

## Transcription: Geronimo Castilleja

---

*Today is Tuesday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010. My name is James Crabtree. And I'll be interviewing Mr. Geronimo Castilleja. This interview is being done in person at the Stephen F. Austin Building in Austin, Texas, and it's in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board's Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you for taking the time to come in and talk to us today and share with us some of your memories of your time in the service. I think the best place to start is to just ask you to tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went in the military.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Well yeah, OK. We were migrant workers, you know, whenever our group were growing up, and my dad was a farm worker. Then we did follow him to wherever he took us to work in the fields, and make the living that way because there were no jobs. It was difficult but we all survived it. It was the way of life you might say.

*Were you born here in Texas?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** I was born in Caldwell County, Lockhart, Texas, yes.

*Did you have any brothers and sisters?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Oh yeah.

*Tell us a little bit about your siblings.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** There was five of us boys and four girls, sisters, and four brothers. Myself included was five boys, but there was four, I have four brothers. We all grew up pretty much the same way, working. My sisters, they grew up to be able to get a job part time or full time, but somewhere they would get a job, and of course us, the boys, we got a job almost – I think I started working at about the age of 10, not for a regular wage, but for like 50 cents an hour.

*Wow. What type of fields would you work in?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Sugar beet fields. Sugar picking up in Traver City.

*Oh, I know where Traver City is. My grandparents live not far from there.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Yeah, and we went to pick tomatoes also in Indiana, and we made the travel, the rotation, all from Michigan all the way back to Texas to the cotton fields.

*So you would be up there during the summer time?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Yeah, and that was, that went on for about four or five years until my dad says we got to go back to Texas because they want you to register for the selective service, and of course you know, it was automatic. Everybody did it. So I did also.

*You registered when you turned 18?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Turned 18.

*And this was the early 50s?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Uh, yeah. Well in '52. It took a little, three or four months before they actually called me, and when they called me, I was expected to come home that same day, but I never did get home until two years later.

*Really? So tell us about that then. You'd been working up in Michigan, Indiana, and your father said OK, we need to go back so you can register. You came back to Lockhart, or Caldwell County?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** To Austin, Texas.

*To Austin, OK. And you did, you registered, and then how long was it before you got drafted?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** About four months, and when I got, well actually they told me that I was going to go for my physical and I could be drafted. I went to the physical in San Antonio at Fort Sam Houston, and they not only gave us the physical and found out that I was in good health, A1 what they called it, and they went ahead and had us all raise our right hands and gave us the oath to tell us that we were already in the service.

*To swear you in, yeah. At that time, had you been following much in terms of the Korean War and what was going on internationally?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** No.

*So it was all kind of a surprise to you.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** It was really a surprise, but mostly they had no idea why I was being called or anything, but it was the general rule. We all knew that sooner or later you would have to register and you would be called for a physical, and if you passed it, you would automatically be eligible for service.

*So were you able to get word home to your family that you were being drafted?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** No, I just went, and they assumed I'm sure that later that I had been drafted and they sent some of my clothes home, so they knew then.

*Wow, so you left from Fort Sam Houston that day. Where did you go to next?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Fort Louis, Washington, at the training division that I went to, the 44<sup>th</sup> Infantry. That's where I got my basic training.

*What were your thoughts? What were you thinking at that time when you were getting shipped up there? Were you scared or were you angry?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Angry, no, because I was still in transition and I was not really, it's kind of like a shock when you don't really realize what's going on. Of course, you know I adapted because all of my uncles, second World War and they had been in there. Some of them did come

back, but as a general rule, that part of it we were aware that when you are called up for duty, it's gonna be to some kind of a war, but not necessarily me going to Korea.

*Did your parents worry about where you were when you told them you were going to San Antonio for a physical, you didn't return, and then how long was it before they found out really what had happened?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** I believe I got some, a pencil and a pad from the chaplain, and he was packing out, so that was a chance for us to write home. The only problem was scrounging up not money but stamps, because I was the type and I'm sure a lot of us other boys were also, when you were working, you would turn in your whole paycheck to mom or dad. That's the way they used to be, not the way it is now. But anyway when we had a chance to write letters home, it was about, I would say two or three weeks after we were inducted and after we were in training, then that's when we got time. The pencil and pad and then we scrounged money for stamps.

*You said you had four brothers. Were any of them older than you or already in the service?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** They were all younger than me, but we were all, with the exception of one, we all went to service. Some went to Germany, one of my brothers, Gilbert's his name, same last name and all that, he went to Vietnam and he was in bad condition as far as agent orange, yeah, and the youngest went to Germany also, Lawrence, he went to a helicopter – I don't know whether a pilot or not, but he was in helicopters.

*OK, when you got to Fort Louis, Washington, tell us a little bit about what your platoon was like. What were the other recruits like?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** They were what I'm gonna consider not rich because we all got along even though the Latinos at that time, it was a little more difficult. Now today, we are all the same, equal. Back then, the only thing that I saw different was that when we were in uniform, we were all the same. Out of uniform, you were considered different. But the platoon was good. I mean I have no complaints.

*And were the guys from all over the country?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** All over the country, yes, and I had no problem with language barrier or anything because we all spoke English and Spanish.

*When your platoon was formed, and your drill instructors took charge and started doing the training, did they tell a lot of you that you'd very likely be going to Korea at that point?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** No, I didn't, we realized that I was going to Korea until we started on the ship. My instructions, my travel orders just said I was going to Pecan. Pecan is Far East command, which is Japan, Korea, and all of that. So about three fourths of the way, I asked the guy, where are we going because we're on a ship. They said it would take about 14 days to get to our destination which was Yokohama, and that's when I found that Pecan meant Korea. Because they don't need no troops in Japan at that time.

*And was this in 1952?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** '53.

*Early '53?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Early '53, yeah.

*Did you have any knowledge then at that point of what the Korean War had been like or what was going on in Korea?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** No, the only information we got was Stars and Stripes, the little newspaper, and it only showed, the highlights were mostly about how many KIA's for that day, and the event that had already transpired, nothing in the future. Then we knew.

*So you traveled 14 days on the transport across the Pacific and got to Yokohama. How long did you spend in Yokohama?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** About a week.

*And all during that time you were getting ready to go to Korea.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** We landed there at Yokohama within hours, we were transferred to Tokyo. They had a military base there, and from there they sent us to Sassaboo to pick up our weapons, ammunition, and then we were ready for Korea.

*Tell us what it was like the first day you arrived in Korea.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** It was pretty bad. It was stinky and the odor of decay, or you might say, rotten stir, and a lot of, everybody was like ants in a hurry, in a big rush to get wherever they were going.

*Where did you arrive to?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Inchon.

*Inchon, OK, and this was after the \_\_\_ landing in Benbay.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** After the landing had been already, but still, it was very active and there was some troops there that they really mistreated their own troops, but as far as I was, we were pretty well -

*And that was what time, maybe January or February of '53?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** That was in May of '53.

*May '53, OK, and what were your thoughts at that point?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** At that point when we landed, it wasn't, we're here, do the best you can. But the time that was starting to get rough is when we were actually going north to the 38<sup>th</sup> because then you could expect to be shot at from kind of around, you know, because there were still a lot of these people that are, what did they used to call them, like the day patrate, and they

would steal your supplies, your food, whatever they could, and it was, you had to be on guard 24 hours a day.

*Sure, tell us a little bit about, now you were in the infantry?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Infantry.

*Tell us a little about your platoon commander, your platoon sergeant, your memories of those guys.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** The platoon sergeant was real good, real smart. He was a second World War veteran, named Sergeant Patrick Pagovich, and he was real good at what he did. He'd give us pretty good instructions, and he had me volunteer for patrols, and at the time when he approached me and gave me this, you might say it was a pep talk or sales pitch or what do you want to call it, he said you don't have to get up for reveille or anything. You can go eat breakfast at 10, sleep in, you know, and you don't have to do anything but be ready around 6:00 with everything you're gonna need to get out to go to the front. So yeah, I expected to sleep. There was two. We went out on patrol every night for a month and then until I had a feeling here in the back of my neck, I could feel somebody grabbing me and stabbing me in the back, and I got so nervous and bent out of shape.

*How big were your patrols? Was it a squad-size element?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Squad-size, yeah.

*Tell us a little bit about what a typical patrol would be like when you'd go out.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Well, dark, and if it was raining, I think once or twice it was sleet, ice, raining ice, and we came under fire, and the only thing we could do is hit the ground, stay there, until they actually went by us, not over us, but went close to us, so we just kept quiet. Our mission was not to assault anybody. It was just to reconnaissance the area.

*And so when you would go out, would you have a radio operator in your squad?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** We had a radio operator and a radio, but we could not break radio silence unless it was an absolute necessity, and we did have one of these crank telephones that you sling a wire. I'm not sure what they call them, but anyway, that's what we strung all the way out there, and that was the communication we had with headquarters. And whenever we were told to come back, cut the wire right there, gotta destroy as much as you can on the way back so that the Chinese wouldn't hook into it, and then head on back.

*Wow, so how far out would you go then on these patrols?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Far enough to where we had no visibility contact with the company, and as far as distance, I couldn't tell you.

*But it was close enough that you could spool out a line back to the headquarters.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Yeah, those spools were real thin wire and strong. You could string it out, I don't know, I'm gonna guess, I would say about half a mile or three quarters of a mile, which is a long ways because if you ever got cut off out there, you were gone.

*Sure. And so you would do the patrols basically just keeping a lookout, making sure your unit is not gonna be overrun. And you had that one instance when you took fire. Was that a North Korean -*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** North Korean.

*Yeah. So you feel kind of lucky I guess that you dodged that situation.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Oh man, I gave my soul to Jesus on the first hour and I said if this is my day, I'm ready, because, and this is not gonna be very like I don't consider myself a coward, but I cried that day. I cried and I gave my soul to Jesus and I said well, if this is the day, I'm all right, because I was freezing and all of a sudden when I gave my soul to Jesus, I was not cold no more. I was just like, I remember with them guys just like anybody else here. I was not afraid no more.

*I think that story is probably not that uncommon from veterans that have been in combat and been in that situation that at some point you have to find some sort of higher power to believe in, otherwise it's pretty lonely being out there and also I guess too, you could say you become fatalistic in that whatever is gonna happen is gonna happen, and you can't worry about every little thing.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** And after that, I'm not a hero, I was trying to, well surviving. That was my, and taking care of my buddy to the right or to the left, whichever, because I knew then and I know now more than ever that his being able to stay alive was my protection and vice versa, that's all. If you stay alive, I stay alive.

*So you did all those patrols for about a month with your unit. Did you ever know later on what the ultimate goal was for the unit? Were you supposed to kind of be protecting a certain area, or were you supposed to move forward?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** We did, not on patrol, but I mean like one day we were all just on the line waiting for whatever, and we were given the order to move up. That's when during the night I heard like a lot of chirping, and I didn't realize it until after, I asked a guy, what is that, like birds. There are no birds here. What it was, it the Chinese using their own technique to communicate with each other. But it sounded like guineas.

*So they had little clickers or something they were using?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** I have no idea what it was, but it sounded like guineas to me, but they said that's the Chinese planning something, and you could hear the tracks that the wheels, you know, heavy machines, in answer, the tracks.

*All tolled, how long did you spend in Korea?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** I think it was 14 months.

*A couple of months over a year then. So you saw the range of seasons.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Oh yeah, well actually one winter only.

*That's what I mean, you were there summer time, fall, spring, winter. And I know from what I've read about Korea, it's very famous for the cold temperatures, the horrible conditions, the Marines that fought the Chosen Reservoir and that sort of thing. What were your memories of the winters there?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** It was very cold. The worst thing about it, not only was it cold, but you had no place to go home to, no place, not even a big shed to run in from the wind.

*No escape.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Because the wind was strong and the snow was packed. And they sent us some mickey mouse boots, but in the infantry, couldn't wear them because they were so heavy, and I was a live infantryman, which means that we didn't carry a lot of equipment. We carried what we have to carry, which was a helmet, bayonet, and of course the rifle or FB, whatever.

*Then of course the saying is pack light, freeze at night.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Well, that's one of the, yeah.

*Did your unit ever experience the temperature so cold that you had trouble with the vehicles running or the weapons being able to fire or that sort of thing?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** The vehicles were not able to get nowhere near where our company was. They all stayed blocking held to blocks back, because they would carve out some area to be able to park in the airport, whatever you know. The way up the hills was Chokey Trail. It was carved along the mountain where actually one vehicle could go up or come down, but two couldn't meet there because there was not enough room. I think it was regularly little trails for little carts, something, but it was not for vehicles. That was the way to get up there.

*When you were over there, were you able to ever get mail from back home?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Oh yeah.

*How long would that usually take for you to receive it?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** At first it took a long time, but once we got our APO number and I started mailing letters home, the only thing was that sometimes we didn't have envelopes and we were on a stamp free, free mail what they called it. We didn't have to put no stamps.

*Sure, yeah it's still that way.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Just write out your letter and give it to the what they called this fellow, there was one of the fellows working in the shippee, he was an all around fellow. He helped you get your mail, like this fellow what they showed, they show MASH, it was something like that.

*Sure. So what were your thoughts of your parents back home? I'm sure they had to have been worried for your safety.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Oh yeah.

*How did your mother in particular handle that?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Well, I can't tell you when I was there, she didn't know how to write. My dad knew how to write in Spanish, but my brothers and sisters, they knew how to write Spanish and English and so did I, but she never wrote to me, but I wrote home. I wrote to my dad, my sisters and brothers.

*So I've got to think that in a lot of ways it's harder on the families, because you know, when you're over there you're busy, you're with your unit, you've got your mission, but your families are back home and they have no idea and they worry and that sort of thing. Did you ever hear later if that was hard on your folks or your siblings?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Yeah, especially when I came back. See, I was, the military or the VA rather, they say now that I have post traumatic stress disorder, but I didn't realize it because when I came back from Korea, I was so I guess disturbed in my mind or my head you know, that my dad went to pick me up at the Greyhound bus station, and I didn't recognize him.

*Really, here in Austin?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Here in Austin. He strolled in there and come right in the door, and me and this friend of mine, Egnar Caldwell, black young fellow, he was real good, he was kind of like my buddy, and well he was my buddy. We both came out the door and my dad says, you know, come here, you're my son. And I went to him and he hugged me and all, and I let him hug me but I didn't recognize him.

*Really? And you think it was just because of the shock of what you'd been in?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** It had to have been, and then when I got to my mother, oh, it even worse because she was crying real bad, and we tried to do something for her, but I was like cold.

*How long did it take you before you were able to recognize them?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Oh, I would say a couple of weeks at least, maybe longer. And the real reason was that I used to get up early in the morning for no reason and sometimes I would find them next to my bed kind of holding me down, and I'd wake up and say why are you? He said well you were hollering. I said hollering? I wasn't hollering. Yeah you were. And they went the extra mile you might say to keep me I guess comfortable, but they had no idea what was wrong with me, and neither did I.

*Over time did it start to get better for you or how did you deal with it?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** For a time, it got better, yes, and then I felt real good, but I was working. The time that it really hit me, the post traumatic stress thing was when I became disabled, I mean not able to work, and then I had a lot of free time, and then they said that's when it usually sets

in. But as far as you know, when my parents were, I'm at home living with my parents, it was pretty nice.

*Were there any particular incidents then in North Korea or in Korea that you think caused that, or do you think it was kind of a cumulative thing, a series of minor incidents?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** I don't think it happened all in one day. It was just the repetition and the fact that you kind of get, you don't get used to it, but it's an affected, you're kind of involved in this huge monstrosity of, and then having to bring your buddies in, drag them in, that kind of thing, because I was assigned also toward the very end to what they called the mop up to where you had to, you go out in your platoons or companies to pick up. We picked up first of all the unexploded ammunition and we got through with that. Then we started picking up body parts, and that's not very nice.

*So things like that you think were really kind of what –*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** It hits you in the stomach right here. But I didn't get over it, but I kind of held it back or out of my way or something because it didn't really affect me until I started thinking about it, and I mean years later, and not really trying to think about it, it's just like nightmares. And actually some of the nightmares were so real that I actually jumped out of bed and ran out.

*Did you talk to anybody when you got home about your experiences, or did you kind of keep it all internal?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Kept it, well, first of all, nobody asked me because nobody ever really, the Korean War was never really actually to what anybody would even remember it.

*The forgotten war, sure.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Forgotten war, except in the 50 years after the war, then they started bringing up events and different things about it. And like I said, the only thing that made me I'm not gonna say aware of it, but brought it up to light or to where I, was when I had the nightmares, and at one point they become real regular, and then I started drinking, way back, you know, but I would say about six, seven years after I got out, I started drinking heavily every day, every day, and I drank until, and sometimes I was still getting nightmares.

*Really, but you started drinking to kind of get rid of the nightmares in a certain way?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Well, it's just I couldn't sleep, you know, and I started drinking. At first, the nightmares seemed to settle down or ease up or whatever you want to call it, and it weren't so bad, but then later on, I drank until I fell over, sleep, and they still come, until I started getting treatment at the \_\_\_\_.

*When was that?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** 1996 I think it was.

*So not until the 90s then.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** 90s, yeah. Well, according to the therapist and the doctors at the VA here, they said that post traumatic stress disorder was not even, they didn't recognize it, it was unknown.

*But there were people that would talk about being shell shocked or things of that sort.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** That was what I first heard, they said that I was shell shocked, but I didn't know what that meant first of all, they didn't do, then explain it, I said oh, just said it was one of those things.

*Do you remember where you were when you learned that you were going to be coming back home that the situation was over for you in Korea? Was it something that, because I know Eisenhower took office and he had said he was going to go to Korea and he was going to end the war in Korea, and he was elected in late '52, and you got over there in '53, right? So did you think while you were there that at some point, OK, this is going to end eventually and I'm coming home?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Not necessarily in that respect, but you see when I was there, a lot of the guys that was there prior to me getting there were rotating home, and that became the sound that everybody would wait for – hey, you're going to rotate, rotate home that means, but they didn't say rotate home, they just said it's almost time for you to rotate, but don't go do up to the front, you're staying behind here because you only got two weeks or a week. And then I told the fellows, don't lie to me because I don't want you to get my hopes up and nothing.

*Now would you rotate back individually or as an entire unit?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** No, it was like maybe two from this squad and one from the other. Oh, I would say on a monthly basis there was about like a dozen, but not from a whole company.

*So it wasn't an entire unit being replaced.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** No, it was just, and of course the replacements seemed to be like double going in, even though despite the fact that the war had already had armistice, but there was still troops coming in.

*Do you remember what your feelings were that day that you finally go to leave Korea?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Well, I was very glad, but I didn't quite believe it because, and I didn't feel that I was coming home until I got on the ship.

*Did you know that Austin was home? Because I know you said you didn't recognize your mom and dad, but did you know where you were going when you left?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** I knew I was going home and Austin was my home, but I didn't, the streets were, of course everything changes, six months, it's a little different here and there, and the streets were all changed a little bit, but not that much. As soon as I hit Austin, I could recognize certain points, the capitol, Congress Avenue, the bus station.

*Wow, and at that point had any of your brothers gone into the service, too?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Right after that, next to me, my next brother, he went to Germany, yeah, and he spent I think two or three years there.

*Did you have any advice for him or were you able to give him any advice before he left?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** No, he never told me nothing about his service, I never told him. The first time that I discussed my service was with the veterans counselor and the psychiatrist, because they asked me like questions you are asking me now, and I said I don't know why I'm getting these nightmares, I don't know, it just happens. And how did I feel, like committing suicide or something? I said no.

*Did it get better for you after you were able to start talking to them about your service?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** It got, I believe right now that they have given me so good service that I really, really appreciate it. And for a long time I didn't really, I had you might say not a disagreement, but I had a bad feeling about the service as a whole, even to the VA, because you know, yes, they gave me a small disability way back in the days, but I forget what years, a long time ago, but it was not like they are giving me now or the treatment I'm getting now. Once they found out that I had post traumatic stress, the whole thing changed.

*Well that's good. And are you active now with any veterans groups or things of that sort?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Yes sir. I'm also a volunteer at the veterans clinic. At the beginning, well right after I got treatment for post traumatic stress, I got treatment for the whole body, but I felt that I owed the government something and I couldn't pay them money, so I volunteered, and I've been a volunteer ever since. And I belong to the Disabled American Veterans, the Korean Association for Veterans, and I have my ID's, and there's a group that meets over there at the coffee shop on Whitemkana Street, there's a bunch of veterans there, but they don't want to talk, and we all meet together every Saturday morning at 7 o'clock, 7:00 to 8:00. We drink coffee, eat breakfast there, have a social gathering, but I guess they are stronger than I am or something, and they have problems, but not the one that I do, but we all understand. We don't dig into nobody else's business. We try to take care of ourselves.

*Sure, and when you got back to Austin, did you ever get married or have kids?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Oh yeah.

*But you never spoke to your spouse or your children about your service?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Never.

*Yes sir. And they never asked you?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Well, they didn't know and since the Korean War was not a secret, but it was never brought out by nobody. My neighbors didn't know. They might have heard of Korea, but that's all, but as far as me being in the service, never. My first wife, she never knew I was in the service, never. Even after I divorced her and we had five children, she didn't know.

*You just didn't think it was something you wanted to tell her or talk about?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Well, I didn't want to tell her because they tell me you are a veteran so you understand all of this, but I don't think, well I didn't want to tell nobody anything because it wasn't that pretty, it wasn't that good. And to say something to someone else that doesn't know anything about it, they would probably say well, you're crazy, or you're not -

*I understand, you didn't want to have that label stuck to you, sure. Well, have you been able to talk to them now?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** To my family? Oh yeah. Now, my sons and daughters, they are very supportive, and one of my sons who went with me the last Saturday to an event that the Koreans had, and they presented me with this.

*Oh, that's beautiful. You're showing me now, for people listening to this interview, a really nice medal and it says on here "We will never forget Korean War veterans," and it has the American flag and the Korean flag, and then it says 1950-1953, and it's on a really nice ribbon. That's neat, and you got that on Saturday?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Just last Saturday, yeah.

*Who was it that presented that?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Well, I didn't get the fellow's name, but it was through that Korean Association, no, strictly Korean people that were survivors of the Korean, where we went, the grandkids, the new generations, because Korea was 60 years ago, and of course the people that were living then might be old or deceased by now, but this was their children.

*That's great. Well I'm glad that you are finally getting some of the recognition and honor that you deserve. I believe there's a memorial dedication, is it for this Friday at the capitol?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Right.

*For the Korean War veterans. So it's taken a long time and I think it's still a forgotten conflict to a lot of people, but at least you are getting some of the recognition you deserve.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** This is about my third award or where I go to a presentation to get something similar to this, but this is the last one.

*Did you keep anything from your time in Korea, did you keep any, I see here you have some pictures and things, did you keep any of your uniforms or that sort of thing?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** No, because when I got back I was so discouraged that I gave my uniforms away probably within the week to whoever wanted it. None of my brothers wanted it because when I got back, my next to me brother was in the service then, and then of course the Vietnam War started and I had two more go in there.

*But you did keep these pictures, and tell me a little bit about, we're looking at some photographs, and these we can get copies of later to maybe eventually put on the web site. Tell me a little about some of these pictures.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** This first one here is me and a fellow from Mexico. He was actually a Mexican from Mexico, but he joined the Army, the United States, to get his card, or rather his citizenship, and his name is Robeles. And this is me and another fellow, he's a Puerto Rican.

*It looks like, is it cold there? Is that snow on the ground?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** That's snow, yeah, and that's a Puerto Rican. I don't have his name. I forgot it. But this is me and him. And here, this is me about 75 feet behind the line, behind the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, and I came down, there's a tent behind here somewhere, and that's where we stored some ammunition and what have you, and that they had sent me and some other boys to pick it up and they took a picture of me there, and we did the same thing. Here, we like to eat out.

*Yeah, it looks like you're sitting out in a field.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** We were out in the field having a meal.

*Eating just your C-rations or whatever.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** C-rations exactly, yeah. I got C-rations and this is me and another fellow in front of a jeep I believe.

*Yeah, it looks like a jeep.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Yeah, and we were also just kidding around and taking pictures, one thing and another. Every chance we had, we would take pictures.

*Sure, and would you send those back home or would you keep them, or kind of do a little bit of both?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Well, we had a few of them developed but not too many because in Korea there was no actually developing place, and the Koreans developed them but the pictures were never that good, so what I did is I took the pictures, I saved the spools in the little containers, and then when I got home I had them developed.

*So you held onto some of those for a year or more I guess.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** Yeah, oh yeah.

*That's great. Well sir, I tell you, it's an honor to be able to sit and interview you today. Commissioner Patterson is a veteran and myself, but a lot of veterans that work here at the Land Office, but even those that aren't veterans I think are very appreciative of your service and your sacrifice for our nation and especially in a war that really has been forgotten in the history books, and the average person probably can't find Korea on a map, but we here are very thankful for your service. This program, the idea behind this program is to save veterans' individual stories for future generations so that potentially hundreds of years from now people could hear these interviews. We have here at the Land Office documents that go back to the days of when Spain ruled Texas. We have old Spanish land grants. We have Stephen F. Austin's original Registro. We have the papers that David Crockett's widow received so that she could get land after he was killed at The Alamo. So our hope is that we'll add these to that and maybe a hundred years, two hundred years from now, somebody might be listening to this interview.*

*And with that in mind, is there anything that you would want to say to anyone years from now that might be listening to this about your service or just anything in general?*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** I have served and I'm proud of it, and if I had to do it again, I would, even though I'm 78 years old just about. I do believe that service to your country should be not only a regulation, but I mean a service with honor because sooner or later you're gonna get paid, maybe not in money, but you're gonna get benefits for yourself, your family, your future families, and it's a good thing. It's a plus.

*That's great. Well sir, I thank you very, very much.*

**Geronimo Castilleja:** You're sure welcome.

*[End of recording]*