as the Division Manager, the State of Illinois Division of Vehicles.

Patton: Oh, for the Secretary of State?

Hall: No, for Central Management Services.

Patton: CMS.

Hall: CMS. I ran that from '85 to '93. I retired.

Patton: You mentioned that you were constantly questioning, even when you worked for the state.

Hall: Yes.

Patton: Did you work for the state? Yes, I did.

Hall: Did you work for the state?

Patton: I worked hard.

Hall: Good. I call them employees. I had two hundred fifty employees. Out of those two hundred fifty, I had probably forty I wanted to fire right then and there.

Patton: But you couldn't, huh? You seem to have a low regard of politics as a process and as a...

Hall: I fired one fellow three times. I didn't document the first two times. Didn't document it properly. The third time I said I'm going to get him. So I documented and he was gone.

Patton: So you retired after that?

Hall: Yes.

Patton: How do you think being in the war affected your civilian career?

Hall: Made me cynical. Definitely. Other than that...

Patton: Could you explain that a little bit more? In what way are you cynical?

Hall: People have to prove to me that they're decent. I just don't think everybody is great until they prove it. I think everybody is lousy until they prove otherwise. That's bad.

Patton: Is that because you ran into a lot of lousy people in the war?

Hall: I think so.

Patton: But I thought you spoke highly of your soldiers.

Hall: I did of those guys, yeah.

Patton: Those guys. So who are the lousy ones?

Hall: I'm talking about the world.

Patton: The world was sort of ... The whole experience made you cynical.

Hall: Uh huh.

Patton: Do you think you are still cynical?

Hall: Probably.

Patton: You spoke of it on an individual basis. Are you cynical about politics?

Hall: Definitely.

Patton: How do you feel about the state of the nation and the current war?

Hall: I think the current war [in Iraq and Afghanistan] should have been fought to win. It wasn't. It isn't. This latest thing called "surge" or "surge and secure" [at the time, a new strategy for the war in Iraq] is a movement in the right direction but nothing's happening. I'm not for bringing the troops home. I'm for winning the war.

Patton: That is pretty much back to exactly what happened in Korea.

Hall: Uh-hum.

Patton: When you came back you went to work for your father. Did you try to go back to college at all?

Hall: No.

Patton: But did you get immediately involved with the veterans' organizations?

Hall: No. I think somebody asked me to join the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] and I did. I never came to a meeting or to the post, but I joined. Same way with the American Legion. Some guy came by the station and wanted me to join the American Legion. I did. I never went to a meeting. But here I am here because...

Patton: Yeah, how did that happen?

Hall: Somebody asked me to run for quartermaster. I said "Okay." I ran and won.

Patton: Even though you'd never been to meetings or anything. What does a quartermaster do at a place like this?

Hall: Essentially, the treasurer. Also, somebody asked me to run for the SMEAA board way back. When was that? 'Eighty-three. I ran for the SMEAA board and won. I was on the SMEAA board for fourteen years. I decided that's enough. Like Thomas

Jefferson said, “I expect legislators to leave their farm for a couple of years and go back to their farm,” not this career crap.

Patton: So you did your time and went back to being a civilian again.

Hall: Just like I’m doing here. I leave on June 24 or whatever it is. It’s my last day.

Patton: Your term is up?

Hall: I didn’t run for reelection.

Patton: So what do you plan to do next?

Hall: Rest. I play in three bands.

Patton: I was about to ask what else you do. You have maintained your musical...

Hall: Yes.

Patton: What kind of bands are you in now?

Hall: I’m in the Capitol Band. I’m manager of the Capitol Band. I play flugelhorn and percussion where I’m needed. Sometimes people don’t show up. Mostly flugelhorn but sometimes percussion. I played percussion in California in the 44th Band up and down California. We had a six man front; we only had five percussionists. Doesn’t work out that way. So I said, “I’ll play.” Since I was instrument repairman, I could do anything. So I did. I played percussion on the march and French horn in concerts.

Patton: You’re in the Capitol Band and then what else?

Hall: The Heartland Brass Band—percussion. And the Tenth Cavalry Band, which just formed, just had their inaugural concert yesterday. I play percussion in that.

Patton: You said something about Civil War.

Hall: Oh, I’m in the 114th Infantry Regiment Civil War. I’m bugler in that.

Patton: I see. So you go to reenactment events.

Hall: I used to do that, but I got tired of running up and down the hills. So I don’t. We do a retreat ceremony all summer long on Tuesday nights at [Abraham] Lincoln’s Tomb. I’m the bugler there.

Patton: Was that following your musical interest?

Hall: Yes.

Patton: So it wasn’t a great interest in the Civil War in particular?

Hall: No. I was at the station working and some guy asked me, "Hey, you know, we're trying to form a Civil War group. You want to join? You can drill teams and so forth." I like sharp drill teams, really did. I said, "Okay." So I joined and got out a bugle and started playing.

Patton: The new one, the Second Cavalry?

Hall: Tenth Cav.

Patton: Tenth Cavalry. What do you do with that one? Do you play concerts?

Hall: We rehearse quite often but we finally had a concert yesterday. I think we're going to rehearse, if you want to call it rehearsal, at the ALPLM. [Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum]

Patton: I'll look for you there since I'm a volunteer down there. (both laugh) So music has always been your passion.

Hall: Yeah, I guess.

Patton: And the war was a diversion into another...

Hall: A side trip.

Patton: How do you think it affected your life and who you are as a person?

Hall: What? Music or the war?

Patton: The war.

Hall: I think it made me a better leader. I think so. After I left the State of Illinois, I had two hundred fifty employees, twenty-five garages, twelve thousand vehicles and six motor pools. I had foremen call me and tell me what was going on after I had left. So that tells me that I made a good impression on those people. I wasn't like some of those people, unlike two of my bosses. The political, oh the political...

Patton: They didn't meet your standards.

Hall: No, they didn't. They really didn't.!

Patton: How did the war affect your wife? You being gone.

Hall: I don't really know. (chuckle)

Patton: She's never remarked or said?

Hall: No. (Hall later added, not on the audio: "My wife got together with other band wives who came back to Springfield quite often. Margie also wrote to me every day,

although I didn't receive mail everyday. She lived with her parents until I came back. She was very lonely.)

Patton: What did she do? She came back to Springfield.

Hall: Yeah. She was a librarian at the Lincoln Library. [city library, not ALPLM]

Patton: Did you ever have children?

Hall: Oh, yeah. After I got home.

Patton: How many did you have?

Hall: We have five.

Patton: Have any of them been in the service?

Hall: One of my sons was in the Air National Guard. He went down to take training in San Antonio. He became –what –Air Patrol like Military Police. He was Air Police. He parlayed that into working for the Clovis, California police department and parlayed that into working for the Fresno Police Department as a fingerprint expert. Then he wrote a paper or two or whatever and the papers were picked up by the Drug Enforcement Agency, the federals. They asked him to come work in their laboratory in San Francisco and set up a new lab for them. That's what he's doing now.

Patton: Parlayed himself into a pretty good career, it sounds like.

Hall: Yes.

Patton: Did you encourage or try to discourage your children from becoming involved in the military?

Hall: Neither. Do what they wanted to do. One is a newspaper reporter on the *Oregonian* in Portland. One is a nurse in Champaign. One is in Carbondale with Verizon. Another boy is here in Springfield doing construction.

Patton: Do they have your musical interest?

Hall: The three girls played piano. One of the girls plays the flute, one of the other girls plays the guitar and the DEA agent plays trombone and trumpet. The one in construction doesn't play any thing. He plays the radio. (both chuckle)

Patton: Do you follow public affairs? In relation to your experiences in the war, do you think about fighting for the nation's preservation? Do you enter in to discussions here like that?

Hall: No.

Patton: Do you talk about the war very much?

Hall: You mean the present war?

Patton: No. I'm talking about Korean War. Do you talk about your experiences?

Hall: No.

Patton: It was just three years out of your life, huh?

Hall: Yes.

Patton: Would you do it again if you were asked?

Hall: Well, yeah.

Patton: I guess I'm trying to say, Are you sorry you had to do that?

Hall: No, I'm glad I did.

Patton: Is there anything else that you think is important about that time that you should share with me or share with the listeners?

Hall: No, I think you've done a fine job of digging it out of me.

Patton: It's been a pleasure to hear. I thank you very much for all of your responses.