

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH LEMUEL SPARKS

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AND
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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Lemuel C. Sparks Jr. On March 13, 2001 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and...

VIVIANA CHAPA: Viviana Chapa.

PIEHLER: And I guess I would like to begin if you could—by asking you to tell us a little bit about your parents. You were born on?

LEMUEL SPARKS: September 13, 1917.

PIEHLER: And your parents were?

SPARKS: My parents were married and my ... father was a North Carolinian. His father was a Baptist Minister in North Carolina, but he [Lemuel's father] was a flour miller. He came ... to Newport and operated a flourmill there on the Pigeon River and that's when he met my mother. My mother was born and reared at Parrottsville, which is ... between Greenville and Newport. And ... she's always been Lutheran. She finally convinced my daddy that he should be Lutheran. He did later on. But at that point ... she went to the Lutheran Church and he went to the Baptist Church.

But ... my father was not an educated—I mean ... an elementary education, but no college education. And one of his favorite statements that I always remember is, “I want to live long enough till my children get an education.” But my mother ... was born in 1890, my dad in 1889. My mother was born in 1890 and ... she went to elementary—country school actually at Long Creek. There is a place up there called Long Creek. ... It was an old country store and then there was a schoolhouse there and a mill. So that's where she went [to school]. Then she went to ... Johnson City to what was then called the Johnson City Normal School. It later became the East Tennessee State University. She finished there in 1914 and became a schoolteacher and was teaching school in Hartford, Tennessee, out from Newport. And that's when she and my dad met. (Laughs) And so ... they were married in 1916 and I was born in September of 1917.

So ... their background was kind of diverse ... but interesting. My mother had five sisters and my daddy had about eight brothers and sisters. So ... in those years there were large families. Well we have some pretty big ones too, today. But ... it was common then. My father had some half brothers. ... His mother died and then his father was remarried again. And he had four or five brothers, half brothers and sisters. But he came from North Carolina, lived in Newport, operated the mill. My mother grew up in Parrottsville, which was really on a farm, out in Parrottsville. And ... that's where I ultimately spent part of my boyhood. I was born in 1917 in Newport. In those days there was a famous coffee named Fatty Arbuckle Coffee. And 1917 was an unusually cold winter. And ... we lived on Woodlawn Avenue in Newport, which is on top of Jones Hill as they call it—as you go through Newport now up to the right. [There was] no central heating or anything of that nature in 1917. So he got a Fatty Arbuckle Coffee box, they shipped it in wooden boxes to the stores. And he got a Fatty Arbuckle Coffee box and put it by the stove to keep me warm that winter. That's where I grew up, in a Fatty Arbuckle Coffee box. (Laughter) No, I didn't grow up there, but ... I spent my first days there ... first weeks and

months there. We lived there until we moved to North Carolina. Now I don't know how much you want me to say about ...

PIEHLER: Oh no, please.

SPARKS: ... Newport.

PIEHLER: When did you leave Newport?

SPARKS: We left Newport about 1923.

PIEHLER: Why did you leave Newport?

SPARKS: My dad got a better job in Shelby. (Laughter) A larger mill, and he was making \$100 a month. Which was almost unheard of sometimes in those days, you know. So we moved to Shelby. ... Before that I remember my first—the first Christmas I remember I was about three years old. The only thing we'd get then was an orange maybe, or some nuts, you know. They didn't go all out like they do now. But ... the door—somebody knocked at the door on Christmas Eve and my dad said, "Son, go answer the door, see who's there." And there was Santa Clause and he was pulling, I think, the prettiest big, red wagon, I've ever seen. ... As it turned out this was one of his brothers. (Laughs)

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: So you were saying this red wagon was full of ...

SPARKS: Yeah, the red wagon was, I think, one of the most beautiful pieces of equipment I've ever seen and ... was filled with building blocks. That was an unusually large Christmas for a young boy in those days. Because about all you ever got was oranges or a couple of oranges and apples or some nuts maybe or a stick of candy. They were great on horehound and ... peppermint stick candy in those days and we might get a couple of sticks of candy. But ... that was about the extent of Christmas presents in those days. ... They'd just go out and get a cedar tree, a small cedar tree, put it up for a Christmas tree and homemade ornaments. And made chains, you know, they would paste and make chains. And ... they had a kind of angel hair stuff they'd put on and they made their own decorations, Christmas balls So they did all that. Christmas was a real significant occasion. But nothing like, you know, the people don't cry about going broke and this season is not very good and so on. But ... we—I remember that particular Christmas, and that stands out in my memory because it was so vivid. I can still see that red wagon come through the front door. (Laughs) And that's been eighty years ago.

PIEHLER: You mentioned your first home in Newport, it did not have central heat. Did you have indoor plumbing?

SPARKS: Yes, we did. And ...

PIEHLER: So didn't have ...

SPARKS: ... we didn't have electricity. We did later, and I'll talk about that when we get back to the farm.

PIEHLER: Okay.

SPARKS: And I'm eternally grateful to TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority). When I was in high school we had no electricity in the home, and that was on the farm. Well in between that, I went to elementary school in North Carolina, and ... my father, after we were there a couple of years in Shelby, about three years I guess it was, took a better job in Conover, North Carolina which is part of Hickory now. And so we moved there and after a year or two he became quite ill with breathing so much dust, you know, in the flourmill. The doctors had told him that if he wanted to survive very long, he would need to remove himself from the mill, get out into the open where he could have fresh air all the time. You know that's how they used to treat TB patients—let them freeze out in the cold air. (Laughter) My mother—in the meantime my grandfather Easterly had died, and he had a large farm up there, and they divided it up among the six girls. Not equal amount of shares, but equal worth—equal value. And then the girls drew, and my mother happened to draw the home place. So when that occurred we moved there then, out on the farm.

PIEHLER: How old were you when you moved out on the farm?

SPARKS: On the farm? I was, let's see, I was thirteen.

PIEHLER: Do you remember what year that was?

SPARKS: Sir?

PIEHLER: Do you remember what year that was?

SPARKS: That was—yes, that was 1930. The Depression had descended very rapidly in a heavy way.

PIEHLER: And the farm again was where?

SPARKS: The what?

PIEHLER: The farm that you moved to, that was ...

SPARKS: That was back in Salem ... Parrotsville.

PIEHLER: In North Carolina?

SPARKS: No, Tennessee.

PIEHLER: Tennessee.

SPARKS: We moved back to Tennessee. In Newport, you cross the Pigeon River, the French Broad River, and then beyond that is Parrottsville, a little town. That's where I went to high school. But ... just a small town, had a post office and a store and a school and that was about it. But beyond that about three miles is a place called Salem Community. Salem Lutheran Church, a beautiful, big, country church. And my grandfather's farm was about two miles from that church. So that's where we moved to. And that was—by the way, on the road over to Long Creek, to where my mother went to elementary school. I told you about the store and the school and the mill. So I spent my high school years there. It was kind of unusual, you know, with the Depression. We didn't have anything; we had plenty of food, but no money. You didn't have any income much on the farm.

PIEHLER: What did your parents grow on the farm?

SPARKS: Well we grew tobacco, corn, wheat, oats, a huge garden. And we took care of our own livestock. We butchered pork and beef every year. And ... my mother canned. We had in that old house—there was no electricity, by the way, at that time. That's why I say I'm eternally grateful for TVA. And [Aubery] Red Wagner was a member of my church for a number of years. He was chairman of the TVA board. He was one of my right hand men at St. John's.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

SPARKS: But I studied by kerosene lamp. We still have some around here somewhere.

PIEHLER: Because you were used to electricity. This, well up until you were thirteen.

SPARKS: Oh, we were used to—when we lived in Conover in 1929, just before we moved, that's when I made my first money. I made a nickel for sweeping the floors in that mill. Of course, I was still in elementary school then. But one Saturday my dad said, "Son, I have to go up to Hickory,"—which was about six or eight miles. He said, "I'll be back." And he left, so I swept around and cleaned and talked to the fellas at the mill. After a little while he came back and said, "Come over here I want to show you something." We lived across the street from the mill. He went down to the garage and opened the door. And there was the prettiest 1929 Pontiac I've ever seen, I guess. New, brand new. Cost him \$640. It was a two door Pontiac and, of course, that was our transportation from then on ... for quite a long while.

PIEHLER: So your father was doing in the '20s, quite well.

SPARKS: Yeah. When we lived in Shelby his first automobile was—well not his first one, but he had one of the first enclosed, they called sedans. A '27 Model-T Ford. The first Sunday we had it, after church, he said, "Let's take a ride." So we went down in the direction of Charlotte, Gastonia and Charlotte. In those days in North Carolina those roads were paved—two lane. But ... near Gastonia, a carload of inebriated men came swishing down between those lanes. And everybody had gotten out of the way until about three cars ahead of us, and they had a collision it was just like the other day out here—jammed up. And there we sat a brand new model-T Ford, with the crank bent back under, the radiator leaking. (Laughter) And he was so cross ... but my

father ... I never remember seeing him really mad. He was an even-tempered kind of a fella, my mother too. Loving, he taught me so many things about patience, and you know.

Well, anyway, to get back over to Salem. The church there was the center of the activities of the community. Families, the church that was the social life. And ... the families were close knit, many of them were related, intermarried, a lot of, you probably heard of, Neas N-E-A-S someone spelled Nease N-E-A-S-E, they were German people whose forbearers had migrated in through Pennsylvania down the valley of Virginia and into East Tennessee and settled there. So they—we, of course, went to church regularly. That was part of our social activities. And later on, when I was older, we went to youth group meetings, the whole family went then. It wasn't just a youth group. I had two sisters, and all five of us got in the car and we'd go to Luther League, which was the youth group meeting. Anytime you want to ask me a question or break in, why go ahead.

PIEHLER: Oh, I will, but you're answering many of our questions.

SPARKS: Well, as I said, there was very little money. We struggled—we had plenty of food. In that old farmhouse you went in the door, over here was the parlor, over here was a living room, back here was bedroom, back here was a dining room and a kitchen, and then there were bedrooms upstairs.

PIEHLER: So it was a two-story ...

SPARKS: Yes. (Laughter) We lived there, and we had to carry a kerosene lamp from one room to the other if we wanted light, you know, unless you wanted to fumble around in the dark. But ... we had plenty of food, and under those—under the living room and under this bedroom were two big cellars. And this cellar under the living room, you had to put the rug back and lift up a kind of door there, a trap door thing, to get down in there. And there were bins of Irish potatoes and sweet potatoes, that we put in that summer—pumpkins, squash, just all kinds of things. In this other cellar, it was lined with shelves. And there were probably, by the end of the fall, there were probably 500 cans of food in there of some kind or other. My mother canned. So we had plenty of food. We butchered our own pork and made sausage. My daddy could make the best country ham. And when he died, his formula went with him. We had plenty of food, no money.

I remember in ... I guess it was 1930, '31, 1931. To raise a tobacco crop is a year round job you know. You burn the beds in January—the seed beds and sow the seed, and then you transplant those plants, when they are big enough long about May, into the field. Then during the summer, you cultivate them, you have to go through and 'sucker.' They used to sucker tobacco. You ever heard that term? At each leaf on the stem, at each leaf, a sprout would grow out, that was a sucker. You pulled those out so they wouldn't take the growth out of the leaves. And the worms, big ole great big, green, tobacco worms. We had to do that all summer. Sucker and worm the tobacco. Then you cut the tobacco. And we had a sled, and old Jack was our mule. We had other horses too, but Jack pulled the sled. And we would cut the tobacco and put the stems of the tobacco plant on a stick. You've probably seen those, you know. You spud your tobacco, you cut one and put it on, cut another and put it on, and hang that in the barn. And when it cures, along about the end of November, then you begin grading it. What they call

working the tobacco. Grade it—you had to start with the deep red at the bottom, and the brighter leaves as you went to the top, and the real tops, the tips, they weren't very good either. The middle part was the best part. But anyway, we cultivated that crop of tobacco in 1931 and hauled it to Greenville, a big, big truckload of tobacco to Greenville. And ... when the end of our experience there had come, they bid off that tobacco at a quarter of a cent a pound, a half a cent a pound. My daddy received a check for \$102 for a whole summer's work, for all of us. And he owed part of that for fertilizer, maybe \$15, \$20.

PIEHLER: And he used to make \$100 a month?

SPARKS: Well, yeah. But this is after that. This is during the Depression.

PIEHLER: Yes. So his income ...

SPARKS: Yes, well he also lost some money during the Depression. When the Depression hit, he had signed one of his brother's notes for a house or something and he lost even the house we had in Newport. So ... he lost a good bit. But he plugged along, even in ill health. He wasn't really a farmer, but he farmed at it, he worked at it.

PIEHLER: How long did your father stay on the farm?

SPARKS: Huh?

PIEHLER: How long did he stay on the farm?

SPARKS: He stayed—they moved there ... the doctor had told him if he wanted to live, he needed to get out. He lived until 1952. He died when he was sixty-three years old. I don't know whether you remember one of the writers ... I've got a clipping of it here—wrote about the big snow at the Tennessee-Kentucky football game.

PIEHLER: No, I don't.

SPARKS: I have a copy of it in there. That night my father died. We, at that point were living in Blacksburg, Virginia. I was chaplain of the VI, but we'll get to that later. But, they tried to get a hold of me—he died on Friday night. This was [the] Friday night before the football game. (Laughter) It was a big storm, one the biggest we've ever had here. And it broke trees—the road was just impassable. So that night about midnight, they had to come get him. They pulled the hearse through a neighbor's field with a tractor. To get in there to get him. But ... anyway he lived to be ... sixty-three when he died in 1952. He lived that long, he lived for about a little bit over twenty years, and we had a good life together.

He was always very patient with me and showed me how to do things. He would watch me trying to do something, he say, "Well son, wait a minute. Let me show you how to do that," and that's the way he did. He was very calm and I don't think I ever heard him say a curse word. He never would raise his voice, particularly with me. His way of working off anger sometimes, when I did something—he wanted to switch me as they say, you know, cut a hickory switch.

He'd say, "Son, go cut me a switch." I'd go out and get one, and he say, "No, that's not right, that's too knotty," and he'd send me back about three times. By the time I got back the last time, there wasn't much to it then. That's the way he worked his anger off. (Laughter) But we had a—I know one time I was trying to—are you familiar with the hames on a horses' harness. You know they have a collar and then the hames, fit around here with the chain going back to the plow or the wagon or whatever they're pulling. You have to put those hames on and tie them. I've got some—I've still got some down at the lake. But you have to tie them at the bottom. They have those leather thongs, you know, that you tied it with, some use chains, but we used the leather. He stood there and watched me for about ten minutes trying to tie that, he said, "Now son, just step over here a minute and let me show you how to do that." He went on and just tied it. Then [he] said, "Now you try it." (Laughter) That's the kind of person he was, and I always appreciated that, the fact that he probably taught me as much as anybody else about human relations, family relations, morals and all that sort of thing.

But during the Depression, there was a family closeness—we would get together with our relatives for meals at Thanksgiving—different times. They would come over to the farm sometimes. They would come to pick blackberries. An aunt in Newport and one of her sons who was my age—just died about two weeks ago. They would come when the blackberries were ripe about the first of July and spend the day, with these big five-gallon buckets, and they would go home with a trunk full and a back seat full of blackberries. They'd make jam and can them into jelly and all that stuff, you know, pies. So we had a lot of wild strawberries along the fencerows, so we didn't want for food really. We had plenty of food, we had a big garden, plenty of—you know, tomatoes, corn, potatoes, and all that stuff. We had apple trees, peach trees We made our own molasses. We grew sugar cane. On a frosty morning in September, October, I would sit down there before I'd do to school and feed the cane into the mill, with the mule going around, you've seen pictures of it.

PIEHLER: Yes, I have seen pictures.

SPARKS: Anyway, then the juice—then they'd cook that all day, kept taking the foam off. Finally, you've got the molasses part. (Laughter) So ... but we've had, I've had a rather kind of diversified life, from the standpoint of living on the farm and then the city and then on to school. I graduated from Parrotsville High School in 1934. From there, it was the height of the Depression then—in fact, that's a picture of the old school (showing photo) in 1934, and nobody had any money to go to college, and I borrowed money from a school teacher friend of our family to take a course with Drawns Business College. They had a night extension in Newport. I got a diploma for bookkeeping, shorthand, and typing.

PIEHLER: How long were you at the school?

SPARKS: Four years.

PIEHLER: At the high school—at the business school ...

SPARKS: Sir?

PIEHLER: At the business school? How long were you at the business school?

SPARKS: About a year, a little bit over. Then I became a bookkeeper for the Farm Bureau of Newport. They had their office and the mail office there. Well, that just didn't exactly fit what I thought life would be like. So I didn't—we had a minister who kept talking to me about the ministry. We became real personal friends. He finally helped me get a partial scholarship at Roanoke College, which is a Lutheran school in Virginia. And that was my undergraduate work. In those days each community also had a baseball team, you know. And they would play each other, like Parrottsville would play Bybee. They played every Saturday afternoon. Albert, Reverend Schumaker, and his twin brother had been a pitcher and Albert was a catcher. So he caught for the Parrottsville baseball team, and he would take me to the games. (Laughter) And we'd come back and pass ball and he would say something about the ministry. Until one night, we were at Luther League... anytime you want me to stop ...

PIEHLER: No, no please just keep going.

SPARKS: One night at Luther League, I had a part in the program, in those days they would—when you went to church in the morning, if they wanted you to be in the program that night, they gave it to you to look at and read that afternoon. Because we didn't have anything else to do, there was no recreation. All I did was ride horseback sometimes on Sunday afternoons. That particular occasion, they gave me a part in the program, and I memorized it. It wasn't too long, maybe two or three paragraphs. We went to Luther League that night, it was an old building that you'd go in, there was two aisles and the women sat on this side, the men sat on this side, and the young people sat in the center, where they could keep their eyes on you. (Laughter) Anyway, that night at Luther League, about the time we started the program, a terrific storm brewed. Oh, lightening like you wouldn't believe, and thunder. They just kept going with the program, when it came my time to be on the program, I went up where the pulpit is, chancery area, and turned around and started giving my part and the lights went out. I just continued on with my part in the dark. In the meantime, one of the men had gone out and gotten his car and drove it up to the front of the church, opened the door, and that was our light, the headlights. Well, after that episode, Reverend (Schumaker?) said, "Boy, anybody who can do that ought to be a preacher." Some of the things of that nature kind of clinched my feeling of a call and so I went ahead then to prepare for that.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you in some ways were recruited over time by your pastor, had you thought of any other careers before?

SPARKS: No, I really hadn't. Except when I went to business college. I thought, "Well that's what I really need to do. Get somewhere in the business world." But, no I hadn't, at that point there were not professional positions available like there are now. You either farmed, or worked in a mill, or sold shoes, or something of that nature, you know. Or you taught school, maybe. My mother taught school. But ... they were not available at that point, the invitation so to speak. It was right about time that I had my first visit to UT [University of Tennessee]. One of our friends in the church, Joe Bacon, had a 1927 model Chevrolet. He invited my dad and myself to come down in the fall to the—they had kind of an agricultural fair, one of those AMI things. I don't remember what it was called, but it had to do with agriculture. They wanted to come down

and get some new ideas and see some of the new equipment, new kinds of plows and you know and all that. So I rode in the back seat of that '27 Chevrolet to UT. And that's the first time I had ever been on the campus at UT. Now our four children have degrees from UT. In fact, I taught at UT for twelve year, at one point. But anyway, that was my contact with UT. It was about 1931.

PIEHLER: How much traveling had you done as a kid growing up, say in the 1920s when your family—your father had more money?

SPARKS: Well, we didn't do long trips. We did trips to North Carolina, where his folks— near Asheville, Barnesville, up to my grandparents. And maybe Greenville and, you know, places of that nature.

PIEHLER: But you never went to say, Myrtle Beach or ...

SPARKS: Oh, no. I hadn't even heard of Myrtle Beach at that point. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And you never ...

SPARKS: Or Hilton Head, either.

PIEHLER: Yeah, well Hilton Head, I think, was just an island.

SPARKS: No, our recreation was more home-centered. We didn't do much. We'd travel when dad got a—have a vacation in the summer, we'd come from Shelby over to my grandparents there on the farm and spend a few days with them. Or go up to see his folks near Asheville. Well, we did one time, we went to ... my mother had a sister who lived in Four Oaks, near Goldsboro, North Carolina, and we got in that T-Model Ford about 1928, I guess that was after he got the crank straightened out, and I'll never forget really, they lived—he was a farmer too near Goldsboro, Four Oaks—tobacco farmer. That was a different kind—they called it a bright leaf tobacco. Ours was Burley. You know, two different kinds. But anyway, it was late in the afternoon, and dad didn't really know how to get to their house so he stopped at a farmhouse. The fellow said, "Well let me show you." And he picked up an axe and got down on the ground, and in the sand drew a map of where we were and a map of where my aunt's house was. That was the best way of doing it, I guess. But ... you know, such as that, later in my high school years, I was a delegate to some church conventions.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: Did you have a radio growing up when you were ... when you lived in North Carolina?

SPARKS: Radio? Yes, we had a radio, but that was it. That was our Saturday night entertainment.

PIEHLER: But when you moved to the farm, it sounds like you lost the radio.

SPARKS: Yes, well we had a battery-operated radio.

PIEHLER: So you still maintained the radio?

SPARKS: Well it wasn't much recreation, but we listened to the Grand Ole Opry every Saturday night. (Laughter) Well, we didn't go anywhere.

PIEHLER: What about the movies, did you ever go to the movies?

SPARKS: Oh, yes. When we lived in Shelby, I went to the movies. In fact, on one occasion, when we first moved over there, I used to go on Saturday afternoons to see Tom Mix and all the guys in the Westerns. Well, anyway, I went to the movie, and I just stayed. I sat through the first showing, and I sat through the second showing. Next thing I knew my dad was punching me and said, "Son, you're suppose to be home." I said, "Well I'm just waiting for them to let out." (Laughter) Yeah, we had some movies. Some of them were pretty good. Then the early movies were silent. If you couldn't read, there wasn't much point in going. I went to the movies later, when I was growing up. Well, I played athletics, too. When I was a sophomore at Parrotsville, they decided they wanted to have a football team. They had not had one before. So thirteen of us went out. We had thirteen on the squad, and we played a whole season.

PIEHLER: How big was your high school?

SPARKS: Not very big. There were only twelve people in my class. I suppose probably seventy-five or one hundred people.

PIEHLER: All together?

SPARKS: But you might be interested, the first football game we ever played, was in Hot Springs, North Carolina. Our transportation was riding in the back end of an A-Model Ford truck with straw in the bed. We arrived over there and ... 'cause I had been through Hot Springs going to North Carolina, and we arrived there and played the game. They had a football field down along the French Broad River in Hot Springs, but the high school was not located there, it was up on a mountain, somewhere up here. So there was a little place there to change our clothes and we put our uniforms on and we played a football game down there. When the football game was finished, there were no showers, we put our clothes back on, got in the back end of that A-Model Ford truck, and started home. We got up to the top of the mountain to an old country store, and our supper was a Coca-cola and a pack of peanut butter crackers. I often wondered what contemporary football players would do today. You know, it's just so different, completely different. We did it for the fun if it, we got nothing out of it except enjoyment. One play in that game, I got knocked out, and there was nobody to replace me, so I just laid there on the ground, until they ran another play. I was coming to then. (Laughter) But recreation, relations, the whole concept of life, at that time, was different from today.

PIEHLER: You also were old enough to remember the National Park coming.

SPARKS: The what?

PIEHLER: Great Smoky National Park.

SPARKS: National Park?

PIEHLER: Yes, the Great Smokies.

SPARKS: The Smokies? Yeah.

PIEHLER: Did it affect any of your family? In terms of land?

SPARKS: The biggest effect it had on us is when I was a senior in high school in 1934. For the senior trip, the principal talked the county into—they didn't have much money either, you know, to run buses, to give us a bus. We packed our lunches, rode to the Smokies, and hiked to Mount LeConte. That was our senior class outing. But not particularly, because that was a little distance from where we were. Are you familiar with east of here, Del Rio, and some of those places?

PIEHLER: I have a general sense, but I'm still so new to Tennessee that I don't ...

SPARKS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Like I know where Newport is for example.

SPARKS: Where are you from?

PIEHLER: I'm originally from New Jersey.

SPARKS: Are you really?

PIEHLER: Yes. I've only been in Tennessee since January of '99.

SPARKS: Well, Del Rio, is kind of like Parrottsville, east of Newport. Near there were some mountainous areas called Max Patch and some places like White Top Mountain. People would go up there in the fall and pick up chestnuts. You could get a washtub full of chestnuts in just a little bit, there were so many of them—cause the blight cleaned that out. Newport is famous for its bootlegging you know, moonshine. When I was in high school, I guess it was the next year, about 1932 , '33. Reverend (Schumaker?)—they decided that maybe we ought to take our youth group on a little outing on Sunday afternoon. Go up to the top of White Top Mountain up there, and have our devotions up there and have a picnic supper. Well in those days the road was not through from Newport to Gatlinburg, you could only go to Cosby. That's as far as you could get. We got up there, and he started up this little road and somebody stepped out with a rifle and stopped us. He finally convinced him we were a church group, we weren't revenuers. (Laughter) So he let us go on, but he gave us instructions, "at certain intersections, you blink your lights so

many times, and at certain intersections, you toot your horn so many times.” Otherwise you couldn’t get through. Reverend (Shumaker?) said, “I’m never going up there again.” (Laughter)

I played basketball up in Cosby in the snow, on an outside court. We had outside courts in those days. We didn’t have gyms. It snowed the whole game. We had our regular shorts, just our basketball uniforms on. We played the whole game out in the snow. They finally at Parrotsville—there was a basement, but the ceiling wasn’t much higher than this, but they made a basketball court down there, and the floor was concrete. You could kill yourself down there. (Laughter) They used to have it, you know. Girl’s basketball was quite different then. They had three sections. The guards stayed here, then the center, there were a couple in here, and then the forwards up here. These people could not cross this line, neither way, nor that way. Nor could these people cross that line. They had to pass, you know. They wore black bloomers for their uniforms. (Laughter) Way down to their knees, you know.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you were very active in sports. What else were you active—and you were helping a lot out on the farm ...

SPARKS: Yeah, I played basketball ...

PIEHLER: ... and you were active in the Lutheran League. Is there anything else you were active in?

SPARKS: Well, I played baseball too, baseball, basketball, and football. Well not particularly, you didn’t have the opportunity to be in too many activities because they just weren’t out there. That kind of opportunity, even in Newport, the activities of young people were—would be limited. Unless you worked, you could work. We had some horses. My daddy bought a horse one time that had been a racehorse and ... I think the first Sunday we had it—Queen, was her name. I put a bridle on Queen, and it had a straight bit. Are you familiar with bits at all?

PIEHLER: No.

SPARKS: A straight bit is what you see on a lot of these racehorses. They can control them better. Another bit, a regular bit, the middle will dibb like this. (Gestures with hands) But a straight bit cuts her lips kind of—if you pull back on it. I got on Queen and pulled back on the rein and she went straight up. (Laughter) Finally, it occurred to me what was happening. I put the wrong kind of bridle on her. That kind of thing, you know.

And walk—if I went anywhere in those days, I had to walk, two, three, or four miles, whatever it was, I’d have to walk. You were busy with family affairs more so than now. For instance, if we were running low on baking powder or soda, coffee, sugar. I would go to the store. I walked a mile and a half to the store, with a half-bushel basket on my arm with eggs. If we didn’t have eggs I’d take a couple of old roosters. And you know, you’d trade and barter them off. That’s how farmers received many of the staples that they—we take for granted now. You didn’t always have them or couldn’t always get them. And we butchered our own pork and beef. So my activities were really family or church oriented more than they might have been than had I lived in say, Newport in high school, although they didn’t have much activities either. You’d wander

around, get in fights occasionally. (Laughter) I remember when I was a little boy and when we lived in Newport before we went to Shelby my mother used to say, “Son,”—because there was a store a block from us, Pritchard’s Store. I could go over there and get a loaf of bread for a nickel, a quart of milk for a dime. It was a completely different atmosphere, there were different family relations, there were different community relations, in fact there was different morality, I guess if you want to call it that—right and wrong. We didn’t have television. We didn’t have instantaneous news. We might hear this week, something that happened last week. Although Newport had a paper, called the *Newport Plain Talk*, it was published once a week, or maybe every two weeks, something like that. That plus the radio, and there wasn’t much news on the radio because they didn’t cover it like they do now. Now, if you turn the TV on you can see something that happened five minutes ago.

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

SPARKS: Why don’t you ask me some more questions?

PIEHLER: Before talking about college, your parents were Republicans ...

SPARKS: Yes, uh huh. They were.

PIEHLER: What did they think of Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt?

SPARKS: Well, he, Franklin Roosevelt turned out to be a great president and my daddy voted for him one time. But at that point, the uncle I mentioned in Newport, he was such a Republican that you could just mention Democrat or Franklin Roosevelt and he’d get red in the face. But my daddy wasn’t that rabid. He was a Republican, my mother and daddy were both Republican. I know Uncle Ben’s son became a member of the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]. You remember the youth corps that did the trails in the Smoky Mountains? They [his parents] were Republicans and voted—I remember my daddy worked for Wendell Wilkie one time. We had materials, Wilkie’s picture, copies and so on. He didn’t do much of that though, he was never much of a politician. That was the only time I ever remember him really participating, except voting, they always voted. But he did vote for Franklin Roosevelt, I think it was his third term. And I’ve heard my daddy say, “I don’t know why they ever talked me into voting for him again.”

PIEHLER: Was it the third term or the second term that he voted for Roosevelt?

SPARKS: It could have been the second, I don’t know whether it was the second or third. But he had already been in office and was running again. Either it was the second or third time.

PIEHLER: When did you get power on the farm, you mentioned TVA brought the power, do you remember what year it was?

SPARKS: Oh, I don’t know. I was gone to college.

PIEHLER: Okay. So it was sometime in the 1930s.

SPARKS: No, it was later than the '30s. Well towards the end of the 1930s. They started building Norris Dam and ... then they built Cherokee and Douglas and all those dams. No, in fact, it was later than that, because when we were married in 1944, I brought a Pennsylvania Dutch girl down here, to wander around in the dark. (Laughter) It was either late 1930s or early 1940s. I don't remember exactly when. I think we had electricity when she came down here. It took a while. We didn't think anything about it, because nobody else had any electricity. Your power, what little power you did have for your machinery, would be a gasoline powered—Fordson tractor. An old Fordson tractor, have you ever seen those, with the cleats on them?

Course that's another picture of the farm. (Showing photo) The thrashing and community things you did together. There is a picture hanging on the wall of the barns where I grew up. We had a barn covering, you know, we split the shingles for a long time before that, to let them cure. Then there was a barn covering. The whole countryside came in, and my mother cooked country ham, fried chicken, and roast beef. Some of the ladies helped of course. Then at the time of thrashing, the thrashing machine would go around from one farm to the next. The people who lived in that area would follow it and help each other. At our house where these barns are, is a hill. I remember the thrashing machines were pretty heavy. I don't know, have you seen one? Have you seen a thrashing machine?

PIEHLER: Only pictures of it.

SPARKS: Anyway, they were long. They would feed it. Then it would blow the straw out here and the wheat would come out down here. Anyway, going up that little hill, the Fordson tractor would just rev up, it was so small. The men would get on the front and stand there to hold the front end of the tractor down, so it could get up the hill. I guess some of the hottest times I've ever spent out there were making hay in the summer. We had an old horse drawn mower. We had just a big old hay rake and you had to rake up your rows, with your lever you pulled up on to make your rows. Nobody ever bailed anything in those days. We used to stack that hay out in the field, and then you get up to a certain point, and you cap it off and preserve it. It would stay there all winter, without destroying much of it. That's how we preserved—in addition to what we had in the barn. Have you seen a hayfork? That's what they use to put hay in the barn with. The barn was open and the stalls here where the horses and cows stayed and the gear room, as they called it, with the bridles and saddles. They pulled in the horses in that opening there and the wagon under the overhang. You've seen those barns?

PIEHLER: Yes.

SPARKS: Well up in the very eve of that thing is a track. A hay lift would go up and down. You'd go and take one of the horses out of the wagon and hitch it up back there to a single tree. Do you know what a single tree is? Well that's where—for instance on a wagon, there is a double tree, and then there are two single trees where each horse is hitched to. I'd take that mule back there, and my dad would say, "Okay son, I'm ready." I'd jack up through the field. You'd pull that up to the top and then it hits the track and goes out and then they had a long rope down here. When it gets back to where they wanted to unload it, they'd just pull the rope, and the hay would go down. (Laughter) Then you pulled the thing back again. It was slow. Farming is so sophisticated now, you don't even recognize what I did, hardly, you know, eighty years

ago. Even the equipment. We had what we called double shovel plows. Two little plows about this wide. You'd go down the field and back and sometimes there were three. And the single one was called a bulldog. You laid off your rows with the bulldog. If you're planting corn, you or your dad laid off the rows and the other one came along with the corn planter which had a little wheel, about this big around. You fed corn and fertilizer into that and covered it up. But that is so slow. I made up a bunch of, a series of stories for our children when they were little. And called them Horse George Stories. Horse George, Pony Horse and Gray Horse and I had a whole series of stories. That's what one of our grandson's is doing. He has one of those digital things and he's doing some oral histories for our family. Yeah, all those kinds of things were so ...

PIEHLER: It's a very different world, from the world of today's Knoxville.

SPARKS: I started writing my autobiography two or three years ago. I got up to about six pages and I got up to about that first Christmas. What happened? I got so intrigued with what had happened in transportation, communication, and you know, all the things that had happened in my life—all these things that happened in my lifetime. The first car I ever owned was 1922 Model-T Ford. And I bought it when I was in high school. I paid \$22.50 for it.

PIEHLER: How long did you have that for?

SPARKS: Huh?

PIEHLER: How long did you have the car for?

SPARKS: I had it until I finished high school. (Laughter) Is your coffee getting cold?

PIEHLER: I'm all set with my coffee.

SPARKS: Do you have some questions you need to ask?

CHAPA: Not ... yet.

PIEHLER: What was college like for you?

SPARKS: College?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SPARKS: College was great. I went to Roanoke College, which is a Lutheran school in Virginia at Salem. You've probably seen the signs there if you've driven up and down [Highway] 81. It was a four year liberal arts and a very fine college, one of the finest. *U.S. News and World Report* always has it on the top nationally. It was tough. I had to work, I didn't have any money. I went on a partial scholarship. I worked seven nights a week until midnight for three years. Never got off—if I got off of work, I had to pay somebody to work in my place. We didn't have forty-hour weeks and that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: Where did you work?

SPARKS: At Norman's Restaurant which was in Salem, Virginia. He was a fella who had come here from Montana and worked his way through Roanoke College working on a sandwich board in a drug store downtown. So when he finished Roanoke he established his own eatery, so to say, restaurant. And he was particular about it. He would not have a nickelodean—had to have white linen table clothes. I mean, it was kind of a family restaurant. Yet all the students would hang out there, one time or another. I really—I guess I learned about as much at Norman's Restaurant as I did in college.

PIEHLER: Well that's—seven days a week is a long...

SPARKS: Seven days a week, yes sir. Till midnight and a lot of times it was after midnight. And I always had an 8:00 class. I've told somebody that I have never slept much because of the farm, you know, you get up early, before daylight. I had to walk a mile to get the school bus, and a mile home in the afternoon. We'd get up and do the chores, then I would eat breakfast, walk a mile to get to the school bus and go to school. When I went to college, I had to work till midnight and I always had an 8:00 class. When I went to seminary, I went to Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, our southern seminary there. We have one in Gettysburg, Philadelphia—different places. But I worked in Belk's Department store there. Then I went to the navy as a chaplain and we always had to go to general quarters an hour before daybreak. So I never have slept in the morning. (Laughter) I couldn't sleep all morning if I had to.

To get back to college. I arrived there, I went by train—I had to go by train. With the old Tennessean, they had the Memphis special, the New Orleans special, the Tennessean, and so on. So I went by train, by myself, an old country boy, never been away from home. And I got off at Salem, Virginia, where the college is. There was an A-Model Ford truck there to meet us, and I put my footlocker up there and sat on the back end of that truck and rode about two miles up to the college from the railroad station. I was to room—I knew who I was going to room with, it was a boy from Edelberg, Massachusetts. His name was Joe Maury. Joe is dead now, I'm sorry to say, but we became good friends. His daddy worked for Balfour, the jewelry people. They paid his way. Well I didn't have anybody to pay my way. Joe and I—I arrived and got out of the truck and a fella helped me up on the third floor where I was living with my footlocker. Joe had just arrived. He turned around and the first thing he said to me, without name or anything, he said, "Who won the Civil War?" (Laughter) I said, "The Civil War? What's that? We don't even talk about that."

PIEHLER: Because he had forgot that East Tennessee was Unionist.

SPARKS: He didn't even know, I don't guess.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SPARKS: He didn't know that East Tennessee had been Union rather than Rebel. Well, anyway, college then ... they had arranged for me to live with one of the Board of Trustees' mother who lived in Salem. About—probably about a mile-and-a-half from the school. I was to take care of the furnace and do the chores around there, for my room and board.

PIEHLER: When was that?

SPARKS: 1934, I mean 1936. I'm sorry.

PIEHLER: So your third year in school?

SPARKS: Sir?

PIEHLER: So you started in '36?

SPARKS: Yes, '36. I went to Drawns Business College.

PIEHLER: You had a roommate, at first, how long did ...

SPARKS: Yeah, Joe was my roommate.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SPARKS: But then, I forget the fella's name, he was on the Board of Trustees, arranged for me to live with his mother. So I moved down there. She was about half as big as you are. Little bitty dried up women. Old southern hospitality, she sat at the head of the table and I sat here. We were the only two there. She had a little button down here, if we needed something, she'd punch the button and the maid would come out to see what we needed. Well she ate like a bird. I can still hear her punch that button and the maid would come and she'd say, "Bring Mr. Sparks another piece of bread." I nearly starved to death. I would walk uptown, nearly a mile, to get a cone of ice cream for a nickel so I wouldn't growl. Finally I went into the office of the college and said, "If I have to go to school like this, I'm gonna go home." And the fella said, "Now wait a minute Sparks." That's when he got me a job at the restaurant. So I moved back to the dormitory then.

PIEHLER: So did you move back in with Joe?

SPARKS: No, I didn't. Somebody had already moved in with him. I was down there about a month, oh probably, nearly two months, getting skinnier and skinnier. (Laughter) But college was great. I got to know all the kids at school working there and they used to come down at night. They would wait for me to make their milkshake 'cause I used to put in an extra scoop of ice cream in. I worked on what they called the fountain then. That year, you'd be interested to know what my income was, that year, no, two years, worked four hours a day, supposedly, from eight to twelve, but it was more like seven to one. I made \$4.00 a week, and a thirty-five cent meal a day. We were confined to thirty-five cent meals, which was pretty good. We had a meat, two vegetables, bread, dessert, and a beverage and all that for thirty-five cents. The most

expensive meal on our menu was a T-bone steak dinner, for seventy-five cents. Can you imagine that? You can't even buy a cup of coffee for that now. But anyway, I got to know the kids particularly at dances and things, you know. They'd all come down there after the dance. I never did go to them, because I didn't have the money to pay someone to work in my place.

PIEHLER: So you in many ways had a very limited social life, because every night you were working.

SPARKS: Yeah. Well, no I didn't date much, very little. A time or two I had a date. My social life consisted of being in contact with a good bit of the student body almost every night. I didn't have any particular girlfriend or, you know, dating or anything like that. I never did go to a dance those whole four years.

PIEHLER: Did your school have fraternities?

SPARKS: Yes. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: Did you join?

SPARKS: In fact I pledged Sigma Chi, but I didn't have the money to join. Joe was a Sigma Chi, and of course, Balfour paid for his initiation and his dues and everything else. But we had KA [Kappa Alpha] and Sigma Chi and so on Now one of our boys, our oldest boy went to [Lenoir] Rhyne College in Hickory, he later came to UT and got his master's and is a Sig Ep, Sigma Phi Epsilon. Now our grandson, who is a sophomore, is a Sigma Phi Epsilon over at UT. But I pledged, but I didn't have the money to even think about becoming a member. Yes, we had fraternities, and a football team. They don't have a football team now. Roanoke discontinued football during World War II, and they've concentrated on academics. Now they have intercollegiate basketball and lacrosse, and soccer, but no football. But I played and in fact got hurt my freshmen year playing football, got a knee hurt. The biggest man we had on our squad weighed 210 pounds. Most of them were about 160, 70, 80. I weighed about 165. We didn't have any of these bears that we have now on the teams. Yeah, I played end, right end.

PIEHLER: How many years did you play in school?

SPARKS: I couldn't play any more after that, [because of] my knee.

PIEHLER: Does your knee give you problems at all?

SPARKS: No, it doesn't now.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SPARKS: They got me connected up with an orthopedic man in Roanoke, and he looked at that knee. The cartilage and ligaments were all out of shape. He said, "Mr. Sparks if you'll bear with me I believe I can straighten that knee out without surgery." I said, "Boy, that'll be great." For weeks and weeks I rode the city bus three times a week on my crutches, I had to go on crutches,

over to his office, and this was in October. By the time I came home for Christmas for the Christmas holidays, my leg was almost straight. And it hasn't bothered me since. And I didn't have to have surgery on it. But they wouldn't let me play any more football. And I had played a little bit of basketball, I couldn't play that either, too much. And, of course, working at the restaurant, I couldn't. I used to play in the afternoon a lot of handball, you know, now they call it racquetball. We didn't have gloves [rackets], it was handball. Well, they still have that. But that was the extent of my collegiate athletics.

PIEHLER: What was your major?

SPARKS: Religion and philosophy and psychology ... that was my major and I had courses in bible study. They had a—talking about fraternities, they had another group called the clericus. And it was made up of young people who were studying for the ministry or who were active in there church. It was about like a fraternity. It wasn't secret or anything, but it was like a fraternity, in terms of friendships and activities together. But no I majored in philosophy and psychology. I taught over at UT for fourteen years, no twelve years, I'm sorry, not fourteen, in the school of religion from 1954 to 1966. That was chartered by the state legislature, separate from the university, but the students were allowed to take those courses, they received credit for them. We got no pay, we were carried as faculty members, we had all the privileges of faculty, and we used their building. But from the standpoint of separation of church and state, the Tennessee School of Religion was chartered separately, now that's all different now. That's completely different. But I taught over there for twelve years. As far as Roanoke College is concerned I really kind of got an all around experience by working and knowing all the students, I knew every one of them. 'Course we didn't have that many. Today there are 1800 students.

PIEHLER: How many was it in your day?

SPARKS: Well, I think there were about 500, maybe between 500 to 600. That was during the Depression and nobody had any money.

PIEHLER: You mentioned your first roommate, he had a good deal going, his parents were ...

SPARKS: Oh Joe, yeah.

PIEHLER: How many students were in his situation, and how many were in your situation?

SPARKS: Well, I'd say there were more in my situation than his.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SPARKS: Although, quite a few of the students there were local, they lived in either Roanoke or Salem. Many of them rode the city bus to school. And their tuition wasn't any [thing]. So it wasn't near anything like ours—what we would have to pay for room and board. One year I worked six hours a day at the restaurant and was in charge of getting ready for the evening meal. I would go in at five and sometimes before that and I didn't leave till after midnight. That year I made \$6.00 a week and my meals. Isn't that something, you don't even make that much an hour

now, I mean, you make more than that an hour now. Our grandson works out at—in high school, did Betty tell you this in her ...

PIEHLER: He works at Bi-Lo, doesn't he?

SPARKS: Krogers, in the pharmacy. He makes twice as much an hour as I made in a whole week.

PIEHLER: How much did you follow in college what was going on abroad, in Europe and Asia?

SPARKS: Yes, we did because Hitler had made his move. In fact, in 1939, when I took a course in European History, the professor said that we were going to write our own history book. Things were changing so rapidly between the countries in Europe. From one week to the next there were changes. And, he said, we were going to write our own history book and we did. I don't know where mine is, but it was a big thick thing by the time we got through the semester. And we were well aware of what was going—not all of what was going on. We didn't realize that the Holocaust was taking place, and so many other things. In fact, even at the time of Pearl Harbor, there wasn't much about that. Until we got into the midst of things, and we got our people in over there. So we were aware of the fact that there had been—there were at that point many changes taking place in Europe. The Chino[Sino]-Japanese War had taken place in the Orient. We of course had that information. Following what the Japanese were doing with their military might and so on. But we didn't realize it was as eminent as it was that we would be involved. In fact, I didn't realize that until I went to seminary later. I went to seminary in 1940. I graduated from seminary in 1943. In 1941, when Pearl Harbor occurred, we all came home from church, it was a Sunday, and we listened to Franklin Roosevelt's speech on the radio, while we were having Sunday noon meal. And everybody—you had such an intense appreciation of what we have in America and here something is disturbing it, and they're going to need people to defend it. We were all—the whole student body was ready to go down and enlist.

PIEHLER: And you were in the seminary ...

SPARKS: I was in seminary, this was in '40, '41. The president sensed what was happening and he called a meeting of our student body. And he said, "Gentlemen, I appreciate your patriotism, your loyalty to your country, and your appreciation for what you have, but I think you could serve your country better, if you complete seminary training,"—which would be '43, "and go as a chaplain." He said, "You can contribute much more that way than you can just being cannon fodder." So to speak.

PIEHLER: Did anyone from your seminary class decide to enlist anyway?

SPARKS: No, they didn't. We listened to his advice, and then the winter of '42—'43 a whole group of us decided that we would apply for commission to be chaplains. Five from my class did—we didn't have a big class, you didn't have big classes in seminary then. Now they have 100 or 150 in a class. We had to do certain things to prepare our application. We were given a subject to write a paper on, some on current events. We had to write a sermon and submit that. And then our last function was to meet in Raleigh, North Carolina with some of the officers of

the navy. Five of us went up there, and we walked in the room, and these guys had gold braids on their elbows—you talk about being scared. So they had told us to be prepared to speak for five minutes on a current event. They all went in and the fellow before me, Charlie Sheeley, who died last year, a real close friend—but he came out from his interview just laughing like heck, he said, “Boy, did I pull the wool over their eyes.” He said, “They told me to speak on something, I had never heard of and I spoke for five minutes on it.” I went in and they asked me to speak about some Italian Count I had never heard of either. I said, “I’m sorry gentlemen, I don’t know anything about that. I’m not prepared to speak.” They said that was okay. When the letters started coming, the other four got their letters that said, “We’re sorry to inform you...,” but my letter came and said, “We’re happy to inform you that...” And I was the only one that got in and became a chaplain. Charlie got so mad, he said, “Well, I talked for five minutes.” And I said, “Well that’s the problem, you talked about nothing and they recognized that.” He didn’t get in. But seminary—we could not be married, that’s different, much different. Course they’re all married now and have children. You could not have an automobile.

PIEHLER: Could you smoke?

SPARKS: Yeah, you could smoke.

PIEHLER: What about drinking?

SPARKS: No there wasn’t much of that. Now there is some beer and liquor. I love to have a scotch and water.

PIEHLER: The Lutheran tradition is not a dry tradition.

SPARKS: Oh no, not dry at all. Because Luther used to go around with his beer mug in hand.

CHAPA: Was this at William and Mary that you went to seminary?

SPARKS: Huh?

CHAPA: Was this at William and Mary where you went to seminary?

SPARKS: Where?

CHAPA: Did you go to William and Mary? Is that where the seminary school was at?

SPARKS: No, it was in Columbia, South Carolina.

CHAPA: What was it called?

SPARKS: Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary.

CHAPA: Okay.

SPARKS: Now, I was at chaplain school at William and Mary ...

CHAPA: Okay, that's what ...

SPARKS: At Williamsburg ... later ...

PIEHLER: What—I have a good friend that is an Episcopal priest, I think it is common to a lot of professions, it's not just unique to the ministry, but he sort of observed that you really learn how to be a minister, not in seminary, but you sort of have to do it ... to be it. How practical was seminary in teaching you to be a minister? Not so much the intellectual rigor, but the ...

SPARKS: In a lot of respects, you can't do it without it. Actually, in terms of say church history, we don't concentrate on that in our undergraduate degree much. Church doctrine, church traditions down through the centuries, church practices ... you know, actually those things, and also from the standpoint of speaking—we had to practice sermons in the chapel, during worship. The seniors talk a lot and the other groups talk once or twice a year. From that standpoint it was invaluable to go to the seminary. I wouldn't want to be ordained without having that background. At that time, it was three years, now it's four. You go two years, then you do an internship year with a parish or an institution, a hospital, whatever that may be, then you go back for your senior year, fourth year. So it's a four-year process now. But in those days, it was only three. Sometime later I'll tell you—we sort of had a hand in starting that internship here at St. John's, that's another story, that's later on in our parish ministry.

PIEHLER: So in other words that was not built into the curriculum at that time. In other words, there was no internship experience, you did things like sermons, but it was with the chapel class?

SPARKS: That was the closest you got, except relationships. Now we did clinical work with congregations there. I was assigned to St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Columbia. I helped with their ... I did their children's church every Sunday. They had an old church back here and the new church up here, and they had their young people, the children, come in this group and we had our regular service every Sunday. There were a lot of seminary widows you know, the girls that were trying to get a ministerial husband, from the local congregations. We used to have this girl named, Marguerite Cannon who had a 1935 Ford and she would come by and take us riding in the afternoon. (Laughter) The seminary training was quite valuable, for me at least it was. Because in college I had not had much of that sort of thing. Just like when I went to the navy, they teach you navy regulations and navy traditions and, you know, that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: Did you ever have any crises of faith, as you were studying say, philosophy or biblical criticism?

SPARKS: I don't recall that I've ever had any real earth-shaking things, I used to—when I came up to—in fact, I am still a navy chaplain. I was just released to inactive duty. When I came to inactive duty I used to wonder what I would do if I can't make it preaching, you know. (Laughter) But that wasn't a real crisis of faith. There are times when you deal with people, some individuals when, you know, it kind of shakes you down to your boots. It's difficult at times with people who have questions, who are questioning their own faith, their own stability,

their own depression, whatever it may be. It takes time to work through those things. I have found that what my daddy taught me, to be patient, to work with people. I developed the attitude that if I'm counseling with you, you are the most important person in the world everything else is wiped out, except just the two of us. In fact, I've had people say, "Well you act like you're listening to me." (Laughter) So I've never had a personal crisis, we've had times in our own family—Betty had a miscarriage at one time, between our two oldest boys and things of that nature, but that's not really a faith-shaking situation. But I never had any real crises where I doubted, if that's what you mean.

PIEHLER: In other words, this was really your calling.

SPARKS: Yes. I do—I feel that—I haven't been in a lot of different parishes, but wherever I've been, I have felt a real sense of call to that particular ministry. I went to school on the G.I. Bill, after I came out at George Washington University in the History Department, and other than that I've done some correspondence courses, and I've gone back for refresher courses, and that sort of thing. But I haven't gone back for any more formal education after I went to George Washington. But now I don't think—Betty and I have had a wonderful, we've had more fun, we've had a wonderful life, all over the world. We've been—I guess she told you, to Palestine and Europe and she was in England. I was all the way over in Borneo, different places—Philippines. But we've had a lot of funny experiences and we've had more fun, I think.

PIEHLER: What synod was your home church on?

SPARKS: My home church?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SPARKS: We are members of the Virginia Senate of the United Lutheran Church of America.

PIEHLER: And then the seminary, was it United...

SPARKS: Yes. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: What did that eventually evolve into? Was it the...

SPARKS: That evolved into—in 1962 there was a merger of the Augustinian Lutheran Church, the Suomi Center, which is a Finnish church, the ULCA became the Lutheran Church in America. In 1988, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America was formed with some free bodies like that. I was at the Constituting Convention for the one in '62 in Detroit, Decebel Hall. I was a delegate. So no, I haven't really encountered any doubts that I'm in the wrong place. Sometimes, I'll question my abilities. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: When you were in seminary, what was your notion of what life would be like as a pastor?

SPARKS: At seminary?

PIEHLER: Yeah. Did you want to have a rural church? An urban church? Did you expect to do much counseling? I'm just curious on your thoughts about the future of you as a pastor.

SPARKS: No, the curriculum was so inclusive of those things, we had courses in personal counseling, we had courses in different kinds of religious backgrounds, whether it be rural, or urban, or whatever it is, whether it be Hispanic or Black or what, you know. We had no problem with that. I think from the very beginning, I didn't have to develop—I had already developed a kind of empathy for all people that I'm associated with. I feel very deeply about their trials and their illnesses. We had last Sunday, at church, a couple that used to be members here at St. John's years ago, and I just walked in, because I haven't been—I'm retired you know, and their name was Crisp. She said, "You remember us, don't you Pastor Sparks?" I said, "Why sure I remember you." She said, "Well, you know, you baptized our daughter." And the current pastor said, "Well who haven't you baptized or married." No I think the curriculum was inclusive enough to include those elements of the ministry.

PIEHLER: When you started out in 1940, you didn't expect to be a military chaplain, or particularly a naval chaplain?

SPARKS: When I started the seminary?

PIEHLER: Yeah, in 1940.

SPARKS: Oh, no. I had no concept of a naval chaplain.

PIEHLER: How well did your seminary training—because you never had a home church before going to the Navy—how effective was your seminary training for the chaplain part of the Navy?

SPARKS: Well oddly enough it was very good, because Navy chaplains were permitted to use their own liturgy and their own orders of worship, from their denomination. And, of course counseling, that's what you did a great deal of—they used to kid that the chaplain had sympathy chips. If he wanted something to talk about he'd hand you a sympathy chip.

PIEHLER: I've been told by people in the military, that invariably an officer, if someone was really sort of discontented, they'd say go see the chaplain. That the chaplain was the convenient person in the chain of command that someone could come and vent.

SPARKS: I'm sorry, what?

PIEHLER: Could come and vent—vent frustrations.

SPARKS: No, the chaplain—you probably heard this too, the chaplain is on some ships as a recreation officer. He is in charge of government insurance, he is in charge of the library, he is in charge of securing musical instruments, kind of a jack-of-all-trades. Now those things I wasn't prepared for.

PIEHLER: I've also been told, on some ships, chaplains, when someone was coming aboard or leaving, you would have to do the inventory of his possessions.

SPARKS: No, doing inventory?

PIEHLER: Yeah. You didn't have to do that on your ...

SPARKS: No we didn't have to do that.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like you did a lot—handling a library...

SPARKS: Oh, yeah. We were hit with a bomb in the Philippines and came back—were sent back to Bremerton, Washington for repairs. And on the way in, the captain had a meeting with all the heads of the departments to put in our requisitions, while we were at port, you know, new radar and new this and new that. And I had to put in requisitions for musical instruments that I knew nothing about, course I did know about the library and that sort of thing. But we were between Pearl Harbor and the States and when we finished he said, "Gentlemen, is there anything else?" And I said, "Well, captain, why don't we have a ship party while we're in ... Bremerton, Washington?" He said, "Hell, chaplain we don't need a ship party." You know, he was one of those crusty old guys. Well we came in—that's when we were married, during that interim. And when we were about to leave, this is in November, we were leaving in February to go back out. About a week before we were to go out in Puget Sound and rearm and refuel, the captain's orders said he wanted to see me up in his cabin. I went in and he was up in his sea cabin, up in the bridge and I climbed up there and he said, "Chaplain, why don't we have a ship party while we're in." (Laughter) I had already learned that if you can plant the seed and not say anything about it will come about some of these days. So I said, "How much money is in the welfare fund?" We had small stores on the ship, you know, a gedunk stand which is ice cream, clothing. All the profits went into the ship's welfare fund. I don't remember what the figure was, but anyway he told me and I went over to Seattle and rented a nightclub—lock, stock and barrel. Band and everything. We had a real party. We did that after we were hit by a kamikaze, they decommissioned the ship and sent us back to Norfolk and we called the supply officer and myself and said, "We want to have a real good ..."

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Lemuel C. Sparks, Jr. on March 13, 2001 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

CHAPA: Viviana Chapa.

PIEHLER: And you were telling a story about the ship you were on, which ship was it?

SPARKS: The *U.S.S. Sangamon*.

PIEHLER: And you were hit by a kamikaze and you were at Norfolk harbor and the captain said he wanted to throw a party before the ship was decommissioned.

SPARKS: We had been hit at Okinawa on May 4, 1945, and it took us until June 4 to get back to Norfolk. Towards the end of the summer, when we were getting everything wound up, he said, “We want to have a good party.” So we went out to Virginia Beach and rented the Surf Club for the whole night. They had one band and we brought our navy band in from Philadelphia and it was formal. They had to go formal, with their dress blues and our dress whites, and the ladies had to have their evening gowns. We used a lot of WAVES, the women navy from Norfolk, we transported them out on a bus and we took our fellas on the ship out on ... another bus. That was one of the best functions that we had, really. And I’ve got some pictures of that. Betty even got a new evening gown out of that. But soon after that we decommissioned. We were all sent to our home districts, but the—we had some interesting experiences she probably related some of hers with the navy personal and the officers.

PIEHLER: Well, just backing up a little. You mentioned earlier about the tests, the sort on talk on any point for five minutes, and being interviewed by the Navy. When did you actual enroll in Chaplain School in William and Mary?

SPARKS: Well this was in the spring—we had not graduated from the seminary. We were still seminary students.

PIEHLER: When you were interviewed?

SPARKS: But we interviewed and made application for commission as chaplains. In fact, it was at that point that I found out I was colorblind. I never even knew I was colorblind. I’m not totally, but partially. And all those years that I worked at Belk’s Department Store, I messed up suits and ties, and all that stuff, and I often wondered what kind of outfits they got.

PIEHLER: You worked at Belk’s when you were in seminary?

SPARKS: Yes sir, in Columbia. Well, anyway this was all occurring towards the end of our senior year in ‘43.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

SPARKS: And those who had not been accepted were informed, and I was accepted and had been informed that I would be commissioned when given ecclesiastical endorsement, which meant by the national church, and when I was ordained. So I had correspondence back and forth, and the executive counsel of the United Lutheran Church of America, meeting in New York, approved me for ecclesiastical endorsement. Then Dr. Scherer, who was president of the Virginia synod, which we were a part of at that time—I have a letter from him informing me that I would be ordained on such and such a date. I spent the summer at home, most of it, that summer, ‘43, just getting ready and then I reported at William and Mary in September of 1943 for chaplain school. And that’s when we, during that interim of several months, that’s when we met, and became engaged. And she went to England and I went to the western Pacific. But at that point, even at the beginning of ‘43 ... I wasn’t—I hadn’t really thought through the whole thing. Although in ‘41 we had all wanted to volunteer, then, you know, after the war goes on for

a while and you hear all the things that are happening. Just like Betty, they told her, if she wanted to have a better place to serve—would be the navy rather than the army. We always had a place to sleep and food, but there wasn't any place to go if you got hit, you had to jump in the ocean. So the Navy then appealed to me, I had had an uncle who was in the Navy during World War I and had heard him talk about, you know, in stories. So I tended to be a Navy person, rather than Army, or Marine Corps. Course the Marine Corps is part of the navy department, it was always navy then. Now one of my classmates later became an army chaplain. The navy was much more strict from the standpoint of educational background and experience, than the Army. You could be an army chaplain without even having finished the seminary, if you had two or three years experience. Anybody could be a chaplain, but in the navy you couldn't do that until you finished seminary, get ecclesiastical endorsement from your national church body, was ordained, and ready to become a chaplain.

PIEHLER: So you couldn't be say ... you have to come from a religious tradition that has a very formalized ...

SPARKS: What the Navy?

PIEHLER: Yeah, in other words the seminary.

SPARKS: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: And you needed some sort of national synod approval.

SPARKS: Sure.

PIEHLER: Where it sounds like the army, you could be a itinerant Baptist preacher ...

SPARKS: That's right, if you had five years experience, that didn't hold as much weight, I guess, as being a seminary graduate. And having that kind of a background, they're both similar in a sense, I guess, but if you're just, as you say, an itinerant Baptist preacher, there are a lot of things that you miss, that you don't have grasp of and you don't have control over, if you do not go to the seminary. There's an awful lot of—you've got to get to the point sometimes where you make your own rules and regulations and your own interpretation of things, which can be okay, but can be otherwise too, sometimes.

PIEHLER: You reported in September of '43 to chaplain school.

SPARKS: Yes, I reported in September of '43.

PIEHLER: When did you actually have your ordination ceremony?

SPARKS: July 18, 1943 and ...

PIEHLER: Was that at your home church?

SPARKS: No, that was at a neighboring parish. My roommate was a member of that parish. We were ordained together—my seminary roommate. He was the only one that had a car when we were at seminary. He had it before we went ... and well we had a boarding club. Somebody was appointed to buy the food, and then we just divided up the cost among the seminarians, although the seminary employed the dietitians or the one who prepared the food. But he had a car—he had a 1937 Desoto. We went back and forth, we didn't have two cars, so we went back and forth during Christmas, or New Year, or Easter or whatever, and we did our traveling together. Then I officiated his wedding later. He's the one who became an army chaplain.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. Is he still alive?

SPARKS: No, no, he's dead. He was here at the Messiah Lutheran Church when I was at St. John's first from '54 to '66. Then he moved to Pulaski, Virginia. That's where he developed a malignancy about five years ago, but we're about the same age, I was a little bit older than him or he was. But he became an army chaplain and married a young lady from northern Virginia. I went over to her church and officiated the wedding. Even at the beginning of '43, that fall—I was still mulling this all over in my mind, about the navy chaplaincy. I don't mean '43, I mean '42, because we finished seminary school in '43.

PIEHLER: So you did think of the army?

SPARKS: I thought of it, but not very much. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Clean sheets and the regular meals, and the family background ...

SPARKS: That's right. Well you usually have pretty good food too, they told me that. We ran out one time—by the way, I'm getting ahead of my story.

PIEHLER: But did you running out, which I can't resist—how did you run out?

SPARKS: We ran out of food. I mean, we ran out of food period. We had two thousand men on board the ship.

PIEHLER: What did you do?

SPARKS: Well, they brought an old Australian scow alongside the next morning and unloaded, I think, all the mutton in Australia, on our ship. You couldn't stand the smell of that place after they started cooking that stuff. But ... about three or four days later, one of our American ships came along side and we just stood on the flight deck and drooled, crates of lettuce and crates of celery, and half sides of beef. We had a good place to live, although it wasn't after we got hit with the kamikaze, but otherwise, I have no complaints.

PIEHLER: What did you learn at chaplain school?

SPARKS: In chaplain school?

PIEHLER: And how long did it last?

SPARKS: It lasted until the end of that year.

PIEHLER: So basically you were there a full semester.

SPARKS: Yeah. We had navy regulations, navy traditions, naval correspondence, that's different too. All of it related to the military. You know, the date like this is the 13 of October. They say, 13 October, 001. They don't say October the thirteenth. They always put the date first. We drilled—we had to do the same kind of physical preparation that troops do. We lived at William and Mary, but we had an obstacle course there. We had classes in the morning. Well first we went to chapel about daylight, and they moved the bell into the dormitory, so that we could have a ship bell like they do on a ship. We would go to class in the morning, and then in the afternoon—after the noon meal, we would have to run the obstacle course. Trot at a pretty good pace, do the obstacle course, go out to one of the inlets and scrape paint off an old rusty whale boat. Then we had to go back in and do that obstacle course, back in before we had the evening meal. During the training, we had no classes at William and Mary, but we were sent to different places for training. I was sent to Bainbridge, Maryland one time for boot camp. Stood in an old boxcar, it was so full, we couldn't sit down, and we all stood up ... through Washington up into Maryland. For two weeks we were there. My next tour of duty, two weeks of training, was at Inova Hospital and that's when I met Betty.

PIEHLER: And what would you do in those two-week stints?

SPARKS: Well whatever the chaplain we were under ...

PIEHLER: So you were a chaplain's assistant?

SPARKS: Yeah. We were chaplains and we had our commission, and we wore our uniforms. But we were not in charge of anything. In fact, at Inova Hospital I would simply go in the morning and we would talk, and he would say we needed to do this today. So many hospital visits, or whatever it may be, maybe a lecture or two on something. But that was a part of that training. And it gave us an on-site experience—I had boot camp and also the Inova Hospital in Norfolk. Later I was sent to the Great Lake Naval Training Center, which was a boot camp training center, we had 125,000 men there. But that was essentially why they sent us out, for practical training, as well as book learning as they say.

PIEHLER: In seminary, you were a fellow Lutheran, future Lutheran pastors, and at Roanoke you had gone to a Lutheran college.

SPARKS: Yeah, Lutheran college.

PIEHLER: Now, you know, at chaplain school, you were meeting people from different denominations. For example, did you have any Jewish chaplains?

SPARKS: Yes.

PIEHLER: What was that relationship like?

SPARKS: We had a really good relationship. In fact, when Betty's group was at NOB... she had a Jewish—kind of Hebrew looking nose, (Laughter) the pastor said, "I haven't seen you in worship." She said, "Well, I'm Lutheran." And he said, "Oh, okay." But we had Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. And the Jewish people wore the scroll on the ... but the Catholics and Protestant chaplains wore the same thing, the crosses. I'll show you my uniform in a minute.

PIEHLER: But, for example, Catholic—I mean Lutheran and Catholic theology clash quite a bit. How did that all ...

SPARKS: Well we had—I went to ... Great Lakes and Great Lakes was divided into what they call camps. And each camp was a large building that had two chaplains, one Catholic and one Protestant. So we worked together. It also had a barbershop and a big swimming pool, and all that kind of thing. So we had close relationships. I had a very close friend who was a Roman Catholic, and Betty's roommate overseas was ...

PIEHLER: She had mentioned that.

SPARKS: But I relieved a chaplain on a ship—the side I was on. They alternated, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and so on.

(Tape Paused)

SPARKS: Chaplain Scott was the chaplain on the *Sangamon*, when I received orders to go abroad, and he would be relieved. Sometime before he left, a few weeks before he left the ship, he advised the congregation of men who were gathered there, it would be better not to go to church if you were a Catholic, to a Protestant Church, than to go. We had one—he was a great big fella, reminded me of one of those Pennsylvania football players, and he showed up the first Sunday I was at church on board. And he came to me and said, "You know, I didn't really appreciate what Chaplain Scott said to me, I need a chaplain, whether he's here, whether it's Lutheran, or Baptist, I don't care what's here, I need a chaplain. The denomination doesn't matter." So from then on we became real close friends. He was there every Sunday. He didn't miss a Sunday. But that was a little bit out of step for chaplains. We were not supposed to say that kind of thing.

PIEHLER: So you were really, in a sense, you were encouraged to be very, in the modern term, very ecumenical in the thinking.

SPARKS: Oh, yes. Well, we were joined with the Episcopal Church in the Eucharist, communion, and interchange of clergy, and that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: But in your era of the 30s and 40s that was unusual I guess.

SPARKS: Oh, very unusual.

PIEHLER: I mean the Lutheran Church was all divided between ... ethnic churches.

SPARKS: They were mostly ethnic, Swedes, Finns, Germans, French Huguenots, and so on. Before World War II, they were sort of ingrown so to speak or segregated among themselves, but after that, some years after that, say in the late 60s, we began and the Episcopal Church, we began, interchange holy communion, not change pulpits, particularly but we—if I helped with a communion, the Episcopal Church would be the officiating minister. If we were having communion together in a Lutheran Church, I would be the officiating clergyman, but we did it together. There's much more of an ecumenical attitude now than there was even twenty years ago, even ten years ago. We've also been working closer with the United Church of Christ, and several—in addition to the Episcopal Church. I, you now, I've never been much of a denominational ... I'm Lutheran, and I'm proud, I appreciate that. But I think that Episcopal or Baptist or Methodist or Presbyterian have as much right to do what they believe as they do, as long as they stick to the scripture, you know. So I don't make any distinctions, really.

PIEHLER: I've read where chaplains, one of their missions is to serve the spiritual needs of all people, but everyone's not going to be Lutheran. In fact, you have Jewish servicemen and women, what kind of training did they teach you? I think it would be very different from seminary, how are you suppose to meet the spiritual needs of all the people?

SPARKS: I guess, just naturally.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Were there any specific dos and don'ts?

SPARKS: No. But I have to relate to you, at Great Lakes, about four boys came one Sunday—I had about 5,000 men at church in three separate services on Sunday morning, and these fellas came and professed Christianity, they were from down in Kentucky and they said, "We want to be immersed." And I said, "That's fine. We recognize that." We did immerse, as well as sprinkle or pour or whatever it is—the man in water is not the important thing in a baptism, it's the water connected with the words. They said, "We want to be immersed." So I told them to meet me out by the swimming pool. We went out to the swimming pool and I baptized all four of them, and we were instructed in chaplain school that when we performed an official act like that, to inform their home church. And the home church is supposed to, you know, if they had any kind of sense of responsibility, they would accept that. But these guys were members of a little Baptist church down in Kentucky somewhere, I don't even remember where it was. But boy, I could feel that letter sizzling coming back from that preacher. (Laughter) He let me know, in no uncertain terms, to let his boys alone that I wasn't supposed to do anything to them. I said, "Well you haven't done anything for them either." (Laughter) And I called them in and said, "Listen," I showed them the letter and said, "This is what your minister wrote back to me." And they said, "Well, if he's that kind of a guy, we don't want to be a member of his church."

Well, we've had the—but as far as identification, the dog tags have on them just Protestant or Catholic or Jewish, they don't have denominations at all. See these are my dog tags. Well, where are they? Here they are. (showing dog tags) But that's the dog tag. See it just has a P on there. It also has your blood type, I'm type B. One of the doctors said, "Chaplain, you better not

get hit, because we don't have any of that kind of blood around." There was no real identification of denomination, for instance, on ship it was Protestant or Catholic or Jewish. And one of my real close friends, who's dead too, was a flight deck officer from Milwaukee. He was Catholic and we got to be real close friends. And then each week, during the week sometimes, the Catholic boys would meet if they wanted to meet with him and they would have prayers together, but they didn't have communion or anything.

PIEHLER: Well Catholic theology is very strict about the priests.

SPARKS: Yeah. They—oh yeah, their pretty strict about it. We had a fellow who was hit with shrapnel, we were under a strafing attack in the Philippines, and there is the carrier flight deck and then down under here is the ... and then this next deck down is where my office was, and you come off of that and there is a hatch that comes down each side, and you could go down. This fellow had left the bow of the ship and was going down the ladder, and shrapnel ricocheted and hit him in the back and killed him. They called me up there and I started giving him his last rites, and I had a book. And someone said, "Why chaplain, can you do that?" And I said, "Why sure, why couldn't I do that, what the Pope don't know won't hurt him." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But you were using a manual and it was the last rights according to the Catholic Church.

SPARKS: Yeah, I used the Catholic Church last rites. Uh huh. And if there was a request like that, of course, you could do that, and I was free to do that. We didn't try to make any big deal out of separations of groups. Now, on the ship there was enough of that with the different gunnery departments, and with the communications department and all that—ship store. (Laughter) The aviation—we had a squadron of F-6 Hellcat fighters and Grumman Avenger torpedo bombers. So ...

PIEHLER: You mentioned your wife's run in with the rabbi at the hospital. What about the Jewish navy people on your ship? How would their needs be taken care of? Did any come to your services?

SPARKS: Yeah. We didn't have as many Jewish chaplains as we did Protestant or Roman Catholic. Most of them would go to whatever was available, whether it be Catholic or Protestant. They didn't participate in the whole thing, and often times they would meet themselves without the formal leadership of a chaplain. My assistant—we all had an assistants, my assistant was a Mormon, Ernie Cook from Salt Lake City, a real fine young fella. You know, they have to do two years of missionary work. He had done his missionary work in Boston, up near, above you. (Talking to Piehler) But ... he was very fine, and there were two Mormons on board and they met every Thursday night, together just the two of them. I guess they had their own prayer book and things, you know. Now you ministered to all men who were on board. I didn't do it as a Lutheran, I did it as a spiritual representative.

PIEHLER: Did you ever lead a Jewish service, because I know some of the Jewish servicemen I've interviewed have remembered Protestant and Catholic chaplains even reading in Hebrew. Did you ever do any Jewish services as chaplain?

SPARKS: No, I've helped here in Knoxville, over at the Temple of Beth El.

PIEHLER: But never in the Navy?

SPARKS: No.

(Tape Pasued)

PIEHLER: Let me let Viviana get a chance to ...

CHAPA: Is that back on?

PIEHLER: Yeah, it's back on.

SPARKS: Speak up so I can hear you.

CHAPA: Okay. How often did men usually come to you with their worries and fears about being in war or were like—when they were going into battle or when you guys were on ship?

SPARKS: How often would they come to see the chaplain?

CHAPA: Yeah.

SPARKS: Well, some were there everyday.

CHAPA: Really?

SPARKS: ... but not the same ones. It depends on what was happening, how involved they were. Some of them were gunners on the 40mm gun mounts. Some of them were on the 20mm gun mounts—5 inch 38 gun mounts. We had a squadron of fighter planes, a squadron of bombers, sometimes it would be a zoomie, as we called them—pilot. Somebody in the air department, the flight deck crew is air group—I mean, they were part of the air ... you know, naval air group. The hangar deck, too, down below ... the hanger deck. So they were all—but we were all pretty well integrated as far as relationships, we had our meals together, we trained together, if we needed training and all that sort of thing. I can show you—that's where we were hit. I thought I had maybe a picture of some of the (Showing picture) That's a beautiful picture of two—that's how we looked after we were hit. These elevators weighed thirty tons each and they were blown up and came down. So it's ... Fred Brown still had some of my stuff, you know. He did that article.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

SPARKS: And I have a book on kamikazes and ... full pictures of my ship in that book. And I'm in a couple of them so ... the books only been published about ten years ago—the *Kamikaze Corp*—the *Japanese Kamikaze Corp*. So they would come different times, and of course, some

of it would depend on what they heard from home. If somebody was critically ill or whatever it may be. We had a relationship with their families, and if there were deaths or casualties we communicated with their families. Often times we had inquiries from wives, parents ... you know, about whoever the person was, where they were. Well we couldn't say where we were, nobody knew where we were. Betty and I used to write each other every day. When we were on this Okinawa journey, they couldn't pick up mail every day when you're at sea. One day the postman in her home in Harrisburg, said, "Is there a Betty Sparks, here." And she said, "Yes." And he said, "I have ninety letters out here for you." It had been that long since she had gotten any of them. Course I would get a bunch, we probably got them a little faster, all they had to do was fly over and drop the mailbags on the flight deck, where they couldn't land and pick up the mail. But with families and relatives and, you know—and later I officiated baptisms, weddings, not on board the ship, but in the navy.

I started a newspaper on the ship called the *Sangamon News*. (Laughter) I got a letter from a fella in Boulder, Colorado just about a month ago that I didn't even know was living. He has started a present-day *Sangamon News*, trying to keep up with people. The paper that I did was a little four-page paper. Ernie Cook and I did it, and we had it in the mess hall when the boys came in for breakfast, and they just loved it. We had all kinds of stuff about the war, in the Pacific and in Europe and everywhere. But the morning after we were hit, we had a burial at sea and I had written a thing in that. And he had made a copy—he had a copy of that and made a copy of it and it's fifty-five years old, it's so yellow and you can hardly tell. I can read it, because I know what it says. But he started that over again. (Laughter) But there are still some around. I had a call from a fellow in New Jersey, just within the last three months, and a call from Northern Wisconsin, Colorado, everywhere. There are kind of creeping out of the walls now, what's left. But we dealt not only with personal problems, but sometimes it was financial, sometimes it was a love affair, or whatever it may be or with their relatives. So we dealt ... with all those kinds of things.

CHAPA: When I was skimming through this book a few weeks ago I noticed you guys were putting on a show.

SPARKS: What?

CHAPA: You guys were putting on a show in one of these pictures. How often did you guys have recreation time to just goof around?

SPARKS: Huh?

CHAPA: When I was skimming through the book ...

SPARKS: Oh, uh huh.

CHAPA: You had a picture in here of the men putting on a show.

SPARKS: A show?

CHAPA: Yeah, remember. I think it was when you guys were crossing the ...

SPARKS: Oh, there was a picture in there of the burial at sea. Is that what you are talking about?

CHAPA: No, there was one about the hoola girl that you were talking about.

SPARKS: Well, another thing the chaplain was is the movie officer, and you were in charge of taking care and securing movies and that sort of thing. The ship's company had a tradition of grading the chaplain by what kinds of movies they got. (Laughter) And they did. We had a—our captain had a beautiful gig, about twenty feet long, fast and so I developed a habit and had the seamen trained so that when we went into an atoll somewhere, where there was a movie exchange, they'd get that gig down as we were going in, they lower it, just above the water, and before we ever anchored, we'd get in that and they'd let us in the water and we'd take off. I was usually about one of the first ones there. That's initiation into the—when you crossed the equator, the Shellback Initiation. But we usually had pretty good movies but, none of them were real good in those days. But we had movies on the hangar deck. And the protocol, you know—we had an Admiral Staff, Admiral Tommy Sprague, we were the flagship for our carrier division, and the protocol for anything like that is the Admiral and his staff, the captain and his staff, and then the heads of the departments and their staff and on back until you get to the peons back here, you know. (Laughter) But that's the way they saw the movies.

Turn back some more of those pages there. That (picture showing the *USS Sangamon*) was the only communication we had after we were hit by the kamikaze, see how the elevators are blown up there. And one of the most gruesome jobs I've ever had was the morning after we were hit, the ship had burned most all night, until they got it all extinguished, but along the flight decks up here, where the guns were, they had what they called ready service rooms, where they kept the ammunition back under the flight deck, there were rooms up there. And some of the men got trapped up there and were burned. We had to kind of go through all that rubble to see what we could find, we found just torsos of some of them ... we didn't find anything but the dog tags. Some of them other parts. That was one of the hardest jobs I think I've ever had to do. And then we had the burial at sea, they placed them in canvas caissons—burial at sea. The navy regulations say that you need twenty-eight to thirty pounds of weight that will take them down from the top of the ocean. Not all the way down, but just down underwater where they wouldn't be subject to mutilation or anything. We buried about forty the next day. So it was gruesome—to me it was a rewarding experience to be able to help. The only time I ever saw the captain cry. Captain stood at the burial service and just cried like a baby. And, of course, we all did just about because here these fellas are, one minute they're with you, the next minute they're not with you. Here you are putting them to rest in the ocean. But another interesting thing you might put on here, is the fact that in the old sailing days, before there were medical doctors on board, the last stitch in that canvas caisson is taken through the nose, they had discovered somewhere along the way, that if there is any kind of life left in that person, that there would be a reaction, some sort of response to that. But it's hard to describe the devastation that takes place in war. You just can't describe it unless you are there.

Oh, talking about recreation, I brought a hula troupe on board in Honolulu one time. And this lady right here (showing picture) boy could she hula. She really could. And, you know, we transferred people by breeches buoy between ships and that sort of thing. There was no, at that point, there was no admiral, no seaman, no distinction, no commander, or anything else. They were all members—here. Here it is. See that's me standing there with my service book and we buried about forty men in those caissons that day. But there was no distinction, you ministered to the seaman same as you did to the admiral, or the captain of the ship, or one of the heads of the department. That's really one thing I liked about the chaplain's corps, you were kind of all things to all people.

PIEHLER: Because the Navy is very hierarchical, you eluded to the seating at the theatre.

SPARKS: Yeah. Oh yeah, and where they seated for movies?

PIEHLER: Yeah, so you talked about the different ...

SPARKS: Oh yeah, and that goes anywhere. Even if you were at a graduation, the admiral and his staff was front, and then the captain or whoever it is or wherever you are. Now, I don't know where they would sit at a football game, they play all their football games in Philadelphia, the Army and Navy and ... they still have some seating arrangements there too, but not as strict as it would be say, on a ship, if you are going to have a movie. 0800 tonight, a movie will be shown on the hangar deck, and you'd get ready for that, and you'd get your chairs set up, and they all know where to go. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You were first—after finishing chaplain school, you went to Great Lakes first, how long were you at Great Lakes for?

SPARKS: I was at Great Lakes from January 1 to the 7 of May.

PIEHLER: And ... how did being on a land facility differ from being aboard the ship as a chaplain?

SPARKS: Well, it's considerably different, although you have the same kind of laundry. When you check out, you got to go to the laundry, then you have to go to the ship store, and you have to check out, as you do on board ship. But on board ship, you're a closer-knit kind of a unit. You finally just mesh together. At Great Lakes, there were five camps there and then the main part of the camp was on up from Chicago on Lake Michigan. Actually, I lived in Lake Bluff, with another chaplain who was married, and had his family there. I wasn't married then. And another Lutheran chaplain, and I roomed with him, but we would go our separate ways during the day. I would be off and immerse someone in the swimming pool, or listen to someone complain, or go in and laugh at the barbers. They used to see who could cut hair off the quickest. They had raffles, you'd put your money over here and then march through the rows and get all the men seated and they'd say go. And those guys would start with their razors and go this way and that way. I think the fastest, was a little bit over a minute, for a haircut. (Laughter) But the fact that you're on board ship, you eat together, you pray together, you work together, and you share each other's problems, where as on a base, you don't always do that.

I bought an old 1936 Chevrolet, and named it Oscar. I would drive into the base, and go into my ... we had camps with main buildings, which had all these things in it. So I'd just go in there. And every Sunday morning, you may not have ever heard about this, but Great Lakes Naval Training Center had a choir that broadcast every Sunday morning, nationally. These guys were real musicians, they were brought in to be the Great Lakes Choir. After the broadcast, this choir, of about 150 men would go in different directions. I would get about thirty men in my camp, somebody else would get about thirty men. We had beautiful music. They would provide the music for the church service. And we gave away New Testaments, the American Bible Society, I guess it was, would ship us New Testaments by the crate, these fellas going overseas, figured maybe they better take one with them. But all those things were part of the whole scenario of the chaplaincy. But when you ask a question like that, you are a closer-knit unit if you are assigned to ship rather than a base, and I suppose that's true with the Army too, although there are ...

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

PIEHLER: You mentioned you never got seasick.

SPARKS: No, I never did get seasick. When I arrived in San Francisco, from Great Lakes, there were five officers who had arrived at the same time and were reported in. They had an old BOQ, Bachelor's Officer's Quarters, but it was full, and they said, "Well, you fellas go up to St. Francis, and live there until we call you." So we went up there and lived three weeks. (Laughter) All we had to do was report in every other day. But we did get our little pink slip, "Report to pier so and so... at 0-1200." We were put on an aircraft carrier that was ferrying planes it was loaded—flight deck and everything was loaded with planes to Honolulu. I was in a compartment that was about water level. In San Francisco, the day we left, the chief petty officer said, "Chaplain, have you ever been to sea?" I said, "No, sir." And he said, "Let me tell you what you do. When you get on there, you go down and stow your gear where it's going to be, and go topside immediately, and stay up there in the fresh air." Well, I went up there, and there happened to be a medical doctor up there, and we became acquainted, and he said, "You go up there and stay there till they signal for chow down. Go down to the mess hall, eat your meal, and go back topside, immediately. When you're ready to turn in you go down at ten or whatever it is" ten thirty. See we didn't have anything to do with running the ship, we were just getting transported. [He said], "And ... get in your bunk, get a good night's sleep, and get up in the morning and immediately go topside. Eat all you can eat when you go for your meals. I'll guarantee you, you won't have too much of a problem." And I never did. With the salt air, I was starved to death, and I would go down to eat a big meal. He had binoculars, and we watched the seagulls following the ship. We'd stay up there under a plane's wing, in the breeze, we didn't have anything else to do. We had no duties aboard this ship. But I never did. I got a little whoosie one day, but it didn't last long. We had a dentist on there that didn't have any summer uniforms with him, the light ones, he was wearing one of these ... hot as Hades. He got sick and stayed in the bunk all the way to Pearl Harbor, he was sick the whole way over there. But I always kind of appreciated the chief petty officer who had given me some instructions, not that it works for everybody, I guess, but it did for me.

We rode out a typhoon in the Philippines. And before October 20, 1944, which was D-Day at the Philippines, we were in that, and there was a hurricane. We rode out a storm over to the Spice Islands over towards Borneo. But the worst storm we ever got into was after we got hit and we were sent back to the station and spent the night on the other side of the canal, Panama Canal. Then we spent the next night on the other side in Colon. And as soon as we left the next morning, we got into a hurricane. The whole flight deck would go underwater and just stand there and shimmy. And even with that, I didn't even get nauseated. (Laughter) We picked up a group of flyers, about 250 flyers, who had flown to Panama earlier. They were being sent back. They put them on the hangar deck on cots, when we got out in that storm, you have never seen such a deck. Every one of those guys got deathly ill. I never did really get seasick.

PIEHLER: When did you meet the *Sangamon*?

SPARKS: At Eniwetok.

PIEHLER: Eniwetok.

SPARKS: Mm hmm. I was on—I have orders here for about a half a dozen different ships that I was on before I got out of Pearl Harbor.

PIEHLER: So it took you a while to get to the *Sangamon*.

SPARKS: Yeah, I didn't get on board until August 12.

PIEHLER: And when did ...

SPARKS: I left May 7.

PIEHLER: So you were in transit from May to August.

SPARKS: They put me on one old banana boat, and they never did get it started. So we had to get off of that after a couple days. It was that kind of thing. But we finally got out, they sent us on another carrier, a small Jeep carrier, they used them to ferry planes. We arrived at Eniwetok and when we arrived the atoll was under alert. Japanese planes were in the air somewhere. The ship we were on never did stop. It slowed down, out in the middle of nowhere, the fantail of the Jeep carrier was probably six feet higher than the tug that came alongside, and they just threw our gear over on the tug and we jumped. That's the longest jump I've ever done. We jumped from the fantail of that ship onto the tug. And then the tug simply took us around and deposited us wherever some ship would take us. Then it was about a week before the *Sangamon* came in there and I was able to go aboard. During that interim, I got to see Bob Hope and his troupe on shore. (Laughter) It was an interesting two or three months there till I got on board the *Sangamon*. And I walked on board, this fella said, "Sparks, where have you been? We've been looking for you all summer." It was a college mate of mine from Roanoke College, kind of a small world.

PIEHLER: I get the sense that the chaplain is sort of both an insider and an outsider, because you are an officer, and you are subject to the ship's captain. On the other hand, you are actively encouraged to fraternize with the enlisted ranks.

SPARKS: Oh, absolutely.

PIEHLER: Which is unique for the officer corps, particularly in the Navy.

SPARKS: Yeah, that's right.

PIEHLER: And sailors would often tell me about officers ...

SPARKS: Well, a while ago, I mentioned that there was no distinction, and there wasn't. We would do something for our seamen third class, the same as we would for an admiral. And they respected that. The officers did, but we dealt with the entire ship's company, not just one class of personnel. We were responsible, we had church services for them, the library was open. The warrant officers had the best duty in the Navy. (Laughter) They were between the officers and the enlisted men. The supply officer got the best food. And even though I ate in the officers ward room—every once in a while we took on new food on board, and got new beef, and that sort of thing, he'd stick his head in my office and say, "Chaplain, come on down tonight." I knew we were going to have steak, and gravy, and biscuits. We had this old boy on there about 6'6 from Texas. He was a meat cutter, and he would cook those steaks and make steak gravy and biscuits in the bakery, and we'd just have a real feast. That's what you call breaking over from one—I was the only officer that could do that.

PIEHLER: 'Cause the other officers—you ...

SPARKS: No. No. They wouldn't do that. I just used that to illustrate that you're sort of an umbrella in a sense, over everybody you know, from the standpoint of the spiritual life and the activities aboard the ship. But it was an interesting experience.

PIEHLER: Who would write your fitness report as chaplain?

SPARKS: Sir?

PIEHLER: Who would write your fitness report? Who would you report to ...

SPARKS: The captain.

PIEHLER: The captain would write a fitness report?

SPARKS: Well, actually, the executive officer would write it, and the captain would review it and either approve or not approve it. But fortunately I always got good fitness reports. I didn't have anyone over me, except the captain. One time, after we were hit, the gunnery officer was kind of a low-down, scallywag. (Laughter) He used to have the boys doing things on holiday routines days, when they're not supposed to be doing anything. We had a holiday routine, one

Sunday after we were hit, and we set up our altar in the mess hall to have church. We couldn't get on the flight deck, it was torn up. So the gunnery officer had assigned these men to start chipping paint, in a compartment next to it. If they are chipping paint, you can't hear anything for a mile, except that. I just went up to the captain and said, "Captain, I'm sorry. We're on holiday routine, the men are supposed to be off from their duties, except unless they have duty, for four hours, but here we have men chipping paint in a compartment next to where we are having church, and I couldn't have church." He picked up his phone and called the gunnery officer up there and just chewed him out all over the place. (Laughter) So you see, I had access to every rate and every rank.

PIEHLER: Because, on a large ship, access to the captain was a hard thing, I mean, for junior officers. I mean, you're—if you were head of the section, it would be easy, but not if you were a junior officer. I've asked junior officers, and the captain was a very remote figure on a large ship.

SPARKS: That's right. That and most everybody was afraid of him. (Laughter) I wasn't afraid of him, and we got along real well. I could plant the ideas and he would carry them out about two months later.

PIEHLER: What was his background, your captain? What was his name?

SPARKS: I don't know. He was an Annapolis graduate, but I don't know what his background was really.

PIEHLER: Among the officers, what was the percentage between Annapolis and Navy Reserve? Do you remember?

SPARKS: That again, I don't know. I'd have to guess, probably, twenty percent Annapolis and eighty percent reserve.

PIEHLER: And what was the relationship between the two?

SPARKS: Well, that's pretty good. The head of the air corps was an Annapolis—the head of the engineering department... not all the heads, but many of them were Annapolis graduates. But then you get down to your next rank, like lieutenant commander, a bunch of them that were Annapolis graduates. But when you're at war, there is not much distinction between your background. It didn't make any difference to the enemy whether they were shooting at Annapolis graduates or some peon from East Tennessee. So you supported each other. The officers were very solicitous of the care of our enlisted men. And of course, most of the enlisted men were reserves, but a lot of the officers were Annapolis graduates. I go to rehab with an Annapolis graduate out here at ... I call him the admiral. He graduated from Annapolis and is retired, but lives here in Knoxville. I go to cardiac rehab with him, and he calls every once in awhile. There is another fella that calls me rabbi. Well, as Luther said, "I've learned to put the most charitable construction on all your actions." Talking about your fellow man, and instead of looking for weaknesses, look for strength. And instead of being a sour puss, I've always enjoyed a good sense of humor, and we've had fun. That's a part of the whole picture of life, I think.

PIEHLER: What about the stewards aboard ship, did you have stewards?

SPARKS: Yes, we did. We probably had, I don't remember, about twenty-five. There was not much distinction with them either. They did other things. After we were hit in Okinawa, they put abandon ship lines over the side, you know, those big lines with knots on them that you could go down and escape. We thought we were going to have to abandon ship, it was burning so all over. Well, we didn't. Anyway, some of those stewards decided they were going to abandon ship anyway, and about three or four of them went down these lines on the side. I happened to be up there, when they came back up. One of them said, "That ain't no place for me down there, there ain't nothin' down there but sharks." The sharks were all over the place. But there was no difference on treatment of them. At that point, there was more emphasis on segregation, than there was later, of course, but that's another difference between being on a ship and being on a base. When you're on base, you have a tendency to—birds of a feather, flock together, you stick with your group. But when you're on a ship, you're with everybody. I know that there are some pictures of birthday cakes or anniversary landings, somebody made their 500th landing on the carrier, and they had a big cake for them. Their quarters weren't interdispersed, but they were in the same area as where we lived. I have never had much problem with that, I don't know whether you saw the thing in the newspaper about how Jim Crow didn't bother this lady in Newport.

PIEHLER: Yes, I did see that.

SPARKS: Did you clip it out?

PIEHLER: No. But I did see it.

SPARKS: Well, I knew that lady. When we lived in Newport. We went to school together. But her daddy, a man by the name of Rice, was one of the most respected businessmen in Newport, in the [19]20s and 30s. He was pretty well off. I didn't hear anything about segregation until I left home. And so I never did really grow up with that kind of attitude. It was not instilled in me. Being from East Tennessee, we didn't really advocate slavery. So I had no real problems with that, and we don't now. We have black people in our church that come regularly on Sunday. In fact, until I got up to Roanoke and Joe Maury asked who had won the Civil War, I hadn't really thought much about it. Anyway, we didn't grow up with that kind of segregation. I remember when the Supreme Court first handed down its decision about segregation, I was at St. John's, and there was an activist in Knoxville, that just tried to overcome everybody with integration. One Sunday, we were getting ready for church. And about six people from Knoxville College came in and this fella and we had a Lutheran minister who lived and taught over there. I guess this fella thought he couldn't get in. I shook hands with him, and the only seat we had left was in the front row, and I said, "Ted, take these folks up, and get them seated, get them a bulletin, and a hymnal and so on." That's the last time they were ever there. I tried to inquire about them, [but as it turns out], he was just going to different places forcing something that shouldn't have to be forced. So we never really had any problem with that at church or anywhere else. [It is an] interesting thing to watch the development of these kinds of attitudes, backgrounds, histories, and so on. We had a program in Knoxville, when TV first came, on

Channel 10 they had a program on Saturday afternoons called, “A Pastor’s Study.” Dr. Joseph Copeland, who was president of Maryville College, Dr. [W.T.] Crutcher, and Tom Mattingly from the First Christian, and myself did the program for about six years. The people would call in questions—that’s what it was a question and answer program, for people to call in questions about the Bible, or about Christian life, or about life itself. And Dr. Krutcher was on that, and he was the black minister from Ebenezer Church. He was just the finest kind of a man. And Betty grew up in Pennsylvania were there was no demarcation. We’ve never really had any problem with that, our children haven’t either. So I’m grateful to say, I have no animosity against anybody.

PIEHLER: Did you have a Marine contingent aboard?

SPARKS: No, we didn’t, although, we did minister to the Marines. The very large ships, like the *Wasp* and the *Hornet*, the *New Jersey* battleship, not all, but some of them had Marine contingents. They were part of the Navy and we ministered when we needed to just like anybody else. So but, they used to laugh in World War II, the chaplains, who were not the strongest kinds of people, were sent to Port Hueneme, in California, which was the dropping off place for the Marine Corps. And they would be assigned to the Marines. They had all kinds of classifications like that. They used to say, one of the choice duties for a chaplain was an aircraft carrier. And I guess it was.

PIEHLER: What navy assignment did a navy chaplain not want to get?

SPARKS: Port Hueneme was one. Any of the fighting ships outside of the air corps were bad. A battlewagon was good duty, a heavy cruiser. In fact, after I served on the *Sangamon*, I was on a brand new heavy cruiser, the *USS Fall River*. It was a beautiful ship, that’s the best duty I had, I guess.

PIEHLER: When did you go on the *Fall River*?

SPARKS: I went on the *Fall River* when we decommissioned the carrier. We were in Norfolk for a couple of months, counting everything. We were going to decommission in October, I guess it was. I was in the Chaplain’s Office over on the Navy base, the day before we decommissioned. The chaplain there said, “By the way, I believe you’re getting orders to go on another ship.” I said, “Another ship, not if I can help it.” So I kind of held my breath. They hadn’t arrived in Norfolk and we decommissioned our ship. Betty and I left Norfolk. I had bought a 1934 Victorian coup from one of the boys who lived in California. We left Norfolk, with everything we owned in the backseat. We took off to Pennsylvania to her home, and then came down to my home, and then we went to New Orleans, which was my Naval District Headquarters. Well, I walked in down there and the chief petty officer said, “Chaplain, I believe there are orders in here for you.” Sure enough, they had arrived in Norfolk, the day after we left. But they sent them back to Washington and were reissued and sent to New Orleans. So we drove back to Norfolk and went on board the ship. I asked the chief if we could have a few days [in New Orleans]. So he arranged it. We had never been to New Orleans before. So we spent nearly a week there and had a great time. The war had ended by then. But we drove back to Norfolk, and I went aboard the heavy cruiser. And that was a good duty. We would leave on

Monday morning, go out into the Atlantic, and they would target shoot their guns, and they would test new radars. We just gaggled around until about Thursday and then we would come back to Norfolk for the weekend.

PIEHLER: When you were on board the *Sangamon*, you were out to sea for months.

SPARKS: Oh, yeah. I was on that carrier from the twelfth of August till a year after that October. So I was on it about fourteen months. And we were hit by the bomb, and we were with a bunch of Japanese submarines, which went down, a whole gamut of things. So you're all over. But with this duty, we didn't have much to do, to be honest about it. The ship had just been commissioned, had gone on a shakedown. We had to go to Guantanamo Bay for a shakedown then come back if we needed any adjustments or repairs. So we had done that. I went aboard and Betty stayed in Norfolk. I would come in about Thursday, and I didn't have duty again until Monday. So I guess that kind of made up for the kamikaze hit.

PIEHLER: Of the crew on base, on the aircraft carrier, and on the heavy cruiser, what percentage went to services?

SPARKS: Well, when I was chaplain at Great Lakes, they marched them to church.

PIEHLER: So they had no choice, they were marched.

SPARKS: Yeah, I had about 5,000 every Sunday morning, at three different services. But since then, they don't do that. But when you're at sea, about half the ship's company is on duty, and the other half might be sleeping from being on duty all night, so it depends. We were set up either on the hangar deck or in the mess hall. We had portable altars, and a beautiful portable organ. I had a Missouri Lutheran medical doctor, who was my organist on board the carrier. But I don't know, course it was free will, they didn't have to go, but the place was usually pretty full. I don't know whether it would be as high as twenty or thirty percent, because there wasn't that many available, probably about ten percent. We had about 2,000 men, so about ten percent, sometimes more, sometimes less, but on an average. Now, if you had it on the hangar deck, you might have more. Sometimes we did things on the flight deck. I had a burial at sea from the flight deck. That was a real experience, to slide a casing from the flight deck, that's a real plop when that thing hits the water.

Course we always mustered for quarters on the flight deck, in some of the pictures, you saw some of the groups gathered. I always felt a little peculiar, because I didn't have a department. But I was a head of a department. When I reported, I'd always say, "Reporting my presence aboard, sir," to the captain. I always thought that was so asinine, to say, "here I am standing, reporting my presence." The heads, say the gunnery department, would always report how many men, so many on the gun mounts, and so on. But all I had to report was that I was still there. With that, I could move from one group to another, maybe from the gunnery department, to the navigation department, to the air department. The chaplain had more freedom to do things and be places than anybody else, except for the medical doctor. Navy regulations say the chaplain's battle station is the sick bay or wherever he is needed on board. If somebody was wounded, they'd come get me. Where that plane exploded on the hangar deck, the sick bay is on that

hangar deck level, and that's where I was in the sick bay when the thing hit and exploded. As a chaplain, I really appreciated the fact that there was no distinction. It didn't matter if I was a captain, a seaman, or an admiral, I was the chaplain. I had a different connotation from being a gunnery officer or head of communications or whatever it is. I had access to different places that nobody else did. The captain had a sea cabin, as well as his state room, and I could go up there anytime or to the executive officer or I could go down to the engine room and chat with the people running the engines, which I did quite frequently. Every day that I could, if we weren't in action, I'd visit all the departments and shops aboard the ship. The library was open on the honor system. People could go in and browse all the time if they wanted to. If they wanted to take one, they would just put the card in the box and take it.

PIEHLER: Approximately, how many books did you have in the library?

SPARKS: Well we had, well it wasn't this big, probably about half (the size of the room where the interview was taking place).

PIEHLER: So you had several thousand books?

SPARKS: Oh, yeah. A lot of them were novels, a lot of them were history books, a lot of them were technical book. People were taking them in and out. In fact, some of the guys on the gun mounts would read their books, as long as we weren't in action. They'd sit over there and read their books. So they did a good bit of reading during the course of a cruise. But, I don't know, we did have, it was several thousand. Every time we came into port, if we needed to discard, we did, and we put in requisitions for new books and new novels, new professional books, and that sort of thing. We had a pretty good library. The fellas would come in and there was a long table, and they could sit there and read if they wanted to, or if it was a reference book or something, they could sit in there, and find what they were looking for if it was in there.

PIEHLER: All branches of the military have a reputation of men going on leave, and really being hard drinking, particularly sailors going into port after being aboard a ship.

SPARKS: Yeah, every sailor had a woman in every port, they said, you know. But that isn't true. The Navy did not allow ships to have alcoholic beverages aboard the ship.

PIEHLER: Yes, that one I knew, you had to have beer parties off the ship.

SPARKS: Yep, we did. You could carry it—you couldn't carry say, bourbon or scotch, or anything of that nature, but we carried beer. We were at Marianas Island, there was holiday routine that afternoon, and a certain number of the ship's company could go ashore. Each man could buy a chip for two beers. Now, what happened was that some men did not drink beer, and they sold their chips to other guys. You'd get over on the beach and start a softball game and have some of the dangest fights you've ever seen.

PIEHLER: I've also been told that when people are dried out that much, two or three beers has a much sharper impact.

SPARKS: Well, that's right. The captain usually took the heads of the department ashore to the officer's club and they'd sit there and drink. Well, I used to go two or three decks down and avoided that. Until one day, I was about three decks down, and here comes the captain, he said, "Chaplain, you have to go ashore with us today." So I said okay. We were at Mannis Island and we went to this officer's club there with a thatch roof and everything. On the way in, the captain ordered drinks for everybody. They took us back into a little room and I had a scotch and water. So he was sitting at the head of the table, and I was sitting at this end—it was a long table, with all the heads of the departments. He said, "Chaplain, it's your turn to go get the drinks," because that one didn't last long. I said, "Yes, sir," and I went out and got my cap and went down to the dock and hitched a ride back to the ship. I don't know how long they sat there before they realized what had happened. I just left, I wasn't going to sit there, course I enjoyed it, but they'd just sit there and guzzle. But it's true that Navy regs denied the privilege of a ship carrying alcoholic beverages. Now, I'll tell you what they did do sometimes. The sailors had bell-bottomed trousers, we'd go into Balboa, on the other side of the Panama Canal, and when they'd come back, their socks would be filled with pints of bottles. On the ship there were ventilators, we didn't have air conditioning, air was just pumped, anyway they could take two screws out and put the stuff up in the ventilators. Another thing they did, we carried pure grain alcohol, to prime the torpedoes, but that was always under lock and key, except when a couple of them would get really dry. They would break in the alcohol locker and mix that pure grain alcohol with grapefruit juice. That'll take your top off in no time at all. But we weren't supposed to, and we did not have much imbibing when we were underway or in battle or anything. There was none of that kind of hanky panky going on at all or you'd be put on report real quick. But the regulations deny the carrying of alcoholic beverages on board the ship. They used to come along with a personal boat, not an LST, that was too big, but smaller, an LCV, and take about 1000 men in there, and they'd go over and drink beer, fight all the way back, and hang over the side. They didn't know where they were, and we never did lose a man. But we had a good crew.

PIEHLER: How many 'Dear John letters'? How much of that was a problem, of unfaithful spouses?

SPARKS: Probably some, not any more than there is now.

PIEHLER: So you didn't think it was unique to wartime.

SPARKS: Well there were times when you got a couple of drinks in you and you're going to try to have some fun if you can, some people did that. But the real gentlemen—not many of them did that. Just the people who were single and who just probably did that at home, there wasn't much difference there from what it was at home, I guess. I didn't have much confession of that sort of thing, from the standpoint of the spiritual anxiety they might have from doing that.

PIEHLER: Also, Lutheran tradition is a public confession, not a strong tradition of private confession.

SPARKS: If they wanted to come talk to me, they were free to do that.

PIEHLER: But you didn't have a lot of ...

SPARKS: Not a great deal, no. We had a lot of people who would talk about—this I can say, we did have some homosexuality, this I'm sure, but I don't know what percentage that would be. Not a lot big percentage, because we were in such small quarters, you could find places, but there was not as much opportunity.

PIEHLER: Well, one of the things that has always struck me doing the interviews—but also going out to some of the old ships I was on the *Intrepid* in New York Harbor. The living quarters are really ... there's not much room once you get past the flight deck. The flight decks are huge ...

SPARKS: And the hangar deck ...

PIEHLER: ... and the hangar deck, but after that it's very narrow and very cramped, even the captain's quarters.

SPARKS: And some of them slept on the hammocks. Most of ours were bunks. They have hammocks on submarines. There are easy to stow. But we didn't have many hammocks on our ship, most of it was bunks, two, three, or four high in the compartment. But you're right, there's not much, there's so much other stuff, you don't have room for anything else.

SPARKS: So you've been on the *Intrepid*?

PIEHLER: Yeah, in New York Harbor, it's a museum now, and I was very struck by the ...

SPARKS: Where was it?

PIEHLER: It's in New York Harbor now, it's a museum now.

SPARKS: Have you been on one of the new ones?

PIEHLER: No, I haven't been on one of those.

SPARKS: I have got a cap in there from the *Roosevelt*, the *Theodore Roosevelt*, and that thing is absolutely unbelievable. We happened to be in Norfolk when that and the *George Washington* and the three or four carriers were in the same class. Our flight decks were wooden, but these flight decks have some kind of texture like tar or whatever it is, so that it has to be changed periodically. They'll come out and just peel that whole flight deck off and put a new one down. But our flight deck was wooden, you can see that just looking at those pictures. Because they have to build in a certain amount of movement on the flight deck of our ship for instance, we had metal about this wide, across the flight deck, and you could see the ship giving, if it didn't it would break in two.

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

PIEHLER: Well, I also think you may be the first chaplain I've ever interviewed. I always observe that.

SPARKS: You know there is another navy chaplain here who's retired. A Presbyterian minister, Julian Spencer. I've known him for many years. Do you know that name?

PIEHLER: No, I don't.

SPARKS: He had some interesting experiences. In fact, on one of his cruisers, they took the president to Alaska, I believe it was. You know, that kind of thing. I don't know if he was in any battles or not, but he was a Navy chaplain.

PIEHLER: Well, let me just say, this continues an interview with Lemuel C. Sparks Jr. on March 13, 2001 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

CHAPA: Viviana Chapa.

PIEHLER: You seem to really like being in the Navy.

SPARKS: Oh, I loved it. I'm still in the Navy.

PIEHLER: Well, yes.

SPARKS: I'm not really in active duty, that's right.

PIEHLER: In your interview, it seems you really learned quite a bit about how the ship worked and how the ship both physically itself, but also what the crew did.

SPARKS: Well, to me, it was a very interesting experience to be a part of the military of your country. Of course Betty and I both—we weren't drafted, the Chaplain Corp is volunteer and so is the Navy Nurse Corps.

PIEHLER: So you could have avoided the service all together.

SPARKS: Oh yeah, absolutely. I didn't even have to worry about it. But I didn't want to do that. I don't know, it's like Fred Brown said. When you're a member of things that happened, you respect those who and the principles they went down to sea for. It really broadened my perspective of the whole world with people. As I think back about it, I had never really been anywhere much but for East Tennessee. I had been to Washington, and some of those places before, when I was in college, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and some of those places, but I had never been overseas or even to the beach, but once or twice or anywhere west of the Mississippi. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you really did see the world or a ...

SPARKS: Pardon?

PIEHLER: You really did see a good part of the world?

SPARKS: Yes, we did. Later on we were in Palestine for three weeks, and then in Germany for three weeks in 1984, before the Iron Curtain came down. We were behind the Iron Curtain nine days on that trip. Yes, we together, Betty was in England—been all over the United States. I was as far that way, to almost Borneo, and New Guinea. Some of the islands in the Ulithi Atoll group were just east of the Philippines, so we went there several times. Little island called Maug Maug Island. But they had moved the Navy off those places when we were there. The interesting thing, where Maug Maug Island was we went ashore and there was a little thatch brick thing wide open on the sides, that was their City Hall. We walked around a little and ran across a cemetery with about fifteen graves, and every tombstone was a cross, which indicated that some missionary had been there at some time or another. I don't know, I didn't read the dates or anything, but every one of them had a cross on them. The wartime experience exposed me to the world, I guess and to different kinds of people, different nationalities of people, different backgrounds of people, different educational levels of people. That's one of the things I've enjoyed about the ministry, is that I have access to the president of the university, probably better than some of the professors do. Or to the freshman that are coming in. Dr. Brown was president and was a member of our church for some time in the 50s and early 60s. He's from Pennsylvania, but his daughter-in-law still comes to our church, his son is dead, Fred Brown. Dr. Brown has been dead now for many years. I could go over what to you might be a line of demarcation between classes of people or kinds of people or nationalities and nobody would think anything about it. I mean, I'm accepted there. I think one of the treasures that I've had as a navy chaplain, is the fact that the whole world is yours or you belong to the whole world, not just a little segregated section out here, or a little geographic area. You're really ecumenical in that sense.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, before leaving the chaplaincy, what about the issue of war and religion. In terms of Lutheran doctrine there is a notion of just war, but on the other hand there is also scripturally ...

SPARKS: Well that's right, and I didn't have to deal with that too much. But that is part of the whole worldwide scene.

PIEHLER: But you didn't encounter that when you were a navy chaplain in World War II.

SPARKS: No, not particularly. Nobody said, "What are you doing out here, we're shooting guns."

PIEHLER: What about sailors did any of them have angst about ...

SPARKS: Do what?

PIEHLER: Did any of them ever have misgivings about their role?

SPARKS: Oh, yeah. I've counseled a good many men. Course you have conscientious objector, there were quite a few of those during the war, but I don't know, there is a line of demarcation there that is almost invisible between preservation, principles, truth, integrity, and all that between the fighting. We've seen so much of that in Bosnia and different places. Those guys are so greedy and, of course, we see our own government, that kind of thing. But the fact that I am a part of the United States and a part of that government, I'm going to support that government, if I have to give my life, because that's the principles that I have been reared with and have been instilled in me. Democracy, I guess there is not a true democracy anywhere, but we do enjoy, and I'll have to say of all the places I've ever been, we enjoy the most freedom in America than anywhere else. We were behind the Iron Curtain, for over a week—nine days. That was scary. I mean there were guards all over. I wouldn't have thought of getting a camera out to take a picture. They spied on you. We were in Erfurt, one of the oldest cities in Germany, behind the Iron Curtain, that's where Luther was in seminary, and the building is still there, it's called the Cell, Luther's Cell. No heat or anything in there, but as a group of Americans, after the evening meal, it was still daylight, and we were out in front of the hotel just talking and laughing, having a good time—this whole area was paved with brick and over there was the railroad station and the railroad. But we noticed this kind of slinky looking gal walking around us after a little bit, and we started watching her. She would come over and listen to what we were saying and then go back over to the side and report to one of the guards what we were talking about. You were under surveillance all the time. (Laughter) I tried to—I'd say *Guten-abend* and they wouldn't even look at you. They were afraid a guard would see them talking to an American. But the whole world for me has a different perspective than it did when I was a boy. You see back in the 20s and 30s and even the 40s, we were still departmentalized all over the world, but we are more with televisions and news reports Some of these news reports just drive me crazy, they'll drive the things in the ground, they just repeat and repeat. Late breaking news and it's been breaking for three days. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What about views of the enemy? What did you all think—you but also your sailors and officers, think about the Japanese?

SPARKS: Now we were a flagship, as I mentioned, so if a pilot was shot down, that pilot was brought aboard our ship for an interrogation by the admiral's staff to get the information they could about where the ships were and people and so on. We picked up one pilot in the Philippines after the action, and what they would do, they developed a tactic of coming right out of the sun on just above the water early in the morning and you couldn't see them and the radar that day would not pick that up, and then they would get our ship formation and they would just jump the ships, we couldn't shoot because we'd be shooting at our own ships and they would be shooting at us. So they would go down between our ships, and doing what we called "Skip Bombing." That's what we were hit with. They would come in low on the water and release their torpedo or bomb and it would skip the water, just like when you throw a rock, and it would skip two or three times and then hit your ship. He was brought aboard and I never will forget, I was standing over by the fantail when they brought him over. He was absolutely scared to death. And I couldn't converse with him, they put him in the brig and used to go by there regularly, he knew who I was, but the ship's company would stand there and call that guy every name under the sun that's ever been thought of. And he just hunkered back in the corner of that brig and try to hide. But I never had—I detested that fact that they pulled off Pearl Harbor, but at the same

time, the German people, after the war, I was released to inactive duty, we were in Front Royal, Virginia, up in the northern part of the state, and they had there for years a remount station, which is a training station for horses, cavalry, but they brought a group of German prisoners there, and they asked me to conduct their Sunday morning services. I went up there every Sunday morning, early, before our service and would, it sounded like Europe, walk up the hill, and bells were ringing all over. But then we would greet each other after the service and I gave them communion, I didn't really have any animosity against them, I did against the principles behind what they did, like Hitler, I couldn't agree with that sort of thing, but most of these people, were kind of coerced into the job they were in, and I couldn't hold them, even though they might have, and I'm sure many of them did have a feeling of guilt at times, but I never had any kind of an attitude like that. I didn't really minister to any Japanese, because I wasn't in any position to do that, but Germans I did. I saw a lot of Japanese at a distance, and perhaps like in the brig, but I never—I had Oriental people in our church, and we've never had any problems at all.

People ask me what I think about the atomic bomb. We have groups that protest the fact that we used it, still protest. And my feeling is that if we hadn't done that, we would have lost a lot more men, I know that. When you're in war, you're in war to destroy. It doesn't matter if it's a conventional bomb or a nuclear bomb or whatever. That is the objective, to destroy. It doesn't matter whether it's an atom bomb or a 50mm rifle. You're still destroying. I don't put much distinction. Well, they said it was so many, I said, "Yeah, that's right." It did wipe out two cities, but at the same time, it probably saved more than two cities from additional fighting. So I don't have any qualms about that at all. In fact, I've said they probably should have used it sooner if they could have, to end the destruction out there. Some of those islands, it's just absolutely unbelievable what they did to our people and what our people did to them. And I've been on a good many of these islands where this occurred. So in warfare you're trying to overcome whatever is in front of you out here, and destroy it if possible, including human life, I guess. I would have a problem with some of that, taking life. Chaplains were not allowed to bear arms. We could not be armed at all. I could not carry a pistol even for protection, self-protection, I did carry a sheath knife, they did give us one of those. They gave a little abandon ship kit, it had a sheath knife, it had a little thing with mercurechrome in it, and it had another little fish hook and some line, the theory was that you could use that to salvage food or to get food for yourself, or self protection if you wanted to. But it was primarily to provide food for you if you had to abandon ship and go to shore. But there are a lot of philosophical questions like war and peace, and killing and not killing. I think you know that the Bible is centered in Palestine, and that thing had been going since Abraham, back and forth, fighting all the time, it's not settled yet, they don't quit. So the issue of war, I guess, I have to stand with Luther, sometimes it's justified to uphold that which is honorable and truthful and which is fair for people. So that's my feeling on that.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you were in somewhat tempted to stay in the Navy.

SPARKS: I was a little. I guess I could've stayed in. Well, Betty was there, and I had been out on the ship by myself, and we needed to be together. I thought, well, maybe if I stay in the reserves, things might ... but when we moved to Knoxville, I got so busy ... parish building. They told me to either resign my commission, retire without pay, or get active in the reserves. I

didn't want to give up my commission and I didn't want to ... well I just said I'd retire without pay. I don't get any retirement pay or anything. But I'm still apart—but I gave it some serious thought, I really did. But in those days, you alternated at sea and at home a certain amount of time. Like two years at sea and three years at home, when you're gone, you don't know where you're going to be. And well, I don't think that's too much for me, that aspect of it. Now, if it was like it is now, where you're distance and time doesn't amount to much, I probably would [have stayed]. But then it was really a struggle, but I'm glad I didn't stay from that standpoint, because we have four or five children and ten grandchildren and two grandchildren-in-laws.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, after you left the Navy, what was your first assignment as a civilian?

SPARKS: Front Royal, Virginia. I was released through inactive duty in February of 1946. And went to Front Royal, Virginia. Front Royal, Virginia was a mission church at that time. It had just been organized. In fact I was the first pastor. We were there, and we built Parishville into that church. Then I decided I needed to go to graduate school. So I enrolled at George Washington University in the History Department. We moved to Washington [D.C.] and I became an associate minister at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Silver Springs, Maryland, with Robert E. Lee. I don't know if Betty mentioned this, but our second boy, who is an architect at Vanderbilt, Bob baptized him. And John gets a big kick out of telling everybody he was baptized by Robert E. Lee. We moved to Silver Springs in the early part of 1950. Then we moved to—I accepted a call to, Luther Memorial Lutheran Church in Blacksburg, Virginia and as a chaplain at VPI [Virginia Polytechnic Institute]. We lived there on the campus until we came here in 1954.

PIEHLER: And you've been in Knoxville since?

SPARKS: We've been in Knoxville or Kingsport. We went to Kingsport for an interim to build a new church up there, and then came back here. But we've spent going on twenty-five years at St. John's. I retired in 1981. I was secretary of our synod then and had an office in Atlanta until 1988, when the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America was organized. We continued to live in Kingsport at that time, I wasn't a permanent resident of Atlanta, but I had an office there at the synod headquarters, and had to go periodically. Then I retired from that in '88. That fall I got a call from down here, so here we are and we've been here since then.

PIEHLER: Do you still preach at all?

SPARKS: I have been.

PIEHLER: Have you recently?

SPARKS: No, I'm retired completely as of December 31 of this year [2001].

PIEHLER: So it's fairly recent, that's not that long ago.

SPARKS: No, just this past December.

PIEHLER: That's still pretty recent.

SPARKS: I wore that uniform and preached every Memorial Day. I was really just part time, and in charge of the Senior Adult Ministry. We used those initials and called ourselves SAMs. They called me Sam. I'm Sam. We moved back here in March of 1989, and been here since then.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, you as a navy chaplain, had seen in many ways more life and death experiences than your average pastor, fresh out of seminary. Also, most young ministers did not preach to 1500 hundred people at a time, is that an active reading, that you got much more experience being in the Navy?

SPARKS: That's correct. Had I not become a navy chaplain, I probably would have been at some small parish, which was limited in its outreach and its service. As I said before, the Navy Chaplain's Corps made me kind of a worldwide guy in a sense. With your prospective growth and if I had come out in '43, I probably would have been confined to a smaller parish, but at the same time, some large parishes were available. I had one in Charlotte, I had a guy talk me into coming up there, and I had already applied for the Navy Chaplain's Commission. But, you become parochial in that, you're local mostly. You're so confined in your thinking, that you almost without knowing it, there are boundaries to that kind of ministry, and you don't get a chance to—today we have relationships with people practically everywhere. Betty's roommate lives in California. I've had opportunities that I never would have had. Glenn Davis, who is one of my closest friends in the navy, was a Congressman from Wisconsin. When he came back he was appointed to fill out an unexpired term for a man who had passed away. So Glenn became a congressman and moved to Washington. When we moved to Silver Springs, there we were together again. And our families used to have picnics. They had a girl who was a little bit older than our oldest boy, she used to come down and tell her mother, "Mother, little Davy won't do what I tell him to do." (Laughter) On the fifth anniversary of our being hit with a kamikaze, he had me open Congress with prayer. I have one of the Congressional records here, with the prayer printed in it. And it was quite a significant experience for me to do that. When you become a part of something that is worldwide, your sights are lifted from just simply selfishness or whatever you are doing in your own little bailiwick—you step over the bounds of ecumenism and everything else.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that you're part of the founding synod of the American Lutheran Church that you've liked the movement in the Lutheran Church towards greater unity.

SPARKS: The mergers we had?

PIEHLER: Yes.

SPARKS: When I was in seminary in 1942, the United Lutheran Church in America Convention ... there were representatives from each synod for about an eight or nine day convention. They assigned me to preach in St. John's Lutheran Church in Charleston, the oldest Lutheran Church down there. Looking at that place, and remembering that the first Lutheran came there in 1742, and remembering the history that is there, somehow you get a feeling that this is bigger than just

me and it's bigger than just St. John's parish. It is a world for me, it's a divinely given institution. It's really opened my perspective of relationships and nations, people and different kinds of backgrounds. Then in 1962, I had been ordained and was a delegate to the ULCA Convention in Detroit, which at that point the LCA was instituted. Then we were, Betty and I, were both present for the ELCA in 1988 in Columbus, Ohio for that merger. So we're been a part of that, all the way through our ministry, of getting closer together, and breaking down barriers.

PIEHLER: You sound very enthusiastic about the Episcopalian and Lutheran merger.

SPARKS: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: It's interesting, I interviewed another Lutheran pastor, who was not a chaplain, and he was actually a German prisoner of war. But his skepticism was towards Lutheran theology, because it is much more I wouldn't say rigid, but much more defined, and Episcopalian theology, well, you could drive a truck through it very easily.

SPARKS: Yeah. I guess you could. We've approved sharing pulpits together, sharing Holy Communion, calling from denomination to the other to serve. There are many places where Lutheran and Episcopalian congregations use the same building and different times during the week, they are coming together now. And there are many other aspects of the coming together. We have in our church, a dissenting group, and they question the apostolic succession in ordination and the necessity to have a bishop present at the laying on of hands. They have started an organization, and are having a convention, I believe next month, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. But they are just a few of those die-hards. You know, you look at some of those doctrines, who created the doctrines anyway? Man did I guess. They object to our saying that there is apostolic succession in ordination. That doesn't bother me any, and there may be succession. Course I've had hands laid on me, and I've laid my hands on people. But you receive and you pass on, that's the way Christianity is. That's the way a chaplain's work is. I think I've received more than I passed, although I've enjoyed it and we've had numerous friends all over. So it's been that kind of experience.

PIEHLER: How many people from your ship did you stay in touch with after the war?

SPARKS: After the war, Glenn Davis spearheaded a group, and we had reunions periodically. Now it wasn't a whole ship reunion, but there were different people involved from different departments on the ship, they lived all over the country. We met in Milwaukee a few times, we met in Springfield, Illinois, we've met in Washington D.C., and we've met here on the lake, we have a little place down on Washington Lake. At one point we had about fifty people at the reunion in Springfield, Illinois. But other than—I have communication now with two to three hundred people still surviving from our ship.

PIEHLER: You mentioned a newsletter earlier.

SPARKS: Yeah. Well, he started one. I don't remember this guy at all. But he said, "I'm grateful to get to know the chaplain who started the *Sangamon News*, fifty five years ago." And

I had a fella from New Jersey call not too long ago, and one from Wisconsin. They just call from all over. But I've never been to any of those reunions. They are mostly tied in with other ships, like the CBEs, two or three or four CBEs will have a reunion together. This has been simply a group from our own ship, and nobody else is involved. We haven't had any big crowds, but we've had some good times together. In fact, one of my favorite caps I have, I got in Milwaukee and I wear it periodically out to rehab and it says on the front, "Old Granddad, the Spirit of America." The distillery up there provided all the caps, from Old Granddad Distillery. But it's been interesting now, more recently, these old fellas have been emerging. They all got our address from the widow of a flight deck officer from our ship who lives in Milwaukee. So they got our telephone number and now they've sent us their email address. We may be getting closer to some of them than we had been. I hope we will anyway.

PIEHLER: You joined the American Legion ...

SPARKS: We were at one time, members of the American Legion, in ... Pennsylvania. Betty's daddy was a member there. We became members, in fact he joined us. It was a very active, very fine American Legion. They did not only historic things, but they did things for the community. It was very fine. Since then, we have not been to Veterans of Foreign Wars or any of those, or the American Legion. Betty, I guess she told you, her picture and service record is in the Women's Memorial in Washington, and now they are talking about building a World War II Memorial for everybody who served in that war. But I don't know, it's one of those of things that takes time to take care of. So I don't have any particular feeling about the memorials or about the service organizations the VFW or the American Legion. I have nothing against it. I've just been busy and haven't had time to give time to it. But that post, is probably one of the most active posts, I've ever seen. Much of the community activity centered around that American Legion post. But since then we haven't been members of any local post or any other veteran's organizations, except the Navy.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, because you were in Knoxville through much of the 1960s, what was the impact of the Vietnam War, both on your church and your sense on the community.

SPARKS: Well, we came here in 1954 and then moved to Kingsport in 1966. There was an impact in both because of the nature of that war, and because of the way it was devised, and handled, and promoted, and so on. I did bury one fella in Kingsport who had been in Vietnam. We talked about it the other day, I wasn't sure if he was on that box, but he was killed in Vietnam. They sent that box over here, we never did open it, but he was a young man in our church in Kingsport. And I had his funeral in Kingsport. But there were—from the standpoint of youth attitude, from the standpoint of really community attitudes against Vietnam. We had to deal with that sort of thing because there were so many who dissented from the fact that we ought to be involved there, and I have to almost agree with them on that one because it did not serve a purpose, it did not accomplish anything, but it did cost a lot of money and a lot of lives. But the impact in our churches was not too great, except on one or two instances. Of the men and women who served, some of them regretted that they served, I mean, it was not a positive attitude when they came back. Such as we had after World War II, because there were completely different principles and different attitudes involved. But Vietnam served very little, that is one of the black spots on America's life, I guess, is the Vietnam War, and the men that

lost their lives there, and some who are still there and have never been recovered. I suspect there are some who never will be found, and maybe some that are in prison, that never will get out. I—we don't know those things. Although that we've been told ... but you don't know what to believe or not. But the Vietnam War has been kind of a sore spot for churches and with this nation, and actually with the world. Even as dastardly as Pearl Harbor was, to see that over and over again. I heard President Roosevelt speak that Sunday, he said that we were at war, and the Vietnam fiasco, I have to call it that, did affect a lot of people and families and attitudes. I think we have moved through that sort of thing into a period of laxity from the standpoint of patriotism, from the standpoint of what we have and who we are. We have moved off center, and that kind of thing pushed us off. That's how I feel about that particular thing. Although it did not impact our churches too much, except for one or two instances.

PIEHLER: Without naming names or congregations, Lutheran churches have more autonomy, much more so than a Methodist or a Catholic, where the bishop has all this power. What has been your relationship with the congregation what are the good parts, and without necessarily naming any names, the bad parts?

SPARKS: I can't really say that there have been any bad parts, I'd have to say, it's been pretty positive. Of course, I think some of that depends on your attitude, too. But Front Royal, Silver Springs, Blacksburg, Knoxville, and Kingsport, that's where we've been, in all of them ... in fact, we got a call today from a couple in Kingsport that are going to drive tomorrow and take us to lunch. It's been a very positive relationship, and I think part of it is due to the fact of our attitude towards people. We love people and appreciate them. But the relationships I've had with all my congregations We left Front Royal and they said, "Well, what have we done to you?" We left Blacksburg and Mr. Price said, "What have we done to you, that you're going down there?" I mentioned Red Wagner, chairman of the TVA Board, his wife was at Shannondale [Retirement Home] for about ten years, she gave me the dickens for leaving here and going to Kingsport. So I guess we've had a healthy relationship, I should say.

PIEHLER: My friend who is an Episcopalian priest, he unfortunately had a congregation that was just riddled with dissent and he ended up getting caught in the middle of that. But it sounds like you've been both a good pastor, but you've also been fortunate to avoid those types of ...

SPARKS: Well, there are times when you begin to wonder, I told you at the beginning, I wondered what I would do if I couldn't preach. There are times when you are counseling with people, you wonder about what they are telling you, whether it's the truth or not. And you can ask questions and dig around and maybe find out, but in our relationships, I'd say we've had just a very beautiful relationship with each congregation we've ever been in. We still hear from them all, we still get the paper from Front Royal, the little church paper, and also from Kingsport, different places. Course I was president of our Knoxville Conference for several years here. The Knoxville Conference reached from Chattanooga to Bristol, as part of the Virginia synod. I was on the executive board of the Virginia synod and also the Southeastern synod, so I got to know a lot of people, and they got to know us. I know one fellow, he's dead now, I don't think this killed him, but he used to say, "You're my bishop." (Laughter) But we really have had ...

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

PIEHLER: Your trips overseas, to Palestine and Germany were both paid for by your ...

SPARKS: That was given to us in 1977, and it was a seminary study tour. When I retired in 1981, they gave us a gift to go to Luther Land, and we went over there in '84 and spent three weeks there. We've had so many favors done for us that I couldn't even begin to count them. Our children and our grandchildren now, after this article came out in the paper last week, well we've had calls from everywhere. But, for me and Betty, for the both of us, it has been a most interesting journey for eighty-three years, most uplifting, positive, fun-filled, although we've had sorrow, we had a miscarriage, Betty had a miscarriage, and one of our granddaughter's had leukemia, and all that kind of stuff. But at the same time, I think we can say that we've had about as much enjoyment in this world as any couple could have had.

BETTY SPARKS: I guess so.

PIEHLER: In terms of the Lutheran Church, how do you feel about the ordination of women?

SPARKS: Oh, I voted for that in 1970.

PIEHLER: So you were one of the supporters for that.

SPARKS: Yeah, that's when we first approved it. I was a delegate at our national convention that year, and I voted for it. And we have an ordained woman at our church.

PIEHLER: No, it's very common actually in the Lutheran Church. But the Missouri synod still has not ordained them.

SPARKS: No, the Missouri synod does not, and I don't think the Episcopal Church will either, will they?

PIEHLER: No, the Episcopal Church, well some bishops might not.

SPARKS: No, the convention that we adopted that during, we lived in Kingsport at that time, and I was a delegate to that convention ... which that was a real issue. No one else was doing it then, no other Protestant group. Now the Methodist, now have them all over. In fact, my doctor's wife is a minister down at Church Street Methodist. Now the Baptist church doesn't do much of that, but I have no ... we have a delightful young lady at our church, she trained here, she finished at a Baptist seminary. Went to a Lutheran seminary for refresher courses and was approved for ordination and was ordained at our church this past December. And she's here as an associate minister. No, I don't think that the good Lord meant to say you can do this and you can't do that, in that regard, there are some things he's says that about, but not ordination. Women teach in Sunday school and do everything else, why not be a clergywoman.

CHAPA: Do you think it was necessary for us to drop the second atomic bomb?

SPARKS: Well, it was just as necessary as the second other bomb I might have dropped. For instance, a suicide plane came in to us and it was a near miss, the second one came in, twelve really came in, but we shot down eleven of them. The eleventh one got to be a near miss, and the twelfth one hit us. And we shot at that guy and got him off course. As far as the fighting is concerned, this fighting here with these armaments is no different from this fighting here with these armaments, and if I'm going to use a multiple thing of 40mm antiaircraft clips, you just keep firing, you don't stop because you hit one. You don't stop a war of that nature, because somebody says, well, you shouldn't do that. As I said earlier, war is a matter of destruction, and the objective of war is to destroy and protect. And if I'm protecting American principles and the principles of freedom and democracy, whether I drop a conventional bomb or an atomic bomb or whether I drop a dozen of them, it doesn't matter as long as the objective is achieved. So no the number does not bother me. I do think that we saved probably hundreds of thousands of lives, even though we took quite a few at Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Nonetheless, it could have been a much bloodier war. Okinawa was one of the bloodiest land wars we were in. And we did not gain our objective by simply firing one time and then stopping. Then you open yourself to all kinds of ramifications of war, if you have a particular kind of weapon, then that weapon needs to be used. That's the way I feel about it, whether it's a machine gun or a 50mm. When you fire guns on a battleship, sixteen inch guns, you don't just fire once and wait to see what happens, you fire all of them, one after another. I don't have any particular qualms about that. As I said before, I—war generally, but when it comes to principles and survival and human life, sometimes as Luther says, there are just wars. So you use whatever you can to obtain the objective. And if we had not done that, America may be something else, completely different today. I'm proud to say, having been all over the world, that this is the most beautiful place and the most free place I've ever been, and I'm grateful to be a part of it.

PIEHLER: Is there anything we forgot to ask you or anything you'd like to add?

SPARKS: Well, I was going to tell you about my T-Model Ford. Well, it had a gravity fed fuel condition, no fuel pumps, so if you went up a steep hill, and didn't have a full tank of gasoline, you would have to turn around and back up so that the gas would flow down into your carburetor. But driving that old Ford, with tires that big around, I could drive from my home to Newport, which was about fifteen miles, and have two or three flats in one trip. Every once in a while it would just simply stop. The T-Model Ford had one little thing on the dashboard, and that was an amp thing, that's the only thing that was up there. You fed the gas and the sparks from the steering wheel. There were three pedals. One was a clutch, halfway in was in neutral, all the way in was in low, the middle pedal was reverse and the right pedal was the brake. The coils were down under this little dash about this high, and had one little round thing in it, every once in while something would get in there, and you'd have to clean that off. But the magneto point was under the driver's seat and under the floorboard. Every once in a while the thing would stop, and I got to the point to where I knew what to do. I'd just pull up the floorboard and clean the link off the magneto point and we'd go on. (Laughter) But such was travel in the late 20s and early 30s.

PIEHLER: Well, I think that's a great life story. Thank you very much.

----- END OF INTERVIEW -----

Reviewed by: William Anderson 10/24/04

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