

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE  
KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH SAMUEL A. SHIPMAN

FOR THE  
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KURT PIEHLER: ... This begins an interview with Samuel A. Shipman on April 10, 2000 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee, with Kurt Piehler and ...

SHELLEY STAFFORD: Shelley Stafford.

PIEHLER: And, I guess, I would like to ask you a few questions about your parents and growing up. And ... starting off with your mother, could you talk a little bit about your mother? She was born in Texas?

SAMUEL A. SHIPMAN: Yes, born in Pecan Gap, Texas between Dallas and Texarkana.... Her dad was a gentleman farmer and a U.S. postman. And she was the oldest of the clan—after the first-born died—of seven children. She was like leader of the family, chopping cotton. She somehow wiggled out to go to Paris, Texas to get her nursing degree. She was an RN. That was like, '43, '44,—'43, I guess. And that's where she met my dad who was in the Army. He volunteered, [he was] not drafted, and he was at Camp Maxie, Oklahoma. And they happened to meet and begat me. And then he went to World War II.

PIEHLER: So you were very much a World War II baby.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, they got married and begat me. Then he went to Europe for D-Day, the invasion, and mom stayed back and chopped cotton and had me. And I was born in Cooper, Texas, which is the seat of Delta County, which is ...

PIEHLER: And when were you born, what was your birthday?

SHIPMAN: 21 April, '44.

PIEHLER: '44. How did your parents actually meet? Did they meet at a USO dance? Did they ...

SHIPMAN: My dad and his friend, Samuel Dickey, who I am named for, were—Sergeant Dickey was a Sergeant and dad ... juniored him [and] they slipped out of Camp Maxie. A camp by name *is* a camp, it is not a post, you know, it's quite primitive. And they slipped down to go out of Paris, across the border to go to a movie. And they met some nursing students there, and it's all history.

PIEHLER: And one thing led to—how long had they courted each other before they got married?

SHIPMAN: Oh ... a very short period of time 'cause he had to go overseas.

PIEHLER: So this ... might not have happened quite this way if it hadn't been for the war?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, 'cause he was from South Carolina, you know. He didn't know where he was hardly. Texas someplace.

PIEHLER: And your parents stayed together for the rest of their ...

SHIPMAN: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: Is your mother still alive?

SHIPMAN: My brother and I had to put her in an assisted living center last year. She's eighty-four, still spunky, still doing okay. My dad passed in 1995.

PIEHLER: Your mother, you mentioned that she was the only one in her family to go to college. Was that the case?

SHIPMAN: Basically, yes. I think my grandfather, her dad, I think he had a smidgeon at East Tennessee State University and Commerce, I think it's changed its name now. But he did qualify for the postal exam, to be a U.S. postman. And he did teach a little college in 1918, 1917, I mean teach a little high school. So he had a smidgeon.

PIEHLER: But your mother was actually an RN?

SHIPMAN: And she got an RN degree, yeah.

PIEHLER: But she still chopped cotton, even when your father was overseas?

SHIPMAN: Yeah. I mean ... you are slaves to the farm, and it's mainly cotton and corn.

PIEHLER: I also get the sense that there was a real shortage of workers.

SHIPMAN: There weren't any men around.

PIEHLER: Yeah, that she needed to, if the farm was to be viable, that she really needed to chop ...

SHIPMAN: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: But she did work as a registered nurse after the war?

SHIPMAN: Yes, yes. Soon after my dad returned from Europe, and he—by the way, he was at the Battle of the Bulge, both feet froze, and he was medevaced to a hospital ship and came back.... They soon left Texas, and went back to South Carolina where he lived. He worked in a textile mill, eighth grade education, my dad, okay. He barely could—he could write a little. [He] finally got his GED [and] he worked at the textile mill. Mom, you know, did the children's thing, two boys, got us up to a reasonable age, and then she went to work at a private physician's in Laurens, small town [of] 9000. And [she] became the office nurse for a well-known physician there, and everybody loved her. And then they moved back to Texas. They couldn't make [it] up there—you know, and she worked at a hospital there.

PIEHLER: Which part of Texas?

SHIPMAN: Central. Temple, between Waco and Austin. My dad went to work at Fort Hood. He was tired of textiles. The textile industry was going down in Carolina, and he was somewhat union oriented, but that's not ... good. They don't like unions over there. So he went to Texas, went to work at Fort Hood, in a civil service job, stayed there and then retired.

PIEHLER: When you said your father was union oriented ... did he ever join a union?

SHIPMAN: They wouldn't let him.

PIEHLER: But he would ...

SHIPMAN: He would campaign a little ...

PIEHLER: ... Was he a part of any campaign? Like, I know there was a big campaign, Operation Dixie, by the CIO.

SHIPMAN: No, no, no.

PIEHLER: He wasn't part of ...

SHIPMAN: It was, you know, the union organizers coming in and trying to sign up workers.

PIEHLER: And he was one of those?

SHIPMAN: And he ... approved of the concept, and he was identified as a union supporter. And they started giving him a hard time, and so he said, "To hell with it." And to this day, the textile industry is not unionized in the Carolinas.

PIEHLER: No, I know it is very resistant. When did your parents make the move from South Carolina to Texas?

SHIPMAN: When I started Clemson.

PIEHLER: Oh, so it was fairly late, and you were ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah, I was eighteen or so, in the mid-'60s.

PIEHLER: When did your father get his GED?

SHIPMAN: At Fort Hood.

PIEHLER: At Fort Hood, so he didn't use his GI Bill to go back for any schooling that you know of?

SHIPMAN: The only GI Bill he used was to buy a home [for] \$4000. I sucked my GI Bill to the max.... U[niversity of] T[ennessee] got a lot of it.

PIEHLER: And, I guess, in regard to your parents; your father was a veteran of D-Day, a veteran of the Battle of the Bulge, what did he ever tell you about the war? And, I guess,—because you would actually go to war yourself. And I am sure that he may have—did he tell you different things at different times?

SHIPMAN: I would overhear conversations. In those days, in the '50s, veterans would like to get together on the front porch and tell war stories. You know, that was an afternoon, drinking tea and whatever, you know, and I just heard stuff. He wouldn't tell me, but I just heard it. He was basically a disgruntled soldier. But he joined because his dad had died, and he needed money to send back to his family, who was dirt poor. They were sharecroppers and textile workers and whatever. So he joined to make money to send back home. And his dad was in World War II (probably means World War I) and died from that mustard gas lung problem later on. But he was disgruntled. Got busted from Sergeant down to Private. After D-Day he was running that express transport service, Red Ball?

PIEHLER: Red Ball Express.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, from Normandy area over to Paris, and he was involved in that, and sleeping in pretty substandard quarters. And the story goes my dad spoke inappropriately to the captain, and he was reduced in grade down to private and he was sent to an infantry unit, wound up at the Battle of the Bulge, and about froze to death. And he came home.

PIEHLER: Did his legs cause him problems?

SHIPMAN: Circulation problems, later on. He didn't lose any members. Luckily, he did not.

PIEHLER: But you say your father was a disgruntled soldier. Is there any stories [that] stick out? I mean obviously he got ...

SHIPMAN: Well, you know, badmouthing the captain. He hated officers, and I became an officer. I don't think he liked me. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So there was some teasing about ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah, he just did not like officers, I don't know. And—they always made the wrong decisions, you know, "I could do better than that," ... "they don't know what they are doing," kind of stuff, you know. Just disgruntled comments about officers.

PIEHLER: What about Army food and [the] Army way of doing things?

SHIPMAN: Well, being a sharecropper's son, you know, any food was food. I never heard a word about food being bad. I mean, it was three squares and a cot, you know. He enjoyed that ...

PIEHLER: In terms of that, it was the officers, as you say, he could have really done without?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: Shelley?

STAFFORD: Not at this point.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. I guess, you grew up in South Carolina. Could you talk a little about your hometown?

SHIPMAN: It was Laurens, between Greenville and Columbia, South Carolina, a small, poor county. Named for Henry Laurens, he signed the Declaration of Independence. Textile industry, farming, pulpwooding pine trees, cutting down pulp wood, mainly service industries were around. 10-9000 population in the county seat. Couple of little small towns around. And today it is very rural and very poor. I went to high school, two stories, grades one through twelve in one building. Graduating class [of] twenty-one, and I graduated third out of twenty-one. There were only three from my class [that] went to college.

PIEHLER: So did the top three people go?

SHIPMAN: Why, yeah. Well, no, two top people and then one down the pack who surprised everybody.

PIEHLER: And, I guess, people went to the mill, was that ...

SHIPMAN: Stayed there, you know, lost all their teeth and drove a truck or whatever, [or] sell cars or something. I could not handle that, I had to leave, you know.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you knew you wanted to get out pretty ...

SHIPMAN: Oh, I would not stay there. No. It was still quite racist there too. A lot of that stuff, was ...

PIEHLER: Any incident that stands out? Big or small ...

SHIPMAN: Now I'm going to speak the language of the time. We'd go "nigger knocking." You know, [we'd] get in the back of a pickup truck with a broom, go down to the black section of town and ride around, just swatting them with a broom. And go by the railroad tracks and pick up stones and throw them at them. It was a game. Sad, I don't like it now, I

am a good Catholic now, and I feed the poor, but that was part of it. And everything was segregated you know, black and white.

STAFFORD: So your school was not integrated at all?

SHIPMAN: Oh, no, no, no, no. No way. The parents would come in with their guns and burn that place down. But it was right before—Clemson that was a different story. I was in the class when Clemson, the first state school integrated with Harvey Gant, from Charlotte, ... architect. He was there when I was there. It was an armed camp ... officers everywhere. Harvey Gant became an architect and politician up in Charlotte. Great guy, I knew him. He was in my classes.

PIEHLER: So you knew him?

SHIPMAN: In my classes, yeah.

PIEHLER: I guess, since we're on Harvey Gant, I want to ask you some more about your home town, but what do you remember about him?

SHIPMAN: He was lonely. He was surrounded by bodyguards and people outside his windows. And his house [was] isolated in an area by himself. You know, he had to be lonely.

PIEHLER: So in other words—where were ...

SHIPMAN: To the cafeteria, he had an escort. Walking to his class, he had escorts. Walking downtown ... to buy a pair of socks, escorted. He was quite brave.

PIEHLER: And that lasted the whole time he was there?

SHIPMAN: I think I was a year older. I think it was the second year I was there. I graduated in '66, and I think he graduated maybe the next year.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but did the bodyguards diminish by the second year?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, it finally slowed down because they got some more in.

PIEHLER: Uh-huh.

SHIPMAN: They brought some more African Americans, blacks, then, still Negroes, I guess, then. But the tension went down.

PIEHLER: But it was very tense when he was there? The first ...

SHIPMAN: Oh, God, yes.

PIEHLER: Well yeah, I just ...

SHIPMAN: First in the state.

PIEHLER: Anything that sticks out in terms of the tension, because you say you had him in a number of classes.

SHIPMAN: Oh yes, see I was a civil engineer, and he was an architect, and a lot of our classes overlapped. You know, I forgot which ones, and he was a very intelligent student. And I don't particularly like architects. (Laughter) They want to be engineers. That was in the day of the slide rule. We would walk to class and say, "hellos," you know, that kind of stuff.... But the activities finally slowed down and it became safer. And it became a non-issue after a while.

PIEHLER: What was the attitude of fellow classmates towards Harvey Gant?

SHIPMAN: Mixed. You know the redneck attitude then the more liberal, accepting, Democratic-Catholic kind of attitude, which I was in that group. I thought it was cool. Sort of a little piece of history, you know.

PIEHLER: So you ... had a sense that this was part of history?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, yeah, first in the state.

PIEHLER: Well, I want to go back a little to your hometown.

SHIPMAN: Sure. Well, Laurens is where I grew up, I guess.

PIEHLER: ... You said that you wanted to get out. Did you have a sense that you wanted to go to college at an early age?

SHIPMAN: Always.

PIEHLER: What about your parents? How did they feel about it?

SHIPMAN: Can't afford it.

PIEHLER: That was their ...

SHIPMAN: Basically, can't afford it. So, I worked in the summers in the textile mills and made money.

PIEHLER: What did you do in the mill?

SHIPMAN: Oh, swept, doffed cloth—doffing is removing the cloth from the loom in its woven condition, and you doff it and put it over here, that's doffing. Heavy, heavy work.



Some of my friends changed fluorescent light bulbs. I loaded—I brought yarn. I was in a knitting mill and I brought yarn from the warehouse out to the knitting machines. I checked light numbers and color numbers and all that. Swing shift, sometimes, you know, eight to four, four to midnight, midnight to eight. It kills you. Swinging shift, you know. Week, week, week. So, I made summer money. And the old man eeked out some money from the mill. And Clemson was the cheapest school at the time, but he was still a bit disgruntled by that because it was expensive. We had our share of problems. That's one of reasons I joined the Army, but we'll get to that in a minute, Clemson.

PIEHLER: ... You went to a public school. What was the expectation that students had for you?

SHIPMAN: Now, what?

PIEHLER: What were the expectations that your teachers had for their students? I mean, were you encouraged to go to college or was it the attitude that ...

SHIPMAN: One or two. Mainly my senior class teacher, Ms. Stevenson. She made us memorize Shakespeare ... and French, and in that environment, you know ... she pushed it. But I just knew I wanted to get out of that environment. That environment was terrible. Bible belt, I mean extreme Bible belt. So I went to Clemson right away.

PIEHLER: Growing up, what church did you—you mentioned that you are a practicing Catholic, what church did you grow up in?

SHIPMAN: I was raised Baptist, but I converted in Vietnam, as a matter of fact.

PIEHLER: To Catholicism. We'll definitely get to that. And your parents were—you mentioned that your mother was Baptist, so what was your father? Also Baptist?

SHIPMAN: He was coerced. I mean, he wasn't very religious, but he became quite active, he became a deacon, and all of that.

PIEHLER: Your father strikes me as somewhat of an independent from what you've ...

SHIPMAN: Just say stubborn okay, that's a better word.

PIEHLER: Okay. He didn't like officers, it sounds like he was pushed by your mother, he was somewhat favorable to unions, there was a stubborn streak?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, quite independent.... Liked to pay cash for things, didn't like debt. But he was quite stubborn. But the mom was the silent leader of the family in her own way. She guided all of us, she got him to the church, he quit his vile drinking, which was little, you know, a beer—very family oriented, you know. And he had family there, so a lot of family visits.

PIEHLER: ... [In] a lot of textile communities, the mill actually owns the homes, in a mill town ...

SHIPMAN: Well, we were outside the mill village.

PIEHLER: But there was a mill village?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, J.P. Stevens built the mill. We had the old mill, which is [in] Milligan and both mills in small towns, Milligan and Stevens, had a mill village [with] those two-bedroom, shotgun kind of houses, you know. And they had a substantial—you could rent them and buy them, but just basic stuff. They had a sewer, you could flush a toilet, you know. We had outdoor privies. Cold in the wintertime. Whooooo.

PIEHLER: So you grew up with outdoor privies?

SHIPMAN: Yes, cold. But we lived outside. I guess it was the stubborn streak. He would not ... live in the mill village. He lived just outside the boundary of the mill village in an older house. He did a lot of work on it, remodeled it, added a room and a bathroom.

PIEHLER: So the bathroom eventually did come?

SHIPMAN: He built a bathroom after he got water there. He had to petition the city to run a water line out there, like a three-inch water line.

PIEHLER: When did you finally get plumbing?

SHIPMAN: I was nine, ten.

PIEHLER: So that's a pretty distinct memory of not having to go to the privy anymore.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, we had a bathroom. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: What did you, you mentioned ...

SHIPMAN: I'm not Tom Sawyer, this is true of the '50s.

PIEHLER: No, I've interviewed people of the World War II era [with] similar stories in New Jersey of having outdoor privies, which I think a lot of students today have a hard time, I think, imagining.

SHIPMAN: Oh, yeah, and I'm not that old. I mean, you know.

PIEHLER: No, no, no, you're not. And that's partly why we want to document it.

SHIPMAN: My funny story about it: the privy hole would fill up after a year or so. Four people using the privy hole, it would fill up, so you gotta move it. So, the process was, the

privy is here, so you'd go over and dig a new hole, and you'd physically move the privy and put the soil that you'd excavated from this hole into the old privy hole, and then move the privy to the new hole. And, of course, the soil hadn't consolidated, and the soil was sorta mounted up with the soil in a semi-liquid fashion under it. And I ran and jumped in the pile of soil to play, and I squished up in that stuff up to here! I almost drowned in shit, you know! That was awful. They hosed me down, burned my clothes, the whole bit. True story.

PIEHLER: You were probably more careful the next time you played in ...

SHIPMAN: I did not do that. Well we ... eventually got our bathroom.

PIEHLER: What about ... electricity?

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah, the co-ops. The REA co-ops were around.

PIEHLER: Growing up, you mentioned family visits, what else did you do for fun? What memories stick out?

SHIPMAN: The men's' side of the Shipman family are outdoorsmen, hunt, fish, all those things. I was raised in a hunting and gathering kind of environment. They were so poor in the Depression they hunted to live. Squirrels, rabbits, whatever. And they carried over, they still did a lot of hunting, fishing, squirrels, whatever, as a food source. As a sport and as a food source too, you know. So that was a lot of the male activities. Setting up traps to catch turtles. And then there was church-oriented—the Baptist thing, twice on Sunday and once on Wednesday, all that stuff. And then the school stuff.

PIEHLER: When you say school stuff, were there any clubs or dances or other things that ...

SHIPMAN: Oh, the prom, which was nervous, even nervous then.

PIEHLER: What about sports?

SHIPMAN: I played football, even though I wasn't that big. This was a Class B school, I mean, it was teeny. Anybody who wanted to play could play. I broke my leg. I broke four bones playing high school football. Shoulder and left leg, well, three bones total, so I was on crutches most of the time during my high school sports thing. I was highway school patrol. In those days, high school students could drive busses. We took a little training course with the South Carolina Education Association, or whatever, and they assigned a bus to us. And I kept the bus at my home, and I had my route, and I'd go by and pick students up in the morning and take them home in the afternoon as a student, as a seventeen year old. But they had governors on the carburetors, so we couldn't go above thirty miles an hour anyways.

PIEHLER: So even if you wanted to gun it, you couldn't?

SHIPMAN: You couldn't, no, you couldn't go fast, but I was a student bus driver. My grades were always good, I didn't have to try, they were always good. My senior year, I got

a spanking, a paddling from the principal for fighting. Probably a little bit militant, so I got the military side from my dad. My mom's side couldn't—because her dad—cotton was king in Texas in that part, and ... his arm got caught in the gin, and it was mangled. And so he was disabled in this arm so he wouldn't qualify for the military. So, my mom's side was not very military oriented. It was more Indian stories, out there. You know they lived on the cattle drive from the 1880s, whenever.

PIEHLER: So you heard a lot of those stories from that side of the family about the cattle drive and ...

SHIPMAN: About half lies! My grandfather's storytelling ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So there were some tall tales that ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah. Bulls and Indians, you know, and finding old coins out in the cotton patch by the well that were from the cattle drives and all that.... My grandfather claimed that on his mail route ... he gave Bonnie and Clyde directions on their little foray. They were going from Oklahoma through Texas over to Louisiana where they finally got shot up, you know, in that movie.... They were heading from Louisiana and he swears they stopped him on his route and said, "How do you get to Shreveport." (Laughter) "That way." He was carrying mail checks and all that kind of stuff. They could have robbed him, you know.

PIEHLER: So you ... suspect that this might be a tall tale?

SHIPMAN: Well it's probably—I don't know.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah. But it sounds like ...

SHIPMAN: ... It could have happened. It could have happened, okay. The time, the area, it could have happened. Yeah. We'd always go back to Texas.

PIEHLER: You would go regularly to Texas, growing up?

SHIPMAN: Mom got a two week vacation in July, so we would go to Texas two weeks over there every summer, heat and all. Before the interstates [it took] two days of driving, non-air-conditioned car, car sick, picnics on the side of the road. It was awful, you know. US-82 to ... Greenwood, Mississippi, and El Dorado, Arkansas, Birmingham. Tough trip. So that was ... our summer Texas fling.

PIEHLER: And you must have been—you would go in the summer, so it was dreadfully hot. Um, did you guys have any help in the house? Did they ever hire anyone to clean?

SHIPMAN: Ironing.

PIEHLER: Ironing?

SHIPMAN: Yeah. Black labor was cheap, oh God it was cheap. She [mom] had to have a nurse's uniform. These were the days of heavy, heavy starch. And the starched caps from your school. Each cap is different, if you notice. Each school has a distinctive cap from their nursing school, and their starch uniform. So it was a chore, to starch her nurse's outfit. And so we hired a lady—[she] lived in a shack, I mean a shack on a concrete block—to do our ironing. We had that help. Uh, my neighbor was a half-textile worker, half-farmer, he had some property and he had a family of three living on his property. They didn't earn any money, they just got sharecropping food. They'd call him, "Massa Craig,"... and they took his last name. Jot, was his name, and Jot took Mr. Craig's last name, Jot Craig. And they called him "massa." It was Jot and two women who lived in an old house. Somehow the two women got jealous of Jot and one—Sara killed Maggie, I guess with an ice pick because of jealousy.... They lived all together; you know, two women and a man. And one of the women killed the other woman with an ice pick over Jot, we think. But after the killing, nobody prosecuted anybody. No police, no nothing. Jot and Sally [not Sara] went away somewhere, we don't know [where], and two weeks later the house burned down. That was the environment then. And no police, no investigation, no nothing. They buried, Lois, that was her name. Sally killed Lois. Lois was buried someplace. The house burned down, Jot and Sally went away. That's the environment in the '50s.

STAFFORD: Did you have much interaction with the lady who did the ironing or with ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah, I finally got my permit, my driving permit, when I was fifteen, I think. I was driving the school bus when I was sixteen or seventeen. So I would ... deliver and pick [her] up. We got to be friends. I never saw her husband. She had a bunch of snotty nosed kids running around the house. I think she just might have took in ironing as a living. But it was a pure shack. The house was leaning, you know, kinda deal. I guess ironing for the white folks was her living, you know. So we got to be pseudo-friends, you know. I felt sorry for her.

PIEHLER: It sounds like ... it was a very segregated time, and that there wasn't a lot of interaction in terms of ... recreation, you know, white and black children didn't play together.

SHIPMAN: No, no.

PIEHLER: They were very much separate.

SHIPMAN: Back in town, Laurens, there was Sanders High School, pure black. [It was] over next to the ... packing house, where they killed hogs, and stuff. Sanders High School over there, our high school over here. White, [versus] one hundred percent black.

STAFFORD: You said you played football. Did you ever play Sanders High School?

SHIPMAN: Negative, no way. Could not happen.

PIEHLER: ... In the '50s, the Civil Rights Movement was starting to break out. What was the sense of the people in Laurens about it? I mean it was still a very distant phenomenon,

things hadn't really changed there. What was—was there any organizing to oppose it? Where there a lot of people who thought that it wasn't going to happen here?

SHIPMAN: [They thought] it wasn't going to happen here. There was a hanging in Laurens in 1913, or thereabouts. They hung a "darkie" from the railroad truss, still there. And that picture has been blown up and reproduced so many times of that black gentleman hanging from the railroad truss because he looked at a white woman or something, I don't know the story. But that picture was passed around [as a warning] ... "This is what we'll do"...

PIEHLER: So you remember this picture being passed around in the '50s?

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah, this is what was going to happen to them [if] they put one step in my school, you know, whatever. Lot of mainly talk, nothing formally organized. The parents would really get uptight about school integration. They would really get upset about that. There was talk about getting their guns out and barricading the school.

PIEHLER: 'Cause, I guess, there are integrated—there was Little Rock, for example, when you were growing up, ... [but] people never really thought that it was going to happen to them, or they were going to take action, it sounds like.

SHIPMAN: That's what they were going to do. I mean the governor did the thing over there in Little Rock. But in this little small town the citizens were going to do it. You know, stand in the doorway, you know that kind of thing and have a shoot out. Blacks in those days were ... real poor. Not many cars. If they had a car there were always like fifteen people in the car. We always made jokes about that. If they made a little bit of money, they dressed to the T's, you know, zoot suit kind of thing with the pomaded hair. If you, excuse me, found you a hot black chick she took on a crowd, you know. That was always a sport. Churches, oh no. No, no, no, no, no. Baptist Church had the same attitude. Never set foot in those doors.

PIEHLER: So you would hear sermons ...

SHIPMAN: Oh, it was sick. Oh yes, big time. You know, they would never come here, you know. That was drilled into you. And the preacher is always right, you know. So then I went away. I went to Clemson, and it was integrated, and my attitude, I had a positive attitude about it the whole time, and then I got that Harvey Gant stuff, and then I went to the Army, where it was no problem. Everybody was equal, which I loved.

PIEHLER: Well also, Clemson sounds like a very different world from where you grew up in.

SHIPMAN: It was an escape. It was big time education, it was big time football, sorta famous. It was a big military school for a while there. A good rich history, old Sam Calhoun, whatever. So that was a different world. You're right, I never thought about that, getting away from Laurens County.

PIEHLER: Well because you—there were rich kids who go to Clemson.

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: It's not just ...

SHIPMAN: ... The rich kids go there and join a fraternity ...

PIEHLER: So that was one of the ...

SHIPMAN: ... and flunk out. (Laughter) They'd party ... they wouldn't study.

PIEHLER: So fraternities were out of the question for you?

SHIPMAN: I was an engineering student I didn't have time for that. You know, you gotta cook numbers all the time, you know. I just couldn't—I was smart enough to say I can't play that hard, you know. I am here on a mission and I'm not going to disappoint everybody.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that you chose Clemson, in part, because it was the cheapest alternative.

SHIPMAN: And Carolina, USC, Columbia, the state school. And, of course, then, as now, South Carolina State is almost a black school, a predominantly southern black school. I don't know what the ratio is now with minorities at Clemson.

PIEHLER: Why an engineer?

SHIPMAN: I did some part-time work in the summers making money for going to Clemson ... in the textile mills. And then one summer I built houses. I was a carpenter's assistant in roofing, putting up insulation, you know, just doing carpenter's work. And I liked that. I was, you know, I would always try to build dams on creeks when I was growing up. I finally got into dams in civil engineering as a matter of fact as my expertise area. But I couldn't build a dam! I couldn't figure out what a spillway was. If you're going to build a dam, you've got to build a spillway for extremely high flows. If the water goes over the top of the dam it'll erode it, you know. If you have a spillway it'll catch high flows and runs it around. That's why all my dams failed, you know. So I always wanted to be an engineer. Not structural, not concrete and stone, I wanted to be dirt and water. And I've been in dirt and water all my life, all my career.

PIEHLER: Had you ever thought about other majors, or ... were you an engineer from day one?

SHIPMAN: Day one. A lot of guys start off wanting to be engineers and then change over to business management, textile management, or something like that, or whatever, you know. [It's] a tough curriculum.

PIEHLER: Oh, engineering is a very tough ...

SHIPMAN: It's long, too. I had an extra semester just to graduate because they changed curriculums, you know, they added some more courses. I would consider architecture, but, you know, I'd always be a pseudo-engineer.

STAFFORD: Clemson has a really good engineering program, they still do.

SHIPMAN: Won the National Canoe Contest last year, concrete canoe.

STAFFORD: Oh?

SHIPMAN: It's a big deal. Concrete canoe contest nationwide, we won it.

STAFFORD: Well, was that something that made you decide you wanted to go to Clemson, as opposed to maybe South Carolina, in addition to the location and the price?

SHIPMAN: Carolina was always called, "the tea-sippers and the sissies." It was a downtown college, university. It wasn't worthy. Known as a party school. Clemson ... had the sports, activities, the military environment. I had to have my head shaved my freshman year! And wear a little orange beanie hat for six weeks, you know. I was called a rat. A rat hat. You know, that's the military tradition. We had to join the ROTC, and get our head shaved, and wear our little rat hats. Upperclassmen would make us fall down and eat dirt ... and all that stuff. No, Clemson was the best deal; tradition, close, economically available. You know, I would have liked to gone to Duke, or I would have liked to have gone to Georgia Tech, I really would, but [it's in] Atlanta [so] I couldn't do it, so I went to Clemson.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like there were some things that you liked at Clemson, like, you liked football. You liked football games.

SHIPMAN: Yeah football, yeah, yes. That was really big time stuff for me. I mean really big time, to see that many people, you know. I'd never seen a crowd that large before.

PIEHLER: Well it also—you had gone to a, even by southern standards, a very small ... high school.

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah, teeny tiny. We had 300 total, one through twelve.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and Clemson, the student body, must have seemed enormous.

SHIPMAN: It was about four of 5000 then, you know. It's up ... around 10-15000 now, but it was around 4000 then.

PIEHLER: How well prepared were you, particularly your first year?

SHIPMAN: Tough. I was not. That's the quality of education down there in that secondary school. It just wasn't there.



PIEHLER: So you had a struggle.

SHIPMAN: I had a struggle, big time.

PIEHLER: Any close calls?

SHIPMAN: I got caught cheating in chemistry lab. Everybody did it. Everybody did it, you know. I'd do part of the experiment, he'd do part of the experiment, and we'd swap, you know. I got caught. They threatened to kick me out. I started crying. They were going to call my parents. They were looking for us. And ... I did flunk freshman math, called "bonehead math." It was designed to weed out people who didn't have a strong background in math. And I did flunk it and have to take it over. It was a close call.

PIEHLER: But you did pass it the second time?

SHIPMAN: Yes, yes. By memorizing formulas, the derivation of formulas. If you can do that, you can get to the bottom.... The derivation of formulas to get to what you want to do is memorizing, by rote. You close your eyes and it pops up, you know. I knew it.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that ROTC was mandatory in your day, ... when did you decide to try to get into the advanced ROTC?

SHIPMAN: Well, your first two years, sophomore, were mandatory. You had drills on Thursdays, and our uniforms and our weapons, our M-1s, wood-stocked M-1s. It had several battalions of ROTC students. It was a big deal. 'Cause they were military for years, and less than ten years before I got to Clemson, they demilitarized and went co-ed. So the military tradition was still there. So after your sophomore year you had an option. You could go in advanced ROTC and receive credits in military science, okay, which were usually pretty easy, it worked off some of your electives. Plus, you know, they'd give you a commission upon graduation, little butter bars, you know. Plus, they'd give you thirty-five dollars a month. Whoa! That was a lot of money then. I liked the thirty-five dollars a month, you know. Buy a little beer, buy a little gasoline, a little party time. They had some good looking co-eds hanging around when you'd sign up. The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak, okay! (Laughter) I thought, "thirty-five dollars a month." So I joined up because of that. Plus I liked the military too. But it was a pain, you know, the weekend drills, and stuff. But I enjoyed it, plus I got a commission ... at graduation.

PIEHLER: Did you want to have a military—you ended up having a very long military career, but when you were signing up, did you think, "I'm going to have a military career that's ..."

SHIPMAN: I saw co-eds and thirty-five dollars a month. I didn't think about, you know, Vietnam was just beginning, I didn't think about that. I was not thinking long-term. I was blinded by the moment.

PIEHLER: You mentioned the co-eds, did you have a military ball? I'm assuming that you had a military ball at Clemson.

SHIPMAN: There weren't any women there. We had 4000 male students and forty female students. They would truck in, or bus in, sorry, bus in women from some nearby, all women's schools: Wesleyan, Converse, Winthrop up in Rock Hill, they would bring them in for the balls.

PIEHLER: But you never had a military ball, that you remember, ROTC ball?

SHIPMAN: No. I did a full \_\_\_\_\_ They did the same thing, they had to bus them in.

PIEHLER: ... I guess before leaving college, one thing is, do you have any memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, that was scary. Was that '62?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SHIPMAN: ... I had just started—of course, we were still in the Harvey Gant thing. But we remember the missile crisis, but it wasn't as strong as when JFK was killed. I mean everybody—that just shocked the world, you know. Yeah, I was aware of it, but we weren't particularly afraid.

PIEHLER: What about the reaction to Kennedy's assassination?

SHIPMAN: Everybody knows where they were at the exact time, you know. And who did it, that was the thing. Who did it and why. He was a good guy.

PIEHLER: Were people favorable to Kennedy? Because Kennedy had been, even despite his Civil Rights record ...

SHIPMAN: The blacks and the Democrats, where I lived. We had a little statue ...

-----END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE-----

SHIPMAN: ... You got to realize the Democrats and the Republicans changed clothes. Now, the Democrats were conservative, is that right?

PIEHLER: Yes.

SHIPMAN: Then. Now it's the other way around. The Republicans are conservatives ...

PIEHLER: So, when you grew up in Laurens it was a Democratic town?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, of course, the Congressman and the Senators were elected for life.

PIEHLER: Well, I mean, there is still a lot ...

SHIPMAN: Strom Thurmond! Still there man, he was there when I was there!

PIEHLER: Did you ever—that was one of my questions, did you ever hear Strom Thurmond give a speech when you were growing up?

SHIPMAN: Oh, he'd come to Clemson, yeah. He'd give a speech or two. He was old then. But you know he graduated from Clemson and he donated—pumped a lot of money into it. There's a lot of structures named for him up there, some lands, centers for advanced study of something, you know.

PIEHLER: So you have a memory of an old Strom Thurmond.

SHIPMAN: Then!

PIEHLER: ... Relatively speaking, he was a young pup when you went to college. ... Any other memories of Clemson or growing up in South Carolina that we didn't ask you?

SHIPMAN: While I was at Clemson, my parents did move back to Texas, and I had no place to live. So, what do you do, what do you do? So, I had my dad's brother—my aunt and uncle, lived in Laurens. And so if I ever came home on the weekends, I'd stay with them. But most of the time I would just stay up there in Clemson. I'd periodically go back down to Laurens and stay with my aunt and uncle. That was a big change, because my parents left back for Texas.

PIEHLER: Where did you live—did you live in a dorm on campus?

SHIPMAN: Still there, called tin cans. It was supposed to have been built for, like, ten years, it's a concrete slab. They put in metal columns and a concrete slab on the bottom and jack 'em up, you know. They were temporary structures, they're still there. Had metal walls, they called them tin cans. So that's where we lived.

PIEHLER: All four years?

SHIPMAN: Mm hmm. Bunk beds, you know. Bathroom at the end of the hall. It finally got quite rowdy, the crowd I hung with. They built a co-ed dorm on Cherry Lane, I take that back, that's the way it was. And we went on panty raids, the old Animal House panty raid. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you were a participant in ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah, we'd dress up and moon people, you know and all that kind of stuff. That's just part of growing up. American Graffiti stuff. Jump in the pool, put soap suds in the reflecting pool, you know. Streaking was in, we'd go streaking around someplace, you know.

PIEHLER: So you did have some fun in college?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, we had that fun streak in us, you know. Setting the dumpster on fire ... and watch the firemen come out and panic. We set it on fire on purpose, you know. One little fire truck would come out, stuff like that.

STAFFORD: The friends that you did all this with, were most of them still in the ROTC program?

SHIPMAN: No, most of them got out. They really did. One stayed in, two of them, three from my school as a matter of fact. Ford High School was a little school in Laurens. One stayed in Air Force ROTC. I, and another guy, stayed in Army ROTC and graduated. And believe it or not, we met years later in Vietnam in Long Binh, I mean just by happenstance, you know. So no, most of the other—there was also a larger high school in Laurens, which was on the good side of town that's where the muckety-muck's kids went to school, you know. There was more from that school that went to Clemson than from my little school. Most of 'em flunked out. Maybe one or two stayed in ROTC, but most of them just flunked out and didn't graduate.

PIEHLER: So, despite this—this isn't a very big town, and you had two high schools?

SHIPMAN: I don't know why that was true.

PIEHLER: And the one high school was really for the managers ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah, the doctors, the insurance guys, the car salesmen, you know, the better part of town. And we had Ford High School out there where we were. Itty bitty. That's a good question. I don't know why such a small town had two high schools.

PIEHLER: ... How great was the distance between the two?

SHIPMAN: Across town, five miles.

PIEHLER: ... And you had busses, so it's not—[that's] very interesting.

SHIPMAN: I don't know why Ford High School existed. I don't know. Well, actually, Laurens itself—we were in Wattsville, named for Watts Mill, J.P. Stevens' Watts plant, and the little village around it the mill village was called Wattsville. And they had a school there in Wattsville. It might have been built there as part of the mill village later on, I don't know. And maybe we were just a separate community early on, you know, and that just stayed on. Possibly, you know.

STAFFORD: Was there a difference in the facilities?

SHIPMAN: Oh, God yeah. They had a pretty modern school with a covered sidewalk. Much bigger. Most of the kids had cars, very little bussing. We mainly either walked to ... school or ... were bussed in. Two story building, brick construction. Twenties-type construction. Grammar school on bottom, high school on top. Homeroom concept. We had a homeroom, then a whistle would blow and then you'd go to class, and then go back to homeroom at the end of the day, you know. We had shop classes. Very small facility.

PIEHLER: I guess one of the questions I have is since ... you mentioned going through ROTC and going through college, you had a very narrow window where you were looking at and didn't anticipate a life-time career in the Army, but one of the other questions is how well did ROTC prepare you, particularly advanced ROTC for your military career?

SHIPMAN: Well, basically in mandatory—the first two years of the ROTC they taught manual arms, marching movements, how to move a large people from point A to point B, basic military science, the organizations, you know, divisions, battalions, brigades, whatever, platoon squads. Very simple small-unit tactics were taught. Code of conduct, you know, basic, basic stuff in those military science classes. But then you got into advanced ROTC. You got into large unit movements to fire, you know, more strategic planning, uh, we had to attend a summer encampment over at Fort Bragg. We were big boys, we played with real stuff, paint stuff on our face and ten-mile marches and all that. So we were pretty well prepared in the basic soldier skills and basic military concepts. So I cannot fault ROTC.

PIEHLER: After you graduated, how long before you got your first ...

SHIPMAN: Immediately. I was butterbarred by my mom at Clemson, December 16, 1966. The next week I was at Fort Belvoir, Virginia into ... Army Engineer School. Each branch, engineer, infantry, transportation, artillery, has their branch school. Ours was at Fort Belvoir. I went to Fort Belvoir to take the AOBC. Army Officer Basic Course. Eight weeks, middle of winter time, pretty intense training, PT all the time. Marching through swamps, up camp AP hill. I was running alongside where they'd ... bus in the ladies from neighboring schools. This was the Virginia countryside. They were very proper, you know, with arches and flowers on their wrists, and ...

PIEHLER: White gloves obviously.

SHIPMAN: White gloves, the whole bit, you know. Very formal, very military.

PIEHLER: ... I once talked to a General's wife, retired, who commented about knife and fork school.

SHIPMAN: What?

PIEHLER: Did you get some knife and fork training in terms of proper decorum at social events.

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah! The placement of ...

PIEHLER: ... which knife ...

SHIPMAN: ... opening doors and which side to walk on.

PIEHLER: I once ... interviewed a World War II veteran who ... was called up on January 1, 1941 and he was describing—and this all went out the window after Pearl Harbor, a very elaborate world that he was taught, in terms of, if you report to post you had to drop your card at the commander's wife—if they had daughters ...

SHIPMAN: Had to do that. Had to leave your card at the commander's house, had to meet your commander's wife, and that was a whole different other army there. There's rank among wives and girlfriends, you know. Stronger than it is in the real military almost. A big pecking order.... A lot of decorum type training for our balls, our dress blues. They were fun. It was like, take a number to find your date kind of deal. She'd have a five, and I'd have a five, and we're going together. Pot luck kind of deal. On the Potomac River, very scenic, columned house, dancing. I mean to be a little kid from Laurens, that was pretty big time stuff. Virginia Blueblood stuff, you know. So eight weeks at Belvoir in engineer basic, officer basic stuff, they taught more advanced—well, we got more secretive stuff like atomic demolition munitions, which were underground atomic charges that engineers used. A lot of political news of what's happening strategically world-wide. The domino theory stuff.

PIEHLER: This was in your advanced ...

SHIPMAN: Advanced at Belvoir. We were full blown, oath-taken soldiers now. We weren't students, we were soldiers. We took allegiance to the President when we got commissioned. So they were giving us more serious stuff, you know, about hot spots in the world, whatever. And then after Belvoir, my first set of orders assigned me to South Vietnam, Mekong Delta, IV Corps. But my final orders came out on graduation to Germany. That's my Cold War experience, I went to Germany.

PIEHLER: Were you surprised?

SHIPMAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you expect to go there?

SHIPMAN: No, I was geared to go to Vietnam, then my orders came in for Germany.

PIEHLER: Did you ever figure out, I mean the Army doesn't always have a reason, but did you ever find out why your orders got changed to Germany?

SHIPMAN: It wasn't personal, it was based on ... strength needs at the time. The Army still operates that way. They'll change in a minute. It was just at that particular time, they needed more troops in Germany than they needed in Vietnam. The build-up hadn't begun in '66 big time in Vietnam and I spent a year and a half in Germany. Then I volunteered from Germany to Vietnam when I got there. And that was during the big build-up, for the big 500,000 troop build up ...

PIEHLER: Well, before we get to that, which, we obviously want to ask you about that, one question, you expected to go to Vietnam, Mekong, what did you know about Vietnam? And what did you know about the war at that time, particularly after you had all those briefings about the domino theory?

SHIPMAN: I thought it was exciting. Here's my letter. (Shows interviewers the letter) 20 March '68 assigning me from Belvoir to the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion combat down there in the swamps of Mekong. This was my first letter.

PIEHLER: And this was March 20<sup>th</sup> 1968?

SHIPMAN: And somehow—my orders are in here [searches for orders]. But then I volunteered, then I got assigned to ...

PIEHLER: But you volunteered [on] the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1967 ...

SHIPMAN: Is that what I said?

PIEHLER: Yeah. And this is your request.

SHIPMAN: So I spent a year and a half in Germany. '66 and part of '67—that's my timeline—I think, the timeline—yeah.

PIEHLER: So before we ask you about Vietnam, what did you do in Germany? This was your first ...

SHIPMAN: We were a LE company, light equipment. A separate company, unique, and we were attached to an engineering group out of Heidelberg, and we were stationed in Manheim south of Frankfurt on the Rhine River. And we were a separate company attached to the group called light equipment. It was a company commanded by a captain. Four platoons of equipment. We were equipment heavy. Rock crushers, dozers, graters, you know, a platoon to support a division, almost, in our equipment capability. Battalion, let's just say a battalion. And so we did a lot of public service kind of missions, building foosball [soccer] fields, yeah, building training facilities, clearing some areas for the influential Germans. We were on constant alert. This was right in the middle of the Cold War. We would have a monthly full blown alert, dressed to the combat hilt get your equipment and go somewhere and sit and turn around and comeback home, every month. No matter where you were or what you were doing.

PIEHLER: And these would come unannounced?

SHIPMAN: Unannounced. You could be at the O-Club drunk as a dog or you could be in church. You had to go get your gear, go to your unit, line up and go to your designated spot.

PIEHLER: I am assuming that you are free to talk about this. What was your mission if, in fact, there had been a ...

SHIPMAN: Well, it was support. The stated mission was support, you know, to build civil affairs type projects. We ran a rock crusher in the summer months, not during the rainy months, in Grafenwohr over in Nuremberg just to supply the artillery ranges and crush stone. Back in Manheim, we did a lot of civil affairs type projects, but our real mission was—I might have mentioned in my write-up there—to blow up the Rhine River.

PIEHLER: That was your mission if war ...

SHIPMAN: If the balloon went up, and they came in the Fulda Gap, and that was our scenario, they were coming down the Fulda River Gap, Warsaw [Pact] troops, en masse, and we knew we couldn't—there would be too many of them, the first wave would be too many of them. So we would have to destroy the whole river and get the hell out of there and then give the alert and counterattack, I guess.

PIEHLER: So your contingency plan was to ... blow the bridges and ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah, to basically flood the Rhine River Valley.

PIEHLER: Oh, to flood the river.

SHIPMAN: With these ADMs, atomic demolition munitions, you know. We'd auger a hole, and these ADMs are yea-big. But they were small charge atomic devices but they had a lot of power. You know, it was a small underground atomic bomb. It would breach a dam, you know, breach levies, and flood out the valley.

PIEHLER: I guess, how many miles would be flooded out theoretically if you ...

SHIPMAN: From above—I don't have a map of Germany here, from Frankfurt okay, Berlin over here, (Points in the air) Frankfurt over here, Rhine River goes to Manheim, Heidelberg, Stuttgart, I don't remember.

PIEHLER: All the way down into Switzerland.

SHIPMAN: Yeah. Our AO, area of operation, was north of Manheim, a big industrial area, [and] south of Manheim, to wherever the ... the stored water would dissipate into flat flow, non-critical flat flow, non-damaging. So it was forty miles, I'm guessing on that. I need a map. But that was the secret mission. The above-board mission was the civil affairs projects.



PIEHLER: And that was daily life.... But did you train, in a sense, when you went on alert would you go to the sites where you would plant these demolitions?

SHIPMAN: No. We'd just go to various sites ... that were leased by the U.S. Army because the Germans are very proud of their soil. If you knock down a sapling you have to pay fifty bucks for it. I mean really, they counted trees. So we had to go to a designated area that we had leased. If we got out of line we would have to start paying property damage. But only the officers went to our demolition sites for the real mission.

PIEHLER: ... So the men in your unit didn't know that this was your mission?

SHIPMAN: The officers did.

PIEHLER: Just the officers? That was the level of need to know.

SHIPMAN: We'd go to training classes at 8:00 a.m., and other war time scenario, the Fulda Gap invasion and if we took notes—we took notes of course ... by the instructor. But before we left the training classroom, which was guarded by the way, top secret stuff, they would review our notes and black out anything critical about the weapons potential, the size, frequency of distribution, area of coverage, you know. They would black out all that critical stuff from my personal notes. Because it was a real possibility then of World War III over there. Warsaw [Pact] and NATO going at it big time. That was a real big threat.

PIEHLER: You knew that war was not ... a distant threat but something that could happen while you were over there.

SHIPMAN: Oh, we were led to believe that it was any day. Khrushchev was getting hot, you know, Warsaw was big then. Twice as many divisions in Poland and East Germany and Czechoslovakia than we had in West Germany. We were totally out-manned.

PIEHLER: In terms of your mission—I'm curious in terms of your briefing, what about civilians in the way?

SHIPMAN: Oh, God they didn't like us. They were still fretting over losing the war. Fifteen, twenty years later, still mad about it. Except for some of the younger Germans who liked to butter up to us you know. A lot of World War II damage was still in existence. Bridges over the Rhine River were still collapsed. Also, our secret mission was to put up a floating bridge across the Rhine, like we did going into the Ruhr, and making our—you've seen the movies when Patton pissed in the Rhine, you know. Well, about the same place, one of our missions was to take a light equipment company that had floating bridge capabilities and bridge the ... Rhine, you know, ... for troops to escape West Germany before we blew up the dams.

PIEHLER: And then once everyone's gotten through you would ...

SHIPMAN: I think that was it. There would be other floating bridges up the river ...

PIEHLER: But in your particular sector ...

SHIPMAN: In our sector, yeah.

PIEHLER: But I am curious about the area that you would flood. What about civilians in the way?

SHIPMAN: I don't know, we didn't get into that.

PIEHLER: That wasn't your area, you had a very set mission?

SHIPMAN: That was Pentagon G-3 stuff, you know, disposition, civilian casualties, or whatever. I am sure someone made some calculations.

PIEHLER: Because ... I'm just curious, because you were flooding out areas, and so ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah. We were just the guys going to have to go out and do it, you know.

PIEHLER: That wasn't your area.... I am curious, what was your first command like? You are a young lieutenant ...

SHIPMAN: Well, I was a platoon leader, in Germany.

PIEHLER: And what was that like? I mean the whole experience of ... your first command?

SHIPMAN: Of course, you're looking—I was second lieutenant, butterbar, the whole thing, you know. Of course, you know, they make fun of you at first. Even the platoon sergeant talks down to you. But once you get your platoon sergeant on your side, to convince him of ... a trust between you two, that you aren't the dumbest person in the world, that I have had some military training, that I'm not the dumb bespeckled second lieutenant that's going to take you off the cliff kind of deal, you know. So if you get your platoon sergeant on your side, you got it made. By and large the troops [thought], "another damn lieutenant," you know, they didn't care. They're coming up, you know. But once you got your sergeant ...

PIEHLER: ... Did you know this going in or is this something that you learned about?

SHIPMAN: No, we knew it. Heard too many jokes.

PIEHLER: But some second lieutenants, I've heard, were pretty stubborn.

SHIPMAN: Oh, yeah. In the movies, Good Morning Vietnam, that stupid lieutenant.

PIEHLER: But you knew about this ...

SHIPMAN: You had to sell yourself. It took a few weeks, or maybe a month or two, to sell yourself that you weren't stupid, that you knew what parts of the engineering equipment were called, you know. What is that piece of engineering equipment, you know.

PIEHLER: So there is a lot of skepticism?

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah, but you had to be a good sport about it. Some people couldn't, some just stayed real stubborn and maintained an air of superiority. "I'm an officer" kind of attitude, you know. Didn't work out.

PIEHLER: What about your platoon sergeant? Your first platoon sergeant. What was his background?

SHIPMAN: A lifer, of course. Career.

PIEHLER: Was he a Southerner, too?

SHIPMAN: Trying to think of his name ... gosh. No, he didn't serve in the war. Very understanding.... But after I got his attention and trust and confidence, I didn't want an assistant platoon sergeant, for some reason. The E-6—a platoon sergeant is an E-7, he was an E-6 and I was an O-1. But you know, we were a team, there was no problem. We'd load up a train, you know, and take our train up to Nuremberg, no problems. Civil affairs type projects around town, no problem. Maintenance, we were using World War II equipment. Cable operated dozers. All that trash that was left over from the war, V-E Day. And maintenance, we spent a lot of time on maintaining that, worn out. Flat worn out.

PIEHLER: This is over twenty-year old equipment.

SHIPMAN: Still there. Our barracks was a German *kasserne*. A *kasserne* is a military post and it was a German Army post. They called it *Kaiser Kasserne*, I forgot what it was. And it still had German instructions written on the walls like in hallways, you know. "*Verboten!*" you know, don't do this. It was a German barracks, quite well built.

PIEHLER: I have a feeling that it was probably taken over by the U.S. in '44 or '45.

SHIPMAN: We were the victors, you know. And inherited all that junk equipment. I mean it was really bad. We had CMIs, command maintenance and management inspections. Used white gloves on a greasy diesel engine. So we sweated maintenance tests as much as anything to keep us up and going. And this is the opposite of Vietnam [where] everything [was] new, tear it up, don't give a shit, send some more in, okay. Really.

PIEHLER: So this must have been night and day, having come from where everything is really old.

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah. We got priority one over there. Priority zero over there in Germany.

PIEHLER: You mentioned the hard feelings towards the Germans ...

SHIPMAN: German civilians?

PIEHLER: Yeah, you sensed that you were, in many ways, occupiers.

SHIPMAN: Mostly older Germans.

PIEHLER: What about your enlisted men? Was there a lot of dating between German women and ...

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah. That generation didn't have any problems. The Beatles were just getting started. It was a fun environment between the *fraulines* and the GIs. GIs had more money, we had good money.

PIEHLER: The dollar then was very strong.

SHIPMAN: Four marks to a dollar! Oh man, I had lots of money. It's less than one or two marks now. But, four marks to a dollar man, we could party big time, which we did. But the older people were still bitter. But their standard of living didn't change, but hell, most of them owned property and drove cars. And had the same way of life, little village—a lot of little villages and farm areas in the Rhine Valley.... In our engineering group in Heidelberg, which we were attached to, the light equipment company, we had two battalions of DPs, displaced persons, mainly Poles and Czechs, who somehow got lost in the war, in the concentration camps, [their] family got killed or.... And they were DPs. [There was] nothing [else] to do with them, so they formed a DP battalion to operate smoke generating equipment. If the balloon went up, we had to generate smoke to blind everybody, you know. There were miscellaneous little bitty water purification units, you know, from DPs. And they were generally older folks, but they just got lost in Europe and we just made them military units. Quiet, couldn't speak English. All just sad, sad old men.... Just making a little money, you know.

PIEHLER: And they lived basically in this camp.

SHIPMAN: Yeah. It was sad. They didn't have uniforms, we gave them fatigues and Army uniforms. There was nothing military about them except they wore olive drab clothes and black boots and that was about it. But they were organized into platoons and that kind of stuff, you know. That was really sad, come to think of it. Just old men, didn't have nowhere to go. Yeah, without that, they had nothing. Oh yeah, of course as a lieutenant, I got all the little DLJO dirty little jobs officer, mess officer ...

PIEHLER: ... I hate to interrupt, but what was the dirtiest little job you can get as a second lieutenant?

SHIPMAN: Mess officer. KPs. As a mess officer, you got to count meals. You know, meals on demand, you gotta keep your books pretty tight. Meals consumed has got to be

meals ordered the next cycle. Army standard menu of pieces chicken per, you know. One of the lower ranking sergeants had a German girlfriend who had friends in Manheim. He was giving his girlfriend American food out on the Germany economy for resale.

PIEHLER: Not just a few pieces ...

SHIPMAN: Four marks to a dollar ... that ham was worth a lot of money out there, you know. So we caught him through investigative operations, and we had to put him in the brig. OCS, Old Coleman jail, Old Coleman stockade, it was across town. Coleman *Kasserne*. It was OCS, that is officer candidate school for the enlisted to become officers, you know, but it's Old Coleman Stockade. And we had to put him in jail for giving food to the economy. Everything outside of the military is called the economy. You could live on the economy. Married folks could live on the economy, find a little apartment someplace ... and you could live on the economy. If you lived on the post, you stayed on post. What question did you ask?

PIEHLER: I asked about ... the dirty little assignments in mess hall. What other assignments did you have?

SHIPMAN: Yeah. And then property book officer. Keeping track of all the equipment was a dirty little job you didn't want. In those days, military officers were responsible to the UCMJ, uniform code of military justice. Today, they have civilian counsel and local judges. Then they did not, it was all kept in the military. I was an investigation officer, I was prosecutor using UCMJ. Mainly troops going out on the economy on the weekend and tearing up bars. I had to do an Article 32 investigation with the grand jury kind of deal to make amends to the bar owner for breaking mirrors and chairs, and all that kind of stuff. Interviewing with a translator, to the German, you know—of course our guys were always wrong, according to them. And they probably were, they just went out and tore up the place, you know.

PIEHLER: For any good reason?

SHIPMAN: Oh, they got drunk, might have been over a girl. Hey, what's new. What's new in the world? So that was another DOJ.

PIEHLER: Was that the most serious offense? Did you have any serious offenses?

SHIPMAN: Stealing food was a pretty serious. You know that was ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, but no attacks on German civilians except for bar fights, or ...

SHIPMAN: No, no. There was no hostility evident between the American troops of occupation—and that's what we were considered—and the German civilians. Talk yes, physical hostility, no.

PIEHLER: So stealing was the most ...

SHIPMAN: In Germany, yeah. Plus, the normal stuff, sleeping on duty, you know.

PIEHLER: The military ...

SHIPMAN: The military stuff, you know. Shirking your duties,

PIEHLER: AWOL.

SHIPMAN: Going out and forgetting to go home, and that kind of stuff, you know.

PIEHLER: I guess, ... you grew up in a very segregated environment, but the Army is integrated in this era. What about in your unit? How many black soldiers did you have in your platoon?

SHIPMAN: Quite a few. My company commander was Puerto Rican. Ernest Pinero. Slightly overweight, he wouldn't fit today's standards, Ernest Pinero. I have a picture of him, I didn't bring it. One of my favorite troops, he was in my platoon as a matter of fact, a guy from Trinidad. And he had that Caribbean beat, salsa music, you know [taps rhythm on the desk]. And he could do that to entertain us. And he was a black gentleman with freckles. First one I'd ever seen, a black gentleman with freckles. But he was from the Trinidad. Plus we had people from California which is another race all by themselves, you know. (Laughter) Then. Really. They still worshipped the sun, you, know, that kind of stuff.

PIEHLER: So you would have the sort of California stereotype of sun worshiping and surfboards?

SHIPMAN: We had a Dutch national as a platoon leader in the company, Vorstadt.

PIEHLER: ... It sounds like you had a very interesting company.

SHIPMAN: It was a light equipment company, you had to have special skills. You just don't take Joe Tentpeg and have him run a two ton dozer. You had to have special skills, you know. And so they got the special skills where they were available. And most of the commanders and platoon leaders were engineers. We were all engineers, mainly.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like your company overall was pretty top notch.

SHIPMAN: It was. It was proud, very proud. We had some good missions, you know. It's the 135<sup>th</sup> LE Company, light equipment. It was a very proud company, we'd take them on. Except for the floating bridge boys. We didn't like the floating bridge boys. Their mission was quite concentrated. Blow up a balloon and put it on water. Lay some tracks on top of it, you know. So we had our fun with the floating bridge boys. 'Cause we'd always build the approaches to the floating bridge, you know, the roads, the embankment, so it wouldn't get muddy. But yes, it was proud—and I hated to leave it. You know, it had a good mission, I

made a lot of money, had a lot of fun, but it wasn't where it was happening. It was happening on the other side of that big water.

PIEHLER: Well, I guess one question was ... while in Germany, did you think this is where I wanted to make my career? Because you could have just done your hitch, your required service and then ...

SHIPMAN: I had seven years duty.

PIEHLER: So you had seven years when you signed up.

SHIPMAN: I had almost four active and I had three more to fill so I joined a local Reserve unit. After moving back to Tennessee from Texas—from Army to Texas, Texas back to Tennessee, I joined a local Reserve unit over here, [the] 844<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, to fulfill my seven basic years of my entitlement.

PIEHLER: ... Before going on to Vietnam, one other question I have, you had not traveled very much. You described going to Texas for vacation in the summer. What about Germany, you were now overseas, you had four marks to the dollar, and it's—did you do any traveling?

SHIPMAN: Yes. I met a very nice American schoolteacher. They were self-contained bases over there. Schools, groceries, I mean we didn't depend on the German economy. It was a very self-contained military post. Churches, hospitals, schools, everything was there, to include American teachers. And she was a special-ed teacher for disabled kids. So we made friends and I bought a MGB, that little MGB from Europe, from England. And we took a lot of trips down to Luxembourg, saw Patton's grave. Did a little bit of France, a touch of Austria, but all over that part of Germany, you know.

PIEHLER: You took a lot of weekend trips.

SHIPMAN: Weekend trips, yeah, and I just enjoyed it. Germany in the springtime is pretty. Wintertime is awful, terrible, lot of snow. But yeah, we did some traveling. Plus, we spent our summers at Grafenwohr in Vilsek training post up near Nuremberg. I've said Nuremberg about four times now. I saw the movie the other day.

PIEHLER: Oh, Judgment at Nuremberg?

SHIPMAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you have any contact with other NATO allies? For example any German officers or other ...

SHIPMAN: Good question.

PIEHLER: ... British officers, any joint training exercises?

SHIPMAN: No, did not.

PIEHLER: No contact at officers' clubs? So you were very much a contained American?

SHIPMAN: We were quite contained. No we had no joint exercises. I guess because of the *Wehrmacht*, the German Army, they were awful small.

PIEHLER: You mentioned about going to Vietnam.... You could have continued on in Germany—I mean, you volunteered. Why?

SHIPMAN: I felt guilty for one thing. The action was occurring over there. We got the Stars and Stripes newspaper, which was quite censored. You could also get the New York Journal?

PIEHLER: Or Herald Tribune?

SHIPMAN: Herald Journal, Herald Tribune, then. You can still get it now. It's an international—it's like the USA Today only then. Does that make sense? But I think that the Herald Tribune is still published.

PIEHLER: Oh yeah.

SHIPMAN: You could get real news. I'd read Stars and Stripes, that hunky-dory thing, where the Ia Drang Valley you know, how many body counts, all that kind of stuff, how much progress we're making. And then I'd read the Herald Tribune and it was a different story.

PIEHLER: And you noticed this in Germany?

SHIPMAN: Yeah. What's going on here? And there was no T.V., the T.V. was out, but I keep getting different stories here. And I believed the civilian paper more than the Stars and Stripes.

PIEHLER: Really? You were ...

SHIPMAN: And I started feeling guilty. I'm not a martyr, but I felt guilty. That's where I should be, that's what I was trained to do, I had too much fun over here, I felt guilty. I was riding around in a convertible spending marks, you know.

PIEHLER: It does sound like a nice life, actually.

SHIPMAN: It was, it was the super life, you know. But I got patriotism or guilt, I don't know what it was. I just gotta do it.

PIEHLER: Did you think that it would help your career at all?



SHIPMAN: No, I wasn't ...

PIEHLER: You weren't career ...

SHIPMAN: No, at the time I was not career oriented at all.

PIEHLER: Because it's often said that you need to have a battle, you know.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, I wanted to.

PIEHLER: But not for the career. Because some officers it's sort of almost on the list you check.

SHIPMAN: Oh, AR Army, as opposed to RA, regular Army.

PIEHLER: You were still Army Reserve.

SHIPMAN: Army Reserve, yeah, on active duty.

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned reading the Stars and Stripes and the Herald Tribune, or an American paper, did you think, trying to think back now, did you think the mission was going to work? Did you think the Americans were going to win in Vietnam?

SHIPMAN: In Vietnam? Yeah.

PIEHLER: In '67?

SHIPMAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: But you had a sense that things weren't going as well as ...

SHIPMAN: Well, what you read over here didn't match up with what you read in a civilian newspaper, you know. But yeah, it was winnable. We were just superior, in our mind.

PIEHLER: You really felt that this—superior in terms of equipment?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, equipment, you know. A lot of those VC didn't have uniforms, you know. They rode on bicycles, you know. We didn't understand that they would wait a hundred years to beat you.

PIEHLER: You really didn't think in those terms.... I guess—when did you think we'd win? Did you have a sense of timetables at all?

SHIPMAN: I left after Tet. I went in before Tet, and I left between Tet and Cambodia. Remember the Cambodia invasion?

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

SHIPMAN: Uh, right between those events. Before Tet and after Cambodia. No, before Tet and before Cambodia.

PIEHLER: Because you signed up, you were volunteering in December of '67 ....

SHIPMAN: And Tet was February of '68.

PIEHLER: And then you were given your orders in March of ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah, so after Tet, my campaign ribbon said ...

-----END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE-----

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Samuel A. Shipman on April 10, 2000 at the University of Tennessee, in Knoxville Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

STAFFORD: Shelley Stafford.

PIEHLER: And you were saying you were ... in the counter-Tet—you finally report to Vietnam after the Tet adventure, but you leave before Cambodia.

SHIPMAN: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: I guess, you got the orders in March. When did you actually ship out for Vietnam? And what was the route that you ... went to Vietnam?

SHIPMAN: My time line? Uh, flew out of Oakland in a civilian chartered airplane. Flew to Tan Son Nhut, Saigon, and they told us to hot land it, and I'm not sure, [they were] ... under some kind of alert in Tan Son Nhut, it was being rocketed and mortared. So we made a pretty swift landing, pretty steep, steep landing where you bump on the tarmac and got off very quickly at Tan Son Nhut. Then we shipped off ... in Vietnam to Long Binh, which is out near Vung Tau where there was a replacement company, and you stayed out there for your assignments. But the timeframe [pauses] sometime in early '68, after Tet, March maybe.

PIEHLER: But I'm curious ... you were in Germany ...

SHIPMAN: No, no, no. June to July. That's my timeframe.

PIEHLER: June of '68 to July ...

SHIPMAN: July of '69, that's my nine months.

PIEHLER: ... But you leave from Germany? You fly back to the United States or ...

SHIPMAN: I got a couple of weeks off.

PIEHLER: And then you flew from the United States?

SHIPMAN: Flew back to Portland, Oakland, and I flew from there.

PIEHLER: And you mentioned [they sent you] on a civilian ...

SHIPMAN: Civilian Charter. Tiger Airlines, whatever, Flying Tiger. Tan Son Nhut, then to Long Binh for a replacement company for my initial assignment, which was the 62<sup>nd</sup> Engineering Battalion, in staff duty in operations of the battallion. Just learning what was going on. I was a first lieutenant by then and had my rank. And so, 62<sup>nd</sup> Engineering Battalion doing more civil affairs type projects, initially. Um, then we built revetments around buildings to decrease bomb damage or rocket damage. Doing some Army type projects, laying down PCP pierced—PMP, pierced metal planking for hasty airbases. Those kinds of projects, you know, military or local civilian type projects. And then the battalion had a change of mission to land clearance, combat land clearance, and we started clearing jungle.

PIEHLER: And ... when you say you cleared jungle, with heavy equipment or through other methods?

SHIPMAN: Heavy equipment.

PIEHLER: Heavy equipment?

SHIPMAN: Yeah. That's a photograph. (Shows photograph) We had thirty of those. Like cutting grass, basically.

PIEHLER: (Reads) "Race Track Carve Road Jungle." And this appeared in Pacific Stars and Stripes on February 9, 1969.

SHIPMAN: It was like cutting grass, but with triple canopy jungle and big lawn mowers. Here's a convoy. And here's after we cleared it we're going on the cut.

PIEHLER: And this is being cleared to make transportation more accessible?

SHIPMAN: Basically, we were clearing for ... Australia, something. I went to Australia for R and R. Uh, the land clearing—they tried every scheme in the world [on the] triple canopy jungle. They tried Agent Orange that dioxin stuff, you know. Temporarily successful. Killed this year's growth but next year's growth would come back. Agent Orange didn't work. I got some Agent Orange dust, but I didn't get sprayed directly. They tried tree crushers, I showed you a picture a while ago, big machine with ribbon around it. Just ride through the jungle and crush the trees, hit a swampy area they would sink. Too heavy.

PIEHLER: They literally would sink?

SHIPMAN: They would sink, too heavy to retrieve. They'd go down to China, you know.

PIEHLER: So once they'd start sinking, you really couldn't get them out. They'd literally ...

SHIPMAN: We'd finally got the scheme of using D-7 Caterpillar dozers, medium-sized, with a tree clearing blade called a Rome plow, built in Rome, Georgia, used for clearing rice lands in Louisiana and around the swamps, ... and whatever. It was made for clearing jungle type environment. Had slanted a blade with a stinger, and it cut—we had to sharpen the blade—it cut. And that was quite successful. And our mission was to clear the round roadways. The existing roads in the jungle [were] built by the French, and we'd open them up, around firebases. We'd cut fire lanes. We'd clear out a certain area around the fire base, and then cut straight lines for the line of fire stuff. They'd shoot a radar down these lanes. We did a lot of rubber tree plantation destruction. That was fun. We'd put a big old anchor chain between the dozers and go down the row of the rubber trees and go, "pop-pop-pop-pop," you know, "tu-tu-tu-tu-tu." And so that was the mission, clear—on a good day we'd clear 300 acres. On a good day with thirty dozers. And my job as platoon leader was in the morning get on the helicopter, get the dozers lined up, go up and fly over the new cut area in a helicopter, and radio to my lead dozer operator. Telephone from up there and ... I would lay out the trace, the outside perimeter of the trace. And they were all lined up behind him in stair-step formation. So we'd—cutting the trace, once we got it cut, just kept cutting grass down the middle till there wasn't nothing else to cut. Then we'd go home to our base camp or NDP, our night defensive position. And then, in the late afternoon I'd fly up again to map out what we had ... cleared that day, and get somewhat of an idea of what we're going to cut tomorrow. 'Cause this was a pretty hot territory. It was Iron Triangle stuff. Hot caves, and you didn't want it to be repetitive. The way in would not be the same way in tomorrow. They set land mines up and, I had to get an idea of where we were going to cut tomorrow. We may cut over here today and over here tomorrow.

PIEHLER: Very different, different spots?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, because they would be watching our activities, and so ...

PIEHLER: If you did a checkerboard, they'd know where to mine.

SHIPMAN: Exactly. They'd put in land mines and blow us up.

PIEHLER: So how often did you encounter land mines?

SHIPMAN: Oh, many, many times. Most of them were French. Left over from the French, uncharted mines from the French-Indochina War.

PIEHLER: Any serious injuries?

SHIPMAN: Oh, yeah, quite a few. Sniper attacks at night were the biggest deal. Small unit VC, Vietcong, the locals. Farmers by day, soldiers by night. They'd come for a sniper attack and rockets for ten minutes and then leave. Throwing hardware on us, you know. Get us all scared and upset and whatever, we'd go on alert for the rest of the night and not get any sleep. That was more frequent than anything. Night attacks.

PIEHLER: So ... these were generally pretty short?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, intense short period of time, and then they'd disappear.

PIEHLER: Would you pursue at night?

SHIPMAN: No. Defensive only. Night defensive position.... It was a task force of engineers, infantry, and some armored cav. So, the infantry and armored cav was our defense. We were the combat engineers doing a mission.

PIEHLER: Any attacks more serious than sort of the ten-minute rocket attack? Any sustained battles at night that last more than ...

SHIPMAN: No, not on my tour. There were elsewhere. But we had the small unit attacks. We came under alert one night for a battalion of NVA—the bad guys from up North in uniform—for a battalion attack, but it never occurred. Friendly fire was really bad, really, really bad. I guess the friendly fire was ... [as bad as] the sniper attack sometimes. Especially the Australians, and B-52 strikes and napalm. The Aussies would shoot and ask questions later. They did it to me, my battalion twice. Air strikes—you gotta call in coordinates for fire missions and our maps were not very good in Vietnam. They just were not good. They were aerial photographs with grids superimposed on the aerial photograph, and sometimes the coordinates were off. And you call in air strikes by the coordinates, six digit coordinates, you know, left, right, and all that stuff. Fire effect kind of deal or lay your bombs here, the napalm. They'd get awful close sometimes. 'Cause of just poor maps, or just a bad fire mission. Lot of B-52 strikes. Exciting at night. It's like an earthquake, "boom-boom-boom-boom." Flashes of light at night for thirty minutes. Just many, many, many B-52s. And in our AO [area of operations] we'd go out the next day for a cut [and find] a lot of unexploded 500-pounders, you know.

PIEHLER: That gets a little ...

SHIPMAN: That was a problem, yeah. There's the piece that hit me [shows a piece of shrapnel]. But I didn't get a Purple Heart because I didn't bleed enough. You gotta have blood for a Purple Heart. I had a big whelp, right there you know. This is from a B-52 after-effect explosion, but I didn't bleed.

PIEHLER: I guess one question, ... is there any particular memory, or any close call ... involving in combat either from friendly fire, or ...

SHIPMAN: The first time ... [as a] first lieutenant, the first time I had combat engagement, and it was near Lai Khe. That was a base for the Big Red One, First Infantry Division, the big boys, the professionals, and they'd just moved into Lai Khe, which is III Corps, north of Saigon. See, DMZ was hot, I Corps, and III Corps was hot down here around Saigon. Lai Khe, Cu Chi, Bearcat, Xuan Loc, Tae Ninh, Songbe, you've heard of all these names. But Lai Khe, right here, was Big Red One, and we had to clear a lot of area around their base, its called K-25 wood. First time we went to that area to cut was a daytime convoy from Lai Khe into that area ... to build our NDP. And we came under a rare daylight attack. It was tunnel rats, tunnel guys coming up. That whole area, they had underground hospitals and stuff, you know. And they'd just come up and did their thing and went back underground. The first time I came under attack I cowered. I hid my face, I crawled under a machine and hid my face. I was not in command of anything except my life.

PIEHLER: You were really scared.

SHIPMAN: I was scared shitless! First time, okay. True story. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: I guess, I would wonder as an officer ... what my reaction would be. Was that the reaction you thought you'd have to combat?

SHIPMAN: It's so confusing. I had no idea what was going on, "Pop-pop-pop-pop," you know, "ting-ting-tings,"... "kabooms-kabooms," you know. You have no idea what's going on.

PIEHLER: ... What you did, it's a very natural reaction ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah, yeah. I just got under a vehicle and hid my face. Lowest profile I could get.

PIEHLER: Were you supposed to be doing something different?

SHIPMAN: Rounding up the troops, I guess, you know, "Follow me!", you know, but, I didn't.

PIEHLER: You were combat engineers. What kind of weapons did you carry?

SHIPMAN: I carried a cal .45 grease gun. Most of the guys carried M-16s. But I was authorized for a cal .45 pistol, which I couldn't hit you from right here. I had a .45 caliber grease gun, folding stock kind of deal that tankers used. I had that, that was my personal weapon. But most—we had crew mounted machine guns, .50-cals and .60mm's, machine guns, and M-16s. And we had the armored cav that had the small armament, small weaponry on it. But later on that night, after we got our NDP setup, you know, we got attacked again by snipers. And we rallied, we run 'em off. And I remember that night, they had somehow—their spotters had found out, we had enlisted area, NCO area, an officer area for sleeping quarters, and whatever. They knew where each area was and they concentrated on the NCO and the officers' areas with their rifles, RPGs, rocket propelled grenades, and they

tried to take out those two areas, and they missed. They hit some equipment before they hit our trench. I always said a Deuce-and-a-Half saved my life. It hit a Deuce-and-a-Half tire, blew this half up, but it didn't get to us. That night. So, that was probably the longest one. A daytime attack and a nighttime attack.

PIEHER: And that was your first experience.

SHIPMAN: My first experience, yeah.

PIEHLER: That sounds like a pretty ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah, yeah it was. That's why the Big Red One was there to get rid of those bad guys. 'Cause that was a heavy concentration up there.

PIEHLER: Yeah, the Iron Triangle even in general histories ... there is a persistent—efforts to try to clear it out go back to—from what I read '67. There was this sustained effort which you were continuing in '69.

STAFFORD: Was III Corps a free-fire zone?

SHIPMAN: Hmm?

STAFFORD: A free-fire zone. I have read that I Corps was a free-fire zone in that if you didn't know if a civilian ...

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah. Now I Corps was way up here now at the border [refers to a map]. That's Marines, mainly Marines, you know, Phu Bai, Da Nang and the Perfume River, III Corps was down here. The Delta, you know, swampy stuff down here, Central Highlands, Ia Drang Valley early on. This is a hot spot, this is a hot spot. Free-fire. I never went to I Corps, so I don't know. Around Khe Sanh, all that stuff you know, I am sure it was. Those Marines like to shoot things, so I don't know.

PIEHLER: Well, you also said the Australians liked to shoot things.

SHIPMAN: The Australians were down here, and we had the ROKs, the Republic of Korea troops, Aussies, down here, ARVN, which were—that's when I knew we weren't going to win the war, you asked earlier. Army of Republic of Vietnam. At night generally, daytime no. If you got movement, outside your perimeter at night, they'd shoot. We killed a lot of water buffalos and a lot of monkeys. At night, anything—if it's outside the perimeter and it moves, shoot it. Like I said, we zapped quite a few water buffalo.

STAFFORD: And the ARVN. Did you have a lot of contact with them?

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah. They were straggling along beside us. Lazy! And their mission was—in and in early '69 the concept was to Vietnamese, Vietnamize ...

PIEHLER: Vietnamization.

SHIPMAN: What?

PIEHLER: Vietnamization.

SHIPMAN: Vietnamization. And that sucked big time, okay. We were supposed to turn over our equipment, train guys to take over our mission, we were leaving in '73, which we did. We got beat in '75. But we started in '69. And the ARVNs were just lazy. They weren't very skilled at all. But the Australians, you know, in one of our cut, in a single platoon cut—we were on our own, LT Shipman and the platoon—there was no bad guys down there, it wasn't in a VC controlled area or NVA controlled area. But the Australian Army's area of operation was south of Saigon. And we were moving in to cut, in this triple canopy again, and got mortared, "Kaboom!" you know, up and down stuff, you know. And they were mortaring to our front and—we didn't know who it was. We were receiving mortar fire, it was indirect fire, goes up and comes back down, you know. And they were coming from our front walking them, you know twist a knob, they'd come in ten meters, ten meters, ten meters. Getting awfully close. You try to turn around thirty bulldozers in the jungle, to advance to the rear. It took forever to get that unit turned around out of the jungle. And I was on the horn the entire time talking to HQ saying, "What the hell's going on." And they started talking up there, back in Long Binh. And they finally made contact with an Australian commander and said, "These are friendlies." So they stopped mortars and we went back to cutting. We went out the next day and they did the same thing. Twice in a row.

PIEHLER: Twice in a row?

SHIPMAN: They didn't care. I finally ... personally went over there, walked into their camp, and said, "Stop it!" And these officers live in holes like rats, you know. They'd see something and they'd start shooting at it. But I personally went over there and said, "Look, we're good guys, we're going to be here such and such, and such and such time ... doing this, and this, and this. Don't shoot us!" They were tough.

PIEHLER: And this is heavy equipment. The Viet Cong didn't use heavy equipment.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, they carried everything.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean this is ...

SHIPMAN: This is artillery kind of stuff, you know.... The kill radius was quite—20 meters, that was my experience with the Australians. Sort of funny, you know.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean, now. But that's awfully dangerous....

SHIPMAN: That was awfully close. It was all friendly fire and they were about to wipe us out.



PIEHLER: ... You mentioned the B-52's. How close did they actually get?

SHIPMAN: Of course, they lowered the bombs over the South China Sea, they released out there and then they went back to Guam. And they were 40,000 to 50,000 feet and they released their big heavy-duty weapons up there over South China, and then they would turn back to Guam. And so the bombs went down 50,000 feet on their trajectory, wherever it was. You never heard an airplane with the B-52,

PIEHLER: So you just heard the bombs come down?

SHIPMAN: You would just see a flash of light and felt the earth quake. That was awesome, awesome. Then the fire missions, call in napalm or call in artillery fire. Because of poor maps, you know, that was awful chancy too, real chancy.

PIEHLER: Because you often get the impression—and this might be believing what I read—that air-ground coordination was pretty good in Vietnam. But you are saying that in fact the maps—you took your chances when you called in air support, in terms of where the bombs would actually drop.

SHIPMAN: I would rather for a FAO, forward air observer, attached to an artillery unit back in Bien Hoa or Lai Khe whose in an airplane flying around to call in your fire missions back to his units, using his coordinates from the air. If Lieutenant Sam called in an airstrike, I would be unsure of my coordinates because of the poor maps, and they would fire where you told them to lay them. You know, if you said, "Fire for effect," they'd load them up. So you know I would rather for our infantry buddies and our artillery buddies to—this lady tried to poison us. [Points to a picture] She came out to the cut. That was me, and this is one of our pieces of equipment. She came out to the cut and we were taking a break eating C-rats, noon lunch. And she came out with a bunch of ... [they] call them "Mama Sans" and "Baby Sans" trying to sell us Coca-Colas. This was not too far from the built up area. And Cokes in bottles, and icy. You couldn't get ice over there. Oh God, you'd kill for ice, anything cold. And she had iced-down Coke in bottles [for] so many piasters, you know. And I ... bought one from her.... She popped the top for me, and I looked at it and there were things in the bottom of the Coke. It was ground glass, which eat your insides out. You know, so I said, "Stop." They were going to kill us. We would have died two hours later of internal bleeding. But she was the lady that sold us the ...

PIEHLER: What happened to her?

SHIPMAN: Well, at the time, I just ran her off. I said, "Leave, go away."

PIEHLER: Did she ever come back?

SHIPMAN: I didn't see her. She probably went off somewhere and did the same thing.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, what is this picture?

SHIPMAN: Aww, that's just a girlie joint. Down in ... Saigon ...

PIEHLER: I'm just curious, the tongue is sticking out.

SHIPMAN: That guy was killed. That was friendly fire. We killed him, Tusky, I've got a couple of pictures of him.

PIEHLER: So guys did die from friendly fire?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, we killed him on purpose. He went crazy. He had a bad marriage back home. Here he is. Robert Tusky. He was in operation section of ... Charlie Company of the 62<sup>nd</sup>, my platoon, my company. He had a bad marriage, he got a Dear John kind of letter and he went off the wall. He started playing with hand grenades, pulling the pins and waving them around. And he got a hold of a .45 caliber weapon and took hostage of the company commander. And it so happens that the chaplain was there for a visit. The padre came over to do something. And so he was holding the padre and the company commander hostage and we just—the first Sergeant had a weapon but the ammo was locked up, because we were in base camp. He went through a drawer and found one M-16 cartridge, and he locked and loaded, (makes a firing sound) right there. And my contribution was to—it, it was called a sucking chest wound where your heart is still bleeding and its blowing blood out the hole. And I tried to stop that, stick my finger in the hole kind of deal, but he died, right there on the spot, it was too massive. This is my platoon. (Points to picture) ... This right here was an artillery preparation of an area before moving into it the next day for a cut. And they would saturate it with artillery.

PIEHLER: That was the pre—before moving in with your bulldozers?

SHIPMAN: Yeah. Prep, [we] called it prep. They prepped it with artillery or air strikes. And this was an unfortunate NVA lieutenant and his little handkerchief that's got his girlfriend's name on it. And I got his handkerchief and his fountain pen. But this was [NVA] Regular, and that was his stuff he carried. I got his gas mask, his canteen, his spoon.

PIEHLER: Any orders or any ...

SHIPMAN: No, there was no papers on him.

PIEHLER: No papers, the handkerchief is the most personalized ...

SHIPMAN: And the fountain pen. It was given to him by his girlfriend somewhere up in North Vietnam. I never had it translated. Sort of sad. You know, the VC didn't take care of the dead. They didn't bury them they just left them there.

PIEHLER: Would the Americans bury them?

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah, big time [in] the body bags. Oh, the Viet Cong?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SHIPMAN: No.

PIEHLER: No, you just left them on the ...

SHIPMAN: ... That was our night defensive position I was talking about, you know, perimeter. (Points to picture)

PIEHLER: And this is your dad?

SHIPMAN: This is a temporary doughnut night defensive position. That's where we stay at night. We build this, you know. Officers over here, sleeping area, motor pool, infantry, whatever. That attack ...

PIEHLER: Can I read this? This is the letter your dad wrote.

SHIPMAN: You can read it.

PIEHLER: (Reads letter) "Dear Son, I bet it's cold over there, at least it was when I was in that part of the world in December. Hope everything is alright with you. As for myself, I am working everyday, not hard, but working and for that I am very thankful. I am sure you know what you were doing when you put in for Vietnam. I just wish you all the luck in the world and please be careful over there. Well, I am about to run out of space and will be thinking of you ... while in South Carolina. Love, Dad." ... So it's interesting your dad projected his cold ...

SHIPMAN: He was talking about Europe.

PIEHLER: Is that a European ...

SHIPMAN: See he was never in Southeast Asia. He was in Hawaii for a little bit, back in '38, '39. He was never—he was always in Europe so this might have been [when I was in Germany] awaiting my orders.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Oh okay, I'm just curious.

SHIPMAN: I wrote this book.

PIEHLER: So when you say you "wrote the book," you did write the book.... And this is pamphlet number 525-6 Military Operations, Lessons Learned Land Clearing. And this is issued Washington, D.C., 16 June, 1970. Well, I guess, what were the lessons that you learned? I mean, there's a whole book here which we could eventually look at, but what were some of the things you learned that you put in the book, to summarize?

SHIPMAN: Air support. You had to have daily air support. I wear the Air Medal as an engineer officer. I don't wear the wings, I don't fly anything. I fly kites. (Laughter) But I won the Air Medal which is unusual, and I get a lot of looks from real Army guys, you know, "How do you get the Air Medal?" Well, you get it for ... aerial combat, command and control. Flying around every day. You know, thirty hours of combat command and control. You need air support, to layout the stuff, you know. You need a lot of replacement equipment. The layout of the night defensive positions was quite important, you know. The way to cut, the series of cuts—some of the old stuff they tried to use didn't work.

PIEHLER: That's one of the things you made clear doesn't work.

SHIPMAN: That's what would work, that's a stinger. (Shows picture) These things we we're cutting down were hardwoods, a bunch of teak and mahogany.

PIEHLER: This is expensive wood.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, this is good wood. Did the same thing in Panama too.

PIEHLER: So you did apply these lessons again?

SHIPMAN: In Panama, yeah. We went down there and built a road.

STAFFORD: When you chop down the trees, what happened to the lumber?

SHIPMAN: ... We would either burn it so it wouldn't provide any cover for the bad guys, the Charlies, and the North Victors [Vietnamese]. Sometimes on a fresh cut, the locals—and we had some Montagnards, the loin-cloth guys, betel [nut] juice, you know [with] black teeth—and they were prevalent up there between ... II Corps and III Corps. They'd come by and try to salvage some of it with hand axes, and whatever. They salvaged a little, but we burned most of it so it wouldn't provide any cover. It was a shame.

STAFFORD: When you burned it, did the smoke pose any problems.

SHIPMAN: Not really. No, I don't know why but it didn't. That's a soldier being medevaced from a mine explosion on his dozer at our camp called Remagen One. (Shows picture) That's a medevac going back to Saigon.

STAFFORD: ... What kind of machinery did you use for mine field breaching?

SHIPMAN: We tried to avoid it. But they weren't charted so, if we knew a mine was there we'd go around it.

PIEHLER: ... Would you ever bring in somebody to disable, or disarm, or do you just—the jungle is just so big, did you ...

SHIPMAN: It's futile. I remember, if it's in a very critical location, a tactical or strategic area, you'd call in some airstrike to blow them up, you know. Most the time we tried to avoid them.

PIEHLER: You mentioned in your pre-interview [survey] that you've had a confrontation with George S. Patton III.

SHIPMAN: That was fun, whoooa, man! Twice!

PIEHLER: Oh, two times?

SHIPMAN: Twice, yeah!

PIEHLER: Oh, so what were the two ... confrontations?

SHIPMAN: Where were we? Let me think. He was an O-6, Colonel commanding the Eleventh Armored Cav Regiment, A-C-R, Eleventh Cav, O-6. The Eleventh Cav, I think, had a headquarters back in Bien Hoa, I think. And we had cut in his A-O. That was his tactical area of operation, to kill the bad guys. And he was there to kill the bad guys, you know. And he was a shoot first, ask questions later kind of guy.

PIEHLER: Somehow that doesn't surprise me.

SHIPMAN: I mean, and he wore the polished pistol handle thing, and polished helmet too, like his dad. You know, a jet black polished personal helicopter. Very flamboyant. And we had to meet his AO doing our cut thing, using his troops, a platoon of his Eleventh Armored Cav troops for our security. And we got word through the net, the radio net that Colonel Patton was coming in for a briefing. So I scurried around, had an easel, set it up, you know, had a couple of maps, you know, to tell him where we're going. I said, "this is what we're doing," standard briefing, you know. [Our] mission, you know. All that kind of stuff.... And I said, "We had been successful clearing so many acres of jungle so far in the duration of the mission." And he said, "Hell no, you did not ... my troops did this, my cannon, my tanks, my APC, and armored equipment, cleared all of this, just knocked 'em down.... Engineers had nothing to do with this.... I don't need engineers," ta-da-ta-da-ta-da. You know, "I'm responsible for this area, that's my deal, we don't need you guys." Got in his chopper and flew off. He didn't have a dog, by the way. He had his swagger stick, he had his pearl handle revolver, polished helmet, starched fatigues in the middle of the jungle. (Laughter)

Encounter number two was [when] we were ... moving into a cut, improvised, low class road, class ten kind of road. One or two of his armored equipment set off into a large ditch on the side of the road and could not retrieve itself, it could not pull out. It was there, stranded on its side. We always took a tank retriever with us, for pulling our equipment out of holes, so I had a tank retriever. A big heavy-duty deal, like a wrecker. So we pulled his piece of equipment out, so he could continue the march. Patton was in the area, he landed, said, "What's going on here," you know. I said, "Remember me, we're retrieving some vehicles that went off the road." Then he started chewing on us. He didn't say thank you, didn't say

anything, move out, you know. Then, “By the way, your troops are not in uniform.” It was hot, okay. We were authorized to wear flack jackets only without a shirt. It was awful hot, so we had flack jackets no shirt, and soft caps, no helmets. We were out of uniform. He chewed me out for not being in uniform [and] not representing the United States Army, ta-da-ta-da-ta-da. And then he left. He didn’t say “thank you” or anything. He just said, we were out of uniform.

PIEHLER: And you could have just driven by. You didn’t have to stop. I mean, you were basically doing some errands.

SHIPMAN: Yeah. Asshole! He didn’t really make it.... He made Major General, and he finally—but he didn’t really make it big like his dad, because he was pretty arrogant.

PIEHLER: Well ... someone wearing starched fatigues in the jungle does sound ...

SHIPMAN: Typical though.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean it doesn’t totally surprise me, but it ...

SHIPMAN: Could not believe it.

PIEHLER: Um, I want to ask you a little bit about your unit.... What was unit cohesion like?

SHIPMAN: Platoon, company or battalion?

PIEHLER: Yeah, platoon, and then, I guess, company. Your particular platoon and ...

SHIPMAN: The company was great, with one exception in the first few months of operation. We had a super-duper captain. A chemical engineer from Baton Rouge, intelligent, you know, nice. Delegated heavily, you know, didn’t micromanage. Sent us out, let us out to do our job, we did our job. Then we had a company command change. We got a Lieutenant Brown from someplace. Scared to death! Didn’t know what he was doing. [He] gave us a hard time, basically. So it depends on the commander. He was scared, so he wouldn’t volunteer for anything, he wanted to stay back at base camp and polish something, you know. As a matter of fact, rumor had it that he lost a map prior to the Cambodia invasion that had a lot of critical areas on the map. Rumored.

PIEHLER: Rumored that he literally ...

SHIPMAN: Lost out of a chopper. A tactical map flew out ... that had all sort of key positions on it.

PIEHLER: That’s not a good thing.

SHIPMAN: I don’t know if it’s true or not.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SHIPMAN: But it sort of fit with the commander, you know.... Strike, that was a strike outfit. They worked their butts off. And I let them take marijuana. I mean, they worked hard, they really did. Long, long days. A lot of guys—bee trees were an enemy. We'd hit bee trees and get stung to death. We medivaced ... quite a few of our soldiers for multiple bee stings. 'Cause they could kill you.

PIEHLER: Oh, particularly if you are allergic.

SHIPMAN: They didn't know it was a bee tree and they would swarm, you know. And riding into a jungle-covered gully and turning over and getting injured, you know. We medivaced—occupational kind of injuries.

PIEHLER: Well, in many ways, things that could happen in civilian ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah, but these were occupational ... hazards, you know. But they worked hard. You'd send them to base camp for hair cuts, or whatever, you know, fill out some paperwork or a dental appointment, whatever, and they'd come back with a whole bunch of marijuana. Normally they'd stick it in their canteen, they had a dry canteen, and would stuff it in their canteen and share it with the troops. And we knew ... it was in the platoon. 'Cause they were goofy and they'd do anything, you know, 'cause they were happy goofy. But we were told to destroy the marijuana. So we figured it was coming back in their canteen and I had to burn it. And it killed me, you know, because ... Captain Brown said to get rid of the marijuana. But it didn't affect their performance, and those were the hippie days with headbands and crosses and peace symbols, and ...

PIEHLER: So that was okay with your men too, if they wanted to put a ... peace symbol on their helmet, that was ...

SHIPMAN: Oh, big time. Well, they had no choice, really. These were draftees.

PIEHLER: So you have a draftees unit?

SHIPMAN: It was a draftees unit, yeah. I got a picture here someplace with all of them. So I had to stop the marijuana, which bothered me 'cause the troops weren't happy. Their morale went down, but I think they understood, you know. But otherwise the morale was great.

PIEHLER: ... You didn't have people who didn't follow orders or became—no challenges to authority?

SHIPMAN: Not out there. Base camp, yes. Base camp yes, you'd get bored, but not out there.

PIEHLER: So the rebellion—there's a World War II phrase that it was often a rebellion was often against chicken shit.

SHIPMAN: Base camp was worse. These guys had too much beer, too much free time. You know, a lot of them were non-combat troops, they were administrators, or clerks or supply and maintenance. I got beat up by a Specialist-4 back at base camp. But I didn't press charges. I was officer of the day for guard duty. Had to set up the perimeter at night for base camp. The big base camp, back near Bien Hoa, the big airbase, you know, mortars all the time, rockets attacking. So we had to have the perimeter set up. It was rotational duty. And I was officer of the day, and had to go out, you know, and check on the uniforms to see if they were ready, assign them to their station, you know. One Spec-4, Hispanic type guy, I caught him asleep on my tour in the middle of the night. Asleep, passed out on—too much mary-jane, too much marijuana. Butts everywhere. He'd smoked it and went to sleep. So, I had to press charges. That was critical, you know. You gotta have your fence set up. So, he was court martialed and was put in LBJ, the Long Binh Stockade, for a few months and got busted down to private zero. And when he got out he came looking for me. And he found me and beat the crap out of me. And I could see his anger, you know. I just let him whoop on me a little while, you know. And then we became buddies. But he wanted to get it out because I put him in jail, you know. But I had to. And some of the other enlisted men said well, "Why didn't you prosecute or have him charged ... for striking an officer," you know ...

-----END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO-----

PIEHLER: I guess, one question ... why did you let him go? I mean, you could have pressed charges, that's a pretty serious offense—falling asleep on duty when you're protecting the perimeter is also extremely serious, but striking an officer is one of the things that was emphasized not to do. What led you to not press charges?

SHIPMAN: I think it was [he was a] short-timer. It was a twelve-month tour. That was another problem. The unit cohesion went to hell because the individual had a twelve-month tour of duty. So the cohesion of the unit would just come and go, come and go.

PIEHLER: So you were constantly trying to reform a unit?

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah, all the time. You know. The buddy system couldn't stay very long, you know. And he was a short-timer, I think. If I remember, I didn't want to keep him over there and put him in jail for six months. He needed to go home, you know. Plus, I could see his anger. I ruined his career, if he ever had one ...

PIEHLER: That he was not going to be ...

SHIPMAN: He was going to be out. So why punish him anymore? Just let him—he didn't break an arm or anything, he just beat up on me a little bit. So, I guess, that was the reason, just let him go home, which he did.



PIEHLER: You had mentioned that before, in Germany, you had noticed the difference between Stars and Stripes and the civilian newspapers. Being in Vietnam, how did your impression of the war change?

SHIPMAN: ARVN. When they started the Vietnamization. That was a big surprise, because all they have over there was Stars and Stripes and re-runs of Laugh In.

PIEHLER: What about Playboy?

SHIPMAN: No.

PIEHLER: You didn't get Playboy over there?

SHIPMAN: No. Maybe they'd slip a few in but mainly not. It was too much temptation for the horny troops, really. They finally authorized lady houses, health cards and all that. Massage parlors [became] authorized.

PIEHLER: During your tour.... Before that was the Army trying to prevent [or] resist? Is this just something they caved in to the ...

SHIPMAN: They just gave in.

PIEHLER: They just gave in. Before this ...

SHIPMAN: So we had a lot of hippie types, you know. We had a lot of long hair. It was, '68, '69, [a time of] counterrevolution. They were burning towns and cities back here. News was sketchy over there. It was basic Stars and Stripes and Armed Forces Radio. But it was all censored. News? News you'd get would come from home. People would send you news from the states. But I knew the Vietnamization thing, I mean, "what's going on here?"

PIEHLER: This didn't seem promising?

SHIPMAN: I knew it wouldn't work. These guys could not do what we were doing. They weren't motivated. Zero motivation, you know. So, I knew that's when it was all downhill. And they started the Paris peace talks around then. They bickered over the size of the table, round, square, rectangular, you know. They went 'round and 'round in circles over that table. Then started Vietnamizing the U.S. military over there, you know. Take me home!

PIEHLER: So you wanted to get out.

SHIPMAN: By that time.

STAFFORD: What were your impressions of the things that were going on back in the States? About the demonstrations and the marches ...

SHIPMAN: I didn't want it to happen over there. There was a lot of bitterness over there too between the races. It carried over to the military because it was a draft. And they picked people off the street, and I was afraid about that happening in the military over there. 'Cause the brothers all banded together. The hippies, ... the druggie white boys and the brothers stuck together. Against us more straight up guys.

PIEHLER: And marijuana was one of the things that ...

SHIPMAN: Marijuana was extremely plentiful. I mean, a nickel a bag, you know. And so I heard about it remotely through these sketchy, shadowy articles in Stars and Stripes. Glossed over words of civilian disturbances occurred in Watts, fires occurred, whatever. But I was afraid that would happen over there. And I saw signs of it. Especially the music, uh, CCR stuff, [Credence] Clearwater [Revival], and a lot of the black stars were coming on. Boom boxes were the big thing, you know. And the brothers and the hippie whites were just belligerent. They started fragging officers. You remember that story. That was fragging officers. I didn't get fragged, but I was a candidate, I'm sure. But throwing a grenade in the hootch or tent, you know. And that was happening.

PIEHLER: One historian, we recently had here, said that a lot of the fragging, and I just wondered ... if you think this was the case, was about drugs.... Officers sometimes got fragged because they were cracking down on the drug use.

SHIPMAN: Maybe. And this resistance to authority.

PIEHLER: Did you know of any ... concrete cases of fragging, or strong circumstantial ...

SHIPMAN: No, not personally.

PIEHLER: Not personally.

SHIPMAN: But we heard about it.

PIEHLER: You heard about it?

SHIPMAN: From different commands, whatever, you know. It was just beginning then.

PIEHLER: I guess, when you got together with officers at the officers club, what would you talk about? Would you talk about things like fragging? I mean, what were the rumors?

SHIPMAN: Officers club, unless you're in the Air Force, where they got everything nice—they had carpeting, air conditioning, ... Prima donnas!—unless you go to an Air Force base, the Army O-Clubs were nothing, little shacks with handmade signs with beer, and a record player or radio, and that's about it. The O-Clubs were just an escape. We'd go in there and get our three-beer buzz, you know, and just be able to escape for a while.

PIEHLER: Unless you got to the Air Force one ... where it sounds pretty cushy ...

SHIPMAN: That's when we had fun, you know. They had waitresses serving you drinks, and that kind of stuff. (Laughter) But it was escapism. It was a little touch of American society, or a stateside environment, you know. Other than going to Cholon, and getting a petty cab, where he'd take you down to a house in an alley where there were about fifteen ladies and you took your choice and had your fun. You know, you could do that, you know. Or go to a Vietnamese bar in Cholon, a suburb of Saigon, you know, with weapons, go into a bar, get your three-beer buzz going, buy some tea drinks for the ladies, get ... her to sit on your lap and then go upstairs. You know, that was a lot of time off-duty for the soldiers. That decadent life, you know. You were bad to the bone, you know. And sometimes it was justified. They were worn out, some of them. But no, Vietnamization and the segregation ... of the troops on their own.

PIEHLER: Self-segregation.

SHIPMAN: Self-segregation ... of that particular group, you know. You could see the belligerence. You know, it's like they would question what you're doing. And did that talk you couldn't quite understand. Some of that lingo they were using. That's when it started getting scary, and I knew it was downhill. Peace talks, Vietnamization, the quality of the troops were really going down, really going down.

PIEHLER: And you noticed this during your tour? It wasn't just ...

SHIPMAN: Yep, last four or five months of it in '69, up to July.

PIEHLER: It sounds like some of your confidence had waned.... Because you went into this thinking you were going to win this.

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah. It was winnable. Well, I know what I read, you know, but I thought it was winnable because we had superiority in weaponry, and we had some pretty good troops. We had a good Army up front, motivated. But that concept of war where you capture territory and keep it [or] expand your holdings, we didn't do that. We worked from base camp, and our concentration was just killing people by attrition. Wipe them out by attrition, you know, the body count thing, you know. You'd go out and kill a bunch of them, come back, and then go and kill some more in the same place. But we weren't trying to expand our territory, which is the only way you can win a war, not by killing millions and millions of little slant-eyed Vietnamese people, you know. So the whole concept was questionable up front, even though I was still positive.

PIEHLER: You still thought it was ...

SHIPMAN: I was still positive, you know. With 500,000 troops over there, and our air superiority, and our heavy weapons, you know, we can do it. But it didn't work out. And then it went sour in '69 with all the domestic stuff being transferred over there. I was glad to get out. Matter of fact, when I got out, I flew from Bien Hoa to Hawaii, then Oakland, and in

our out-brief in Oakland [told] to not appear in military [uniform], “Wear civilian clothes.... Go out somewhere and buy civilian clothes.”

PIEHLER: So you were advised to wear your ...

SHIPMAN: Do not fly military.

PIEHLER: And did you follow that?

SHIPMAN: Yes.

PIEHLER: Where did you land?

SHIPMAN: Oakland. That’s a big transfer point ... [for] Vietnam.

PIEHLER: And then did you go to your parents in Texas?

SHIPMAN: Texas. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: I guess, before leaving Vietnam, it was really significant that you converted to Catholicism—I don’t know if you can convert to Catholicism from Baptist, but what prompted you, if you don’t mind me asking?

SHIPMAN: Oh, well.

PIEHLER: Going from Baptist to Catholic is a big ...

SHIPMAN: Well, I got that—all that I told you about Laurens, sent me all that Baptist indoctrination of the races, and even how crooked the Pope was. I got the anti-Catholicism talk from the Baptist ministers, which I didn’t like. And plus, because of our social make up, there were a lot of Catholics in the military. You heard we drafted the poor folks, the Hispanics, the ghetto folks from up North, and ... the percentage of Catholics was quite large in that concentration of those troops. And they had, of course, a lot of Catholic chaplains. They would try to get us a chaplain periodically out in the jungle, out in our A-O to have a service. And they would send some Catholics out, and I would go by, just out of curiosity, you know. And I got more—my spiritual feelings were enhanced by what he said, the non-guilt type of talk, you know. And the ritual of Catholicism can be the same in a jungle as it can be in some cathedral or someplace. You know, it’s the same series of events. Same sacraments, same ...

PIEHLER: The mass.

SHIPMAN: Mm hmm. Yeah, the mass and the Eucharist and all that. So, I was impressed by that. It was more meaningful to me, and I kept going to him over there. And then I came back and got married very quickly, matter of fact, to a Catholic girl, and then I converted.

PIEHLER: So this was a very significant part of your life?

SHIPMAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Going to mass in Vietnam ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah, and the priest was in a helmet with an M-16. No, he didn't have an M-16.

PIEHLER: But he was in ...

SHIPMAN: Medical guys and chaplains don't carry weapons.

PIEHLER: But he was in harms way?

SHIPMAN: We dug him out a trench, and we drove a jeep down there, and he used the hood of a jeep for his altar. So yeah, that made a big impression on me.

PIEHLER: What did your parents think about this?

SHIPMAN: Oh God. They didn't speak to me. It never came up.

PIEHLER: You just didn't talk about it?

SHIPMAN: Did not talk about it. When I'd go to Texas, I'd go to the Baptist church. It was a *verboden* subject. It never came up.

PIEHLER: Did your parents come to the wedding?

SHIPMAN: No. I had a quickie. Got home in July, got married in November. I lived in Texas, she lived in South Carolina. I knew her very briefly in South Carolina. She wanted to get away from home, was lonely, and I was in my state of condition at the time. I drove to South Carolina, got organized, got married by the Justice of the Peace. No, in a Catholic church, I'm sorry, had to go to a J.P. to get our license on a Monday, [then] drove back to Texas. Quick, quick, quick. Lasted nine years, and that was it, had it annulled. So the marriage legally didn't exist after nine years. Yeah, I don't have any—a lot of guys, if you talk to them, carry a lot of ghosts and skeletons and bizarre nightmares, nah, I don't have any of that. But, you know, I had a guy there up at TVA where I worked for a long time, he claims ... he got a big dose of Agent Orange spray. Theoretically, it's supposed to affect your kidneys of either yourself or your offspring. And he would come to work with an I-V on a rack, having shots for his kidneys for Agent Orange damage. I questioned that, but I didn't make a big deal out of it. But he looked funny, walking around with an IV at work. And, you know, you see a lot of draftee kinds of troops, spent a minimal amount of time in the military, you know, now making a big deal about it. Maybe not now, but you know, a few years back. They made a big deal. There was a whole rash of movies back in the '80s about Vietnam: Platoon and Deer Slayer ...

PIEHLER: Deer Hunter.

SHIPMAN: ... and that good one, Apocalypse Now, and Full Metal Jacket, and all that. And a lot of guys think they have uncovered some skeletons and old nightmares, whatever, I thought that was silly. I mean, they were—the ratio of combat troops to non-combat troops, it was eight to one, or eight to two, whatever, of combat to non-combat. Seven [to] three, something like that. But I didn't have that problem. My first wife said I did, she said Vietnam made me crazy.

PIEHLER: You think other things made you crazy, I have a feeling.

SHIPMAN: I don't know, she actually thought that. It was sad, after Vietnam, to come Stateside and to see the country [South Vietnam] overrun like that. In '75, there, and in '73 when we got out and the POWs coming back, you know, that was sort of sad. Pushing the equipment over the side of an aircraft carrier, that was a sad scene, too. To see it just disintegrate like that, after all the effort we put into it. You know, that was sort of [sad], to see the way it ended.

PIEHLER: You mentioned movies earlier. What did you think of these movies? I mean Vietnam, particularly in the '80s, there were scores of them.

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah, there were a ton of them.

PIEHLER: Did any of them come close to your reality of Vietnam?

SHIPMAN: Well, my unit was so special, of course, and most the movies were of infantry units, Hamburger Hill stuff, and all that. It's all infantry oriented, which I was not infantry. Secondary mission was infantry, first mission was engineer. Secondary mission was infantry. And we had a heavy dose of that. I don't know. Some of them were very well produced. Francis Ford ...

PIEHLER: Coppola.

SHIPMAN: His work was great.

PIEHLER: What about his work, why do think it was so great, speaking as a veteran?

SHIPMAN: The realism, you know, of the loneliness, the realism. All this stuff happening to you and nobody cares over here. I mean you go through pure hell, but nobody cared.

PIEHLER: Is that the sense you had? Even though ... your parents wrote to you.

SHIPMAN: They thought it was a waste of time.

PIEHLER: Really?

SHIPMAN: My Dad said I wasn't in a real war.

PIEHLER: That was your Dad's [view]. Even while the war was going on, he didn't think it was real?

SHIPMAN: But the realism in the movie was quite stark, you know. Some of it was being pushed, you know. Colonel Kurtz in Apocalypse Now, that couldn't happen. I mean, that's just a yarn, a story, some crazy colonel up in Cambodia sacrificing oxes, whatever, that's pretty weird. But the river patrol units, the first half—I had a little river duty there around the Mekong Delta, the river patrol duty was quite realistic in Apocalypse Now. And the narration, by that captain, was pretty close to it about the loneliness, you know, and, “what am I doing here,” and ta-da-ta-da-ta-da. That Robin Williams thing ...

STAFFORD: Good Morning Vietnam.

SHIPMAN: That's—I could see some of that, the stupid officers, you know. And civilians killing you. You think they're your friend and they'll kill you. Full Metal Jacket, just that loneliness and disorganization that occurs in moments of high activity, you know. Deer Slayer, [Deer Hunter] I never could understand it. A bunch of blue collar guys going to Vietnam trying to play Russian Roulette. I never could grasp that one. But you know, there's been a lot of great B movies made about that stuff, you know. I saw one the other day about some troop up in I Corps, finagled around and got his girlfriend over there. They stayed together in base camp.

PIEHLER: Not a very realistic ...

SHIPMAN: I don't think that would happen. My brother-in-law, he's quite involved in the military. He asks for a lot of advice from me. He's quite involved. As a matter of fact he's going to Bosnia for six-month tour in July. It'll be his second tour over there. He talks to me a lot about it. I guess, that's it. Oh, uh, (shows a picture) I had to beat her off, a little Thai girl. I thought I had a letter. She wrote me a letter. She wanted me to adopt her. The best way to get your “baby san” back to the States, you couldn't marry them, took months and many layers of administrative paperwork.... She was a hooch maid, swept up and polished boots, okay.

PIEHLER: This is in Vietnam?

SHIPMAN: Vietnam. Little Cambodian girl. And, for some reason, she saw me as her meal ticket. I don't know why, I never touched the lady. But I was sympathetic to her situation. And she could speak broken English. I thought I had a letter in here somewhere. But she wanted me to adopt her. That was the easiest way to get a Vietnamese to America is to adopt them. Get them over here and then marry them, you know. And a lot of guys did that. She wanted me to go that route, adoption then marriage, you know, to get out.... No, I didn't fall for that. We had some married guys who would adopt a young Oriental lady, take them back

to the States, divorce their wife, and marry the little girl. That happened. Here we go, that's the letter she wrote me.

PIEHLER: Okay. (Reads the letter in broken English) "Dear Sir, I ... Dao Van Dong have nine children. Only I work to earn money so my family is too poor, sir. I ask you to give me the"—I can't read that word—"you do not use more, would you please yesterday. I do not understand you and not talk with you so I write this letter to ask you to help me a truck to take lumber to my house to cook. My address is Hanoi."

SHIPMAN: Oh I'm sorry. This is was a Vietnamese ...

PIEHLER: This isn't the woman?

SHIPMAN: ... day worker who wanted scraps ...

PIEHLER: Scrap lumber

SHIPMAN: ... for his house. That's not the one. Here's another worker who wanted scrap lumber for his house. Well, you can read it. He's begging for building material also. Oh, here's the two page letter from her. I don't know if you want to read it, but here it is.

PIEHLER: You don't know what ever happened to her?

SHIPMAN: No, I don't. Be curious, yeah. Because she was Cambodian, and wasn't Vietnamese, she eventually had to go back to Cambodia. It got pretty bad over there. But, you know, [it's] sad. She's probably dead, soon thereafter. Very little hope. Oh, let me show you this. Which is a lie. OER, Officer Efficient Report.

PIEHLER: When you say it's a lie, what was ...

SHIPMAN: I'll show it to you. My previous discussion with you. I'm trying to find the date on it. Oh, whatever. Lieutenant Shipman—this is my rater, OER.... My job was (reads) "land clearing, platoon leader in a hostile environment where enemy contact daily is a reality, aerial flight for command control is a daily routine and duty requires extended field time. Supervising approximately one million dollars of heavy equipment and thirty men." My rater, was my company commander, "Lieutenant Shipman organized and trained the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, 984 Engineering Company, part of the 67<sup>th</sup> Battalion, L-C, land clearing, from inception and developed them into a truly professional unit with highest morale of any land clearing platoon. Lieutenant Shipman's outstanding leadership, knowledge and effort, compiled with cool, collective reaction under fire make him a most outstanding officer capable of attaining a high position in the Army." That cool, collected reaction under fire, remember my story?

PIEHLER: Yes. (Laughter)



SHIPMAN: He didn't know about that. Okay, he didn't know about that! That's a funny part. [Here's] my ration card, we got rations.

PIEHLER: Oh, I guess, one question I have before we leave Vietnam, and sort of a side question, you did get R 'n R to Australia?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, that's another story.

PIEHLER: How did you like it?

SHIPMAN: I screwed up. Seasons, okay, southern hemisphere, northern hemisphere, opposite, okay. I went down in early June, and froze my butt off. I thought I was going to sunny beaches, you know, with round-eyed women—that's what you called them you know, "round eyed" or "slant eyed,"—to see round-eyed women on the beach. We had to rent coats when we got there. They had a station in the in-processing, even R 'n R was regimented. We had to rent clothes, coats and woolens and stuff. I froze my butt off. So I went cultural. I went to museums, you know, inside stuff. (Laughs) But that was about it.

PIEHLER: How did Australians treat you?

SHIPMAN: Oh, they loved us. They've always been friends to and liked us, even now. I remember, I got into a long discussion with a lady in a pub drinking Schooners, about Ayn Rand. She liked Ayn Rand, and I had read a little about her and architects, and whatever. I remember that. But ... they were quite friendly. I think because we kept them safe down there, we were doing their dirty business up there. It was really their world.... I think it was sort of "Thank you for doing this," kind of deal, you know. That's my opinion.

PIEHLER: What about USO shows?

SHIPMAN: Oh, yeah, Bob Hope. I lucked out.

PIEHLER: You did see ... a Bob Hope show?

SHIPMAN: Early on in Long Binh, Bob Hope came over. Of course, I was two miles away, and could barely see him. And some female dancers. (Shows a picture) That's the opera house in Sydney, I thought I had a picture of Bob Hope. Well anyhow, he was there, and it was a standard USO show. You know, the dancing ladies with the boots. The boots were big then. What did you call the girls in the cages dancing?

STAFFORD: Go-Go dancers.

SHIPMAN: Go-Go girls ... yeah. Yeah, he came to Long Binh.

PIEHLER: In terms of coming home, you mentioned you were told to wear civilian [clothes].... Did you ever confront any protesters?

SHIPMAN: When I joined the 844<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, I had to finish up my seven-year commitment. Four years active, three more Reserve, or you could take the correspondence courses and do that dippy stuff, or join a unit and get some points. It was a point basis, you know. So I joined the 844<sup>th</sup> ... it was also an engineer battalion, and we spent our summers over at Fort Bragg doing post maintenance projects. And in the ... mid-'70s in our convoys, to Fort Bragg and back, we'd get people throwing stuff in their cars, beer cans, whatever. I don't know if I ever heard the word baby killer, you know, but they probably screamed it out sometime, ... spitting at us and shooting us birds. It was anti-military environment at the time. It wasn't friendly, just random acts of showing their dislike for the military.... That kind of stuff mainly.

PIEHLER: Now you left Vietnam in 1969, and you got married, and so you reported to ...

SHIPMAN: Home.

PIEHLER: Home. And then you reported, your next duty ...

SHIPMAN: I went to work at Fort Hood, Texas in the Department of the Army as a civilian.

PIEHLER: As a civilian?

SHIPMAN: As a civilian.

PIEHLER: So, you then went into the Reserve status?

SHIPMAN: I went into the Reserve status over here. I had to move back to South Carolina and work for TVA.

PIEHLER: So when did you start working for TVA?

SHIPMAN: '72. I liked what TVA did. Its overall mission was honorable. I mean they're laundering money now! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Even though you signed, you will see the transcript, so ...

SHIPMAN: So, I went to the Reserve unit and finally became an executive officer, and whatever.

PIEHLER: So you stayed in the Reserves for a while ...

SHIPMAN: Twenty-eight years.

PIEHLER: Twenty-eight years. And ... when you first joined the Reserve unit, people were lined up to get into the National Guard is my sense. But you stayed long enough that that changes.

SHIPMAN: Well, the draft was still on.

PIEHLER: Yeah, the draft is on until '72, through '72.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, and I ...

PIEHLER: And people are signed up, so ...

SHIPMAN: I volunteered over here, you know.

PIEHLER: Why here?

SHIPMAN: We had a lot of reservists who had joined to escape Vietnam. There was a special program for people with influence to get you into the Guard and the Reserve. We had a lot of those over there in that unit there with long hair and hippie stuff, you know. So they were glad to have me. A veteran, you know, lieutenant, at least three years of duty out of me. I had to get my hair cut, I'd sort of let my hair grow out, you know. So yeah, it was no problem. They sent me right in over there.

PIEHLER: Why did you pick this area?

SHIPMAN: TVA.

PIEHLER: You picked this unit very much because it was near TVA.

SHIPMAN: It was right there, mm hmm.

PIEHLER: ... You rose in the Reserves, ... tell us a little about your Reserve unit, the routine of the Reserves, because you do get called up in the Reserves.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, like I said, we spent most of our time as pure reservists going to Fort Bragg, North Carolina to support the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne to do range-type projects. Small buildings on posts, whatever, engineer type projects, you know, just two weeks in the summer. And then in '85 this Panama thing popped up. We were selected to go down to Panama [on] Operation Costa Abajo in support of the Joint Chief of Staff Operation. We were secret.

PIEHLER: Is it still classified, do you think?

SHIPMAN: It's not classified, the full story's buried someplace though. It was a Joint Chief of Staff Operation.

PIEHLER: It's just not talked about.

SHIPMAN: We took weapons, you know, all of our equipment. A logistical nightmare, but we made it. So, that was a six-month deal I guess.

PIEHLER: Why such a logistical nightmare?

SHIPMAN: ... We had to move equipment from that motor pool over there to Panama.

PIEHLER: And that didn't go very smoothly.

SHIPMAN: C-5A Galaxy airplanes, big ships out of Mobile, just getting the equipment. And we had—our priority designation was real high, we had one of the highest priority [levels] at that command at that time. We'd get what we wanted, you know, we got priority on getting the equipment down there, but getting everybody there, in place, in the middle of the Panamanian jungle, you know, was tough. But we made it.

PIEHLER: It's just interesting that you say that because one of the ... complaints in the recent Bosnia operation was how long it was taking to deploy men and equipment. And that's not new, the problem of logistics.

SHIPMAN: No, the logistics train, the tail, that's a Civil War problem. The logistics train could not keep up with the events in the Army. They started eating horses, you know. You've heard that. They started eating horses, acorns, stuff like that.

PIEHLER: Oh yeah. No, I know. Well, I'm probably urging you to put it on the record because people think these are new problems.

SHIPMAN: No, no, no.

PIEHLER: A lot of journals were saying, "Why can't the Army move quicker in Bosnia, how come its taking so long?"

SHIPMAN: In [Operation] Desert Storm, I did the same thing. I had involvement in Desert Storm moving troops and equipment from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to Saudi Arabia. Same problem. Put people on trains, busses, planes, and getting to the point of embarkation, POE, over to, Saudi [Arabia] in the Gulf, same problem then, 1990-1991. You know, I couldn't get trains from here to Charleston, you know, [or] there to Charleston. Problem! Dealing with railroads was tough. Getting authorization to clear the line and get the troop movement through there, you know. So that logistical tail is always behind a moving army. Always. Well not always, you know, but most of the time.

PIEHLER: Now, the operation in Panama, what was the operation, the Joint Chiefs operation?

SHIPMAN: It was JCS, Costa Abajo. Concurrently with another Joint Chiefs of Staff operation called Kendall Liberty, going on concurrently. And our job was on the ... north central part of Panama to build roads and bridges. Colon, this is Colon, on the Caribbean side, and this is the Pedro Miguel locks, the old French canal there. This is the ... locks that we built. And we had to come down the road all the way to ... [indicates on a map] Rio

Indio, right here. See that road stops before Fort Sherman. This is the Fort Sherman jungle warfare college down here. And we had to take this road down to ... Rio Indio ... and build this road down to Gobeia, over here ...

PIEHLER: A totally new road.

SHIPMAN: That's about thirteen miles. It was pack animals and foot trails. So [we had to] build nine miles of road in my sector and three bridges, timber trestle bridges. Under the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with a memorandum of understanding from Panama and the U.S. in two languages under Noriega's term.... We had—basically, I was a forward base commander in Gobeia. We had about 300 troops and about 100 PDF, Panamanian Defense Force, under Noriega. Supposedly in charge of the operation. But like I said, we had our weapons and our alert set-up and all that. Ironically—(shows a newspaper) this is the New York Times. After our mission stopped in March of 1986, in June of '86 Noriega was charged with drugs and political murder and whatever. A couple years later he was overthrown and Operation Just Cause.

PIEHLER: Yes.

SHIPMAN: And Kendall Liberty, which is the operation jointly with Costa Abajo, with 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne troops north of us, was getting ready for the invasion during Just Cause.

PIEHLER: When you say getting ready for the invasion, I mean this ...

SHIPMAN: Practicing sea landings, amphibious assaults, and airborne operations in the jungle, to write lessons learned papers, after action reports. So it was an extended operation.

PIEHLER: And the purpose of this road, I mean why did the Americans want it, why did the Panamanians want it?

SHIPMAN: Panama [is a] funny shaped country. Where's that map? Yeah, the main road is from Panama City over here to Colon over here. The canal zone. Theoretically the Pan American highway goes all the way down here but it stops in Panama. Our deal was to build a Class-25, which is a weight capacity road, from where the road stops over here at Fort Sherman and Rio Indio to build a Class-25 road to Gobeia, with bridges, culverts, whatever. To eventually make it up here, to go across the isthmus, and do the same thing on the other side. To make a circular road in Panama, because there's no road network there. And eventually, it would be upgraded to the Pan American highway. And so we were ... going up the coast to build the road, and somebody over here would build a road over there and come back down. But that was the basic purpose.

PIEHLER: In many ways ...

SHIPMAN: It opens up areas. And it was low-intensity warfare. PDF were there. They had rights to our equipment. They even had rights to fly their flag above our American flag. That was an issue there.

PIEHLER: That was touchy. Touchy with who?

SHIPMAN: They had a PDF captain in our base camp. He personally was a nice guy, Captain Pinero. As a matter of fact, Gen. Noriega flew out to our base camp and I briefed him while we were there. The general population liked him. The townspeople, the barefoot hut livers, you know. They are called barefoot hut livers. So, we came out and briefed him, run him down the road with a four star American General driving the jeep and me and a bodyguard in the back of the jeep. It was a big deal for them, and we had to present him with gifts, he was like an emperor.

PIEHLER: So what did you give him? What do you give him out in the middle of nowhere?

SHIPMAN: C-rations and fruits. That's all we had. We were presenting him with fruits of the land, and Army rations, you know, token stuff you know. (Laughter) He had a throne kind of thing, you know, he was a king. Ten helicopters for one guy? I mean lots of security. But he got overthrown.

PIEHLER: I guess, when you said there were incidents with the flag, ... who resented flying the Panamanian flag over the American flag?

SHIPMAN: Say that again now?

PIEHLER: Flying the Panamanian flag over the American flag? Who ...

SHIPMAN: Them. They were.

PIEHLER: They insisted on this, but you said ...

SHIPMAN: And they wanted us to feed the Panamanian forces in our area of operation. Out in the middle of nowhere. They even wanted us to feed the local civilian population. We put our foot down on that, we said no. But it was—they made a big deal.... (Shows a picture) that's part of our equipment. This is a bridge we built at Rio Indio.

PIEHLER: That's a big bridge.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, 300 feet long.

PIEHLER: How challenging was this from an engineering standpoint?

SHIPMAN: Getting the material—the piles, the material, getting the material there. We had the equipment. We got the equipment in by sea. (Shows an article) Article ... from the [Knoxville News-Sentinel](#) about being down there.

PIEHLER: (Reads the article headline) “Army Reserve Building Road for Panamanians, New Skills for Army.” And this story came out in ...

SHIPMAN: Either '90 or '91.

STAFFORD: So, how did the civilians react to the American troops?

SHIPMAN: No problem. It was the PDF. The PDF ... was both the police and the army.

PIEHLER: And your story, just to put it on the record, your work was also featured in Army Reserve Magazine in summer of 1986.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, that's one of them.

PIEHLER: How useful was this operation for ...

-----END OF SIDE TWO TAPE TWO-----

PIEHLER: Hold that thought for just a second. This continues an interview with Samuel A. Shipman on April 10, 2000 at The University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

STAFFORD: Shelley Stafford

PIEHLER: You said it was a strange operation.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, very secret. In '85 during the planning stages called Project South, which even at a military conference (whispers) Project South.... Then it became Blazing Trails, then officially became Costa Abajo, Joint Chief of Staff Operation along with Kendall Liberty. The highest priority operation going on at the time. We were a better army engineering Reserve unit. We had good, good history, good maintenance, good leadership, very successful. They chose us along with PDF contingent and US Army 193<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Southern Command Support from Panama as liaison. And getting people and equipment there was a problem, but once that happened, it was click, click, click. The locals ... [liked] us, but the PDF did not like us. They would issue us driving citations for frivolous automobile and equipment violations, for nothing! If we were in rented civilian cars, they would stop us and take our license and keep 'em. They would set up artificial roadblocks, with people painted up like Aborigines and try to scare us. We heard shots in the night that were unexplained, [fired] by the PDF, I think. We did have Noriega come out and visit us. He was friendly. Let's see, we had a duration cell that stayed there the entire time, and they rotated units in in three-week increments, and I was base-camp commander for three of those increments. Successful mission except [for] the big bridge I showed you a picture of. Unbeknownst to us, that was a monsoon kind of area that had extremely heavy rainfall. We didn't have any good weather data. A large rain ... 500-year ... rainfall occurred. And ... it didn't wash the bridge out, but it distorted its—its horizontal and vertical alignment. It was distorted by debris washing down from the mountains, the ... debris building up and distorting the horizontal alignment and the vertical alignment. It had to be destroyed by the active Army. And a metal type temporary Bailey bridge was put in. That was the only disappointing part

about it. But you know it's a strange outfit—I mean a strange operation. You had bigger—it was low-intensity warfare in preparation of Just Cause, in my opinion, of Just Cause later on that overthrew Noriega. As a matter of fact the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne landed in Panama City to lead the invasion.

PIEHLER: It's interesting because you talk a lot about this low-intensity war going on between Panamanian forces and your forces, this real tension, so in some ways you ...

SHIPMAN: That is an accurate military term.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SHIPMAN: Prior to [large scale] hostilities, ... Vietnam was low-intensity warfare.... Winning the hearts and minds, that ... was low-intensity warfare.

PIEHLER: So it doesn't come as a surprise to you that we moved against Noriega eventually?

SHIPMAN: Not at all.... They liked us because we were giving them freebies and improving their country, building roads and bridges that we all paid for. But our very presence was—they didn't like us. They liked what we could give 'em, but they didn't like us at all. Then after we left it got worse, and worse, and worse. Went through a series of freely elected presidents, [former U.S. President Jimmy] Carter went down for the election, surveys, whatever. Finally the civil election was overturned by Noriega and they finally got him. The DEA got him on drug trafficking, not on war crimes. But, you know, we didn't realize until later the significance of our involvement down there, you know. It was bigger than I thought. It wasn't a training exercise, it was the real thing.

PIEHLER: It was the real thing.

SHIPMAN: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: Did anyone get hurt?

SHIPMAN: Occupational. Cutting coconuts with a machete and cutting your hand, you know. Banging up your leg ... on the equipment, half drowning on our LCMs, our landing crafts led the equipment in, rough seas, people falling off their boat, including me. Re-supply operations were terrible, initially, because of heavy rain. We were stranded. We had to fly in fuel. Injuries? Normal ... [for] that kind of environment, common in a construction mission.

PIEHLER: ... You were in the Reserve unit, but now you were in contact with the ... active duty Army extensively during the Panama operation. How was the ... active duty Army doing since the '70s? You, in some ways ...

SHIPMAN: My impression?



PIEHLER: Your impressions.

SHIPMAN: It was Southern Command, which is big. Four star. It was under the Southern Command, which is all the troops south of Mexico. We were attached to the 193<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade in Fort Clayton in Panama City, Panama. The mid-‘70s had the big post-Vietnam draw down. The Army was cut in half. This was mid-‘80s, and they were just keeping what they got. The relationship between the active Army and the Reserves had improved a lot. They knew our capabilities. Most of us were veterans—not most, quite a few of us were veterans. There was no hostility between our ... active Army counterparts.

PIEHLER: You got along very well? Because there is often a lot of hostility between National Reserves and Guard and ...

SHIPMAN: No, we got along very well. So that was our priority, full support [for the] 193<sup>rd</sup>. And we had more General type visits out there—thirty or forty different stars came out with various numbers on their shoulders. Lots of stars came out. I guess that’s about it.

PIEHLER: What about race relations during the ‘80s? How was the military doing from your perspective, the regular active duty? Any sense of that?

SHIPMAN: Digging way back, I don’t remember. I think that was about over with, as far as ethnic races go. The problem emerging about that time, and we had that problem in Panama, was female soldiers.

PIEHLER: And what was the problem?

SHIPMAN: Separate quarters. Shower facilities. The Army is set up for males, so we had big shower tents, with shower heads, you know, that showered six people at a time. And sleeping quarters, so we had to have a separate facility for female soldiers. In a remote environment, that was pretty tough to do. We had women nurses, quite a few nurses there. We had female captains in logistical outfits. That movement was just beginning to where the women involvement in the military was expanding rapidly, faster than we could keep up with. It wasn’t a problem. It was just, logistically, what do you do?

PIEHLER: So it was a logistic problem? The problem was ...

SHIPMAN: We didn’t have separate tents and showers, so we had to put up shifts. We had to designate an hour for the female soldiers and two hours for the male soldiers, you know, that kind of stuff.

PIEHLER: So that racial tension that had been there in Vietnam, you mentioned the hippies and brothers ...

SHIPMAN: That had gone away. It was all-volunteer then. People were there ‘cause they’d volunteered. That was a volunteer Army, volunteer Reserves.

PIEHLER: And that affected ...

SHIPMAN: If you're all-volunteer you were there cause you want to be. It was all red, white, and blue in that outfit. A story, a side story—our pseudo task-force commander was an Army Reserve colonel in Birmingham who was a lawyer by day, an attorney. But he delegated the task force command to my battalion commander, and he sub-delegated to me to be task-force commander to the forward base camp. And the Birmingham commander would come down periodically to get an update on his project. At the time we had an active Army black female captain who was a PAO, public affairs office, to do a story on the unit and its operation. She came in sort of unexpected, and we had a vacant tent and I put her in the rear of the tent, set up a canvas partition between her and the area being used by my Birmingham, Alabama, southern lawyer commander. In the front part of the tent, isolated by the partition, she was in the back part. He refused to stay there. So, I had to evacuate her over to some enlisted barracks tents, which, as an officer, she shouldn't be there. But the only place to put her was with the enlisted females.

PIEHLER: This Colonel, why wouldn't he ...

SHIPMAN: I don't know. I kept saying, southern, Birmingham ...

PIEHLER: You think there could be ...

SHIPMAN: There's two factors here, female and race. I don't know. Add the pieces and parts up, I can see a picture there but I'm not sure.

STAFFORD: How did she react? Was she offended?

SHIPMAN: Tight-lipped. But didn't—she couldn't talk about it.

PIEHLER: She was very military in other words.

SHIPMAN: She did what she was told to do. I apologized to her. I shouldn't have, but I did. I remember it raining. She had to move in the rain, I believe. But that was a touchy situation. And it ticked me off, because I thought I had the perfect situation set up [with the] partition. And these were big ... general-purpose tents, you know, huge! You could sleep thirty people in there. For two people, you know, there's lots of room. Separate doors, flaps, that kind of stuff. But that didn't work. But it was all-volunteers so it was a different class of troops, okay, that's the point I want to make. Our main enemy was PDF and their belligerents. The U.S. Army supported us with help. We had high priority designator codes. Successful operation. Everybody got medals. You know.

PIEHLER: And then you came home, and went back to ...

SHIPMAN: I came home. And then Desert Storm popped up.

PIEHLER: I guess, before I leave the point, how did your employer take it? How did TVA take it that you were called up?

SHIPMAN: Ironically, my battalion commander was my boss at TVA.

PIEHLER: So that ...

SHIPMAN: No problem. It was either he goes or I go. (Laughter) Either he leaves for three months, or I leave for three months. So he delegated to me and I went down there for three months. No problemo!

PIEHLER: So you didn't suffer any deficient ratings, or ...

SHIPMAN: Plus, it was a Federal agency. There are rules about—you've got to maintain your job, you know, during military call-up.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but it still affects peoples lives ... people have to cover ...

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah. I was a single parent at the time. I was raising some girls, my babies. I had to make arrangements, no, that's a different war. That's Desert Storm. And I wasn't married at the time, so I had my girlfriend and [gave her] power of attorney take care of my bills. I tell you, things change fast. From Panama in '86, that's not too long ago, the way we had to communicate was through radio telephone: set up a short wave radio down there in the jungle on a thirty foot antenna, go through a whole bunch of stations to get to a telephone net here in Knoxville and to talk to somebody, you had to speak "over," "out," that kind of stuff. Nowadays, if you can go down there with a cell phone and call anybody at all on a cell phone. But that's how ... things have changed.

PIEHLER: No, that's not very long ago at all. I mean, you were around in '86.

STAFFORD: Yeah. (Laughter)

SHIPMAN: We had teletypes, the written teletype stuff, you get stuff instantaneously. But the voice communication, it was short wave. Not too long ago. Things are changing fast.

PIEHLER: We sort of left off, you came back home from a very successful operation, and it was appreciated what you had done. Tell me a little, since I know you have to leave shortly, but tell us a little about your involvement in Desert Shield and Desert Storm. You were in the Reserves.

SHIPMAN: Assigned to a garrison unit in Chattanooga. A garrison is—garrison duty, is an administrative headquarters for subordinate units, battalions in separate companies. We were strictly desk soldiers, okay. We were mobilized, we were first in, first out as a matter of fact. We were mobilized—you gotta put this in perspective; the aerial bombardment in the Gulf occurred January-ish, 1991. The ground war was in February, I think, of 1991, lasted 100 hours, something like that. The garrison unit was called up in August of 1990 to Fort

Campbell, Kentucky. We operated a deployment unit to train, organize, and get ready all the troop units who were called up to be sent to Saudi Arabia. We were a deployment outfit. We stayed eleven months, first in, last out. We processed sixty something units to go to Saudi, plus their equipment, whatever. Our collateral duty was to run Fort Campbell post in the absence of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, which they were sent over there also. So we ran the post, and we were the deployment unit to send troops over, process them, wait until things were over with, and bring them back home and de-process them, and send them to their units. That was our main mission. Even though it's stateside, it was a 360-day call up, basically. They went in sixty-day increments. It went sixty, sixty, 180, it never was going to stop, you know. And we named our little social club over there Hotel California. Once you check in, you'll never check out, you know that old song. (Laughter) So that was basically our mission over there. I don't know how many thousands, but I know it was sixty something units and a lot of Guard and Reserve units. [We] got them over there. They did their job, and brought 'em home. And the logistics was a problem. One tiny story, up front, while they were setting up for base camps over in Saudi and that area, we shipped sand over there! That's crazy.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I remember the stories about that.

SHIPMAN: That was crazy. It's not sand, it's like powder over there. So we had to ship—it's not construction grade. So we had to ship construction grade sand for them for the construction projects. So then, after the Republican Army and the Iraqi thing was over with, we got involved with the Kurds. He, Mr. [Saddam] Hussein turned his efforts on his Kurdish citizens. You remember that?

PIEHLER: Yes.

SHIPMAN: ... And we set up little camps for them they had a special name, I forget "benevolent discharges," or whatever it was, you know. And we got involved in that, sending material, plywood, cots, and other materials for the Kurdish operation. Sort of a make-up kind of project until the other troops got back and we went home. So, we went August of '90 to June or July '91.

PIEHLER: And you were based in ... Fort Campbell.

SHIPMAN: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: So you, in a sense, fought the war from a desk, and worried about the details.

SHIPMAN: Getting 'em over and getting 'em back, we were a deployment command.

PIEHLER: ... There were some obvious strengths in the logistics, because we do in fact deploy an army in Saudi Arabia and we do win a land war. What were the strengths of logistics and [what were] some obvious weaknesses? What, did you sense ... worked well and why didn't things work well? What were the lessons learned ... from the operation in terms of logistics? That's a big question, but ...

SHIPMAN: Saudi is fairly remote. It's a big desert, basically. The Saudi government was not prepared to receive that infusion of troops that quickly. Basic housing, water. And so we sent a lot of troops over there very quickly and [they] didn't have any ... place to stay, basically. So we had to—in order to get the troops over there, we had to get their equipment over there. We used a railhead, for the most part. If it was transferable by air, we'd use air from the 100<sup>th</sup> airfield there at Fort Campbell. Or we'd railhead it down to—I said Charleston earlier, it was Savannah—for the POE point of embarkation.... Getting the train made up, you know, and getting the train down there ... was tough. Getting the stuff to the port. Gas masks were in short supply. And there was a gas masks heavy involvement over there. Cots were in short supply. We had to scrounge around and get lots of cots, basic sleeping stuff. Medical supplies, stateside ran out of all those hundreds of injections they had to have, you know. Medical supplies were short. What else? Equipment was no problem. One of my accolades, [reads] “directed the transfer of over one thousand cots to the deploying troop units over there.” Very little belligerence between the actives and the Reserves.... They turned their post over to us, to maintain it. They had to trust us to take care of their post. That's a real tight knit, Airborne, Air Assault division up there. You don't mess up.... They were skeptical about leaving us to run their post, and we did. And we had to take a lot of security measures there because—security arrangements were that terrorist activities—somebody took a poll of all the Arabic, Iran, village folks in the area, colleges, whatever, and made a list of them over here. We had to set up a heavy-duty perimeter of defense around the hospitals up there, the fuel supply points, the outer perimeter of tanks and natural gas tank farms were empty [in] case they were going to come by and shoot them with something to blow them up. We emptied all the outside tanks, only the inside tanks were full.

PIEHLER: So, you very much put the base on a war footing.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, and we had high security. Check in, check out, sign in, sign out, that kind of stuff.

PIEHLER: And what was your rank by this time?

SHIPMAN: I was an LTC.

PIEHLER: Lieutenant Colonel.

SHIPMAN: Mm hmm. I was a major in Panama.... Stark living conditions up there. We couldn't stay in their living facilities because their troops left their personal goods in their barracks. That was a problem. They are a highly deployable unit, the 101<sup>st</sup>.

PIEHLER: They're one of the first to go.

SHIPMAN: Yeah. They leave their personal goods. They put it in a wall locker, band it with a metal strap, push it against the wall, and then leave, you know, with military gear only on their back, going that way. So when they came back, all their personal stuff's in their

metal wall locker. So you couldn't put Reserve troops in a room with the personal gear of the active Army troops. So that housing was always a problem up there. You knew who was coming in, who is going out. Just basic housing [security], that was part of my job. Director of engineering of housing.

PIEHLER: So how did you solve the housing problem?

SHIPMAN: Bits and pieces. And convincing some of the deploying units to trust us to use their facilities on an interim basis, to house departing troops if we didn't mess up their barracks. In my OER I got some accolades for making all that happen. We had to deploy a field artillery brigade, a 1500 man unit at one time, and that really put a strain on us to find ... temporary housing to get them over there. But we did, but it was tough trying to find adequate housing and not disturbing the division's housing. It was the boringest time I had in my life. I hated it. It was eleven months, working your butt off getting them over there, doing that while they fought their 100-hour war ...

PIEHLER: Just twiddling your thumbs?

SHIPMAN: Then they come back, processed them back in, send them home, and then we went home. It was tough, tough, boring duty.

PIEHLER: Would you have wanted to go? Would you have liked to have gone over ...

SHIPMAN: Oh, big time! I even tried. As an engineer officer—separate, not part of a unit—as an engineer officer to go over there and help. They had a housing shortage over there at first, remember?

PIEHLER: Oh, yes.

SHIPMAN: And I had combat construction skills. I went through various organizational levels trying to get individual assignment to Saudi.

PIEHLER: They wouldn't ...

SHIPMAN: But it was boring. Eleven months of active duty. [Shows a picture] That's, where I lived, you know, that was a little hooch. The walls start closing in after a little while.

PIEHLER: Especially for your rank, this is pretty close quarters.

SHIPMAN: Oh, this is primitive.... Let's see here. [Shows more pictures] Basically sending them over, you know, troops in the area, going to the airplane and the flight over, going out. This is coming home, they're heroes. They would have parties and all that kind of stuff. Barbara Bush came up there.

PIEHLER: So, I am curious, the groups that came to greet them, who were they?

SHIPMAN: Families. The commander promised them a live band for every returning unit. They had a live band, night or day. Lot of politicians came up, [Al] Gore, Mrs. Bush came up, a lot of state officials, governors, whatever. We had a lot of those type visitors. Barbara Bush came up, high, high security. They had advance teams to track her movements and all that. She was the president's wife, you know. But it was a lot of hoopla when they came back.

PIEHLER: Was there any sense in terms of these welcome homes, that the military wasn't going to do to what happened in Vietnam? There was no band to greet you in Vietnam, was there?

SHIPMAN: No, and that was pointed out by lots of folks. You know, they came home the heroes. First time in a long time we had some heroes coming home. There was a parade in Knoxville, you know, [with] yellow ribbons, all that stuff. It was—it sort of made some of the old vets a little bit ticked.

PIEHLER: Really, the Vietnam ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah. You know, that thing was fast over there, ... it was no contest.... I mean, there was no contest up front, you know.

PIEHLER: Your war was not a 100-hour war when you were in Vietnam.

SHIPMAN: But there was just a lot of overkill, not literally, but a lot of hero worship in this thing. Some of the older hands got a little bit jealous, you know, because of that. But it was good for America, I think.

PIEHLER: Well, it was a very successful operation.

SHIPMAN: It worked.

PIEHLER: I remember vividly saying that it was going to be a much longer war. I didn't know for certain, but I remember saying ...

SHIPMAN: It looked ominous, Republican Guard, advanced Russian equipment. That scared us, you know. But really, I went to an operations briefing on the post with ... a couple of units "in country" over there ... pretty well about the strategic goings on, and we knew up front that it was going to be a knock out punch.

PIEHLER: Well, that's some of what I heard.

SHIPMAN: Everybody else didn't know that, we knew.

PIEHLER: My advisor said—I was just out of grad school, and my advisor said that he had talked to some of his friends in active duty who said that it was going to be a pushover. But I also remember thinking the Iran-Iraqi War has dragged on for a very long time. I told my

class, I don't know, it could go various ways, but I was surprised at how quick it went.... Any other observations on the Persian Gulf War?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, it was a hardship. This was really tough on people, you know, this was extended—it was so quick, it was a rapid operation. I had ... two days to settle my personal affairs before I deployed to Fort Campbell. POA, power of attorney taking care of my custodial daughter.

PIEHLER: How old was she?

SHIPMAN: Sixteen ... fifteen! I had to call my parents up in Texas temporarily to take care of her until I could make permanent arrangements with her mom. Bank account statements, you know, employer arrangements ...

PIEHLER: ... You were running around for two days. This sounds very complicated.

SHIPMAN: It was tough taking care of your personal arrangements, because you didn't know how long it would last. Actually, the operation had three names. Part three didn't occur. Desert Shield, up to the battle, Desert Storm, the battle, the war effort, then Sword, Desert Sword.

PIEHLER: And what was Desert Sword?

SHIPMAN: The penetration into the country, take over everything, including their leader, I guess. But that never occurred. They stopped after Desert Storm.

PIEHLER: But there was planning for that?

SHIPMAN: They had plans for Sword, but it stopped after Storm.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I think we're not privy to that as historians. Someday we will but that will take some time.

SHIPMAN: It was all planned out, you know.

PIEHLER: And you were aware of that?

SHIPMAN: Yes. Somebody stopped at Storm and didn't go to Shield.

PIEHLER: Yes. But Desert Sword, you knew about it?

SHIPMAN: Yes, because of the operations briefings I went to up there, which were interesting, because if you remember, up near the border, the divisions—the Marines did a fake amphibious assault.

PIEHLER: Yes, I remember that very well, yes.



SHIPMAN: All right. And we had the foreign soldiers over there below Kuwait, the Germans, the British, and French, and whatever. The American sector was over here, and we had a division, maybe the 24<sup>th</sup> Division here for a frontal assault on the Republican Army. We had the 101<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne divisions over here. We had to move these divisions east to west. Nobody knew about this. It was all considered a frontal assault, okay. We moved divisions through this division, which is unheard of logistically, move a division ...

PIEHLER: Through another division.

SHIPMAN: They got over here, [and] they did a frontal assault. They did a pincher movement behind them, and knocked the crap out of them. But nobody knew about this movement this way and the pincher movement. A Hail Mary. You heard of a Hail Mary? That's what it was, a Hail Mary. Nobody knew it, even we didn't up in operations. Total surprise of a Hail Mary, 'cause they were over here, ready for a frontal assault, and they moved.

PIEHLER: They moved before the frontal assault.

SHIPMAN: That was a brilliant move, it really was.

PIEHLER: No, I remember all of the publicity, what the military was releasing gave the impression of the amphibious assault.

SHIPMAN: A front.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I remember in fact it was not.... And some of the secrecy made a lot of sense afterwards. I was not aware of moving a division through another division. As I said, you are the first Persian Gulf veteran I've interviewed.

SHIPMAN: That was a very different, very different kind of environment.

PIEHLER: One thing I had not really picked up on, I had a guy ... service our air conditioning unit, and he was a Persian Gulf vet. He was in Israel deployed on the ... Patriot [missiles] that shoot down ...

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah, the air defense ...

PIEHLER: But he said that a bonus was offered by the Saudi, or the Kuwaiti government to everyone that had served. Do you remember that at all?

SHIPMAN: A bonus? Monetary?

PIEHLER: Yeah, monetary. It may have been for people actually in Saudi Arabia, but he said it was offered and came to several hundred dollars.

SHIPMAN: It was only a ribbon. My brother-in-law was in Saudi and he took a quick helicopter trip to Kuwait.

PIEHLER: It was supposedly turned down by President Bush.

SHIPMAN: He did not receive a bonus offer. He received a campaign medal.

PIEHLER: But apparently there was—he remembers very vividly [that] this offer was made and the Americans were the only ones who didn't accept it for their troops and he wanted that \$800. So I'm just curious if you had any ...

SHIPMAN: Never, ever. By brother-in-law has never mentioned it.

PIEHLER: Well apparently, for this NCO, he is still mad he didn't get his money.

SHIPMAN: That might be a rumor.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I'm curious on that, and that's why I'm asking, because I don't know a lot about—as I said, you are one of my first [Persian Gulf] interviews.

SHIPMAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... When did you leave the Army? When did you retire?

SHIPMAN: '94. MRD.

PIEHLER: December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1994.

SHIPMAN: Remember, I was commissioned December 16, 1966. If you add up the dates, that should be ... roughly twenty-eight years from commissioning to leaving the service. That's called MRD, Mandatory Removal Date. So my MRD was in December of '94, so I had to get out.

PIEHLER: It was time to go.

SHIPMAN: That's part of regs, MRD, Mandatory Removal Date. So, you know, I had to leave. I couldn't just hang around and suck the money off of them. So I got out in '94.

PIEHLER: If it hadn't been for your MRD, would you have stayed longer, or were you ready to go?

SHIPMAN: No, I was still hot for it. There was some camaraderie there. Yeah, I was in a position to do it, to get some more. But, you know, [when] you're out, you're out.. What I feel sorry for are those active duty guys who got their early outs, mid career. You know, the post-Gulf War draw down. As a matter of fact, my eye doctor is an Air Force captain who had about twelve years of service and had to take an early out. Career was ruined, ...

militarily. Had to start over as a civilian eye doctor, you know. Same thing after the big wars, happens: World War II, Vietnam, Korea, Desert Storm, the military draw down. That always hurts the economy [and] the individual involved.

PIEHLER: Well now, I think, the military has somewhat regressed that draw down 'cause now, I get the sense, that there's a scrambling for certain specialties. Is that your sense or ...

SHIPMAN: I'm not in touch much anymore.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so you really have retired?

SHIPMAN: Well, I get the Army Reserve magazines and stuff, though.

PIEHLER: I noticed that you joined the Retired Army Officers' Association. Is that the only veterans organization you ever joined?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, I don't believe in that VFW stuff and ...

PIEHLER: What about Vietnam Veterans of America? Have you ever been to the Wall?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, several times. No big deal. The Tusky guy who died in Vietnam, friendly fire kind of guy, his name's on the wall up there, [I] found it. But he died right there. So I found his name. But most of those tents that they set up, most of those people are homeless people, you know. I don't know if they're real veterans or not.

PIEHLER: What do you think about the whole controversy of missing in action?

SHIPMAN: They are still looking for people from World War II in the jungles of New Guinea, did you know that? That's America's philosophy, and it's good, you know, we take care of our dead. And if it takes fifty more years, we'll still be digging for them. They're still digging over there for World War II pilots who went down, until we've exhausted everything. That's the American policy, you know. And they'll keep it up. They're finding more and more, you know. They just have to find a tiny bit now to verify ...

PIEHLER: But you don't think that there are any live POWs over?

SHIPMAN: I'm sure there are. There were some defections over there.

PIEHLER: You mean defections of people who want to stay?

SHIPMAN: Yeah. Sure. Find them a woman, you know, ran off to Cambodia, whatever, North Vietnam. That's sort of true lots of places, you know. I don't have any evidence, I'm speculating on that, you know.

PIEHLER: I guess, if you could say a few things before you have to go about your career at TVA? Are you still working for TVA?

SHIPMAN: No, I retired from them after almost thirty years. A friend of mine and another guy, we're building high-end boat docks down on Tellico and Fort Loudon, pile driven structures. That's where I've gotta go this afternoon. It's a pretty lucrative—the economy is quite good right now. A lot of new money down there. We're helping them spend it. (Laughter) Build them a \$30,000 boat dock.

PIEHLER: What did you start out doing for TVA?

SHIPMAN: Civil engineer. I've been a nerdy civil engineer, two pens in my pockets, you know. I built highways and railroads. I helped build Tellico, and I still get spit on because of Tellico.

PIEHLER: So that was one of your big projects, Tellico?

SHIPMAN: Up front, yeah. Roads, road relocations. And then I ended up doing dam safety. We got fifty-four dams with TVA and they all gotta be inspected and upgraded to meet federal standard and all that. Roads, dams, a little bit of nuclear work, but I detested that. I got out of that fast.

PIEHLER: Why did you detest that so much?

SHIPMAN: So much redundancy. Triple checks. System B checks system A, and C checks system B. Redundancy, I guess, just boring. Lot of regulations in the nuclear business. Lot of watchdogs. It's not fun work. But hydro and construction, that's more freewheeling. I like that.

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned that you were positive about TVA and you wanted to join TVA?

SHIPMAN: Its mission, yeah.

PIEHLER: What did you like about the mission?

SHIPMAN: I won't talk about the present, because it's still so controversial up there.

PIEHLER: But any disillusionment? Did you think the mission is still—did TVA live up to what you thought it would be? It's an open-ended question, so I ...

SHIPMAN: It's getting close to being whittled down to a basic mission. I think that they have extended the mission somewhat, I think, in my opinion. But the mission to harness the Tennessee River, which is a tough river, with all the shoals and stuff, and you know—the Tennessee River is now a series of lakes, with nine dams on the main river there. And all the economic development there, it's a model. It's socialistic as the devil! A lot of people look at it, because they are the authority, TVA are the authority. But it's a good mission to take a

basically rural area and turn it around. Get some electricity out to them so they can cook and have lights, you know.

PIEHLER: So you still think that the mission was basically a good one?

SHIPMAN: Exactly, yeah. And it's been studied worldwide. We have people from all over come by to study the model. It's a model.

PIEHLER: And you still think, in many ways, it is a model? Not that it's not without ...

SHIPMAN: Things change, you know. Gets a different orientation, you know. But basically, TVA is a good sound project that could not have been done individually by the states. The Federal government had to do it and they did it, you know. And this area is much better off because of TVA. Remember, we're still in Appalachia. You go thirty miles and find people living in shacks who can't read and have never seen a dentist office, you know. I mean, really, when you get down to it, it's still there. So, yeah, I came here for TVA. And I am proud of it. I have always said I love TVA and what it stands for, but sometimes it gets in the way of itself... Well, UT gets in the way of itself, too.

PIEHLER: Oh, no, no, I don't ...

SHIPMAN: It's a great institution but it has its ways.

PIEHLER: No, I'm not necessarily looking for dirt, but there has been a lot of wrestling with what the future of TVA holds.

SHIPMAN: Lorayne Lester keeps me posted on this stuff. We're bouncing back.

PIEHLER: I guess one question relating to Vietnam, which I meant to ask earlier; did you serve on any court martials during Vietnam?

SHIPMAN: Oh yeah. The guy that beat me up. I was his ...

PEHLER: Prosecutor.

SHIPMAN: No, no, no.

PIEHLER: You testified, though.

SHIPMAN: I reported the offense, he was charged by the board. I'm getting things mixed up here.

PIEHLER: Did you serve as a judge or a defense counsel?

SHIPMAN: I was his ...

-----END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE THREE-----

SHIPMAN: ... Okay, I reported his marijuana and his sleeping on guard duty. Maybe the guy that was sleeping on guard was prosecuted and went to LBJ, Long Binh Jail. And [for] another guy, I was the defense attorney, appointed, knowing very little law.... And the guy was obviously guilty, I forget what the charge was, he was obviously guilty, and my only defense was, "He's sorry and he won't do it again." And he went to jail and came back and got me.

PIEHLER: So the guy who got mad at you was the guy you were defending?.

SHIPMAN: My defense was inadequate in his opinion. I said, "He's sorry and won't do it again." But his offense was obvious and blatant, you know.

PIEHLER: But you don't remember what it was?

SHIPMAN: No.... In those days we had military justice duty, and we weren't prepared for it.

PIEHLER: No, I mean, did you get any training in law, or—so you were just reading the book as best you can?

SHIPMAN: The night before. (Laughter) They changed all that for the good.

PIEHLER: Another question, ... do you ever stay in touch with people that you served with?

SHIPMAN: Yeah, that's the tough part of the military. You make super good friends and then you lose them. You'll find that out at the university, too. You will make super good friends, you graduate and you lose them. You'll keep up with some, but for the most part, you lose them. The military is big on that.... One of my platoon leaders in the land clearing outfit in Germany, we send postcards every single Christmas, or Christmas cards. He's watched my family grow up and I've watched his family grow up, you know. And I had another Lieutenant that we exchanged cards, but he moved and didn't leave his address. I didn't know where he moved to. And my company commander in Vietnam, that's a strong bond, there, we exchanged cards for a while. He got shipped over to Holland, he was in the petro-chemical business, and I lost his address. But one of them, I'm still maintaining contact. Some contact with Germany, with one of my friends from there. He's from California but works up in D.C. And in some of my business trips up there for TVA in D.C.—he was in the Department of the Interior, in the same line of business that I was, and I met him.

PIEHLER: Just ...

SHIPMAN: So we kept in contact, you know. That's about it.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that your father bought a house on the GI Bill, but that was about it. You mentioned earlier on your pre-interview survey that you used education, mortgage, VA loan, dental ...

SHIPMAN: Yeah, it was there.... I got my teeth—you had a very short window of time to get your teeth fixed, so I jumped on that dental window quite fast. There's wasn't anything wrong, my teeth weren't falling out, I just got some basic work done.

PIEHLER: And you got a VA mortgage?

SHIPMAN: Then a VA mortgage. No interest rate kind of deal, it was a bargain. And then I used the GI Bill to go to grad school over here.

PIEHLER: And you studied engineering?

SHIPMAN: Engineering administration, yes. I guess that's it. They'll probably bury me one day.

PIEHLER: Hopefully not too soon.

SHIPMAN: The benefit for burial is \$250. That's peanuts, you know. That's a pine box. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... Did you ever use any other medical care from the VA? Just the dental?

SHIPMAN: No.

PIEHLER: You never used a VA hospital?

SHIPMAN: My dad did when he croaked, down there in Texas. One of my buddies is using the VA prescription service for a condition he developed in the military. But, no, I don't use it now. Two daughters, you might have noticed my note there ... [on the pre-interview survey] are anti-military, thought war is evil. Did not appreciate my duty anywhere including when I left them to go to Desert Storm. Daughter number two has been a classic challenge to get focused in life. I tried all kinds of things. Tried UT, didn't work out. She flunked PE over here. I got her involved, got her enlisted in the Navy. She was discharged, because of mental problems, just tantrums. But my two daughters have not appreciated nor cared for military type operations or anything. Very, very anti military. I don't know where it comes from.

PIEHLER: Because you were third generation military. So, in a sense, it seems like it skipped a generation.

SHIPMAN: Yeah. A little bit. Now, they're asking a few questions, but it's just out of curiosity.

PIEHLER: They never really sat down and asked you to tell them?

SHIPMAN: No, that's unusual. They just have no sense of what's going on. They're '70s generation, born in the '70s. I don't know what that does to them. I don't know. That's an aside, you know. I guess that's it. Well, for the record, officially, I was in warfare in Vietnam, a declared something, it was a police action in Korea, whatever it was over there, a conflict, conflict, I guess. Officially, I was in Desert Shield, Desert Storm call-up. The Cold War was an ongoing, unofficial kind of warfare. Panama was a separate case. It was a one of a kind, extended call up, but not a general war. It was low intensity with hidden agendas, so that was not officially a war, but it came damn close.

PIEHLER: ... Your interview was very enlightening.

SHIPMAN: Panama was very close, especially with the attitude of the PDF. It got dangerous a few times, especially shots in the night, you know, and stopping cars at random, and searches, and stuff. So, you know, I had bits and pieces of four conflicts, four military duties. So I'm proud of that.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you've seen quite a bit.

SHIPMAN: Needed one more, though. I tried to get one more, you know. Missed Bosnia.

PIEHLER: So you wouldn't have minded?

SHIPMAN: No, I'd go over there. Little too old, though, you know. Can't run a two-minute mile anymore, you know. Push-ups are getting tough. Army PT test is tough. You have to take it twice and you have to maintain it. There aren't no fat people in the Army anymore, you'll never see the fat people.

PIEHLER: Whereas, when you were in the Army you mentioned that your first captain was a little overweight.

SHIPMAN: Yeah, but there was not a weight control program then. But there is a very strict weight control program and physical fitness profile you gotta have [now]. So many sit ups, so many push ups, so many miles running, you know. If you can't make it you have a special program. Early on, the military pushed drinking and socializing and O-Clubbing and smoking, whatever, you know, and ten-cent cocktails, you know, happy-hour cocktails, cigarettes for a quarter a pack, kind of deal, you know. That was a part of the military environment. Now there are no smoking areas, you know, physical tests, you know, diet control, whatever.... Drinking is ... secondary or non-existent. No more happy hours.

PIEHLER: Particularly interviewing World War II people, they really drank.

SHIPMAN: The Vietnam ...

PIEHLER: And Vietnam also.



SHIPMAN: They would ship us beer out into the jungle! Be it hot, it was still beer. We couldn't get any ice. A 500-pound block of ice the size of this table, somewhere on a sling on a chopper, by the time it got to us, it was the size of that book; it had melted. You'd [be] attacked by ice cubes! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So they did try to ship you ice?

SHIPMAN: They tried, but on a sling in the jungle, hundred plus degrees. It didn't last very long. But they would ship hot beer. And a barber, periodically. But I have seen to see the military change. And I mentioned some of them, the communications, the racial environment, the female involvement. And that is still developing. The sexual harassment thing—I just saw that this female general accuse another general of that just recently, you know. And the Army is having a tough time defining harassment, you know. Both male on male, female on male, any way you cut it, you know. That is still a tough one to cut and define. They haven't solved that problem yet, have they? Where's the line, you know?

PIEHLER: It sounds like, you are overall though, you are very impressed, you are very positive to the way the military has changed, overall.

SHIPMAN: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: ... I get the sense that it is for the better, overall.

SHIPMAN: And a lot of that is due to the civilian Secretary of Defense. They really have a lot of influence on the military and make the hard decisions, you know. They can ignore the brass, you know, and we've had some good ones lately.

PIEHLER: ... So you think that the current ones—well, you served under, the last one was, I think, Secretary Perry, and then before that it was ...

SHIPMAN: Guy from Montana under Bush.

PIEHLER: Oh, [Dick] Cheney.

SHIPMAN: Super guy. You know, I didn't believe everything.

PIEHLER: But you thought he was a ...

SHIPMAN: Very intelligent. A non-vet. But he did some good things. [Admiral Elmo R.] Zumwalt, way back, did some good things. But Zumwalt was Chief of Staff, though, ... Chief of Naval Operations. CNO.

PIEHLER: And he in the Navy was even more radical.

SHIPMAN: Yeah.... But the Army is changing for the better. Strength is always a problem. It's a predicament, you know, how strong an army do you keep when you don't need them. A classic problem. Or how quickly can you raise an army when you do need them, you know. I don't know the answer, you don't know the answer.

PIEHLER: No, if I did I wouldn't be here.

SHIPMAN: Just cut the numbers, you know. Our mission now is to handle, what, three conflicts simultaneously in the world? I don't think we are close to that.

PIEHLER: I guess, the question is that do we need to handle three? Then it also becomes a tough call.

SHIPMAN: A lot of anti-American sentiment now in Europe about the way we see the world. The trend now is to get the military involved in the civil disobedience stuff, like the guard would do, you know, riot control and forest fires. That should not be the military's position, I don't think. The Army's changing, you know, and I've seen it go through quite a.... They should have—a lot of ... my veteran friends say this, they ought to have more medals and recognition for the homefolk, the people that are left behind. Give them a medal for hardship, you know. They try to have family support units, but that's sort of Mickey Mouse, you know. But they should recognize the sacrifices of those who stayed back.

PIEHLER: In other words like in World War II where they did have a defense medal for those who stayed.

SHIPMAN: Did they?

PIEHLER: Yes. You got a medal for doing almost anything—not to belittle the World War II effort, but I often interview veterans who ...

SHIPMAN: They should maintain that.

PIEHLER: Yeah. There were medals given for people—I forget the exact term, but it was basically the home medal, and then if you crossed the ocean you got another decoration for that. I should let you go because you mentioned you had an appointment. But thank you very much, we really appreciate it.

STAFFORD: Thank you so much.

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