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AN INTERVIEW WITH W. LEWIS WOOD

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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with W. Lewis Wood on August 3, 2002, in Memphis, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler ...

NASHWA VAN HOUTS: ... and Nashwa Van Houts.

PIEHLER: And I want to just begin by asking you a little bit about—you were born in Starkville, Mississippi.

W. LEWIS WOOD: Right.

PIEHLER: What year were you born?

WOOD: What year?

PIEHLER: Yes.

WOOD: Uh, in 1925.

PIEHLER: You were born in 1925.

WOOD: November 15.

PIEHLER: And you moved to Memphis at an early age ...

WOOD: Right.

PIEHLER: ... when did you move to Memphis?

WOOD: I was about one year old when we moved to Memphis. My father was with a ... feed company that was headquartered in Meridian, Mississippi and they had a ... plant here in Memphis, and he was transferred to Memphis, and we moved to Memphis from Starkville, where we were at.

PIEHLER: So you're a ... Starkville, Mississippi native, but you really, Memphis ...

WOOD: I was born in Starkville, but I ...

PIEHLER: But Memphis ...

WOOD: Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Could you maybe tell us a little bit about your parents?

WOOD: Well, my mother was the daughter of a Methodist minister, and he was later a presiding elder for the North Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Church, and ... she was born in a little town called Lula, Mississippi, which is over by the river, small town. And ... she was an

occupation—prior to marriage was, she was a teacher and then she taught at Belhaven College in ... actually, it was in Jackson, Mississippi, but they also had a portion of that school in Brookhaven, Mississippi. And my father had been born and raised in Brookhaven, and he was running the ... kind of the family—they had an old, actually, it was really kind of a plantation type home in Brookhaven, and he was—had two brothers and a sister, but he primarily lived there with his parents and ran the farm, the plantation. And he met my mother when she was down there teaching at Belhaven College, and they married in 1919. And I have a sister who was born in Brookhaven. She's basically five years older than me. Her name is Lucy Wood Underhill. And ... my father had graduated in law from the University of Mississippi, and he got into politics with ... some of the Bilbo people in South Mississippi and also he served one term in the state legislature. And then he kind of had a falling out with some of the Bilbo crowd and others and ... he didn't serve anymore in the legislature, so he, that's when he really took over and started running the family farm.

VAN HOUTS: What was on your farm?

WOOD: What was on that farm?

VAN HOUTS: Mm hmm.

WOOD: They had some horses and cattle and a tremendous grove of peaches. And they, I guess that was one of their primary purposes. My father's older brother ran a wholesale grocery there in Brookhaven and he shipped those peaches all over the country, and particularly to New Orleans, because they were, Brookhaven was right on the Illinois Central [Railroad] main line that ran from Chicago to New Orleans. And they shipped those peaches in and out of there, and that was their principal thing. Times got a little tough, and this was just a little bit before I was born, and he had become quite a, my father had become quite an authority on cattle. He was raising cattle and at that time in Mississippi, that was kind of a new thing in the early '20s, 1920s. So when he ... when times got a little tough he, even though he had a degree in law, he was brought into the—which was at that time called, the Mississippi Agricultural Mechanical College at Starkville, which now is Mississippi State University. And he taught some courses there in animal husbandry and ... cattle feeding and that sort of thing.

But he also began work for the Royal Staff of Life Feed Mill, which was headquartered in Meridian and he was representing them in Starkville and the Central Mississippi area, and then he got transferred, that's when we came to Memphis and ... shortly after I was born. And ... he stayed in that 'til the Depression hit pretty hard, and I guess, like a lot of people, he had to get out and find him another job, because the feed business, the cattle feed business went to pot. It seemed like all people could do was keep food on the table in some of those days, and they didn't worry too much about the cattle. And he then went into the food business, started ... got a job with the Crosse & Blackwell Company selling ... fancy food. And he did that until, well, he passed away in 1947. And my mother was, after she had been a teacher, she was a housewife. After that until times got pretty tough, so she, after they had moved to Memphis and my sister and I were enrolled in public schools in Memphis, she took a job in ... with the Brodnax Company, which was a fine silversmith here in Memphis. And she sold silver, as you can see. That's why I've got such a collection.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I was wondering. And so there's a reason why you have so much silver.

WOOD: She, she ... we got a lot of it up in the attic, too. She ... gave us silver almost every birthday, every anniversary, everything, because she could get it at a discount. And so we had a lot of silver. (Laughter) My daughter has a lot of silver. She lives down in Fort Lauderdale, and she's taken some with her and she's looking forward to getting the rest of it, I guess, one day.

VAN HOUTS: One day.

WOOD: Yeah. So it's ... I'm sorry I'm talking so much.

PIEHLER: Oh, no, no! No, this is great. I want to back up and ask you, before I forget to ask you— ... Senator Bilbo, in American political history, is a legendary figure ...

WOOD: Oh absolutely, yeah.

PIEHLER: Why – do you know why your father—did he ever tell you why he had a falling out with the Bilbo organization?

WOOD: Well actually there were two factions in Mississippi at that time, and Bilbo's group and a fellow by the name of [James K.] Vardaman, who was a senator in, from Mississippi for a while. And Vardaman had a group and Bilbo had a group. And my father, when he first went into politics in South Mississippi, he was in with Vardaman, and he got elected to the House. Then Vardaman and Bilbo had been enemies, but suddenly, just like, sometimes, you know, enemies get in bed together. So Bilbo and Vardaman got in bed together, you might say and ... for some reason or other, there was no place for my father in that organization, and that's how he lost out. He never had any love for Mr. Bilbo. He was always ...

PIEHLER: So he was, he ...

WOOD: And when, you know, Bilbo got [I] think he got put out of the Senate ... as I recall. I'm not as good on history as I should be, I guess. But he did, I think he got recalled. They had a recall election or something. And my father was always very pleased that that happened. My father was also ... at the University of Mississippi and played football on the team at the University of Mississippi with a governor, [a man] who became governor of Mississippi, a fellow by the name of [Martin S.] Conner. And they were good friends. And they both played on the same team together. And those days—I've got pictures of it someplace, but they didn't wear ...

PIEHLER: I know! What they wore then, compared to today ...

WOOD: They just had, like, sweat jerseys on, and their hats didn't have ... they were, they came down, looked like dog ears flapped over. And it was just a piece of leather across their head. And he used to tell a story about playing Vanderbilt. Vanderbilt was a big team in the Southeastern Conference back then, bigger than even the University of Tennessee. This was

back before Neyland's day. And he tells the story about playing against Vanderbilt and ... there was a person who later became the publisher of the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* on the Vanderbilt team, and he played right opposite this man. He was really good, and he got so ground into the dirt during the game that he was dusty from head to toe and when he went back to the sidelines, they all started calling him Dusty. (Laughter) And that became my father's nickname from then 'til he died.

PIEHLER: He was known as Dusty ...

WOOD: The people that really knew him from his college days and from his days in Mississippi knew him as Dusty Wood. Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: And did he leave the law practice because of the falling out with the senator?

WOOD: Did he what?

VAN HOUTS: Leave the law practice.

WOOD: Uh ...

VAN HOUTS: What made him leave?

WOOD: Well, I guess that he, when he came out of the University of Mississippi ... he really never did actually practice law. He went almost directly into politics. That's the way he went. And ... so, even though he, I guess, was an attorney and was qualified to practice law, when he got out of the legislature, there became a need for somebody to take over and run the family plantation. And his father and mother were, had become pretty old. And so he got ... into that and he just never did practice law.

VAN HOUTS: Okay. And is the plantation still in your family?

WOOD: Yes. The plantation—a first, a second cousin of mine is a ... young lady who never married, and she was the daughter of my first cousin. They—it goes back [to] when the Depression hit the family, we didn't lose the plantation, but they had it so indebted that nobody was there for a good while, and when they finally got enough money to get out of debt, so to speak, my first cousin was the one who was then practicing law and they had begun to strike oil down in that part of Mississippi.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: He was an attorney for a lot of people, oil leases and things like that, and he made some pretty good money and he was able to get the plantation back out of pot, so to speak.

VAN HOUTS: Right, right.

WOOD: And his daughter ... is an old maid. She never married. And she is now running the plantation.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: Whenever we drive from here to New Orleans, we often times stop. It's actually, it's an old—by the way, I have a short story I'd really

PIEHLER: No, please tell it. I was going to ask you more about the plantation, so ...

WOOD: Yeah, I have a short story that I can give you a copy of if you'd like, that I've entered into a contest ... called "Galloping Ghosts." It tells— doesn't identify my family, but it is my family's background, and the galloping ghosts come from the standpoint—right after the Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan was organized in that county. And the first county to come back into the Union in Mississippi was named for the president, Lincoln. And if you're interested in why Lincoln County got its name, they ...— some of my ancestors, who were accused of being scalawags, although they were not scalawags—scalawags are people that ...

VAN HOUTS: Yes, I know.

WOOD: You know what a scalawag is, was? Well, they were instrumental in getting the county ... lands drawn out of adjacent counties and instrumental in getting it named for President Lincoln.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: As a result of this ...

VAN HOUTS: They were not popular?

WOOD: Well the Reconstruction forces never entered that county. They were allowed to operate as a county without having any occupation forces from the Union Army. This is, all comes down to me from my uncle's people and so that's what my short story is. "Galloping Ghosts" is about ... the people that served and ... from the Brookhaven area and that area of Mississippi that served in the Civil War and came back after the Civil War and found their homes burned. And actually, the plantation that my family has was almost burned to the ground and it was nothing left there but a few stalls and one of the, a couple of the darkies that lived on the plantation, which were, they were now free. They were slaves at one time. They still stayed there, and they were able to tell what all happened when the Union forces came and occupied the area. And that's ... the story is that the— my great-great-grandfather was the one who was instrumental in getting the county named and he was also instrumental in forming the Ku Klux [Klan].

VAN HOUTS: Oh.

WOOD: And that's why they later found out that he wasn't a scalawag. (Laughs) He actually, and what they did, since there were no occupation troops in ... Lincoln County—it was right next to Natchez and Fayette over on the river, where there was a lot of black soldiers. Occupation troops [had] come in and a lot of the, I guess you might say, the white youth that had come back from the Civil War ... didn't like the idea that these black troops were occupying Natchez and Fayette, Mississippi and those places along the river. So they would, they organized the first Klan group in Mississippi, was organized in—kind of like Pulaski, Tennessee was where the Klan ...

PIEHLER: The Klan ...

WOOD: ... started. They, and they would raid out of there over to burn crosses and what have you. And some of these black people that were—I hate to tell this, but that's in my story.

PIEHLER: No, no ...

WOOD: And uh ...

PIEHLER: So your family had deep roots ...

WOOD: At the ...

PIEHLER: ... and still does. I mean, you still have a ...

WOOD: Well, I have a second cousin ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean that's ...

WOOD: ... that's the only one that's left in Mississippi.

PIEHLER: But still, I mean, the plantation is still ...

WOOD: The plantation is still there. Yeah.

PIEHLER: When was it founded? Do you know what year, roughly?

WOOD: Oh. I ... I really don't know ...

PIEHLER: It's before the Civil War.

WOOD: Actually, my father was born there, and he was born in 1882. [He'd] be right old, wouldn't he? Yeah, he was born in 1882, and he had an older brother that was born there ... so I know it goes back, it must go back to pre-Civil War days.

PIEHLER: Pre-Civil War, but how far back?

WOOD: It doesn't go very far back.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: Actually, it was a very ... nice run plantation even after the family recovered it. My cousin did very well by it.

PIEHLER: When your father managed it, how big was the plantation, in terms of acres? Do you remember? Do you know? And how many workers ...

WOOD: Well, I don't really know. I have some letters that—one of the things, he would go up into Wisconsin and he, and Minnesota and places up North, Chicago, and he would buy cattle and have cattle shipped down of special breeds, mostly in the dairy cattle. And ... so I don't know, I really don't know ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: ... how many, he had quite a few cattle, but one of the things that caused him ... to lose out was that some of these cows got shipped without enough food and when they got there, they were all, some of them dead, some of them just in bad shape and everything else. Of course, he had spent quite a bit of money and I guess he just really didn't, he was an attorney, and I don't guess he knew as much about raising cattle as he should, because he had those cattle shipped, I guess you'd say FOB or whatever. They didn't take responsibility from up there.

PIEHLER: Up there. Yeah.

WOOD: It was your responsibility, when they got to you, and unfortunately there wasn't enough food and water, I guess, for the cattle and most of them died.

PIEHLER: Oh, wow.

WOOD: From being shipped ...

VAN HOUTS: How can you make receiving a shipment the ...

WOOD: But anyway, I didn't mean to get off on all that.

VAN HOUTS: Now, your sister has a different ...

WOOD: My what?

VAN HOUTS: Your sister. Her last name is Underhill.

WOOD: Underhill.

VAN HOUTS: Why is that?

WOOD: Because she married.

VAN HOUTS: Oh, right. Okay.

WOOD: She married Luther Underhill and ... she has three sons.

VAN HOUTS: Right. Okay. I'm sorry, I thought you'd given her name from when she was born.

WOOD: Lucy Wood Underhill, yes.

PIEHLER: Your father also briefly, before going to Crosse & Blackwell, he also briefly sold life insurance.

WOOD: Yes. Very briefly, he did.

PIEHLER: It sounds like he didn't like it, or wasn't ...

WOOD: Well, actually again that was right during the ...

VAN HOUTS: Depression?

WOOD: ... part of, early part of the Depression. And I guess one of the things, one of the reasons that he went into insurance [was] some of the people at our church that we belonged to, Saint John's Methodist, worked with Penn Mutual Life. And they convinced him that this was a good place to be selling insurance, because if there was anything that people would not give up during the Depression, it was their life insurance.

VAN HOUTS: Really?

WOOD: Well, if they had life insurance, they kept it going. But if they didn't have life insurance, they didn't have money to buy life insurance. That was—so, when he got into the life insurance business and selling, he didn't sell many policies. I still have a policy that he sold me. (Laughter) But that's why he didn't stay in very long. It was tough.

PIEHLER: Yeah ...

WOOD: It was really tough ...

PIEHLER: ... I would imagine.

WOOD: He having ... his background having been in foods and animal feeds and that sort of thing, I guess it was kind of natural for him to go with Crosse & Blackwell when the opportunity presented itself.

VAN HOUTS: Your mother was a housemother of a fraternity?

WOOD: Yes. Sigma Chi.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: Out at University of Memphis.

VAN HOUTS: How did she enjoy that?

WOOD: She loved it.

VAN HOUTS: Did she?

WOOD: One of my first cousins. One of her nephews, was a member of the Sigma Chi Fraternity, and ... they needed to have a housemother and at that time she was living alone and she—this just appealed to her very much, and she loved it. And the unfortunate thing is that her health being—she stayed there for several years. I can't remember now how long, but her health began to break and my sister and I felt like the best thing was that—it's not that being a housemother is that much work, but it's a lot of—there was a lot of anxiety with it, worrying about the boys. (Laughter) They were almost all of them like her sons, you might say, and if they came in late or if they'd had too much to drink or what have you, it really ...

PIEHLER: She took it very personally, it sounds like.

WOOD: She took it very personally, and it was, she was not—we finally got her out of it.

VAN HOUTS: Did she have funny stories to tell you about what went on there?

WOOD: Oh, yes. She had some real ...

VAN HOUTS: I can imagine. (Laughter)

WOOD: ... funny stories. And, of course, I was in a fraternity at Knoxville.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: And I know how housemothers work. My housemother, I was Kappa Sig in Knoxville, my housemother was very tough, rough on us boys. And I mean, if, you know, if we got out of line, she had the president of the fraternity, that was a big husky guy, that he could take it out on us. (Laughter) He did that. Now, my mother just loved all those boys and she, actually, she let them get away with murder, quite honestly. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Could you tell us a little bit about your early recollections of growing up in Memphis in the late '20s and the 1930s?

WOOD: Well, okay. My earliest recollections, I guess, were everything seemed to revolve around my church. My mother and father were very devout Methodists, and we never missed a Sunday school service or a Sunday or a Wednesday night dinner and prayer meeting. We went to—so everything seemed to revolve around that in my real early recollection. There was one fellow, who, he and I seemed to get in ... we'd have fights almost every day after Sunday school. And we'd get into tremendous fights. And ... later, we became very good friends and fact is, he was a fraternity brother of mine in Knoxville.

VAN HOUTS: Oh.

WOOD: And we had become good friends. But that, I can remember those fights just ... and I can remember also there was one fellow that was quite a bully. Then my mother—and I was afraid of him, really was 'cause he, I thought he could beat me up. And he was bigger and a little older. So ... would threaten me with all kinds of things, and I would just kind of melt and do whatever he wanted done, and my mother got real mad about it. She said, "You've got to stand up to that fellow." And (Laughs) so, one day he was over there and he started hitting me and I was, like, going to walk away, and she got a big switch and she says, "You go back and fight him, or I'm going to switch you within a inch of your life." (Laughter) And so I had—I was more afraid of my mother than I was of him. (Laughter) So I went back and fought and after that, he never did bully me anymore. And it was, I guess, just what I needed, to have someone make me stand up to him.

PIEHLER: Sort of like, you know, do the men fear you more than the enemy?

WOOD: Yeah. (Laughter) And let's see. I can remember, particularly, my sister was five years older than me and consequently she would have dates. Boys would come by the house and I would ... we had a sliding door where we lived, an old house there in Memphis, over in Midtown area. And I would get behind the sliding door and listen to hear what was going on with my sister and her friends. And I can remember one story that I don't think I've put in anything because she never did like me teasing her about it. But I can remember that apparently this one boy had tasted her lipstick and I was listening and he said, "Raspberry!" (Laughter) And so ... after he left and I came out of the front room and I said, "Raspberry!" and, boy, she got so mad at me. (Laughter) She would never let me get over calling that "Raspberry!" business. So I did that and she and I, we didn't get along too well together, because she was just at the age and I was just a brat little brother, brat. And ... I constantly caused a problem. She'd have boys that would take her out to the park, and of course, back in those days—this was towards the end of [the] Depression days, nobody had a lot of money, and I'd go out—he'd take her to the park and maybe buy one ice cream cone. And I'd be going—my mother would send me with them just, I guess, to tag along. And I'd go with them and he wouldn't buy me an ice cream cone, didn't buy himself an ice cream cone, he bought my sister an ice cream cone ... I asked, I said, "Lucy, let me have a lick." And that story has gone around her sons and they, whenever they see me they recall that story, and they say, "Lucy, let me have a lick." And that's kind of stuck with me. (Laughter)

Is that ... okay. We used to have a lot of sandlot baseball, sandlot football, and we had rubber gun battles in the neighborhood. We, and I guess that's where I first got into combat. They were

taking up the streetcar tracks along Peabody Avenue, which was a main east-west corridor here in Memphis, and the streetcar tracks were basically, I guess about ... twenty, thirty feet apart. And when they took them up, there was a ground ... return line underneath the tracks, so that when they took up the tracks, they had to dig down about three or four feet to get the ground return line up, too. So you had two trenches ... apart, right across from each other, about twenty-five, thirty feet. And the kids, we'd get in those trenches and we'd play like we were in the war, combat fighting the war. This was back actually, before World War II.

PIEHLER: And were you remodeling, like, trench warfare from World War I? Was that your ...

WOOD: That was, kind of our model. Yeah. And we would—it was unfortunate, because the clods of dirt that had been left were dried out and were hard, and if you hit somebody with them, it really hurt them. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: You caused some damage.

WOOD: We didn't throw rocks, but we threw these clods of dirt, and those clods of dirt were quite hard and they hit somebody, and—so we had, constantly had somebody crying, going home to their mother. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you played fairly rough at times. You had bullies and

WOOD: Very rough. It seems like we had a, you know, I don't say it was a rough life ...

PIEHLER: But still, I mean, you had some rough play. I mean, it wasn't

WOOD: Yeah. And we—the area of Memphis at that time, in Central, what is now Central Gardens, supposed to be a real nice old place, it was a nice old place then. But we had—it was right close to what later became one of Memphis's first ... apartment places for low income. So you had, in that neighborhood, you had people from a fairly high class of people and then a very low class. And you also began to have a mixture of some blacks and whites in the area. So we had, we used to have—the fact is [that] I can recall one time that we were flying kites down on the grounds of the junior high school, Bellevue Junior High School. And ... we were flying our kites and this bunch of young blacks came and threw rocks up at our ...

PIEHLER: At the kites.

WOOD: ... kites. And this one fellow I was telling you about that I used to have all the fights with, he was tough. He, when that started happening, he goes home and he had some brass knucks. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: Oh, my goodness.

WOOD: And, see, that's how rough it was back in those days. I don't know where he got the brass knucks. I never had any brass knucks, but he came back with these brass knucks, and he

was threatening these kids that if they didn't stop doing that, and he showed them those brass knucks and they knew what those were so they took off. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: Oh my ...

WOODS: But I don't think he would have had any compunction about hitting them with it. And ... so. And also there was a time—my mother used to give me, when I'd go to school. This was in, like, the 1930, '31, '32, right at the depth of the Depression. I'd go to grammar school and she'd give me lunch money, fifteen cents. I mean, I got fifteen cents every day, and at that time, fifteen cents would buy you a scoop of potatoes, a hamburger, and a glass of milk. I mean a nickel apiece. So fifteen cents was pretty good. You had mashed potatoes, a hamburger, and milk. But what would happen is I would go and I would put my fifteen cents up on my desk, so I'd have it and know where it would be when I was, when it was time for us to march down to the ... dining room to eat, you know, in the grammar school. And this young fellow that sat across from me ... I didn't know it at the time, but I kept missing my fifteen cents. Just kept missing and kept missing and kept missing. And I finally figured out who this kid was. And he was from one of the ... he was a young white boy, and he was from a very low-class neighborhood. Probably didn't have money. So he was picking up my fifteen cents. And ... I never did tattle tale on him or squeal on him or anything. I knew he was doing it. But it almost got to be the point where I would put it up there on purpose, so he could get it. I felt kind of sorry for him, because he was ...

PIEHLER: You knew ...

WOOD: ... he was worse off than me. But later on, his mother—he must have been saving some of that money or something. His mother came over to the school and made him pay me back all that money for almost a year that he had been taking off of my desk. And she, but that's the way it was. And this particular fellow later, unfortunately, went to jail ... selling drugs. So we were in a rough neighborhood. It was rough.

VAN HOUTS: And did you stay in that same area of Memphis the whole time you grew up?

WOOD: Well, I went, I stayed right there in that neighborhood and went to Bruce Elementary, Bellevue Junior High School, and Central High School. And they were just right around each other, so I guess all the way through high school I was in there.

PIEHLER: Until you went away to ...

WOOD: 'Til I came up to the University of Tennessee. And then from there, I went to the service. Well ... my family moved out, further out into a better area.

PIEHLER: But not until after the war, or ...

WOOD: Well, they moved ... in about 1940.

PIEHLER: 1940, so ...

WOOD: Just right before the war, I guess, they moved out there. '40? Well, yeah, '40.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: Okay. So I lived there in the new home for a short period of time before I went into the service ...

PIEHLER: Yeah but that was brief ...

WOOD: ... yeah. I didn't go to the service 'til '43, '44.

PIEHLER: You uh—did your parents own their house when you lived in Central? Did they ...

WOOD: When we first—when I was going to Bruce Elementary, we were living in a duplex and renting. And then we moved into a, purchased a home out on Vance Avenue, which was still in that same corridor, and ... well-known then. Later on, they moved on further out.

PIEHLER: And did your parents own a car?

WOOD: Well, my father, was a, became a traveling salesman, so he had to have a car because he was selling feed and then selling foods, so he had a car. And that was the only car we had until, I guess, until I got up old enough to have a car.

VAN HOUTS: So your mother couldn't drive?

WOOD: Well, she could drive, but she didn't have the car.

VAN HOUTS: A car, right. But she could, she knew how to drive.

WOOD: She knew how to drive.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: And I guess back in those days, I guess, you know, the public transportation was so good that you really didn't need ...

VAN HOUTS: A car.

WOOD: ... a car so much, you know.

VAN HOUTS: And did you get to go to the movies or things like that when you weren't having fights? (Laughter)

WOOD: When I wasn't fighting? Yeah, I used to go to the movies a lot. And we had, of course almost every Saturday—that was the big movie day. We'd have to go Saturday afternoon.

VAN HOUTS: With your family, you'd go?

WOOD: No, usually, I went with some of the guys in the neighborhood.

PIEHLER: So would you go to Tom Mix?

WOOD: Tom Mix ... yeah, and Buster Keaton. Yeah. He's really old now.

PIEHLER: What did—I just watched a little Memphis TV, and apparently—any thought there's been asking for fond memories of movie theaters. Any memories you have about movie theaters in the '30s or early '40s that you used to go to?

WOOD: Yeah. Yeah, but I haven't responded to any of those. I don't know. I had a distant cousin, in fact, a cousin of my mother's, who owned a theater, the Ritz Theater. And ... we used to go to the Ritz Theater quite a bit. Fact is I remember the first movie I ever saw in my life was at the Ritz. And I really can't remember the name of it. It was a talkie, but ... it was a jungle picture. That's all I can remember.

PIEHLER: Yeah. But you don't ...

WOOD: I can't remember the name of it.

PIEHLER: You were probably—its sounds like you were very young when you saw it.

WOOD: I was very young. Very young, yeah. And ... like I said, we'd go to the movies almost every Saturday. And movies back in those times, I think, were like ten cents, you could go in as a child.

PIEHLER: This is a question I realized I should ask because and I usually haven't asked people this before, but it just seems so appropriate today, because Knoxville is so much milder in the summer, and Memphis is not. Memphis is pretty—you up in a Memphis without air conditioning ...

WOOD: Right.

PIEHLER: ... except for the movies. Did the movies have ...

WOOD: Well, the first building in Memphis to get air conditioning was the old Warner Brothers Theater. And I know about this, because having been in the engineering business, my firm put in the first air conditioning in the first commercial building in Memphis, which happened to be the National Bank of Commerce building at Third and Monroe. And that was the first commercial, and that was, like, in about 1938, '39, something like that. Then I later was with the utility here in Memphis after I came back from Korea in 1952, '53. And that's when the room air conditioners all hit Memphis. (Laughter) And we were, my job at that time was, I was an electrical engineer, but all my job entailed was changing out transformers. I mean, because

transformers were getting hot and blowing up because people were plugging in all these room air conditioners, and we had to get some ... permit things started and one thing and another, but the big thing was we were having to change out so many transformers all over town. And here my job, as electrical engineer, was shuffling transformer cards. (Laughter) All I had to do, you know, we'd get a call about transformers low voltage or blowing up or what have you, and I'd go to the map and see that this transformer here was a twenty-five kilowatt transformer, and the next size larger was a thirty-seven-and-a-half, and then they had a fifty. Well, we never went to the next size, because by the time we got it to the next size, they'd plugged in another air conditioner and it would be overloaded. (Laughter) So we'd go to skip sizes.

PIEHLER: Skip a generation.

WOOD: That was my work ...

PIEHLER: You essentially ...

WOOD: ... as electrical engineer, was fooling with those cards. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: Most important.

WOOD: Most important, but it had no real challenge. That's why I didn't stay with them very long, part of the reason why.

PIEHLER: Actually, this is almost ready to run out ...

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

PIEHLER: You were talking about how it affected your career after ... the war as an engineer. But I'm curious about life, say, in Memphis, really in this ... of America. What were summers like without air conditioning? Because I think, particularly younger readers probably couldn't understand. I mean, my parents were resistant to air conditioning, so we never had it, and it's not as hot as Memphis in New Jersey, but it can get pretty hot, so I have—and I now realize I have air conditioning and I feel different in the summer than I did when my parent's ...

WOOD: Well, I'll tell you. Life was different. Of course, not knowing about air conditioning ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean ...

WOOD: ... we were able to ... withstand it. But we had these tremendous attic fans. And this attic fan would—you open the windows and it would draw air in and out through the attic. And course, we'd get these breezes, but they'd be hot breezes, and so they wouldn't be nice. And everybody, almost everybody, had a screened-in porch where they could go sit outside in the evenings and at least get some relief. And, of course, I with every town had the, we had, of course, we didn't have, a lot of us didn't have refrigerators back in those days. We had iceboxes. And the ice man would come down the streets and sell blocks of ice. They'd be mule-drawn

wagons, mostly. And they'd have the whole rear end of the wagon loaded up with big blocks of ice with a big tarpaulin over it to keep it from melting too much. And you'd come in. You'd had a little card that you put in the window that showed how much ice you needed, and the card had a fifty and a hundred and a seventy-five and a twenty-five on it. So, if you wanted fifty pounds, you put that up at the top, so the guy would come in. And usually, your ice box, or our ice box was on the back porch where ... he could get in without having to knock on the door or anything. He'd just come in and drop that block of ice down in your icebox.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: So we had, didn't have refrigeration, but we had plenty of ice.

PIEHLER: How long did you keep an icebox? How long did your family ... how long do you remember having the ice man come, all during your ...

WOOD: I can remember the people that got the first refrigerator on the street.

PIEHLER: So that was a very ...

WOOD: That was ... I must have been about ten years old at the time, which would ...

PIEHLER: ... be about '35.

WOOD: ... be about '35.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: 1935. And I remember, he's still around, this fellow I played with. He was a little older than me. And his last name is Katz. And they lived right across the street from me when we rented this duplex, and all the kids in the neighborhood would go over there to the new ice box, new refrigerator that they'd got. It was one of those kinds that had the cooling coil out on top, you know.

PIEHLER: Because I've seen those when I was a boy, that you could still find a few of those still around.

WOOD: Yeah. Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: So, because it was so hot, would you play outside in the summer? Was that just normal?

WOOD: We played outside, yeah. And almost always without shoes.

VAN HOUTS: Gosh.

WOOD: Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: And was there anywhere that you could swim? The Mississippi was not too far.

WOOD: Well, we didn't go swimming that much in the Mississippi. We very rarely went in there because of the ...

VAN HOUTS: Snakes?

WOOD: No, it was these current and the swiftness and all.

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

WOOD: It was tough to swim.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: You had to be a pretty doggone good swimmer to ...

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

WOOD: ... swim the Mississippi River. But we'd go down [to] Nonconnah Creek would, it wouldn't run full a lot in the summertime, but there were always little pockets of muddy water that would be left and ...

VAN HOUTS: Swimming holes.

WOOD: ... we'd go swimming in that and the Wolf River.

VAN HOUTS: Very often, or not? Was it often that you ...

WOOD: We did it fairly often, and we would get on our bicycles a lot of times and ride out to, like, Cold Water River, which is about twenty miles.

VAN HOUTS: Gosh.

WOOD: And it would be a long ride, but we'd get out there and we'd go swimming and rafting, what have you, in the river.

VAN HOUTS: And so ...

WOOD: And then ... I can't remember exactly when, but we got the first big municipal swimming pool we got was out at the fairgrounds here in Memphis. And ... that thing went in, and, boy, it was ... I mean, it was so many people there you could just ...

VAN HOUTS: (Laughs) You had to stand still.

WOOD: Yeah. I mean, it just crowded everybody in, and it [was] something else.

VAN HOUTS: And so, during the summer, did you just play all day? Did you do whatever you wanted to do, or was your mother very strict about things?

WOOD: No, she wasn't very strict, and fact is ...

VAN HOUTS: You could ride away?

WOOD: You know, people don't understand, I guess, but, my wife doesn't understand, but I grew up, and we never locked our door in the house, because everybody would come in and out, you know, during the day. You know, you're playing outside, you may have to run in and get a drink of water, or ... and we were all friends and I could go in somebody else's house just as well as they could come in my house. And we didn't lock the doors. And we didn't have to, 'cause there was no ... we didn't have any robberies and things like that back in those days. I don't know why.

VAN HOUTS: So even though it was a rough neighborhood, it was a safe neighborhood?

WOOD: It was a safe neighborhood. Yeah. It was safe. Yes. But we did play outdoors a lot, and ... like I say, almost always without shoes, barefooted, and just, I don't know, it was just ...

VAN HOUTS: And the kids you played with in your street, did you go to school with those kids as well?

WOOD: Yes.

VAN HOUTS: Same group.

WOOD: Most of them. There were a few—we had private schools then, as well as public schools. And one of my very best friends' father was a very outstanding attorney and they lived right around the corner from us in a big house, and ... Crawford McDonald. Crawford had a lot of ... I mean, his family had a lot of money, so they could afford ...

VAN HOUTS: Afford to send him.

WOOD: They sent them to private schools. And so, but he played in the neighborhood just like the rest of us outside all day and every day. And he, in the school time, he'd go to a private school, and he went off to ... a private, actually he went off to a private military academy. And I had always wanted to go to a military academy. I really wanted to go to a military academy. And I guess it cost too much, and my family never would send me to one. (Laughter) I never did get to a military academy. And I even wanted to go to ... either West Point or Annapolis and unfortunately, I didn't have the grades. Back in those days, I didn't, I wasn't committed to ...

VAN HOUTS: So you just played around at school? You didn't ...

WOOD: Played around in school. I didn't really get serious about education 'til I got to university.

VAN HOUTS: Do you have any regrets about that, or did you ... did affect you?

WOOD: Boy. I guess I have regrets that I didn't get to go to a military academy, because I really wanted to.

PIEHLER: Why ... growing up, I mean, going to a military academy—how early did you think you wanted to go to a military academy ...

WOOD: Well, let's see. I guess I really started thinking about it mostly when I was in about the seventh or eighth grade.

PIEHLER: So that early? That ...

WOOD: Yes. And I used to go to the library there in the junior high school and read all about West Point and Annapolis and really wanted to go bad. Never did. And I never have been. Been in two different services, but I never ...

VAN HOUTS: But no military academy. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: No military academy.

WOOD: No academy. No.

PIEHLER: So you really thought of yourself as having a career, possibly, in the Army or the Navy. Was that the sense ...

WOOD: Yes.

PIEHLER: Yeah. That you would go to the service and you'd become ...

WOOD: Right. I guess I did. You know ... you know, I guess, for young guys before World War II, the military life was kind of a fantasy. I mean, you know, you read all about World War I and everything. And war was not bad. In fact this war seemed to be good. We played cops and robbers, and we played Indians and cowboys and ...

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: ... everything.

PIEHLER: When you said you had trench warfare ...

WOOD: Trench warfare, and so, you know, it was something that if you could go—and it wasn't only the military academies, it was places like up in Sweetwater, Tennessee, they had a

very fine military school at Tennessee Military Institute. ... But it cost a lot of money, and too much for my family to send me. Fact is, even after I went to the University of Tennessee, I had a pretty hard time ... even though there wasn't a lot of expense, other than, I guess, living in a fraternity house. (Laughs) But I had a pretty hard time. Fact is, if my uncle hadn't loaned us the money, I may not have made it all the way through until I had to go off to service, and then when I came back on the GI Bill, everything was okay.

VAN HOUTS: So when you went to—first of all, what made you go to UT, as opposed to Memphis State, or Mississippi State in Starkville, which is pretty close? Why ...

WOOD: Why not Ole Miss?

VAN HOUTS: ... why ...

WOOD: My father graduated from the University of Mississippi. And that's where he wanted me to go. And by that time, I had decided that I wanted to study engineering, and that's a story all of its own. The reason I wanted to study engineering was in my high school, I had a shop class, an electrical shop class. And in that class, we learned how to make a Western Union splice, which was just twisting a couple of wires together and then soldering over them and making a good bond. And my shop teacher looked at one of the Western Union splices I made, and he said, "Lewis, have you ever thought about studying electrical engineering?" He said, "You'd make a good electrical engineer." Just because I could splice two wires together. Well, it stuck with me. I thought, 'Well, yeah, if that's ...

VAN HOUTS: If I'm not going to be a ... (Laughs)

WOOD: "Yeah. I can splice wires together and do things, and I don't know, you know." I didn't realize all the math and physics and science you had to have to go to engineering school. All I could think about was that mechanical putting things, doing things. So I decided that I wanted to study electrical engineering, and Ole Miss at that time—my father wanted me to go to the University of Mississippi. It's right close by, not far from Memphis, sixty miles, but they didn't have any electrical engineering. They had civil engineering. They had all kinds of engineering, but they didn't have electrical. Now they had it at Mississippi State. And ... so I thought, "Well, that's where I would like to go." And my father says, "You're not." Of course, he, being a University of Mississippi, he was really opposed to ...

PIEHLER: He wasn't going to send you to the Ag. school.

WOOD: He wasn't going to send me to the agricultural mechanical school. No. So ...

VAN HOUTS: That left UT.

WOOD: So several of my friends were going to go off to the University of Tennessee and ... one really good friend was going to go and study electrical engineering. And he had been in high school with me, and so I said, "Well, you know, I'll just go." I went up there without having made any kind of—I up on a train with these guys and I hadn't registered or anything.

Didn't know where I was going to stay. Fortunately ... the fraternity people put me up in a fraternity house, and I went and registered and ...

VAN HOUTS: Stayed there?

WOOD: Stayed there. And I had a hard time at first. I was not very well-rounded in English and the English teacher I had at Central High School was, she was partial to guys that played football. And ...

PIEHLER: And you played football?

WOOD: And I played. I wasn't a star football player, but I was ...

PIEHLER: Did you ...

WOOD: ... on the football team. And I'd go in there and Miss Hassinger would say, "Lewis, I know you must be tired. You've been working out. Just lay your head down on the desk." (Laughter) I'd lay my head [down.] And I remember when I got to the University of Tennessee and had a great English department, and still do, I understand. And the fellow that—in fact my professor also had written a grammar book. His name was Hodge[s].

PIEHLER: Oh, you had Professor Hodges!

WOOD: Professor Hodge[s], yeah. Is he still around?

PIEHLER: No, he died, but he endowed, he left such an endowment.

WOOD: Oh. Is that right?

VAN HOUTS: For the library.

PIEHLER: For the library and for the English Department ...

WOOD: He's one I had.

PIEHLER: Oh, well, you should talk. Yeah. Please talk at length about him.

WOOD: No, I can't talk at length, because I didn't do all that good in his class. (Laughter) And fact is, I went and the first exam we had ... covering some of the grammar, it was English 101, and he called me in and he said, "Lewis," he says, "I can tell who you had for English in high school." I said, "Who?" He said, "Miss Hassinger. And tell me if that's not right." (Laughter) I said, "Yes. I had Miss Hassinger at Central High School for senior English. Yes." He said, "Well, I figured." He said, "You didn't get anything out of it at all?" He said, "We're going to have to start you back in high school English." So I, and not only that, I took two years that were required of English before you took, they had a junior English exam, which I flunked. Here I am, studying to be an engineer, making good grades in math and physics and chemistry and that

sort of thing, but flunking the junior English exam. I had the option of doing one of two things: either taking English 101 over, or getting someone to coach me ... and then retaking the exam. And that was the best thing that ever happened to me. This lady English teacher, she said, "Now Lewis," she says, when I went and got her to coach me, she said, "what I want you to do is, I want you to bring me all of your lab reports. I want to see your lab reports and see how" This was my writing, just from scratch. So I took these lab reports in there and she took them home with her and came back, red marks all over them, everywhere. There was all kinds of English grammar that I had done wrong. But she sat with me and together we studied what I needed to do to keep from putting so many commas in everything, keep from all these kind of things. And I really learned more about English in six weeks of her coaching than I did in two years. And I went back and took the junior English exam and passed it with flying colors. But what Professor Hodges had said was true. He knew that I had not ... and he was a nice person and all, but ... he felt like I needed to take high school English again.

PIEHLER: So Hodges ...

WOOD: I took a course in high school English.

PIEHLER: At UT?

WOOD: At UT. Yeah.

PIEHLER: So you didn't take him for the semester? Did you ever take him again for class, or ...

WOOD: I never took him again.

PIEHLER: So that was your ...

WOOD: Oh, wait! I take it back. Yes. He taught a ... I don't know whether it was a ... it was a ... I don't know what you call it, when you get up and talk before class.

PIEHLER: Public speaking class?

WOOD: Well, it was ...

VAN HOUTS: Rhetoric?

WOOD: I guess you'd say public speaking. But they called it something else.

PIEHLER: Recitation?

WOOD: I don't know. I can't remember. But he taught a course that, it was kind of a—you could either take, like, an advanced course in English literature or this public speaking course.

PIEHLER: It sounds like, maybe, oratory?

WOOD: Oratory. Yeah. Oratory! That's what it was. And he did take, so I went and I had him for that and did okay on that.

VAN HOUTS: So, moving to Knoxville from Memphis, how did Knoxville strike you after living in Memphis and what stood out and what, you know. What was the same?

WOOD: Well of course, back when I started over there, which was in the summer of '43 ... I graduated in June from high school and got on the train practically the next day with these guys and we went up there and entered school. And Knoxville, that summer, was fine. I didn't, it was, you know, we would spend a lot of time at ... we'd hitchhike up to Gatlinburg.

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

WOOD: Which it wasn't very much up there then. We'd go out to a place called Big Ridge, which had just been formed by a dam, go swimming. And ... summer, that summer, was just great in Knoxville. You know, hitchhiking up to Gatlinburg was not bad. Back in those days, people picked up, especially if they could tell you were students at the university, they'd pick you up and drive you up there and there was no problem.

VAN HOUTS: And were people's attitudes the same in Memphis as in Knoxville, back in '43?

WOOD: Attitudes? Yeah, I didn't notice a lot of difference in attitudes.

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

WOOD: Now, in the fall, when I went back up there in the fall, I had been warned that Knoxville—most everything was coal fired. They didn't have natural gas heat much up there. They had, everything was coal fired. And I had been warned that you'd better bring plenty of changes of clothes, because you're going to be soaked with coal. You couldn't wear a white shirt back in those days, because it would turn, literally, turn black from the coal dust that was floating around in the air. (Laughter) And Knoxville was just a miserable place. They called it the Smokies, but it wasn't smoky because of the clouds from the mountains, it was smoky because of the coal fire. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: How funny.

PIEHLER: And Memphis was already natural gas.

WOOD: Memphis had already gotten natural gas and there wasn't a lot of smog or ...

PIEHLER: Oh, the coal must have been horrible, because it's so prominent with the power plants. But it's the mountains. It just traps it in.

WOOD: It just kind of traps it in.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: And it just stayed, just hovered right over. It was awful.

PIEHLER: So there was a ...

WOOD: And the place just smelled bad. Knoxville just smelled awful from this coal dust.

PIEHLER: So there's a reason why John Gunther called it the ugliest city ...

WOOD: There's a what?

PIEHLER: ... there's a reason why John Gunther in *Inside America* called it the ugliest city in America.

WOOD: I didn't know that.

PIEHLER: Yeah. But that, I now wonder, because the coal dust must have really ...

WOOD: Oh, it was awful. It really was. And what we would do is, we had these little things we'd pack up our clothes [in] and send them home to mother to wash and send them back to us pressed and nice, you know. And she finally told me, "Don't send any more of those clothes. You might as well just throw them away." (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: Really?

WOOD: Some of those shirts were just awful. And it was awful.

VAN HOUTS: And when you were at UT ...

WOOD: But now, the attitudes of people ... I didn't find the attitudes to be bad at all. In fact, there's, later after I married and we moved up there, we lived with, we lived in a duplex on one side, and on the other side were the people that owned it—he was a retired police officer for Knoxville and a very fine person. And not only that, oh yeah. And we lived next door to the biggest bootlegger in Knoxville. (Laughter) And at that time, he owned the United Cab Company. And you could pick up the phone—liquor was not, you couldn't buy liquor. They didn't have liquor stores. This was before they got liquor. But you could pick up the phone and call the United Cab Company and tell them what you wanted, a quart of Jack Daniels or whatever, and the next thing you know, the cab was right up there with it. (Laughter) And it was, the prices were no more than they were [in] Memphis, by that time, had already gotten liquor by the drink, and they also had liquor stores, but Knoxville didn't. But the liquor was cheaper there, good whiskey, buying it from a bootlegger, than it was in Memphis. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And it was labeled stuff. I mean, you weren't ...

WOOD: Oh, yeah. I mean, you could name a brand.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: And so when you were at UT, how often did you go home to Memphis?

WOOD: Well, when I was first up there ...

VAN HOUTS: Yeah, the first time.

WOODS: ... before I was married, I just went home between—we were on the quarter system at that time. I just went home after the quarter.

VAN HOUTS: Okay. You wouldn't go home for weekends?

WOOD: No. After I, well when, after I had gone away to World War II and come back, and my wife and I got married in November of '46, I was at the university and I started in that fall coming home almost every weekend, and I would hitchhike all the way from Knoxville to Memphis. And uh ...

VAN HOUTS: Okay, so she was in Memphis?

WOOD: She was in Memphis.

VAN HOUTS: And you were in Knoxville?

WOOD: That's right. Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

PIEHLER: It's a long way.

WOOD: Yeah. It's a long way, and they didn't have interstates then. It was, you went—the fact is it was real funny. I caught a ride out on Kingston Pike, going towards Memphis ... and this fellow that I caught a ride with, he was going—he owned a fleet of trucks and he had been up in West Virginia someplace about a truck that was broken down and he was headed back. His home office was in Birmingham. And he was heading from [West Virginia], coming down through Knoxville, and going through Chattanooga and to Birmingham. And he stopped and picked me up, and I said, "I'm going to Memphis." He says, "Well, I can't help you very much. I'm going to Birmingham. But," he says, "I tell you what." He says, "I been driving night and day." And he says, "I need somebody to talk to make sure I stay awake." And he said, "If you will come on and ride with me to Birmingham, I'll put you on a bus to Memphis."

VAN HOUTS: Ah.

WOOD: I said, “Well, Okay.” That wasn’t too bad, except it was a long ride from Knoxville to Birmingham. And then he put me on a Greyhound bus and paid my way from there to Memphis. So I ... so I didn’t have that bad of luck. Most of the time I could catch a ride, and I hitchhiked a lot.

VAN HOUTS: And by the time you went into World War II, how much of your electrical engineering degree had you done?

WOOD: Well, I’d only had ...

VAN HOUTS: You’d only been there for a year, hadn’t you?

WOOD: Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: Yeah.

WOOD: So I’d only had, really I hadn’t had any electrical engineering. I’d had math, physics, and chemistry, and just science courses. And I didn’t do well, too well. Fact is, I, like I say, I didn’t, I guess I really caught on after going to the service. I went in, fortunately, in the Navy, I went into electronics. That’s where I really got started into serious electrical engineering.

VAN HOUTS: And when you were at UT the first time, how much did you stay in touch with the kids from Memphis? How much did you see of them? And how many were at UT?

WOOD: Well, the fraternity I was in, about half of us were from Memphis.

VAN HOUTS: Oh, really?

WOOD: Yeah. The other half was from Knoxville.

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

WOOD: We had hardly anybody from any other place. We had a couple of guys from Nashville and a couple of guys from—well when I say from Knoxville, around in that area. Some of them may have been from little towns, not from Knoxville, but as far as we considered, they were all Knoxvillians, and most of them had gone to Knox High School. And they were very smart, a lot smarter than the guys that I was with that had come from Miss Hassinger. (Laughter) Go ahead.

VAN HOUTS: And, oh, I’m sorry.

PIEHLER: Oh, no, that’s ... go ahead.

VAN HOUTS: And when you first went into the service, how many of your buddies from Memphis were there? Your fraternity brothers, how many went into the service got the draft as well?

WOOD: There were only two people from University of Tennessee that went with me, that got drafted when I did.

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

WOOD: And both of those fellows went into the Navy. That's why I went into the Navy, really, because my friends ...

VAN HOUTS: So you just followed your friends again.

WOOD: Actually, a lot of people were getting deferments if they had finished as much as a full year in college. They got a deferment ... for another year, or however long they would give them a deferment. I thought I was going to get a deferment and I did get a deferment. Not a deferment, they just didn't call me up to the ...

PIEHLER: The draft board.

WOOD: Draft board. We went down to Fort Oglethorpe down on, got on a train in Memphis and went over to Fort Oglethorpe, which was right outside of Chattanooga. And there they lined us up. We went through the chow line and we ate and then they lined us up, going through, and they had three different places. They had the Army and the Navy and the Marines. And every other person was going either to the Army or the Navy. I mean, you didn't really have much to say about it, except that if you saw where it was coming up, and you wanted to get in the Navy, you'd maybe slip back in the line if it looked like ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Because they were sort of doing even, odd.

WOOD: They were doing even, odds. I mean, it was really ...

PIEHLER: So you took a chance that it would go ...

WOOD: Yeah. And then every so often, the Marines, I guess they'd see somebody that looked like a tough guy or a big guy. (Laughter) They'd pull him out and send him over there if he wanted to go to the Marines. And usually they'd say they did.

VAN HOUTS: But the only reason you chose the navy was 'cause your buddies were there and going into the navy?

WOOD: Well ... partly that. That's right. And they had made the decision that they somehow or another were going to stay in that line and get into the navy line, and so consequently, I felt like I didn't want to get separated from them, necessarily, so I tried to stay in that same line, and I did. And I got into the navy. They had a good program going on in the Navy that was called the Eddy. Captain Eddy was a person that had organized a very strenuous electronics course to teach radar and electronic surveillance and that sort of thing. And you went through the Eddy course. So you took an aptitude test when you went to the, the first time, after you had signed up for the navy, if you wanted to take the Eddy test, you could go to the navy recruiting station here

in Memphis and you would tell them you want to take the Eddy test, and they'd give you the Eddy test. And I took it and passed it and went into the electronics in the Navy. But I didn't get commissioned, because my eyesight wasn't good enough. So I ended up a chief, not a chief petty officer, a petty officer, first class. Electronic tech, Aviation Electronic Technician.

PIEHLER: I just want to back up a little, because you were in Memphis—well let me first back up with even a larger question. It sounds like your father and mother were Yellow Dog Democrats. Is that ...

WOOD: Oh, very much.

PIEHLER: Yeah. How ...

WOOD: When you say Yellow Dog, yeah, I guess so.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I just, I mean, I just ... we did an interview yesterday with someone and he had even on his door, there was a sticker on the door, 'Yellow Dog Democrat'. And he had other stickers and you could tell he was a Democrat. How did your parents feel about Roosevelt?

WOOD: Oh, they liked Roosevelt very much. Oh, yeah, very much so. And I guess I liked him. That's just what I knew. And ... they hated Hoover. They blamed the whole Depression on Hoover.

PIEHLER: Hoover, so ...

WOOD: Oh, that was his, he was the one that caused it. And I don't think that's right, but ... they really did.

PIEHLER: They really held it against him. (Laughter) I'm curious, because you were too young, probably, to remember, but what about, did your parents ever talk about the '28 race? Because Al Smith was pretty controversial in parts of the South, so I just wonder, because you were three, so you wouldn't have had, but ...

WOOD: I do remember. Let's see. Was he Catholic?

PIEHLER: Yeah. He was Catholic.

WOOD: That I do remember.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: They held that against him, I think. I won't ... you know, I hate to say, I don't think my parents were necessarily racist or anything, but they had a very strong ... Methodist upbringing and that's, they felt like the only way to God was through ...

VAN HOUTS: Through Methodism.

WOOD: Through the Methodist Church. And they ... I don't guess ... that was the only thing I can remember hearing, that they didn't like him because of that.

PIEHLER: And a question, not related to politics, but I just—did your parents have any hired help when you were growing up? Anyone to clean the house?

WOOD: Yes. We had occasional ...

PIEHLER: Occasional or permanent?

WOOD: It wasn't a permanent thing. We had some darkies that would come and do household work, mostly at their, whenever they could come. It wasn't necessarily that we called them to come. It was when they had some time to come, they would come. That was kind of the way it was. Now, early on, we used to have servants' quarters. And back in Central Memphis, particularly, we had alleys behind every one of the streets, and usually that's where us kids, we'd run up and down the alleys. We didn't play out in the street much, but we were up and down the alleys. And ... these black families would live in these servants' quarters. They didn't necessarily weren't servants for the house that they were living in, they just happened to live in this servants' quarters place. And I, you know, I grew up kind of playing with some of their children, really. They were right there in the neighborhood. We played together.

VAN HOUTS: And that was okay? That was acceptable?

WOOD: Well, yeah, it was okay. I mean, you know, we didn't go to school together. We didn't do a lot of other things, but we did play together some.

VAN HOUTS: And were you, how aware were you, as a child, of the inequalities?

WOOD: Race?

VAN HOUTS: And racism.

WOOD: Yeah. Uh ...

VAN HOUTS: Like, it seems you were a pretty ...

WOOD: I was very much aware that, you know ... and it doesn't seem, and I don't seem to remember having any great objection to the fact that they sat at the rear of the buses and things like that. It's just ...

PIEHLER: That was just ...

WOOD: It just seemed quite natural. Seemed like ...

VAN HOUTS: ... the way it was.

WOOD: Yeah, the way it was. Fact is, I hate to jump ahead, but there was a time when I was stationed in the Navy at Corpus Christi, Texas, at an air base down there, and I was with this young Greek fellow, sailor, from Greenville, Mississippi. He and I had gotten to be good friends, and we—of course, down there, we had been out in the sun a lot, and both of us had gotten just, particularly since he was Greek, he got really black, and I was pretty black. And I recall we were getting on the bus to go to town one day and I noticed that the bus driver kept putting people on in front of us. (Laughs) And it finally dawned on me that he thought we were black. And ... when we got on, he said, “Move to the rear.” And he sure did, he thought we were ...

VAN HOUTS: What did you do? Did you just go to the back, or did you ...

WOOD: We just went to the back.

VAN HOUTS: You didn't, you didn't stop and ...

WOOD: It was kind of funny. We kind of laughed about it. We said, “Golly, we've got such a nice tan that he even thought we were black.” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: How aware were you of ...

WOOD: That was in, like, 1944, '45, so even the government facilities were very ...

PIEHLER: Because this was an Army base, so this was a military bus.

WOOD: That was a Navy base.

PIEHLER: Navy bus. Yeah.

WOOD: Navy bus, going to town. And the Navy base was segregated. Yeah. And we didn't think that much about it.

VAN HOUTS: You didn't? Okay.

WOOD: Didn't really.

PIEHLER: How conscious were you in the 1930s that war was coming in Europe and in Asia?

WOOD: Well, I was pretty conscious of it because ... I was in the Boy Scouts, and we would go to down Camp Currier, which is a Boy Scout camp just south of Memphis. And we'd go down there and, again, it was kind of like playing soldier. We'd go down there and we would—the camp director, Chief Ford was his name, and he had a ... real nice radio. And we'd go listen to the news on the radio. And I can remember all the Nazi cheers going on for Hitler and all, back in the early thirties. And I can remember that, you know, being completely and totally upset with ... Britain and France for not stopping him from doing some of the things ...

PIEHLER: You were aware of ...

WOOD: I was very much aware that he was trying to take over all of Europe. So, and fact is, we were kind of incensed about it, really. And ... just seemed like things just didn't go well for us for a while.

PIEHLER: How long were you in the Boy Scouts, and what rank did you make?

WOOD: I lacked one merit badge of being a ...

PIEHLER: An Eagle Scout?

WOOD: ... Eagle Scout. And don't ask me why I didn't get that merit badge, but it was bird study, and it was a required merit badge, of all things, bird study. And I went to camp one summer and Chief Ford was an authority on birds and he would take us out through the woods and we'd listen to the birds chirp and we would spot them with our field glasses and what have you, but I just could never, never identify all the species of birds that I was supposed to know, so I never could pass that one merit badge. And then, I guess, I'd moved up in the, I was a patrol leader and assistant, junior assistant scoutmaster of my troop. But I was a Life Scout ...

PIEHLER: Life Scout.

WOOD: ... and not an Eagle Scout. And I had more merit badges than I needed, except I didn't have that one ...

PIEHLER: The one required.

WOOD: ... the one that was required that I didn't have.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like you had fun. You really enjoyed Boy Scouting, I mean ...

WOOD: Oh, I loved Boy Scouting. We'd go down to camp and, of course, we had a nice lake down out Camp Currier. We'd fish and swim in that lake and ... cook and ... sometimes it was, we even rode our bicycles there. It was about thirty miles, but back in those days, we'd ride bicycles a long way. Yeah.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, what music did you listen to as a kid growing up? What music did you like?

WOOD: Well, mostly church.

PIEHLER: Mostly church.

WOOD: Yeah. And fact is, I sang in a boy's choir at an Episcopal Church. I was a Methodist, but I went to St. John's Methodist, which was at the corner of Peabody and Bellevue, and St. Luke's Episcopal Church was down on Peabody at ...

VAN HOUTS: We've seen it. We saw that church.

PIEHLER: Yeah. I think we ...

VAN HOUTS: We drove past it yesterday.

WOOD: Oh, you drove past ...

VAN HOUTS: St. Luke's.

WOOD: ... St. Luke's? Yes. There at Belvedere. And it wasn't far. I could ride my bike from St. John's to—I had a good friend who went to that church and he was in the boy's choir. They had a nice boy's choir at St. Luke's at that time, and I'd ride down and sing in the boys' choir. And we got paid to go to practice. They paid us. We got ten cents each practice and then we got a quarter for singing on Sundays. So I ... didn't really do it for the money, I just loved to sing. And the people at St. John's found out that I was singing in the boy's choir at St. Luke's, so they'd get me to come to Wednesday night prayer meeting and I would, they'd ask me to sing. And I would sing solos of church music. I loved church music.

PIEHLER: So you would sing Bach and Mozart? What would be your area—do you have any particular music? Because I think of Bach and ...

WOOD: I don't know that it was Bach or anything. It was like, "And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own." (singing) And ... just church in the wild wood. I don't know who the authors ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah authors.

WOOD: ... were, they were just old time ... southern Methodist hymns.

VAN HOUTS: And how long did you sing in that choir for? How many years?

WOOD: Well 'til my voice changed, which was, let's see I started singing in about 1930 and my voice started changing in about 1936, so it's about five or six years. Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: And I guess your parents were especially pleased that you were doing that?

WOOD: Oh, yes, they were. Even though, you know, I was singing in the Episcopal Church, they felt, they didn't feel that bad about Episcopalians.

PIEHLER: As long as it wasn't Catholic.

WOOD: As long as it wasn't Catholic. Or Baptist.

PIEHLER: Really? They were ...

WOOD: They didn't like Baptists either for some reason.

PIEHLER: Well, I guess one question, because in your memoirs, the Episcopal Church would mean a lot to you, and particularly ...

WOOD: Well ... after Jane and I married in the Episcopal Cathedral here in Memphis. And when I came back from Korea, there was one particular minister that had prayed for me the whole time I was gone, and he was very instrumental. Up until that time, I still belonged to the Methodist Church, but when I came back, my wife had converted to Episcopal and ... her father was very strong in the Episcopal Church, and so I joined the Episcopal Church and had, you know, I had so many good priests that I liked that put me to work doing things. So I ended up being the bishop's warden, which is the highest ...

PIEHLER: Lay.

WOOD: ... lay position in the cathedral, and I was a bishop's warden for three different bishops, one of which lives in Knoxville now.

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with W. Lewis Wood on August 3, 2002 in Memphis, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

VAN HOUTS: Nashwa Van Houts.

PIEHLER: And you were saying that one bishop that you served as a bishop's warden actually became a ...

WOOD: He became a, he ... actually, he was dean of St. Mary's Cathedral, Bill Sanders, and he married Jane and me ... in the cathedral. He later became bishop of the Diocese of Tennessee. He was still in Memphis at that time. And he selected me as his warden, and I became his warden, served for a little over a year, and then they split the diocese up into three positions. They had West, Middle, and East Tennessee, diocese. And Bill Sanders, by this time, had moved to Knoxville. And ... he was bishop of East Tennessee. He is now retired. So I was bishop's warden. I was his warden and then I was warden for the two other bishops in West Tennessee. Yes, I very much ... [have] been involved. And when I go, again, I'm jumping ahead of myself, I guess, but when I go some of my Army reunions, one of my sergeants later became a Episcopal minister. And I see him when I go to our reunions and he conducts—we have memorial services for some of our deceased members of the unit, and he conducts the services and he always uses me to help with the ... service, so I enjoy that.

PIEHLER: Your parents were Methodists. Were they dry Methodists? Did they ...

WOOD: Dry?

PIEHLER: Did they drink alcohol at all? Or they were ...

WOOD: My father just loved beer.

PIEHLER: So they ...

WOOD: He drank beer like it was going out of style. (Laughter) In fact, back in one of my earliest recollections of ... life, was back in the ...

PIEHLER: Prohibition?

WOOD: ... prohibition. And I can remember him making beer at home in these big kegs, big ...

PIEHLER: That ... yeah ...

WOOD: ... big ole pots. And he'd put them out on the back porch, because you couldn't stand the smell that would come up from them in the house. (Laughter) But yes, he did love beer. But my mother pretty well shied away from it, and my grandmother even had me sign a pledge when I was very young that I would never drink or smoke.

VAN HOUTS: Like a pledge of temperance?

WOOD: Yeah, actually. I had to sign a New Testament ... in her presence that I would, with a pledge there that I would never smoke or drink. Unfortunately, I didn't keep that pledge. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You also smoked at one point?

WOOD: Oh, Lord, I did smoke. I used to. Well, I had a heart attack, you know, and I smoked, oh gosh, up until I had my heart attack, I was smoking as much as two, two and a half packs a day.

PIEHLER: Oh, you were a smoker.

WOOD: Yeah, and that's what really caused my heart ...

VAN HOUTS: When did you start smoking?

WOOD: When did I start?

VAN HOUTS: Uh huh.

WOOD: Probably when I was ten or eleven years old ...

PIEHLER: Oh. (Laughs)

WOOD: I used to slip out behind the garage and smoke.

VAN HOUTS: And where would you get the money, from your choir singing or ...

WOOD: Well, there again, we used to roll our own.

VAN HOUTS: Okay, okay.

WOOD: We'd buy these little bags with tobacco, which were very inexpensive, and we'd get some of those little rolls of paper and we'd roll our own. And then we got those things that you could make them almost like a regular cigarette, the little machine that you roll them with. (Laughter) And we did that a lot. We didn't buy, but cigarettes were very cheap back in those days.

VAN HOUTS: Yeah.

WOOD: You could get, you know, you could go to the drugstore and they'd sell you one cigarette for a penny.

VAN HOUTS: Gosh. And what did your parents, did your parents know that you were smoking? Did they ever find out?

WOOD: Early on, they didn't. I can remember ... again, I used, I got—some of us did some of the craziest things. One of the things we did to keep our parents from knowing that we were smoking is that we'd get mint gin and we used it almost like mouthwash, and we would take a swig. And this mint gin, these little half pints of mint gin didn't cost much at all. (Laughter) And we'd get a little half-pint of mint gin and we'd just ...

VAN HOUTS: Swirl it around?

WOOD: Swirl it around.

VAN HOUTS: And they didn't, your mother didn't smell it on your clothes or ...

WOOD: I think she did and she just kind of overlooked it. She knew I was smoking.

VAN HOUTS: She did?

WOOD: And later on, she knew I was smoking.

VAN HOUTS: But she never said to you "Don't smoke."

WOOD: She tried to keep me from smoking, but she saw it was a lost cause.

VAN HOUTS: Yeah.

WOOD: I was really, I was bad hooked on cigarettes until I had my heart attack. And then they had to go down in my lungs and pull all that tar out and everything, and it was so painful. It was the worst pain. It was a lot more painful getting rid of that tar than the heart attack itself was. And I vowed then, with the help of some of the nurses, that if you ever do it, start back smoking—of course I was taking oxygen then to stay alive. I did oxygen for about twenty days, and while I was on oxygen I couldn't smoke, and that's when I really broke the habit. I didn't break the habit, I just quit. I hadn't broken the habit, I could ...

PIEHLER: You could go back ...

WOOD: Right now. I love, you know, they talk about secondary smoke and all. Not me. I love to smell people smoking. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: Did you ever quit during your younger years?

WOOD: I tried to quit quite a few times. But that was kind of like some of my friends did. I quit thirty times a today. Every time I quit smoking a cigarette, I quit. (Laughter) No, I tried some, but it never did work until I had a heart attack and had that serious situation and life threatening thing that ...

VAN HOUTS: Made you realize.

WOOD: Made you realize, made me realize. And I hate to say, I don't tell people that I know this that smoke, "Be careful, you may end up like I did." I don't do that. I feel like I should, because there's no question in my mind that that's what caused my heart attack.

VAN HOUTS: And was your wife always very lenient about letting you smoke? She didn't mind?

WOOD: She smoked, too.

VAN HOUTS: Oh, she smoked.

WOOD: But not much. She was the kind of smoker that I could never understand. She could smoke ... after eating dinner or something. She could have a cigarette, and then she wouldn't have any more. She'd just have one or two cigarettes ...

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

WOOD: ... and didn't have to, she had no, she wasn't hooked on them like I was. I was a chain smoker.

PIEHLER: Just to add, I mean, the service is a great place if you are leaning toward smoking.

WOOD: Oh, yes. Because they had cigarette rations and you could get all the cigarettes you wanted and, you know, you smoke anyplace. And I would almost say that they encouraged smoking because they had smoking rooms and they had, you know, onboard ship they had the smoking lamp was lit, everybody smoked. Time to smoke, you know. They had times when you weren't supposed to smoke if you were in a ... dangerous situation or something where the light of the match or the cigarette might give you away or something, so then you'd have times when they'd announce that the smoking lamp is lit. And everybody would go to smoking. (Laughter) Some guys that didn't even smoke would start smoking. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor ...

WOOD: I remember almost exactly. I was ... Pearl Harbor happened on a Sunday. And I was in a high school fraternity here in Memphis, And we met at the Peabody Hotel, and we would meet, oh, about noon and go home from there to have lunch or usually, we would go to a local gathering place. At that time, it happened to be Fortune's Belvedere, which was Fortune's ... a place at the corner of Belvedere and Union. And ... I remember we left the fraternity meeting at the Peabody and we got out to Fortune's Belvedere, and people were saying, "Hey, have you heard? They bombed Pearl Harbor!" "Who bombed Pearl Harbor?" "The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor!" Then that's how I heard about it. And immediately, it was almost immediately that guys began to say that they were going to join up, you know.

PIEHLER: At the high school fraternity?

WOOD: Yeah. We were right there in the meeting place. People were talking about it, and a lot of the guys ... did right away volunteer and go on, even though they were, some of them hadn't finished high school. And a lot of them went in. And, of course, I was a, seemed like I was a junior in high school at the time, '41. Yeah. I graduated in '43. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah, that ...

WOOD: But a lot of the guys didn't wait 'til their senior year. They went ahead and got in. And, of course, they weren't drafting you unless you were eighteen at the time, but you could go in at seventeen.

PIEHLER: With your parents' permission.

WOOD: With your parents' permission. And sometimes, some of them got in before that. [They] lied about their age.

PIEHLER: Well, I love your story, I mean, just getting ahead, you said the soldier who should never been in he ...

WOOD: One foot shorter than ...

PIEHLER: ... I mean you ... personally met everyone before you signed off, and he in fact clearly should never have been accepted because of unusual ...

WOOD: He should never been—well he was accepted for limited ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, limited.

WOOD: ... service, but for some reason or another, that didn't get on his record, and he could cover up that, I guess that story's in ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, it's in your memoirs. How did the war affect your high school? And how did it affect your family and Memphis, from what you could tell?

WOOD: Well, one way it affected was ... so many of the guys that left, that the girls didn't have anybody to go around with. It seems like I remember the girls, they'd have dances, and there would be just a handful of boys there, men, and all these girls ... (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: It was fantastic, was it?

WOOD: Well, and we had what they called backward dances. That the girls would invite the boys to go to the dances, and the boys, the girls would break [in] on the boys. They would break [in] and they'd go around and, you know, I might go with one person, but I might end up dancing with twenty or thirty people, girls. They'd just go around, especially if you were a good dancer. But that's one thing I remember, that it seemed like there was a, just a shortage of men. And ... began—then of course, I guess, other things that I recall ... it affected was the grain stamps and the books and the gas rationing and all that. That was tough. One of the reasons why, when I got in the service, that I was able to do so good hitchhiking, I'd hold up my gas ration stamps that I had, and ...

PIEHLER: So during the war, you'd ...

WOOD: Yeah. I was stationed in Biloxi, Mississippi and we always liked to go over to New Orleans. And, of course, it was not that far. It was about seventy miles, and, of course, they had military transportation and that sort of thing, but you had to wait in line and do this, so we'd get off the base and we'd go out on the highway and just hold up our gas ration books, and somebody would stop, and you'd tear off some of the stamps and give them to them, and so it's part of your ride. (Laughter) And that was a good deal. Also, when they had liquor rationing, you couldn't get a lot of good liquor, and you know, you could, if you got a hold of a good bottle of liquor, you could do almost anything with it. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Did your high school do any scrap drives? Or for your Boy Scouts, did you do any sort of bond or scrap drives that you can remember or anything along those lines?

WOOD: Not a whole lot, no.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: We really didn't. They, I guess some of the women's clubs and all did a lot of that. But for some reason or another, it didn't seem like I got involved in it very much.

PIEHLER: You decided to go to the University of Tennessee. Had you thought of going into the military after high school right away?

WOOD: Well, I guess, not really. I had, I still wanted to be an officer. And I had taken three years of high school ROTC.

PIEHLER: So you had junior ROTC?

WOOD: Yes. And I kept thinking that maybe I could take ROTC in college and then maybe ...

PIEHLER: And become an officer then.

WOOD: ... become an officer that way. And ... unfortunately, the draft board caught up with me before I was able to complete a full year, and I was unable to pass the ...

PIEHLER: The eye ...

WOOD: ... eye exam for the Navy. And ... you know, the real funny thing, after I went back to the university after the war and I got, after World War II, and I got my commission through ROTC and then got called up at the outbreak [of the Korean War]. They didn't worry about my eyesight then. (Laughter) They needed infantry officers too bad.

PIEHLER: But in World War II, it was a barrier for the Navy.

WOOD: Yeah. It was a barrier.

PIEHLER: In terms of an officer, you mentioned reading about West Point. Do you remember any films you saw about war? You played war a lot, you mentioned.

WOOD: Well, yeah, I remember particularly pictures about aerial warfare. And picture, what's that ... *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

PIEHLER: You remember that?

WOOD: I remember that. Yeah, very much so. And some pictures about World War I, mostly about ... aerial warfare, and then, of course, that *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

VAN HOUTS: So, your first time in the military, in the Navy, were you kind of shocked about how different it was from the way you'd imagined it, with seeing films and playing war? Was it a big shock to you, or was that something that you just found very easy to adapt to?

WOOD: No, it wasn't any big shock. Of course, by this time, I had qualified to study electronics, aviation electronics, and I was—it was no big shock, although I will say this, that we had some of my people that did go aboard carriers and went ... early on, and some of them were caught in the, particularly in the Pacific, where they were caught in the Japanese kamikazes, you know. And I remember, yeah, that was pretty traumatic. I remember feeling like I really would hate to be on one of those carriers that got hit by kamikazes and have to jump so far out into the water. One of the things they taught us at boot camp was how to jump into a ... thing of flames. They poured oil out on, we had these big swimming pools, and they ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: They actually lit up an area ...

WOOD: Oh, yeah. Great Lakes training, and they would—your final test in going through boot camp in swimming was how to jump off a carrier into flaming oil and what you needed to do to make sure that you didn't ... and it was very realistic.

VAN HOUTS: Would you like to share the tactic as to how you do that? How do you ...

WOOD: Well, how you do that is very simple. You go down ...

VAN HOUTS: You go down with your arms first?

WOOD: No. You go down, you jump down your feet first and you can see as you come up towards the surface, you can see the flames up on the water, the surface of the water, and you begin to just make waves to push that away from—make more or less a hole. And you keep pushing it away enough that you could come up and get a little air and then keep pushing to keep the flames away.

PIEHLER: So in other words you sort of chop it ...

WOOD: They didn't leave the flames going very long. They didn't put enough out there that, I mean, if you really fell into oil burning off a carrier or something, I'm sure it would've been much different. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: Much more traumatic.

PIEHLER: But there was a technique.

WOOD: There was a technique. The technique was to come up and see the flames on the surface and to tread water just beneath the surface and push the flames back.

VAN HOUTS: I think that's the same ...

WOOD: And you always had to, of course, first take your shoes off. So you stayed in long enough to take your shoes off, and if you had on any clothes, you take your pants off and trap air in them, as much as you could, and then you'd float on those and come up and do that. So there is all kinds of techniques. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I've also told—since you're on the question of fire, I often ask of people who went to Great Lakes, because it leaves such an impression—but firefighting, being taught firefighting. Were you taught that, too?

WOOD: Fighting fires?

PIEHLER: Did you have any ...

WOOD: I didn't get into firefighting.

PIEHLER: They never gave you a day of firefighting at the ...

WOOD: No, I didn't have any firefighting.

PIEHLER: That's interesting. Because other people have talked about, no one's talked about diving into the ...

WOOD: Jumping in ...

PIEHLER: ... jumping in. I've heard people say firefighting as one of the ...

WOOD: Well, I guess that firefighting should have been one of the things... and I'm sure some of the, particularly some of the people that had, were in a particular position were taught firefighting.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: I don't, don't ask me why, since I happened to be in aviation electronics, I was almost considered, almost considered like a flight ... and I was. I had to do a lot of flying. But I guess that's why we were not the guys that were staffed in the carrier or in the ship. We were part of the squadron, aviation squadron. And that, I guess, equated to being able to jump off the carrier decks into flaming oil. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So when you went into the Great Lakes, you knew you were going into electronic ...

WOOD: Yes, I had taken ...

PIEHLER: That was already clear? You were ...

WOOD: Yeah, I had taken ...

PIEHLER: ... the Eddy test.

WOOD: ... the Eddy test and I had passed it, and fact is, we ... got somewhat specialized treatment. We got promoted to seaman first class right off the bat.

PIEHLER: So you went into Great Lakes as a seaman first class?

WOOD: Yes. And then from there, we were sent to, some of us went to the Navy Pier in Chicago, some of us a place called Wright Junior College in Chicago and took basic electronics, and then we got shipped to advanced electronics at ... Biloxi or Gulfport and then over to Corpus Christi.

VAN HOUTS: How many were there of you that wanted to get into electronics?

WOOD: How many wanted to get into it?

VAN HOUTS: Yeah. And were successful at passing the test and ...

WOOD: Well ... the guys that I went into the Navy with all took the Eddy test. There were three of us, and I was the only one that passed the Eddy test.

VAN HOUTS: Oh. So it wasn't—was it a rigorous test? It was a hard test?

WOOD: It was a tough, tough, tough test. And I don't know that I've ever had anything quite as tough as that. You know, I've taken all kinds of SAT tests and that sort of thing, but this was much tougher, and it was an aptitude test, as well as it got into some basic ... scientific things.

VAN HOUTS: Right, right.

WOOD: So if you hadn't studied engineering at least, like I had, for three quarters, if you hadn't studied it, you hadn't been exposed to the math and the science like I had been exposed to it. It was easier for me. Now, the other—one of the fellows turned out to be very famous doctor. He's a doctor over in Lawton, Oklahoma now. And he went into the Navy, and he went into the navy pharmaceutical, not pharmaceutical, medical unit. And he came out and went back to ... medical school at Oklahoma, not at UT. He'd been a freshman at UT with me.

PIEHLER: So, at Great Lakes, in some ways it sounds like you were spared some of the terror of the chiefs. I've been told by people who went to Great Lakes just as a regular, you know, a newly inducted that they sort of went through the knocks and the—how is that sort of initial, what did they, besides jumping into a carrier, what else did they teach you?

WOOD: Well, I do remember that when I was at Great Lakes, the thing I remember most about it, it was cold, horribly cold. And the wind would blow in off of Lake Michigan and all across that base, and it was just horribly cold. And I was up there, it was like in March. It was not, the bad part of winter was over, but it was still very cold out there. And they would, they had things that they would never do, talking about the chief, and it wasn't for disciplinary reasons, it was just that—for instance, they had maybe taken down a building or something and they had a lot of loose brick and gravel and stone and so forth that needed to be loaded onto trucks and they'd send us out there in this cold weather to ... and a lot of it was bricks frozen together, so you had

to take a sledgehammer and break them open and then scoop them up and then throw them in there. It was horrible.

VAN HOUTS: Did you resent that, being made to do those ...

WOOD: Did I resent that?

VAN HOUTS: Yes.

WOOD: Oh, absolutely. (Laughter) I always resented that, but—and we had, talking about the chief, we had a chief whose name was Grohar, G-R-O-H-A-R, and he had been a star football player at Notre Dame. And I haven't ever looked him up to see what year he was a star player, but that was the ... Chief Grohar was from Notre Dame, and he was a big heavyset tough guy. But, he was, he was not, he didn't railroad it over us, really. He was the kind of guy that made you be present when it's time to be present for roll call. He was the guy that made sure you were there at bed check time. He was all these things. He was just, he just made sure that you were doing what you were supposed to do when you're supposed to do it.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: And he didn't, and he wasn't tough about it. He'd just make sure you got there. And he had all kinds of duties for you to do if you failed to do that. (Laughter) And things like—and he, it wasn't, you know, no telling how many times we polished the brass and the heads of the toilets.

PIEHLER: And to make your bed a certain way.

WOOD: Oh, yeah. You had to make your bed a certain way. And the thing I still remember, and a lot of things that I did, I even do to this day, is how to roll your socks up real tight, how to roll your undershorts and your undershirts up into real tight things so you could get them into your sea bag. And I still do that to this day. My wife makes me do all of the pajamas and the shorts and T-shirts and socks. I roll them all. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: So how long was your airborne electronics training?

WOOD: Well from the time we got out of boot camp, that was around the end of April, and I graduated from advanced electronics at Corpus Christi at the end of April the following year.

VAN HOUTS: And then ...

WOOD: ... so it was one whole year.

VAN HOUTS: And it was from Corpus Christi that you went to Biloxi.

WOOD: No, I went from Biloxi to ...

VAN HOUTS: Biloxi to Corpus Christi.

WOOD: Biloxi to Corpus Christi. We had basic electronics in Chicago. We went to intermediate electronics training at Gulfport, and then we went to advanced electronics in—that's where we got into all the super secret stuff, radar, and surveillance-type equipment. One of the things that I like to talk about is IFF.

PIEHLER: Which was then very ...

WOOD: Oh, very ...

PIEHLER: ... revolutionary. I mean, now it's sort of common, but ...

WOOD: Yeah, it's common, but you know, the funny thing about it, and I've, got it in one of my short stories. IFF, you know, it was something that we had that would allow our aircraft primarily to—what brought it about was over at Salerno and the invasion of Italy, a lot of our planes actually sunk some of our own ships and landing craft and all.

PIEHLER: It was also vice versa.

WOOD: And it was vice versa. A lot of the ships blew up some of the planes. So they developed this IFF, which would even allow your planes' guns to be locked, so you couldn't ... if your electronic, if your transmit pulse showed that this was a friend, then the return pulse would lock your guns, so you couldn't fire on them. And ... you know, they—one of the things that is a real problem in combat is challenging people, people that come up on you at night and so forth, and you have passwords. We had passwords that we used and things, and it was not very good. I mean, because guys would forget the passwords or maybe the passwords didn't get disseminated like they should, they didn't get around, so. I have an idea, and I mentioned that in my story. It's an embedded chip that can be put in the shoulder of a soldier or in, maybe, I started to say in one of his weapons, but he oftentimes will lay that down, but to be embedded in, so that a person that would come up to challenge, I mean, he could identify you as a friend or foe just by the response he gets from your chip. And I haven't heard of that being used. It seems to me like it'd be fantastic. We had that problem in Korea. They've had it in all wars. One of the big things that they had was, you know, close air support for troops on the ground, planes flying in. A lot of times they can't tell whether you are Chinese or American. You know, they come in and they see a bunch of troops in the open, they, if they don't know—and this has happened in Afghanistan. We fired a lot of times on our own troops. And so, I just, I put that in one of my short stories. One of my ...

PIEHLER: It's interesting, you've become, just to go back a little bit, you had a real problem with English, but you've become, I mean, because your memoir is very well written. It's a wonderful, you know, just the mechanics of writing a story it's a very well done story.

WOOD: I appreciate that.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So you really taken ...

WOOD: Well, actually, since I've, you know, spent, oh, almost forty years in the engineering business, I've written a lot of reports ...

PIEHLER: Okay.

WOOD: ... and I've written a lot of things. And yes, you're right, but I've had along the way a lot of help. I've been fortunate, like the coach at UT and like the fellow who was head of my—he fashioned himself Lorin Allen, he fashioned himself, he was a graduate of UT also, and he did well in the—he could never understand why I didn't pass the junior English exam. He said, "That was a snap!" I said, "That may have been a snap for you, but it wasn't a snap for me." But he would ... review some of my reports and things, and kind of like this coach, he'd find some things, and usually it was grammatical things. And I just, and I've learned, not learned, but I put into practice some of the things I've learned.

PIEHLER: One thing I think for students who would read this interview, particularly on the Internet, I think what it also, one of the lessons, I guess, for students would be that for engineers, that writing actually is important.

WOOD: Oh, it's very important.

PIEHLER: Yeah. But it's, you know ...

WOOD: And it's unfortunate, but most engineers are not good at it. They really aren't. I've had young engineers that ... number one, you can't read their handwriting at all, because they, you know, now they're all on the computer, and if they write something, you can't read it. And if they do—and even on the computer, their English is atrocious. I know that e-mail is supposed to be something you do quick and get the message across and don't worry too much about the grammar, but if you're writing a report that's going out to the world for people to look at, you need ...

VAN HOUTS: You need it to be tidy.

WOOD: So it is very important.

PIEHLER: Yeah, because I've been—I don't want to stereotype, but occasionally I've had science and engineering people who I think are convinced it's not that important, and they, you know, the serious courses are the, you know, the engineering and the, and I know those are demanding courses, but I try to say writing is actually important, and even more than—and the history's important, too, but, you know, some students would argue ...

WOOD: The other thing that really bothers me about advanced engineers, people that have really made a place in history in engineering, I read some of their works, and they use these tremendously big, complicated words that the average person doesn't even know what they're talking about, when they could say it in a much simpler fashion. And that's one of the things, I

really find it awful, even for these guys that are fellows of the National Institute and this that and the other.

PIEHLER: So you think sometimes they're using big-letter words to impress, you know, because they look impressive ...

WOOD: They look impressive, and, of course, they're, of course a lot of them are new words in the scientific field, some of them, but a lot of them are just—like you say, I think they're trying to be very impressive.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, going to Chicago, to Great Lakes—how much had you traveled before the war? You'd hitchhiked to Knoxville and you'd ...

VAN HOUTS: And you'd been to Alabama.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Had you been past Kentucky or past—had you been north of the Mason-Dixon line before the war?

WOOD: No, not really. Fact is, my—yeah, going to Great Lakes was the first time I'd been in Yankee country. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: And was it the first time you'd seen snow?

WOOD: No, I'd seen snow. Not as much.

PIEHLER: Not as much as Chicago. (Laughs) I mean, had it ever snowed in Memphis, then, or is that how you saw ...

WOOD: Oh, yeah. It had snowed in Memphis. In Memphis, you know, we'd had ... we had snow most every winter, some, not ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, not a lot. Not like Chicago.

WOOD: ... not like Chicago, where it stayed on the ground all summer, all winter.

VAN HOUTS: So, did you go to Chicago with funny, preconceived notions of Yankees, or how did you find meeting them and dealing with them? You know, did you ...

WOOD: I didn't really have preconceived notions about it, but I found it very—I'm sure they found me very interesting with my voice, but I found them much more interesting, it seemed like to me, that the way they talked. And I don't know, it just seemed like a different ... not that they were any smarter necessarily, but seemed like ... well, I'll have to say, I have to say that some of the ones that I've met had been to some fairly good Eastern universities and that sort of thing. They were pretty sharp, and I found that maybe they were a little more of an intelligentsia than myself and some of my cohorts.

VAN HOUTS: Did you find them practical, as practical as you were? You know, they were obviously intelligent. Were they, you know common sense ...

WOOD: Pretty practical, pretty sharp, pretty, yeah. Most of the ones I was with in the navy and electronics and all, they ... actually going through that school ... that was the navy's only aviation electronics ... school place that you learned all about radar and advanced electronics things that they had during World War II. So we had in our school, we had officers as well as enlisted personnel, anybody that had passed Eddy tests and was going through to operate and maintain very sophisticated electronic equipment.

PIEHLER: So both at Biloxi and at Corpus Christi, you had officers in the class, too?

WOOD: No, actually, we didn't have officers until we got to Corpus.

PIEHLER: Corpus Christi. So ...

WOOD: Most of the officers, navy officers, had been probably engineers, electrical engineers ...

PIEHLER: Oh, Okay.

WOOD: ... when they came in and they just didn't have the, they had the background in electronics, but they didn't have ...

PIEHLER: The new technology.

WOOD: They didn't know the, well most of that was secret. A lot of it, like the IFF, and every—we had one called EHIB, which was “every house in Berlin.” (Laughter) That's actually the designation that the Navy gave, is EHIB. And it was a ... radar that seriously could, you could almost see street lights on the streets, down the streets, every street, blocks, buildings, so forth on this big radar screen. And of course, that was then tied into your bombing runs and your ... and the other thing we had was, I'm trying to ... I've gone a blank right now, but we had proximity fuses, which were developed actually during World War II, and there was a strange story behind that. We had, in the Pacific, when they had gotten the anti-aircraft guns were trained in with the searchlights. Maybe I told you this before. The Japanese bombers would come over and just as soon as the searchlights landed on them, they would disenigrate. They thought, they really actually thought when the war, when we began capturing some of these higher up Japanese after the war, they thought we had a secret weapon. They thought we had a laser-type weapon that would, as soon as it hit on the plane, it would disintegrate it. What it was, was the anti-aircraft was tied in with the searchlights and the proximity fuse that was developed, it didn't have to come anywhere close to hitting the plane, it would explode just as soon as it got within a certain range. The proximity fuse would explode and just blow up the plane. So they began to think that, they didn't know that it was the gun, they thought the search light would hit them, and as soon as it hit some of their planes, they would disintegrate. And the proximity fuse is one of the things, of course, I don't think they give enough credit to that, but it's one of the things which allows them to be so accurate with the warfare they've got now, the directed fire.

VAN HOUTS: When did you know that you were not going to be going overseas? That you were going to be staying in the continental United States?

WOOD: When did I know that?

VAN HOUTS: Yeah. Did you know that from the beginning, or did it just become good luck that you never had to go?

WOOD: No, I just, I guess, really became kind of good luck. I was stationed, after I left Corpus Christi, I was sent to an airbase in North Carolina called Edenton, North Carolina, and it was just down below Norfolk. And I was scheduled to go aboard a carrier when the war ended. And, in fact, the group I was with went ahead and went aboard the carrier, and I was able, fortunately, to—the CASU unit [Carrier Air Service Unit] that I had been in before I got transferred to the squadron, it was being sent back to Millington the next ...

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

WOOD: ... back to the naval air station here in Memphis to decommission planes that were coming back from, Navy planes that were coming back from the Pacific and wherever. And that's what we did. I fortunately got transferred back into the CASU so I could come home.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: And that was kind of an unusual way. The personnel officer at the ... squadron was a lieutenant commander by the name of White. I don't remember his first name, but he was from Humboldt, Tennessee. And when I found out that the CASU unit, which is a carrier air service unit, was coming back to Memphis from Millington, I went in to see him to see if I could get transferred back in there since this was my home. He almost laughed at me about it. He said, "No, sailor, you're going back. You're with the squadron. You're going out." We were commissioned in the Midway. "And you're going to go aboard the Midway," which was a brand new carrier that was just being outfitted to go back into the Pacific, even though the war was over. So ... anyway, I said, "Well, gosh, I ...," I said, "You know, that's right, my home is right there." He said, "I know." He said, "My home's in Humboldt." I said, "Well," I said, "you must know how I feel." He said, "Well," he says, "how well do you know ..." He happened to be a politician, and he asked me how well did I know Mr. Ed Crump.

VAN HOUTS: Oh! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And you said ...

WOOD: And I said, "I actually know him very well, because I threw his newspaper." And I did throw his newspaper when I had a paper route. (Laughter) I had a *Commercial Appeal* paper route, and I threw Mr. Crump's paper. He had, he lived over on Peabody there at, just east of Saint Luke's Church, in a big old home there on Peabody. And I threw papers all along Peabody

and Lauderdale and streets like by it. And I can remember Mr. Crump, when I'd go collecting, he would come to the door. He always came to the door. And he had a little pocket ...

PIEHLER: Change purse.

WOOD: Change purse. And he'd always take that change purse out and he'd very carefully count out—I forgot now what the *Commercial [Appeal]* was then, maybe like seventy-five cents weekly and Sundays together. Maybe it wasn't even that much. Maybe it was fifty cents. But anyway, he'd count it out very carefully and he was always very nice, and he was very pleasant. And so I didn't get to know him all that well, but I did know who he was and I felt like he might even know who I was, because I later got him to sign a petition when we were trying to salvage high school fraternities.

PIEHLER: Could you talk a little bit about that?

WOOD: Well, yes. We, it was, I was a senior at Central, I guess, at the time, and the legislature somehow or another had gotten the idea that high school fraternities had gotten out of hand, that they were discriminatory and so forth, and felt like they ought to be disbanded. So there was a law that hadn't become a law, but it had been proposed, to do away with any kind of fraternity or club that was mutually exclusive of people. And so we got together, a lot of us from each of the fraternities and decided that we needed to get some clout up there in the legislature, and we ought to ... they decided the best clout was if we could get the mayor of Memphis and some others to sign this petition we carried up to the legislature that would say all the good things about high school fraternities and this, that, and the other, brotherhood and all that good stuff. We took it to the mayor of Memphis, who also lived on my route a little bit further up, Chandler, not, the old Walter Chandler. He wouldn't sign it. He absolutely didn't believe in ...

PIEHLER: There should be high school fraternities.

WOOD: ... there should be a high school fraternities. But after we talked to him for a while, he said, "I'll tell you." And he felt pretty safe, "If you can get Mr. Crump to sign that, I'll sign it." (Laughter) And he kind of laughed when he said it. Well, we left there and we said, "You know, maybe we can get him to sign it." So we got to thinking, "Well, who knows Mr. Crump?" I said, "Well, I happen to throw his newspaper." "Lewis, you're the one. You're going to take that petition up there and get Mr. Crump to sign it." And I did. And Mr. Crump signed it. He was so happy to sign that. Not only did he sign it, but ... he told us to take it back to the mayor and let him know that he had signed it. But he said, not only that, he was going to let his contacts with the legislature know. And sure enough, when some of us went up there to Nashville ... the way was just paved. We went up there and boy, they had killed that bill.

VAN HOUTS: And so how old were you when all this was going on? How old were you when you got him to sign it? How old were you?

WOOD: When ... I was a senior in high school.

VAN HOUTS: Senior in high school.

WOOD: I was seventeen.

VAN HOUTS: Seventeen.

PIEHLER: I'm just curious, when did you join your high school fraternity?

WOOD: I joined it when I was a freshman, in the tenth grade of high school. High school fraternities were a big, and sororities, were a big thing in Memphis. They really were. I don't know that they were that much in Knoxville. I don't think ...

PIEHLER: But they were very common in that era around the country. I mean, I think some places more than others, but I did interview students in New Jersey from Rutgers who were in high school fraternities.

WOOD: Yeah. Well, some of the high school fraternities were national. I mean, you know, and fact is, the one I was in had its headquarters in St. Louis. We weren't national. We had chapters in Louisiana and Arkansas and Memphis and St. Louis. That's about it. But some of them had lots of chapters and they were very strong nationally, which is surprising. Kids that age being able to run anything, you know.

PIEHLER: Well, and the fact that you met at Peabody, which is a pretty nice hotel ...

WOOD: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean, it ...

WOOD: We met at the Peabody and ... back in those days, the Peabody I guess was kind of a social center. Of course, we had Cotton Carnival and things like that and the Peabody was kind of the center of carnival activities and they were very civic-oriented and they made some of their, especially on Sunday when we met, and a lot of those meeting rooms were not being used for business purposes and that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: So they didn't charge you to use ...

WOOD: Didn't charge us one penny.

PIEHLER: Really? Wow.

WOOD: Now, we had to clean them up ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: ... and make sure that we didn't mess them up or anything.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: They were usually set up in theater-style seats and all for maybe a seminar the next day or something. We made sure we got the seats back right like they were supposed to be and everything, and any guys that had smoked, we cleaned out all the ashtrays and everything cleaned it up. So we did leave it as nice as it was when we got in there. But that's right. [I] enjoyed it.

VAN HOUTS: Sorry, go ahead.

PIEHLER: I wanted to sort of ask about—I've interviewed people who have gone through various army, navy, air force schools, specialized schools, electronics, and the sense I get from them is that it was extremely rigorous. You really were cramming, in many ways, several years of college or slash graduate program in a few months. Could you talk a little bit about that? Because you mentioned earlier that that made a real difference in terms of when you went back to college after the navy.

WOOD: Oh yes. They did exactly what you're talking about in this, particularly in this Eddy test thing and the progression through basic and intermediate and then advanced training. And as you said, we studied and crammed in RC circuits and things that we didn't get at the University of Tennessee 'til I became a junior in engineering. And yes, I was well head of—when I went back to the university and took my first year of electrical engineering, that's when they cleared out most of the electrical engineers, guys that went in thinking, "Well, I want to be an engineer." (Laughter) I started out with a class of about four hundred and I ended up with a class of about eighteen that graduated. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You were in a small group, then.

WOOD: The four hundred, they thought they wanted to take it and then after about the first quarter or second quarter, they dropped out. And usually went into industrial engineering or industrial management, seemed like that. They didn't want to stay in engineering.

PIEHLER: What was the hardest part of your ...

WOOD: And so I had picked up a lot of circuitry and things and I knew, and I could see where all this was leading, where a lot of it we were studying in freshman or sophomore electrical engineering was basic, but I could see that that's where it was leading to, so I was well ahead because of that cramming all that together in one year, as you said.

PIEHLER: What was the most difficult part of either the beginning, intermediate, or advanced? And what did you take to, in terms of what you were learning? Does anything stick out, in terms of ...

WOOD: Well, the thing that really sticks out is when—right there in the very first when we went to Wright Junior College in Chicago, a lot of the guys that went in there had been ham operators, one thing or another. They had taken the Eddy test. They already knew a lot of basic electronics and basic radio and that sort of thing. And it was real easy for them, but that first

shot of it that I got was really tough and it took, I had to really ... and I didn't make really good grades in it like some of the others, because they were so far advanced. But then it began to catch on, catch on, and catch on, and I did better. I especially did better after I got to the University of Tennessee, as I said, and this stuff had become somewhat old, not old hat, but it ...

PIEHLER: In some ways, you were very familiar with it.

WOOD: Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: And when you returned the second time, how much do you think Navy discipline and, you know, that sort of life played a part in advancing you?

WOOD: You mean ...

VAN HOUTS: Like the habits you picked up in the navy. Did they help you when you returned? Did you find yourself more motivated, or ...

WOOD: Well, yeah, it helped me a lot. One of the things that I have always known, the difference between the navy and the army, the navy was far more in a caste system than the army. In other words, the difference between an officer and an enlisted man in the Navy is like the difference between God and something else. I don't know. (Laughter) I mean, they were supreme. In the army was more close-knit, especially in the infantry, I guess, because you had to depend on these fellows. I mean, in most cases, your men were better marksmen than you. They were better ... disciplined, had better discipline even than I, and you depended on them to protect you. And you definitely, so you almost became a part of them, and you wanted to be sure that they didn't dislike you a whole lot, so you just absolutely tried to mix more closely with them.

PIEHLER: It's interesting you say that the navy is more of a caste system, because it's almost—though you didn't serve aboard a ship. I've always been struck by the formality of the navy. The navy tries to be formal. The only time I've heard stories about when it was a little looser was on the dungaree navy. You know, some of the smaller crafts. But on the big ships or on bases, it used to be it was a very formal ...

WOOD: Yeah. And I guess the dungaree crafts that you're talking about, you're ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, there ...

WOOD: ... they were more like living together in close quarters and all that ... kind of like the army. But I never was a part of that. I was either at a big base or on a big carrier or whatever.

PIEHLER: What ... you were involved with secret or classified—did you have any sort of security clearance?

WOOD: Yeah, we were all cleared, but again, back in those days, it wasn't quite like it is. When I ... I've had a few clearances to Oak Ridge and things like that, and it's much more

difficult than what I went through and I think the classifications back in World War II were not as strict as they are [now].

PIEHLER: So you didn't have an FBI agent coming by where you grew up in Memphis? And your mother didn't report back, you know, "There's been this FBI man asking all these questions" or ...

WOOD: I've had that happen. But not when I was in the service.

PIEHLER: No. So that didn't happen.

WOOD: In the service, that didn't happen in the service. You got clearances ... basically more readily. And, of course, I guess you were subject to a stricter discipline than you are in public life.

PIEHLER: I guess Biloxi, I think of Neil Simon's movie and play about being a naval recruit to Biloxi in World War II. I don't know if you've ever seen it.

WOOD: I don't think I have.

PIEHLER: Yeah. But I've heard that, you know, it was a pretty, at least the impression I get from this movie, it was a pretty raucous place.

WOOD: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Any memories of that? And it's pretty close to New Orleans, you mentioned, which I've heard, or I've seen, is a pretty raucous place.

WOOD: Well, you know, the funny thing about it, when I was at ... Gulfport and Biloxi in that area, we had a curfew. The enlisted men had to be off the street at midnight, and boy, the shore patrol and the military police strictly enforced it. And so I didn't see that much raucousness going on when I was there during in the war. Now, later, I've been there since the war, and yes, it's very raucous ... in New Orleans, of course. But the nice thing about New Orleans that I remember was on the weekends the whole town was just every kind of enlisted man or serviceman you can imagine, army, navy, Marines, coast guard, merchant marine, everything was in New Orleans. And they had this curfew at midnight, and they enforced it in New Orleans pretty strong. We would—but ... the Charity Hospital is a big county hospital there, complex. They used to—we could get off the streets right at midnight and we could go in and they didn't, they would set up cots down in the hallways and things for us. The nurses ... that were, most them were ... they were part of the pastoral ...

PIEHLER: They were nuns?

WOOD: Most of them were nuns, or they were somewhat in ...

PIEHLER: Or they looked like they were nuns.

WOOD: Or they looked like they were nuns. And they were very nice, and they would ... we'd go in and they'd hand us a sheet and a blanket and head us down the hall to a cot and we'd go down and we'd stay there until morning, and then we'd leave. They didn't feed us or anything, but we had a place to get off the street, and that was great. They also had a—one of the things I remember is they had a hotel there called the Lafayette Hotel, and it's still there. It's down on ... where the streetcar runs down there, I'm trying to think ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, I know. I ...

WOOD: But anyway, it goes down its own circle, Lafayette Circle, and this hotel was a WAVE barracks and it was like a date bureau. (Laughter) We'd come over there and you know, if we didn't have a date and we wanted a date or something, we could go to the Lafayette Hotel and I mean, you'd go in and the WAVE on duty there at the desk, you'd say, "Is there any ..." you know, "Do you have ..." Usually we knew somebody we wanted to see or something, or we'd heard about somebody that might be willing to go out on a boat with you and this that and the other, so we'd come down there and we would tell them that we wanted to see such-and-such, and they'd say, "Well, she's already on a date. But so forth and so on is up here and she's very nice, she's a good date, she's a nice-looking person. I think you'll like her." I mean, it was like a date bureau.

VAN HOUTS: So the WAVES were very lax there? They weren't, you know, weren't curfewed, weren't anything? They could go out and do what they wanted?

WOOD: Pretty much so. However, they were on, they were curfewed, though, just like the rest of us. They had to, but they had a place to go, see. They could get back to ... the Lafayette Hotel and the rest of us we didn't have a place to go except to Charity Hospital. Some of us would go into the bus station and I've done that, but those seats were awfully hard in the bus station, and it was often hard to get them, there were so many servicemen in there. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Did anyone ever invite you to their house? Did a stranger invite you to their house for a Sunday dinner or ...

WOOD: Well ... I had, you might say, like most sailors I had a girlfriend in every port. (Laughter) When I was at Corpus [Christi] we ... we oftentimes would hitch a ride up to Houston or San Antonio, and I had a friend in Houston that I met in a PX or a serviceman's center and she invited me out to her home for dinner. And I got where I'd go up to see her most every weekend. And then when I went over to Norfolk and Edenton, I had a friend in Richmond the same way, just about the same way. She used to come down to Edenton to see me. Then her family invited me to have Thanksgiving dinner and one thing or another. And I've always appreciated that, and we've tried to have servicemen come by from our navy base here.

PIEHLER: So you've continued that tradition.

WOOD: Well, we've had people—back when my daughter was growing up, she liked ... servicemen. I mean, she was not old enough to date or anything, she was young, but she loved to

see those servicemen. (Laughter) So we would go out ... I'd go out and sometimes wait out at the gate at the Navy base just to pick up anybody that wanted to come home and have—of course we belonged to a country club and I'd sometimes take them to the country club.

VAN HOUTS: Can you—you started to tell us a story about how you got Boss Crump to get you out of going away, going into the Pacific.

WOOD: Oh, yeah.

VAN HOUTS: Could you finish that story?

WOOD: Did I not finish that story?

VAN HOUTS: Not quite.

WOOD: I guess I didn't, did I?

PIEHLER: Well, you said he ... you told him you knew him.

VAN HOUTS: You started to ...

WOOD: I told him ...

VAN HOUTS: Yeah. And then we got you off on another track.

PIEHLER: Was that enough, or did ...

WOOD: That was enough, because it developed that Mr. Crump had been responsible, he had actually been responsible for him getting a commission in the navy, but he was a, had been in politics in West Tennessee ... and he knew Mr. Crump very well, and when I told him the story about throwing his newspaper and having known him so well and—fact is, not only that, but my mother of course, being staunch Democrats, my mother and father both knew him and really liked him. We all liked him. We felt like Mr. Crump had done a lot for Memphis. And I guess when I kind of proceeded with that, he found an opening for me in the carrier air service unit to come back to Memphis, and that's the way I got back to Memphis. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And how long were you in the Memphis base before ...

WOOD: Before I got discharged? Well, the war was over and we came back here in, let's see, it must have been like in, well the war ended in August of '45, and the CASU came back to Memphis in about November. Then I was released from active duty in June and went immediately back to the University of Tennessee.

PIEHLER: So, June of '46, so you ...

WOOD: '46, yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you were, were you—how eager were you to get out, or were you eager to get out?

WOOD: Oh, I was very eager to get out. And Jane and I, of course ...

VAN HOUTS: Got married later that year.

WOOD: We got married in November of '46, so we had pretty well decided that we were going to marry.

VAN HOUTS: So, tell us how you met her and things.

WOOD: How I met her?

VAN HOUTS: Yeah.

WOOD: Well, of course, we both went to high school at Central.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: And I was in a fraternity, boy's fraternity, and she was in a girls' sorority. And ... I, when I first got in the fraternity, I was a little bashful. I ... didn't make friends with girls so easy and one thing or another. So the fraternity would have parties and I would end up with no dates and they didn't like that. They said, "You gotta have a date to go to this party." So different ones—I had one particular friend, Al Bensabat, who is deceased now, but Al ... knew Jane. And he dated one of Jane's good friends, and Jane had been dating some of the older men, older guys in the fraternity, but she was kind of between dates about this time, so Al arranged for me to have a, really, almost like a blind date with Jane. I knew her at Central, but I didn't, I hadn't ever had any ... and the girl he was dating was the sister of a good friend of mine, so we were just kind of, just kind of thrown together, and we started dating and ...

VAN HOUTS: So you ...

WOOD: ... one thing and another and when I went off to the service, we had—she came to visit me one time with my mother and her mother down at Biloxi and we stayed out so late, that was one of the times that I got caught by the ...

PIEHLER: Shore patrol.

WOOD: ... shore patrol for being out after curfew. Fortunately, I guess fortunately, we were with our parents, so that they didn't throw me in the hooskow [jail], they just made me go back to the base. And then I had to appear before the ... officer in charge just to make sure that what I was doing was acceptable and not a, the fact that I was with my mother and her mother and we weren't up to any no good.

VAN HOUTS: Yeah, yeah. (Laughs)

WOOD: So she visited me down there and we sat on the seawall out there outside of Biloxi, big old moon, and we decided, we thought then that we were going to get married. But we didn't set any kind of dates 'til I came home, and then we got engaged. Fact is, I bought a ring from the Navy ... not PX, the navy ship store. (Laughter) Diamond ring. Actually, they had a deal with a local jeweler in Memphis, and what it amounted to was that I picked out what I wanted, they got it, and I got a discount from what it would've cost me if I had gone to the store.

VAN HOUTS: That's alright.

WOOD: Yeah, it was alright. But since then, I've gotten her a better ring. That was a ring on a navy ...

VAN HOUTS: Budget.

WOOD: ... budget.

PIEHLER: Did you think of staying, did you think at all of staying—do you need a break or anything?

WOOD: No, that's fine.

VAN HOUTS: You don't want to get some water or anything?

WOOD: No.

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

WOOD: I probably should have. Would you like something?

VAN HOUTS: No, but you're doing so much talking.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: Had you thought of staying in the navy at all?

WOOD: No, I didn't really think of staying in the navy. I was really anxious to get out by the time I got out.

VAN HOUTS: Why?

WOOD: Well, to go back to college and try to do something with my life after having lost a few years in the service, which I felt like were lost.

VAN HOUTS: Really?

WOOD: Well, I mean, you know, you come back home and you maybe ... you have ideas about careers and things that you want to do. And I—the navy at this time was not part of that. And certainly, when I came out of Korea, I had several opportunities to stay in, but I didn't want to stay in then, because I was ... had a bad MOS. Military Occupation Specialty as an infantry officer below the field grade is pretty tough. You don't last too long most of the time. Company grade officers in the infantry are very expendable.

PIEHLER: You had the GI Bill. Had you thought of going anywhere else but UT? Had you thought of going to another school?

WOOD: No.

PIEHLER: No, you were pretty loyal already by that time.

WOOD: No. I was pretty sold on UT. I liked the football team. I liked the fraternity. I liked the school.

PIEHLER: And it sounds like you had some very good professors. I mean, you talked ...

WOOD: Oh, I had great professors.

PIEHLER: I mean, Professor Hodges ...

WOOD: Hodge[s] was ... even though ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, even though he gave ...

WOOD: ... he was tough on me, but he was a good professor. And I had a professor in mathematics—I became quite a, for some reason or another, calculus and advanced math and all really clicked with me. And fact is, I had advanced math classes with guys who later went to ... the NASA program and other things. And the professor we had, we had so many brains in that class that he would just, he would give us an assignment and we'd come back to the class and he would sit back and let us conduct the class and do all the work and everything. And ... he particularly let me do a lot of it and I always, I just really felt—fact is, from a math standpoint, I was really a scholar. Not much in some other areas. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But math you really did take a—had you been very good ...

WOOD: I had not been good at math in ... I hadn't really applied myself, as I say. The navy, going through the Eddy program really solidified math in my being.

VAN HOUTS: So, just to, I just want to jump ahead a tiny bit. When you finished your degree at Knoxville, your wife was there, but you both moved back to Memphis. Is that correct? Did you ever think of staying in Knoxville?

WOOD: Well, no. (Laughter) We had, of course, interviews there on the campus with different people that wanted to hire us or one thing or another ... and most of the guys that I graduated with, like I told you, there was like fourteen of us. Most of them were either going with General Electric or TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority]. Every one was with either one of those two. And neither one really paid outstanding wages at that time. They probably do pretty well now, but at that time they were just kind of average for a graduating engineer. I had a mutual friend who was working with a firm building power plants in Arkansas and Missouri and Louisiana, and ... he suggested I may want to talk to this particular person and see if they needed young engineers, that he thought they might pay better than going with TVA or GE. So I did and I found out, yes, they did pay better. The work was tough. It was hard. I worked seven days a week, but I went to work in—first of all, in Little Rock, we were building a steam electric power plant there in North Little Rock. That's where I first went to work out of Knoxville. Then they moved me over to Forest City. We were building another power plant there about the time that I got called back into the service.

VAN HOUTS: Uh huh.

WOOD: And ... the company I was with was also working on the nuclear plant, the power plant serving Paducah, the Paducah facility. And when I left I had the same friend that had ...

[To Jane Wood:] Yeah, Jane, go on and take the dog [out of the room]. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I think ... I forgot. I think you were asking a question or—you were talking about the power plant in north ...

VAN HOUTS: The power plant in Little Rock.

PIEHLER: ... Little Rock.

WOOD: Of course, when I left it was real unusual. The guy that had helped me get the job with this firm, which was Ebasco Services Inc., a big company building power plants all over the world. They ... tried to get me a deferment, and they tried him and I together at the same time. And he was in the army engineer corps, officer in the army engineers, and I was an officer in the infantry. He got a deferment and I didn't. And they said, "No, we need you." So I—it was not long after the war broke out in Korea that I ... well it broke out in June of '50, and I was called up and went to Fort Chafee, Arkansas, I guess, October. So I had from June to October and then from there.

VAN HOUTS: And ...

WOOD: But, pardon me.

VAN HOUTS: No, you continue.

WOOD: That's it.

VAN HOUTS: Are you sure?

WOOD: Well, yeah. Except that when I left the company said, "When you come back, we'll have a job waiting for you." And ...

PIEHLER: Legally, they had to do that, too.

WOOD: Legally, they had to have a job waiting for you, and it was supposed to be at the same level or higher than you were when you left, and the pay had to be the same or higher, and fact is, it was supposed to be, I think, according to the law on a certain progression, your pay had to be. Well, when I came back after Korea ... they didn't have a job for me anywhere except up in Paducah. And the fellow I had been working with very closely in Arkansas, at the time, he was in Paducah and I thought, "Well, I'll call and see how it is up there." And I called him and he says, he said, "Well, listen," he said, "if I were you, I'd try to find something else." I said, "Why? You don't want me?" He said, "No, it's not that." He said, "We're not going to be on this job very long. They're getting ready to kick us off of the job. They're ... going to change constructors and Bechtel is going to be brought in and we're going to be shoved out." And he said, "I'd hate for you to come up here 'cause then you'd just be out of a job."

PIEHLER: And you'd be in Paducah.

WOOD: And I'd be in Paducah. (Laughter) Yeah. So, with that, I didn't go back there. I stayed here and went to work for the utility here in Memphis.

VAN HOUTS: And when you came back to Knoxville after being away in the navy, had Knoxville changed at all? Had UT changed at all? Or did you think, you know, that it was just exactly the same?

WOOD: No it had, well I guess it had changed a lot. My outlook was a little bit more mature than it had been when I left, and ... I was interested in different sort of things, I guess. I wasn't interested in hitchhiking to Gatlinburg much ... I was more interested then in trying to get an education and get on with my life.

VAN HOUTS: And so when you came back to UT, did you stay in your fraternity, or did you ...

WOOD: Yeah, I stayed in the fraternity.

VAN HOUTS: You did?

WOOD: But after Jane and I married, I wasn't as active in the fraternity as I had been. I stayed in, but I'd only go ... to chapter meetings. I didn't hang around the house a whole lot.

VAN HOUTS: You quieted down.

WOOD: Fact is, we were—well, not only that, but the engineering school, Ayres Hall, was way down over the hill, and our fraternity house was up on Temple Avenue, so it was a long way for me to go and it was easier for me—Jane and I were living way out on east, east, out on Magnolia.

VAN HOUTS: I know Magnolia.

WOOD: You know where Magnolia is. Way out on Magnolia, and that was a long way from ... from the fraternity house. So we didn't get there too often. We'd get there sometimes on Sunday and go to have dinner in the fraternity house.

VAN HOUTS: And did you and Jane have a car or anything? Were you ...

WOOD: We had a car, yes. Yes.

VAN HOUTS: You had a car.

PIEHLER: How were you able to get a car?

WOOD: Well ...

PIEHLER: I'm curious how you also got an apartment ... which was not easy to do.

WOOD: No, no. It was very tough. Actually, you know, when you returned they had all those places up on the Hill with the Quonset Huts, and all that ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. You mean ...

WOOD: ... and ... places around the university, the old buildings where they did have things for rent, they were [in] awful shape. I remember looking at some of them and water was just streaming in the roof.

VAN HOUTS: Ah! (Laughter)

WOOD: And some of those places were just awful. As I say, we were very fortunate in finding this couple that owned this duplex, a couple of different duplexes. And the one they lived in, the one opposite it was vacant. I mean, they one that was, the side that was vacant. And he was the one that was the policeman, a retired policeman. And we were very fortunate. And they lived in a nice section of town, even though it was right around the corner from the biggest bootlegger in Knoxville. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You were considerably more mature. You were married. What was your relationship to, say, you know, nineteen-year-olds who were first year students, you know, freshmen, or fraternity ...

WOOD: Well, actually, there was so many returning veterans at that time that I didn't, I wasn't around that many. There were a few. And ... you know ... I don't know that I had any particular feeling one way or the other about it.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like ...

WOOD: I didn't hang around with them, with the young guys.

PIEHLER: So it was really ...

WOOD: Being married, I didn't hang around with the young girls. (Laughter) So ...

PIEHLER: And you decided to elect ROTC. I mean, you took advanced ROTC. So you really, you still wanted to be an officer.

WOOD: I still wanted to. I liked the military, and I did want to be an officer, but the other driving force was that you got paid, not much, but we got, it seems like sixty dollars a month, something like that, to take advanced ROTC.

PIEHLER: So that was in addition to your GI Bill stipend?

WOOD: That was in addition ...

PIEHLER: So you got the ...

WOOD: ... to the ninety dollars that I got for the GI Bill, so I was getting a hundred and fifty dollars.

PIEHLER: Which was actually ...

WOOD: Oh, good money for a married couple at that time.

VAN HOUTS: And then your wife was working as well.

WOOD: She worked at a place called Cooper, Kaufman, Brooks, which ...

VAN HOUTS: Insurance.

WOOD: ... was at that time a big insurance agency there in Knoxville. Yeah, and that job was kind of passed from one wife to another.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: The ... guy that was, I can't remember his name, but he was the person that went out and checked on accidents and things like that, and he was a SAE, big fraternity man on campus, or had been, and he believed in fraternities, and especially any of the wives that were married to

guys in fraternities, they had an automatic job. So they passed it along just like you passed along something else, that job. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: I don't know how well you can answer this, but how hard was it for your wife to relocate to Knoxville? Did she mind at all, or did she find it hard to settle in?

WOOD: Well, she didn't find it hard at all because, see, a lot of our friends were back in school.

VAN HOUTS: Okay, in Knoxville.

WOOD: And they were married ...

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: ... a lot of them. And fact is she looked forward to it.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: She was really gung-ho to get up here.

VAN HOUTS: And when the two of you were here, how often did you get back to Memphis to see your family?

WOOD: Well, at first we didn't have a car and ... that bus ride from Knoxville to Memphis at that time was like fourteen, fifteen hours.

VAN HOUTS: Are you serious? (Laughter)

WOOD: I mean, there was no ...

VAN HOUTS: We shouldn't complain.

WOOD: There was no freeways you had to get on Highway 70 North and go through every little burgh and the bus would stop at every little ...

PIEHLER: Every little ...

WOOD: ... filling station, practically, all the way from Knoxville to Nashville, then Nashville to Memphis, and it took forever. And so we only rode that bus about, I think, once or twice. And then we had carpool, we had people that had cars, and we would get together and drive each other's cars, and then we finally ended up getting a car. And when we did, we'd carpool with others, and then we would drive back and forth to Knoxville. To answer your question, I guess we came home ... between every quarter, and we came home ...

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with W. Lewis Wood on August 3, 2002 in Memphis, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler ...

VAN HOUTS: And Nashwa Van Houts.

PIEHLER: And so you were sort of saying the—it was a journey to get to, until you bought a car, it was quite a trek to come back to Memphis.

WOOD: Oh, yes. We rode the Southern several times. That was also an overnight trip from Memphis to Knoxville, and it was tough ... but we did ride it a few times.

PIEHLER: How did you, politically, were you still a Democrat? And what did you think of Harry Truman, because you had sort of grown up ...

WOOD: I ... was a great admirer of Harry Truman. I think he probably maybe going down in history as one of our finest presidents.

PIEHLER: So you were a Truman, because Truman wasn't that popular in some circles ...

WOOD: No, and fact is, I was there when he won over ...

PIEHLER: Over Dewey.

WOOD: ... Dewey. I was in Knoxville and nobody gave him a chance.

PIEHLER: Well, because Knoxville was very ...

WOOD: Knoxville was a big Republican area, you know.

VAN HOUTS: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: So everyone was expecting Dewey in Knoxville.

WOOD: Oh, yes, yes. They had big Dewey signs and everything. And I remember going into a Democratic, a Young Democrats meeting at the old courthouse there in Knoxville, and I've never ... I hate to say this, but if there was ever any place that I felt any closer to being communist, that was it. I mean, it was really ... I didn't, I hadn't experience that in my dealings with Democrats down in this part of the country, but in Knoxville, it seemed like they were just rabid liberals, rabid ... I don't know. Just ...

PIEHLER: So you thought, even though they were, I mean it's still Republican, but I get a sense it was even more Republican, if that's possible.

WOOD: Oh, I think it was more Republican then. And fact is, this is another story I guess I shouldn't tell, but ... the fraternity house, we—back in those days, you still had the poll tax. You had to have a poll tax receipt to go vote. We had some of our alumni of the fraternity very

active in local politics there in Knoxville, and they would come around with a whole slew of poll tax receipts and take us all down to vote. (Laughter) And tell us how to vote and everything. Cas Walker was ...

PIEHLER: Was the mayor then, yeah.

WOOD: Well, he had been mayor ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: ... and he had been out and back in and out ...

PIEHLER: But he was a very dominant ...

WOOD: Yeah, and he was a big thing. And there was Dempster, Dempsy, Dempster, like Dempster Trucks. The Dempsters were big in Knoxville at that time. I forgot now how we voted, but it seemed like we—oh, I do remember one thing, talking about, when they voted to legalize whiskey. We were all on that to legalize whiskey. And I guess we were, let's see, seemed like the church people and the bootleggers were opposed to it, and all of the rest of the folks in town wanted whiskey ...

PIEHLER: Wanted whiskey to be ...

WOOD: ... wanted whiskey legal.

PIEHLER: Was there a chapter of the American, do you have any recollection of a chapter of the American Veterans Committee on campus?

WOOD: I don't recall, no.

PIEHLER: When did you join the—you joined the American Legion and ...

WOOD: I didn't join the American Legion, well I say that. I joined the American Legion first, oh, way back ... I had a friend that was promoting the American Legion memberships and I joined, but I didn't stay in and then I got out again, and then ... I started making quite a few trips to Washington in connection with ... some of my work with the National Society for Professional Engineers. We were doing a lot of lobbying in Washington, one thing and another. And I stayed at the—one of the advantages, I guess, of having been in the service was I could stay at the Army-Navy Club. I stayed at the Army-Navy Club, and right around the corner from the Army-Navy Club in Washington was the, not the headquarters of the American Legion, 'cause it was over in Indianapolis, but the ... I guess the main ... arm of [the] political part of American Legion was right around the corner from the Army-Navy Club. I remember going by there and seeing it and having some of my friends say, "Well, you really ought to go." And then Jane got on me about, [she said] "Why are you're not in the American Legion, I don't know." So I joined it and I've been in it ever since. I don't take an active part in

it, but I do get a lot of their magazines and things, and I really enjoy the military articles and that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: You did take ROTC, and advanced, did you think you would be called up for a war? I mean, how much ...

WOOD: I had a unique experience with the ROTC in Knoxville. Being in electrical engineering, I—we three branches of ROTC, of the Army ROTC, in Knoxville. We had the infantry and the engineers and the Air Force. At that time, the Air Force had not become a separate Army, it was still Air Corps, a division of the Army.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: So everything in Knoxville, the Knoxville campus was Army, either one of those three. So, what did I say? Engineers ...

PIEHLER: Infantry ...

WOOD: ... infantry ...

PIEHLER: ... and Air Force.

WOOD: ... and Air Force. So I, when I went over there to sign up for ROTC, they had a PMS&T, Professor of Military Science and Tech, who had been a colonel, regimental tactics commander, in the invasion and all in Europe. And he was gung-ho about the infantry. Oh, that's all he knew, Colonel Black. And he interviewed everybody that came to sign up for advanced ROTC. So when I went in there and, of course, my background had been navy, active duty, and here I was taking electrical engineering, so he, I think he immediately saw an opportunity to get a recruit to the infantry. So I said, "No." He asked me if I didn't want to sign up for the infantry ROTC. And I said, "No." I said, "I'm an engineer. I'm studying electrical engineering." And he said, "Well, what you really want is the Signal Corps, but we don't happen to have a branch of Signal Corps here at the university in ROTC. But what you do is you go and you get your basic MOS infantry and then you can more readily transfer from that into engineering, armor, artillery, whatever." (Laughter) Well, of course, that might have been true had there not been a war break out in Korea where they needed a lot of infantry officers.

PIEHLER: It also sounds like the recruiter's bill of goods.

WOOD: Oh, he sold me a bill of goods. There was no question about it. But I tell you the truth, I have never been unhappy about it, because I felt like I had good training. We trained, summer camp was at Camp Campbell with the 101st Airborne, and these guys, most of them, had been in the Battle of the Bulge and one thing or another. They were really seasoned veterans and really good soldiers. And I learned a lot from that training, and I also had good grades and done well in military ROTC. I didn't advance to be a big officer in the corps or anything. I was just a first lieutenant, I think, but I had good training and when I went on active duty I found out that I had far better ... credentials and abilities in terms of leading a combat unit than most officers,

and I think it stood me in good stead and stood my men in good stead. I have always been proud of the fact that I didn't have a single one of my platoon members killed in action. I had some casualties, but none killed in action. I've been very fortunate about that. Now, after I left ... Korea, I was replaced by a West Pointer and he was gung-ho and led them into some tough firefights and things and we did lose some men. We just had our reunion of my platoon, I think I told you, in Valley Forge at the Freedom Foundation and we had a memorial service for four of our guys that didn't make it back. But anyway, I've always been pleased with that service ...

PIEHLER: That training.

WOOD: ... training and I wouldn't trade it for the navy or anything else.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, this—one of the things, I often think of, you know, who will use these oral histories and sort of things that are tips from the past. What did you get a sense from these people, these were pretty hard-bitten veterans. I mean, to get through the Battle of the Bulge, the 101st. What did they sort of impart on you, what lessons, practical lessons, did you get? Or just ways of thinking about combat? Particularly that you might not have gotten from someone who didn't have that kind of ...

WOOD: There was a lot of good practical lessons that we learned, I learned. Things that, you know, like, just hearing guys say things like ... the best place to be in an artillery barrage is on the enemy's position.

PIEHLER: I read that in your memoirs about, that's it's important to keep going ...

WOOD: Keep going.

PIEHLER: ... and it's not just because ...

WOOD: Well, I learned that primarily through some of those guys in the 101st who had been through it, and it turned out to be very true, because very seldom does the enemy, like to ... put artillery right on their own people. Nobody but the US does that. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, it was just interesting as I read that. The more I thought about it, I mean, in a lot of situations, it made sense, that if you keep going, right, they'd probably won't. Unless it's preplanned to do that, they won't put the artillery on their own trench.

WOOD: No, they don't drop artillery on it. And ... our troops, our forces don't usually do that, either. We sometimes had final fires that we had arranged in case of a, say, a mass attack like the Chinese were interested in doing where we had concentrations that were right on our position that we could call in, in case we were overrun or something where we had to just get down into bunkers and let them just drop.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and hope for the best.

WOOD: And hope for the best. Yeah. But we didn't ever have to use that.

PIEHLER: In your memoirs about Korea, one of the themes I was struck by was your fear of a mass Chinese attack, even though you never had it. But that sounds like that fear was a really ...

WOOD: I dreamed about it all the time.

PIEHLER: Yeah. And you never experienced one, but ...

WOOD: Never experienced a mass attack, but we were always were prepared for it, and I always felt like—I had a fear of it, certainly, but I always felt like we were very well prepared for it. We had planned our concentrations of artillery and all in such a way that, and we had our barbed wire and concertina in such ways that, and our fields of fire so that we, I don't think that we could have ever been overrun. I don't think that ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: ... but I had a fear of that.

PIEHLER: No, but it seems like ...

WOOD: My dreams, I have had dreams about just hordes of Chinese. And ... I will say this, it was awfully fearsome. We would go out on night patrols, and I think this is probably in my memoirs, but we'd go up on hills and we could look up coming down from the north at night, we'd see these coolies, just mile after mile after mile of them.

VAN HOUTS: Yeah, that is in the book. And little Chinese lanterns.

WOOD: Little Chinese lanterns, I didn't think of that. And also the Chinese lanterns and the flares they fired.

VAN HOUTS: Yeah.

WOOD: That's something that's, I think, was very unique. But anyway ...

PIEHLER: I ...

WOOD: And we had, of course, napalm in barrels in such a way that we could, and we had white phosphorus grenades screwed into them, so that we could pull a pin on them and then it would blast the napalm all over the side of the mountain. I didn't really think that there would be any way that we could be overrun, but it was just the fear of it happening, I guess. You say you felt that reading that.

PIEHLER: Yeah, that you had this fear, because I read it and ...

WOOD: I never really actually can think that I had that kind of, you know we were always, you know ... what did I say? There's no, no atheists in ...

VAN HOUTS: There's no atheists in a foxhole.

WOOD: ... foxhole. Right.

PIEHLER: One of the things I, what's striking to me—to me, Korea's such an understudied war, and in the popular consciousness. And to me, I've become more and more intrigued how quickly the war had changed, because you entered a war that was very static, but people who had served two years earlier had a—they were overrun.

WOOD: Yes.

PIEHLER: They were overrun, victorious, overrun again, counterattacked. Did you encounter anyone in Korea or in training as your unit, as the Forty-fifth was training, who did, in fact, talk about the war in different stages of the war? I mean, any veterans of, for example, when the Chinese did overrun a position?

WOOD: Did I ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, encountered in training, that ...

WOOD: Well, yeah. We had ... we had had people that, you know, they, we had things that we knew would happen, and what we had to look for, and, like, for instance, the Chinese always seemed to form up in a particular valley and right before sundown, they would start mobilizing all their troops in an area and so we had been trained that we would try to spot those. That would be an indicator that maybe something was going to transpire that evening. And so we needed to be on alert and so forth, but we also used that to direct our, what we called turkey shoots. We used to just fire those long toms and eight-inch howitzers and what have you over there and no telling how many ... it's no telling how many people they lost, no telling. We lost a lot of people, but nothing like what they lost from mass bombardments.

PIEHLER: One of the official histories I read—well, let me ask you several questions about National—I just reviewed a book about National Guard in Korea, and it actually had a special chapter on the Thunderbirds.

WOOD: Is that right?

PIEHLER: Yeah. So I guess one of the things in tension with the National Guard has been, well a lot of the regulars don't like the National Guard, but one of the criticisms of the Guard is, in fact, military discipline, and that when you get people from the same hometown, the bank, the person that's the teller doesn't want to give the banker an order that's too strict because, you know, that might come back. You had several great stories about ...

WOOD: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... that sort of tension.

WOOD: There was a lot of that. And ... I ... definitely there was a feeling that the National Guard was—now, not so much in the case of the Forty-fifth, because the Forty-fifth the Thunderbird was very outstanding.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: They had been at Anzio and all through Italy and up through France and they fought valiantly and they had more, actually, they had more amphibious landings than the Marines did. So the Forty-fifth was, Thunderbirds, were fairly well—and they had been next to the Third Infantry Division all through Italy and there was kind of a camaraderie somewhat between the Third and the Forty-fifth, the Third being a regular Army division. But you're right. The regulars kind of looked down on the Guard and a lot of the things they said are very true. Being a reservist, entering into a National Guard, I was afraid that I wouldn't be accepted very well.

PIEHLER: That was a concern when you ...

WOOD: It was a concern, but, gosh, Jane and I, we just mixed it in with them right away and we had a lot of good friends and we—fact is, I was the first junior officer promoted, even over most of the junior National Guard officers. And I always felt like the guy that promoted me did it to spite some of his so-called friends from the National Guard back home in Oklahoma. I really do. I think ...

PIEHLER: And it sounds like, to send a message that ...

WOOD: He wanted to send a message in some ways. Yeah.

PIEHLER: One of the other things this history said—I'm just curious for your take on it. He said, and I think some of the official sources said this, that there was a frustration at division headquarters over strengthening the bunkers, that in early January, February, or March. I got a sense you had built a pretty cushy—I mean, you were very conscious of strengthening it, but do you remember any meetings, divisional or regimental, on the subject of strengthening the bunkers and getting the men to build better bunkers?

WOOD: No, I really wasn't. We, I guess the I Corps commander seemed to come around to us an awful lot. And one of the things he harped on was, you know, when we were out having our helmets on, being clean shaven and all this, that, and the other. He really harped on that. And I think he did that with us because, feeling that, as you mentioned, the lack of, maybe, discipline among Guardsmen and all. And there may have been a certain amount of that. About building bunkers, there was—one of the things that I was surprised about, and I guess came about as part of the integration of black troops, and ... that seemed to go much more quickly in the regular units that it did in the National Guard. There was a certain amount of resistance, even though they were from Oklahoma, they're not necessarily a Southern state. I felt like there was a lot of resistance to particularly getting black officers.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that, that that ...

WOOD: Fact is, I think I may have mentioned it in there, my replacement was sent down and he had a Silver Star from Italy and the battalion commander said, "Let him be back in the ... let him run the rear echelon."

PIEHLER: And he should've been on the line. I mean, he actually knew what he was doing, too. I mean, he ...

WOOD: He knew what he was doing. But there was a certain amount of feeling that maybe the troops from Oklahoma and—well, of course, we had, our division, by this time, had been made, we had filled up mostly with draftees from Oklahoma. Fact is, I was looking at our roster of men in my company that are still around, and I could only find, particularly in my platoon, only two from Oklahoma. All the rest of them are ... and there is a fellow from Knoxville, Jack Bond, who was in my platoon, and he was also became the first sergeant for my company. And we were the only two from the South, and everybody else was all from Wisconsin, New Jersey, New York, everywhere, you know.

VAN HOUTS: Do you think, in that case, that the Army was being oversensitive towards ...

WOOD: Being what?

VAN HOUTS: Oversensitive towards, you know, where they would put these black officers? You know, that they would ...

WOOD: I wouldn't say the army. The army was gung-ho to get it done.

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

WOOD: Particularly after MacArthur. See, MacArthur, when he was relieved, MacArthur was a great believer that black troops should be in service companies and areas and not integrated. He didn't believe in integrating combat units. And ... when Ridgeway came in, and, of course, Truman and I guess ... Harry Truman's dictates and all ...

VAN HOUTS: So who was stopping it? Who was the main force behind ...

WOOD: The force that I saw behind it was the actual National Guard officers from ...

VAN HOUTS: The actual National Guard officers. Okay.

WOOD: ... from Oklahoma.

VAN HOUTS: Okay. So, actual Oklahomans.

WOOD: Yeah. In fact, I think that they were more discriminatory than I was, frankly, even though they were from the West. I don't know whether, they had lived with Indians all their lives and maybe, I don't know.

VAN HOUTS: Your wife told me we have to stop now.

[TAPE STOPPED]

PIEHLER: We went to Overton Park. You drove us to Paulette's. I want to thank you for dinner at Paulette's. I'm partly putting it on the record so when I come back to Memphis and if you're not in town, I know where to go for dinner. And you took us to Overton Park, and you spent a lot of time as a kid, as a child growing up in that park.

WOOD: Oh, yes. Absolutely, yeah. We used to play golf there and, of course, go through the zoo and visit. And they had wading pools there and we used to go over there and do the wading pool bit. Gosh! I spent a lot of time there.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that the doughboy monument—you have real memories of going there as a child.

WOOD: Yeah, and that doughboy monument was quite a thing for Memphis. It's almost as important to most of us as the statue of [Nathan Bedford] Forrest in Forrest Park. I don't guess you saw that.

PIEHLER: No, I haven't seen the Forrest ...

WOOD: Nathan Bedford Forrest. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Do you remember going to, say, Armistice Day? Did you ever see Armistice Day parades or ceremonies?

WOOD: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. We used to go downtown and see the Armistice Day parade and we had—my doctor, was Dr. Quinn and his brother was a hero of World War I. And one of the things I remember mostly about that is the ... when they buried him at Elmwood Cemetery, they had a twenty-one gun salute and did all the military honors and everything and they had some big general that came and did ... the program and all. I was a fairly young person then and I remember that. That has always stuck in my memory. The Jim Quinn Award, later, was given to the best ROTC unit in the city of Memphis, and that was quite an honor. Jim Quinn was, as I say, a hero in World War I, and his brother was my pediatrician when I was growing up. He was my doctor, so I always had a good relationship there with Jim Quinn.

PIEHLER: You mentioned the Forrest monument that was also—would you ever go to Confederate Memorial Day ceremonies?

WOOD: No, I very rarely did, but I do remember ... that monument used to scare me. It is—you didn't see it, but he's riding on a horse and it's very realistic, but it's a ... I don't know whether it's copper or bronze, but it has over the years turned green, you know.

PIEHLER: Yes. Yeah.

WOOD: And it has gotten to be where, I mean, if you see it in, particularly in partial sunlight, it's really an eerie looking thing. It looks like he's ready to just gallop right out and get at you. And of course, he was quite a soldier.

PIEHLER: Well, I thought we would ask you a few more questions about Korea and then we might continue this [interview] either when you come into town or we come back to ... Memphis. So let me let Nashwa ...

VAN HOUTS: Okay. When I read your memoir, there were a lot of things that I thought that I'd like to discuss with you, and I probably can't get them all through tonight. But the first thing that I really was interested to read about was the way that you felt that the U.S. Army—I thought that at times you were critical of the U.S. Army, and it was kind of, it was nice to see someone really being honest, and kind of saying what they thought. In particular, when you were talking about when you were in Japan and you were getting sent to Korea for combat and yet you're being told that you were never meant to be a combat unit. Can you talk a bit about that? In the very beginning of your memoir, when you ...

PIEHLER: When you say the senator ...

WOOD: Oh, oh. Oh, yes, yes. Well, what I was being critical about was, of course, the Forty-fifth Division was an Oklahoma National Guard Division ...

VAN HOUTS: Yes, yes.

WOOD: And there was a politician over there who was a famous senator from Oklahoma, and he was on the Senate war relations Army something, he's supposed to be in the know. And what happened was, he came and we had a pass-through of—the whole division marched around and then he made a speech. We were in ... training in Louisiana at the time at Camp Polk. And he made the statement that the Forty-fifth Division had been nationalized from Oklahoma to replace some of the units of American divisions, regular army divisions that had to go to Korea, and that we would be a training division, and we would not have to go. If we did have to go, we would more than likely go to Germany. That's what he said. Well, I was trying to make a funny. It just, we all laughed about it because within two weeks ...

VAN HOUTS: You were off to Japan.

WOOD: ... we were alerted to go to Japan, where he said we wouldn't be going.

VAN HOUTS: Right. And then after that, on to Korea.

WOOD: Then he came to Japan to visit his great Forty-fifth Division from Oklahoma to let them know that they were doing a great job over there ... doing occupation duty in Japan, and this is where you're going to be and you won't be assigned to any combat. (Laughter) Well, again, it wasn't two weeks before we had been alerted that we were going into Korea. And so it kind of got to be a laughing thing among the guys. [They said], "Don't let Senator Kerr come

here anymore. There's no telling where we'll ... we'll be going to the Yalu River. I wasn't being critical. It was kind of a funny thing ... (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: Funny, yeah. I thought it was funny, too.

WOOD: It was funny. It was really funny as a crutch. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: How long did you stay in Japan?

WOOD: We were there, let's see we went over—that's another kind of a story. We left out of New Orleans, the division, we went down through the canal and we were going to head across, directly across to Japan. And we got one guy that got meningitis onboard, so we had to pull into the harbor at San Diego. They wouldn't let us come all the way in because we were quarantined. We stayed out in the harbor while they came and took this fellow off the ship and took him someplace under quarantine. All of our guys that had been in close ...

VAN HOUTS: Contact?

WOOD: ... contact with him during the trip through the canal zone and all were quarantined to one part of the ship. It was kind of a rough situation, and they had some kind of pills that we all had to take once a day to supposedly ward off any—nothing ever happened, but we stayed there in the harbor for, oh, I guess several days, and then we went on our way and landed in ... the whole trip from New Orleans through the zone and across to, we went to the northern island of Hokkaido and took about twenty-eight days, which was an awfully long trip.

VAN HOUTS: Yes.

WOOD: Especially when you're cramped up with a whole regiment on a little Liberty Ship.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: And that ...

PIEHLER: Oh, you were on a Liberty Ship.

WOOD: We were on a Liberty Ship, yes.

PIEHLER: Which aren't the most comfortable ...

WOOD: They're not the most comfortable thing. We had—the junior officers, like myself, company-grade officers were four to a state room, which normally took two people in a state room.

VAN HOUTS: Nice.

WOOD: There were four of us in there.

PIEHLER: But your men were in ...

WOOD: And the men were in much worse shape. They were down in the holes and they were stacked up. And the ship was not very well air conditioned ... and even though this wasn't a particularly cold time of the year, it—we had come down through the canal zone and all and it had been awfully, seemed like the—and we got a little cooler when we got on out into the Pacific, but up until then, it was tough.

VAN HOUTS: And it's funny ...

WOOD: But it took about twenty-eight days, and then we were in Japan training from ... I guess from about the end of April 'til we were alerted to go into Korea in the end of November.

VAN HOUTS: It's quite funny that although you were with the army, although you were in the navy the first time, that your first time on the sea was with the army. I find that quite ironic.

WOOD: Yeah. Fact is I had more days of sea duty in the army than the navy.

VAN HOUTS: [Simultaneously] In the army than in the navy!

WOOD: I don't know whether I mentioned that or not.

VAN HOUTS: In Japan, you said that you had contact with New Zealanders and Australians.

WOOD: I had contact with them after I had been in Korea.

VAN HOUTS: Oh, was that ...

WOOD: That was on my way home.

VAN HOUTS: Oh, okay.

WOOD: And I was in a bar in Tokyo ...

VAN HOUTS: Right, so ...

WOOD: ... that's where I ran into ...

VAN HOUTS: But on your way to Korea, you did not ...

WOOD: I didn't see any of them. Now, I saw ... Australians over, we were next to the Commonwealth Division. You already stole my story there about being on a picnic.

VAN HOUTS: We'll get to that.

WOOD: Yeah. Okay.

VAN HOUTS: So, in Korea, what—as an occupational force, what was Japan like? Because it was only, you know, five years after the war.

WOOD: Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: What was it like?

WOOD: Well, it was really nice for the American GI in Japan. We were, you know, we were looked up to as being ... real great guys.

VAN HOUTS: By the local Japanese?

WOOD: Well, you know, I have always ... I hate to say this, and maybe I shouldn't, but I never have really honestly trusted the Japanese. We had Japanese houseboys when we were in—some of us had good results. I had things missing that I never knew where they went, but it was no one else unless it was a Japanese houseboy. And everybody talked about how honest and everything the Japanese are, they wouldn't take a thing. I think they took a lot of things. (Laughs) But they were a defeated country and they were working at a very low rate of pay, and I guess I can understand why they might take things and go on the black market or someplace and sell them.

VAN HOUTS: And so how much poverty did you see in Japan? Was it terrible?

WOOD: No, I didn't ...

VAN HOUTS: As bad as Korea, or not?

WOOD: No, I didn't see a lot of poverty. Actually, I was amazed at how well Japan had, in the six years since they dropped the bombs, how well they had recovered. Fact is, we came through on a troop train, I think I may have mentioned that, through Hiroshima, and we stopped at the rail station, which was almost at ground zero, and you couldn't tell anything had ever happened. You look out at streets and buildings and everything, just new.

VAN HOUTS: So could you get a feeling of what the Japanese attitude was? Whether they felt that they'd been justifiably defeated, or could you ...

WOOD: It's like I said, I never did quite trust them, and some of the younger ones were downright, not rude, but almost like they were, they didn't appreciate you.

VAN HOUTS: Really?

WOOD: And we would ride through towns and little Japanese kids—we'd be in trucks going on maneuvers and what have you and little Japanese kids, they would wave at us from the street, but they'd be giving us the finger. (Laughter) They were too young to even know what that meant,

so their parents had had to tell them, “Be sure when the Yankees come by, give them that finger.” (Laughter) And that happened all the time. Every time you went through any town. It was almost universal.

VAN HOUTS: And your wife joined you in Japan?

WOOD: No, she was never in Japan.

VAN HOUTS: She was not? I thought she came. Oh, I’m sorry, she was in Louisiana. I apologize.

WOOD: Yeah, she was in Louisiana.

VAN HOUTS: Okay. And so when you were in Japan, how close were you to your men? Were you very close to them and you saw them all the time, or as an occupational force, were you out there doing different things?

WOOD: No, I was with my men. We were a tactical unit, and we went on a lot of problems together and we did a lot of training together, and we also got alerts. And we had alerts where we had to—the directions were right across the Straits of Sakhalia Island. It was almost, you could go up there to a little town, I can’t remember the name of that little town now, but you could almost throw a rock across the Straits of Sakhalia and the Russians were there and we were on this side, the Japanese side.

VAN HOUTS: And you were almost ...

WOOD: So every time we would have an alert, which would happen on any, mostly on any kind of a—like Memorial Day, they had their Red Army Days and things like that. We would get alerted to go, and our position was right in this fort right across from, and we would place charges and things on oil tanks and have everything ready to destroy the whole fort facility if the Russians came across, or if they threatened to come across.

VAN HOUTS: Did you ...

WOOD: But we didn’t have to.

VAN HOUTS: You didn’t have to. And did you honestly think they would come across when you were there?

WOOD: Yeah, there was some, of course, things that, you know, we—there was a lot of feeling that the Russians were behind the whole thing that happened in North Korea.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: Although it turned out the Chinese were the ones that came, but they came basically because we had threatened their borders. But the real support for the North Koreans doing what

they did, and a lot of their equipment was from Russia. So, yeah, we felt like ... they were strong enough and had enough forces over in that area that they could've very easily come across. So we, we were—it wasn't just playing war games. We were there ...

VAN HOUTS: It was a real threat.

WOOD: A real threat. Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: And because you were, you know, it was six years after the war, how much American popular culture had got to Japan by that time of, you know, all that occupation time? Were there lots of American movies for you to see at that stage?

WOOD: Well, they had a lot of the American dress. A lot of them had begun to dress like Americans.

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

WOOD: They had, they weren't wearing the traditional ... kabukis and things like they had at one time. They had American movies. We very rarely went to those movies because they were all in Japanese language.

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

WOOD: In the Japanese theaters.

VAN HOUTS: Uh huh.

WOOD: They did have big pictures of some of our stars. They particularly liked, oh, gosh. I'm drawing a blank now.

PIEHLER: Gary Cooper?

WOOD: They liked him, but ...

PIEHLER: Cary Grant?

WOOD: No. And they liked Cary Grant, but, gosh!

PIEHLER: A male star?

WOOD: Yeah, probably the greatest of all.

PIEHLER: Jimmy Stewart?

WOOD: No.

PIEHLER: Humphrey Bogart?

WOOD: No.

VAN HOUTS: Dean Martin or, who was the other guy?

WOOD: This fellow's wife was killed in a plane crash. Oh ...

PIEHLER: I think this will be something we'll have to write in the transcript.

WOOD: Well, probably so. Anyway, gosh, isn't that awful? But his picture would be on big billboards. Oh, in *Gone With The Wind*.

VAN HOUTS: Cary Grant!

WOOD: No.

PIEHLER: No, Clark Gable.

WOOD: Clark Gable.

VAN HOUTS: Clark Gable! That's who I was thinking of.

WOOD: Clark Gable.

PIEHLER: So you remember seeing Clark Gable in Japanese movie posters?

WOOD: Oh, big, big, big pictures of Clark Gable. They loved him over there. Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: And what about music? How much American music was there by then?

WOOD: Very little.

VAN HOUTS: Very little?

WOOD: They had most of their—we'd sing some of their songs.

VAN HOUTS: Japanese songs?

WOOD: Yeah. We learned them, and we'd sing them. We'd ...

VAN HOUTS: And did you get to go to a lot of teahouses or saki houses?

WOOD: Saki houses?

VAN HOUTS: Yeah.

WOOD: Well, there were a lot of so-called geisha houses.

VAN HOUTS: Geisha houses?

WOOD: But they really weren't geisha houses, they were hookers. They were ...

VAN HOUTS: And so did you see geishas?

WOOD: I saw some geishas. The real geishas were in the more ...

VAN HOUTS: I know.

WOOD: ... elite theaters and things. But they had a lot of places they called geisha houses which were no more than just bawdy houses.

VAN HOUTS: Right. Right. And did you hear of your men going to them, or they were well ...

WOOD: Well, yes, we had a lot of that.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: We had a real serious problem with venereal disease.

VAN HOUTS: Okay.

WOOD: And we had, that was one of the things we had to be very careful about. We had—there were some real nice, I guess you'd call them spas, in Japan where they had hot springs and you could go into the bathhouses and of course, we had heard ...

PIEHLER: Hold on.

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

WOOD: You'd go into these places and they had, the bathhouse, they would pipe just hot springs water down into the bathhouse, and they'd have a series of about five or six ... places for you to jump into and you go from one to the other, and you really were supposed to go from the one that wasn't quite as hot to the next one. You'd step up in terms of the hotness. And we had a couple of our guys, we went up there, and we were on a weekend pass and staying at this very elite hotel there that had these five or six tubs to get into. And you went into the dressing room and you took off your clothes and you were given a towel that you were supposed to cover your privates as you walked out there, but our guys didn't know that. (Laughter) And they would go in and they had always heard that, you know, the Japanese would bathe in the raw, so they'd say, well, just walk on out there. Well, it started out then all these Japanese women just started

giggling and laughing and here they were strolling out there. (Laughter) And then they suddenly realized that they were the only ones ...

VAN HOUTS: Naked!

WOOD: Everybody else, when they got out of the pools and all, had covered themselves up. So they started jumping into the wrong end of the pool.

VAN HOUTS: Oh! And they scalded themselves! (Laughter)

WOOD: And they were scalding, and that was just, so that just turned everything upside down. These Japanese thought we were crazy, I guess.

PIEHLER: Which is interesting, it's just an interesting cultural thing, because the baths are really a dying culture in Japan.

WOOD: The what?

PIEHLER: The baths that you had ...

WOOD: Yeah, it is, I guess, kind of dying out. Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: Would you talk to your men openly about venereal disease? Was that ...

WOOD: What?

VAN HOUTS: Would you speak with your men openly about things like venereal disease?

WOOD: Oh, yes. We had ... training films. We had studies and things to try to convince the men to have abstinence and all, but ...

VAN HOUTS: It didn't do any good?

WOOD: It didn't seem to do much good. I say much good. It was just a, it wasn't everybody, but there were a handful of them that seemed to just get involved with the wrong kind of people and stuff, and so we did have a lot of it. And there was some feeling for some time that it might be something that the enemy was trying to do, trying to ... put these people in harm's way.

VAN HOUTS: Did you really ever buy into that, or ...

WOOD: I tell you what, I saw some mighty crazy things, and I just have to say that I'm not so sure that ... plus, you know, being away from home for a long time, the men, you know, had some reason to do what they were doing, I guess, but, I can understand now when I've heard tales about World War II and World War I when they actually furnished places for the men to go to have sex, that I can kind of understand that. We didn't have such things over in Japan, and it was really awful, bad situation. I'm sorry to get into that.

VAN HOUTS: No, that's part of it. Okay, so ...

WOOD: And I didn't put any of that, I don't think, in my memoirs.

VAN HOUTS: No. No, that's why I was interested, because you didn't really talk very much about Japan and I wanted to hear more about it. [To Piehler] Do you have any more questions about Japan?

PIEHLER: No, not about Japan.

VAN HOUTS: Okay, we'll move to the next stage. (Laughs) Okay, so moving into Korea, the first thing that really struck me, was your story about being in the snow and digging and thinking it was a tree root and then realizing ...

WOOD: Yeah. It was, that really—very, very came home very strong to me, that the first night on the line you move up there and you're in a strange country and a strange place and it is freezing cold and you're, you don't have a bunker yet. You're laying out there in a slit trench that's not deep enough for anything, and you're trying to dig it a little deeper, a little deeper to make sure that you get yourself in cover from any artillery fire or anything. And so you know, you run into things that you think are tree limbs. That's what happened, and then when morning comes and you look over there and you see a grotesque hand just reaching up out of the, it's just awful. I dream about it, even now.

VAN HOUTS: You still dream about it?

WOOD: Well, not still, but I did for a long time.

VAN HOUTS: I understand.

WOOD: Yeah. It's kind of awful. It was the first taste I had of seeing people dead and decayed like that. Saw a lot of it later on, especially when it began to thaw, you know, and there were so many dead bodies. The whole place just smelled awful. There were—you found, we hadn't—most of the places that we were, the positions we were on had originally been Chinese and they'd been pushed off as we moved up over the 38th parallel, so most of them were dead Chinese, but we didn't know. Some of them, we had the graves registration people come up and they would try to make identifications of these bodies.

VAN HOUTS: And once you—like, in the morning when you realized what had happened, how quickly was that body taken away from where you were?

WOOD: Oh, it was quite a while ...

VAN HOUTS: Yeah. They had ...

WOOD: ... you had to wait for the graves registration people to come, and sometimes they were maybe a day or so before they came out.

VAN HOUTS: So you had to live with it all that time?

WOOD: Yeah. Yeah. We tried to put things over there in the way of it, so you wouldn't see it.

VAN HOUTS: And the other thing is that first, I think it was the first night that you're there, and you said that you heard a voice ...

WOOD: Oh, yeah. That's what the ...

VAN HOUTS: The title of the book.

WOOD: Well, you know, the amazing thing about that was it was very eerie because ... we had come across and the division had come over there to replace the First Cavalry Division, and it was a very, supposedly a very secretive move, that we moved out of Japan and came over and moved up and took over their positions, the First Cavalry. And to be up there on the first night and have this loudspeaker blast forth that, in fairly decent English, "B Company, tonight you die." I still hear that.

VAN HOUTS: I bet that was awful.

WOOD: And a lot of our guys didn't hear it, but a lot did, so when we have our [reunions], you know, when I, the guys will say, "I don't remember that. I remember the crackling of the loudspeaker, but I didn't remember a voice saying, 'B Company, tonight you die.'" I had remembered it very distinctly, and I couldn't understand, well, why did they know we were B Company?

VAN HOUTS: That was what I wondered.

WOOD: Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: And it's ...

WOOD: Of course, it could've been a good guess. I mean, there are three rifle companies in a regiment, in a battalion. The First Battalion is A, B, and C rifle companies. The Second Battalion is E, F, and G, and the Third Battalion is J, K, and F.

VAN HOUTS: Yeah.

WOOD: So they, out of the twelve, let's see ... nine. Out of the nine, they had one chance of being right. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: And they did.

WOOD: But that's not, you know, very likely. They must know somewhat.

VAN HOUTS: That's the other thing. You said in the memoir that before you knew—I'm sorry when you were in Japan, your house servants knew where you were going before you ...

WOOD: They knew before we did. They really did. They said, they told us, even, my houseboy even told us who we were going to replace, that we were going to replace the First Cavalry Division.

VAN HOUTS: So how did ...

WOOD: And they knew where we would be. They told us we were going to be in the Yonchon Corridor. They said that. How they knew, I don't know, because it was a secret, but that's right where we ended up. (Laughter) We thought they were just trying to guess, trying to ... but they somehow knew.

PIEHLER: Or they made a really, really good guess. I mean, but ...

WOOD: Well, yeah ...

VAN HOUTS: I don't think they could guess that precisely.

WOOD: And, of course, there was almost a direct pipeline between—we had what was called ... I'm trying to think. There was a, what do they call them? Was it White Koreans or maybe it was the White Russians. Some—there was a group in Japan that was very close to the Japanese people but also very close to Chinese Koreans, North Koreans. It was almost like a direct pipeline, some of the stuff that got out they knew about. So I don't think it was that strange that they somehow ...

VAN HOUTS: Knew before you did.

WOOD: ... knew that we were coming.

VAN HOUTS: The other thing is when you were sent in and you saw the First Cavalry, how were they? How fatigued were they and how ...

WOOD: The First Cavalry?

VAN HOUTS: Yep.

WOOD: They had taken a lot of beatings in different places and some of the guys that had been there a long time were pretty bad shape, but they rotated home pretty quickly. They left some of their worst soldiers with us.

VAN HOUTS: You talk about that. [in your memoirs]

WOOD: Yes. The ones that didn't have enough points to go back or maybe hadn't been over there long enough and the ones—if they were good soldiers, they took them with them where they were going, back on occupation duty over in Japan, and they took their good ones with them. They left the ...

VAN HOUTS: The misfits, I think he calls them. The misfits.

WOOD: They were misfits.

VAN HOUTS: When you saw them, how did that make you feel? And did you get a sense of what, that would happen to you, or that you would experience the same things? What did you think as they were leaving and you were going in?

WOOD: Yeah. No, I didn't get any kind of feeling like that.

VAN HOUTS: You didn't?

WOOD: No. We felt like, we had—notwithstanding what the regular army people thought about the Forty-fifth Division, we had trained for over a year there in Japan together and we were a well tuned outfit, and I had a good platoon, probably the best platoon in the whole Forty-fifth Division, in my opinion. And I didn't have any doubts but what we would make it through and we would do whatever we had to do. And ...

VAN HOUTS: Do you think your men felt the same way? That you would get through it? Do you think they were just as confident?

WOOD: Actually, that is another thing that is kind of an old wives tale, or an old soldiers' tale, I guess. You know people that really worry that they're going to get shot or hit or maimed are the ones that usually get it. The ones who are very positive that they're going to make it through—so you try to keep a very positive mind that you're going to make it through.

VAN HOUTS: Uh huh.

WOOD: That's one of the things. Of course, the other things is—I've had a lot of people disagree with this, but it is true. It was true in our outfit that we didn't want anybody, we tried to keep people from going back to the aid station and getting a Purple Heart, because ...

VAN HOUTS: It's a superstition.

WOOD: Yeah. It was kind of a superstition, because if you weren't hit bad enough to be evacuated, and it was something that the medical corpsman could bandage and take care of, you didn't dare go back to the battalion aid station, because then they would put you in for a Purple Heart and all like this. We tried to keep from having any Purple Hearts.

PIEHLER: You felt like, I almost get a sense also you felt the Purple Heart is for someone who *really* got wounded.

WOOD: Yeah, somebody that *really* got wounded and hurt bad and needed ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean ...

VAN HOUTS: Deserved it. Yeah.

WOOD: And if you got a Purple Heart for a scratch or things—and the unfortunate thing is the higher up the people, in order to try to make a big impression, you were talking about impressions about ... the big impression they tried to have is the more casualties you had indicated that you had been in the thick of it, and so they tried, and we'd had people say, "Lieutenant," say, "you come back off this patrol, be sure that every man, I don't care if he's just scratched, goes back to the aid station and gets checked in." I said, "Well, are you afraid they'll get tetanus or something? We had all our tetanus shots and everything." "No, no, no. But we just want to be sure that it gets recorded in their personnel file that they were wounded." Well, they weren't really wounded, a lot of them, you know. So, but they wanted it mainly because they'd be able to show in their morning report that the First Battalion had so many casualties that day and that meant that they were really engaged with the enemy.

VAN HOUTS: So, I just ...

WOOD: So we didn't like to do that.

VAN HOUTS: I just want to skip forward now to the story in your memoir about your own ... where you fall down off the bank and the middle of combat. Can you talk about that a little bit?

WOOD: Well, the big thing was that we went up—this was the first daylight assault in our whole regiment on a known occupied position and we were very careful going up this sheer, almost sheer cliff to try to get out with as much ... even though we had tremendous fire support going, tanks firing over our head and machine guns on either flank, firing at the crest of this hill. Even though we had all this going, we were still trying to move up as cautiously and quietly as we could, so that we would—our mission was to determine ...

VAN HOUTS: The enemy ...

WOOD: ... the condition of the enemy, whether they had been there for a period of time or not. And I even asked the battalion commander, when he told me, gave me my ... mission, I said, "Well, how do you tell whether they've been there?" He said, "Well, you look and see whether they've got haircuts or whether they've got clean shaven, whether they look clean. Mainly haircuts." So that patrol has been designated all along as the hair, the patrol to ...

VAN HOUTS: The hair cut checking. (Laughs)

WOOD: The hair cut patrol. And, but anyway, we got up to the crest of the hill pretty readily, without ... and this Jack Bond, by the way, who is a Knoxville fellow. Jack was my squad leader that was leading his squad up the hill and his idea when he spotted the enemy was to pat

on his head to let me know that they were there, and then we were going to open up with our fire coming up the thing. So he gave that signal and about the same time he gave the signal, I saw one of the Chinese there in the trench and I saw Jack fire at him and hit him. I mean, the guy pitched up, but about the same time all these ... grenades started rolling over the parapet and rolling down. Well, we were so close up to the top of the thing that they start, when they started exploding, they had rolled down past us, and they started exploding down past us. And they were potato masher grenades, the type that if you don't get hit by the handle or the ...

VAN HOUTS: Oh, you bounce up.

WOOD: ... casing, if you don't get hit by one of those, you're all right. They're concussion-type grenades, rather than fragmentation. Our grenades are really horrible. They're very fragmentation-type grenades. That was another thing we had to be very careful, when our guys threw a grenade up, to make sure that grenade went into that trench and didn't roll back down on us. So, you had that problem. But when I started back down off of this hill when these, 'cause I had gave the signal for us to withdraw. And when I started back down, I took one turn and I didn't realize, but I took one step and I went down almost ...

VAN HOUTS: Straight down. (Laughs)

WOOD: ... a hundred feet down into this creek bed, down at the base of this hill. And we had been spending all this time going up and I was down in—well, I landed with my carbine [gun]. I had it on full automatic and it just, when it hit ... I kind of braced myself with it, but it started firing back up the hill at my own men. Well, it was awful. But anyway, to answer your question, how did I feel? One thing is I felt a certain amount of relief that I'd gotten back down off the hill without being hit by one of the grenades, and the other thing I felt a lot of relief that I hadn't hit somebody with my own ...

VAN HOUTS: Gun.

WOOD: ... gun. That was—and I had a messenger, he lives up in Illinois, and he was right by my side and he remembers the whole thing. And the radioman was there. And, of course, as part of the story goes, we had signals about how to pull out and that sort of thing.

VAN HOUTS: And then meanwhile, you say that later you found out that you were nominated for, I think, an act of bravery, or ...

WOOD: Yeah, well, I got a ... Bronze Star for Valor.

VAN HOUTS: A Bronze Star for Valor.

WOOD: Yeah. Actually, my company commander and Jack Bond put me in for it. And they put me in for a Silver Star, but ...

VAN HOUTS: You got a bronze one.

WOOD: I got a Bronze Star, which was not as big. But a Bronze Star is a good, shows valor, that you were ...

VAN HOUTS: And you ...

WOOD: ... under fire. But the thing that did kindly get to me was when I would—somebody explained to me that I had been put in, but they don't award Silver Stars on a retrograde movement. I said, "Well, it wasn't a retrograde movement. We had done our job. We went up and we determined how many ... what kind of condition they were in, how many men were up there, and we were able to account for about eight ... killed in action Chinese." And by actual count, not ours, but some of the artillery men on a flanking position saw a bunch of the Chinese come out of the back side of the hill and were hit with ... recoilless rifles and things. So, but the retrograde movement kind of teed me off at first. It really wasn't a retrograde movement. It was an assault to the rear. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: And the other thing that I was, in the beginning of the memoir, is when you talk about how cold it was in Korea, and the story about how you would go to sleep and your eyelids would freeze shut. I mean that ...

WOOD: That was the first time that ever happened to me.

VAN HOUTS: I'm not surprised.

WOOD: You know, I—it was not something you got used to because that was the first couple of nights that we were on the land before we had nice bunkers and we finally got bunkers built, despite what the people said. We got bunkers that were built and they were nice. We even had little coal oil stoves in there that, or diesel oil stoves. That gave us a bit of warmth in there. So we didn't have that, except when we'd be on a hundred percent alert and have to be outdoors. In twenty degrees below zero, anything you had would freeze. So we had these arctic ... sleeping bags that we—they were breakaway bags that everything in it, you zipped up the inner liner and you zipped up the outer liner and all that was left open was about this much. (Gestures with hands)

PIEHLER: Just a little around your eyes.

WOOD: Just a little around your eyes and nose.

VAN HOUTS: And you slept with your guns as well, didn't you?

WOOD: And you slept with your gun, so that—and they were breakaway, so that if, you know, you had to get out of it in a hurry, all you had to do was break it open, and it just popped open like a shell, I guess. But anyway ...

VAN HOUTS: What was I ...

PIEHLER: I wanted to just ... point out something. It was interesting to read, because one of the things I never fully realized until I started doing oral histories with World War II veterans is things like instant coffee, you know, that it comes out of World War II. And I was struck by Kellogg's ...

WOOD: Kellogg.

PIEHLER: ... those little snack, basically Kellogg's little snack pack. I never realized those were developed for Korea.

WOOD: The bowl pack.

PIEHLER: ... the little, you know ...

WOOD: That is what my understanding is, as I said.

PIEHLER: But you had them, I mean, and it's your understanding that they were ...

WOOD: Well, I didn't understand that while I was over there, that they had been developed strictly for the Korean ...

PIEHLER: For the Korean War, but they became ...

WOOD: But later, when we did some work with the Kellogg Company I was told that that was developed strictly for that. And they were great, because, you know, they, you can just take your knife and open it up. And I lived off of Kellogg bowl pack and peaches for almost five months.

VAN HOUTS: And the other thing that I was kind of amused about was the lack of showering that you were able to do.

WOOD: Yeah, yeah. No ...

VAN HOUTS: You said didn't shower in five months.

WOOD: Well, I had one shower.

VAN HOUTS: One shower. I'm sorry, one shower in five months. I really enjoyed ...

WOOD: In the shower tents back on the Inchon River.

VAN HOUTS: That story about how you tried, you showered for the first time and the clothes that you put on.

WOOD: Took off the clothes in the first tent, went through the shower tent, and in the last tent where we picked up a new set of clothes, they were not as ... yeah. They were worse off than

the clothes that we had taken off in the first place. A lot of guys said, “Let me go back and get my old clothes!” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I’m curious—you mentioned about casualties and attitudes. You were in a very static war, where you really were trying to hold the line and really be preventative, but you weren’t, you had no illusions about trying to take, you know, driving the Chinese back to the Yalu River. Was there any tension between higher up and yourself and, in a sense, your men over the amount of patrolling and how patrolling would work? Because I guess ...

WOOD: It wasn’t any tension. Our guys, again, I have to say that I think we had the best platoon in the whole Forty-fifth Division. You give them something to do, they would very seldom volunteer for anything, but you could tell them, ask them to go out on patrol at night and do this, that, and the other, and they’d do it without any questions.

PIEHLER: So you didn’t get a sense ...

WOOD: Pardon me.

PIEHLER: No, I—you didn’t get a sense that higher ups wanted you to do more patrolling in your case? That you got feedback that you were doing enough patrolling and were aggressive enough in that?

WOOD: Well, we were patrolling every day and every night.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

WOOD: And I don’t know how we could’ve done a lot more. I didn’t get a feeling that they wanted us to do more ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, so ...

WOOD: ... I got a feeling that we were doing just what they wanted us to do. And ... you know, those kind of patrols were, even though you weren’t making a fire assault, you oftentimes were subject to sniper fire and subject to ... being, well ... surprised and what have you. So we had a lot of firefights.

VAN HOUTS: So who ...

WOOD: ... we had a lot of firefights, even though we weren’t trying to take and hold. We were trying to hold positions, we weren’t trying to take new ground, except that, you know, as the peace talks were on, it got a little bit—our guys began to think, well, you know, we’re just gonna hold this here until the next round of peace talks and then we get taken back off of it, and then we’re going to have to go back up and take it again. And, you know, there was a lot of that feeling. And actually, a lot of that happened after I left, I guess.

VAN HOUTS: So, who's idea was it that you would start creeping up on the Japanese, the Chinese at night, sorry, and sandbagging them?

WOOD: Oh, well, we had a need to get some prisoners, and we were not taking enough prisoners, and we weren't getting good ... information on what type units were opposing us and that sort of thing. So we did a couple of operations that were—we tried two things. We tried to make the Chinese believe that we'd pulled back off the hills, and we wouldn't let our men out during the daytime at all. They'd stay in their bunkers. We quit firing ... artillery, and we went on just a total silence. And that was gauged to try to make the Chinese think maybe we had pulled off, and they'd send patrols over looking for us, and when they'd send patrols over looking for us, maybe we could capture some of their people. Well, so the idea came up, "How are you going to capture these people?" (Laughter) And one way was lay in wait. You had these hills and then in between the hills you had these ... kind of passageways that came up these draws, and that's always the way the Chinese did. They came up these draws and they would encircle you and that sort of thing. So their patrols would come up these draws rather than trying to come up the bald-faced hills and the idea was to lay in wait alongside these paths and ... the Chinese all wore soft hats, they didn't wear ...

VAN HOUTS: That's right. They didn't wear helmets.

WOOD: They didn't wear steel helmets. So the idea was, and I don't know who came up with the idea, but it was fill these GI socks with these rocks and stuff and go out there and sandbag them. What you do is you lay in wait and let 'em go by and you sandbag the last one. And as I said in the story, we didn't—we ended up with a lot of guys getting frostbite laying in wait all night long in one spot, and we did have one or two firefights as a result of somebody trying to take a prisoner. But we did—now that system worked in a number of places.

VAN HOUTS: Just not for you.

WOOD: Ours didn't seem to work. We just didn't work.

VAN HOUTS: And what about the ...

WOOD: But we did get a lot of frostbite. (Laughter)

VAN HOUTS: And in that story, you talk about the guy that you had to stop, the Japanese-American GI, who kept volunteering, and you had to stop ...

WOOD: Nisei, yeah.

VAN HOUTS: Was he really just that anti-Chinese and that willing ...

WOOD: He was just a gung-ho guy that, yes I think he was, you know, he was part Japanese and I think one of the things was that this—I've read stories about the Nisei in World War II, and that they tried to overcome that feeling against Japanese by being very brave. He was a very

brave soldier, and fact is, he almost, I had to stop him from, he volunteered to go just about every patrol we had.

VAN HOUTS: So you think he was ...

WOOD: He wanted to go. And then he also, he was one of my messengers, and I had to stop him from being a messenger because he would sneak around, and there's nothing worse than having somebody sneaking around at night and you hear him and ...

VAN HOUTS: What was he doing when he was sneaking?

WOOD: Well, he was maybe checking on to see if people were alert in different—well, we had a lot of problems with people staying alert at night when they're supposed to be alert in their bunkers and their firing positions and that sort of thing. Sometimes we had people that would absolutely go to sleep sitting there in their sleeping bags in the flank at night, and we had a lot of problems with alertness.

VAN HOUTS: So you felt that ...

WOOD: So he ... that was one of the things he did. He'd go around and check on that and I had to stop him, because ...

PIEHLER: He could've gotten killed. I mean ...

WOOD: Oh, absolutely. Because I had a lot of my guys come up and say, "Lieutenant, you got to take ..."

VAN HOUTS: George, isn't it?

WOOD: George.

VAN HOUTS: It starts with a 'G.'

WOOD: Yeah. George Kosimoto or something like that.

VAN HOUTS: Anyway ...

WOOD: Yes. "You got to take him off that job." And I did. He later, I heard that he later did get a battlefield commission.

VAN HOUTS: So how, just to skip forward a little bit, how many of your men do you see now and hear about now? I'm just interested.

WOOD: Well, I go on a, I just came back on a platoon reunion, and there were sixteen of my platoon members there and their wives or escorts. So I guess we had about thirty there in all.

And then sometimes I go annually to our division reunion in Oklahoma City, and I see as many as thirty or forty there that I knew.

VAN HOUTS: And in your memoir, you talk about just how hard it was for you when you came back with your trauma. Did they go through the same thing as you did?

WOOD: Trauma?

VAN HOUTS: Yeah.

WOOD: A lot of them did that and worse, yeah. I don't know that. You know, mine was kind of a strange thing. Mine was—I had one particular friend that had been in World War II, but he—and he was in the reserves, and somehow or another he got out of being called up again, and when I got home, you know, he kind of [was] kidding me about some things, one thing or another. I just, it just didn't, I was all mixed up. I thought there were so many people that didn't go that should've gone. A lot of people that were in the reserves, and I think I told about, I don't know that I told all about it, but they had a passing review out here at the naval, or at the army reserve center, when I got my medal, and then they offered to let me come to the reserve unit because they would like to hear my war stories, and for me to be a training officer. Well, at first it didn't sound bad and I thought about it and I went to a couple of reserve meetings, and lo and behold, I found out that the guys that had been there when I went over were still there and some of them had never even been in the service, never been on active duty, and they sat there in the reserves the whole time and here I had been having to go to combat. Didn't make—and they were holding down the good positions in the reserve unit, and here all they wanted to do, and I was supposed to, I had been promoted to first lieutenant and somehow or another I got put back to second-lieutenant, and I didn't like it. They said, "Well, that's just because you were ORC and you were AUS and now you're ORC and one thing or another." And [I] said, "You'll, we'll put you in and you'll get your promotion, but it'll be as of this date." And here these guys, some of them never had any combat ...

PIEHLER: Combat.

WOOD: ... experience or any active duty experience, even, and they were holding down the good positions. So I got, you know, I just, I got all mixed up. I thought the whole world was against me for a while. And I was having bad dreams. I was dreaming all kinds of things and I, about that time, they were exchanging prisoners and some of them weren't coming back and I just got where I was writing letters to the newspaper all the time. My wife said, "Stop that writing those letters!" (Laughter) I even wrote Matthew Ridgeway.

VAN HOUTS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You quoted that [in your memoir]. Yeah.

WOOD: Yeah. And I didn't ever hear from him.

VAN HOUTS: How hard was it on your wife as you were going through, because you credit her with really helping you to get through it.

WOOD: Well, it was hard on her, but one of the things was part of ... my wife and my church and my ministers that had been praying for me the whole time, they were all good friends and worked with me and talked with me.

VAN HOUTS: And your wife was able to see that there was post-war trauma? That you were ...

WOOD: She helped me a whole lot, yeah. I can't put any definite fingers on it, but just, like, keeping me from writing so many letters was one thing. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I'm curious—in your memoir, there's a real tone of, it may be grudging, but a real tone of respect for your Chinese adversaries. That they were, in many ways, a very worthy adversary. They were very tough to take as prisoners, while a lot of their equipment was inferior. They still used ...

WOOD: Some of the things they had were ...

PIEHLER: Well, you mentioned the flares, but even so, I mean, they were a very tough adversary.

WOOD: Yeah.

PIEHLER: They, you had to really know what you were doing, because ...

WOOD: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. Well, I won't say I respected them. But you know they had tactics that were totally built around the hordes and the masses of people they had. And I mean their tactics were really good. The only thing that I felt like that they were kind of stupid about was when they would begin to get all these people together at sundown to make their mass assaults and all. And they would get in these valleys where we had good view on them and we could just drop in artillery on them like, it was horrible. And I just felt like they were, like that's it, a bunch of turkeys sitting out there and shooting at them. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: The other thing I wanted to make sure to put on the record was, you said over dinner there were women combatants that the Chinese had, and you knew because you saw them as war dead.

WOOD: Yes, a lot of them that way. We had some that were taken prisoner, like the one over with the first sergeant.

PIEHLER: Yeah, the first sergeant who took a woman prisoner that ...

WOOD: But we had other women prisoners that we had taken. But yes, they ...

PIEHLER: And they were most definitely combatants. They ...

WOOD: Oh, absolutely. They came up with their little burp guns and ...

VAN HOUTS: Did you have ethical or moral issues about taking them prisoners or about your first sergeant having a Chinese woman living in his house?

WOOD: Did we have any what?

VAN HOUTS: Did you have any ethical or moral problems with that?

WOOD: Well, of course, I didn't fortunately have any people in my outfit that were keeping a female prisoner, but taking prisoners ... we tried, when we take prisoners, when we get a prisoner, we always—the first thing we tried to do is, they always thought we were going to kill them. They thought that the first thing was going to happen to them is that we were going to have them kneel down and shoot them in the back of the head. They just all thought that. So you had to first of all try to get them feeling, because the very first interrogation you can do of these prisoners is oftentimes the best. Once they have a chance to be evacuated back to prisoner compounds and that sort of thing, most of them are no good anymore. So if you get them to talking, if you can get them to talking ... and so we had people from the, oh, whoever it is, the prisoner of war ...

PIEHLER: Intelligence?

WOOD: Intelligence people that would come up that could speak Chinese in all. We'd offer them cigarettes, and they liked American cigarettes. And we'd offer them warm socks. Most of them had these old tennis shoes on and their feet, in most cases, were in horrible shape. They'd been walking on those icy things coming all the way down from the Yalu River and all, so they were in bad shape.

VAN HOUTS: Do you think they wanted to surrender, in a way?

WOOD: No, they didn't really want to surrender, because they thought we'd kill them.

VAN HOUTS: Right.

WOOD: They really thought we'd kill them. And we—I really felt like that we did a good job of interrogating them and getting them to finally warm up a little bit to what we were trying to do, which was basically to find out what unit they were in, where they had come from, and that sort of thing.

VAN HOUTS: And so you never saw prisoners mistreated or anything like that?

WOOD: Didn't see any mistreated prisoners.

VAN HOUTS: That's good.

WOOD: All of them that I saw were treated very, very well. I don't know that our men were treated that well that got captured, but fact is, they were—when they were evacuated back to the rear, they were taken in Jeeps and vehicles and they weren't made to walk long ways and that sort of thing. Of course, the first thing they were, they were always searched first, to make sure they didn't have any guns or any paraphernalia to kill themselves with, because they really would. But I never had, I never saw any of them that tried to kill themselves, but you could tell they were scared to death. They were flinching at most anything you would do to them. They would think that you were going to do something to them.

VAN HOUTS: Have you got any leftover feelings towards the Chinese now, from Korea?

WOOD: Have I got any ...

VAN HOUTS: Leftover feelings.

WOOD: Leftover feelings? No, not really. And fact is, my wife is—that's a thing she doesn't understand, why I, she says, "You buy all these things that are made in China and this, that, and the other thing." I say, "Well, they're hard to get some things that are not made in China these days." But I don't ... now I really, I would rather have them as an ally than the Japanese.

VAN HOUTS: Really?

WOOD: My personal feelings.

VAN HOUTS: So you are still feeling anti-Japanese?

WOOD: I think they're a little more reliable.

VAN HOUTS: Chinese people?

WOOD: Chinese, yeah. I guess that goes with what you were saying ...

PIEHLER: It's getting late and the tape is running out. But one just very quick question, have you ever been back to Korea?

WOOD: Never have. No. Had several opportunities to go and I guess I would've gone, except I can't get Jane, she doesn't want to take a long trip. She's told me several times, "Why don't you go ahead and go?"

PIEHLER: But you want to go with your wife.

WOOD: My sister and brother-in-law have been back several times, and I've got pictures of places that I was actually in and around that are just amazing. You wouldn't know it.

PIEHLER: You wouldn't know? It looks nothing ...

WOOD: No. It wouldn't look—and you're talking about the, I understand, like when I was talking about the urchins in Seoul living in these just paper-box houses and things. I didn't see any nice homes in Seoul when I went in there. It was almost leveled. And maybe there were parts of it, maybe in the suburbs and some places that maybe didn't. But where I saw, what I saw was just desolation.

VAN HOUTS: Just quickly, you talk in the memoir about the Chinese Santa that you met that said, "This is not your war." Sorry, the Korean Santa that you and your men came across when you were going somewhere, the Santa Claus that ...

WOOD: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

VAN HOUTS: And it said, "It's not your war." Do you think most ...

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Reviewed by Patrick Leverton 3/17/04

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Reviewed by Kurt Piehler 11/28/05