

A Veterans Oral History
Heritage Education Commission
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Moorhead, MN

Ed Haugstad
Narrator

Linda Jenson
Interviewer

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EH: My name is Ed Haugstad. I live at 1204 First Street South, Moorhead, Minnesota.

LJ: Ed, who were your parents and what did they do?

EH: My parents were Mabel and Albert Haugstad. They farmed in Traill County, North Dakota.

LJ: Where is your hometown?

EH: My hometown, I call it Nielsville, Minnesota, but we lived across the river in Dakota, just across the river, so that's why I always said Nielsville.

LJ: How big was your hometown?

EH: It was about 150 people at that time ... pretty small.

LJ: Where did you go to high school?

EH: In that same town, I went to high school as a freshman – the last year they had high school there. Then I went to Caledonia, which is south of our farm about five miles and graduated there. By the way, I was the third smartest in the class because there were only three of us.

LJ: What year did you graduate?

EH: 1941.

LJ: Did you go on to college?

EH: No.

LJ: What did you do after that?

EH: After that, I worked on a couple of farms and then I went into the Army in January 1945.

LJ: I understand you were drafted.

EH: I was drafted. I volunteered for induction.

LJ: How did you feel about being drafted?

EH: Fine, I had no qualms about it. I was glad to go.

LJ: What branch of the service were you in?

EH: U.S. Infantry, but I was a paratrooper in infantry.

LJ: What was military training like?

EH: It was good for you. I'll put it that way. It was pretty demanding in the paratroops because we started out with 1,500 and ended up with about 750.

LJ: Where did you go for training?

EH: Basic training was in Texas, I think that was 12 weeks and then advanced training with the paratroops was in Fort Benning, Georgia. That was I think six weeks, four weeks of regular training and then two weeks of jumping.

LJ: Where did you go from there?

EH: From there I went to California to get ready to go overseas and in December of 1945 I went to Japan. I went about the middle of December, because I know I was on a ship during Christmas Eve and there were only seven of us paratroopers on there, so we got guard duty. Christmas Eve I was alone on guard on the bow and Bing Crosby sang White Christmas. That was probably the only time that I ever got homesick, you know, at that moment. It took us about 21 days to get to Japan. We came back in seven days on the same kind of a ship. It was called either Liberty or Victory. They were the same kind of a small ship.

LJ: How many people on the ship?

EH: About 1,500 and that included everybody. Going over, there were so many storms that we would go backwards maybe a whole day so it took a while to get there.

LJ: Any seasickness?

EH: No, I was close to it. The first day they had me way up in what they call the crow's nest. That thing was going back and forth. I didn't feel too good, but I got over it and I was okay.

LJ: What were some of your best memories during training?

EH: Training? Oh, I don't know. I think being able to keep up with the rest of them because that was my goal in paratroop training. I felt that if the other guy could do it, I could do it. I know one instructor, he was on me, he said, "You'll never make it." But just to be ornery I made it, but I think he said that just to keep me going or whatever, I don't know.

LJ: Where did you serve overseas?

EH: Japan ... we were the first replacements after the war in the 11th Airborne Division. The 11th Airborne Division was stationed in northern Honshu up at Sendai, and we were in a little town Yamagata about 50 miles north of Sendai. That is where all the airborne were. They were the first ones that went to Japan. They arrived there on August 29th. The newspaper said it was September 1st, the First Cavalry, but they weren't. The 11th Airborne were the first.

LJ: What did you do there?

EH: First of all they had all your records and at that time there wasn't many high school graduates. I was one of them. So right away they had me public relations man, mail clerk in charge of quarters. That was working in the office when the first sergeant wasn't there and so forth. I worked more in the office. I didn't do too much guard duty because of that. That went on about three or four months. And then the war was over so it wasn't that urgent anymore, so then they started a regimental baseball team.

Well I wanted to play ball. I didn't know if I should or not so I asked the company commander and I said, "I want to play ball but," I said, "I got these jobs." He said, "Haugstad in this world, you are going to have to look out for yourself." That answered it right there. So I played ball all the rest of the time I was there. I got to travel all over the northern part of Japan. We got our own sleeper car. We played ball maybe two-three times a week. It was fun.

LJ: So did you ever serve in a war zone during your time?

EH: No combat at all. No, the war was entirely over before I left the states.

LJ: Tell us about some of people you met while you were in the military.

EH: I met them from all over. When I first went in, I contracted pneumonia, just when I was going to start basic training. That was with everybody from the Midwest was in my battalion. So I got six weeks behind and I got a different outfit. They were half from California and half Texas. So it got to be pretty interesting. In Japan they were from all over. I met a lot of good people.

LJ: Did you keep in contact with any of them?

EH: No, I didn't. I should have but we just didn't.

LJ: Did you take any pictures?

EH: No, there were very few pictures. I didn't get any pictures really. There was one fellow. We jumped in Japan. We had to jump twice to get paid in Japan. On the way down, the one guy was taking pictures. I know he had pictures of me coming down in the parachute, but he transferred out right afterwards, so I never got to see them. They're around someplace.

LJ: What was that first parachute jump like?

EH: That was in training. The best way to explain it is, the first one you didn't know what was going to happen. The second one you thought you did. And the third one, you knew. It wasn't that hard. It was scary.

We had a sign, I forget, I don't know if it was in a plane or in our barracks. It said, "Anyone who jumps out of a plane and says they aren't scared, is a liar." I remember that so well. Also, we had another one that said right above the door where we jumped out, "Here rank don't mean a thing." But we had a lot of good times, comical times with seriousness, too, but there were funner things that happened, you know. Like our jumpmaster one time, leaning over, and they were banking to make the second pass, and we went over the Chattahoochee River in Georgia, and he fell out. Well, he had his own chute on so he was okay. He had to pull the ripcord and floated down to the river.

LJ: What height are you at? How far up are you when you parachute?

EH: They tried to make it about 1,200 feet. If it was less than 800, they weren't supposed to jump you. One day they wanted to jump us so bad and it was cloudy. I know it wasn't 800. I think it was about 600, because I know the ground came up pretty fast. It didn't take long. It was supposed to be 1,200. I would have liked to go off about 2-3,000 feet and jump because it was fun once the chute opened and you were floating down, the anxiety was over and it was fun.

LJ: How long after you jump out of the plane do you have to pull your ripcord?

EH: You don't pull anything. There is a static line about 15 feet long. It is hooked to a cable and that pulled the chute out. On the end there's a string that hold the static line on there that breaks. It takes about three seconds, it opens up. We would count "a thousand one," "a thousand two," and just before we'd get to a thousand three, you'd feel an opening shock and that is very severe because I seen them break the shoelaces. We had our rifles strapped to our legs and our body with shoelaces doubled and I seen them break them with the opening shock. You're just like a worm up there when you watch them.

LJ: Is that when you get pushed back up at that point?

EH: That's when the chute opens up and you just stop right there. They said that you dropped about, I don't know how fast you dropped, but the plane would go about 105 miles an hour, so you were jumping out and ahead at the same time. It was one of those things that I had to volunteer for it. I had made up my mind that is what I wanted to do. One of my good friends from the hometown, he left about eight months before I did. I told him what I was going to do, and I said, "Why don't you volunteer, too?" So he did. We met

in Japan. In fact, he was on the baseball team in north Hokkaido, the northern island of Japan. We got to see each other twice and play against each other twice. So it was kind of fun.

LJ: When did you leave the military?

EH: In November '46, I was actively discharged. I came home in October of '46.

LJ: How long was your total length of time in the military?

EH: It would be almost a year -- because the war was over so that everybody was going home in a hurry, you know.

LJ: How did you feel about leaving?

EH: I wanted to get out, get back and be a civilian. There were times later that I wished I would have stayed in, because I didn't take any advantage of the G. I. Bill of Rights, which I should have because it was a good deal.

LJ: Were you married at the time you were drafted?

EH: No, I wasn't married. I didn't get married until about eight years after I got out. I wasn't in a hurry, because I was still playing baseball.

LJ: What did you do right after you left the military?

EH: I didn't do anything until spring and then I worked on a farm. I worked on two different farms about four years and then I came to Moorhead. The good jobs were harder to get, but it wasn't hard to get a job. I got a job hauling fuel oil and then I got into the repair business. I worked for an electrical company. I repaired generators and welders and so forth.

LJ: Did you still play ball at that time?

EH: Yes, I did for about four years. I played ball after I got out in my hometown for four years. We had a pretty good team. We were undefeated. I came to Moorhead and I played four years for the Fargo Park League. In fact, I played against Roger Maris for two years. I knew Roger real good. After that I got married, then no more ball.

LJ: How would you like to be remembered, Edgar?

EH: I guess the main thing, being honest. I tried to be that in my work and everything else ... just being honest and helpful.

LJ: Do you have any final thoughts about what you went through during your time in the military, serving your country?

EH: I was happy to do it. I didn't think that they were taking advantage of me. I didn't do much. I didn't do anything really but I was ready for it. It was a good thing that it ended like it did. People I know didn't like the A-bomb exploding in Japan, but I belong to the VFW and I think it was last year or the year before, they had a good article in there. You see they can't publish

the plans they had for so many years afterward. It was all planned out where everybody was going to be in Japan when they invaded and I would have been in a rough place like a lot of them. They would have been dug in good and it would have been a tough time. I used to ask the Japanese over there about the A-bomb. They said "B29, big boom." They said, "Good, war over." They were all glad the war was over. That's the only thing that I think that Truman got a lot of flack over that, but it was probably a good thing.

LJ: Anything else you would like to share that comes to mind?

EH: Not really, except that in Japan, we weren't allowed to associate with the Japanese. We couldn't go into the restaurants and stuff like that. They went on pass. I never did go on pass, but they had places over there.

A town had a non-commissioner's club ... it was three stories. One was for the ice cream and pop, and all that, the next one was for liquor, and the third one was on top a summer garden just in the summertime. And that was liquor, too. They had Japanese girls as waitresses and they were good-looking girls, but it was comical because they talked just like we did. You know because that's how they learned from us. We talked slang and we said cuss words, there were some dirty words and they talked just like us. They didn't know any different. It was actually comical in a way.

Now I don't know if I should say this, but we had prostitution houses there. There were four of them in a row. They were numbered one, two, three and four. Now they weren't for the Japanese. They were girls that were inspected by Army doctors. The troops were the only ones that could go there. Pretty soon MacArthur found out about it and he closed them down and maybe that was a good thing. I don't know but the VD went up after that. But those things were going on. You know it was more wide open after the war.

They also had saké and they had a beer. It was made out of rice. It was a very good beer. The 11th Airborne took over the whole brewery. It was real good beer, but then we drank it. It got to be green and it wasn't so good anymore. So there were a lot of things going on over there. Like I say, I never went on pass.

LJ: How come? Why didn't you go?

EH: I don't know. I didn't care about it. I had things to do and I didn't care about it. Usually when they went on pass, they went on pass on a Friday night and they'd come back on a Sunday night by truck ... 13 miles. When they were gone, it was my job to be in the office and that's one of the reasons I didn't go. I had to keep track of when they came back and all that. We had guard duty. I had to wake up the sergeant of the guard whenever he was

supposed to go and change the guard, so I had to be on my toes for that. So I really didn't care about it.

We saw a lot of movies and training and over there, too, but mostly in training about VD and all that. You were a little scared. I was so I kept clean. There were guys there that had girlfriends, Japanese girlfriends. I don't know anyone who took anyone home for a bride or anything like that, but we got along good with the Japanese people ... the little that I had to do with them.

We stayed in old Japanese barracks. They were crude. We had our own wood stoves and so forth. As I left there, they were going to build new ones for our troops. I never did go back and I don't know what happened over there. We had an airstrip at Yamagata. That was our closest town and that's where we would jump off of and jump onto. We jumped on the airstrip, go up in the air and come down again.

LJ: Interesting, anything else you can think of?

EH: That's maybe about it.

LJ: Thank you, Ed.

EH: You're welcome.