

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH CLINTON E. RIDDLE

FOR THE  
VETERAN'S ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WAR AND SOCIETY  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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DUNFORD HALL  
MARCH 19, 2002

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G. KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Clinton Riddle on March 20, 2002 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

SETH WOMACK: Seth Womack.

PIEHLER: I'd like to just begin with a very formal question. When were you born and where were you born?

CLINTON E. RIDDLE: I was born on February 24, 1921 in Loudon County.

PIEHLER: And your parents—their names were Eva Grace Riddle and Samuel Elmer Riddle?

RIDDLE: That's correct.

PIEHLER: And could you just tell me, I guess, a little about your parents?

RIDDLE: My father was a farmer. That's all he knew was farming, and my mother was a housewife. I was the only child and being the oldest and youngest in our family, they say the only child is petted! I disagree with that. (Laughter) But I grew up; I went to grammar school at the Luttrell School which is a country school up to the eighth grade. Then I started to school in Sweetwater, graduated from the eighth grade, went to Sweetwater high school, [and] graduated in 1941. The last year, senior year, I took Diversified Occupations. I took Department Store Management, and I worked at McKinney's department store during the school year and the following summer up to Thanksgiving. And I enrolled—the war was escalating, and I enrolled in Anderson Aircraft School in Nashville to learn to build airplanes. And I went over and stayed a week. We were not supposed to be drafted out of the school but they were drafting men out of the school and if I was going to be drafted, I thought I would go back home. So I went back home to wait to be drafted. I was drafted into the army on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1942, going from McMinn County to Fort Oglethorpe. From there to Camp Wheeler for Basic Training, and I applied for Clerk School. I took six weeks of Clerk School, six weeks of Basic Training, and a week of review. I applied for OCS and went before the committee, was ready to go to OCS and they shipped me out to Fort Bragg as a replacement. The Division was getting ready to go overseas. They first placed me in the MP's; I was in there for some time. They discovered I was two inches too short, and they placed me in B Company, 325<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry. I remained there throughout the war.

PIEHLER: Going back a little to your growing up, and even before you were born—do you have any idea how your parents met?

RIDDLE: ... The families lived in about the same community—neighboring farms—and the courtship started.

PIEHLER: Because, reading from your pre-interview survey, there were some differences between your two parents. At least, your mother was a Democrat and a Baptist, and your father was a Republican and a Methodist?

RIDDLE: That's amusing. What does it make me!? (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And your mother was born in Sweetwater, and your father also comes from Loudon County, that area, but he also was a rancher in California and he worked in the oil fields in California. So, it sounds like he had a, sort of, wanderlust?

RIDDLE: He left me when I was two year old to go to work in California, and he came back then, and rented the farm where I was born and we lived there until he bought a farm in '24. And in '25 they had the great drought through this area, and had a very difficult time, but in the year Hoover was elected, we moved to the farm I grew up on. It was an eighty-five acre farm; had an eleven acre orchard on it. Dad paid—that was during the Depression—my dad paid for that farm by picking apples and hauling them to Sweetwater and peddling them out to the woolen mill people before they went to work in the morning. And that's where I grew up, until I went into the army out from Sweetwater.

PIEHLER: Did your father—you weren't born when he was in California, were you?

RIDDLE: Oh, no.

PIEHLER: Did he ever tell you about California and about his experiences?

RIDDLE: He shared some, but not too much of his experience there.

PIEHLER: Had he been tempted to stay in California and move your mother to California?

RIDDLE: Well, I don't think that the work was what he had anticipated.

PIEHLER: Mm-hmm. He didn't make as much money as he thought, it sounds like?

RIDDLE: He was homesick, too. I have his old trunk that he made that trip to California and back, now.

PIEHLER: So you father played the trumpet?

RIDDLE: No.

PIEHLER: Oh, the trunk. I'm sorry.

RIDDLE: Trunk.

PIEHLER: I though you said trumpet.

RIDDLE: Trunk.

SETH WOMACK: Mr. Riddle, could you tell us some of your childhood memories; some of your fondest?

RIDDLE: Well, yes. I was a very a sickly child. I almost died when I was ten years old, and I had my tonsils removed. It's amusing. We didn't have an automobile; my grandfather had an old T-Model and Dad borrowed the T-Model to take me to the doctor in Sweetwater. And there's a hill as you're going into Sweetwater and he said, "If we make this hill in high gear, I'll take you to Loudon, to the hospital up there." And Doc Joe Harrison was the doctor at that time and he removed my tonsils. I remember him giving me a nickel when he put me to sleep. I wish I still had that nickel! (Laughter) But after that, I began to improve. I never did grow up very much. I attended a nearby country church and I was saved. It was a Baptist Church, by the way. And I was saved when I was fourteen years old. I felt the call to the ministry at fifteen. In the mean time, I had Rheumatic Fever. I was bed-bound for some six weeks, and when I went into the [U.S.] Army, I had been in the bed with the flu. I didn't think they would take me on examination, but they were really needing cannon fodder I suppose, and they took me right on in. I never grew up very big, and I didn't surrender to the call to ministry because my vision of a preacher was a little, weak-backed individual, and I sure didn't want to be one like that. I was little and I had to prove to the world that I was as big as anybody. I never been anywhere or done anything and I ended up in one of the roughest-toughest outfits Uncle Sam had. I had to try out everything.

WOMACK: Wow. You went to Sweetwater High School, correct?

RIDDLE: Correct.

WOMACK: Did you play any sports? I know you, in your condition ...

RIDDLE: Uh, the first year of high school, I attended the country school, who had a two-year program and they were searching for as many scholars as possible to try to hold a school in the community. And they persuaded me to start school, and that's when I had Rheumatic Fever. I went out for basketball; I made the team and played one game, and I was overcome with that Rheumatic Fever. That was the end of my sports.

WOMACK: So, do you have any other memories of high school?

RIDDLE: Well, I have only fond memories of many of the fellas that I went through school [with], who later went in to service and many of them give their lives during World War II. I remember, in particular, two of the boys that were in the Air Force that were shot down. And uh, as I said, I never been anywhere or done anything. In fact, the banquet at our eighth grade graduation was the first time I had ever eaten out. And the suit that I graduated in cost all the money of nineteen dollars! (Laughter) A necktie

would cost more than that now! And then I went through high school. We were poor people. We were poor, everybody else was poor, or at least we thought they were. And if you want to know how poor we were, you've heard the expression, "Poor as Joe's turkey?" You know how poor he was? He had to lean agin' a post to gobble! (Laughter) So, we were very poor. One pair of overalls. Mother would buy the cloth and make me a hickory-stripped shirt. Two shirts, two pair of overalls, and a pair of Brogan shoes was my uniform for the year during grammar school.

PIEHLER: Did your family have electricity on the farm?

RIDDLE: No, sir—had no electricity or inside facilities. Not until I came back in '45! The TVA had run a rural electrical line, and the first thing Mother had was a little refrigerator, which I still have, and an electric iron. One light bulb hanging down from the ceiling in each room, and she was so proud of that.

PIEHLER: Because that must have made her life much easier?

RIDDLE: My mother had leukemia and that's one reason that I didn't end up—I was awarded two Purple Hearts and I didn't ever see but one. The reason: at the time I was wounded, they notify your folks back home, and she was ill, and I didn't want to upset her, so I refused it at that time, and, I guess, that's the reason I never did get it. And she was sick even when I come home. But she was proud of that electricity. Because, before I went to the army, on Monday we'd go out into the woodland close to the house and gather the dead sticks and limbs to put around the wash kettle. On Tuesday, was wash day. And you'd stand there with a stick and poke the clothes to punch the dirt out of it when it would begin to boil. Then on Thanksgiving, that was the day that Father always killed the hog. While I was off at school, he used that big old kettle to render the lard in, and so forth. I still have the kettle. I use it to toss my newspapers in when I get through reading them down in the basement. Well, I could go on a lot about that.

PIEHLER: Well, we want you to go on a little bit long because I think even it's amusing even for the students growing up in this area, this is for them ancient history and it's definitely new to me!

RIDDLE: Well, we had, as I said, no inside facilities. We had to draw water—had a well. We'd draw the water with a chain and bucket. And we used to just have one hog to kill that lasted throughout the year. He would raise half an acre of tobacco. And we had a team of horses; it was all plows—you had to walk and plow. Daddy had always done the plowing and my job was to do the hoeing and chopping out the weeds and so forth.

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like you worked very hard as a child growing up?

RIDDLE: I started at an early age. As I said, I was sickly and Dad didn't force me to go out in the field and work too much. So I stayed around the house and my mother taught me how to embroider, and crochet, and piece quilts, and also quilting and do the housework. I guess I was a sissy! (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Because that wasn't normal for boys to learn that?

RIDDLE: Oh, no.

PIEHLER: Particularly crocheting.

RIDDLE: I *still* can crochet.

PIEHLER: Do you ever do it?

RIDDLE: No, I don't have time. Life's too busy! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: It sounds like that your life growing up was very much regulated by, literally, the sunrise, sunset, and the seasons. In winter the sun goes down pretty early.

RIDDLE: I never understood why ... Dad would get up before the light and go feed the animals. The barn was to our left, and the hog pen was to the right, and on a cold morning I could lay in bed and I could hear his feet a-clopping in those big Brogan shoes going down the road. Why, he got up so early, ate breakfast, and then wait[ed] on the sun to come up to go to work—always got up early.

PIEHLER: You mentioned you had seventy acres and you mentioned having hogs and some tobacco. It sounds like you grew almost all your food?

RIDDLE: Eighty-five acres.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

RIDDLE: And an eleven-acre orchard on there.

PIEHLER: Yeah?

RIDDLE: We did ... the only thing—you could take a little basket of eggs to the grocery store and get your groceries, which composed of sugar, coffee, and a few things like that and still come home with change. Now, you can spend twenty-five dollars and lose the groceries out a hole in your pocket getting home! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So, you were self-sufficient, and, I guess, most of your money came from eggs and the tobacco?

RIDDLE: Yes, mostly. And he hired ... out during ensilage time. He was a good ensilage cutter. They did it by hand with a big long machete-like knife. And, he would work at that. The wages wasn't very much, but it helped out.

PIEHLER: And I guess there was no tractor?

RIDDLE: Oh, no.

PIEHLER: Everything was plow and hand-worked?

RIDDLE: Yes, sir.

PIEHLER: Did the farm ever become mechanized? Did your father ever acquire a tractor?

RIDDLE: Well, I might say that I came home in '45 and Mother passed away shortly after I came home. And Dad tried to live on the farm by himself, and eventually he sold it to the Bowater Corporation. They set it out in pines and since then they've reaped three crops of pines. So it did have a chance to be farmed by mechanized means.

PIEHLER: So it's now, since then, a tree farm?

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: And it still is?

RIDDLE: Yes, sir. I was out there a few weeks back and they had cleared off some of the land and I made pictures of it to get the contours of the fields.

PIEHLER: And I take it that the house didn't survive, that you grew up in?

RIDDLE: No. The house was moved to another location, and eventually burned to the ground, and the old well is filled up. You scarcely can find the old homeplace. I did find a little running rose, a sprig of it that I took home and set out. And I'm giving it to my younger daughter now; it's grown up six or eight feet now.

PIEHLER: You mentioned, at Thanksgiving, the slaughtering of the hog. It sounds like a big event. Were there any other big events during the year? Either as a family or in terms of the community, particularly related to farming?

RIDDLE: Not in particular, because we didn't raise wheat. That was a special time for a lot of farmers, the threshing of the wheat. We raised—about the only grain we raised was oats—that was for hay—and about the biggest event around our house was when the preacher would come home with you Sunday for lunch, or relatives coming to visit with you.

PIEHLER: And where would the relatives come from? How far away?

RIDDLE: Cleveland and North Georgia; that's where my folks originated. Well, North Carolina is where they originally came from, and moved to North Georgia, and then to East Tennessee.

WOMACK: I've got a question. What was your favorite food ... when you were growing up?

RIDDLE: Well I love sweet stuff—sweets.

WOMACK: Did you ever get much of that?

RIDDLE: Oh yes! We'd go berry picking, pick berries, and make jelly and preserves. Had a big pear tree and made pear preserves. I love sweets.

WOMACK: Did you ever make blackberry cobbler?

RIDDLE: Yes, but I don't particularly like it! For the simple reason that back in those days you had screens up, but eventually holes would come in them and the flies would come in, too. And when you'd find a fly in that black cobbler a time or two, you don't have a desire to eat any more. (Laughter) So, I was never foolish about the cobbler.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that when you were growing up ... it sounds like your first suit was for graduation. Is that ...

RIDDLE: Yes, eighth grade.

PIEHLER: How much traveling did your family do growing up? Did you ...

RIDDLE: Not any, except just locally.

PIEHLER: So, had you ever left Tennessee, say, to go to North Georgia to visit relatives?

RIDDLE: On one occasion, we went one Christmas to Cleveland, and then twelve miles across the Georgia line to Red Clay. That was my grandfather's old farm. It's next to the Cherokee headquarters there.

PIEHLER: And what about traveling, say, west. Had you ever been to Nashville, growing up?

RIDDLE: No, sir.

PIEHLER: What about, say, to the Tri-City area?

RIDDLE: No, sir. Not even to Knoxville.

PIEHLER: So, life until you had joined the army ... or gone to Aviation School was a very, sort of, narrow circle?

RIDDLE: See, I was an only child and they thought they kept an eye on me at all times, but they really didn't know where I was at *all* the time! (Laughter) But, it was mostly just in the community, and the neighborhood, and everything local.

PIEHLER: Now I know in some areas—and I'm so new to Tennessee—that often there was a, sort of, going into town, particularly on market day. My father once talked about being—he lived in Virginia for a while—Leesburg at night—Saturday night, when everyone would go into town. Did your family ever go someplace into town?

RIDDLE: Well, my father usually would go every two weeks to get groceries and in later years he allowed me to go. And then as I grew up, able to drive, it was the thing to park on Main Street in Sweetwater and watch the people walk up and down the sidewalk, which was *crowded*.

PIEHLER: And so Sweetwater was where you would go into town?

RIDDLE: Yes, sir.

PIEHLER: What about, say coming to a place like Knoxville growing up? Did you ever come into Knoxville?

RIDDLE: No, sir. Not until I was grown. I came to the merry-go-round when I was about—before I went into the army. And the first time, I remember driving an old '37 Dodge down Gay Street at Christmas time with all of the traffic! And that was an experience for me, as an old country boy.

WOMACK: After high school, why did you decide to enroll in Anderson Aircraft School?

RIDDLE: I thought I'd get out of being drafted in the army. That was my thought; and then that would be a profession. There's a big demand for building airplanes at that time. I was looking forward to going to Baltimore to the factory there.

PIEHLER: Just backing up a little, as you mentioned, you didn't have very much money growing up. In fact, poor might have been an accurate way to describe it. What did your family think of Herbert Hoover? You mentioned Hoover and remembered Hoover as the year your father bought the farm you grew up on. What did you family think of Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt?

RIDDLE: Well, we didn't give him as hard a time as a lot of people did. I don't think a lot of people really understood the situation that he was elected into. Speaking about having money, I never been completely broke since I was four years old, when I lost my four pennies I had in an aspirin box. That was what I carried them in. But since then, I've had a few cents.

PIEHLER: What did your family think of Roosevelt and particularly of the TVA? Because you mentioned your mother was very proud by '45 when TVA lines finally made it out.

RIDDLE: Well, they were not involved in politics very much except—in fact, only Father voted. I think Mother voted maybe one time, but they were not involved except just the family'd get together; they would argue back and forth their side of the situation. That was the thing, you see, in the night after you'd eaten the evening meal, we didn't have a radio, didn't have TV, only lamplight to sit by to read and it was just a small lamp. Couldn't afford the kerosene even for the light! So there was a lot of talking and conversation going on, and maybe a neighbor would come and they would get to discussing politics just among themselves.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like, in many ways, as a child growing up you weren't really privy too much of that. (Laughter) Or you just, sort of, overheard some of it. Is that a fair way to say it?

RIDDLE: Well, I'd become a bookworm. I would sit and read for hours and hours and hours and hours, and really, I wasn't interested in when the neighbors would come in and talk about how many eggs the hens were laying and how much hay they'd made and so forth. In those days, a child was to be seen and not heard, so you didn't enter into the conversation much. Now as far as the family was together, you had the privilege of talking but when there were strangers or neighbors around, you stayed quiet, so I got involved in reading and I *still* read every opportunity I have.

PIEHLER: What were your favorites to read growing up? Does anything stick out?

RIDDLE: Well, I got hooked on old western magazines. I knew Sweetwater, Texas in my mind—every street; the cowboys, where they'd go in; the saloons where they had their gunfights. (Laughter) Man, Zane Gray, I've read almost his complete work.

PIEHLER: So you kept the love of westerns after you grew up?

RIDDLE: Well, I haven't read any recently.

PIEHLER: But, for a while after childhood you'd still ...

RIDDLE: You see, *preachers* don't read worldly things like that anymore! (Laughter) But you still have a love for reading.

PIEHLER: What about movies? Did you ever go to the movies growing up, because you didn't have a radio ...

RIDDLE: The first movie that I saw was—they brought a movie to high school called *The Little Girl of the Limberlost* [*A Girl of the Limberlost*], and the first movie that I paid to go was on my first date, to the Gay Theater in Sweetwater.

PIEHLER: And which movie was that?

RIDDLE: And it was *The Three Stooges*! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: When was that? Do you remember what year you went to your ...

RIDDLE: That could have been along roughly '38 or '39.

PIEHLER: So you were pretty old by that time; you hadn't seen a lot of movies growing up.

RIDDLE: Oh, no, no, no! Those two; that's it!

PIEHLER: That was it?

RIDDLE: That was it. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What did you think of *The Three Stooges* (Laughter) at the time?

RIDDLE: That was something else in those days! We have too many "Three Stooges" now, though! (Whistles)

PIEHLER: Did you, it sounds like you didn't want for food growing up? Is that a fair way to say?

RIDDLE: No, I never went hungry.

PIEHLER: But, clothing—there wasn't a lot of clothing?

RIDDLE: No, sir there wasn't. We had a woolen mill, which wove wool cloth in Sweetwater. Mother would go there and buy remnants, where they had cut off pieces, and make me clothing to wear. What we call knickers in the summertime it would come to around our knees with a band around there and a button. And a Pongee blouse which was kindly a buff color, silky-like material. That was our Sunday dress.

PIEHLER: What about your mother? You mentioned your mother had developed leukemia. When was that diagnosed, do you remember? Was it before the war?

RIDDLE: Yes, it was in the early '40's.

PIEHLER: And what kind of treatment was she able to get?

RIDDLE: The only treatment they had at that time was just simply "X-ray," and we had to bring her to Knoxville for that. And eventually, every time she'd take a treatment it would make her so weak that eventually she got so weak that she wasn't able to make the

trip. And, of course, in those days, you didn't call an ambulance every time you had a sore toe or something; you couldn't afford it. So, at least we thought that.

PIEHLER: Your parents had very modest means. How were they able to pay for the medical treatment; do you remember?

RIDDLE: Just out of their pocket.

PIEHLER: Just out of their pocket?

RIDDLE: No insurance; no insurance.

PIEHLER: You listed on the pre-interview survey your father was a rancher and worked in the oil fields and then was a farmer. Then, the last occupation was Street Department for the city?

RIDDLE: That was after he sold the farm and he came to live with my wife and I in Sweetwater, and he got the job of working with the Street Department there.

PIEHLER: And he kept that job until he passed away?

RIDDLE: Until he retired.

PIEHLER: Your father lived until 1969, so do you know when he retired from the Street Department?

RIDDLE: Well, it was four or five years before that.

PIEHLER: Before he passed?

RIDDLE: He was in his 70's when he retired.

PIEHLER: Before Pearl Harbor, what notions did you have about World War II? Did you follow the news at all either involving Germany or Japan?

RIDDLE: We were really not too concerned there was a battle going on; it was other people and we just weren't involved in it until things began to escalate and Americans got involved in it and began to draft people we knew and so forth. Then we'd become concerned.

PIEHLER: Did you know anyone who got drafted in the peace-time draft from Sweetwater?

RIDDLE: Before the war?

PIEHLER: Before the war; the pre-war draft?

RIDDLE: A fellow by the name of Buster Ayers, which is passed away, is the only one I recall. He was in the Medical Corps.

PIEHLER: That was the only one you know who went before Pearl Harbor?

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: It sounds like the war seemed pretty distant. Did you think that America would actually get involved, or did you give it much thought growing up?

RIDDLE: Well, my father was in the next group to be drafted in 1918 when the war ended, so I had read about and heard about World War I. And then, after World War II started, I knew that it could get serious.

PIEHLER: Now your father was drafted in 1918. Did he ever make it overseas?

RIDDLE: Uh, he wasn't drafted—he received a notice to be in the next group!

PIEHLER: But then the war ended ...

RIDDLE: The war ended and that took care of it, and he and Mother married then.

WOMACK: Do you remember where you were when you heard the news of Pearl Harbor?

RIDDLE: Absolutely: the day that I told you that I enrolled in Anderson Aircraft School, and I caught a Greyhound bus. Another fellow by the name of Robert Holder and myself had signed up. We caught a Greyhound bus in Sweetwater on Sunday morning, went by the way of Chattanooga; ... it took us all day to go to Nashville, and we didn't know about it until we got to Nashville and they give us the news that Pearl Harbor.

WOMACK: What was your initial reaction?

RIDDLE: “Wow!” (Laughter) “I wish I hadn't a-come!”

PIEHLER: Growing up in high school, you mentioned you'd had the call when you were fifteen to go into the ministry. Did you think you would go to seminary to be a minister or did you think you would combine the ministry with another career occupation?

RIDDLE: Oh, no! I rejected the call altogether.

PIEHLER: You did?

RIDDLE: I'm convinced today that—I don't know what your religious belief is or your concept of it, but that doesn't matter, but I'm just making this statement. I'm convinced

that God allowed me to go through all of this because I refused the call. He allowed everything in the world to happen to me except take my life! I crash-landed twice, Holland, Normandy—wounded many times. There’s scars across my hand [Points to his hand] and my back; shrapnel they picked out after I came home. And, all of these things happened because I rejected that call! And I might as well go ahead and tell you, it wasn’t until in Holland—we were to be relieved by the Canadians in the latter part of November. And I had my little Testament with me sitting in the foxhole; there wasn’t any battle going on, no danger whatsoever. We were just waiting to be relieved by the Canadians, and I was reading my Bible and praying. And I finally promised the Lord if he’d let me come back, I’d do what he wanted me to do. As I shared with Womack there that, on the way up, the Canadians, much like the British people, they loved their “spot of tea!” They carried a teapot on the side of the tank. And they would stop anywhere and everywhere, even in battle to make a pot of tea! So, I thought they would never get there and relieve us. But afterwards, I still had to go through the Battle of the Bulge, even after I made that promise. And I did try to make preparations after I came home. I went to preacher summer school at Carson Newman. I became president of the summer school, and I took correspondence—off-campus courses and Southern Baptist seminary extension courses. So I tried to prepare myself. I used my GI Bill when I came out to go to electronics school. When I went to sign up, my desire was to become a racecar mechanic, and the list had a hundred and fifty-five people already on the list, but the electronic field was wide open! So, I’m kind of a guy that’ll try anything *once*! I got involved in electronics and for the next three years, I spent [time working] in electronics, and then a year on the job training, and then almost forty years in electronics work. Most of the churches I served after I surrendered to preach [and] was ordained were bivocational—only one instance that I was in the field full time—so I had to work. And it [electronics] came in handy because I did get good wages out of electronic work. So, I started out to be an electrical engineer, but ended up as an electronic technician because I surrendered to the call to preach in the midst of it and I didn’t see any need going on and getting my engineering degree if I was going to be a minister.

PIEHLER: Because, in a sense, you’re doing two jobs. One as a minister—a full time minister ...

RIDDLE: Well, at one time I had three jobs. I had three children in school and it was during this time, that this particular church put me on the full-time field. I had a business in Sweetwater. I sold the business and went on the field full time. Sixty-five dollars a week, three children in school, and the prices were escalating; going up at that particular time. Many times, these little ice cream place there, we’d come from church and we’d pass it and one of the kids would say, “Oh, I’d love to have a *ice cream*! I forgot, we can’t afford it!” One day I found my little boy out behind the house just crying his heart out and he said, “We *never will* have nothing as long as Daddy’s a-preaching!” And it was a difficult time. And many times I’d be out visiting and I’d pass this little church. I’d go up to there in the altar and pray and pray because I didn’t know what tomorrow was going to bring, but I never went hungry; the Lord provided.

PIEHLER: Going back to ... before the war, what did you want to do when you grew up in high school? What were you planning, or hoping for?

RIDDLE: I wanted to be a lawyer, and Mother said, “The Bible says, ‘woe unto the doctors and lawyers.’” And she tried to talk me out of it!

PIEHLER: So you wanted to be a lawyer, but your mother didn’t want you to?

RIDDLE: No. And right before I was drafted, I was going to volunteer for the Navy and she talked me out of that.

PIEHLER: Why the Navy? Why talking you out of the Navy?

RIDDLE: Well, to me that was the thing, they had the blue uniforms and a little white cap and all of that good stuff. It attracted my attention.

PIEHLER: And this was before Pearl Harbor?

RIDDLE: Yes—well no, it was—they began to draft people and I realized I was going to be drafted. And I had heard that the sailors had a worldly life, too, and I was trying to prove, you know. I thought if I could get away from home I could do what I wanted to do.

PIEHLER: So in some ways, you were eager to get away from home, growing up?

RIDDLE: In a way, yeah.

PIEHLER: It’s not an accident that you picked Nashville as a way to, as a place to go away to.

RIDDLE: And more so to get back when it was all over with.

PIEHLER: Well, yeah, afterwards you came back to your hometown, but initially, before the war, immediately you wanted to get away?

RIDDLE: I honestly say I would, yes.

PIEHLER: Well before we get to the war, is there anything, I feel like, and I don’t know, I said Seth knows, you’ve grown up in that area.

WOMACK: Right.

PIEHLER: Is there anything we’ve forgotten to ask about Sweetwater?

WOMACK: Well, I guess if you could tell us, you know, about where exactly you grew up.

PIEHLER: And I guess your neighbors, too. Who were your neighbors?

RIDDLE: Well I grew up five-and-a-half miles west of Sweetwater on the Old Spring—Blue Spring Road, on Route 3 and my neighbors was: to the east was the Lonas family, and to the west was a little settlement of black people called Piney. And to the north was the Richeson family. And nothing except a huge ridge to the south so we didn't have any neighbors on that side. And one reason I became a reader [was] simply spending my time reading; I had no playmates to speak of.

PIEHLER: Because people were so far ...

RIDDLE: Well, they were all older people who were around us. And, being the only child, they didn't trust me going very far. See what happened, I understand—I didn't learn this until just shortly before Dad passed away—my mother miscarried before I was born; he was a little boy. And I think for that particular reason, they wanted to take care of me and watch over me and [make sure] nothing'd happen to me, especially.

PIEHLER: Growing up, did you wish you had some brothers and sisters?

RIDDLE: I often wondered how it'd be like. Others I would hear of the brothers and sisters arguing even fighting and so forth and I just wondered how that would be.

WOMACK: Well, with your parents being so protective and you said that your mom talked you out of joining the Navy, how did your mother react when you enlisted, or when you were drafted in the army?

RIDDLE: Well, she naturally was sad and cried a lot and worried about me. Everybody—all the neighbors, all the people thought I was a good little boy, but I'm sorry to say that I was a *mischievous* little fellow! (Laughter) And to this day, I still, when I take a notion to do something, I do it or die. And I guess that determination helped me even in combat. But I'll share with you two instances that, when I was about four years old, my parents had went to the barn to milk. They had to milk by hand in there; they had one old cow that furnished the family milk, and Dad would feed the animals. While they were gone, in this little house, the first farm that we had, at the front stoop; there was some dead grass there. I gathered that grass together and put under the steps and set it on fire. About the time they come back to the house, they ... put it out. Another time they were gone to the barn and busy, I decided I'd fill up the old kerosene lamp. So I didn't unscrew the top of it, but I poured it down the chimney, and it went everywhere.

PIEHLER: Wow ...

RIDDLE: Then at this same place and about the same age, my father had grown a tobacco crop and in the fall of the year, they were preparing it. We called it stripping; stripped the leaves off the stalk and tied it in bundles. And they were up there working,

and ... my dad chewed tobacco, plug tobacco, and he kept it up on the fireplace. So, I got me a little chew of that tobacco before I went up to the barn and they were busy at work, and they [weren't] noticing me. I'd spit down through a crack, and we were up in a loft. But eventually Dad spotted me spitting down through the crack and he said, "Son, what you need is some of this stripped tobacco to go with that." So he give me a leaf of, believe it or not, the tips—the very strongest part of the plant. So I put some of that in my mouth with that sweet tobacco and chewed it a little while and man, I got so sick! I was just limber; they had to carry me to the house! (Laughter) So that ended my chewing tobacco.

PIEHLER: Did you ever chew tobacco again?

RIDDLE: No. I used to go to my grandmother's house, on my mother's side. She'd dip snuff, and once in a while, she'd give me a little dip of that snuff.

PIEHLER: What about ... —because you don't have any electricity and so forth—were there any, say music, any fiddling or other, sort of, local musicians.

RIDDLE: Hugh Lonas lived—our neighbor that I spoke about a moment ago—played a banjo. His banjo head [had] become broken but he was able to kill a groundhog and he cured that hide and made him a banjo head out of that! And he would oft times come up and play the banjo for us. My mother could play the organ; in fact, I have her organ now that I'll show him [Seth] when we go back. I've got what I call a war room at the house and I've got a lot of paraphernalia in there. She and her sister worked in the hosiery mill at Niota when she was sixteen and they went together and bought the organ, and after Mother died, my aunt kept the organ until she passed away, and so, now I've got it. And it's in perfect order; it still plays! So, she would play it occasionally and we would gather around as a family and sing old hymns. I know you're getting quite amused out of my stories, because I'm just telling it like it is!

PIEHLER: ... I'm partly very enthusiastic to have it there because I think, for my students. I guess, as a historian, I, sort of, am aware of this more, but I think students really don't fully [appreciate] how life has changed in East Tennessee and the rest of the country. What about dancing? Was there any dancing or were you strict on dancing growing up?

RIDDLE: We had a neighbor that occasionally, on Saturday night, would turn all of the furniture out and invite friends in and they'd have a dance. And this was fairly close to the church. They got quite a bit of reaction to that! (Laughter) And then we had this same doctor, Dr. Joe Harrison, had a farm a few miles from where I was born in Loudon County and he had a hardwood floor put in this old farmhouse and he would have dances in there. So, "Swing your partner!" type.

PIEHLER: So this is what you would call square dancing, I guess?

RIDDLE: I suppose; I never was involved in one.

PIEHLER: You never went to the dances?

RIDDLE: No, sir; no sir.

PIEHLER: What about, you mentioned that your mother crocheted. What about quilting? Did your mother make quilts with other women in the community, or how did that work?

RIDDLE: Yes, they would have what they call a “quilting party,” invite the neighbors in and put up a quilt. I don’t know whether you’re acquainted with the manner in which they did that ...

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PIEHLER: You were beginning to describe the manner that they which they made the quilt.

RIDDLE: They would hang four strings from the ceiling attached to four pieces of wooden material that had holes bored in it the length of the timber. And they would lace the quilt to the frame to stretch the quilt, the quilt top over what they call the lining with the cotton bats [batting] in between and they would sew those together or quilt them together. They would invite—I’ve been—when I was a child, I went with Mother to a quilting party where they’d have two quilts up, one in each room. There would be as many as eight or nine ladies there. They’d have the biggest time, and have lunch together! I have some quilts at the house that Mother made. In fact, I have one that I pieced and helped to quilt on.

PIEHLER: Were you the only boy who had done that ... or were there other boys that helped out with the quilting?

RIDDLE: Oh, no! I was the oddball.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so it was mainly daughters that did that.

RIDDLE: Well, even daughters weren’t involved too much. It was mostly just the ladies.

PIEHLER: Just the ladies?

RIDDLE: Because they wanted little, small stitches. It was a disgrace to make a long stitch.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

RIDDLE: So you had to make little stitches, neat stitches.

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like you were very good at this?

RIDDLE: Oh, yeah! I *thought* I was. (Laughter) Good enough they accepted it!

PIEHLER: Was there ever—I guess it's often a popular image of neighbors with, sort of, barn-raising and others. How much mutual help was there between families?

RIDDLE: Mostly in the area where I lived, it was during hay time—getting hay in because it was all horse-drawn, the mowing machine, the hay rake. Shocking hay with the pitchfork by hand and loading it on the wagons with a pitchfork, then pitching it into the barn. Not many farmers were well enough off to have a hayfork to pull it by the animal up into the barn, so you had to throw it up with a pitchfork. That was mostly the time that you would invite the neighbors to come, or during the harvest of the tobacco crops.

PIEHLER: You mentioned the two things that really, sort of staying on terms of family daily life, that were exceptional is when family visited, relatives visited, and also when the preacher came over for a meal. How often would you go to church? Was it every Sunday?

RIDDLE: Well, [at] the country church where I attended, there happened to be a creek that run in front of the church and the road that led into the church—there's a quicksand hole in it. So when we had our Christmas program, usually the church doors closed until Spring, [when it] opened up and we could get back in. And the preacher then would come on Saturday night and on Sunday morning once a month.

PIEHLER: So church was very much determined by the season of the year ...

RIDDLE: The weather.

PIEHLER: ... and the weather?

RIDDLE: In that particular area.

PIEHLER: In that particular area. Would you always stop work on Sunday?

RIDDLE: Always!

PIEHLER: Always. Even church or no church?

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: But otherwise, it was six days a week, or did you ...

RIDDLE: Most of the time, we'd take off on Saturday afternoon.

PIEHLER: Saturday afternoon would be ...

RIDDLE: If we had some job to finish up on Saturday morning. We wouldn't start anything on Saturday usually.

PIEHLER: So that seems to be that Saturday afternoon and Sunday must have been very special times.

RIDDLE: It was! After I grew up into my teens, there would be some twins coming over and we would visit and I would go visit with them. I remember this one boy ... his dad bought him a horse and we'd go and we'd take time riding the horse. And we, one particular time, we were riding the horse and we were trying to do it Indian-style in battle. We'd get over on the side of the horse so they couldn't shoot us and we fell off! (Laughter) That's the type of fun we had, and then in later years I had a bicycle and we'd ride them. When I was a senior in high school, I rode part of the year to school, which was about a five and a half miles to school on the bicycle. And in the latter part of the year, I roomed with a family in town, and this particular family, they'd moved to Sweetwater; they were distant cousins. They had moved from Chattanooga. Both the man and the lady smoked, and that's where I first started smoking, was my senior year in high school. I continued on while I was in the Service. I got up to even three packs a day and night! Even out on the battlefield, I'd pull the shelter half up over my head in no-man's-land and smoke. Light the thing so they couldn't see it! But I quit the habit; that was my new year's resolution 1960.

PIEHLER: That's when you quit?

RIDDLE: I quit.

PIEHLER: Even before the Surgeon General's Warning?

RIDDLE: Dead stop.

PIEHLER: Do any of your teachers stick out that you had either in high school or before high school, elementary?

RIDDLE: Yes. When I was in the third grade, I had a teacher by the name of Ms. Hughes. Someone stole an article in the classroom one day and she tried to find out who stole—I believe it was a small amount of money that they'd stole[n] out of a person's desk. And she kept us in at recess. We had a recess in the morning and then the noon recess and in the afternoon we had a short recess. But she kept us in in the morning recess—let nobody out until they told who got the money! See, when noontime [came], she still hadn't found out, and she wouldn't let us out! And so, in those days, you took your lunch in a lunchbox. I pulled my lunchbox out and I started eating. (Laughter) And she stopped me, but I also got a big old thick paddle applied for eating. That was one instance. And our lunch consisted that of a sandwich of old country ham and potato

custard pie and a pint jar of milk. We set the milk on the outside of the window to stay cool; didn't have any means of cooling except that.

PIEHLER: This is fresh milk?

RIDDLE: Oh, yeah! Whole milk.

PIEHLER: Yeah, whole milk.

RIDDLE: Cream and all.

PIEHLER: And so you probably also, I mean the cream would ...

RIDDLE: Rise to the top!

PIEHLER: Rise to the top.

RIDDLE: Yeah. A lot of the young people today don't even know where butter comes from. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: They don't; there's a lot of things they don't know about! (Laughter) And so, I guess you have memories of your mother making butter? Remember that?

RIDDLE: Oh, yes. I've churned many times; had an old cedar churn.

PIEHLER: What about hunting growing up? Did you go hunting at all?

RIDDLE: Not very much; I wasn't allowed to carry a weapon. In my teens, Dad swapped for a .22. I was allowed to fire it some, but I didn't—I loved to fish, but I never got to go fishing very much.

PIEHLER: Were you ever a Boy Scout?

RIDDLE: No.

PIEHLER: Was there a Y [YMCA] in Sweetwater at the time? I don't know if there's one now.

RIDDLE: Boy Scouts? Yes.

RIDDLE: Was there a Y—YMCA?

RIDDLE: Oh, no, no. We don't have a YMCA.

WOMACK: They've got one in Athens.

RIDDLE: I spoke to the Boy Scouts in Athens not long ago. They were interested in my experience in the War. No, I didn't go to any function whatsoever.

PIEHLER: And in fact you mentioned that the eighth grade was the first time you ate a meal out?

RIDDLE: You Like It Café. I still have some of the ribbons they strung across the top! I'm a packrat; I keep everything.

PIEHLER: Well, I just, on the record want to say, I hope your family, your children, and your grandchildren will treasure those.

RIDDLE: My youngest daughter is interested in history, and I told her when I'm gone that she can have what I've got. But now the other two wouldn't give a nickel to see.

PIEHLER: I always worry that stuff will get thrown out, because we collect things for our archives and I know the East Tennessee Historical Society collects things. And it sounds like you have some treasures that particularly historians would treasure and museum collections would want. You went to Nashville and in fact it was very memorable, your trip to Nashville, because that was on December 7, 1941? How long were you in Nashville and how many months were you in Nashville?

RIDDLE: I was there only a week! Robert Holder, who went with me, he was a married man, had a family, and after he found out about the attack, he came home the next day and left me over there. The agreement was—see I didn't have money! I had fifty dollars to pay down for entry into the school, but they were to give me a job in the tool room and I could work out the tuition while I was going to school. Well, when I got there, it was different. I had to work out the tuition before I could go to school. And so I stayed the week and after, they were not supposed to draft out of the school, they were drafting the students out of the school so I said if I was going to be drafted I would go back home to be drafted.

PIEHLER: So you were only in Nashville ...

RIDDLE: So I lost my fifty dollars, the first fifty dollars I ever saved, working in the department store.

PIEHLER: Which department store did you work in?

RIDDLE: McKinney's Department Store.

PIEHLER: And that was in Sweetwater?

RIDDLE: Sweetwater.

PIEHLER: And you had mentioned you had roomed with your distant cousins. That was your senior year?

RIDDLE: It was my—actually, it was my great-uncle on my mother’s side. Thomas Gann was his name. I have his double-bitted axe today that he gave to me, and it was his folks that I roomed with.

PIEHLER: And the job you had at the department store, how long did you have it for?

RIDDLE: I worked there approximately two years all together.

PIEHLER: How many hours a week?

RIDDLE: Oh, it was five days that I would go to school half a day and then I’d work a half a day. But on Saturday, it was from opening time until it was usually about 10:30-11:00 when I’d get home at night. And by the way, I have my Social Security slips with the wages of fourteen dollars per week minus the Social Security they took out of it. I have a stack of ‘em.

PIEHLER: Oh, you *are* a packrat!

RIDDLE: I’m a packrat. My wife gets angry at me sometimes. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And how did you get the job at the department store?

RIDDLE: Well, they opened up this program at school; they called it the Diversified Occupations. Some students went to be a understudy as a nurse, some, in the hardware store, and others. And this particular store had an opening. They wanted somebody—what it amounted to was a janitor and firing the coal stove in the winter, sweeping the sidewalks off to start with, but eventually I become a sales clerk.

PIEHLER: And how big was the department store?

RIDDLE: There was two huge rooms plus a basement and upstairs, and a stock room. Right before the War—what they called the “Old Scout” work shoe is a particular type that had the tongue that come from the toe all the way up. It sold for \$1.49, and I spent days after days up there marking the price up as they went up until they were about \$4 when I left to go to the army. So he made a huge profit on what he had in stock.

PIEHLER: Because your stock—rationing came in and the war broke out?

RIDDLE: I still have some ration coupons. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: How did you like living in town versus living on the farm?

RIDDLE: Well, suited me alright because I was busy and I was going to school and then working, and I didn't have much time to roam around. Sweetwater's a small place anyway.

PIEHLER: But I take it you had electricity in Sweetwater?

RIDDLE: They had electricity in Sweetwater.

PIEHLER: And indoor plumbing?

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: So that must have been a real change?

RIDDLE: Oh, sure. Yeah, especially on cold mornings. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: The cold mornings, particularly in wintertime.

RIDDLE: Yes, sir.

PIEHLER: You were only in Nashville a week and you lost fifty dollars, which was *a lot* of money then.

RIDDLE: A lot of [money].

PIEHLER: And even fifty dollars—I would miss fifty dollars even today, not as much as then. But what were your impressions of Nashville because you really hadn't been to big ...

RIDDLE: It was a *huge* place. Huge!

PIEHLER: Did you see anything that week you were there?

RIDDLE: It was on Commerce Street, if you happen to ever be through that area.

PIEHLER: Did you see anything? Did you, say, go to the Grand Ole Opry or anything?

RIDDLE: Oh, no no.

PIEHLER: No, you just really were at the school?

RIDDLE: This was a boardinghouse and there were approximately twelve or fifteen students that were rooming there. It was a huge house, and we had just a huge dining table and all eat together, and there wasn't a great lot of food put out there. I remember the morning I got up before the others when I started back home. The milkman had left—that was in the days when they placed the milk bottles outside the door—they

hadn't, the others hadn't got up and got breakfast. So as I went out the door, I picked up the bottle of milk and I drank the milk before I went to the bus station to start home. That was my breakfast. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You came back to home and in your pre-interview survey you said that you enlisted on December 10, 1942 in Athens. What did you do in between? It was almost a year from the outbreak from Pearl Harbor in December 7, 1941?

RIDDLE: Well, when I came home from Nashville, Dad got me a deferment to help him on the farm. See, at that time the farm products were essential for the war effort. But they cancelled that after about six months.

PIEHLER: And it sounds like it was the local draft board that cancelled it. Is that ...

RIDDLE: Athens, McMinn County.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and why do you think they cancelled it because I thought—my sense was that agricultural exemptions were ...

RIDDLE: Well, they were needing young men.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and most people who had them didn't lose them, or is that ...

RIDDLE: Desperate for it.

PIEHLER: They were really desperate for men?

RIDDLE: Or else they wouldn't have taken me.

PIEHLER: Because you sound like, you mentioned that you were not in ...

RIDDLE: I wasn't enthused, no, sir!

PIEHLER: And you weren't a great, as you might say, physical specimen in terms of—you had rheumatism and ...

RIDDLE: Not rheumatism, rheumatic fever.

PIEHLER: Excuse me, rheumatic fever growing up.

RIDDLE: That is a killer within itself.

PIEHLER: But they did take you?

RIDDLE: Yes, sir.

PIEHLER: I guess, the year you were on the farm, did your father make more money for his farm products during the war particularly that year?

RIDDLE: Not necessarily.

PIEHLER: It wasn't a big bonanza for the family?

RIDDLE: No, it was just more or less helping him with what he was in the habit of putting out that particular year. Of course, his tobacco may have brought a little more. That's about the only thing that he was able to sell because the hay that he raised was for the animals. The corn was used to feed the animals and also to make meal for our cornbread.

PIEHLER: So, in a lot of ways, the war didn't really change your family's life that much?

RIDDLE: No.

PIEHLER: The biggest change, it sounds like, was when TVA strung lines out.

RIDDLE: That was when the change began to take place. And people began to—as I said, most of our neighbors were older people and a lot of them had passed out. In fact, my grandfather and my grandmother on my mother's side passed away while I was in combat overseas. And a lot of those older people died out and new people came in and new houses were built. The change began to take place about '46.

PIEHLER: Mm-hmm. And when new people came in, were they from the Sweetwater area or were they even from other [places]?

RIDDLE: Most of them were from the Tennessee area. The "halfway people" didn't start coming in from the North and South until recent years.

PIEHLER: When was that? I know it is way ahead in the interview, but when did the "halfway people" come in? I like that expression.

RIDDLE: Well in the last, say, ten years.

PIEHLER: Ten years.

RIDDLE: You can go into Tellico Mountains and in that area and there's trailers and buildings everywhere. They come—the reason I call them "halfway people," it's halfway between Michigan and Florida. They come from Michigan. They come from Florida. They come here and retire into the hills so they call them "halfway people."

PIEHLER: So, even people from Florida come up?

RIDDLE: Oh, sure. I know of a number.

PIEHLER: Oh, that's interesting. Because where I'm from, it's traditional that—particularly growing up—to go to Florida every, you know. Well, Seth, let me give you a chance to ask some questions.

WOMACK: Well, I guess most of my questions now deal with Army life.

PIEHLER: Yeah, we can start with training. Let's start with training.

WOMACK: Okay, well, after you were drafted, what do you remember about Basic Training? I know you spent six weeks in regular Basic and six weeks in Clerk School.

RIDDLE: Well let's back up to the Introduction Center. They got us up the first morning at four o'clock. And as I shared with you, I had never been anywhere or seen anything, and the only animals that we would kill on the farm was a hog. Well, they got us up at four in the morning and marched us down to the chow hall. And, standing in line and looking through the window, the butcher was inside and had an entire cow up on the table there carving her! And that was mystifying to me; I had never seen such a huge operation as that to start with. So, when I stepped through the door, behold there's the Sergeant standing inside and I had my cap on. He said, "Boy, get that cap off!" That was the first order I had. (Laughter) So, I took it off there. I remained there about four or five days until they sent me to Camp Wheeler. And I applied for Clerk School. I thought if I could learn to be a general clerk, I wouldn't have to go on a battlefield; I'd have a office job. So, we had six weeks of Clerk School, well first we had six weeks of Basic Training, six weeks of Clerk School, a week of review with that twenty-mile hike that I talked about. I applied for OCS at that point. I went before the committee and was ready to go to OCS. So, they shipped me out before I had a chance to go to school at Fort Bragg.

WOMACK: How did you react to Army life?

RIDDLE: I stayed in camp. On the weekend, a lot of the boys would get a weekend pass and go into Macon. I wasn't on a pass until I was ready to—just before I shipped out to go to Bragg my mother and an aunt of mine were going to come down to see me before I shipped out. And I rented a hotel there, a room in Macon. And they came down and spent Saturday and Sunday with me. I got a weekend pass, and that's the first time I was out of Camp Wheeler. I stayed there. I would write letters. See, we were busy all through the week and training. I'd stay there and I'd write letters corresponding with a number of people, a girl that I had gone with before I went. I tried to write her very often and other friends. So, I was never outside of camp or involved in anything except that one time.

WOMACK: When you were in camp, did you ever get into any kind of mischief?

RIDDLE: Not that I remember. I had to serve on KP a few times, but that was just a routine job.

PIEHLER: I guess, just to back up just a minute, what Induction Center were you ...

RIDDLE: Fort Oglethorpe.

PIEHLER: Fort Oglethorpe.

RIDDLE: Yes, sir.

PIEHLER: And that's where you spent several days?

RIDDLE: Four or five? I don't remember. I'd have to look it up.

PIEHLER: Yeah. I just—you mentioned like the cattle, the scene, this cow being carved up. So, I guess, you really just ate pork growing up and ham as your principle?

RIDDLE: Oh, I was bug-eyed at such an operation as that!

PIEHLER: So, steak or hamburger was different?

RIDDLE: Oh, I'd never eat a hamburger.

PIEHLER: Yeah, or steak.

RIDDLE: No.

PIEHLER: What about chicken? Did you have chickens on the ...

RIDDLE: Oh, we had chickens! Especially when the preacher would come! Baptists love chicken. (Laughter) And it was the old fashion, that you raised it on the farm. You would grab it by the head and wring its head off, put it in hot water, pick the feathers off, and cook it.

PIEHLER: But eating steak and hamburger in the army, that was different?

RIDDLE: Didn't get an awful lot of it.

PIEHLER: Yeah?

RIDDLE: But one thing I remember that sticks out in my mind when I arrived at Camp Wheeler, see, I went in on the tenth of December and by the time I got to Wheeler, it was almost Christmas. They had a big sign up there, "Welcome, Soldier! Merry Christmas!" I thought "My, my, how am I going to have a merry Christmas away from home?" Stranger—didn't know anybody. There was one boy that was inducted when I was. He

was Kyker. Billy Kyker. And he had something wrong with one eye and they rejected him. So, we separated at Fort Oglethorpe and I went on to Wheeler by myself; I didn't know a soul.

PIEHLER: And who was in your Basic Training unit? Who was with you? Where were they from, do you remember?

RIDDLE: There was a mixture. They were from New Jersey; they were from Ohio—a lot of so-called Yankees that I took Basic Training with. And I shared with him (Looks to Seth Womack)—is that worth telling about the big fat boy?

WOMACK: Oh, yeah!

PIEHLER: Yeah, that sounds like a good story.

RIDDLE: Well, we had this one boy named Ozone. He was from Pittsburgh. He was the sad sack of the outfit. He'd never take a shower or anything. He couldn't roll a full field roll. We'd go out on a hike and his roll would fall down on his buttocks. And he was just a sad sack, so the boys got together one evening and threw him in the shower and gave him a G.I.—with G.I. soap. And then this big boy that I was talking about—he was the church pianist and organist. He was big, huge! We went out on the obstacle course and part of the procedure was to swing across this creek on a rope. Well, halfway across, his hands [gave] way and he bumped down into the creek. (Laughter) Never learned to be a soldier, either one of them.

PIEHLER: Did they both wash out—the “sad sack” and the one who fell down into the creek—or did they make it through?

RIDDLE: After they took me to Bragg, we separated.

PIEHLER: So, you don't know what ever happened?

RIDDLE: No, I don't know what happened.

PIEHLER: Looking back—I mean, I have a feeling you reflected a lot about this all through your—particularly in combat but even later on. How good was your Basic, I mean, when you look back on it particularly in combat? I mean, what did they teach you right and what did you think they needed to strengthen?

RIDDLE: Nothing in particular that helped me in combat except ability to march in parades, to obey commands; I learned to keep my uniform nice [and] in place. Everything had a place—an order. I wasn't used to that at home! But, such things as that didn't help much in combat. It was later that you just had to learn on-the-job training in combat.

PIEHLER: So much of what you learned in combat was, in fact, on the job? Yeah, I mean, in other words, you didn't—well, we'll get into some more of your training but let me ask you about company clerk because you studied to be a company clerk. Did you know how to type?

RIDDLE: Oh, I made—in high school, I took several commercial subjects. For instance, I took shorthand two year[s]. That didn't help my longhand much, now! Then I took typing; I got my “thirty-three words per minute perfect” paper certificate in high school. I went to Clerk School and I was striving to do the very best I could. So, I got my seventy-five word per minute. So, I love typing—I still type a lot today. And I made good in Clerk School, exceptionally good.

PIEHLER: I have not interviewed too many people who've gone to Clerk School. What do they teach you in Clerk School?

RIDDLE: Well, that was to take care of the morning reports on the supplies and different things like that. Mostly it's bookkeeping.

PIEHLER: How detailed were Army reports? Do any memories stick out about—because I've read some of the old manuals from World War II, and they're complicated, some of the army ways of doing things! (Laughs)

RIDDLE: Yes, sir. They had a way of doing everything. We always said they had three ways: the right way, the wrong way, and the Army way! (Laughter) That's one reason I didn't want to become a truck driver because you had to drive according to the regulations and I was a speedster! (Laughter) So, when we arrived—I may be jumping ahead a little but we can come back to what you were talking about—when we arrived in Fort Bragg, as I spoke before, they first put me in the MP's and I served there for awhile and found out I was two inches too short. You had to be 5'8" and I was only 5'6"! So they put me in Company B, 325th Glider Infantry, B Company. But when we stepped off of the bus at Fort Bragg before I went into the MP's, the old sergeant came out cursing and said, “What in the world are you sending these clerks and bakers up here!? What we need are machinegun and mortar men!” So that was the end of my clerk job for the time being. However I did—overseas, I did work some in an office. I had one first sergeant and my captain, which ... I see occasionally now, he was a good captain. He let me stay in out of the field and work in the office.

PIEHLER: In other words, you were trained in the specialty, but really that's not ...

RIDDLE: I was trained, but I was never used. I still carry that MOS: General Clerk.

PIEHLER: What about, in terms of the people who went to Clerk School with you, what was that group like?

RIDDLE: One of my next “bed buddies” was a district attorney of Kentucky. And that poor fellow, he may have known law, but he surely couldn't get used to the Army way.

In fact, when we had an inspection he would pay me to make his bunk up so it would pass inspections so he wouldn't get gigged. Those specifications was, they could drop a coin on there and it would flip. It'd be tight. There's a special way of making your folds and everything and that poor fellow, he couldn't put his clothes in the order they were supposed to be. All the hangers had to be to the left shoulder and so forth and at a certain area. His footlocker had to be in a certain order too: a razor here, and so forth. He couldn't get it together, so he'd pay me to fix his part of the time!

PIEHLER: It sounds like some of the parts of Army life you adapted to well, like some of the housekeeping?

RIDDLE: See, I was "mama's boy."

PIEHLER: And so that, keeping your bed neat and your uniforms and your ...

RIDDLE: And the floor cleaned, dusted.

PIEHLER: Whereas this other—how old was he, this district attorney? He must have been fairly old by Army standards?

RIDDLE: He was much older than I. I would say he was in his early thirties or late twenties. When I arrived at Bragg—when I was twenty-one, my supply sergeant was thirty-nine. I was one of the younger men in our company.

PIEHLER: After clerk school, you went to Fort Bragg, correct?

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: Now, how long were you an MP?

RIDDLE: Approximately three weeks.

PIEHLER: Three weeks. Any memories that stick out about being an MP?

RIDDLE: We were—after the move, we were restricted to camp. I never got to go home from the time I was inducted at Fort Oglethorpe until I [came] back, and that was in '42, until '45. We were restricted because of the move, and when that restriction was over, they were restricted because they were alerted to go overseas! So, I never even got to go to Fayetteville while I was there!

PIEHLER: You never got your week's leave after training? I mean, I thought that was ...

RIDDLE: I had thoughts of trying to slip off and go over the hill and come home during that time, but I didn't. I stayed in camp.

PIEHLER: So, you only got to see your mother. Did you get to see your father when they came to Macon?

RIDDLE: No. He didn't come.

PIEHLER: So it was only your mother, then?

RIDDLE: Only my mother.

PIEHLER: So, you didn't see your father after you left from Athens ...

RIDDLE: No.

PIEHLER: ... until you came home?

RIDDLE: No.

PIEHLER: That's a long time!

RIDDLE: Thirty-three months.

PIEHLER: And particularly for someone who had really—your world had been Sweetwater and the farm!

RIDDLE: Yeah, and being at home all that time.

WOMACK: When you got to Fort Bragg, did you volunteer to join the 82nd or did they tell you that you were going to the 82nd?

RIDDLE: No, sir. No, the paratroopers were supposed to be volunteers but not the glidermen.

WOMACK: The glidermen weren't?

RIDDLE: No.

WOMACK: And, can you tell us about your training as a gliderman?

RIDDLE: It was mostly hikes. You see, they were alerted for overseas, and it was just mostly hikes and drills, manual, and such nature.

WOMACK: Right. Well you said earlier that paratroopers would often look down at the glidermen. Could you tell us about that?

RIDDLE: I better not put all that in there! An ex-paratrooper might beat up on me! (Laughter) They considered the glidermen as second-class soldiers. They [paratroopers]

had volunteered; they had uniforms; they had jump boots. They were paid fifty dollars extra per month. So, we didn't receive any flight pay. We wore old leggings and old Brogan army shoes and fatigues. So, we were second-class as far as they [were] concerned until we got to Normandy and we saved them a few times, and then they recognized us and issued the boots, which I have mine today!

PIEHLER: Did you ever get flight pay?

RIDDLE: After Normandy, we came back to England; they [gave] us one half of Base Pay no matter whether you was a private, sergeant, whatever.

PIEHLER: What about—you entered the training, sort of, later than others. Had others received more advanced infantry ...

RIDDLE: They had already; it was organized and started in Louisiana before they moved to Fort Bragg. They had received all of this training. I never even had seen a glider or rode in a glider until I was overseas. I had no training.

PIEHLER: What about advanced weapons training?

RIDDLE: Well, I had gone to the firing line with several different weapons: BAR, '03 Springfield.

PIEHLER: Was that at Bragg or at Basic?

RIDDLE: Well, at both places.

PIEHLER: Both places.

RIDDLE: Yes, sir. Qualified—I still have my medal for that.

PIEHLER: I'm curious in terms of when the Army implemented things. ... You mentioned a lot of marches. It also sounds like, did you still have a lot of drill or did you have some efforts to, sort of, create a real combat experience in maneuvers?

RIDDLE: Mostly during Basic Training and what time we were at Bragg before we went overseas, was mostly just close-order drill, preparations for parades, and that kind of thing. And the food—by all means, I want to put this in! When I got to Bragg, they fed us so much goat, that we'd go around saying "Fort Bra-a-a-a-agg, Fort Bra-a-a-a-agg!" (Laughter) I'd never eaten goat, and, man, I couldn't stand that stuff, and sheep, lamb, so forth! I never had eaten anything except pork.

PIEHLER: And the lamb part, it doesn't sound like you cared too much for it, and well, particularly the goat.

RIDDLE: No. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So, in other words, I guess, how much live fire training did you get at Fort Bragg?

RIDDLE: Nothing except the infiltration course, overhead fire.

PIEHLER: That was it?

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: Could, maybe, I'll have you [Seth Womack] ask some of the weapons questions, particularly about training with the weapons.

WOMACK: Right, right. You said you qualified with the Browning Automatic Rifle?

RIDDLE: Yes.

WOMACK: Did you ever qualify with the Thompson?

RIDDLE: No ... Now, while we were in combat—I might say I went to different schools and I learned the nomenclature of a lot of these different weapons, alright? And in one day, in combat, I had twelve different weapons. Something would happen to a friend of mine's weapon and I'd give him mine and I'd pick up one. I've actually put a bolt in the rifle on the move advancing. And I qualified with the BAR but [with] not too good a score because in rapid fire I'd get off the targets.

WOMACK: It gives a kick doesn't it?

RIDDLE: Now on '03 [Springfield 1903, .30 caliber], I done real good—Springfield bolt action.

WOMACK: And you said, when you actually got into combat, you carried the M-1?

RIDDLE: The M-1 was our weapon. The officers carried the little Carbine.

WOMACK: Right, right.

RIDDLE: Carbine.

WOMACK: Okay.

RIDDLE: Folding-stock.

WOMACK: Right. Were you ever around the .30 cal? The machine-gun?

RIDDLE: Yes. You will find in the interview when we get to it, during the Battle of the Bulge, they needed more firepower and they pulled me off of my messenger's job and formed a machine-gun squad. And I carried the .30 caliber and we went in fourteen miles behind the enemy line and took a little village by the name of Regne on the day before Christmas. And, I carried that. They—I'll wait 'til that time.

WOMACK: That's fine. I guess, you could tell us a little about your boat ride?

RIDDLE: While we're on the weapons, we didn't have a bazooka until we were overseas. And they issued the bazooka one to a company to start with and it was the long type that didn't come apart. Everybody was afraid to fire the thing, and, as I've said before, I'm like the cat! (Laughter) Curiosity got the best of me—I'll try anything once. So I said, "I'll fire it one time to show these fellows that it works if you'll get somebody as a gunner on it." So, after I fired it, they found some other fellows that [were] willing to carry it. Then later, of course, they got the type that come apart. But I was the first one of 'em to fire the bazooka in our company! Oh, I was a daredevil to be so little! I mean, I'm not bragging—just telling you the truth.

PIEHLER: Your company ... at Bragg—could you tell a little bit about it?

RIDDLE: At Bragg?

PIEHLER: Yeah. Because it would change quite a bit as the war went on.

RIDDLE: Well, it was composed of a hundred and fifty-five men. We had the CO—company commander—the executive officer, a supply sergeant, first sergeant, and three platoons with platoon leader and assistant platoon leader. And I was in the Headquarters group. As I said, I was the radioman. I carried in combat the [SRC-]300 combat radio with the battery, which weighed forty-two pounds plus my rifle, nine pounds, and my pack and all of that.

PIEHLER: How heavy were you at the time?

RIDDLE: Well, when I went into the Army I weighed a hundred and twenty-nine pounds.

PIEHLER: And the radio and battery was forty-two pounds?

RIDDLE: Yessir.

PIEHLER: And then the other ...

RIDDLE: Combat battery.

PIEHLER: Yeah, combat battery. And then, you had—you almost carried as much as you weighed!!!

RIDDLE: And that helmet—that's the reason I'm bald-headed today; it wore all the hair off of the top of my head. (Laughter) And I was the messenger, company messenger to start with. A runner, they call that, taking messages to the battalion. And then later, I was sent to battalion to be the battalion runner and bring back messages to the company and then later on up to regiment and with a general. I also, later on in combat, they issued us a signal lamp. I learned Morse code and [was] able to tap out the messages on the light. And, as I've shared with you, I've served in every capacity in the company! I was the flunky, I guess. I'd do anything, master of none; whatever needed to be done, that's what I was used for.

PIEHLER: Do you remember, both in training but then when you first joined the company at Bragg, your sergeants and platoon leaders and lieutenants? You mentioned one captain who sticks out.

RIDDLE: Oh, I didn't get him until overseas and in combat.

PIEHLER: That was overseas? Well, I guess, before combat?

RIDDLE: I really don't have a recollection of too many of my officers while I was at Bragg. After, even after I went overseas, I don't remember too much because they were constantly changing, promoting some of them and filling the gaps, making preparations for combat. It wasn't until, perhaps in England, that I begin to remember the officers and so forth that I went into combat with.

PIEHLER: Now, you didn't get to go home. Where did you sail from?

RIDDLE: I sailed from Brooklyn on the *Santa Rosa*. It was a peacetime ship that had been converted into a troop carrier. It had twice as many men on there as it was allowed. Half of 'em slept on deck and half in the bunks over and we changed over. When it [came] my time to sleep up on the top deck, I woke up one morning, it was raining in my face. It was black out, dark—you couldn't see. I finally felt my way downstairs into the hallway and stood there until daylight. We were in a convoy. The battleship *Texas* was off to our right; I stood on the deck and watched it many hours. And there's a story about it, and I'll show you a picture when I get back home. I'm going to show him (Seth Womack) through my war room when I get back.

PIEHLER: You departed from Brooklyn, so you took the train up from Bragg to Brooklyn?

RIDDLE: We went—no, we went from Bragg to Camp Edwards, Massachusetts.

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

PIEHLER: ... This continues an interview with Clinton Riddle on March 20, 2002, in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

WOMACK: Seth Womack.

PIEHLER: ... and you were just saying you were restricted to camp at Fort Edwards, and it was there that did the sand ...

RIDDLE: They set up the sand table to represent the shores of Normandy and it was very accurate I found after I arrived there. And they would go through the process of the invasion—simulating it to us. So, we pretty well had a picture of what was going to happen.

PIEHLER: And this was still in the States.

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: But did you know that this was going to be Normandy, or was this just a beach somewhere?

RIDDLE: It was just a beach to us; it wasn't designated.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So, you never made it out of Camp Edwards to go into town or Boston?

RIDDLE: Oh, no!

PIEHLER: Oh, no.

RIDDLE: No, no!

PIEHLER: And how many weeks or how many days were you at ...

RIDDLE: I would have to refer to something.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

RIDDLE: It was, I would estimate, around two weeks there about.

PIEHLER: And then after Camp Edwards, did they send you to Brooklyn?

RIDDLE: Then ... yes.

PIEHLER: And again, it sounds like you got to see Brooklyn and New York from a distance. You saw the skyscrapers, but you didn't ever get into Manhattan or ...

RIDDLE: No.

PIEHLER: So, you really hadn't—a lot of people I've interviewed, they were sent all around the country and they, sort of, get to get out off base, go out on leave and people invite them to dinner—they'd go into town.

RIDDLE: No.

PIEHLER: But they—once you got in, they kept you quite literally on base. ... You mentioned the voyage being very, well at one point, very wet when you slept up on deck. Did you get seasick at all?

RIDDLE: Oh, no! A lot of the fellows did. We had two convoys come together and off of the Outer Banks of North Carolina and proceeded to Casablanca. And it was a huge voyage. As I said, the battleship *Texas* was off to our right. I watched it many, many hours. We got credit for sinking two subs on the way over with ash cans! We zigzagged across and they were alerted that the subs were in the area and they dropped those ash cans. And we were—we left on the 28th of April '43 and then May the 10th in Casablanca. The harbor was filled with boats that scuttled—a lot of them were French boats.

PIEHLER: I thought we might take a break for lunch, if that ...

RIDDLE: Well, while I'm on that subject.

PIEHLER: Yes, well I don't want to ...

RIDDLE: While I'm on that subject, you [were] talking about getting seasick. So many of them got seasick that you would go down to eat and they were vomiting and sick and the ship was rolling, so you'd run from one end of the place. They had the food on the table and you could just go by and pick it up and you'd run from one end of the boat to the other. And these fellows [were] vomiting and everything—it would turn your stomach so you couldn't eat! So I finally went to the PX and I bought me a box of Mars and another box of candy—that's what I lived on the rest of the way. I never left my bunk while I had the bunk. I'd eat the candy bars!

PIEHLER: When you were sleeping on deck, I mean—your gear, where was it? Was it with you on deck?

RIDDLE: It was with me.

PIEHLER: So, it got wet.

RIDDLE: You'd take that gear with you wherever you'd go.

PIEHLER: Wherever you went? Even to mess?

RIDDLE: To mess?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

RIDDLE: Oh, well, see, down below in the bunk, I'd leave it with the bunk.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but when you were on deck, you would literally have it?

RIDDLE: Because they were renovating the boat. They were up there chipping paint all the way across, the sailors, and you wouldn't leave your equipment laying out.

PIEHLER: Because the sailors would take it?

RIDDLE: Well, no. Not necessarily, but it was an opportunity for them to.

PIEHLER: How scared were people during that, I mean, you were credited with sinking two German subs? How nervous were people about that?

RIDDLE: Well, the trip was fine, except on that occasion that they were alerted the submarines.

PIEHLER: You had a, it sounds like a natural follow question before.

WOMACK: Oh, I was just gonna ask about Morocco!

PIEHLER: Okay.

RIDDLE: Morocco?

WOMACK: Yeah, we could go ahead and break for lunch if you want to.

PIEHLER: Why don't we break for lunch? That way we could be on the earlier side. Now, where is your car?

WOMACK: I parked over in the garage.

PIEHLER: Okay.

WOMACK: I can go run and get it.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and I'll meet you down in the circle; I'll need to get my jacket.

-----BREAK FOR LUNCH-----

PIEHLER: Okay, we're resuming our interview after a break for lunch. And I just want to on the record encourage you! It sounds like you have enough material, when it's

organized, for a good memoir. We wanted to continue to talk about your arrival in North Africa, and I'll let Seth pick it up from here.

WOMACK: I guess ... you landed in Casablanca, right?

RIDDLE: Right.

WOMACK: And ... I guess you started training in Morocco?

RIDDLE: Well, after we landed in Casablanca, they took us by truck approximately 400 miles to Oujda; a camp outside of Oujda. It was out in the middle of a *great* wheat field! We were told that the Germans came in with airplanes and sewed those wheat fields and the natives [were] out there with sickles trying to harvest that wheat. And we pitched our pup tents in the middle of this big wheat field—no shade or anything. At this point, they brought in machinery and grated out a little landing strip, and brought in two gliders to qualify us boys that had not had training in the States; and I took my first fifteen-minute ride in a glider there in the middle of that desert. It came up a storm one afternoon there and flipped one of the gliders and destroyed it. So we just had one left to qualify the rest of them with. But while we [were] there, they run out of—I served on KP while I was there. We just had a tent with a kitchen. We [ran] out of anything to clean the dishes with—while I was on KP, I had to clean the pots, the grease and so forth out with sand! A lot of the boys took dysentery and a lot of them were sick, and it was so hot that finally they got to having their problems and training in the night. And we were supposed to sleep in the daytime, but it was so hot in those little pup tents that you couldn't sleep. And we were there approximately six weeks until we moved by glider to a place called Kairouan. It was twelve miles to the nearest village and forty miles to the nearest town. And in this orchard, olive orchard, we placed a pup tent under each tree to camouflage it from the air. It was surrounded by a huge cactus fence. We were under British rationing at that time—we were preparing for the Sicilian invasion—[British rationing] liked to have starved us to death!

PIEHLER: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about the British rations, comparing them to American rations.

RIDDLE: Well it was American food, but it was under British ration or, they had the ruling over it. That's the time when the chocolate bar came out. We had two boys that was on guard of this stock pile and they decided that they'd try those things out—and they were very, very rich, and it made 'em sick! They'd slipped in there and eaten while they [were] on guard. But what I was fixing to say—I've went back, actually, for seconds on turnip green juice! That's how scarce the food was! For our water, they had the Lister bag hung up in the tree; it had several spigots around—you'd fill your canteen up with the water, pull a sock up on it and wet the sock, hang it up in a tree and let the air evaporate to pull the heat out of the canteen. That's the way we'd cool the water. And while we were there, before the invasion of Sicily, our chaplain—we had a decent hut there—they had two-week of revival. There were several of the men that were saved, and one Sunday afternoon, the Chaplain took six boys out to a place they called the

Waddi. There were native kids out there with sticks in the water to beat the snakes back while they had the baptizing. They joined the Chaplain's church back in the States in Texas. And, of course, the paratroopers went in first. Do you want me to continue on with Africa?

PIEHLER: Go on—keep going!

RIDDLE: Okay. The time [came] for the invasion of Sicily and, of course, the paratroopers went in first. And they shot down, I believe, twenty-four of our C-47's—they thought it was the enemy coming in. And they got off route and downed those planes and we didn't have enough planes to pull the gliders! So they took us up to Bizerte and began to train us for amphibious training to make an invasion in the water, and to teach everybody how to swim. Eventually, they brought back enough of the C-47's to take us to Sicily. We's supposed to have landed at Palermo, but instead we landed at Gela, right in the middle of the fighting that was going on. And eventually we made our way on up to Palermo and that's about the extent of our experience there. I never went on a pass anywhere. I didn't go anywhere except I went into that little village, Oujda, one time; a lot of the area was off limits—red light district. So, there wasn't much there to see.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, being in Africa—you mentioned the one incident to have baptisms, immersions, they had to beat the snakes away. How much contact did you have with Africans in North Africa?

RIDDLE: Well, as little as possible! (Laughs) You didn't want to! We had a guy in our outfit, a wino. As soon as we'd go into a place ... a lot of times he'd take a mattress cover and swap it for wine. If there was any in the area, anywhere, he'd find it! He got real smart and got to cutting them in two and just giving them half of it rolled up. What they'd do was take these old mattress covers and cut out sleeves and a place for their head and pull it down and wear it like a shirt, those natives there.

PIEHLER: It sounds, the way you've described it, like the supply system had some clear problems? [Like] running out of soap.

RIDDLE: They were preparing there on the end for the invasion of Sicily and I don't know what the cause was when we were in Oujda. They were just out in the middle of the desert away from everything.

PIEHLER: It sounds like ... in some ways a pretty miserable, at times, existence.

RIDDLE: Oh, it was terrible! That's when I wrote "My Version of the Army Life."

PIEHLER: You should probably read that, if you don't mind. I'd like to hear you read us one or two of your poems, because I enjoyed the poems you had mailed earlier, but "The Army Life" would be very appropriate one.

RIDDLE: Alright. [Reads the following poem]  
My Version of the Army Life

The pup tent is my shelter,  
The place in which I dwell.  
The stakes are the anchors,  
Upon which the shovel fell.

Beyond the distant seas,  
Beyond the distant land,  
I dwell in a lonely spot  
Out on the burning sand.

The blankets are my cover,  
A jacket for my head.  
The winds is my music,  
And crackers for my bread.

The bugler always blowing  
From early morn 'til late.  
If I could find that bugle,  
I'd surely change his fate!

The Corporal's always yelling:  
"Come on boys—let's fight!"  
I know he is bucking  
To get another stripe.

We're always running problems,  
With heavy pack and gun.  
They never seem to end,  
But only half begun.

At night when I am weary  
And the sun has gone to rest,  
The moonlight is my candle  
Beyond the distant crest.

I must write my Mom a line  
To let her know I'm well.  
She need not know the life  
Beneath this burning Hell.

Boys, I'll tell you what,  
It is a life to dream about.  
But take my good advice,  
And not a word in doubt!

Stay clear of Army Life,  
And think of what I've said!  
I'd rather be a yellow coward  
Than just a hero dead.

RIDDLE: (Laughter) That happened out in the middle of this desert. No mail for six weeks. No payday. No nothing! Only just work and drilling.

PIEHLER: And the food wasn't very good?

RIDDLE: Oh, no, no, no!

PIEHLER: And the water was hot?

RIDDLE: Sanitation—had an outdoor pit and the flies were terrible—and dysentery ...

WOMACK: Now this is where you talked about, in Africa, the American CG4A gliders. The wings were warped, correct?

RIDDLE: That was the reason we used the British gliders going into Normandy. Because, the CG4A's were put in crates here in the States and shipped to Africa and the sun was so hot, that it warped a lot of the wings and we couldn't use them! So, we used the British gliders for the invasion of Normandy.

PIEHLER: And ... they probably would have been better off if they went straight to England?

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: Probably one of the biggest cases of friendly fire: the shooting down of the paratroopers. When did you know, learn of that? Did you know it at the time?

RIDDLE: Not at the time, but immediately after that we were notified we would not be going. See, we was to follow them, up with reinforcements.

PIEHLER: So, you knew right away that a big mistake had been made?

RIDDLE: Yes. Yes, word got back. I don't know how they received it, but ...

PIEHLER: But there wasn't enough to totally hush it up?

RIDDLE: ... it came down to us, not in detail, but to let us know that we weren't going. And then we began to train for the amphibious [invasion].

PIEHLER: And, now did you know how to swim?

RIDDLE: Not very well, but I could swim in that salty Mediterranean!

PIEHLER: Because of the buoyancy?

RIDDLE: To keep the jellyfish back! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What ... other things did you learn, specifically for amphibious training?

RIDDLE: Amphibious?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

RIDDLE: Ah, we made, well, when we made the landing, see from Palermo we took a LCI and made the beach landing in Italy at Salerno beach. But, we were lucky enough that I stepped from the boat on to the land. But in our practice there in the Mediterranean, some of them didn't make it in to shore and you'd have to wade in the water waist-deep and hold your rifle up.

PIEHLER: So, the one beach amphibious assault you did do ...

RIDDLE: Was successful.

PIEHLER: ... was successful. Now how many waves—in terms of the invasion of Italy, what wave were you?

RIDDLE: Well, of course, I was in the 1st Battalion. And they used the two battalions composed of three platoons and four platoons actually with each company, three regiments, light machine guns. We didn't have any heavy [artillery], but we did have two water-cooled that were attached from division headquarters.

PIEHLER: ... Before I start asking you about combat—now, when you qualified on the glider, that was the first time you had ever flown?

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: What was it like? What was your initial thought?

RIDDLE: I was holding on and looking at the fragile wings flopping in the wind; they just more circled around over our camp area. Marina was the name of the camp.

PIEHLER: Any regrets that you were in gliders from the first, or was it something you just got used to?

RIDDLE: Well, after the initial shock was over, to be honest, I was proud to be in the gliders! And especially after it was recognized by the paratroopers, I could almost strut at the idea! (Laughter) Because most of those—and by the way, I didn't get my awards or ribbons until '92. I'd written everybody in the country, even to Missouri and everywhere else. And I finally wrote to General Sheldon who was Commander of the 82nd at Bragg, and I made the statement—he's a paratrooper—and I made that statement about the paratroopers looking down their nose at us as a second-class citizen. But I had won these awards and I wanted them! So, he wrote me back a letter and I have that letter now framed and on my wall. And it states this: that "Any paratrooper worth his salt would rather go into combat with a parachute than with a glider," and I'm so proud of that! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Now, as I said, I've never been in combat nor have I been in the military, but I've seen what those gliders look like in a museum and I'd much rather jump in than be on those gliders!

RIDDLE: Well I qualified as a jumper! I went out—I mean, I took a training for Jumper and went out to qualify one Sunday afternoon and for some reason I'll never know the plane didn't show up that we [were] supposed to take. And so I said, "Well, I'm not fooling with it anymore!"

PIEHLER: So, this was at Fort Bragg that you ...

RIDDLE: No, that was in—I don't remember whether it was Oujda or Kairouan. I've got it down.

PIEHLER: So it was when you were deployed overseas?

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: Your first combat was in Sicily?

RIDDLE: Well, that was the first combat I was in, but [my first time] under actual fire was in Italy. As I say, we landed in the middle of the fight there, but as soon as possible, they took off and they took us on to Palermo, and it had already been taken. So, yes, we got credit for—well our division, of course—for being in Sicily, but I wasn't in that. And, let me throw in here while I'm at it: while we were there, my pup tent buddy was from Ohio. And, he got a letter from his wife and it told him that a little boy had just been born! And she sent along some pictures and he showed me the picture and the letter and I congratulated him and so forth. He was so proud of it! And later, he was killed in Normandy. And I never had any contact with the family until one day I got this letter. What happened—Pat O'Donnell, I don't know whether you've read after him or not, he wrote the *Beyond Valor*, and he's got a story in there written up on me and in there I

made mention about this boy from Ohio that had received a letter. And this boy picked up on that and talked to his mother and said, “Is it a possibility that that could be the man that knew my father?” And so I wrote him back and assured him that I was, and so, since then, he’s been writing me and he’s planning on coming down and visiting with me. He wants to know more about his father. And I thought that was a *miracle* that he picked up on that story and come to the conclusion that I was with his father because I didn’t make any mention of a name.

PIEHLER: Robert—Robert Worthen.

RIDDLE: Worthen.

PIEHLER: And he was—his father ...

RIDDLE: He’s now a grown man with family.

PIEHLER: But he had never known his father, I mean, literally ...

RIDDLE: Never seen him.

PIEHLER: ... never seen his father. But you’ll have to—I’d encourage you to bring him down during Celebrate Freedom. I see a possible program on Saturday afternoon!

RIDDLE: He’d love that.

PIEHLER: Because we’re having a special children’s program. So, you’re his link to his father?

RIDDLE: Yes. I learned something a long time ago, and it possibly [came] about by being in the ministry. Whenever possible, you pour your life into someone else; it may just be one individual that you can be a help to, and it will continue on, even after you’re gone.

PIEHLER: Let me mention, you mentioned the Chaplain and the revival. How often did you see a chaplain when you were overseas?

RIDDLE: Well, I personally never went to a chaplain, but I would see him occasionally in camp. I would go to church on Sunday; whenever I had the opportunity and wasn’t on duty, I would go. But it was quite different than our country churches!

PIEHLER: What was so different about it?

RIDDLE: Well, it was just a different way of going about it in accordance with army regulations.

PIEHLER: Because the Army does everything by Army ...

RIDDLE: Oh, yes. Even the preaching! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So, what struck you? What was different about army preaching versus your being at home?

RIDDLE: Well, you had the boys there from all walks of life: the Jews, the Catholics, the Protestants—well they called us Baptists Protestants, too. I don't know what your relationship is but they had to be careful not to get on the other denominations.

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like you went to a lot of services where all size fits; one size fits all?

RIDDLE: Well, again, I'm like "the curiosity of the cat." Even after I got back after the Army, I've gone to many different denominations just to see what they stand for, how they carry on as far as people talking in tongues, and Catholics. When we were in Italy, this big boy here that I showed you, my best friend—we'd dig a foxhole big enough for him and big enough for me. He made a deal with me. He said, "I'll go to church with you, if you'll go to church with me!" So, we went to the big church there in Naples and of course, I knew nothing about their procedure but I just tried to follow what he did. And we went one Sunday then went back the next Sunday, and during the week some time we had a bombing raid and a big bomb had come through that beautiful, beautiful building and blasted a hole. I got to even go down in the basement to the old patriarchs down there.

PIEHLER: Catholic Mass was so different then; I mean, it was in Latin.

RIDDLE: Oh, sure!

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean it was ...

RIDDLE: Oh, I'm still anxious to *learn—learn!*

PIEHLER: Well, I'm curious because I also know that in some parts, Catholics were not thought of too favorably. So, what did you think now that your best buddy was a Catholic and you went to a Catholic Mass?

RIDDLE: That's the most true friend I ever had. And after the war, he came down to visit with me. He was a Catholic; his wife was a devout Catholic. He came down and visited with me, and I was the pastor of one of the rural churches there, and he went with me to church one Sunday morning. My wife had a little flower arrangement there in the house and it had a crucifix on it. So I break that off and put it in my pocket. And as I preached, I propped this crucifix up in front of the pulpit, delivered my message, and extended the invitation. And he came down and accepted Christ as his personal savior. So, the church took up a collection and bought him a Bible! And he said, "I'm going to take real good care of this; if my wife finds it, she'll destroy it!" So, whether or not he

held true to his belief in the Lord as his Savior, I don't know. But he's one of the finest, freehearted person[s] I've ever met.

PIEHLER: Did you stay in touch with him much after the war?

RIDDLE: Yes, I did. Yes, for years I didn't make contact with him and I searched and searched until I finally found him. I don't know how many calls I made until I finally made contact with him! And he passed away about two years ago. His wife sent me a Christmas card this Christmas. She's living alone, now.

PIEHLER: But he's—in your long life, it sounds like he was your best friend?

RIDDLE: I'd have to say he's my best. I've had a lot of good friends, but he's one that would give his life for me.

PIEHLER: And I have a feeling you would have done the same?

RIDDLE: Absolutely!

WOMACK: Well, when you were in Italy, you relieved the Rangers at San Angelo.

RIDDLE: San Angelo.

WOMACK: Yeah, San Angelo Mountain.

RIDDLE: That's known as "The Battle Above the Clouds." The mountain was up something like close to 6000 feet, and actually, you could look out and see the clouds down here. They had an outpost there. From this mountain, you could see the shore down here where the boats came in and they were guarding the route into Naples. They had their outpost up there. So, after we had a battle up there and [ran] them off, then we took up position there until we came down off the mountain on the other side and went into Naples. When we came back, we landed at Salerno; we battled up as far as Albanella, then, they brought us back to Salerno to get on a LCT to go to Red Beach. Then, we spent all night long climbing this mountain by foot. It was so steep and they were paying the Italian men five dollars to carry five gallons of water up that mountain to us. A lot of them never did make it. They gave them the five dollars, but they never did get up there with it. And one night, it was real, real dark; and as I say, I was on there with the headquarters, and reinforcement came in. And the company commander sent me with the reinforcements to take them down to where the other men were dug in, and it was so dark that I had to get down and feel my way. There was a little pathway down through the brush on the mountain to where those men were. While we were up there one night, there were all kind of animals, goats and so forth grazing on part of the mountain there. And one came along and fell in the foxhole with one of the boys and he choked it to death! (Laughs)

WOMACK: Was this around about the time that you first saw combat?

RIDDLE: Going in at Salerno.

WOMACK: Salerno?

RIDDLE: Yeah, they were bombing us as we came into Salerno on that LCI. We landed the LCI and then when we went out, we went on the LCT. When we landed, we had to button down all the hatches and they were bombing. And finally they quit bombing and let us off, and we started walking up the beach. They had told us not to take any of the fruit or anything on the way; it was dangerous. But being an old farm boy, I spotted a watermelon patch over on one side and I got me a big watermelon and I and two other fellows were sitting there eating and an officer came along and you talk about getting a chewing out—we really got one! (Laughter) Then, we made our way on up a-walking quite a distance and that night they took us in a truck—no lights, blackout—up to the front line.

WOMACK: Okay. Well, when did you go to Naples?

RIDDLE: Around the first of October. I have the exact date written down somewhere, but it was around the first of October when we went in. [We were] helping to establish the first city government they had. Everything had been bombed out and we had to set up a bread line, water lines, and stand guard over them. I was on guard there one day at the water line and they had a line for the pregnant women, and they had another line for the other people. And this one Italian, he tried to force his way in ahead of this woman, and I kept telling him to get back and he wouldn't. I finally took the butt of the gun and I conked him over the head and got his attention. But we had the first city government there that they had. And they [Germans] bombed every night. It was pitiful. Sometimes five or six times they'd bomb Naples. One night they let down a bomb onto [the] top of one of the buildings there and some of the fellows tried to disarm it and it killed them.

PIEHLER: In these bombing raids, how close [were you]; were there any close calls?

RIDDLE: Well, within I'd say throughout the war, probably a block's distance.

PIEHLER: That's not too close, but that's still close enough!

RIDDLE: It sure is. And a neat little thing that I've got to share with you, while we were in [Albanella], or close to [Albanella], that was the time when the P-38's were famous. They carried two small bombs. And this pilot came around the mountain with that P-38, and he didn't go over the village, but when he came around, he released those bombs and they went sailing on over to the little village. And I thought that was a neat way; he didn't have to go over where the anti-aircraft were, he just came around the mountain and released them and they just continued to sail on. The momentum, I reckon, carried them

...

PIEHLER: In terms of Naples, I've read that there were a lot of hungry children. Is that [true]?

RIDDLE: Yeah, they—the first spaghetti and meatballs I encountered, they were out even in an alley and had a pot with a fire built around it, and they were making that and selling it to our soldiers. I don't know where they secured it.

PIEHLER: Well, I've also been told that there was a *huge* black market.

RIDDLE: Oh, certainly. There was a black market.

PIEHLER: There was also a very big problem with prostitution. Do you have any recollections of that?

RIDDLE: Oh, "*Quanto lire, quanto lire?* How much?" (Laughter) Have you ever read the book, *Of the Later Days of Naples?*

PIEHLER: No, I haven't.

RIDDLE: It gives all of that about the prostitution and so forth.

WOMACK: Besides pulling guard duty, do you remember what other kinds of duties you had?

RIDDLE: Well, we went on a twenty-five mile hike while we were in Naples. And many of the men fell out before we got back. We went out there, and had some different things that we [ran] through, field problems. [We] stayed over night and then marched back. We were within around forty miles of Rome. We hiked. A lot of the men didn't make it back; they fell out. Mostly just guard duty and drill, exercise, and then the small hike, and standing guard.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you were, in some ways, like the paratroopers. You were not kept in continuous combat?

RIDDLE: No.

PIEHLER: Do you realize that your life would have been very different say if you had been with the 1st Division where you're pretty much on the line ...

RIDDLE: They shuttled us in and out.

PIEHLER: Did you have a sense that other infantrymen would—there is no shuttling back and forth—it's a line.

RIDDLE: No.

PIEHLER: You weren't aware of that at the time?

RIDDLE: I realized, yes, Dogface had a hard life.

PIEHLER: You didn't have a bed of roses either! (Laughs)

RIDDLE: Well, ours were rougher at the time, but we got relieved. They put us up in the very best buildings that they could find and gave us the very best that they could while we were in Italy. I have to say that.

PIEHLER: So, in other words, even though you had duties and continuing training, in some ways, life was more comfortable? It sounds much more comfortable than North Africa.

RIDDLE: Oh, yeah—sure! Africa and Sicily.

PIEHLER: Did any, in Sicily but more to the point of Italy, did ... any men not make it because of battle fatigue? Do you remember any instances there?

RIDDLE: We had a number that pretended to lose it. Whether they did, I don't know but, uh ...

PIEHLER: ... It's hard to tell, but you think some were pretending?

RIDDLE: Yes, I do. In fact, I know it's a fact that some of them did. We had one supply sergeant that came in. We already had a supply sergeant and quota didn't call but for one and he already had the rank. So, he pretends to lose his mind and he wouldn't put his uniform on or the gear for the day. And he'd go barefooted and all of those things and go to the medics and kept playing off until he got out of combat anyway. And during combat, we had one Italian boy who was a sergeant. All at once, one day, he came running back through the line there and headed to the rear. He'd lost it, leaving the front. We had one little boy from China. We always kidded him, told him he didn't have a "Chinaman's chance." Sure enough, he didn't make it.

PIEHLER: (Whispers between Womack and Piehler) You can.

WOMACK: Well, after this, in November '43, you went to Ireland?

RIDDLE: Yes, sir.

WOMACK: Would you—you said earlier, you encountered some of the native people?

RIDDLE: Oh, yeah! We started at Naples. The harbor was so filled with some of the vessels that they had to take some of the small boats to get on the larger one, the *O'Hara*. We made the trip out through the Mediterranean to ...

PIEHLER: Gibraltar.

RIDDLE: Yeah, they called it “the submarine junction.” I made a point to stand out on deck at midnight—I wanted to see this Gibraltar rock. All I could see was this little red light up on the rock. But old uh, what was the name, Gertie, broadcasting all the publicity, “Dirty Gertie!” She said, “We know where you are. You’ll never get out of the Mediterranean.” (Laughter) And, we sat and listened to that publicity. I’ve got the articles at the house where she spent those years in prison, and then she passed on. I’ve got those clippings.

PIEHLER: The voyage to Northern Ireland, was that more comfortable than the voyage across the Atlantic?

RIDDLE: Well, no. I have some pictures on that small boat. We didn’t know it at the time, but they took a roundabout way into the North Atlantic. We were within two hundred miles of the coastline here. Had they known that, some of them would have jumped overboard, I guess. But, we run into a storm, a terrible storm, and it’s rolling across the bow of the boat and I managed to stick a camera out the door and take a picture of it; I’ve got it at the house. But eventually, we landed at Belfast. We took a train in to Ballymena, Portglenone. That’s where our camp was, and it was an old nissan-type hut. This is at the time when *This is the Army* was being shown in Belfast, and they allowed us to go one night to see that. We caught the train back to Belfast. After the show was over, there was so many of them that when they came out, I didn’t get out along with some of the others in time to catch the train, so we were forty miles from camp and the taxis only go seven to twelve miles. Some Air Force boys come along and picked us up and we got to their base and then we caught a taxi and rode as far as we could and then we had to walk the rest of the way.

PIEHLER: So, seeing this movie, it was a lot of exercise and bumming rides?

RIDDLE: That Irving Berlin, though, I saw in person there.

PIEHLER: And you hadn’t seen a whole lot of movies either?

RIDDLE: Oh, no, no, no. Of course, believe it or not, in North Africa, when we were flying from Oujda to Kairouan a storm came up. We flew over the [Atlas] Mountains, which was very, very high. We went through a gap. We lost one glider, in fact I was reported on the morning report as missing until they found out later that I was present. And when the storm came up, we had to land at an airfield. And there happened to be a boy there from Sweetwater, but he’s one of these types: he felt a little better than somebody else. So he didn’t speak to me and I didn’t speak to him, but I recognized him.

PIEHLER: But he didn’t want to speak to you?

RIDDLE: He didn’t, no.

PIEHLER: Because he felt he was Air Force?

RIDDLE: I guess. I don't know what!

PIEHLER: Yeah, you don't know?

RIDDLE: It was just his nature. I talked to him later. He came back after the war and opened a service station there in Sweetwater; I talked to him about it.

PIEHLER: And did he ever give you a good reason why he ...

RIDDLE: No, he didn't give me a reason, but he did talk to me after I bought some gas.  
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: There was a question on the tip of my tongue, but I can't think of it now. Actually, I did. In terms of Ireland ... you got to Belfast to see *This is the Army*. Did you get to see anything else of Ireland? Did you make it to the pubs, for example?

RIDDLE: It was so, the weather was so bad, so rainy there that we could scarcely go out in the field. It was so muddy and everything. I remember our commander standing out on a little knoll with his rubber boots on and here we are plowing through the mud there trying to do close-order drill. And, eventually they moved us in to England to prepare for the invasion. But, I was there over Christmas holidays at Portglenone. So I and this big fellow here, Stephan Kralj, and some more went into the village and with the village girls we made round of the business places and sang Christmas carols. We ended up at the rector's—which is a preacher—house, and his wife, who happened to be a Canadian, she came out and she give us refreshments and so forth. I enjoyed that.

PIEHLER: That sounds like a much happier Christmas.

RIDDLE: Every Christmas comes around I'm reminded of that.

PIEHLER: Because the Christmas before, you had just—you were ...

RIDDLE: Oh, it was terrible!

PIEHLER: Despite the Merry Christmas sign, but this one was a very fond ...

RIDDLE: Oh, yes. I look back on it and reminisce.

PIEHLER: How much—it sounds like in Ireland you actually got to know some of the people, some of the Irish?

RIDDLE: I did. I got acquainted with a musician there that used to play a harmonica and he had two little daughters. He wanted to come to the States, and whether he ever

made it, I don't know. I got acquainted with just a few of the people. I say, I was too much like them. (Laughter) I didn't get along with them too well.

PIEHLER: And you eventually went to England. Where in England did they send you? Where did they send you after Northern Ireland?

RIDDLE: We caught a boat, a Dutch boat and landed at South Hampton. Then by train, we went to Leicester ... Then out to the camp where we began our training for the invasion, and that consisted of field problems both night and day—they have a lot of hedges there and fields—digging foxholes, different types, the standing type, the slit trench and so forth. Just preparing us for the invasion.

PIEHLER: It sounds like, because you had mentioned earlier, because of your unique army career being trained to be a company clerk with Basic, but then being thrown into this unit without a lot of the advanced training, your unit's not initially getting some of that. But once you were overseas, your unit did get a lot of continuous training.

RIDDLE: That type of training.

PIEHLER: Yes, very specialized.

RIDDLE: And occasionally we would go out maybe two or three days and stay overnight and have these field problems. We'd have a portion of them acting as the enemy in flag battles.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, how much did your mother know—you wrote home and we talked about over lunch a lot of the correspondence. What did you tell them and what didn't you tell the people you were writing home about?

RIDDLE: Well, [there was] very little that I could tell them because they were censored. Now, when we were in Naples, they had no idea where I was. My father's name was Samuel Elmer Riddle. I began, I wrote a letter one week and I wrote Samuel N. Riddle. The next week, I wrote Samuel A. Riddle until I spelled out Naples over a period of time. And I did that because I didn't want to—I couldn't write all of the letters, the censor would line them up and there it spells Naples. So, and I didn't want my folks to think I had lost it. (Laughter) But that's the way I let them know where I was.

PIEHLER: When you got back to the States, did they figure it out?

RIDDLE: They figured it out.

PIEHLER: That's neat! In any system you set up, there'll be people ...

RIDDLE: Oh, I have a lot of ways. I'll take the alphabet and I'll move the A down to the B or C place and write it out using my alphabet rather than the regular alphabet.

PIEHLER: So, in other words, your letters, if Seth and I were to look at them, there's some code in the ones that survived?

RIDDLE: Oh, no. No, no. You'll find some where they've marked out and censored it. But the only thing you'll see some of those letters I've written with a different initial on the address, tell them where I was.

PIEHLER: So, your letters did often get censored?

RIDDLE: As I say, I have used—not to my parents, but I have used by sliding the alphabet down, misplacing the letter and putting it in a different position, and using it to spell out the word. There's a lot of ways of getting around things.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that you had fond—you enjoyed England, the English?

RIDDLE: Oh, yes. I learned to love the English people. I got acquainted with a lot. One family, in particular, that I used to go there on the weekend, there's a boy and a girl and a father and a mother. And it was just my second home. They accepted me as one of them and I enjoyed going there. And I corresponded with them continuously up to [when] the father and mother passed away and then the boy ...

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

PIEHLER: You were saying that you had corresponded with the son and he had passed away and then the daughter ...

RIDDLE: The daughter passed away, and her son wrote me last December of her passing away. So, I have no connection there except to him and occasionally I'll write him.

PIEHLER: That's a long correspondence; that's been over fifty years!

RIDDLE: Yes, sir. And would you believe my wife and I went back to England a few years back! We stayed a week with this family that I used to go—we didn't want to spend the whole two weeks with them, so we took a tour up in Scotland. But my wife had never drank any tea, and the first morning we were there, they come carrying the tea tray in while she was still in bed! And while we were there, they were going to have a picnic one Saturday afternoon and the lady went to the store and bought—she found out we liked Co[ca]-cola—and she bought two Coca-colas and took on this picnic trip we were going to make and when lunchtime come, she so proudly got those hot Cokes out and presented them to us and all of that! I learned to love that family; they just seemed like a second home.

PIEHLER: How did you meet them?

RIDDLE: Well, myself and this big fellow and one other—the one that played, the one I was telling you about.

PIEHLER: The harmonica?

RIDDLE: The supply sergeant that played all crazy?

PIEHLER: Oh.

RIDDLE: We were out—see, we'd get a pass to go to town over the weekend. And we were strolling down the street one night and [there] happened to be three girls come along. So we just teamed off, two and two, and we kept that acquaintance up until we made the invasion of Normandy. Of course, after Normandy I came back; I still visited with them, even when I got a furlough back to England off of the front line. I went to Scotland; I stopped by to see them. Now, what I started to tell you: when my wife and I went back to England a few years ago, this same old girl that I met on the street, she prepared the evening meal for us and invited us over so I got to eat supper with my old girlfriend! (Laughter) Since then, her husband has passed away and I think she's kindly lost it; she don't remember nothing.

PIEHLER: So, the woman you originally paired off with ...

RIDDLE: Yeah, prepared the supper for us!

PIEHLER: You got to meet her fifty years ...

RIDDLE: Fifty years—no. Well, I don't remember just what year we went back.

PIEHLER: But yeah, at least fifty years after.

RIDDLE: Almost fifty, yeah!

PIEHLER: How much, I'm curious, this town, which you got to know ...

RIDDLE: See, I wasn't married when I was in the service.

PIEHLER: Yeah. But the town that you were based at, this town that you got and the family—you had gotten to know this town fairly well particularly compared to the places ...

RIDDLE: The meeting place was the town square where they had a big, huge clock up in the middle there, and that was the meeting place for everybody. After Normandy and all that we went through there, thirty-three days and nights without relief or stopping and all we went through with there, you got to the point that you just didn't care. And I got connected with a bunch of boys there and we'd go slummin' and go down and drinking in the slum area until they closed the place up and raising a ruckus. It got pretty rough.

PIEHLER: So you, at that point, whereas you mentioned, you might have been someone who gave the MP's a real headache. (Laughter) Because, it's interesting! Some vets are very honest about some of the—you know, there was a lot of drinking, for example, often by some G.I.'s and a lot of ...

RIDDLE: I'm not *proud* of it, but ... you were to the point of, you know, "I'm going back into combat in Holland in just a short period of time and I'm going to live it up while I'm here."

PIEHLER: I'm curious; you've been back ... you hadn't seen the town change over time so, your images of the town in '45, '44-'45 and then flash forward fifty years plus?

RIDDLE: Oh, they had completely done away with the slum area and the interstates had been built through that area and it was changed completely.

PIEHLER: So there was very little, it sounds like, you recognized?

RIDDLE: Very little, except the town square where we used to meet and the park that we used to go to and things like that.

PIEHLER: Do you think it had improved for the better?

RIDDLE: Well, there were far better buildings built back and it was cleaner and a better way of getting through the town with the roads built.

PIEHLER: Did you ever, particularly based in England, [have] any encounters with British, with any Tommies?

RIDDLE: Oh, Tommies, yeah.

PIEHLER: And ... what was the, sort of, interaction, particularly when you were off duty?

RIDDLE: Overall, they were good soldiers, and they were good in combat! I'm talking about generally speaking. They were good combat soldiers. I was amused at different words that were different than ours for instance, like a truck, their "lorries." They had the lorries they used—different things like that.

PIEHLER: You mentioned going to Mass in Naples, Catholic Mass. Did you ever go to any of the churches in England?

RIDDLE: The Church of England. When, let's see, let me tell you about it. Well, this is not in England, but ... we were preparing to come back to the States after our visit there. We were in London and it happened to be over the weekend. So, I have at the present time, as I've told you, I've got forty-four years perfect attendance in church. And I didn't want to break it so I wanted to find a church. So, my wife and I, we started out to find a

church that had a Sunday school. We walked and we walked and we walked for over two hours. We finally found one church that said, “Yes, we have Sunday school.” And I had been the Sunday School Director of our Association, which is composed of seventy-two churches, and I’m very interested in church work. And I requested that I’d be able to join in Sunday school. And the lady that I was talking to said, “Just wait a minute.” And she run downstairs to talk to her rector or pastor. She came back and said, “I’m sorry,” she said, “adults [are] not allowed down where the boys and girls are in Sunday school.” So we started out walking again and we finally come to this beautiful, beautiful Church of England. And there had been another church that had been bombed out and they had joined together with this church and the Catholics were having their church in the basement. But the overall congregation, there’s only forty-two in the congregation, and the rector climbed this little stairway up in the crow’s nest to speak to—I went to Sunday school, there was only six children, now this is in the city of London, and two of them were going to the Caribbean the next week so that would only leave four children there in that great church.

PIEHLER: But you kept your perfect attendance, though?

RIDDLE: Oh, yes. Yes. I’ve gone all the way to Mexico, to Canada, to Israel and various countries.

PIEHLER: ... You had mentioned Sunday school and several subjects, but somewhat related, in terms of off-duty. What about U.S.O. shows, particularly when you were in England, or anywhere when you were in the service? Did you ever get to see a U.S.O. show?

RIDDLE: Occasionally, we would get to see one when we weren’t in combat. Some of the baseball celebrities would come over and visit with us. I appreciate the work that the U.S.O. did.

PIEHLER: So you did even ...

RIDDLE: They furnished donuts and coffee and entertainment.

PIEHLER: So you have good memories of the U.S.O.?

RIDDLE: Oh, yes.

PIEHLER: Because a lot of combat infantrymen and other combat branches would say, “What U.S.O. shows!?! Those were for people way back in the rear.”

RIDDLE: Well, when we were pulled back.

PIEHLER: Yeah?

RIDDLE: As I say, they tried to do their very best they could for us. They gave us a rough time when we were there, but they tried to help as much as they could.

PIEHLER: So you feel, particularly once you got to Italy and England and even once in Europe, that your unit was well taken care of when not on the line?

RIDDLE: We were known as the best-paid, best-equipped; we were a very small unit in comparison with the regular infantry, only a 155 men. But when we came back from Normandy, they increased that to 195 men to go into Holland.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Well, you had a lot of training while you were in England for the invasion. What kind of rumors went around? I've heard the Army is ripe for the rumors. So, before the invasion what kind of rumors?

RIDDLE: Well, see, we had to train those—we had some recruits to come in fresh from the States. And they'd not been to Italy with us and in combat, so we had to train those and prepare them for the invasion. And there were different kinds of rumors going around as to where we would invade and even on up to the time of the invasion, to fool the Germans, they even set up these mock units, rubber, blown-up units along the coast.

PIEHLER: ... Were you aware that there was a mock invasion?

RIDDLE: Not as much at that time.

PIEHLER: Like, did you think this was probably another force that was ...

RIDDLE: We really, really didn't know.

PIEHLER: You didn't know?

RIDDLE: You just got the rumor that this thing was going on and didn't find out until later.

PIEHLER: When did you know the invasion was finally on?

RIDDLE: Well, when they took us to the airport ... to be sure about it. We knew then that was it.

PIEHLER: So, not until then did you know?

RIDDLE: No; we were moving. We knew that something was taking place 'cause we moved out of the camp there at Leicester.

PIEHLER: Did any senior brass come out to visit you before your mission?

RIDDLE: Oh, certainly—Eisenhower! I was close to him as the box over there! He stood on the hood of a Jeep and made his speech, and when he'd finished, I'll never forget what he said. He said, "I'll see you over there."

PIEHLER: So you were there—that's a very famous picture of Eisenhower!

RIDDLE: It was.

PIEHLER: And you were ...

RIDDLE: I was standing that close to him.

PIEHLER: Which isn't—people won't be able to see this but it's only a few feet away. Is it true that people really liked Ike? I've often been curious what soldiers ...

RIDDLE: Generally speaking, he was well-known and liked. He had some different things about his life and different things that people didn't know about and didn't understand at the time. He and Montgomery never really agreed on some things. I met Montgomery.

PIEHLER: When did you meet Montgomery?

RIDDLE: It was uh—I'd have to look at my notes. But I remember when I met him there. He came to us; we called him "Monty."

PIEHLER: Because that's what he said; he said, "Call me Monty."

RIDDLE: I have his book.

PIEHLER: But at the time, did you know of this Eisenhower-Montgomery feud? Did that penetrate down below to the ranks?

RIDDLE: Well, not to the extent that I learned later.

PIEHLER: Yeah?

RIDDLE: But, quite a bit of resistance there. And even after we got into Holland, we could have made a lot more progress had we not held up waiting for Montgomery's people to come in.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you were a little resentful of how long it took to get relieved.

RIDDLE: It seemed like they could have been there a lot sooner. In fact, if they could have kept the supplies up with Patton, he would have penetrated long before he did. We were surrounded at one time there for close to two, three weeks—no supplies or anything. They'd open the road up and then they'd close it up again before the armor ever came in.

That's where I first ate my horsemeat to know what it was. There was a storage place there. One night, the British would go down and get some rations and the Americans would go down and get the rations the next night and the Germans would go. But for some reason or other, they happened to meet up there all at one time and they really had a battle over that! But it was stamped on the can, "Horsemeat." Which, to me was a lot better than some of that Brazilian beef that they had! (Laughter) That was *rough*.

PIEHLER: Well, could you maybe tell us your memories of D-Day?

RIDDLE: Okay. We got up real' early, about two o'clock in the morning and ate a hearty breakfast, went out to the airport and it still wasn't exactly light. It was a rainy day, but the clouds broke momentarily and I remember seeing the moon shine through the canopy in the glider after we were seated in there. And so we took off ... in this British glider—Horsa glider—and thirty-three men is what it carried, and Wayne Pierce was my executive officer on that. By coincidence, before he wrote this book, he and I were talking one day and talking about an event that took place and he didn't remember me being on the glider and I didn't recall that he was on the glider. But when we shared together what happened, we [realized] were both on the same glider [when] that took place! Well, I'm a-riding along, and I get up right behind the pilot—co-pilot's over here, I'm the first seat behind him, then my big buddy here's next to me. (Gestures to indicate placement of people in the glider) I'm writing in my diary as we crossed the channel, and look out on it and the channel's just filled with vessels out there! It was something to look at! And we were flying along real good and here's what we disagree on. He didn't know that I was on there until I told him and then he wrote this book and he states in there that I was with him. But here's where we differ: the plane engines failed as far as I'm concerned. He said we were overloaded, and that when we began to go down ... we threw out supplies and then we gained altitude. But, like I said, I was sitting right behind the pilot. I heard the conversation between the two [pilot and co-pilot], and I've told him [Pierce] this! I said, "The only thing I can tell you what I've seen and what I heard, whether you agree with it or not." But the engines failed on that thing and they continued to crank, and crank, and crank and finally one of the engines started and a big ball of smoke came out of it and then the other fired. But what was happening—this rope that was towing us, we were overrunning the plane like this and the rope became entangled with the landing gear. (Motions with his hands to demonstrate the flight) So when they fired and it stretched the rope, it flipped our glider—almost dumped us! But during that time, we got down within 150 [or] 200 feet of the water. They threw out six five-gallon cans of water, six cases of tank mines and anything that was heavy. And our Supply Sergeant was standing by with a double-bitted axe to chop a hole in the top of the glider so we could crawl out on the wings in case we went down. You see, in the British gliders there were thirty-three thousand ping-pong balls in the wings to keep it afloat. And we were prepared for a crash landing, but at the last minute the engines caught up and then we proceeded on without any trouble. We got to our LZ—the point where we were supposed to land. We couldn't land where we [were] supposed to because the Germans had come out and set up what we called the asparagus post and manned them. So in a very short time—the time we cut of—we had to search out a place to land. The pilot did, and he spotted this little garden-like area; it was surrounded with trees and as we went in

we cut the treetop out with the left wing. Only glider in the company that wasn't completely destroyed!!! It hit the ground and bounced a few times. I was the radioman; it broke the antenna off of the radio, only communication we had with the Battalion. I took a walkie-talkie antenna off the walkie-talkie and put it on the field radio, and that's the only communication we had until I got another radio! Well, while I was down working with that antenna two German fighters came over strafing us, and a news reporter came along and took my picture down working on that radio! And when we landed, we landed close to an apple orchard. In this apple orchard there was an old Frenchman who was sitting out there milking a cow. The artillery were coming in and he was just sitting there milking, unconcerned! And we went on marching up the road at a slow pace because we were looking for snipers. Well, he finished his milking and he came on up the road and when he got even with me, I took my canteen cup out and he filled me up a canteen cup with hot milk, so I had hot milk for breakfast! That was—we landed at approximately five to seven in the morning. And then, that night I slept a little in a briar patch in a gully. From there on, it was just continuous day and night; day and night for thirty-three days and nights.

PIEHLER: So no one in your glider ... got hurt on the landing?

RIDDLE: Not in the particular glider that I was in.

PIEHLER: No. In others?

RIDDLE: Others in the company were. As I said, with the tricycle landing gear it came up through the floor and it cut some of the men's legs off rolling back through the aisle. And they had a pilot and co-pilot on this mission. One was—let me put this in, maybe he'll pick up on it somewhere—one was from North Carolina and the other was from Kentucky.

PIEHLER: And those are two you've been eager to find?

RIDDLE: I'd love to find them! I'd like to ask them that question, "Did your motors or engine fail? Am I right or is ..."

PIEHLER: Yeah, or is your executive officer.

RIDDLE: Right.

PIEHLER: I know this is like leaving the order, but what's your closest call in combat?

RIDDLE: In which battle?

PIEHLER: Well, of all the battles, what stands out? What were some of the closest calls, or were there so many that it's hard to tell?

RIDDLE: Well, there were many of them, but I suppose the one in the Battle of the Bulge going into Neuhof. I had my overcoat tail shot off and on this particular time in advancing the snow was kicking up right in front of me! I was practically two feet from being hit. And of course, I had a lot of small wounds, small shrapnel. I picked little pieces of shrapnel out of my back that festered up even after I came back from the Army. And these scars on my hand are small shrapnel wounds. (Shows hands)

PIEHLER: It might not ... necessarily be your closest call, but when were you the most scared?

RIDDLE: It would be easier to answer when I wasn't scared.

PIEHLER: Well, that may be! Then, let me ask you that. When weren't you scared, or did you ever get used to combat?

RIDDLE: Well, being scared, in one manner of speaking, was an asset. You become cautious. If you noticed, unconsciously, even while we were having our noon meal I was still searching for that enemy! I do that even when I'm in town or in a crowd—I'm still looking for that man that's trying to get me. I can't get away from it.

PIEHLER: And it's been a number of years since ...

RIDDLE: Oh, yes!

PIEHLER: What, I guess, and this is a question which I particularly like [for] future Army officers and other military—what are the lessons you had learned? I mean, you had mentioned earlier that a lot of it is on-the-job training. What are the things you never learned in training, but you began to pick up in combat or pick up because others in combat had told you to do this?

RIDDLE: You have to train to the point of your reaction rather than time to think about it. You're trained to the point that you know what to do instantly.

PIEHLER: So, that's very important?

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: That training?

RIDDLE: That's necessary for your life.

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned that you got very adapted to always looking around and always being very conscious. Anything else that's important, that you remember from the things you learned on the job in combat?

RIDDLE: Well, when you hear an explosion or anything of that nature, you instantly hit the ground. It's amazing how much protection you can get from just hitting ground; even to find a shallow place or just anything will help! But even after I came back, I could be in town and an automobile'd backfire or something and I was ready to hit the sidewalk without even thinking about it. And I'm still gun-shy when I hear a noise—sudden noise.

PIEHLER: So, the backfire of a car will still ...

RIDDLE: Oh, yes! I'm still reacting to that.

PIEHLER: What about, say, on the Fourth of July?

RIDDLE: Well, see that's a constant "pop, pop, pop," and I'm expecting it.

PIEHLER: But that wouldn't?

RIDDLE: Maybe the first one or two that goes off will catch my attention, but I know that's supposed take place.

PIEHLER: Let's say you were out in the woods, and you heard a hunter shoot off a rifle.

RIDDLE: Oh, I'd have a tendency to hit the ground, I guess, if I wasn't expecting it.

PIEHLER: Were there people that you remember in your unit who couldn't learn the lessons of combat? What were the mistakes they made, does anything stick out? Because I've also been told that sometimes it didn't matter even if you did everything right.

RIDDLE: Something that bothered me—without any reflection on anybody. At times, we would get new officers from the States that had no combat experience whatsoever, and they would instruct some of the new recruits that hadn't had experience also in what to do. And sometimes, it wasn't the correct thing to do! I never did anything that I'm ashamed of. I never did anything that would bring reproach upon my unit or service but I had been in combat so much and so many experiences that—well, I'll share with you. While we were in Holland, I had a little officer there that was going to send me out on patrol. Well, I had been out on the patrol before. I knew what was out there and what to be expected, but he was sending me *again*. And I refused to go! And he went with the patrol and he said, "When I get back, I'll court-martial you." Well, he didn't live to get back. That happened more than one time. You see, I was using my experience in the best judgment of what to do, and that bothered me because these young officers would then instruct the recruit to do something and it wasn't the best thing for them! I realized that somebody had to go out on that patrol; we had to find out the information. But that wasn't the time to do that.

PIEHLER: So, you were not necessarily against the patrol itself this one particular incident, it was when he wanted to do the patrol that you thought was a big mis[take]?

RIDDLE: Yeah, it wasn't the right time. That's one reason that I refused a field promotion more than one time because, I guess, I was bullheaded and I had been in combat enough that I had the experience and I knew what to expect. And with my rating, I didn't have much to lose and I thought in my better judgment; sometimes it wasn't to their orders. Now they could have court-martialed me. I agree with that, but I didn't do anything that I shouldn't have done, except I disobeyed 'em! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But in some ways, if you'd been an officer it would have been a lot harder?

RIDDLE: Oh yes, it would. Or if I'd been a staff sergeant, first sergeant—ranking.

PIEHLER: It sounds like your attitude was, "What are you going to do to me?"

RIDDLE: Well, see, I became angry when they didn't allow me to go to OCS [Officer Candidate School]. And I said, "If that's the way the Army wants to play it, then, [I won't] have anything to do with it. I'm coming back. I don't want responsibility of anybody except myself and I'm going to take care of myself!"

PIEHLER: So, when the Army didn't let you into OCS, they lost their future officer?

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: You were not going to ...

RIDDLE: I was [officer] material up to that point.

PIEHLER: And then you just took [care of] yourself; you were not going to take it after that?

RIDDLE: No.

PIEHLER: How many times were you offered a battlefield promotion?

RIDDLE: I know of two times, and possibly more.

PIEHLER: It also sounds like you remember a time when you went through a lot of junior officers?

RIDDLE: We did; we lost a lot. Anything else on Normandy?

WOMACK: I can't think of a ...

RIDDLE: The first dead German I [saw] after we went into Sainte Mère Eglise was [when I was] going down the street and there was this German laying in the doorway. Already killed him—paratroopers had [gone] in and they had cleared that street, and

when we came through then we were in support of them. That's the first dead German that I had seen in Sainte Mère Eglise in Normandy.

WOMACK: Well, how did you react to that; did it bother you, or?

RIDDLE: It didn't bother me; I gazed at him as much as possible in passing.

WOMACK: So ... I guess your next engagement was actually in Holland, right?

RIDDLE: Right.

WOMACK: Could you tell us about your crash landing?

RIDDLE: Well they, let us say, they kept us there thirty-three day[s] and night[s]; that's where they issued us the jump boots, and we went back to Leicester, England to the camp there. When we arrived, they brought in these recruits increasing from 155 to 195. So we get in there late in the evening and well after midnight some of these old vets were standing outside the tent there talking to these raw recruits; they were anxious to hear all about it. They were telling all these wild tales of what happened to them and all! They're standing there bug-eyed and listening! And, we made the invasion of Holland in a CG4-A American glider. I was Acting Co-pilot going into Holland, and we [ran] into a lot of fire going into Holland. In fact, the glider to my right was shot down—cut the towrope in two. The sergeant that was in command of that glider was an old Army man and they hid upon landing; I watched it as it went down and landed. And several days later—they would travel the night and hide out in daytime—and he made it to join up with us later on. But on arriving in Holland, we had a much better place to land in than in Normandy! We didn't have to encounter those asparagus poles or mines or so forth. It was a meadow-like place. I went back to the fiftieth anniversary; I went to the field that I landed in, I took some pictures of the place where I landed, and there was a beautiful meadow-like place here and on the right side of it was a plowed up strip of land. On the CG4A American glider—it has runners, or sled runners, along with the wheels. For some reason the pilot chose to land in this plowed area. Well, when we went down the runners caught in that plowed dirt and just threw us on our nose like that! (Motions with hands) It threw me against the crash bar and that's where one of my Purple Hearts was awarded. It threw me against the crash bar there and bruised my ribs. Medics bound me up and I went on, and after we pulled back from Holland I went to the hospital and had an X-ray; there [weren't] any broken bones, it was just bruised badly.

PIEHLER: It sounds like it hurt a lot!

RIDDLE: It stood on its nose like that: straight up, perpendicular. And some of the boys had to climb—with all of the equipment [that] was loose—there were rifles and everything [that] came down on top of me. And some of the boys that weren't secured good with their straps were laying on top of me when they landed. They had to climb up here and get enough weight to pull the glider back down. We had our names written on the outside; when I got out, I took my trench knife and cut that out, folded it up, and put it

in my pocket. I've got it at the house in a frame. It has the names of all the boys that went in with us. I'll show that to you when we get there.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I hope that someday you'll let the Tennessee Museum of Aviation at least display that temporarily because that's ... really quite a ...

RIDDLE: The museum at Bragg and also the museum in Texas wanted it. I showed it to him out there and when I got ready to leave I said, "Where's my canvas?" He said, "Oh, didn't you give that to me?" And I said, "Over my dead body, sir!" (Laughter) And then, in Holland, our objective was Nijmegen—Nijmegen Bridge, to take it and to hold it for the armor that was later to come through, and Monty [Field Marshal Montgomery] took a long time getting' there. That's where we were surrounded for so many days and didn't get supplies. Eventually, I walked across the bridge after it was secured. There was a huge hole on the end we were on where a bomb had blown it out. Then, as I said, we stayed there; went in in September and stayed to the later part of November before we pulled back. We went to Sissonne, France, to an old cavalry base.

PIEHLER: You suffered high casualties ... in Holland?

RIDDLE: In the landing alone, it was eleven percent; overall, forty-six percent.

PIEHLER: And it sounds like you probably lost a lot of people you knew fairly well?

RIDDLE: Yes.

PIEHLER: What did that do for your morale and those of your other ...

RIDDLE: Now ... going back to Normandy ... as I said, I was a company runner and a battalion runner. And this particular time this boy, [Robert] Worthen, was also a messenger, and I asked to be sent to the Battalion and so he took my place at the company. They were going across this apple orchard as they were making the advance to the causeway there in Normandy, and when they entered the orchard, the Germans were dug in in such a nature that the crossfire had caught 'em in. They were in line as they went across the orchard, and it killed nineteen of them! Worthen was one of them. ... The next morning, I was up at Battalion Headquarters and I slipped off and went back down to where this happened and viewed these boys as they lay. You could almost walk from one to the other, just laying in a straight line out through there, nineteen of them. I knew every one of them and Bob Worthen was one of them, who had been my tent buddy. Way out here on the end was a boy; he was from New York, [Greg] Kellepouris was his name. And, at Christmas time, some of his folks had sent him a package and in that was a pair of black gloves; he had those gloves on and when he fell for some reason his hand went up like that like he was reaching for something. (Gestures) He was still laying there, of course, dead and stiff the next morning. That hand was still extended. For a long time, I wouldn't wear gloves in combat at all; I visualized that.

PIEHLER: Him with his hand up?

RIDDLE: Yes. Like he's [saying] "Help me!" or something, and it affected me. I'm glad I went back to see them but it was a sad, sad picture.

PIEHLER: I'm curious; it sounds like a lot of people, if they had seen what you had seen, particularly from what you've described, the aftermath of some of the action in Holland, would have had a lot of bad dreams. Is that ...

RIDDLE: That's true. I guess I'm an exceptional person in some ways, whether it's a good asset or a bad.

PIEHLER: Did you ever have trouble sleeping or waking up?

RIDDLE: Many times after I came back I would wake up and be engaged in combat and in close places.

PIEHLER: I interviewed someone, not too long ago ... and actually he was a Methodist minister who had been a POW in Korea. And he said that he used to toss and turn in bed so much that his wife and him used to have separate beds, but I don't think that it doesn't sound like you were that sleepless, that disruptive, but did you ...

RIDDLE: It doesn't bother me anymore.

PIEHLER: Not anymore, but for how long ...

RIDDLE: The only thing was just those loud noises that I was talking about. But as far as sleeping, I've got a clear conscience.

PIEHLER: So that's ...

RIDDLE: It hasn't lingered. After I came back there were times .... before I went into the ministry I was having a problem with that. But the time'd come when I just couldn't sleep, I'd get up and walk the floor. But after I surrendered to the ministry, it didn't bother me anymore. I suppose that was a wake-up call; I don't know.

WOMACK: Well, what can you tell us about the Battle of the Bulge?

RIDDLE: The Battle of the Bulge, we were Sissonne, France. The breakthrough came through December 17, and I'd been to Paris on a weekend pas—myself and a boy from Ohio. We'd gotten in and heard about the breakthrough, and early the following morning, we loaded up on semi-open trucks and headed towards Bastogne. That was our objective, and the 101st Airborne was following us. By the time we got to Bastogne, it was beginning to snow; it was cold riding in that open truck! Well, when we got to Bastogne, they changed our orders. We went on up to Werbomont and that's how come the 101st was trapped in Bastogne. They were following us and they were surrounded. That's where the general said, "Nuts to you!" when they asked for a surrender.

WOMACK: ... You said that before the Battle of the Bulge, you were in Paris on leave? What all did you do in Paris?

RIDDLE: In “Gay Paris?” (Uses French pronunciation) Well, I made a round of the nightclubs and up Pig Alley. A bunch of—some of the boys I was with went into a prostitution house, but I didn’t involve in that. I made that statement when I got back, that I wouldn’t go back to Paris if somebody paid my way! (Laughter) But I did go back when I went back to the fiftieth anniversary. I didn’t get to see much of the scenery around Paris on that trip because we were drinkin’ and carousing around.

PIEHLER: So you weren’t, when you got leave, some veterans, I know, they just became tourists when they were on leave, and they would go to museums.

RIDDLE: No; I wasn’t interested.

PIEHLER: You wanted to go to the bars and carouse?

RIDDLE: Yes. It was later, when I went back on the fiftieth anniversary that I got to tour Paris and see all of the towers and government buildings.

PIEHLER: So was it different Paris?

RIDDLE: And believe it or not, they were having an American parade of cowboys and Indians and so forth the day I was there. (Laughter)

WOMACK: We were talking earlier about how you know a fellow from the 101st and sometimes he jokes with you about ...

RIDDLE: R.C. Leming lives in Maryville; he was in the 101st. Well, the 82nd has got a double-A, All-American. It’s called that because there were boys there from every state when they organized, so they called it the All-American Division, double-A. He often kids me and said that double-A is “Almost Airborne.” (Laughter) However, a lot of people [don’t] realize that the cadre from the 82nd Airborne started the 101st! The 82nd is the mother of the 101st; however, the 101st got all the publicity. They got the movie, they got the book, and so forth and so on; and they’re still getting a lot of the publicity that the 82nd doesn’t!

PIEHLER: It’s also striking, and I confess at times I was somewhat guilty, that the way the Battle of the Bulge is portrayed, it’s portrayed as a sort of ... you know, the lines being over all, and that’s not the holdout and then Bastogne being ...

RIDDLE: I’ve got a big picture there at the house that I had in my war room and my wife made me take it down when she found out that Mr. Womack was going to stop by. And it shows a soldier who had been digging a foxhole. A tanker pulls up and stops. The soldier says, “Are you hunting a safe place?” The tanker said, “Yes,” and the soldier

said, “Well, fall in behind me. I’m from the 82<sup>nd</sup> and them bastards are not going any farther.”

(Laughter)

PIEHLER: We may have to sneak ... a peak.

RIDDLE: She made me take that down! She didn’t think that would be appropriate for a preacher to show anybody!

WOMACK: Well, I want to ask you, when in your army career ... did you start writing poetry?

RIDDLE: In Africa.

WOMACK: In Africa?

RIDDLE: That was the first: “My Version of the Army Life.” Well, going into the Army the day I was inducted I wrote two before that and then this was in Africa, “My Version of the Army Life.”

PIEHLER: I’m curious because [of] the comment about your wife—what’s appropriate for a preacher. Do you think some of your carousing, and you were not—I guess ... if I were to encounter you in say, England in 1944 or in Paris while you were carousing, I probably wouldn’t have marked you as a preacher to be?

RIDDLE: No. I’m ashamed of it.

PIEHLER: Do you think that you have some more empathy for the sinner, though, because, in fact, you were quite a carouser?

RIDDLE: Overlooking the bad part of it, it has given me an experience that I can deal with. And I’m not bragging when I say this, but I’ve pastored four churches continuously for thirty years and every one of them has grown. I’ve seen people saved. I know how to *deal* with it; I’ve been there! I know what he’s feeling, and what his reaction is, and it’s helped me in that way.

PIEHLER: Because I think, for some clergy, who often do lead these “straight and narrow lives” from the beginning ...

RIDDLE: Oh, it used to be the thing, if you [were] a bank robber you [were] a great evangelist. You know, you’d go back and say, “Here’s what I used to be and here’s what I am now!”

PIEHLER: No, I know there’s that tradition, but also ... I think for some clergy, or I think the image people have of clergy is they were always “straight and narrow,” but in fact ...

RIDDLE: Pious!

PIEHLER: Pious might be another. Well you have, and I should have brought from my office, but you told a particularly harrowing story that Steven Ambrose used in his book about during the Battle of the Bulge.

RIDDLE: Going into the Siegfried Line?

PIEHLER: Yeah, the Siegfried Line!

RIDDLE: Our company commander, which is William Aussenbaum, he lives in California. He called me just last week and informed me that the first sergeant had passed away. He became sick and went back to the hospital, and they sent an officer from the 504th Parachute to lead us into the Siegfried Line. Shortly after he came to the company, he sent for me. He said, "I understand you've been around here a long time, and I want you to help me." And I said, "Sir, I'll help you any way I can." I thought it was strange that a paratrooper would ask a gliderman to help him, but he was my superior and I said, "Yes, sir, I'll be glad to help you any way I can." Well, that particular night, I helped to distribute the rations for the next day. We were preparing to make the push into the Siegfried Line, and it was about twelve o'clock before I ever even got my foxhole dug! Of course, the snow was all knee-deep and real cold and everything and I fell in that foxhole and slept until about two o'clock, and he sent for me. He said, "You and I are going on a patrol. We're going up and we're going to look this thing over and see what we're gonna face in the morning," and so he and I went out on this patrol. We went up to where the dragon teeth were. You see, there was a road that went through and into Germany, on either side was two big emplacements ...

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Clinton Riddle on March 20, 2002 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

WOMACK: Seth Womack.

PIEHLER: And you were saying you were on a patrol up to the Siegfried Line ... with your officer?

RIDDLE: Yes, sir. It was so situated: they had pillboxes on all of the little hills there and in such a fashion that they could cover the other. They had the dragon teeth; there's five rows staggered—what they actually [did] was to keep the tanks out. They had these two emplacements on each side of the road—the entrance into Neuhof [Neuhof and Udenbreth]. We looked that over, but in the process while we [were] out on the patrol, I fell in a deep German foxhole and re-injured my ribs that I had hurt in Holland. I was awarded a Purple Heart for that, which I never received. The reason being my mother was really ill and any time that you were wounded they would notify your folks back

home, and I didn't want her to know that I had been wounded. So I requested that; I turned it down. I just might as well tell you this. After the war was over and the point system came out and I had enough, lacked a little to have enough points to go home, I went back to the doctor and said, "Doc, you remember that Purple Heart you wanted to give me? I'll take it now. I'm ready to go home." So he [gave] me one of them! (Laughter) That's the reason that I didn't get the other.

PIEHLER: Those Purple Hearts and medals really mattered, I've been told, when the point system came out.

RIDDLE: Oh, yes. Each one counted so much! I had sufficient [points] to come home. But, leading up to this point of patrol, I was looking for his name. He was from the 504 Paratroopers—G. P. Crockett was his name, and I tried and tried and tried to locate him; I hope somebody will pick up on that! He was buried over there and later was brought back to the States and buried, and I've run it in different magazines and on the internet, trying to locate some of his people to share this with them. So, we came back. They started the push toward taking the entrance into Neuhof. And A Company went first, B Company was second—I was second—and C Company was in reserve. When A Company got near it, they pinned them down. B Company approaches; they pin us down. Then they sent C Company to help us, and as C Company came up, we would raise up and go with them. We eventually took it, but, oh, we lost so many men! There were only three of us in my company that were still on their feet when it was all over with. In approaching this road, I was following real close behind my officer, and he looks back over his shoulder and he says, "Come on Riddle, let's go." And he stepped out into the road and they had the road lined up and they hit him right between the eyes. That was the last words that he said. So, that left me in command of what was left of the company until they got somebody. That's the reason I said that I've served in every capacity in the company.

PIEHLER: How long until they found someone?

RIDDLE: Oh, shortly. Before that, I lost another lieutenant, Lieutenant Brey. Artillery came in and hit him. I was real close behind him. I heard these shells coming and I hit the ground—he didn't. And it came in and hit him and his clothing and pieces of him you could see flying up in the air. I thought it killed him instantly, but they took him on to the hospital and he died later. Somehow, his brother—I believe he lives in Ohio, if I remember correctly—got a hold of my name somewhere, and he wrote me about it and I shared with him the experience. Later, he went over there where his brother was killed. We correspond even now. In going into the Siegfried Line, we took these emplacements over each bunker; and some of them had been there up on twenty years. All morning long—this was up towards noon when we took it, and we'd been crawling in that snow, wet and hungry and tired. That's where I got my coattail shot off, going up there and all of this had happened. Here they'd come out a-hollering, "Comrade, comrade!" with their dress uniform on and their boots. That's when you felt like killing them.

PIEHLER: You were not too happy because you said, in the Ambrose book, Steven Ambrose quotes you as saying, “You had been slogging around in the mud. You were dirty ...

RIDDLE: Oh, absolutely!

PIEHLER: ... and it had been difficult. And then, here they are with their shined boots!”

RIDDLE: And after they surrendered, I got to sleep in that emplacement that night. They had bunks and everything in there. But the engineers came in and it had a huge iron bell over the top of it with a lookout gun emplacement. And the engineers came in and put TNT there and blew them over, uncapped them. But we got to sleep in there that night.

PIEHLER: And it sounds like a very comfortable night of sleep.

RIDDLE: It was in comparison with the foxhole!

PIEHLER: How long were you kept on the line during the Battle of the Bulge?

RIDDLE: Well, we went in the 17th of December and we were in combat until the 15th of February, when we came out. Now, during that period of time, they pulled us back into Pepinster, Belgium for sixteen days. They first put us in an old factory that I was telling you about with the windows all broken out and open, and the villagers felt sorry for us and began to invite us into the homes. This particular lady invited me into her home and put me up on the third floor of this brick building. Next morning, she brought up a large Belgian waffle. I thought that was the *best thing* I'd ever eaten in my life! We stayed there for sixteen days and as I said before, I wasn't married at that time, and we didn't do very much during that time. I and some of the other fellas got out to go sleigh-riding in the snow with some of the village girls. I made a lot of pictures while I was there—took a picture of the building where I stayed. So, when I went back on this fiftieth anniversary, I took some of those pictures with us and they had a reception for us there at the city hall and a meal. I began to show some of those pictures around to the people, and eventually, some of the people recognized the building and said that, “That lady's here!” So I got to meet the lady, two of her daughters and two of her granddaughters, and her son-in-law, and we still correspond. I even went back up to the building I stayed in and made some more pictures of it. While we were there, that was the time when the buzz bombs were going over to England, one of them landed just outside of Pepinster, and I went out to see. It knocked a huge, *huge* hole in the ground where it hit. But other than that, I was constantly outside. Sometimes it was down to zero. Machine guns would freeze up; if you didn't use them often they would freeze up. I never had any trouble with the M-1. One night, it was a blizzard came on, and we caught hands, hand-in-hand and made our way to a little barn and put a whole company in this one little barn until the blizzard was over. It was snowing and big snowdrifts were over waist-deep, and we just left the battle front and went to that barn and stayed.

PIEHLER: How much of a problem was trenchfoot and frostbite in general?

RIDDLE: My feet were, even though I had on two pair of heavy socks and snowshoes and heavy gloves, my hands froze. My feet—even now, when cold weather comes, I can show you where cracks come in my hand regardless of the lotion or what I use. They're sensitive to cold weather and begin to break open as soon as it turns cold. And for a long time after I got back, I had no feeling in my feet whatsoever. Many a time when we were out, they sat down to take a little rest along the roadside, and a lot of the men would never get up. The medics would have to come and get them; they were not able to get up. I was very fortunate in that. The icicles would freeze in your eyebrows and in your nose; it was terrible.

PIEHLER: How good were the medics? Do you have any remembrances of any of your medics?

RIDDLE: Well, some of them were good and some of them were cowards.

PIEHLER: That's interesting, because most people—I have yet to hear someone—I've often even been a little skeptical when I hear only good news because a lot of people have praised medics to no end, and there were a lot of good medics, but you knew some medics who did not? Without—you don't have to name names.

RIDDLE: In Holland they started us out one morning across a meadow. There was a heavy fog on, and when we got out in the middle of this meadow, the fog lifted and they opened fire on us and killed so many that they sent me from Battalion to help the medics. I helped them carry them out; that's a job I wouldn't want. Some of them were real heavy to carry on the stretcher out. But, they had a tough job.

PIEHLER: But some were not always as heroic as sometimes they are portrayed? Any incident that you'd mention that stands out in terms of a medic not doing his job?

RIDDLE: Not necessarily. I was with a young man by the name of Zook. He was a Jew; he wouldn't eat anything on Friday except fish. He'd often times give some of what he had to eat to some of us if it wasn't fish. But in combat, he got hit in the leg by a piece of shrapnel, and the medics, for some reason, were afraid to come up and tend to him. I had this morphine package and I gave him a shot, and I was binding his wound up when one of the officers came along and again I got a chewing out. That wasn't my job!  
(Laughs)

PIEHLER: But the medic hadn't show up—the medic ...

RIDDLE: But he went on and I continued to tend to him and helped carry him on a stretcher down to a Jeep and put him on a Jeep. And after the war was over, I came home and got a real nice letter from him thanking me.

PIEHLER: So he made it through?

RIDDLE: He made it through back to the States.

WOMACK: You kept a journal throughout the war, and you said that you were aware that it wasn't allowed?

RIDDLE: No, sir. I kept it on a tablet. I kept that rolled up and in my inner combat pocket. I was more scared of being captured with that than I was of becoming a prisoner. I knew I wasn't supposed to, but now I'm glad I did.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I have mixed feelings about that because I know it was against regulations, and it could have provided some usefulness to the enemy, but for historians, we don't have a lot of those. We have more than people think, but ...

RIDDLE: I have the original handwritten one at the house. Of course, I kept that ...

PIEHLER: Yeah ...

RIDDLE: This was typed-out later.

PIEHLER: What did you think of the Germans, particularly after being in combat with them so long? Did your views of them change? Did your views of ... why we were fighting this war at the time?

RIDDLE: The cause of the war?

PIEHLER: Well, you know, what kept you fighting? Because ... you described being pretty disillusioned at times.

RIDDLE: Knowing the persecution that some of the people were going through.

PIEHLER: How much did you know, say in '44-'45, of what was going on?

RIDDLE: Well, as I shared with you, I was at this camp where people that died of starvation were walking around. You could see their ribs. I've got pictures of them that I've made. And, a terrible scene. A lot of the Germans claimed they didn't know these things were going on even.

PIEHLER: When did you encounter this camp? Do you remember when?

RIDDLE: This was at the close of the war in Europe, near Ludwigslust. It was just before V-E Day.

PIEHLER: That you encountered the camp? Now were you a unit that liberated it or did you just simply get assigned to—you mentioned doing guard duty.

RIDDLE: We helped to liberate it.

PIEHLER: You helped?

RIDDLE: I later became a guard there.

PIEHLER: What camp was it again? Because I know you have records on everything.

RIDDLE: You'll have to excuse me just a minute, 'til I (Looks through his papers; sound of paper shuffling)—I don't have it in this. I've got the videos at the house with the name of it.

PIEHLER: Mm-hmm. Well, was it in Northern Germany or Southern Germany?

RIDDLE: I don't know the area, exact location of it. The closest town is Ludwigslust, if you're acquainted with where it is. [Note: Wöbbelin Concentration Camp was located in this area]

PIEHLER: Mm-hmm. How much did you know about ...

RIDDLE: It probably tells in this. (Looking through papers) Go ahead and finish your question.

PIEHLER: How much did you know of what was going on in Germany? Did you read *Stars and Stripes* at all? Did ... it ever make it to you?

RIDDLE: Oh yes, that was one of my jobs when I was in the battalion, taking the *Stars and Stripes* back to the soldiers at the company. Also, it was my job to deliver the supplies while they were still in the foxhole so they didn't have to get out of the foxhole and expose themselves as to where their location was. So, I'd wait 'til after dusk to deliver it under the cover of darkness and go around to the foxholes. I always knew where the men were and where they were dug in.

PIEHLER: So, you knew a lot? You had mentioned earlier, before we even started the interview, you knew a lot more from your different jobs than your average ...

RIDDLE: Yes. I make a statement in this. If it doesn't agree with other interviews you might get, it's because I was involved in so *many* different things.

PIEHLER: Because a lot of infantrymen will admit this particularly, "my war was a few hundred feet ahead, and a few hundred feet behind, and a few hundred feet on the other side. I had no idea what was going on after that."

RIDDLE: Well, see, being a radio man, I ... could hear the orders as they come down as to what we were to do. I was aware of what went on. And also, our company commander was a real courageous man. He's one of the best officers that I had. His

name was Gibson. He was unafraid. He would walk through fire, the tracers so thick following him, you'd almost hesitate to let it get by. He was a good man and I never heard him say a bad thing until a sniper hit him in the arm one time. I was carrying the radio and he had the mic, talking. That sniper hit him in the arm and he called him an S.O.B. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: That's the worst thing? (Laughs)

RIDDLE: That's the worst I ever heard of him! And by the way, after the war he became a machinery salesman and he was killed in a car accident. I got a letter from his widow after that. He was a wonderful fellow; I've got pictures of him. Go ahead with your questions while I hunt this. (Looks through papers)

PIEHLER: Well, I mean, you mentioned the incident, and Steven Ambrose quotes the incident, where you were very mad at these Germans. What did you think of the German soldier? I mean, did you think he was a worthy adversary? Did you come to despise him over time?

RIDDLE: The common German soldier, to me, they just followed the leader. If you wanted to get to the German, you'd do the trick that Alvin York did. You'd begin firing on the one at the back of the enemy patrol and you'd get the last man right on up to the leader—they'd just continue going. They seemingly didn't take responsibility for themselves; they depended on their leaders. However, they were good soldiers, but they depended entirely on leadership. Me, I'm an individual. I'm thinking for *myself*. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: And it sounds like you did it more than once very deliberately during the war?

RIDDLE: One time—you were talking about the *Stars and Stripes*—our battalion was on one side of a ridge and our company was on the opposite side of the ridge, and every evening, just about sundown, they would send me with the *Stars and Stripes* back to the boys at the company. I had to go over this ridge. They begin firing on me—we were in this position several days—they begin firing on me with what we called a “Screaming Mimi.” They were hitting on, as I went in, on the left side of the road. And on this particular day, for an unknown reason, I always went to the right and they'd fire on the left. They'd miss me! This particular day, instead of going to the right, I went to the left and they fired on the right. They were going to be sure to get me that time. They were down here watching me every day as I went on across that ridge. Later, I went over there and there was a huge place, almost as half as large as a garden, that ... looked like you took a tiller and pulverized the ground where that hit. If I had gone that day to the right instead of to the left, they would have pulverized me. You know what the “Screaming Mimi” is?

PIEHLER: The [German] 88, I believe.

RIDDLE: Yeah.

PIEHLER: The German 88.

RIDDLE: Every time they would fire, it would turn like a cylinder in a pistol, a whining noise.

PIEHLER: I've heard that the sound was just ...

RIDDLE: Whining noise.

PIEHLER: ... could unnerve, particularly younger people new into the line.

RIDDLE: I've had 88s fired at me, flat trajectory, just like you'd fire a .22.

PIEHLER: So, being a runner made you quite a ...

RIDDLE: I was above ground more than any other man in the company. I was up going most of the time.

PIEHLER: And it sounds like ... as a good foot soldier, you wanted to be as close to the ground as possible. So having to move all this much made you more vulnerable?

RIDDLE: One of my assets, the Germans never could figure out what I was going to do next because I do things different. I'll share with you something that is unusual. I look at everything backwards to anybody else. I don't know what you call that; I've asked a lot of doctors and they tried to give some explanation to that, but when I receive something, I have to reverse that and look at it. I do things different—for instance, [if] we go into a parking lot, I'll go in the wrong way. My wife just fusses at me all the time. She says, "You'll do anything wrong, or die!" And to me, it's natural. I don't have any trouble doing anything wrong. If there is two ways of doing things, I'll do it wrong the first time and then I'd turn it around and do it the right way. So they never could figure out, for instance, like going over a fence or through a hedgerow or something, I wouldn't go through it like the average soldier. I'd go through it differently; I'd roll through it or under it or some other manner if they had it zeroed in.

PIEHLER: Which is interesting because ... people have told me about Germans, that, particularly, German shelling patterns, could be very methodical. You often knew when exactly when they were going to hit a particular spot.

RIDDLE: I learned a hard lesson on the Fourth of July of '45. One night, we had fought all day on the Fourth of July.

PIEHLER: Of 1944?

RIDDLE: '44. To the German line, and I got in an old foxhole; I was going to use it for the night and they had that zeroed in. Along just about dusk, they began to throw the

shells in, and these two fellows jumped in on top of me in that hole. I learned real quick not to use an old foxhole because they zero those things in.

PIEHLER: I guess that's one of the lessons you learned on the job?

RIDDLE: Yeah. There [were] two different kinds of foxholes. You'd dig a standing foxhole in case of tanks. You'd dig just a round hole to stand in. When the tanks'd come, you'd scoot down in it and just a small opening there. But they learned a trick too. When they got over the hole, they'd give those tracks a twist and cave it in on us. Rather than digging a slit trench and laying down in it, you'd dig a perpendicular hole.

PIEHLER: Have they taught you this?

WOMACK: No, these are good tips!

PIEHLER: How much urban street fighting did you ever do? Did you ever do any street fighting in Europe?

RIDDLE: House to house?

PIEHLER: House to house.

RIDDLE: Not so much. Most of it was in rural areas. In Normandy, it was hedgerow after hedgerow. In Holland, it was canals and swamps.

PIEHLER: And then the Siegfried Line?

RIDDLE: I have a piece of the dragon teeth at the house. I also have a piece of the Berlin Wall.

PIEHLER: I can't wait for the report; I will have to book my own visit.

RIDDLE: Oh, laws—we've done passed the time!

PIEHLER: Oh yeah? Well, you seem to be enjoying it and I've been enjoying it. Let me make sure Seth gets his ...

RIDDLE: Well, quit any time. I'm willing to stay on just as long as you want to.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I also want to give you plenty of time for the museum ... But let me make sure that, Seth, you've got your questions in, particularly about combat.

WOMACK: I guess the only one is ... back a little ways, June 10. I believe that's in '44? Yeah. That was during the thirty-three days of combat. Now ... you've talked a little bit about, you know, the Battle of the Bulge. What about this thirty-three days in Normandy?

RIDDLE: Well, we were just on the go—continuous combat during that time; continually on the go in combat. All I can say is—fighting from hedgerow to hedgerow.

WOMACK: That's the last question I have ...

PIEHLER: Did you think you might have to go to Japan, or did you have enough points?

RIDDLE: That's one [reason] that I requested that Purple Heart, that I might have enough points to come back home. That was in my mind—our next move—because they called the Airborne in on the different phases and I was expecting to go. And, we had one sergeant that gave up his points with the idea of going to the Pacific but he beat us back to the States! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... I've been told that some of the units going to Japan ... got sent back to the States first for their leave, and then the war ends and they're in the States?

RIDDLE: I'll try to answer this last question here if I can find it here. I should remember the name of it. You can stop it there for the time being.

PIEHLER: Yeah, let me just ... (Tape stops)

RIDDLE: Okay, could I make just a few statements?

PIEHLER: Yeah. Please do.

RIDDLE: After the V-E Day and [when] I had enough points to come home, I was transferred into the 194th Glider Infantry, 17th Airborne coming back home to be discharged. While I was in that, I attended school—took up business law and small business. We had a teacher there; he was from Philadelphia. We called him "The Philadelphia Lawyer." (Laughter) Good teacher. I enjoyed that, and we came back. I was discharged at Atterbury, Indiana, on the nineteenth of September, 1945. When we landed in Boston Harbor, Pier Number Six, went into the harbor there and the boats were shooting the colored water high in the air. The trains were blowing. They were celebrating! There were people there meeting troops that come in; I didn't have nobody to meet me. But we got on the train and made our way to Atterbury. I got on the Greyhound Bus and traveled all night and arrived in Sweetwater in the afternoon. There wasn't any band there; there wasn't anybody greeting me except the girl that I had [written] to while I was overseas that worked in the office there across from where I got off. She come out and greeted me.

PIEHLER: That was your homecoming?

RIDDLE: That was my homecoming. That's back when gasoline was rationed and tires were rationed. There happened to be a man on the bus that came down from Knoxville that offered me a ride home. So, that's the way I got home.

PIEHLER: That's the way you actually got home?

RIDDLE: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And your parents were probably pretty glad to see you?

RIDDLE: Oh, yes. Dad wasn't there when I arrived, but Mother made up for it.

PIEHLER: I'm curious. When you were in Germany—you weren't in Germany very long after V-E Day?

RIDDLE: Not too long. I was there two or three times for short periods of time.

PIEHLER: Did you ever have any contact with the Russians?

RIDDLE: Oh yes, certainly! I didn't tell you about that. I was in the group that met the Russians outside of Berlin. We sat down and waited for them to go in, and when they approached, it was an army of the countries they had overrun, but they had American equipment—Lend-Lease. It looked like the American Army a-coming, but it was those people that they had overrun, and it was days later that the polished Russians came in. They were camped not *too* far from where we were at. Our general went up one night and they got to drinking and carrying on, and he was gonna demonstrate to them how he jumped out of the plane, and [he] jumped out the second-storey window and like to broke his leg!

PIEHLER: Is this General [James] Gavin?

RIDDLE: No, afraid not.

PIEHLER: This general will remain anonymous for history.

RIDDLE: Poor old Gavin. He was a good leader, just straight as a ramrod, so to speak. But before he passed away, he was all slumped over and in a pitiful state.

PIEHLER: You served under him. You got to know him a little bit?

RIDDLE: I got to know him personally. We sat and talked time after time.

PIEHLER: What time in your career did you get to know him?

RIDDLE: That was in Holland.

PIEHLER: In Holland?

RIDDLE: Holland.

PIEHLER: Because I've read that he really was widely admired by his men, and he's been widely admired by a lot of generals because he was quite a thinker; I mean, he was a very bright officer.

RIDDLE: Yeah, he was thrown into a bad situation there at one time, but he was a good leader. I have to say that. I visited his monument there in France. Just a little bit about what I did after I came home. I stayed on the farm. I got home in September; I stayed on the farm and helped my father until the next July and I bought a service station. I was going to get rich on selling gasoline; I found out the pumps was only a monument to get people to stop and sell them something else. So, after two years, I sold it and I became an electrician helper, refrigeration. Then, from that, I went to working as a milk bottler in Dixie Dairy bottling plant. From there, I went to the G.I. school.

PIEHLER: So you didn't use your G.I. Bill right away?

RIDDLE: G.I. Bill. Electronics, in Knoxville.

PIEHLER: Now to get the gas station, did you use the G.I. Bill loan?

RIDDLE: No. I saved up some money. I saved the great amount of nine hundred dollars while I was overseas and sent home to Mother. There was a car salesman in town that had a *beautiful* bright red convertible, nine hundred dollars. Oh, I wanted that so bad I could taste it, but I held on to my money and later bought that station.

PIEHLER: Sounds like you might have been better off with the convertible! (Laughter)

RIDDLE: (Laughs) I learned later; it would have been better. Did you read what Wayne wrote in the front of my book?

PIEHLER: No, I didn't. But it's, "To Clinton Riddle, You were the solid citizen soldier of the 325. Your contribution from Africa to the Elbe River in Germany was immeasurable. You were always there when needed. That helped to make 325 an outstanding regiment. I am proud to call you my friend and comrade. Wayne Pierce, 4/16/98." I don't think, most combat people don't write that to another combat person unless they mean it.

RIDDLE: He's a great fellow.

PIEHLER: Well, I guess, I want to really encourage you to really strongly consider a memoir because you've written quite a bit about the war. Well, you kept a journal at the time. When had you started to write, because you've come here to this interview with really lots of written stories, typed stories. When did you start, sort of, adding to what you had written during the war itself?

RIDDLE: Well, I more or less just from handwriting, typed it out. I haven't really added to it too much.

PIEHLER: So this is really from the war years?

RIDDLE: It's just more or less, strictly the war. I could add a lot of experiences in there.

PIEHLER: So there's a lot that still needs to be written down?

RIDDLE: For instance, I shared with you. I know you've got to go.

PIEHLER: Oh, no. I'm in no rush!

RIDDLE: As I shared with you there, that the weather closed in during the Battle of the Bulge and Patton went up to this little chapel and offered up this prayer and said, "Lord," of course, he used a few curse words, and, "give me some weather so the planes can come in." Then it opened up and the next day I found myself on top of a tank. We went fourteen miles behind enemy line and took this little village, Regne. There were two tanks in there; we knocked out one and one escaped. This released a whole number of men that were trapped in there, and that's when they formed the machinegun squad and I carried the machinegun. We rode in on the tanks but we had to walk back out, and we stayed there until midnight that night before we started out. Soon as we arrived, I began to dig in; that was the day before Christmas. I was afraid those Germans would come back, and I began to dig in. Some of the fellows went into the houses and the ladies had been cooking their Christmas cakes, and they brought me out some of the cake. It was still warm, and I ate it there in the foxhole. But what I started to tell you: when we started walking out, I threw that machinegun over my shoulder to carry it, and there's snaps on top of your shoulder, and it hung in the guard of the gun and we had to be quiet because we was marching out through the German lines on the railroad. We couldn't speak or stop; we had to keep going. I carried that thing until I almost fell over before I finally got one of my buddies to unhook the thing! And that was during the time—you hear that the U.S. Army never retreats, but it did that time. It was Montgomery's idea that we straighten up the line in order for us to retreat back. So, we started retreating back and along came some 155s; they were pulling 'em with Jeeps. I caught me a ride on the barrel of that gun; I got tired of walking! So, that separated me from my company. Well, I knew ahead of time where they were going and I rode to the place where the road turned off to go to where they were going; several miles. I got off and started walking, and I walked until about three o'clock in the morning by myself in German territory. And I found this little building on the side of the road, and I went inside this building. It was a grainery, and there was a huge box in there about half full of grain, and I climbed in that and covered myself up all except for my head and I slept 'til daylight. So, I got up after daylight and went outside and kicked back the snow, and I had the K-ration. I took a box, and made me a fire and warmed it up and ate breakfast. But, while I was out there, I heard firing going on down the road, and when I finished my breakfast, I headed in that direction and, lo and behold, it was my company! I walked right in; they never asked me where I had been and I never did tell 'em! (Laughter) Now, that's the kind of guy I was

in combat. I knew what was going to happen, what was taking place, and so forth and I had that knowledge that the others didn't have. So, I could be where I was supposed to be ...

PIEHLER: Even sooner than (Laughs) ...

RIDDLE: One way or another. There's a list of my relatives that I lost on the *Sultana* in the Civil War.

PIEHLER: So, you lost John M. Daniel Riddle.

RIDDLE: That was my great-grandfather.

PIEHLER: And Miles Riddle on the *Sultana*. Arthur Riddle and James E. White.

RIDDLE: Distant cousins.

PIEHLER: And then Robertson, *Sultana* ... It seems like you had tried several things before you went to the electronics school. Had you thought of college?

RIDDLE: Yes, sir. I sometimes wish that I hadn't gone into electronics and [had] completed college—taken a different route, or even stayed in the service. I had a great opportunity.

PIEHLER: You had thought of staying in the service?

RIDDLE: Since then. At that time, no!

PIEHLER: You were with the group that said, "Where do you sign up to get out!"

RIDDLE: Yeah, when ... they were supposed to give us a inspection and they said, "Bend over and spread the cheeks," then I said, "I'm alright. Let me go!" I had twenty-three teeth filled when I got back. I had one filled in a field hospital while I was over there and the filling fell out before I got home.

PIEHLER: So your teeth really suffered from being in the ...

RIDDLE: Oh, yes!

PIEHLER: You hadn't had problems with your teeth before?

RIDDLE: No, and, eventually, I had to have them pulled and get these old false teeth.

PIEHLER: And a lot of that, I guess, would be from the war—having twenty-three fillings?

RIDDLE: Neglecting to clean them.

PIEHLER: Because, I've often asked. You were actually, in some ways, fortunate because you would occasionally get pulled from the line. But when you were in the line, I take it that such creature comforts as showers and ...

RIDDLE: Well, we had the habit of moving every six weeks on Sunday it seemed like, when we were overseas.

WOMACK: Do you want to talk a little bit about after the war?

PIEHLER: We could talk a little, although I think—it's four o'clock and I want to give you plenty of time to see the museum. So, as I said, I hope you'll consider the Fordham Series, and think of writing your memoirs and even consider maybe your journal and your letters home as part of it ... and publish those because that would be a really wonderful thing to have.

RIDDLE: Well there's very little news in the letters that I sent home ...

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