Interview with Art Holevoet

VRK-A-L-2007-017

Interview # 1: September 11, 2007

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is September 11, 2007. We're six years beyond the September 11 event. I'm here with Art Holevoet. Art, did I get that right?

Holevoet: Excellent.

DePue: Why don't you pronounce your name, as well?

Holevoet: I say Holevoet.

DePue: Okay, so you were kind with me.

Holevoet: Uh-huh.

DePue: We're here at the Center for Belgian Culture in Moline, Illinois. Art, I know from very little talking with you that you're proud of your Belgian heritage. What we want to do to start with is a little bit about yourself. Where and when were you born?

Holevoet: I was born April 5, 1932 in Cornwall Township on the farm of my parents, right?

DePue: Cornwall Township is in what county?

Holevoet: Henry County.

DePue: Henry County, Illinois.

Holevoet: Right.

DePue: I think this is an especially important part of your story. Tell us a little bit about your parents and how they ended up in Illinois.

Holevoet: My father was born in February in 1902. In that October, his dad died in the Belgian Army. My grandmother waited five years and got married. When she got married in January of 1909, her husband came to an uncle and worked with him in Iowa. He made enough and sent it back, and they came Thanksgiving Day of 1909. My dad's older brother was two years older than my dad. By then they had a half-sister from their stepfather.

DePue: Do you know why they decided to emigrate at that time?

Holevoet: It was such a poor time in Belgium then. That would have been just before the First World War.

DePue: So they left at a good time. A very good time for Belgium, especially.

Holevoet: Then my mother came in 1910 in May. She wasn't yet a year old. Her mother died that August. They came in groups from Belgium, a lot of them from the same town. Two sisters that came said, "You should go back to Belgium and marry one of our sisters because she has a child out of wedlock and she needs a husband." So my grandfather left these two girls, each with one of those sisters, went back to Belgium, and married a woman he had never seen before.

DePue: He brought her back to the States?

Holevoet: Uh-huh, and they had three more children.

DePue: This was in Iowa originally?

Holevoet: Yeah, starting in Iowa. But my mother's parents lived in Illinois. But then, there was a little dark side to the story. My dad was nineteen when two uncles were bootlegging; it was Prohibition time. His older brother was twenty-one and had a brand new Ford. He drove these two uncles around, because they knew the country. The county people picked them up. I don't know what county. It was around Chelsea, a town somewhere in that area. The police let my dad go because he wasn't of age. They told the other brother if he gave the car to the county and both of them left the state of Iowa, they wouldn't prosecute at all. So they came then to a cousin in East Moline.

DePue: That's the rest of the story.

Holevoet: That's the story.

DePue: What were they bootlegging? Was it whiskey?

Holevoet: Whiskey.

DePue: 1932 is when you came along in the height of the Great Depression.

Holevoet: The Great Depression, right.

DePue: What were your parents doing to make a living, to make ends meet?

Holevoet: They were farming. They started farming, I want to say, in '29. In '28 they were a hired man, in '29 they were a hired man. In 1930 they rented the farm because he didn't want it any longer. They were tenant renters there for 43 years.

DePue: They never owned their own land?

Holevoet: No. I have a younger brother—seventeen years younger. My mother had four kids but it took her twenty years. She spaced us, I call it.

DePue: You were the first?

Holevoet: I'm the second. I have a three-year-older sister. When my younger brother got married, they were looking for a place. They bought a 40 acre place in the country. I said, "I think it's time I moved out into an apartment on my own." My father said no.

DePue: How old were you then?

Holevoet: Thirty-eight.

DePue: This was way after this part of the story about the Korean War that we're going to hear.

Holevoet: Yeah.

DePue: You grew up on the farm, then.

Holevoet: Uh-huh.

DePue: And it sounds like your folks were pretty poor, but they were no exception at that time.

Holevoet: Not at that time.

DePue: Did you have a good sense that you guys were really poor, or...

Holevoet: No, I didn't think we were poor. We always had one toy for Christmas and the rest was clothes. You always had fruit. A lot of us old Belgians just ate salet. You always had an orange and an apple in your soup bowl with English walnuts. You didn't have fruit back then like people buy today.

DePue: But growing up on a farm, you probably had enough to eat.

Holevoet: Oh, yeah, we always had plenty.

DePue: I would imagine farming at that time, you had a little bit of everything?

Holevoet: Yeah. We had milk, we had hogs, chickens, everything. And he was a good hunter. We ate a lot of wild rabbit.

DePue: Let's jump ahead a little bit. You were about nine years old, maybe, when Pearl Harbor happened. Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

Holevoet: Yeah, I want to say I was eleven. I don't know. I figure forty-one, yeah. No, I was just nine.

DePue: Do you remember it?

Holevoet: Yes, because we had a cousin living with us at Holywood. He was going to be drafted. You had a choice back for World War II. If you knew your draft was coming up, they sent you a card. You could enlist before that date. He enlisted into the Air Force.

DePue: Did he go to Europe?

Holevoet: Yes, he went to England.

DePue: What did your parents think about the war going on in Europe?

Holevoet: I said my mother heard from him all the time because he always said she was like a mother. His mother had died when he was five.

DePue: Well, they had to have lots of relatives they knew were back in Belgium.

Holevoet: Not immediate; no brothers or sisters.

DePue: By the late 1930s and 1940s, were they thoroughly Americanized in their outloo?

Holevoet: Yeah. This cousin that was a hired man from my parents went to England. Also another one that was here locally from the Quad City area went to England. Between the two of them, they stopped by cousins out in California on the way. They got an address, supposedly from cousins there, from a sister that was in Belgium. But they never got there to see her and they never wrote. But when they brought the address back, my mother started to write.

DePue: Did you follow the war very closely?

Holevoet: Yeah, you'd always listen to the radio in the evenings. That's the only thing you had to do. The older parents generally sat around that listening.

DePue: I assume you had plenty of chores to do on the farm.

Holevoet: Yeah, plenty of things to do. You milked in the morning. You took the cows to the field before the three went to school. We laugh then; now we said they wear a shirt and pants to school when you come home, you take that off, and you're dressed if you're going out in the evening. The high school kids and grade school

kids. All that you throw in the wash when you're through, four at once. We hung our shirt up and our jeans wore them to school all week. Same one.

DePue: But then, so did other kids, right?

Holevoet: Yeah. Everybody did. But today, they'd flip out and they'd figure you wore a dirty pair of jeans and a shirt.

DePue: Now let's jump ahead to June of 1950, when the North Koreans attacked South Korea. I'm sure you heard about that as well. What were your thoughts at that time?

Holevoet: That's probably where I'll end up.

DePue: How old were you? Let's see, you would have about seventeen.

Holevoet: Eighteen, I was graduating.

DePue: So you figure, "Okay, my number could come up."

Holevoet: Uh-huh.

DePue: Did you think we were—in 1950, this is—did you think we were there for the right reasons?

Holevoet: Oh, yes, I think we were there for the right reasons.

DePue: And how much longer after that, then, before you actually joined up?

Holevoet: I was drafted September 7 of '52.

DePue: Two years later. What were you doing in those two years between that time?

Holevoet: Farming at home.

DePue: Did you have a girlfriend or a steady at that time?

Holevoet: No.

DePue: At least when you went in the Army, you had no encumbrances in that.

Holevoet: No, but it's different in that book; it's in there, too. I had never been away from home overnight when I went to the Army. That September I knew I was going to the Army. They said I was going to be drafted in September. So in August, when I was twenty years old, I won a free trip to a leadership school. That's the first time there was a girl that took an attraction to me. That's the first time I ever kissed a girl. I was twenty.

DePue: Where was the leadership school?

Holevoet: Monticello.

DePue: Monticello, Iowa, or Illinois?

Holevoet: Monticello, Illinois, at Allerton Ranch. Do you know that? He gave some to the University of Illinois, a thousand or two thousand acres. Allerton—the U. S. ambassador.

DePue: Was this a church camp?

Holevoet: No, a 4-H camp.

DePue: That was quite an experience for you, finally getting away from home for a couple of days.

Holevoet: It was different, and the first time that a girl really ever paid any attention to me. (laughter)

DePue: And why shouldn't she?

Holevoet: Hey, who knew? I always said I was a little bit of a geek.

DePue: Well, you weren't alone. Then you were drafted.

Holevoet: Right.

DePue: What did your parents think about your going away?

Holevoet: My mother was beside herself. My father took me to the train alone. When I came back in March, or maybe in April, of '53, I knew I was going to Korea. I was home just on leave. TY—they called it—or something. Temporary leave to travel from one place to another. My mother said she was going to the train with us. My father, when we milked that morning, he said, "I've already told her she couldn't."

DePue: Because she figured she'd be too emotional about it?

Holevoet: Way too emotional.

DePue: Well, her baby was going off to war. I suspect she was...

Holevoet: But she had a baby, right? My brother was almost three.

DePue: Wow. She did spread them apart, then. Where did you go for basic training? Tell me something about that.

Holevoet: I went to Fort Bliss. When I knew I was going, I said, “I don’t want to go to Leonard, where it’s cold and muddy. Send me someplace warm and dry.”

DePue: That would be Fort Bliss, Texas. You can’t get any farther south in Texas than

that.

Holevoet: We got there in September. We spent about a week at Sheridan before we got on the train. I can't remember. I know it took at least a week. I think it took eight days for us to get from Chicago to Fort Bliss. We pulled on the side rail in cattle cars loaded with cattle. They were shipping by cattle car back then. You had the same meal for seven or eight days. Morning, noon, and night. I said it was canned dog food. It looked like hash with bread and coffee. Every meal was the same.

DePue: That was your real debut with the military—with the Army. How was basic training, then, for a kid who had hardly ever been away from home in his life?

Holevoet: Good. I didn't stand out. They picked on a lot of different ones. They had one from Kentucky that they just picked on. I think he was mentally handicapped. It bugged me terrible. We had three, in the first eight weeks of basic training, that were Indians. They were unmerciful on them. Complained on everything they did, found fault when they shouldn't have. But if you said anything you were right with them. I learned that fast, because some other ones complained about it. They were right with them three.

DePue: You learned how to keep a low profile and how it was better...

Holevoet: How to keep your mouth shut. But the thing that really got me was while I was in Sheridan, an older fellow who was drafted was in the same barracks with me. He was already an attorney. He lived in the Chicago area. When we got orders that we were going to Fort Bliss, he said, "I'm not going to Fort Bliss. I don't want to go there. I want to stay close to Chicago." Okay, so then I lost track of him. When I came back in August of '54, I'm at Fort Bliss. Somebody hollered, "Art!" It was him. He had never left Fort Sheridan. He had been in and out of the brig the whole two years. Never did anything.

DePue: Wow. That's a different way to spend the war, isn't it?

Holevoet: That's on his record forever that you were no good, in my book.

DePue: Do you remember any of your instructors? You mentioned a couple of them were merciless with some of the troops. Do you remember any of them who really stand out, or any incidents that really stand out?

Holevoet: I don't remember any names. They were all corporals—the rank on their shoulder. But they were just privates, I learned later, too. They had only given them that rank, and they felt big.

DePue: Were they Korean War vets?

Holevoet: No. They were just draftees like I was. Only many had been drafted earlier. Some of them were like 21e or 23. But they had actually no rank. The only one I remember is when I'm overseas. I'm at Fort Bliss in the second eight weeks, and

I'm left-handed. The only thing I had fired at home was a BB gun. I fire that left-handed because the right eye winks and the left eye don't. In the second eight weeks you had the battery commander. Then you had the next one. He was like assistant. That was a lieutenant out of West Point. I could say a prick, but that isn't good on this, right. (laughter)

DePue: No, we would never want to say that.

Holevoet: He said, "You are going to fire right-handed. We'll go to the range on a Sunday." I said, "There's no use. We tried it in the first eight weeks, and it doesn't work." He said, "I'm in charge now. It will work." Well, I said, "It's Sunday, and I'm a Catholic. You can't stop me from going to Mass." He said, "I'll be waiting outside the chapel after Mass." He was. We went out to the range and we stayed out to 3:30 with much cursing. But we never made it right-handed. I fired all the time left-handed.

DePue: Were you able to qualify left-handed?

Holevoet: Yes, with no problem.

DePue: You're thinking: So what's the problem here?

Holevoet: Uh-huh. (laughter)

DePue: You're learning more and more about the Army by that time. Going down to Fort Bliss, and you already mentioned that you were in a battery not a company. You were in the artillery right from the beginning?

Holevoet: Right, light artillery.

DePue: Was this air defense artillery—anti-aircraft artillery?

Holevoet: Anti-aircraft.

DePue: And that was the center for anti-aircraft artillery?

Holevoet: It's one of the big bases in the United States—probably the biggest. Because I learned later, even artillery units of Belgian men came to Fort Bliss to see what Fort Bliss was doing.

DePue: What weapons systems did you train on in basic training?

Holevoet: Mainly the Quad .50.

DePue: And for the people who are listening to this, the Quad .50 is what?

Holevoet: Is four .50mm machine guns mounted on a turret on a half-track. You had to qualify with the M1 rifle. Because you had that, also.

DePue: So did you also qualify on the Quad .50s?

Holevoet: Yes, I qualified on everything. I never had no problem.

DePue: Do you remember any other weapon systems that you qualified on?

Holevoet: Yes. I can't remember, I want to say it's a 38 tank, fired a 38 shell. Or did they fire a 40, I don't remember.

DePue: A gun or a howitzer? Probably a gun. Was that mounted on some kind of a—?

Holevoet: It's mounted on a tank, and the turret swings.

DePue: Oh, okay.

Holevoet: I don't know. I never seen one until I went to the headquarters of the battery. We had one there, and we had two other ones in the company. There were only three in the whole battalion.

DePue: Yeah, and that was 38mm guns on a tank.

Holevoet: In that tank.

DePue: Okay. So you joined up in 1952. Immediately after basic training, what happened to you?

Holevoet: I went to leadership course after basic. I would have graduated sometime in March. But on February 22, George Washington's birthday, I had an emergency appendix operation. So I think it was eight days in the hospital. I came home for 12 or 14 days. Then I went back. That's when I led the parade at graduation as one of the three officers with the pistol on my hip. That was one of my big joys.

DePue: This was all at Fort Bliss?

Holevoet: Bliss. To think that I was selected out of the class. After I had missed the end, really.

DePue: It's something to be proud of.

Holevoet: Yeah, I was, anyway. But our commander was a fellow from Georgia. We had three of them come to leadership course from Georgia. A big colored fellow—twenty-two. He ran the show. And a little fellow from Kentucky, and I can't remember the third one. I liked the little one from Kentucky. His name I can't remember; it began with a "G," so he was right ahead of me.

DePue: You mentioned that you had a black gentleman in your unit. This is, of course, fairly early in the time when the military had integrated. Do you think that worked pretty well from what you could see?

Holevoet: For me it did, but some of the Southern ones, yes, were a little prejudiced. Even in basic, because we had quite a few colored in basic.

DePue: Were some of the NCOs from the South, because there's a tradition, of course...

Holevoet: No.

DePue: That the South has sent a lot...

Holevoet: Not any of them.

DePue: Okay, so they weren't treated any differently from the rest of the recruits?

Holevoet: No.

DePue: You learned that you've got to depend on the guy who's in the next bunk. It doesn't matter what he looks like.

Holevoet: What he looks like. We had one big one from down South—Dudley. I can't remember Dudley's last name. When were going to get out after the end of the second eight weeks of basic, a lot of them went out and got drunk. Some were coming back. We slept four in a little square building with tar paper on it. They were puking all over in my little hut. So I went to my friend from Chicago, Edward Brufkey, because I figured Dudley wouldn't be there. He'd be out carousing, too. So Dudley's bunk was empty. I jumped in his bunk and went to sleep. In the morning, somebody was touching my shoulder. He said, "It's Art! What are you doing in my bunk, Art?" I said, "They're throwing up in my hut, so I came to your bunk." "That's no problem," he said, "I'll find an empty one, too." (laughter)

DePue: (laughter)

Holevoet: A good guy. Some of them were really good, in my book. He'd do anything for you.

DePue: I assume that shortly after you graduated from this leadership course you then were deployed to Korea.

Holevoet: Yeah, you had about twelve days, again, to come home and go back to Fort Sheridan—not Fort Sheridan. What is the one in San Francisco? Camp Pendleton is where we shipped out of.

DePue: When you were shipping out, were you assigned to a particular unit, or did that only happen once you got to Korea?

Holevoet: When you got to Korea.

DePue: And you shipped overseas on what?

Holevoet: The Gordon.

DePue: U. S. S. Gordon, which is just a troop transport?

Holevoet: Uh-huh. Nice ship. I was lucky I worked KP.

DePue: Why was that a lucky thing?

Holevoet: Because you could eat more often and eat a lot of crackers that you weren't puking all the time.

DePue: Does that suggest that it was a rough passage?

Holevoet: It was a rough passage, and I—what do you say—I can't ride in the back seat of a car. I can't handle it. I can't swing in a swing at school. I got motion sickness; still got it yet today. I used to fly all the time and I took Dramamine.

DePue: So you were one of the miserable people going on the...

Holevoet: The bad part was, they didn't have no guards on ship. They said the night before we were going to sail, they needed men, and they wanted volunteers. Nobody would volunteer. They said, "You have to volunteer or we're going to have to pick somebody." So I volunteered. That was the wrong thing. Because the ship hits the dock and then goes back all night long. You know how sick I was by morning? That wasn't a wise volunteer, right? But you had your room and all of your gear already packed before the rest came on.

DePue: So there were advantages to that.

Holevoet: There were advantages.

DePue: Where did you debark in Korea?

Holevoet: First we went to Japan. We were in Japan six or seven days and then we got on a little ship, the Marine Adder. Dirtiest little tub I've ever seen. And from there we went into Pusan.

DePue: Marine Adder?

Holevoet: Uh-huh.

DePue: A-d-d-e-r?

Holevoet: I think so. I swore then I'd never get on that ship again in my life. But when I got ready to leave Korea, what was I boarding but the Marine Adder to come back to America.

DePue: You said you debarked in Pusan, then?

Holevoet: Yeah.

DePue: Was it there that you found out what unit you were headed to?

Holevoet: Uh-huh. You stayed overnight, I remember, in the barracks, and then the next day you went by train to the 25th.

DePue: The 25th Division. Where were they at the time?

Holevoet: I don't know; wherever they were.

DePue: In the line, though?

Holevoet: In the line. They were supporting infantrymen then. I stayed there one or two nights, when they place you then out in the gun section.

DePue: Okay, so you were with the 25th Division, but what company and regiment? You mentioned Charlie Company of the 25th Anti-Aircraft Artillery?

Holevoet: Right.

DePue: That's correct?

Holevoet: You've got a little more to it. You want a little more?

DePue: Yeah. (He looks in his packet of official records.)

Holevoet: I had that little teeny card there I showed you, but I don't know where it got to now.

DePue: That had the unit assignment on there?

Holevoet: It had where you belonged. It did for some reason. We'll see what this one says. Sergeant

Holevoet. It should say it on there too, right?

DePue: I'm not as good at reading these DD-214s as I should be.

Holevoet: You should be an old pro at that. I'll say that low. You notice that. Where did that little card go?

DePue: Okay, don't go too far.

Holevoet: I can't go. That's right.

DePue: We'll find that out later, and we can correct the record after we find that out.

Holevoet: You didn't see it on here? You never did see it on here.

DePue: Again, what you had told me before was Charlie Company of the 25th Anti-Aircraft Artillery...

Holevoet: It should be Battalion BN, and then SP in parentheses. I noticed that last night. See, I check things out? See what you made me do?

DePue: That's good. And SP stands for Self-Propelled.

Holevoet: Right.

DePue: Which, in Army parlance, means tracked vehicles, right?

Holevoet: Right.

DePue: So what did the unit basically consist of? Was it Quad .50s on tracks?

Holevoet: Yeah, uh-huh, and only three tanks.

DePue: With the 37mm gun on it?

Holevoet: Uh-huh.

DePue: That was pretty much it.

Holevoet: Yeah. I didn't know they existed until I went there and we had tours. You didn't get told a lot, and I didn't ask a lot of questions. I just did what I was told.

DePue: When you arrived at the front were you still a private?

Holevoet: Right.

DePue: And they don't tell you a lot, do they?

Holevoet: No. They just showed me that I was a gunner and how I had to take care of two of the Quad .50s, right? I was a left side gunner.

DePue: Are there two gunners per Quad .50?

Holevoet: Right. One mans two on the right side; one mans two on the left side.

DePue: Oh, okay. I thought all four worked in conjunction, though.

Holevoet: They can, but you have to put ammo in them.

DePue: That was your job, to keep the ones on the...

Holevoet: Left side.

DePue: Left side armed.

Holevoet: Uh-huh.

DePue: Do you remember your first day up at the front?

Holevoet: No, maybe some later.

DePue: Anything that really sticks in your mind while you're with that gun section?

Holevoet: No. It was good, because every gun section had a sergeant leader. I can't get my book right. I've got a half-track drawing and who all was there. Every two tracks had a section leader. That was generally a master sergeant or three rockers.[insignia indicating rank] That one was from Virginia, right next on a pedestal to God for me. Such a damn good guy. He stayed with us, too. We had two tents with three men in each tent.

half

Holevoet: Middle or end of May.

DePue: How much action was going on at that time at the front, at least where you were?

Holevoet: We never fired. Like I said, the whole time I was on my half-track. The day I left, they fired that night the first time.

DePue: Okay, and you were with the half-track about a month.

Holevoet: A month, five weeks, somewhere in there.

DePue: Okay. So it was generally pretty quiet.

Holevoet: No, it wasn't quiet, because we had a lot of incoming day and night.

DePue: Oh! Mortars and artillery?

Holevoet: More mortars.

DePue: Were there Chinese on the other side?

Holevoet: I don't know who was firing. Yes, the Chinese had been with the Koreans long before that.

DePue: In a classical sense you're in an anti-aircraft unit, so your mission is to fire on any enemy aircraft. Did you have any expectation of seeing any enemy aircraft?

Holevoet: We didn't fire a lot on aircraft. You fired more ground support for the infantry that was ahead of you. When I say ground support, that's when they know where the troops—the enemy is—and you're firing on them.

DePue: So your section had to be very close to the front lines?

Holevoet: Yes, we ate with the infantry. I was there probably a week or ten days, and we had to walk probably between a half mile and a mile to where we ate. We didn't eat with the 25th Division, I don't think.

DePue: Do you remember who you were eating with?

Holevoet: No, I don't know. I could have been eating maybe with the 25th Division infantry. But that's where they met. They had probably all of your stuff out. They didn't cook it there. On about day eight or ten, you're walking on top of the rice paddies because you don't want to be down in the mud and slush with the rice and the water. About five men ahead of me, rounds are coming in all the time. But you get used to that after a week or so. One came in, and it just hit right on the ledge where everybody's walking. About five men ahead of me just blew all apart. I never saw anything like it. You couldn't find nothing but body parts floating in the rice paddies on both sides: a big gap on the little trail we were walking. But you always had a sergeant walking with you to control you so you didn't run away, I call it. He could really scream; "Just keep moving! Jump over the pit!" On to the next to keep going to eat. So we had to go eat, and we sit down. I wasn't good, but I wasn't bad. Many were giving over, I hadn't yet. But they said you had to go in line and get your food, you had to eat, because that's why you were here. So I went and got my food and a lot of the other ones did, too. But I don't think anybody ate. I ended up with the rest—giving over.

DePue: "Giving over," you mean throwing up?

Holevoet: Throwing up. It's the first time I've seen anybody get killed. It's a little different. And the rounds: they're still coming in where you're sitting and eating.

DePue: And you're closer to the enemy now than you were when you started.

Holevoet: Right. (laughter)

DePue: How far back were your gun positions from the front lines, do you think?

Holevoet: Somewhere a half mile to a mile.

DePue: That far back. So the range of the Quad .50s is substantial, then?

Holevoet: Yeah. But we just wanted to get ahead of the infantry and stop ones that were advancing.

DePue: You only needed to fire a couple hundred yards beyond the front lines, then, to be effective?

Holevoet: Yeah.

DePue: Okay. Let's focus on what happened to the folks you left behind. You said they fired the Quad .50s the day you left. What was going on then?

Holevoet: Our half-track wasn't running smooth—the motor. [a vehicle with tires on the front axle and tracks on the rear] The mechanics were coming out from the motor pool, and when they were out, they said they'd pick me up. That's when they called and said, "Don't tell him that. Ask him if he wants to come in to tight, that we're sending somebody from the motor pool out. They'll be there in an hour to fix the track. Have him ready and they'll bring him back in while your track is getting fixed. So I picked up just a little bit of stuff, because I figured I wasn't going to be there long, and I left. The mechanic went to work on the track to get it running. A round come in and killed him. My best friend then on the gun section was Beham, was his name, Louis.

DePue: What was his name?

Holevoet: B-e-h-a-m. Okay, he came in as Louie Beham. And then his mother was sending information. I was trying to find him, because Louis Beham didn't show up to be drafted. He went by his nickname.

DePue: Confused because of Louie instead of Louis?

Holevoet: Uh-huh. All records said Louie, which Louie really wasn't his name. His real name was Louis, and I forget his middle initial.

DePue: Is it L-e-w-i-s, or is it L-o-u-i-s?

Holevoet: Louis? I don't remember. A nice guy. Him and I were called two farm kids, right? (laughter) And the same age.

DePue: What happened to them that day, then?

Holevoet: He would tell me how bad it was to see that guy blew up.

DePue: It was only the mechanic who was injured in that?

Holevoet: Killed, uh-huh. In my book, there, I've got the things. I was at the battalion when they held the special service for him at the battalion.

DePue: Were you driving back towards the battalion at the time that round hit?

Holevoet: Uh-huh. We didn't know it, but when we got to battalion, then you knew it already, that our half-track had been hit.

DePue: Your half-track was out of action permanently, or...

Holevoet: Yes. DePue: If it hadn't been for that decision, huh?

Holevoet: I didn't make the decision. They did.

DePue: Let's talk about why that decision was made. Why were you moved to the supply section?

Holevoet: When I went in, I said that I wanted to stay there and type. They said that they didn't need a typist.

DePue: When you went in?

Holevoet: When I got to the battery in May, before I ever went to the gun section, they said they didn't need a typist. They needed more men out on the gun sections. So I didn't question that. Then just before, they called once. The sergeants always answered the phone. We had two of them out of six men. A private didn't answer the phone. They said, "They want you to come and type in the headquarters; they want to talk to you." I said, "I don't want to talk to them. Tell them I don't want to leave my gun section." So I never talked to them and I want to say it was a week later, they called again. They said, "We want to talk to him." I said, "No, I'm not even coming to the phone," which I didn't. But then it was only three days later when they said, "He'll be ready in an hour."

DePue: Your sergeants obviously didn't want to lose you. They were all in support of you staying right there in the section. Why did you, when you first arrived, say that you wanted to type?

Holevoet: I figured that it was better than being on line. (laughter)

DePue: (laughter) You were right about that. Where does a farm kid learn how to type?

Holevoet: I was signed up my senior year to take art. I like art. My mother said, "You can't take art. You have to take typing. It's more useful." My mother's thinking to school changed my classes I was taking. So I took typing. I passed, but just enough. I think you had to get thirty-five words per minute and I got thirty-six. I typed very accurate but not very fast. But even back in '50, there weren't too many that typed.

DePue: Not guys, at least.

Holevoet: No.

DePue: And every first sergeant, every supply sergeant needs somebody who can type.

Holevoet: Right. (laughter)

DePue: You probably had no idea, when your mom forced you to take typing, what that impact would be.

Holevoet: No. That ended up good in the end. (laughter)

DePue: Okay. What, exactly, then did you do when you went back to perform that duty?

Holevoet: They said I'd stay from three weeks to a month or more. I was just typing everything new—little slips like I was in an inventory book for what was in the

battery. Like, how many half-tracks, how much ammo, everything. What the kitchen had. Everything had a little page and you had to type a whole new page, because we're starting a whole new book.

DePue: So you were working with the supply sergeant, then?

Holevoet: Or working for him, right? (laughter)

DePue: And how long were you doing that?

Holevoet: I did it until probably the week when the Korean War was ending.

DePue: Which would mean about...

Holevoet: The end of July.

DePue: About a month, then.

Holevoet: Uh-huh, or a little more. They said, "You're done typing." Yes, I had typed everything they needed. Everything was transferred from the original book to a new book. We had two books, really. They said, "You can go back to the gun section if you want to, now, because you like your gun section." I said, "I'm not too bright, but I think I'll stay here, right?" (laughter) They told me then, if I stayed, I'd be supply clerk. When the supply sergeant rotated, I'd take his job.

DePue: Was your unit in the line that whole time?

Holevoet: Yeah.

DePue: Okay, so even when the war ended...

Holevoet: But the infantry wasn't, from the 25th Division. They pulled the infantry off.

DePue: Oh, okay.

Holevoet: And they pulled them off shortly after I came back to start typing. Then the Marines were on line as infantrymen, and we supported the Marines.

DePue: The 1st Marines, then? It had to be.

Holevoet: I don't know. They were something else.

DePue: That would make a lot of sense from what you'd talked about. I was looking at the map and couldn't find the 25th. But I saw the 1st Marines there.

Holevoet: Okay, we were supporting them.

DePue: I was looking at a particular date when the 25th had already come off line. But the war's ended, so there's nobody firing in either direction by that time?

Holevoet: The last week they fired, I want to say, four days—day and night.

DePue: I think it was the twenty-seventh of July that the armistice was signed.

Holevoet: Yeah, so it would have been about twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six, or else twenty-three, that we started firing day and night.

DePue: Why all the firing right before the Armistice is signed?

Holevoet: America wanted to use up all their ammunition, what I was told as a supply clerk. Because in the supply tent, four people slept: the supply sergeant, I, the jeep driver for the battery commander, and the ammo man. One corporal had been in the Army for a year or two and kept getting busted. He got busted when I was there, too. Back to private, as low as you can go. Because they caught him out with a Korean prostitute. They didn't really catch him, but he hit the pimp alongside the head with a scoop shovel and almost killed him. That's not a good thing.

DePue: Say that again?

Holevoet: He hit the pimp...

DePue: Oh, okay.

Holevoet: With a scoop shovel. (laughter)

DePue: Okay. I won't tell you what I thought I heard. Nobody was crying too much about the pimp, though, were they?

Holevoet: No, they weren't. Oh, yes. He was hurt, and the Koreans were complaining that an American had hit him.

DePue: Do you recall the attitude of yourself and the rest of the troops as the war was coming toward an end?

Holevoet: No, I wouldn't say there was any relief. But in our half-tracks, we had ten Koreans. You only had one Korean in each half-track. There wasn't any of them on the half-track that I was. I want to think there were about ten or twelve of them.

DePue: In your battery?

Holevoet: Uh-huh. Then, when I took over as supply sergeant, we got a sergeant with three or four rockers as high as they could go in the Korean Army. He worked in supply with me. He'd go off to the different gun sections to see that his Korean counterparts were happy. (laughter) I mean, he outranked me, right? I was a corporal and he had three or four rockers. I can't remember him. But a nice guy. He and I really got along good.

DePue: As far as you and your buddies were concerned, it was a great thing that the Korean War was ending like it did?

Holevoet: Yes.

DePue: Nobody was troubled that it was ending at...

Holevoet: At a stalemate.

DePue: At a stalemate, just relief that it was over. At the end of the war, you said that we were kind of emptying all of our rounds. Were the Chinese doing the same thing?

Holevoet: About the same thing.

DePue: So that was one heck of a firefight going on.

Holevoet: Especially at night, because you've got so many tracers. The whole sky is lit up. Because even when I was on the gun section the first night, I just couldn't believe. Because we weren't firing. But they were firing back towards us. Then you'd have to get out of your tent, out of your cot, and go to your foxhole if they're firing.

DePue: When you were back in the supply section, were you still within range of enemy artillery?

Holevoet: Occasionally. Not very often.

DePue: Only the bigger stuff—the longer rounds.

Holevoet: The bigger stuff, once in a while one would come in. But after a while, as we said, you learn the whistle.

DePue: When it comes in, did you just stay in your...

Holevoet: But then we had our tents. The supply tent was dug in probably about four foot in the side of a mountain. But it was the rainy season then. You know what that's like? You woke every night, and your cot had sunk clear in the mud. Your butt and back was all wet from water and mud. So you took your cot out and tried to put boards and sticks to stay out of the mud for the next night. They said you had two pair of boots. Every morning you looked to see which is the less hairy one for today from mold?

DePue: Not the best situation.

Holevoet: It's not mother taking care of your clothes. (laughter)

DePue: You're just hoping that you get a dry spell so that you can dry something out, huh?

Holevoet: Uh-huh.

DePue: What was the toughest part of your service in Korea, do you think?

Holevoet: I can't say any of it was bad. Like I said, the day before I came in, we had a new battery commander. He was one that was through the rank commissioned. He came up from a private to a first lieutenant. A super fellow—a lot different than those that came from West Point. No comparison at all for compassion or anything.

DePue: You didn't care for the ones who were West Point graduates.

Holevoet: (exhales heavily)

DePue: Or ROTC, or it was just the...

Holevoet: ROTC and West Point. Isn't that about the same? I never heard of ROTC back then. West Point graduates we had.

DePue: What did you think of the NCOs you had?

Holevoet: They were all good. No trouble with any of them.

DePue: A lot of them World War II vets?

Holevoet: Yes. A lot of them had quite a bit of rank.

DePue: By that time I would think they were carrying several rockers.

Holevoet: But even the ones that came in that had the gun sections, especially. If you were the one that had overseen two Quad .50s, most of those had two rockers already when I came to. They came in as privates like I did, in a year's time.

DePue: So people were moving up in rank pretty quickly, then?

Holevoet: Yes. We had a clerk in the orderly room who came in at about the same time I did from Massachusetts. Not much use for him. I made corporal as soon as I took over the supply sergeant. When I took over I was a POC. The sergeant position. I never did make only the one rocker. Every time the battery commander would put me in, he would say, "Oh! You can't promote him again. I'm still a corporal, and I have two years of college. That's a farm kid with no college at all."

DePue: The battery commander is worrying about getting the job done, more than that, I would assume.

Holevoet: I was denied a couple or three times because of him speaking up. It's the first sergeant telling me this—a colored guy that was number one. (laughter)

DePue: This other guy was the one that has two years of college?

Holevoet: Uh-huh. He lorded that over everybody, because most of us didn't have any college.

DePue: He moved up ahead of you, then?

Holevoet: No. But he couldn't get any rank, because as supply clerk, the highest you can go is corporal. When the colored fellow came in about the time I did, they rotated them. He told the company commander that he should be first sergeant over all our company.

DePue: He told the commander that?

Holevoet: Uh-huh.

DePue: Wasn't there already a first sergeant there?

Holevoet: That one was rotating home.

DePue: But there had to be other senior NCOs there in the unit.

Holevoet: Yes. So he put him in. Then he made corporal before he rotated. He rotated a little ahead of me. When he got sergeant, he thought he was hot stuff. He had to show his sergeant stripes to me.

DePue: But as a sergeant E5, he's not serving as the unit first sergeant, is he?

Holevoet: Yes, he is. He was serving that as a corporal when he took over. It was probably illegal. (laughter)

DePue: That doesn't make much sense at all.

Holevoet: It was done so he could get rank. It was the only slot that was open.

DePue: And the battery commander was all for that. He thought this was the right guy to do that.

Holevoet: He did it, anyway.

DePue: And you said before that you liked this battery commander.

Holevoet: Yes, he was excellent. That was one poor choice. But we had other poor choices, too. Then we had a little guy from West Point or ROTC. He thought his girlfriend just looked like Audrey Hepburn. He was unbelievable. I couldn't stand him. But I didn't shower; I always just stayed and washed in a wash pan of warm water you got. Because if you went to shower, you rode about two miles on a dusty road in a two ton truck. Do you know what you looked like when you came from your shower?

DePue: I have a real good idea.

Holevoet: You were worse than when you went. One night he said, “I’ll take you to shower with me, because you can never have time to go.” But I said, “You’re showering in the officers’ shower at battalion, because I'd ride the truck then already. The supply sergeant would always go. I'd ride the two and a half ton truck to the battalion to get supplies. He said, “That won’t hurt. There won’t be any officers showering right at this time.” I said, “But that’s not going to be good.” But he said, “I’m the one that’s in charge. If you want to go, I’ll let you go.” Not being a wise choice, I went. We’re showering and I heard people come in. I want to say one captain and two lieutenants. Our clothes was laying folded in my new two that we’d brought with us. They came in and showered with us. They didn’t know no rank. As soon as they came in, I thought it was time for me. I thought I'd better go out and dress. I put my sergeant clothes on. But one of them came out and the first thing he screamed was, “We have a damn non-com showering with us! He’s got sergeant stripes on!” Those others flew out of the shower naked to see that I wasn’t an officer. (laughter)

DePue: You didn’t have a good experience with the officers that you ran into over there.

Holevoet: I had a bad one, too, a little, because I had a clerk from Virginia that was my supply clerk. He just died two years ago of cancer out in Virginia. I went out; he came back to see me. We were really close. We spent ten months together. In the mess hall, you had a place for officers, and you had a table for the one rocker sergeant and above that I was, or regular men. He couldn’t eat with me because he was only a corporal. If it went real late, we would go sometimes together, lock the supply room. If I sat the table with him, they’d stop clapping their hands, stomping their feet, “We have a sergeant sitting with us! We don’t want that. He has his own place.” I won’t say what that did to me. (laughter)

DePue: You were there from roughly May of ’53 to about the same time, about August of ’54?

Holevoet: Right.

DePue: Most of the time you were in Korea, the war was over.

Holevoet: Right.

DePue: How different was your duty after the war ended, after the armistice?

Holevoet: I was still clerk from when I came there, when the war ended in July, until I took over in early September as supply sergeant.

DePue: September of ’53.

Holevoet: Right.

DePue: But I liked it, because then the Korean farmers came out, planted the rice paddies and everything around us. You couldn’t communicate good with them, but I liked

to see them farm. I'd always go out and a lot of the men would shake hands with me when they're walking to their farm. Maybe that's because I'm a farm kid. (laughter) I don't know. No, I can't remember. It was later. It was the place where I came home from. And we changed then with the 7th Division. In other words, they were moving where the 25th Division was located, and we were going to their place. I had to go ahead to scout it out. I do remember that.

DePue: Roughly when did that happen?

Holevoet: I don't know.

DePue: At that time, though, the 25th came out of line, and your unit came out of line.

Holevoet: And the 7th replaced it.

DePue: Was your particular duties all that much different after you came out of line?

Holevoet: No.

DePue: I mean, a supply sergeant's job is a supply sergeant's job.

Holevoet: And when I took over supply sergeant, I never pulled guard duty at all. Not even sergeant guard. Because we had probably between 20 and 30 tanks, or half-tracks. And they'd come in sometime around 10:30 at night. I was in bed ready. I got up, and they got whatever supplies they want that day. . During that whole time there, I never went to a USO show. Only one.

DePue: Being a supply sergeant was good, but you were always busy and always expected to be available.

Holevoet: Uh-huh. If I wasn't there, I had to have my clerk there. I did go Christmas of '53. Every Christmas Cardinal Spellman came to see the troops. I did go to see Cardinal Spellman.

DePue: Really?

Holevoet: Yes. And I stood in line. Got to kneel and kiss his ring.

DePue: As a young Catholic kid, that was something.

Holevoet: Yes, it was. I'd never seen anybody with that much rank.

DePue: (laughter)

Holevoet: But we never had a Catholic chaplain in the 25th Division, where I was. We always went to the church with the Marines.

DePue: The Catholics did?

Holevoet: But there weren't many that went to church. Even when I was clerk, I went almost every Sunday. We'd two, three at the most. A lot at Christmas, we went to a Catholic Mass. We had a lot of Protestants, even, with us. (laughter)

DePue: They had better food, or...

Holevoet: No, this is just Christmas Mass.

DePue: Did the Army do anything special for Christmas?

Holevoet: They have a fantastic menu, if you call fantastic food looks good. I just went less than two weeks ago. Do you know where Milan is from here?

DePue: Yeah.

Holevoet: We go a lot to Milan's parades and stuff, and we go to their Legion, so I know where it is. With my Korean group here from the Quad Cities. They told us at our meeting last month that there was going to be a guy coming back, just up near Rockford, I can't remember the name of the little town. But he was going to give a talk, "To Iraq and Back". He had been there just a year. I went. I was the only Korean veteran there even from the Legion. I couldn't believe they could have such few people see him. I want to say twenty at the most.

DePue: That's it.

Holevoet: I was so disappointed for him. But I went early. First, I had went over to Davenport, Iowa to Field of Dreams for all the soldiers that had been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan since the start of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq.

DePue: From Iowa.

Holevoet: From all states, and every flag flying flew for forty different soldiers of the United States—of all fifty states. There were ladies there that walked you through all this. I didn't know; it's all from families. A lot of them are wives, mothers, fathers, mostly women backing this all up. They would tell you all about this as they walked you through with it.

DePue: This is at the Field of Dreams location where they made the movie, and...

Holevoet: That I don't know. It's a cemetery in Davenport, Iowa, behind Runge Mortuary. But I was impressed with what they have. The display. The things they did every night with them. But I couldn't stay at night because I wanted to be in Milan to meet this fellow. I was early in Milan and I was down here early. But I went to the Legion, and he came early and we talked. Before he went to Iraq, he had been to Korea. He could really talk to me. He said, "It's not as good as they tell you back here." He said, "There's never a day almost that there isn't an incident on the DMZ. [de-militarized zone] That somebody's trying to cross—a North Korean trying to cross into the South—and the Communists aren't letting them." They're

called on alert and you've got to get up, like he said, 2:30, 4:30 in the morning when somebody's trying to cross. He said, "You never hear that back here in America."

DePue: These are North Koreans who are totally fed up with living under the Communist regime?

Holevoet: Yeah, and they're trying to cross, but they won't let them.

DePue: I suspect that if there were incidents that were going on while you were there after the armistice had been signed, they were of a completely different nature.

Holevoet: Yeah.

DePue: Was there still a lot of activity going on along the DMZ?

Holevoet: Oh, yes. All the time.

DePue: What kind of stuff was going on?

Holevoet: Oh, I was told, crossings. But most of the time, the North Koreans had shot them, right?

DePue: Even then, North Koreans were trying to defect to the South?

Holevoet: South. The North Koreans killed their own; they wouldn't let them come across.

DePue: What do you think of the South Korean soldiers who served with you?

Holevoet: Oh, I found them good.

DePue: Did you call them KATUSAs? [Korean Augmentees to the U. S. Army]

Holevoet: No. I guess some did, yes. None of them was ever on a gun section with me.

DePue: But they were fully incorporated into your battery.

Holevoet: Right. There was only one on a gun section, so he could have been with either five or six men.

DePue: Some of the ROK [Republic of Korea] units over there had a pretty bad reputation, or did they by the time you got there?

Holevoet: Yes, they had a—of running. (laughter)

DePue: Yeah. But the soldiers, the Korean soldiers you served with, that was not your impression at all?

Holevoet: No. I didn't find that. I found them fairly nice. And most of them spoke nice

English or enough to get by. I suppose maybe that was one of the requirements to go out in another company like the 25th. And most of them were in their twenties, too. Some were even like twenty-six already.

DePue: Describe the Korean countryside, especially after the war was over, when you came back out of the front lines. What was the Korean countryside like where you were located?

Holevoet: All blew apart. No trees on the mountains, and unreal.

DePue: There weren't any trees?

Holevoet: Only shrubs, nubs, right? Stumps. I think I could have been a clerk, or it could have been about the time I took supply sergeant, but I think I was a clerk. Once a month they'd take a truckload from the whole battalion, and they'd take them into Seoul to visit an orphanage. I didn't think I could handle this, so I never went. I couldn't stand it even where I was—the little kids begging like when I'd be along the road just going to supply. That just...

DePue: , The Koreans were in desperate straits.

Holevoet: I would say it wasn't good. I don't know. But I can't see little kids begging, I guess. I hadn't seen that before. Some it didn't bother. I think it's just whoever you are. I thought, "Well, I don't want to go to an orphanage and see how bad it really is."

DePue: Did you have a chance to see a lot of Koreans, though, as a supply sergeant where you were located?

Holevoet: Like I said, a lot of farmers come out with their oxen and their wife. They had a pretty good life. They generally were leading the oxen. The wife was carrying the plow on her back and probably had a baby strapped to her breast and dinner on her head in a basket.

DePue: Just figuring out how to survive, getting back to life again?

Holevoet: Uh-huh.

DePue: Okay. You mentioned your one buddy, Louis. Did you stay in touch with him when you moved back to supply sergeant?

Holevoet: Yes, all the time he was there. I don't want this on tape, so I'm not going to say anything.

DePue: Did you manage to stay in touch with him afterwards?

Holevoet: No. He received a Purple Heart. And the battery commander that was my favorite said he requested that I fall out when they brought him in from the gun section to

receive his Purple Heart in the battalion, That I'd be out there. And I told him before, I said, "He's called; I won't go." "But he wants you there," my battery commander said. I said, "I told him, and I just told you, I won't go." So I didn't go. He was very unhappy that I wasn't out there. But there is a reason.

DePue: That's what you don't want to talk about.

Holevoet: I won't talk about that.

DePue: Okay.

Holevoet: He wasn't my real close friend after that. If I had seen him, I'd always holler, "Hello, Louis!" Then he'd generally stop and talk. But he'd never acknowledge me first.

DePue: I've got some of these questions I think you've addressed already. How was the morale of the people you were with?

Holevoet: I'd say good. I didn't see any bad.

DePue: During the short time you were there...

Holevoet: Okay, the only thing I could say was, we had a driver of a half-track when I was still on it. And about the time that I came off, he wanted to come back to the States and get married. He was a colored fellow from the South somewhere. But when they found his girlfriend was having his second baby, he already had one three and a half or four years old, it didn't work to get him out of Korea and back home. (laughter)

DePue: He probably wasn't happy about being stuck there.

Holevoet: No. But the only bad experience was, if you had a parent, or a guardian—because I knew they had one. They'd leave everything then in supply and come home on leave. He had always lived with his grandparents, and his grandfather was going to die, but he was alive. Then you get to go back. But I was real close to this supply sergeant from the battery company. He took over about six months ahead of me, a super guy. We really got along good together. We just talked almost every day by phone. His father died, and he got word that his father was dead through the chaplain. He said, "When do I have to start packing to go home?" "You don't get to go home," they said, "your father is dead. You only get to go home if they're alive and call for you." So he didn't to go home for the funeral or nothing to be with his family and mother. After that, he wasn't the same man. He would do nothing. Paperwork was never done right. His battery commander would just lose it. "You can't do this!" he said, "because you're a supply sergeant." He said, "What did they do for me?" You can't believe what they did to a man."

DePue: They don't have that same rule in place anymore, obviously.

Holevoet: I don't know.

DePue: No.

Holevoet: It had to be somebody that was close to you, like either a parent or a guardian, asking for you. But if they were dead, you didn't get to go.

DePue: I was going to ask you before: while you were there, , you were in combat for about two and a half, three months, what was the impression that you and the people with you had, of the Chinese as an enemy?

Holevoet: We actually never seen any Chinese. I just know now from the ones that I talk to from the Korean unit that I'd belonged to here that I joined in 2000. They were there in '50 when the Chinese were running. Half of them didn't have a gun. They had New Year's noisemakers, or just screaming.

DePue: Waiting for somebody to get killed so they can get a weapon.

Holevoet: Uh-huh.

DePue: Does that mean that the soldiers you were with had a lot of respect for the Chinese and their...

Holevoet: No, no respect. They always said they thought they had to be drugged, or who wouldn't run—facing an enemy with nothing but a noisemaker? A lot of them blew bugles. That just drove the troops insane, from what I heard. I didn't get in on any of that.

DePue: While you were there, was the point system still in place?

Holevoet: Yes.

DePue: Is that what determined when you'd get to go home?

Holevoet: Uh-huh. And you made more money if you were on line.

DePue: You made more points, you mean?

Holevoet: No, you made more money. You got paid for being on line, I think twenty dollars a month more.

DePue: Combat pay.

Holevoet: Right.

DePue: But if you're assigned to a company or a battery that's in the front lines, aren't you then getting combat pay?

Holevoet: No, not if I'm not on the front.

DePue: So while you were on the gun section...

Holevoet: I was, yeah, for about not quite two months. (laughter)

DePue: You were there for fifteen months total?

Holevoet: I said one year, three months, seventeen days.

DePue: To be in the rough neighborhood of it, huh? Okay.

Holevoet: People complain now when they're a year in Iraq. But I agree, it's war all the time.

DePue: Yeah, it's tough to compare the two, I would think. How did you manage to stay in touch with your family? Did you stay in touch with your family?

Holevoet: Oh, yeah. My mother wrote I think every day I was gone but one day. I wrote quite a bit being in supply. But I wrote not every day; three or four times a week. I have all the letters I wrote. She kept them—every one. Just now my mother's been dead seventeen years, and I just cleaned out a dresser now again with my brother. We came across some letters to my younger sister that was eight years younger than me and some letters to him. He was only three to five when I was gone. He'd draw me pictures and send me a chicken feather. I'd draw pictures back to him. I think I had three letters that I wrote to him. I put them all in a box.

DePue: Did you keep any of the letters that you received overseas?

Holevoet: A few, but very few. They were really strict when you left that you couldn't bring hardly anything back in your duffel bag. That I just couldn't get over.

DePue: You had to be very judicious in the things that you took back.

Holevoet: No, you dumped everything out on a table. They came and looked with you what you put back in. If they didn't like it, they had a trash can where they put it in. But I did mail some things back in a box, but not a lot, when I knew I was coming back home. I have that little box yet. I painted it olive drab and wrote on it with white paint my address in Korea and to my dad. I want this picture on it. I'm giving it all to my younger brother.

DePue: When you came back, it was August, September of '54.

Holevoet: August, the very end of August.

DePue: You were drafted, so did you have a three-year hitch?

Holevoet: Two-year.

DePue: Two-year hitch. So that's over.

Holevoet: You could make your choice. If you wanted to be in the active reserves or the inactive. I think you stayed in the inactive either six or eight years. I seen a paper or two where they were releasing me from the inactive.

DePue: Yeah, that's standard.

Holevoet: Okay. I didn't want to be active. None of that two week warrior stuff.

DePue: You came back, and obviously you went back to the farm.

Holevoet: Uh-huh. I worked some on the farm for other farmers off and on by the day, too, and at home. But then I worked seven years for an electrician. We did wiring of new houses. A farmer right close, when World War II hit. Then after that, I always worked in furniture stores and restoration of furniture until I retired. I really didn't retire. I wanted to retire at sixty-four. I had made up my mind, instead of waiting until sixty-five. But I was sixty-three in '95 when they dedicated the Korean War Memorial in Washington, DC. I'm on the farm alone now. Both of my parents are dead. Every March I took my two weeks' vacation, when my goats would kid, so I'd be there. Then my Army buddy that I went in with from Chicago lived in Pennsylvania, and he said, "Come out, and we'll go to the Korean dedication of the memorial together." I told my boss at the store, and he said, "You have to talk to the boss." I had to go to the office and talk to the boss, and I said, "I want a week off without pay." "Oh, we'll have to think about it," they said. It took them four days. They said, "You can't have a week off without pay." I said, "But I'm going to the dedication of the Korean War Memorial." He was a World War II National Guard man—a captain. I say, "Pissant." That's going in there, right?

DePue: Okay, we'll put it in there.

Holevoet: I just don't care for National Guard. I don't think they're qualified like we were. The ones that came and would replace even in our company while I was in Korea, National Guard men. They aren't up to par of a regular Army man. I said, "That's good. If you aren't giving me a week off with pay, I'll quit today." He said, "You can't quit today. You have to give me two weeks' notice." They made my two weeks hell, but I did stay for two weeks. So I retired at sixty-three.

DePue: But you were still working the farm at the same time, here?

Holevoet: I was living on the farm but working full-time in the store.

DePue: What was the store again?

Holevoet: Furniture stores.

DePue: What was the name of the store?

Holevoet: I worked at Huebotten's down here for ten and a half years.

DePue: What was that?

Holevoet: Huebotten's, a Jewish name. Don't ask me the spelling. You'll have to look that up.

DePue: Okay, we'll find that out.

Holevoet: Then when they went out of business—all three stores—I was 55. My mother had Alzheimer's. I stayed at home a year with my mother. I didn't think she'd die during that year, but she did. Then at 55, you want to try to find a job. Nobody wants you; you're too old, they thought. Now you're just a child.

DePue: Thank you.

Holevoet: Black Hawk College they had a course for everybody over 55. That's Black Hawk East, a college sixteen miles away from me. I enrolled as an unemployed person over 55. Most of them were college students that had some college but hadn't graduated. Yet all were unemployed. We were all studying on a computer. Those kids could outdo me on the computer galore. But I think it was my third day in, they said, "We've got somebody that will already hire you; you don't have to finish the course if you don't want to." I said, "That can't be. How do they know I'm even here?" "Oh, we have somebody that if you've been"—by then it probably was close to 15 years that I've worked in furniture stores and restoration, and they said, "Good, hire all our people like that." I thought at 55, if somebody wants you, you can't be real picky, right? I said, "That's good. " I dropped out of the course and went to work. But I didn't know at the time, either, until I started working, the State of Illinois pays half my wages, and the boss of the store pays half the wages for six months. He's got a cheap worker. It was screaming hell, that's all I got to say there. You're not from this area. You don't know Goods Furniture.

DePue: That was the name of the place you went?

Holevoet: Uh-huh.

DePue: G-o-o-d...

Holevoet: G-o-o-d-s. He's on his third wife. We don't want this on tape, either. But she was, what do you say, one of those work students? She worked her way up through the ranks to be a wife. She liked to pick on me, although there were four of us doing the same job I did. Of course I was much older. Much of the other ones were in their twenties, maybe one could have been in his thirties already. She always said, "You have to lead them." I said, "But if you're a leader, and you see what they do, you get more pay. We're all getting paid the same." I said, "I don't see any benefit to being the leader." (laughter) Right?

DePue: It's good logic.

Holevoet: I don't know if it was good logic or not. She could get mad and jump higher than the table.

DePue: Let's go back a lot. When you came back from Korea initially, did you find any difficulty in readjusting to civilian life?

Holevoet: Yes. I didn't do anything for a year. When I left, I belonged to a youth group. I belonged to that, I think my senior year of high school, most of the time.

DePue: Was it that 4-H group?

Holevoet: It's Rural Youth. It's like 4-H, only you're older.

DePue: What were you doing during that year, then?

Holevoet: Nothing. Just stayed home all the time.

DePue: Were you working around the farm then?

Holevoet: Uh-huh.

DePue: Was that just because you were having a hard time getting used to being back as a civilian, or...

Holevoet: More or less. But see, I got back, when, in '54, right? My mother joined the War Mothers as soon as I knew I was going to Korea. I don't know if you know War Mothers or not. It's almost a lost organization right now.

DePue: War Mothers.

Holevoet: That's mothers of sons from World War II and Korea. A few got in from Vietnam, but not very many. Every mother that had a son in Korea was a war mother. And in '56, in July, our town was 125 years old.

DePue: What town was that?

Holevoet: Atkinson. We're always in the same place. The War Mothers were having a float. She said they asked around, and nobody will do it. They want a veteran to ride in a wheelchair as a disabled veteran on their float. She said Angeline, the president, her friend, is going to call you. See if you don't do it. They contact a lot of them and nobody will do it. I told her you would do it. We're about five days before the parade. (laughter) My mother said, "I know you will do it for me." So I was a wounded veteran riding on the float.

DePue: (laughter)

Holevoet: It's, what do you call that, mother persuasion?

DePue: (laughter) You weren't necessarily happy about doing it, is that what you're

suggesting?

Holevoet: No, I wasn't.

DePue: Did you get involved in veterans' organizations, then?

Holevoet: As soon as I came back, I belonged to the Legion, but I didn't like it. I think I was active three years. And then I didn't do anything until I read in the paper in 2000 that one of the Quad Cities groups for Korean veterans was here. Then I joined here. Then I joined my Legion group here.

DePue: (phone rings) Do you need to get that?

Holevoet: That's not ours.

DePue: Just keep going, then. It's one of them sitting right over here. Get unhooked.

Holevoet: No, we're going to let it ring. They don't know I'm here.

DePue: During that year when you came back, were you just kind of down a little bit, or just didn't know what you wanted to do with your life?

Holevoet: Probably down a little bit.

DePue: You know what they would call that today. Would you think it's the same thing as what they would call post-traumatic stress disorder now?

Holevoet: No, I don't think so. I probably was mixed up. This shouldn't probably go on tape, too, because I only went on one R and R. They said I had just took over supply sergeant, and it wasn't good for me to leave. Nobody knew anything. I said, "That's no problem." I wanted to go. We had a young gun mechanic that was with the motor pool from Tennessee who was a good buddy. He said when he went on R and R, we'd go together. We did, and I think maybe went March of '54.

DePue: You were there for a long time before you got this.

Holevoet: We talked about it, him and I, before. He was married with no children. I said, "No, I know when I go, I'm not having a woman." "I'll have to decide," he said. I said, "That's up to you." So yes, he had a prostitute. He had three. He had one two days, one one night, and then he got this third one. We did a lot together. He'd never dance with her; I did. Yes, I really liked her, nice gal, and she would always say she liked me. Then she wrote to me when I was in Korea and she wrote me for three and half years when I was back in the States.

DePue: Wow. Sounds like she's wanting a way to get to the States.

Holevoet: Probably. She had stopped being a prostitute. She worked in the silk factory right

away. I thought she was a super gal. That made no difference to me. But some of my family, whoa! Some aunts and uncles were beside their selves that I'd even think of marrying an Oriental girl. (laughter) So it confuses your mind.

DePue: I think I understand.

Holevoet: After that year at home, then I joined the Rural Youth again. Then I joined, and I want to say maybe three to five years, I was on their square dance and folk dance team. Yes, then I went with a girl from the team for two and a half years. She thought we were going to get married. She was a Lutheran. Yes, I went to the Lutheran church, and she went to the Catholic Church a lot. There was no problem there at all. But even today, what is love, to me I don't know.

DePue: Does that mean you've been single?

Holevoet: I've never married. (laughter)

DePue: How did you get involved with this Korean War group here, then? Because I know that's a pretty tight-knit group.

Holevoet: I seen that they went to Chicago to get some of the medals from Korea, and I thought, "Maybe I should join that." Because I didn't go to the Legion then.

DePue: What year would that have been?

Holevoet: 2000. So I contacted them, and they said they'd come to Atkinson to be in our Heritage Day parade. We have a parade every September. It's this weekend—the 15th. The 16th is the parade, and they came out, and I was impressed with some of them, especially my good friend, the Methodist minister Bob Pitts.

DePue: Ah, yes. I'm going to interview Bob.

Holevoet: And another one that lived in Silvis was Tom Moore. I'd generally drive to him and we'd do everything together. I really got close to those two. Some of the other ones I'm still not close to today. I'm close to Bob; yes, we're like brothers. And Tom was the same way.

DePue: I've got a few questions to finish up here. Some of this will be your opportunity to say some things that you want to get on the record. Looking back on Korea, are you proud of your service there?

Holevoet: Yes.

DePue: Do you think the United States was there for the right reasons?

Holevoet: I think so.

DePue: Do you think the war ended the way it should have ended?

Holevoet: No.

DePue: Why?

Holevoet: I think it should have been a total, one whole country not divided. Because you have families on both sides, yet today.

DePue: But at the time in '53 you were certainly happy, like almost everybody else, that it was over.

Holevoet: That it was over, yes.

DePue: Okay. So your opinion was a little bit changed on that one.

Holevoet: It changes over the years, but I think you get a different opinion with maturity. I don't think you're mature at 20. (laughter)

DePue: You're still pretty young. How did the experience of being in the military for two years, and especially being in Korea for one year, change you? Or did it?

Holevoet: Yes. Just even being in Fort Bliss changed me. Because some of the officers there in the second eight weeks would say, "We want you for leadership school. " But I said, "I'm not a leader." They said, "Yes, when we look at your records, you really are. Only, if you were trained more, you'd put more forward, where now you just lay back." I think that was true. I do a lot of volunteer work at the Atkinson Museum. I especially started in 2000 because we've had displays and we have a whole showcase on the Korean War. My boss was my mailman when I went to service. Before, he said, "You're not the same person." Yes, in high school, and out, I was very shy. I'm not shy anymore. (laughter)

DePue: No, you don't strike me as being shy. But then growing up on the farm and having rather limited horizons at that time, your life was the farm.

Holevoet: Yeah, like I said, it's different. But I think ten years later I was an exchange student through the University of Illinois to land grant colleges. It's like a foreign exchange student. To be a student, you have to be between the ages of 20 and 30. I was just going to be turning 30. You went to the university for interviews. Six open spots, 21 people. They were all college graduates or juniors in college. I was the oldest, and no college background at all. When I got interviewed, I figured it's the chance of a cut rabbit. But I was one of the six picked. You had to have a choice country. I chose Belgium first and Sweden second. I was assigned to Sweden. I was studying German for about two or three weeks, when Washington, DC, called. I was working then hauling manure and a neighbor's helping me. His wife was excited; good friends. Belgians, of course. And she said, "Washington, DC just called. There's a drop for Belgium, and they want to know if you'll change." Of course, everybody wanted Switzerland, right? I said, "There's no problem." They said, "You have to call them back when you get home." I called back and never regretted it.

DePue: You've been back how many times to Belgium?

Holevoet: Ten. But it made a difference, too, that I worked 27 years for a nonprofit company. A lot of contact. We had a student in 1960 from Italy. We had students then in 1960 through 1980 every summer—one or two. But they never stayed. I say you can only have one in the family. One summer we had five came. You have to find homes for them.

DePue: So you think a lot of that stems back from being in the military, your horizons are expanded. Getting over to Korea, and being there during the war, your horizons—your perspective—changes?

Holevoet: Yeah, it's a different outlook on life.

DePue: Exactly how did your outlook change, would you say?

Holevoet: More open, more outgoing.

DePue: Help people? You think you're a better person because of all that experience?

Holevoet: We just had somebody visit me; she's going through a divorce. She has a son going to turn 15 and one 12. H was just talking about the military. I said, "The trouble is, right now we don't have anybody. We should go back to our draft, and every man gets drafted. You don't get deferred for college. You can go to college afterward. You don't get deferred to be a minister or a priest. You can do that after you've been in the Army."

DePue: Does that mean that you don't have a very high opinion of the way we ran the Vietnam War, either?

Holevoet: What did they do, there?

DePue: They had deferments for everything. College and all kinds of reasons to defer people.

Holevoet: My boss at the museum was 17 when he graduated from high school, because if you started Catholic school, a lot of times you could start at five. You couldn't get in college or anything until you were older. He had a year. His father said he had a year to send him to the seminary to be a priest. "Oh, my God," he said, "They're all running and dancing, 'I got my 4-F card! They'll never get me!'" That's a good reason to be a priest. And then I have a priest friend that went. He's two years younger than me, and they were all dancing then about the Vietnam time. "The draft will never get me! I'm in a seminary."

DePue: It worked different when you got drafted then.

Holevoet: I suppose they got out then, too. But I say they shouldn't. Even for school. If you're really interested in school, why can't you when you… I was out at what,

yeah, I turned 22. You could go to college, and it was all paid for.

DePue: You didn't take advantage of that, though?

Holevoet: No.

DePue: What do you think Americans today should remember about the Korean War, because this is the forgotten war. I'm constantly reminded of that.

Holevoet: But it was different when we came back. They didn't pay us any attention, you know, as I came back home. The local people like the War Mothers were happy I was back and local neighbors and stuff. But I have a neighbor just a half mile away—all his three sons went to war. The one that's my age, or about ten months older, was lucky; he got to Germany. (laughter) I don't remember what the other two—where they ever really went. Then I had a neighbor right close. I swear he did something wrong, and my neighbor swore to it until he died. He supposedly had high blood pressure, so they didn't draft him. But he could work like a horse on the farm all the time and have kids galore. I couldn't ever see that he was sick.

DePue: (crash in background) I don't know what all that noise is.

Holevoet: Somebody open and shut the door, I thought.

DePue: Or the wind did.

Holevoet: I don't know. No, they were kind. But we have, I think, seven Vietnam vets in our Legion in Atkinson. And so many of those got spit on when they landed in Chicago by men and women—mostly women—had you actually fought in Vietnam.

DePue: So you were ignored...

Holevoet: And they were drafted, too!

DePue: You were ignored, but you at least weren't spit on when you came back.

Holevoet: No. We weren't dishonored. So I thought we fared fairly well.

DePue: What at this stage in your life, and all this experience, and knowing what's gone on in the last 50 years in American history as well, what advice would you give for the future generation?

Holevoet: I probably wouldn't have any advice. The only thing is, if you're in the Army, just be happy and keep your mouth shut, because the farmer where I did my electrical work for eight years with was a World War II vet; he was in Battle of the Bulge infantry. That was screaming hell in that snow—that cold winter. He complained to his battery commander. He said, "That's no problem. If you don't want to be an infantryman, I have a job waiting for you." He said, "Fine." He got to bag bodies,

and he was just 20y years old. He said, "Do you know what that's like?" (laughter)

DePue: You had mentioned before we started here that, even as a supply sergeant, during all of this time that the bombardment was going on, they were bringing bodies back into your supply room. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Holevoet: I never seen the bodies. I seen the bags, but they had everything in—like, it was anybody. You didn't even have to have rank. You just had a paper, and you went up, and most of them should have had a dog tag on or a dog tag in their mouth. That's what that little clip is—to hold your mouth open. You wrote down on that little piece of paper who it was when you put them in the bag. Then I had to type that all up. That went back to the battalion.

DePue: Somebody from the front lines is bringing the body bags to your supply section...

Holevoet: And then our company would take them to the battalion.

DePue: You weren't dealing with the remains, though. You were just strictly doing the paperwork?

Holevoet: I was just doing the paperwork. I was lucky there, right? Or I figured I was damn lucky.

DePue: But some of these guys weren't retrieved right away from the front lines, I would think.

Holevoet: I told you, it was three days in 90 degree weather. The smell was horrendous.

DePue: Okay. Well, that's kind of a down point to end this on. Art, what other comments would you like to make?

Holevoet: I just think we need to go back to the draft. Everybody goes, like I said before. No—only maybe medical. Then they better check it out good.

DePue: We've got an hour and a half into this. Thank you very much, Art. I really appreciate it.

Holevoet: Thank you.

DePue: It's been an honor to talk with you.

(end of interview)