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Interview no. 1630

James L. Hayden

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: James L. Hayden

Interviewer: Barbara Dent

Project: US ARMY El Paso Medical History

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: March 12, 2010

Terms of Use: Unrestricted

Transcript No.: 1630

Transcriber / Summary: Pamela Krch

As a career soldier, Hayden spent the better part of his life in the Army; in this interview he recalls his experiences as a fourth-generation West Point graduate, his service both in the Army Constabulary in immediate post-World War II Germany and in Korea during the Korean War, his responsibilities at White Sands Missile Range under Wernher von Braun, and his recent volunteer work as a West Point admissions advisor. Born in 1923 in New York, Hayden was expected from birth to attend West Point; indeed, his father was an instructor there at the time. Although he applied in 1940, 1941, and 1942, Hayden wryly admits that he was rejected each time until the academy relaxed its standards and started letting everyone in. After his eventual graduation in 1945, the Army sent Hayden over to Germany as part of its police force. Hayden describes in some detail his responsibilities there, the devastation he witnessed, and both the physical and emotional toll the war had taken upon the German population. After returning to the United States in 1948, the army transferred Hayden to its Guided Missile Regiment at Fort Bliss, where he began working as Wernher von Braun's staff's gopher on the V-1 and V-2 missile projects. During the years of 1952 and 1953, Hayden served in Korea and, while briefly describing his duties, he also offers some anecdotes from the time he spent there. Upon his retirement from the Army in 1975, Hayden grew quite despondent. It was not until he began working as a volunteer for West Point admissions that he once again found his calling.

Length of interview 83 minutes

Length of Transcript n/a