THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD THOMAS ALEXANDER

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

INTERVIEWED BY
G. KURT PIEHLER
AND
JAKE WHITE

CANTON, NORTH CAROLINA
APRIL 4, 2003

TRANSCRIPT BY JAKE WHITE

REVIEWED BY
PATRICK LEVERTON
GREGORY KUPSKY

KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Richard Thomas Alexander, Jr., in Canton, North Carolina on April 4, 2003 with …

JAKE WHITE: Jake White

KURT PIEHLER: … and Kurt Piehler. I just want to begin—you were born on October 5, 1917.

RICHARD ALEXANDER: That's correct. Nashville, Tennessee.

PIEHLER: Nashville, Tennessee. And who were your parents?

ALEXANDER: My father was … Richard Thomas, Sr., and my mother was an Andrews.

PIEHLER: Grace Elizabeth Andrews.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Grace Elizabeth Andrews Alexander, and they were married in 1916. I was born in '17. I was born at home, because of the flu epidemic during the time. I lived about 150 yards from the Vanderbilt hospital. (Laughs) But the doctor didn't take maternity cases unless it was absolutely essential in '17. My sister, also, was born in '19, was born at home. My father was professor at George Peabody College for Teachers, and he was there from 1914 until 1924. He was the one that started the Peabody demonstration school, and was the first director. And he took the job there at Peabody in 1914, when they opened up the new campus where it is at the present time, right across from the main Vanderbilt campus.

PIEHLER: What are some of your earliest memories growing up in Nashville, and also growing up so close to Vanderbilt and Peabody?

ALEXANDER: Well, it was—I was always a faculty brat. 'Cause after my dad was at Peabody for ten years, he went to Columbia University for the rest of his career. And I started school at the demonstration school there at Peabody, when it was very, very simple…. I remember we lived right across the street from the campus, the social religious building, on 21st and Highland. 21st goes out Hillsborough, and Highland is the cross street that no longer goes through the Vanderbilt campus, but it's right there at the entrance of the emergency hospital. I remember a military parade that they had there.

PIEHLER: Was this during the …

ALEXANDER: This was—I'm sure it had to be … after the war. I was about two, maybe three. It was some kind of a victory bond. It was not a war bond; it was a victory bond. They were getting ready to sell bonds. I was about—probably going on three, two and a half, three years old. I remember that. Peabody women's team had a very fine basketball team at the time, and I was the mascot. I remember that vividly.

PIEHLER: So you would go to games?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, my dad used to drive me along. He was sort of the manager and the faculty advisor for the team. I went to Memphis a couple of times with them, and went into Arkansas once…. It was before I left in '24, when I was seven. Lived down in Belle Meade later, and I was interested in our conversation the other day … when they were talking about Luke Lee. My dad was …

PIEHLER: Your dad knew Luke Lee?

ALEXANDER: Oh yes, yes. My dad bought property out there in the Belle Meade, and we lived just off of the course of the Bell Mead country club. We lived out—I remember the burning of the crosses on Nine Mile Hill in the early 20s. The Ku Klux Klan, you know. They put them up there on the—Nashville is like a bowl, and … Nine Mile Hill was nine miles from downtown, and Belle Meade was about halfway out, and they would burn these crosses up in the woods on the hill. It's all developed now, but its …

PIEHLER: It sounds like it's a very distinct …

ALEXANDER: I remember that very vividly, because, you know, it was very spectacular to see a cross burning. I guess it was a tree they had peeled and burned. I remember that. I learned to swim there. I remember they had a swimming pool when they built the—that was after we had come back in the summer. But I learned to swim there in Nashville. Peabody had a swimming pool. Peabody demonstration school had a pool. I have been back to Nashville a good deal over the years, because I have a lot of cousins, my mother's side of the family. My grandfather was …

PIEHLER: Do you know why your father took the job at Peabody?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. He wanted to make a living, first of all, and he had done his graduate work at Columbia…. He did his undergraduate work at Columbia. Before he went to Columbia undergraduate, he did normal school in Kirksville, Missouri, and graduated in the class of 1905. [He] taught for two years after finishing the normal school in Missouri, and then he went to New York, and enrolled in Columbia, and finished—he was supposed to finish in 1909, but he didn't swim across the pool as he was supposed to, and that was one of the requirements. He didn't think it was very serious, and so he didn't, and they didn't give him his degree until he swam across the pool. So his actual graduation year is 1910, although he was working then.

PIEHLER: He just had to learn how to swim.

ALEXANDER: Well, I think he could swim. I think he just didn't think it was worth the time to go down to the pool. What did that have to do with his education? (Laughter) And there were several other people. If you read any of the biography of Mortimer J. Adler, [it] was the same thing. He never graduated.

PIEHLER: I have heard about several schools that require swim tests.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. And you had to do it by a certain date, and if you didn't do it by a certain day in April or May, you didn't graduate in June. My dad had something more important to do, and so he said, "To hell with it," and then he graduated in the class of 1910. While he was there, he started his graduate work at Teacher's College and he was a graduate assistant to Thorndike, Dr. [Edward Lee] Thorndike. Also, Dean Russell, who was the first dean of Teachers' College, this is James Russell. His son, Will Russell, who later became dean at Teachers' College when I was there in the '30s, was a very good friend of my dad's. He was teaching at Peabody, and they—a whole bunch of them were teaching at Peabody.

PIEHLER: So there was a real connection?

ALEXANDER: Oh yes, yes. There were four or five of them that were bachelors. Will Russell and my dad. Let's see. James Tippett was down there, and then he went to Columbia later. There were two or three others that went there. Dr. [Hollis] Caswell went up there later on, and the McMurrys [Drs. Frank and Ruth] had a relationship at Peabody, and Columbia was always getting some of the better ones that they could get. So they would go to Peabody first, and that's how my dad got the job. He knew James Russell when he was at Peabody, and James hired him … back to Columbia…. He went there in '24 as a member of the International Institute, which was an institute. Its major function was to study international—education in other countries. Comparative education. And my dad was selected to be the expert on Germany, Prussian education. That had been his doctoral thesis, was in Prussian education. By '24 of course, the First World War had intervened, and he had gone back and had done some work on education in the new republic, Weimar Republic. He stayed on the rest of his career. Not—the international institute was no longer there, was no longer operative. But he was at Columbia until he retired in the '50s. He went back to Germany in 1945, just after I got home, and was on General Lucius Clay's staff at A.M.G.U.S., the military government, US. And he was in charge of the education branch of A.M.G.U.S., and was there five years helping restructure the German education in the American zone of occupation. He left about a month after I got home…. He then worked—he retired from Columbia, and then worked part-time at Adelphi University. It had something to do with his social security quarters.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. So he very much liked being an educator?

ALEXANDER: Pardon?

PIEHLER: He very much liked being an educator?

ALEXANDER: Oh yes, yes. He taught—his last teaching he did was at Indiana University. He was a very close friend to the late chancellor there, Herman Wells, who died just three or four years ago. But anyway, that was—he was in teaching all of his career, starting out at the normal school.

PIEHLER: How did your parents meet?

ALEXANDER: My mother was a sophomore at Peabody, and I think she had a class with him, and then she dropped out and never finished. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: And she never worked outside the home?

ALEXANDER: No, no. Well, no, no. Not gainfully employed.

PIEHLER: No, no, but I take it take it she had a lot of volunteer activities.

ALEXANDER: Oh, she was a very active faculty wife, was very close friends [with other faculty wives], well, both at Peabody [and Columbia]. Of course, we were still pretty young when we left. I was seven and my sister was just five, and so she was—and we lived out in Belle Meade, which was kind of remote in those days. Interurban Railway came out that way. But it was not like living in downtown Nashville. She had a bunch of sisters. There were eight of them in her family. There were six girls and two brothers she had. She was number five of the eight, so she had sisters everywhere that were in Nashville … at one time or another. They met there at Peabody, and they married in '16. She graduated from Hume Fogg High School in Nashville. [It] was the first graduating class of Hume Fog, and they graduated in the old, what's now the Ryman Auditorium, The Grand Ole Opry. She graduated, I think, in '14.

PIEHLER: Your mother was originally born in Bradford, Pennsylvania. How did she end up in …

ALEXANDER: Both my father and my mothers side of the families were all Pennsylvanians. They were Scotch-Irish immigrants, most of them, that came into Pennsylvania, and my—western Pennsylvania, Bradford, where my mother was born, that was right there close to oil city, you know, where they struck oil there at …

PIEHLER: Oh yes. Titusville. I think its Titusville.

ALEXANDER: Titusville, yeah. Bradford is almost [on the] New York state line. And my grandfather was in the lumber business, and I think he got started, and he ended up eventually in Nashville, with a Nashville crosstie company, making railroad crossties. He started that up in Pennsylvania, but his source of wood and so forth was Kentucky and Tennessee. So he moved from Bradford—well, he lived in Bradford for a while, but his family was from Meadville, that area. Bradford is a little northeast of Meadville…. My maternal grandmother, they were from Conneaut Lake, which is right outside of Meadville. So they were northwestern Pennsylvanians. Some of them went west and came back, but my granddad moved about 19—mother was born in … 1896. They moved to Nashville about 1899 or 1900, and they lived there on the Cumberland River for a few months while they built a house. [They lived] in a riverboat there on the Cumberland. They came down through Salina. But they moved from Pennsylvania to where my grandfather was establishing his crosstie company.

My father was born … near Punxsutawney, you know, groundhog—a little town called Smicksburg. They were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, and I think once—on my grandmother's side, my paternal grandmother was by the name of Wilhelm. They were Germans. Most of them were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. When he was very young—he was born in 1887. He was about nine years older than my mother. They moved to Missouri. My grandmother Alexander

inherited a farm and some property out there. That's where my dad was brought up. He … was the youngest of four and was born in Smicksburg in probably about 1890. They moved to Kirksville, where he grew up, finished high school and went to the normal school. That's also the home of osteopathy. It was the first college … that trained osteopaths. That's the mother … hospital. It's still there. An older brother of my dad's studied to be an osteopath, and a second older brother was a chemical engineer. [He] worked for one of the big oil companies in Cleveland for several years. My aunt, who was also old—my dad was the baby—my aunt stayed there in Kirksville the rest of her life. And then my dad went east. So that's how they met.

PIEHLER: It sounds like your mom liked the role of being a faculty spouse.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, she did. She was studying home economics there at Peabody. [She] never finished. When she got up to Teacher's College at Columbia, she thought she wanted to go back, but—in those days women weren't in school very much. It's hard to realize that my mother didn't have the vote when I was born. Or my sister, either. So it was not unusual. A lot of the faculty wives had not finished … school. I couldn't give you figures on it, but my mother was one that didn't.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, do you remember women getting the vote? I mean, you were still very young.

ALEXANDER: Oh, no, no…. But I was aware of it pretty young, though. Now, of course, some women had votes in certain states.

PIEHLER: Yes, the western states.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. And I don't know what Tennessee was like, but not for national elections. A lot of states had state rights for the women. I don't know when the women got suffrage in Tennessee. I'm not sure.

PIEHLER: We joined it with the nation in 1920. Tennessee was the decisive vote.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, but did they have some state [voting rights] before that?

PIEHLER: I'm not sure.

ALEXANDER: It was very often that the strong states for women suffrage generally had state statutes that preceded the national.

PIEHLER: I'm curious: what was it like to move to New York, the New York area? Where did you live when you …

ALEXANDER: Oh, it was—I remember it very well. I had a—my mother's … older brother, my uncle Billy, who was working with my granddad in the crosstie business, lived in Nashville. I used to see a lot of him in Nashville, and he was a great baseball fan. Uncle Billy introduced me to the New York Giants, and Uncle Billy was jealous that I was going to go to New York,

because he loved the Giants. So when I got to New York—we moved in October. The next spring when I was out at the Polo Grounds—and I'm still a Giants fan—I remember that very well. That first winter we were in New York was a gasser. Oh man. Snowfall was unusually heavy, and I remember there on Morning Side drive—we lived in Morning Side Heights. Of course, I was just a kid, but the snow banks were way over my head.

PIEHLER: So they were even larger, being so small.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah, but it was really …

PIEHLER: Yeah. You arrived at a very harsh winter.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. This was the winter of '24, '25. It was, I think, the worst since—they had one, I think, before World War I that was worse. Then they had one in 1950-'51 that was worse. But it was one of the worst in the first half of the century. And the snow was there forever. I remember they had—when you got to the corner they had little places you'd walk, and the snow was on both sides of you. I was just there one year in this particular apartment. Then I went to Germany [in] '25, '26.

PIEHLER: Could you talk a little bit about that first year in Germany?

ALEXANDER: Oh, it was interesting. I remember a lot of that.

PIEHLER: Could you tell us?

ALEXANDER: Oh, well, the reason I went to Germany was that my dad was a German specialist, and he was in the process of writing on the new Republic, the Weimar Republic, see, which didn't start until 1919-1920. It was just after the horrendous inflation of '23-'24. We were there in '25, and we were there for a year. My dad had groups of—he took some graduate students over, and then we stayed all winter, and he had to come back to teach classes, then he came back again in the spring through next summer. So we were there a full year, and I remember it very well. We lived there out in Grunerwald, in a boarding house, *pension*, you know. Nice section of town. It's out … west. Interesting enough, I was back there in '94, and the building, the house—it was a very fine home, three storied manor house, that was obviously lost by its owner during the inflation. It was taken over by a family, a man and his wife, and they made a living by just taking in boarders. We had our meals there, and we lived there most of the year, not all of the time. We traveled a good deal….

I remember, across the street was another lovely home, was behind a big wrought iron fence, and they had a kennel of German Shepherds, beautiful dogs…. I did everything I could to get my dad and mother to get me one for Christmas. They were very inexpensive, you know, and I wrote him and told him how much they were. They were about twenty bucks, or something like that. They never did, because we were living in an apartment in New York where they were bad pets. But boy, I really loved those dogs. When I started living down here where I could have them, I've had German Shepherds ever since. Don't have any right now…. And then I learned something about the inflation. It was over, but up in the attic of this big house where we lived in

the *pension*, there was—it was just an attic, a storage place. We were kind of small, and when my mother would go out socially in the evenings, we always had a young gal, a *Kindermaedchen*, who would come in and baby-sit for us. And she was a German girl who was a refugee from the Soviet revolution. Her father had been in business in Saint Petersburg or Moscow. The family had lost everything with the Russian Revolution. They came in, came back to Berlin, and this gal was, oh, she was probably sixteen or seventeen, and was interested in baby sitting. She took care of us quite often.

One of the things I enjoyed—my sister, too—was on rainy days when we couldn't go outside and play or walk someplace … off property, we would go up to this attic. It was kind of a playroom. I remember this … round top trunk that was just chockfull of inflation money. Billions of billions of marks. Most of it was paper money, but had all kinds of white metal—they weren't precious metals. They were just these things they didn't use after a while. I think it was 4,200,000,000 marks to the dollar. I believe that was right. It was supposed to be four marks and 20 *pfennigs* to the dollar. They just kept moving the decimal point over until they got into—I think it was billions. Because the Germans have a different notation for that. See, we go from a thousand to a million. We don't have anything about 100,000. The Indians have 100,000. They call it a *lakh*. And then a million is six digits. The Germans have a milliard and a billion, and I don't know—I can't remember which is which. [Million is the same in German; *Milliard* means a billion.]

PIEHLER: But it was an astronomical sum.

ALEXANDER: It was into the millions and millions of marks to the dollar. Everything was paper, because the little *pfennigs* didn't mean anything. You can look at the stamps if you're a stamp collector…. They would surcharge then about every three weeks. They would have to raise the price. So, when they stabilized the mark in early '24, all this other stuff became completely redundant.

PIEHLER: It was play money.

ALEXANDER: Oh, it was just like a pirate—I thought about a pirate's chest. You could just pull the stuff out and throw the stuff around and just play with it. I remember it vividly.

PIEHLER: What was it like to go to a German school, and how well did you do with the German?

ALEXANDER: Well, it was different. Now, that year I didn't go to school.

PIEHLER: You didn't go to school at all.

ALEXANDER: That year. But I did in '30-'31, when I was about [an] 8th grader. It was interesting.

PIEHLER: Since you brought up '30-'31, could you talk a little bit about '30-'31?

ALEXANDER: In ’30, I went to a school that was directed by a very close friend of my dad’s, Fritz Karsen, who was—it was the largest school in Berlin. It was a new attempt, to some extent—Dewey, of course, was influencing even the Germans. He was trying to make it more comprehensive. It was co-educational, which was unusual. He had from the kindergarten all the way through the *Gymnasium* in one—well what it was, there were several buildings, but it was all one administrative unit. It was Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm *Gymnasium*, but the primary school was the Karl Marx *Schule*. It was named after Karl Marx, because it was out there in the southeast district of Neukölln, which was the—it was [the] blue collar and lower district of Berlin. It was a laboring area. They were—had a good deal more freedom than a typical German school. The boys and girls where in school together in high school. And I was there six months. Very good, very nice experience. A lot of friends that I got to meet. I lost most of them during the war. I only know of one girl that’s in this country…. Her father fled. It was the daughter of Dr. Karsen. They fled.

PIEHLER: They fled in ’33?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. About a week after Hitler … took office, they took off.

PIEHLER: Why? I mean …

ALEXANDER: Well, there were two reasons. The first one, though, the first one was that he was the director of this school and was a very, very radical socialist, and he had been politically involved, and then he was Jewish.

PIEHLER: Those are two very good reasons.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Two. Actually, the reason he left was that—he could have stayed, I think, at that time, just being a Jew. But he was director of a very important school that was very much the antithesis of what the Nazis stood for. So he lost his position, I mean, right away. So he packed up his stuff and fled to Paris, and went to Bogotá, and finally my dad got him a job at Brooklyn College in New York.

PIEHLER: When did he finally end up in Brooklyn College?

ALEXANDER: It was about … late ’38, early ’39. It was before the war started. But he didn’t come directly to the states…. He ran a school in Paris for refugees like himself, just to get enough to eat. It was just a—we saw him in Paris after he left Berlin, but then he got into Bogotá, and there apparently was a pretty good sized German community, and I think he started some kind of a German language school in Bogota that was very popular with the Colombians. Because in South America you had a lot of these French, German, English private schools that the wealthy, well-to-do South Americans liked their children to go to, because the instruction was generally in French, or German, or English. Then he got to this country. And I remember when he came, and I was still—I hadn’t finished my undergraduate work, so it was some time, late ’38 or early ’39, because I left New York in ’39. I remember I helped him out when they first came. They didn’t have any vehicle. My mother used to have me chauffer them around places when they first came. Mrs. [Erna] Karsen. So …

PIEHLER: I'm curious: the second time you were in Germany, how aware were you of the rise of the Nazi party?

ALEXANDER: The second time I was …

PIEHLER: When you were there actually going to school.

ALEXANDER: Now, the first time, in '30-'31, it was pre-Nazi.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but … there were Nazis around.

ALEXANDER: Oh, yeah, yeah. Course, a lot of people don't realize Berlin was not the strong Nazi stronghold…. It was red. Hamburg and Berlin were both very red. Of course, Goebbels and Goering were there, and they tried their darnedest. They had some success, but to the very end, and even after the Nazis took over, Berlin was very, very red.

WHITE: By "red" you mean communist?

ALEXANDER: Yes, and socialist, and Nazi.

PIEHLER: I mean, I could tell with Karl Marx—this was a real strength. Communist and also social democrat.

ALEXANDER: Of course, see that was my second trip, year in Germany. Then when I came back in '33, I wasn't there quite a full year that time. I was just there from summer until January. I didn't go to the *Gymnasium*. I went to the university and just took language courses there at the Institut für Ausländer, there in Berlin. It was obvious what … changes had taken place.

PIEHLER: What were some of the obvious …

ALEXANDER: Oh, you can't believe the flags and the banners.

PIEHLER: So Nazi flags all over?

ALEXANDER: Oh, everywhere. It was just unbelievable. Back in '30-'31, they had two very serious economic crises. They were worried about the political situation that was unsettled. The Reichstag was having a terrible time getting any kind of quorum, you know. They couldn't get a cabinet that would last a week, and Hindenburg eventually had to rule by decree. That led eventually, in '32-'33, to Hitler's ascension to Chancellorship. But the, out there in Neukölln, which is out southeast, there were demonstrations in front of the *Rathaus*. Berlin was an amalgamation of a lot of little outer lying communities. There were about twenty or thirty of them that were absorbed over the years. After World War I, and then again between the wars—and Neukölln had it's own *Rathaus*, its own courthouse. That district was ruled under the aegis

of greater Berlin, but they still had some—I guess you would call it Neukölln business that was decided in the *Rathaus*.

PIEHLER: Or a sort of local boroughs like, London. A series of local boroughs.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah, the same sort of thing. Well, New York has the same thing, but it's not quite the same. Because a lot of those boroughs were absorbed quite a while ago. But anyway, the school was about three streets from the *Rathaus*. They would meet there about once a week. There would be some kind of a demonstration. It would be the communists one week. The next week it would be the Nazis out. And they were always fighting. They always had—the traffic would be jammed, and they would have police out and around trying to keep order. We lived—at that time, we lived about as far as from here to—well, about 150 yards from the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate is where we lived, in another boarding house. We took a streetcar every morning out to the school, which was out in—it was about a twenty-five minute streetcar ride out southeast. Whenever they had a Reichstag meeting, they would throw a cordon around the Reichstag, oh, about at least a mile radius. The busses and streetcars just wouldn't stop. The streetcars had to go through because of tracks, but they just wouldn't stop. Our stop was right at the corner of the Reichstag. So we either had to get off way back at *Potsdamerplatz* and walk around, or we would have to go on the other side of the river and walk back a long ways. My sister and I finally figured out that in most cases the street car … driver had to stop and throw a switch right there at the corner of the Reichstag, and when he threw this switch, he had to stop, and we would hop off and we'd make for our apartment where we stayed. The police would see us at the other end of the street and they would come running after us, wondering what we were doing getting off in that forbidden zone. That would happen any day they had any kind of a meeting at the …

PIEHLER: So you were very conscious when the Reichstag was meeting, because they wouldn't stop in front of it?

ALEXANDER: Pardon?

PIEHLER: You were very conscious of the meetings of the Reichstag because of this.

ALEXANDER: Oh, yeah, yeah, because it would be about two miles. If you know anything about Berlin at all, *Potsdamerplatz* is there at *Leipzigerstrasse*, and that was the last place you could get off and on. Then you went by Brandenburg Gate. They just went around the Reichstag and then at *Dorotheenstrasse*, that's where the switch was, and occasionally they didn't stop if the—Mary and I learned that if the streetcar before us had gone down *Dorotheenstrasse*, they wouldn't stop…. Ours had to go around by *Lehrte Bahnhof*, and it had to stop and throw the stop. About one time out of five or six we would end up having to ride the full distance. But it was interesting to see the—now, on days when it didn't meet, or early in the morning, we went to school about—it was dark when we went to school. It was about 6:30, quarter to seven. We started, I think, 7:30. The police wouldn't be there yet, but coming back in the afternoon around 2:30 or 3:00, the meetings were still going on, and sometimes even in the evenings they would meet. So we would hop off there at the corner. That was in '30-'31. Then when I was there in '33 and '34, we still lived at *Dorotheenstrasse*, same place, right by the

Reichstag, but I was going to the *Gymnasium* down the street. And I just walked. We didn't take a streetcar, so I didn't have that problem.

PIEHLER: Also, the Nazis were in power.

ALEXANDER: Yes.

PIEHLER: What else did you notice? You mentioned the banners, what else did you notice that changed in Germany?

ALEXANDER: Oh, uniforms and the rearmament. There were all kinds of—they had all kinds of military ceremonies there at *Unter den Linden*. That's where the tomb of the Unknown Soldier was, down *Unter den Linden*. The *Zeughaus*, which was … a museum of armaments, and whenever someone from World War I died, they'd have a state funeral, and they'd all go through the Brandenburg Gate and down there to the cathedral, and they'd have a big military parade, and I—they were always obvious there.

PIEHLER: And this differed from your previous times?

ALEXANDER: Oh yes, oh yes.

PIEHLER: These … lavish state funerals.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. You could see the buildup, the military buildup. Very obvious. Then, of course, in '35-'36 when I was there, it was even more so. And another thing, there were no riots. The communists were pretty well taken care of. The Nazi—that's all there were. The SA were still in great numbers. We lived just a short distance from the chancellery. Let's see. *Wilhelmstrasse* is perpendicular to *Unter den Linden*, and it's just one street east of the Brandenburg Gate. That's where—*Wilhelmstrasse* is just like Pennsylvania Avenue. It's the center of all the main government functions. We would see—I remember, this was in '34, yeah. This was in '33-'34, and I was going to the *Gymnasium*. The Germans had all kinds of relief programs. Every month there was some kind of a national program …

PIEHLER: To relieve someone.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, the *Winterhilfe*. The Winter Aid. It would start about August. (Laughter) They were out. Then they had another one. It was called *Eintopfgericht*, which was—every meal in every restaurant in Germany was to be of one pot. *Ein Topf*. One pot. It was—that's all you could get. It was a stew. You would pay the usually three or four marks for a full meal, and it would probably cost a mark and a half, and then the difference between the *Eintopf* and the menu price was collected at the restaurant, and they came around to the families, too. They came around to our boarding house where we were, and Frau [Sophia] Betz had to ante up the difference between what the one pot meal cost, and our—it wasn't much. They would give you a little button, a little thing to show that you had …

PIEHLER: Did you wear the button, or did you get a button?

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah, you always wore one.

PIEHLER: You would give to these …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, you did, because they were always shaking a canister in your face. "*Spende für die Winterhilfe*." You know, "Contribute to the Winter Aid." (Laughs) There at the *Gymnasium* where I went, before I went back over to the university—they're right across the street from one another, the *Dorotheenstrasse* and *Realgymnasium*. I was there for about three or four months before I went back to the language courses over at the university. I was in with a group of—they weren't first class; they were the second group. [Of] the *Oberprima-Unterprima*, [they were] *Obersekunda*. It was the second. They were two years from graduating from the *Gymnasium*, which is a thirteen-year program. It's a little more than our twelve years. They put me in that class with these boys. All boys, and no girls. Once a month, oh, more than that, every month at least, they'd be some kind of a drive on, and … all the kids in school above certain ages would be asked to get out and shake canisters for—we were right down town, right there at *Friedrichstrasse* and *Unter den Linden*. That's like 5th Avenue and 42nd Street…. That's where we had to go.

PIEHLER: So you would have to stand out there and shake …

ALEXANDER: And so on certain days that was assigned to our school—they would rotate with classes, and our class would go on a certain day and the next class [a] certain day. We'd go out there on *Unter den Linden* and *Friedrichstrasse*, and there were four corners, and there was a big railroad station up there at *Friedrichstrasse* and *Dorotheenstrasse*, so we'd cover three or four of those very important things. Didn't happen to me—they put me someplace else up there near the train station, but some of the boys in our class were standing there at *Unter den Linden* and *Friedrichstrasse*, and Hermann Goering comes by, and they were all excited because Hermann and his wife put some money in their canister.

PIEHLER: So that was the talk of the school.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. It was on a Sunday, and it was nice weather, and everybody was parading up and down, being seen, and Goering lived very close to there, and he would go out and take a little stroll. These kids came back: "Hermann, *der Dicke*," "the big fat one." (Laughter) But they were thrilled that Goering had given them a little money.

PIEHLER: Was that a nickname they used?

ALEXANDER: Was that what?

PIEHLER: The fat one.

ALEXANDER: *Der Dicker*.

PIEHLER: Was that one they used at the time?

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah, yeah…. I remember, another thing [I] very vividly remember. I don't know whether we … have ever done it, but in Germany and Europe, the cigarette companies had cards, a little like baseball cards—a little smaller—of celebrities and all kinds of things. Little old pack of twelve cigarettes, you'd get a little card. They would give you albums that you could stick these things in, and this one boy in our class, apparently his father must have smoked a lot, or somebody did in the family, and he had a huge album of these things, just hundreds of then. These at that time were all Nazi celebrities, and when I was there—you wanna change?

PIEHLER: Yeah, let me …

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

PIEHLER: And you were saying, so your …

ALEXANDER: Well, this boy had a gorgeous collection, just dozens and dozens of these things, [with] a little … biographical statement about it. But these were all very prominent members of the Nazis, the SS, the SA, and all of their leadership and everything, in this album. He brought it to school one day. He didn't bring it to show it to me, but he brought it, showed it [to] the rest of the fellows in the class. So he was going through it, and this was after the *Putsch* of 193[4].

PIEHLER: Against the SA?

ALEXANDER: [Ernst] Röhm. Of course, [Röhm] was a very close friend of Hitler. He was Hitler's army captain during World War I, and was head of the SA. But in the first year of their rule, the SA was many times bigger than the SS, and the SA was very radical. It was quite a socialist group. They had a lot of fellows who probably would have been communist if the Nazi's hadn't given them more money, a better deal. So they—Hitler finally purged the SA. They shot Röhm, and they shot what's his name, the fellow who had been the vice chancellor. Two or three other big army people got just murdered. There were hundreds of them murdered. Well, in this album, there was a problem, because all these people were in that album, and the company apparently had printed a sticker, a little label—I forget exactly what it said, but it says "Traitor to the fatherland." And they would—I guess they sent them out, or I don't know how the boy got it, but this was not a hand written thing. This was a label that was glued over the man's image, and there must have been fifteen or twenty of these people who were now *persona non grata*.

PIEHLER: But the cards had been printed, and …

ALEXANDER: Oh, they had been in the album, and I guess Röhm probably was in the first month. But they circulated these things, and kids swapped them just like we swap baseball cards. So I asked him about it, and they didn't have much explanation, you know.

PIEHLER: Particularly when the Nazis were in power, what did they think of you, as an American?

ALEXANDER: Oh, well, even when—before Hitler, when I first went to school, I was a freak. I'm left-handed.

PIEHLER: Oh. And that …

ALEXANDER: They used to ask me to write something so I could show them I could write. When I was in the younger group, when I was there in '30-'31, we had a P.E. class that—it was a gong about that big around [ten inches], up on a standard about like this lamp thing [four feet], and it had a ring. They put it down on the gym a ways, and the idea was to throw this—it wasn't a baseball. It was just a ball, a soft ball of some kind. You were supposed to throw it to see if you could hit it. Well, I was left-handed. I threw with my left hand—that was bad—and I could hit it almost every time, being a baseball player. Then finally one day, … we were out in the wintertime, and the classroom teacher had a pitching game he organized. He had a thing out on a frozen lake, the *Grunewaldsee*, and anybody who hit the can got a Hershey bar, a little Hershey bar. Well, I got four of them in a row, and he finally said, "You're disqualified." (Laughter) And these kids couldn't understand how I could do it with my left hand. So they always—we had a … relay game. You lined up two teams, and you pitched this ball for that ring. Some of the kids would—after I think five tosses you went anyway, but if you got it the first time, you passed the ball to the next fellow and you tried to see which team would get—they always wanted me on their team. And they just couldn't understand writing with your left hand. I remember one kid said, "Come with me. I want to show this." He had an older brother who was in another class. (Laughs) He wanted me to demonstrate my left hand.

WHITE: So that was a bigger issue, was being left-handed than being American?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, oh yeah. They knew I was an American. The English teacher didn't like me very much, though. When I say he didn't like me, he didn't use me as a resource person because I didn't have a … British accent.

PIEHLER: And he had a British accent?

ALEXANDER: Oh yes, yes. He insisted that the word "giggle" is "yiggle," and he wanted the British pronunciation. I don't think the British pronounce it that way. Also, I learned in a math class very quickly that in Germany a decimal point is not a decimal point; it's a comma. In other words, twelve dollars and fifty cents is "1-2-*komma-funfzehn-null*. I had some problems to do, and I'd marked off as we mark off with a comma, for thousands, and we used a decimal point. The Germans use … what we call the decimal point as a way to mark off thousands and millions. The teacher brought my paper. He says, "what's all the—they're right, but what's this business, all these commas?" And then I learned…. Even when I was an adult, when I was back there after World War II—I had a group of students there with me, from 1953-'54. I had to go to the bank and draw money. The clerk that I knew quite well after a while—I was there every month getting from the university to give our students. We had to … get foreign exchange. He said, "Mr. Alexander, do you mind if I ask you a personal question?" I said, "No." He said, "Why do all Americans, … so many Americans write with a left hand?" I said, "Well, that's the way we were taught, or was natural to us." Well he said, "I've been told that that—I see them here in the

bank all of the time." He said, "Somebody told me it was a way to keep signatures secure from forging." I said, "No, no it's not." But he said, "It's very strange." (Laughs) Then I went to register the same year with the police. My wife and I rented an apartment, and we had to get a—we had to register. I went in to the police station to register. The man there at the desk—he was obviously a veteran of World War II. Relatively young man. His right sleeve was rolled up. He asked me to fill this out, and he gave it to me, and I filled it out with my left hand. I noticed he was watching me, and I knew what he was going to ask. He said, "It's obvious why I use my left." He was left-handed, too. He'd lost his right [arm]. He said, "It's obvious why I write with my left. What's wrong with your hand?"

PIEHLER: So he assumed it was a war wound.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. I was forty years old! (Laughs) I was a grown man, and he—I could see he was watching me, and thought maybe I had some kind of a problem with my nerves, and I couldn't use my hand. Now, in England, it's quite different. The English, quite a few left-handers there. But you get in Germany and they just …

PIEHLER: Very rigid. There was also—I guess, if you could put it into some context, in America there were a lot of schools that would force people to write with their right hand.

ALEXANDER: Oh, yes, yes. I had a terrible time in high school. Particularly when we had wraparound desks. 'Cause they never gave a left-handed desk. Now, some schools, you can get them, but then the problem is [that] the distribution of left-handers in each class is varies a lot. You don't know where to put the left-handed armchairs. So when I was in high school, I used to always try to find a place to sit where there was an empty seat to my left, so I could sit in this one and write on that one.

There is another interesting story, talking about the difference in the Nazis, during the Nazi period. This would have been summer of '33, six months after Hitler's becoming Chancellor, January 30. This was July, I think, of '33. We had just joined my dad, and he had been over there a little earlier with a group, and was in the office of a very good friend of his, who was director of the Prussian Pedagogical Institute in Berlin. Dr. [Franz] Hilker had been a very close friend of my dad's since 1910 or '11, when they were both young men, and they had met in Weimar, someplace. Dr. Hilker always helped my dad set up visitations and places to go, interesting places in Germany to take his group. My dad was in Dr. Hilker's office, going over an itinerary that was going to—they were going to take a trip down into the Rhineland and into Bavaria, with this group of about 150 people. They were going over this business, and in walks a—I guess he was Gestapo, the secret police. [They] walk in and they arrest Hilker.

PIEHLER: Right in during the meeting?

ALEXANDER: Oh yes, they just opened the door …

PIEHLER: No formalities.

ALEXANDER: No, no. Just—I think they probably asked who he was, to make sure he was Hilker. They walked in and said, "You're under arrest, your office is commandeered," or whatever they told him. They asked my dad his name. Then my dad's assistant, John Taylor, was there discussing this … upcoming trip, and they took Hilker away! About two days later, my dad got a communiqué from some office, saying he had forty-eight hours to get out of the country. My dad.

PIEHLER: Your dad had forty-eight hours.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. This was either the next day or two days after. But my dad got this notification that … he was no longer welcome in Germany, and he was *persona non grata*, and he … was gonna get out. Well we couldn't leave his group, and he didn't know what to do, so he contacted some of his better friends in Berlin—he had a lot of friends in Berlin—and he had one who was in the publishing business, published educational materials, and had worked with my dad in New York, and my dad had used his services in Berlin. And so Dick [Dr. Richard] Mönnig said, "Let me check." So … apparently he went to the propaganda ministry to inquire, "What is all this?" Well they found—Mönnig finally found out what the trouble was. That they had arrested Hilker. They had gotten my dad's name, and apparently the minute my dad left the building, they went to Hilker's files, looked under the As, and came out with a dossier of Alexander's correspondence that went back I guess to, God knows how far back. They read a letter that my dad had written in 1932, which was just about eight, nine months before the arrest…. It was a letter that my dad had written after he got back from the 1932 trip, saying what a … great trip it was, that the students were extremely happy about it, and that things looked good for next year, "We'll let you know in January sometime as to … whether we have a viable group," and made a couple of suggestions of some things we might want to incorporate next year. It was a little business letter, and it was signed, typed up by the secretary and signed. And then my dad in the bottom third of the letter wrote a P.S., and this was the problem. In his … personal handwriting, he said, "If you Germans don't get your political situation settled—" and this, you see, was just after Hitler had run for president and lost, and Hindenburg was ruling by decree, and the Reichstag had not met, and my dad said, "If you Germans don't get your political situation straightened out, when I get over there next summer, I'll show you how to run your country." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So this was sort of a—almost sort of a little spoof.

ALEXANDER: And so some German read that, you know, and thought, "Well here is this guy," well, Mönnig got hold of somebody. I don't think he talked to Goebbels, but it was in Goebbels's office, and said, "Look. This guy Alexander is not a politician. He is an educator, he has been in Germany for decades, and … he comes from a very prestigious university in New York, and if you throw him out, before he gets home it will be on the front page [of the] New York papers and make us all look like a bunch of idiots. And … he said, "If you read that, you'll recognize that it's not somebody going to overthrow the regime, it's just somebody just … sticking it to him as a joke." And so before the forty-eight hours are up, they—somebody—wiser heads, they removed the thing.

PIEHLER: What happened to the person arrested?

ALEXANDER: He was—detained for a while. I can't tell you. He survived the war.

PIEHLER: He did survive the war.

ALEXANDER: Oh, yeah, yeah. I saw him in '53-'54, and my dad found him very quickly. When my dad took over, he was in the American zone, luckily, and he survived. But he lost his position. Luckily he was not political, but he lost his job. I think he had a very minuscule retirement, and had a tough time during the war, getting, you know, enough to eat and everything. But my dad found him, and I saw him in Wiesbaden—this is Hilker—in '53-'54, and he was back—he had a research institute, educational research institute, in Wiesbaden, that he was directing, and was developing an educational museum there in Wiesbaden…. By that time he was retirement age anyway, but he was still active. His son, that's how close they were, his son was named after my dad, Tom Hilker.

PIEHLER: That's a very close relationship.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. I heard from him, but never met him, because … he left Berlin. My mother and dad, my mother went over in '46 and stayed about three years with him, and then they had to move out of Berlin. This was before the wall, but when they started closing down the Autobahn and making it difficult. They moved all the non-essential people to—in the Bonn area. Bad Godesberg.

PIEHLER: These stories have just been wonderful. I think students today don't realize … that the Nazi regime was around awhile before the war began. What were your impressions …

ALEXANDER: Another thing though is—another thing a lot of people don't realize is that the Nazis didn't do it all, by any means. As far as the military is concerned, the covert military development, redevelopment of the German army after Versailles, after the Armistice of 19[18] had already started. They would have had an army, Hitler or … anybody else. The only thing is that Hitler expedited it. They had people in Russia, they had people in China, they had people all over South America trying out airplanes and the tanks and everything else that they later brought home and produced. So the rearmament—they call it Hitler's army. It was Hitler's army only to the degree that the army allowed it to be. They used his name in order to get his resources that the Weimar people did not.

PIEHLER: You had a very unique experience, even being a faculty—as you would say, a faculty brat is a pretty rarefied world. But you had lived in Germany for several stretches of time. What were your perceptions … of the Nazi's and what this would all mean?

ALEXANDER: Oh, well, my perceptions, living in Berlin at the time shortly after Hitler took over, it was obvious that a great change was taking place, that the military was being reestablished, that they were building airplanes—because some of my classmates in the *Gymnasium* had signed up for a glider course in 1935-'36. It came during the summer months and a bunch of them went down to Silesia and were learning to fly. They couldn't fly motored planes, but they could fly gliders, and they had that program, which was very obvious. Some of

the kids in my class—I say kids; they were … seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years of age—were going down—there was a group from the Dorotheen *Realgymnasium* went down there. I would have loved to have gone, just to, you know, just to learn to fly, but of course being a foreigner—but I learned of the program through them, and … a bunch of them were taken in, and they went down [during] that summer of the Olympics. That's when my class, they had—it was about three weeks or a month, and they brought groups down and rotated them through, I guess out of schools all over Germany. But this was when my group, the ones I knew there in Berlin, went. It was in the summer of '36. I lived with a lady, she was a German nurse, and … this nurse had a brother who was flying with the Condor group in Spain, and that was the air force group that the Nazis sent down to—wasn't it called "Condor?"

PIEHLER: Yes, yes. Fought with the …

ALEXANDER: And I had been in Spain when the revolution started, and we left—this was after—well this is kind of convoluted. It's not chronological at all.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but we can come back to it, too.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. But in 1936 we went to—my mother, sister and I, and another Columbia student that was doing residence in Berlin, we went over to England for two or three weeks, and then … we had a Chevrolet with us, our own car, and then we went back to France, and then we went into Spain for a short trip, and then came back into Germany. 'Cause … we had seen the winter Olympics in Garmisch, and we were planning to see the Olympics in Berlin in August. But during the Easter season we took this—about a month trip and that's where—we were in Barcelona, and they had this general strike that took over. This would have been in—Easter Sunday was in April, and we were crossing the channel on Easter Sunday, so it was after Easter. It was late April. So the situation in Spain was very bad. They had a general strike, and the hotel where we were staying, they couldn't serve us in the dining room, 'cause it was on the main floor, and everything was supposed to close, and so they fed us upstairs in one of the halls where we couldn't be seen by the strikers. And then we left, and then about a week or ten days later, Franco came across from North Africa and started his march towards—eventually Madrid, I guess it was. Well, anyway, I was talking about the things that were so obvious. When we crossed the French-German border, going back into the Palatinate, I think we went in through the Saar Gebiet. There was a big sign, a great big—oh, it was a big billboard sign on the French side. It said, "Welcome to Germany. Come and see how they persecute the Catholics and the Jews." (Laughs) This is just before you got the checkpoint for the boundary. Then when you went through into Germany—this was some group that put it up in France, telling everybody who was going into Germany they were going to see how they …

PIEHLER: This was in 1936?

ALEXANDER: Yes. Yeah, this is in '36. Then when you went through the *Grenze*, the border, and you checked into Germany and drove a little ways, I remember seeing those dragon's teeth that were being constructed, part of the Siegfried line. And they were building these … very modest little homes, one-story bungalows, on top of reinforced concrete foundations on every

little hill where they had a view, looking—they were gun emplacements with a little farmer's house on top. You could see them building the things.

PIEHLER: It was very clear.

ALEXANDER: Absolutely. Of course, the Maginot line was there, too. It was already finished along there, and you could see these things very clearly. Then I was in Berlin the day that the Germans marched into the Rhineland. I was on a streetcar, and the thing stopped right at *Potsdamerplatz*, and they had speakers up in the streets, and we sat there about forty-five minutes. Everything stopped while Hitler spoke to the Reichstag. He didn't speak at the Reichstag building; that had been burned, and they were over at the Crow opera house. That's where the Reichstag met. They burned the [Reichstag] there in early '33.

PIEHLER: You weren't there.

ALEXANDER: I was not there. But when I was there later, I used to see the wagon, the paddy wagon that—they had a trial, you know, of the man …

PIEHLER: You were there during the trial.

ALEXANDER: Yes, I was there. That was after they caught him, and they tried him, and they had always brought him there. [Marinus] van der Lubbe, his name was. He was a Dutchman.

PIEHLER: What was it like? Because historians have written about these Hitler speeches, where listening wasn't optional. I mean, they stopped the streetcar…. What was that scene like, and what was your reaction to it?

ALEXANDER: Well, I knew what it was. I had a great difficulty. As well as I understood German, Hitler was almost unintelligible for somebody who wasn't used to that south German accent of his. It was atrocious.

PIEHLER: Well the south German accent is a hard accent.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, the southern accents, particularly…. Because what they call *Schuldeutsch* is not the *Hochdeutsch*. When you talk about high German, you're talking not by high class; you're talking about where it was spoken, in the high reaches of Bavaria and the Alps. *Plattdeutsch* … [which] comes from the flatlands up north, is more like English and *Niederdeutsch*. But *Schuldeutsch* is more northern than it is northern than it is southern. More Prussian. When I spoke they always knew I was a—I had learned my German in Berlin. It was quite clear, the same way that if you're a foreigner learning your English in New York, as opposed to South Texas.

PIEHLER: You were there during the Olympics?

ALEXANDER: Do what?

PIEHLER: You were there in '36 during the Olympics?

ALEXANDER: Yes.

PIEHLER: Did you go to any of the …

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah. I went to them all. I had a season pass. '36, the most interesting story I have about that is—that was the year that baseball was not an Olympic sport. Basketball was, for about the first time, I believe. But baseball was a demonstration sport. They brought two teams over. They were semi-pros or retired pros. I think Babe Ruth might have been with one of them. But anyway, they were two American teams who were going to put on a demonstration. Well, the problem was that they did not have a baseball diamond. They didn't know anything about it. A bunch of us Americans who were at the university belonged to a Berlin sports club. We paid, you know, ten marks, and we'd go out there and use the lockers and—not at the Olympic stadium, but out there in the area where they had the sport club. And we'd go out there in the spring and take a ball and bat and play around with it.

So when it came time, in the late spring, to get ready for the Olympics, one of the fellows in our group—I think he was a medical student—was contacted by the … German Olympic committee. They wanted somebody to tell them how to build this baseball diamond in the big stadium there in Berlin. They didn't—they were going to be at night, and their big problem was lights. So they got us to go out there one evening. They knew they would have to have floodlights, and this stadium held 120,000. It's still there. You know, it's a big Olympic stadium, beautiful place. We went out there some weeks beforehand, and they said, "Bring your equipment out," and we didn't have anything other than—I had a glove and a ball, and somebody else had a bat. But they contacted the Japanese embassy in Berlin, and those rascals … had everything. They had masks, they had aluminum bats that I had never seen before, they had balls, they had bases, they had uniforms, and so the idea was that we would go out there and play a game with this Japanese group, and us. Then they were going to wait until it got dark and see how the lights worked.

We went out there in the late afternoon when it was still sunlight, and we played two or three innings of ball. We showed them—they didn't skin the infield. It was just a grass—it didn't have a pitching mound or anything like that, didn't have a backstop. But they got the base lines, foul lines, all straightened out, and had plenty of room. Centerfield was about 600 feet, I think. (Laughter) But anyway, we helped them line up the field, and then they wanted us to wait [for it] to get dark so they could turn the lights on. Well, it was a disaster. They … didn't have these big banks of flood lights like they do now; they had these spot lights, and you had the option of shining them down low to where you could see the infield, and about seven, eight, ten feet about the ground, it went into darkness. And if you hit a fly ball, it went up into this darkness, and then you're waiting for it to come down. So they then raised it a little bit, then you couldn't see the ground. So they got the idea that they would have to have lights at several levels for the fly balls. So we played there with these Japanese from the embassy…. I think most of the men, though, were university—studying, but it was the embassy … that had requisitioned all the equipment. Oh, they were really equipped. We went out there—I had on sneakers, just an old pair of pants, and then aluminum bats. First time I ever saw an aluminum bat. They were using

them then. So we went out there later when the American team arrived. I remember that was Jesse Owens's year, when Jesse and Ralph Metcalf and …

PIEHLER: So did you actually see Jesse Owens?

ALEXANDER: Oh yes, yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: You actually saw him compete?

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah, 'cause we went out there again. Now the basketball team—they played basketball that year, and the Phillips Oilers, represented from Phillips, Oklahoma, sponsored by the Phillips Oil Company, they were some kind of AAU champions. That was interesting…. I've got pictures of—and a very good friend of mine was a—his mother was an American. His father was German…. I didn't go to school with him, but I had met him and knew him quite well, and he spoke English quite well, in addition to his native German. They had young fellows as interpreters that they assigned to the various national teams, and he was assigned to the American team…. They had a nice uniform, and they appeared at the railroad station, and I took his picture there when the—before the team came in. Everyone traveled in those days by boat you know. They didn't fly. It was a—that was a year that Eleanor Holmes, did you ever know of—she was a backstroke swimmer.

PIEHLER: I've heard of her.

ALEXANDER: She married Billy Rose, and she got thrown off the team for getting drunk on the ship going over. (Laughs) Eleanor, she was the best women's backstroke swimmer of the bunch. And Jesse Owens was there. Then Helen Stevens was the women sprinter. We met them all out one evening. We were out there when they were—they had just gotten there, and they were out looking at the stadium. It was a beautiful facility. I went to several gymnastic—mass calisthenics, which was very popular with the Germans. They had 10,000, they'd have, you know, of school kids, and they would all do calisthenics together.

PIEHLER: Did you ever participate in that, or did you just watch the mass gymnastics?

ALEXANDER: Well, we had a lot of gymnastics in the *Gymnasium*. Parallel bars, and things that …

PIEHLER: But the mass gymnastics, that's something that Americans, I think, have no conception of.

ALEXANDER: No. I went to one big one they had just a week or two before the Olympics. There must have been 10-12,000. I've got pictures of them massing, and then they do flag waiving, and all kinds of stuff. It was done out on the Mayfield. It was an equestrian field right adjacent to the stadium.

PIEHLER: Do you remember any persecutions of Jews, like boycotts of the department stores in Berlin?

ALEXANDER: Oh yes, yes. In fact, my best friend, German friend—that is, school friend from 1930, Max Koesten, the thing you noticed was that, particularly in Berlin, most of the department stores were all Jewish owned. International combines, even. I'll tell you that story a little later, interesting story that had to do with some of my friends in New York. By anyway, there was definite clear evidence that when the tourist season started in '36, prior to the Olympics and during the Olympics, that almost all of that very obvious anti-Semitic stuff, all the billboards and the boxes where they put up the *Sturmer* and all of the other papers, they all disappeared downtown. Now, I did see some in small towns; I did see some suburbs. But in the areas where visitors would be going, around all the prominent railroad stations …

PIEHLER: This was very noticeable to you, it seems…

ALEXANDER: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. They were gone. I'm sure they—I don't know. I didn't see them again, because I left shortly after the Olympics and didn't get back until—I never got back during the war, even. I didn't get back until—when was it—1970. But it was obvious that they were taking them down. They still published these things, and if you had a subscription, I guess you got it. But the Germans—well, it was typical in this country too. All newspaper publishers had billboards or display boards where the fellow who couldn't afford a paper could read it, and it would be up on the street corners, important street corners. All the scurrilous kinds of things that were put out, people wouldn't buy, but they were exposed to it.

PIEHLER: It's sort of like people sneaking a peak in the National Enquirer at the supermarket.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: I've seen pictures …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, we do that in our grocery stores.

PIEHLER: And I've seen pictures of those boards.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. And it was quite common, and in this country years ago, to where the latest edition was always published, was posted on the window at the printing office, and you could read it if you wanted to. They had a lot of billboards. The Germans had a lot of billboards. All Europeans [did]. The French, political and otherwise. But they did come down. But I saw Max—he was no longer in school. He had to drop out because they wouldn't take him in the German schools, and he was working for a … tailor and clothing manufacturer in Berlin. Had a pretty good job. He went to the Olympic games with me two or three times. I had extra tickets, 'cause you had tickets to everything. You couldn't possibly go to them all. So Max—I guess, probably five or six different times when he could go. So I saw Max up through September of '36. I corresponded with him after I got home. 'Cause we had been corresponding since 1930.

PIEHLER: So this friendship had continued since '30.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. Cause Max and I were very close friends. Max belonged to a sports club in Neukölln, and it was mostly a political thing. But they did have boxing matches.

PIEHLER: Was it social democrat or communist?

ALEXANDER: I think it was probably communist, or social democrat.

PIEHLER: You're not sure which one?

ALEXANDER: No, I didn't know. It wasn't Nazi. But they had one of the main attractions, that they sponsored boxing, prize fights, part of this sport. It was very political, out in Neukölln. So I corresponded with Max in 1930, '31, '32, when I came home. Then I saw him when I went back every time. He was still there. There were a couple of other—the Karsens had fled, then there was another Jewish family. They were in the textile business. Some aspect of it. They made labels, labels for the back of shirts. They had a little label company, and they emigrated from Germany before '36. They went to Palestine. I never saw them again. They were very close friends. So Max corresponded with me while I was an undergraduate at Columbia, and I don't know when I heard from him, but he eventually left Germany after *Kristallnacht* in '38. He fled into France. He snuck across the boarder some way. He didn't write me, then but he wrote me—I got a letter from him. I was teaching school down here in Haywood County.

PIEHLER: How many years later?

ALEXANDER: It was in '39…. The war had just started. Max wrote me to my New York address. He didn't know I had moved. See, I moved down here during the summer of '39, and he wrote to my mother and dad's apartment in 106 Morningside, New York. I got his letter. It was before Christmas of '39, I'm pretty sure, and Max was in North Africa in the French Foreign Legion. He said that was the only way that, 'cause he was stateless, didn't have a German passport, and he said that was the only way he could stay in France and, I guess, eat. And he was in the French Foreign Legion, and he wanted to know if I could help him out financially. He was trying to buy his way out, 'cause you could—apparently I guess you could pay the—I guess it was the enlistment fee that they paid the next guy to take your place. It was—I forget what it was. It was several thousand francs, which—I think there were fifty francs to the dollar, but it was more money than I had.

PIEHLER: I can't believe you were making very much money.

ALEXANDER: I was making a hundred dollars a month, plus my room and board. That was pretty good.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but still, that's …

ALEXANDER: But I didn't have the ready money, and so I wrote him to his address in North Africa. I don't remember just where it was, but it was in North Africa, and he had a French Foreign Legion number, and I sent his letter to a very dear friend of mine in New York. I had gone to school with a daughter [of hers] since we were kids. We went all the way through high

school together. Mrs. Rothblatt was very active in some of the refugee programs, and I wrote and told her that this was what I had, and I couldn't help him any way, and did she know of any groups that might be able to help him. That was the last I ever heard from him.

PIEHLER: You never found out what happened to Max?

ALEXANDER: No, no. I don't know whether Mrs. Rothblatt—I doubt seriously if she could have done much at that time, 'cause the war had started, you see, and he was in North Africa. Just the communication was almost impossible.

PIEHLER: You never were able to contact him after …

ALEXANDER: I never heard from—I never heard of him or from him.

WHITE: It's 12:00, that's the first break you wanted …

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Richard Thomas Alexander in Canton, North Carolina on April 4, 2003 with Kurt Piehler …

WHITE: … and Jake White.

PIEHLER: You were talking about your friend Max, who ultimately ended up in the French Foreign Legion, and you sort of said … we should remind you to talk about the department stores and syndicates.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. I was [a] Tennessean by birth, but I was brought up in New York. From the second grade until I finished my master's degree I was there at Morningside Heights at Columbia, and I went to laboratory school there. From 1924 until 1939, that's fifteen years, and I spent about four years of those years in Germany and Europe, going to school both places, both in Europe, and back in New York at Lincoln School…. I went to Germany just after the Nazis took over, and was there again in '34 and again in'35-'36. I finished high school in '35, so my freshman year I spent in Germany. Whenever I came back after a year out of school in New York, people would ask me about Germany, especially after '33. I told them, as best I could, my impressions, and unfortunately, I was misunderstood, grossly misunderstood, because I was very fond of Germany, still am. I'm more comfortable in Germany than I am in France, because I speak German much better than I speak French, and I was there longer, and I had … friends that were there before the Nazis … took over, and before the war and after the war, and I've kept my contacts in Germany ever since.

I did notice that after the ascension of Hitler, there was a definite improvement in the morale of the Germans. They got an emotional lift, and they began to throw off that very depressed attitude they had. They'd lost so much of their territory, they lost the First World War, they couldn't do this, they couldn't do that, they couldn't have airplanes, their ships couldn't go beyond a certain speed. The Versailles Treaty was really quite an emotional problem for them as

a nation. This was pre-Hitler. When Hitler came in, one of the chief things he kept telling them is, "I'm going to get rid of Versailles. Versailles is going to be gone." I noticed that the spirit of the average German was greatly improved, in terms of the way they looked at themselves. They loved parades and they loved flags and all that business, and a lot of flag waving and a lot of parading and singing and marching that was instigated to a great extent by the Nazis, but it was not solely that; it was their tradition. They loved the Wandervögel. They loved to walk in the country and sing, and they were a happy bunch. They were much happier—I noticed that in the '30s after Hitler took over, than they had been when everything was so depressed, and they were worrying about the mark, and they were worrying about the economy, and so when I came back to New York and told some of my friends that there was a new spirit, they didn't like it.

PIEHLER: It really wasn't just propaganda. There really was a new …

ALEXANDER: Oh, it was, there was. There were no riots, because everybody—I knew why. The Nazis won out, and the communists had to go undercover. But, they didn't have these riots. There was no evidence at that time of any starvation, and there had been starvation after World War I, and there was starvation after World War II, just because everything was so beaten up. So when I said this—and I … knew exactly what the cause was, that they felt better about themselves because they were getting some action and some promises, and they had reoccupied the Rhineland, and everybody knew they were going to take the Polish Corridor back, and they would have taken it back with or without Hitler. It might have taken longer, and they might have been able to do it without the war, but when I told some of my friends that, they said, "Oh, you're a Nazi." They did. And, in fact, my high school yearbook—you know, you take it around and everybody signs it, and I was president of my high school class, so I was not some schnook. I mean, I had some friends in the class, and they voted for me, and I was a good president. But there were some in there that just thought I was … Hitler's mouthpiece. I couldn't convince them—and when my social studies teacher used me as a resource person to talk about Germany, and the changes in Europe, to our senior class contemporary civilization course, it went over like a lead balloon. I couldn't convince them—I was telling them that "There's going to be a war. The Germans are arming. They've got airplanes."

PIEHLER: They didn't believe that part either?

ALEXANDER: Nope.

WHITE: So when the war started …

ALEXANDER: Even though Lindbergh told them. You know, Lindbergh told them. I was there when Lindbergh was there, when he came back, and was honored, and got into a lot of trouble.

PIEHLER: So you were in Germany when he was being feted by the Nazi …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But he was telling the truth, though. He was something of a—he was being manipulated. The Germans wanted him to warn people like that, to scare them a little bit, but he was telling them the truth, that the Germans had airplanes.

PIEHLER: And so they didn't want to believe you in the Social Studies class that Germany …

ALEXANDER: No, no, no. They—it wasn't only social science class…. They said, "Why do you spend so much time in Germany?" Well, I told them. They knew my father was a professor at the university. They knew what his position was. They had since I was in the grades. I missed third grade, I missed eighth grade. So I had been coming and going and they said, "Well, why are you going to Germany all of the time?" So they vandalized my yearbook. They wrote—put swastikas and things on my—I had it at school one day and I put it in my little locker. We had a senior room where we would assemble. And while I left it in class one day, some guy came in and vandalized my yearbook. That upset me, 'cause I knew who did it. He was a very good friend. So, he never really discussed it with me. We had a lot of common agreements politically but he—I said to him, "Look, what is the difference of my going with my father to Germany," and there were three kids in the class there that—they owned Gimbels, Macy's. And Henry Morgenthau's son … was in my class. He didn't graduate with me, but he had been in my class, and David Rockefeller was a good friend of mine. He was ahead of me in school. You know David Rockefeller?

PIEHLER: Oh, yes.

ALEXANDER: I worked for him when he was—he graduated in the class of '32. For some reason or other, he was treasurer of the class. (Laughter) He came to me and asked me if I would take the job of selling the yearbook in my class. I had the concession. For that I was going to get one free, I think. That's what it was. Big deal. But I worked for Rockefeller, (laughs) and so there were a lot of people in my class in this school who had tremendous financial interests in Europe, and particularly in Germany. They owned Macy's, and Gimbels, and all the Karstedt and Wertheims and KDW [*Kaufhaus des Westens*], Herzogs. All of them in Berlin were tied together either by direct ownership, or they sold German products to Macy's and Gimbels, and Macy's and Gimbels sold American products to them. It was all one big family. In fact, two of my—the same summer when I came back from Nazi Germany the first time, there were two other kids in the class who went there with their families, on business, Jewish families on business. I said, "Why don't you talk to them about it?" Well, at that time, of course, there was tremendous problems in the Jewish community in New York, you know, between those who wanted the big boycott, and those who didn't, because they said, "All we're going to do is make the Germans mad at us, and it's going to hurt us financially. Hitler will fall anyway." You know that cleavage

PIEHLER: Oh yeah. That was a very vivid debate.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. But with me, a *goy*, you know …

PIEHLER: In your school, what was the split, do you remember? How would you say the split was, to boycott, not boycott?

ALEXANDER: Well, Rabbi Wise's daughter was in my sister's class, you know…. Morgenthau, Robert Morgenthau, who still …

PIEHLER: He's still the district attorney.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. He was in my sister's class. Henry—is he the third?

PIEHLER: I think he's the third.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, 'cause his father, Junior, was on Roosevelt's—that's one that appear in The Conquerors [by Michael Beschloss].

PIEHLER: And he's also—he wrote a book about the Morgenthau family.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But then the Lewisohns, the Strauses. The Strauses were … in Europe the same time I was. The only difference was that their fathers were making money out of their business with Nazi Germany. (Laughs) My father was simply an academic, studying the educational system, and seeing how the Nazis were taking over the education of the young generation. I pointed that out. I said, "Wait a minute." And so that was the dilemma I got caught up in…. I had another friend that was—his father was a Presbyterian … missionary in Japan. He got the same kind of treatment I did. In '30-'31 is when the Japanese went into Manchuria and …

(Tape paused)

PIEHLER: You were saying that you knew a classmate of yours who had been in Japan.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and he had the same kind of problem, because his father was—ran a Christian ministry, missionary's program in Japan. Of course, this boy … had been brought up in Japan. They were back in the states for a furlough, for a sabbatical, I think it was, and the father, I think, was working at his advanced degree at Union Theological. It was interesting that the boy had the same kind of problem with Japan, and trying to explain Japanese politics and Japanese aggression in China and Manchuria that I had trying to explain the dynamics of the nationalist, socialist movement in Germany. Most of them didn't understand it.

PIEHLER: I want to go back. You said there was a real split between the boycott and the non-boycott within the Jewish community.

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You also said … a lot of people didn't believe Germany was rearming and wanting to go to war. How strong was the peace movement in your high school?

ALEXANDER: Oh, it was very strong. Yeah. No more war. That was my teenage generation. Anybody that was dumb enough to take ROTC. (Laughter) You understand what I'm saying.

WHITE: Right.

ALEXANDER: And, of course, it didn't affect me because I went to a private school, private university, and it wasn't offered. I probably wouldn't have taken it. Well, I guess some places you had to take it. It was mandatory, if it was a land grant college. At least two years you had to take it, yeah. But that would have been the last thing I would have done.

PIEHLER: Do you remember any of the strikes for peace, student strikes for peace, or any demonstrations or …

ALEXANDER: During the war?

PIEHLER: No, during the '30s.

ALEXANDER: Oh, yeah, yeah. I didn't participate in them, but I remember—you see, Manhattan, you can get student groups in about thirty minutes from all over, from Brooklyn, and the Bronx, and Queens …

PIEHLER: I grew up in the New York area, so, I …

ALEXANDER: Where did you grow up?

PIEHLER: I grew up—well, initially in Queens, but I was very young, until seven. And then I grew up in New Jersey. But I, for example, worked at Baruch College.… CUNY [City University of New York]. So I know what you're saying about gathering student groups.

ALEXANDER: So you could pick up a telephone, and if you wanted a demonstration at Columbia, it would take just a subway ride, and you could have thousands there. Or if there was somebody over in Brooklyn College, or—up at CCNY is where the …

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ALEXANDER: CCNY was the place that used to always have demonstrations there. Particularly during my last year or two at Columbia, with the Spanish Civil War going on, there were all kinds of things there, very active socialist and communist groups on all campuses.

PIEHLER: Was there a Veterans of Future War[s] on Columbia's campus?

ALEXANDER: I couldn't tell you. I don't remember. But the editor of the Spectator was—the Spectator was the Columbia thing. It was always very radical. What is his name? They gave my father a lot of trouble with his work.

PIEHLER: Why?

ALEXANDER: Well because of his going to Germany. There was one situation where—plans had been made in '32, that one I told you about, when Dr. Hilker was arrested, and my dad got in trouble in '33, because of that letter he wrote. They had—my dad and another gentleman who had some music students in a same group had used Hamburg-American Lines, which is a

German American money—Jewish money, mostly. You know, the man … who started the Hamburg-American Line under the Kaiser before World War I. What was his name? [Albert Ballin]. Very, very influential.

PIEHLER: I can't think of the name.

ALEXANDER: I can't either. I'll think of it. Probably midnight tonight, and it'll come to me. Anyway, they had used the Hamburg-American Line. Some of the students there at Columbia didn't want the group to go to Germany at all, and if they were going to go, they didn't want them to go on a non-American line or on a German line. Yet, it was not solely a German line. It was not a Nazi line. It had never been a Nazi line…. It flew the Nazi flag when they took over, but the money was still American German Jewish money. So they finally got very nasty about it in the Spectator, and they used to have about 150 going on this tour. These are graduate students during the summer. In those days it was very common that if you had a tour group, whether it was an airline—it wasn't an airline very often, but steam ship lines always gave—for every twenty you had, they gave you one passage for your leadership and the people running the tour. So when you had 150, there were five or six of these passages, and they wrote and said my dad was getting [a] kickback and pocketing the money. Well it wasn't the case at all. It paid for his trip and it paid for a couple of secretaries and graduate assistants that could go along to help with the group. When you have 150 people going to a foreign country, you have to have some help. This writer kept writing about [it], and wrote Nicholas Murray Butler, who was still president of Columbia at the time. Said that Dr. Butler ought to—President Butler ought to investigate. So that's what happened. My dad knew Butler very well, and my mother was a very good friend of Mrs. Butler, and so my dad—I didn't hear this meeting. I was not at this meeting, but my dad told me that he met with President Butler very briefly and said that it was all a misunderstanding, that they go and check with … the controller and see that there was no hanky panky with the monies. But that as long as the president was going to investigate impropriety of that type, my dad suggested he might want to look into the ownership of the Teacher's College Bookstore, that was owned by Dean Russell and his family.

PIEHLER: The dean. The dean actually owned the bookstore.

ALEXANDER: Yes, he did.

PIEHLER: That does seem something of a conflict.

ALEXANDER: And so that was the end of that, and the Russells finally changed the ownership. I don't think they were getting filthy rich, but it was …

PIEHLER: It was a clear conflict.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. When it was done, it was done, I think, for the benefit of the students because when Teacher's College was very young under old James, James Russell probably put up some money to get it started, and maybe lost money on it for years, but at the time they were raising this business of conflict of interest, and they were accusing my dad of pocketing this money from the steamship company. My dad finally … used the U.S. lines.

PIEHLER: The last time he went to Germany was when?

ALEXANDER: I went?

PIEHLER: The last time your father went to Germany in these groups?

ALEXANDER: I think was in the summer of ’37.

PIEHLER: And that was the last time he went to Germany?

ALEXANDER: ’36.

PIEHLER: [To] Europe the last time.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, until after World War II. I went to Germany during the war, but I got within forty miles, and that was as close as I got. Oh, to finish up this business about this friend of mine who vandalized my book. As the last class president back in—after I retired in ’80, see, we graduated in ’35, so a fiftieth anniversary in ’85. I thought I’d had the time, so I started trying to run down some of my classmates. There were about sixty of us in our class, very small class. It had been fifty years. I finally ran some down, and this particular fellow was one still living, and the one I got a hold of…. They had a reunion, but something came up in my family. My wife got sick, and we couldn’t attend. But a group of them met in the New York area, and I heard from them. And I heard from this fellow. When I went to New York, he lived up in Hastings, and I called him, you know, and talked to him. He was asking me—he hadn’t seen me since high school. He asked me what I had been doing, you know, and I told him. He asked me, had I been back to Germany. I said, “Yeah, I’ve been back. The last time I was back I was with the Army, got within forty miles of Berlin,” and so forth. I told him briefly what I had been doing. Well, I found out that he had applied for conscientious objection and had spent his war years—I don’t know where it was. Something like White Sulphur Springs, [West Virginia], at some medical thing. And so I thought to my—and so he—I didn’t have time that visit. I just didn’t. And he said, “The next time you’re in New York, we must get together.” And I said, “Well, I’ll see.” But I just got—even this many years later, I thought, “You son of a gun. You were conscientious enough to where you didn’t really fight for your people, and I did.”

PIEHLER: Well he was also very active in …

ALEXANDER: Huh?

PIEHLER: He was the one—this was the same one writing swastikas in your yearbook?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah…. I’m sure that he probably did things, but he didn’t do the things I did. He didn’t fly over a target area, get shot at. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Were you surprised that he had applied for conscience objector status?

ALEXANDER: I was. Yes. I didn't have any way of knowing. I had two other very good friends that—they were brothers, but they had cousins. Their mother was Italian born. Their father was born in Hamburg. They had cousins everywhere in Europe on the wrong side. Both of those boys—that I understood. That was different. Ralph never told me, and I just think … if he called—I haven't talked to him. I haven't heard from him for almost twenty years now. But that crossed my mind.

PIEHLER: That was a real shock to you.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, it was a shock. I would have thought at least—now, if he had been 4-F, that's something totally different. But this, he had to petition it some way or other. I don't know what it was. I never was aware, as long as I knew him, aware that he had that kind of religious conviction … because a lot of times people could get quite religious, if it means exemption. I had another younger friend that lived in the same … building we did. I don't think he ever went to church. He tried to get it [an exemption], and finally ended up in medical school, was his solution. (Laughs) But they turned him down, because he couldn't establish any kind of religious conviction.

PIEHLER: This was in Manhattan in your apartment building?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. He was another faculty kid just like I was. He was between my sister and me in age.

PIEHLER: Before we—because I think you wanted to serve lunch shortly, let me just ask you one quick [question]. You were living in a pretty rarefied environment, particularly in this school, and traveling frequently abroad.

ALEXANDER: Rarefied, and that was one thing I noticed when I got in the service is how—what an advantage I had over the more typical draftees, kids who had grown up same time I had. They ended up in CCCs, or never finishing high school, because they had to work. All of my friends and my classmates, a great majority of us went on to college and then to—it was a—I knew all along that I'd had an education that was not typical. That I knew. But the reality of it, when you see it in the barracks at night, and when you're out doing something in basic training, it's quite obvious because I wasn't the only one in my battery. There were any number of us who had collegiate experiences. We were the college boys. That was a very common—not that we flaunted it necessarily.

PIEHLER: But also I mean in terms of—even when I did a lot of interviews at—I was at Rutgers before this, and I interviewed a lot of Rutgers classmates about the—that was my center. I would ask them where they had traveled to, and I figured this was pretty much an elite group…. A goodly number of [them] had really not been out of the greater New York area. I mean you had traveled several times to Germany.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. It was obvious that—well, we had in our group, and I think I mentioned to you in Knoxville, when I was drafted and I was sent not to a replacement training center, but I was sent to the division up in Indiana. I didn't know it at the time, because I didn't understand

how the army worked, but it was a godsend. It was a stroke of luck that I ended up there, rather than at Fort Bragg or Fort Sill, or one of the training centers. In basic training, we were given all our basic training by the division, and they soon—after, oh, just a week or so—they had had about a dozen of us that they had pulled out, and divided us into two groups, and we trained one day, and they put us the fire direction center and the headquarters the other day, because we didn't need all of that learning, as much the average [recruit]. So we didn't—we were training both areas, and those of us they picked out were—most of us were college people. It made a difference in the—'cause, you see, if you go to a replacement training center, you get three months of basic training, and they send you into an established organization, and you're the bottom man on the totem pole. Whereas in the division training like that, there is a cadre there of officers and enlisted men. When the basic training is over, they extract probably two thirds of those cadre people and send them over here for another division to train, and it leaves all those positions open. So I was drafted on [October] 20' here in Canton. When I got to Atterbury on the 27th of October …

PIEHLER: What year was this?

ALEXANDER: '42. And the first day of January, I was a corporal. I hadn't even finished basic training. Because they had to replace some cadre people that had been pulled out, and in that group that we had there, there were—I was from Columbia, Jim was from Harvard. Don was from Ohio Wesleyan. Tom was University of Pennsylvania. One fellow was a graduate of—[Alan] Ingling was from Annapolis. (Laughs) He had been six years in the Navy, an Annapolis graduate. (Laughter) [Edwin] Diller was from one of the eastern schools. I think out of the twelve, eight of us were college people.

PIEHLER: Pretty good colleges, too.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and they weren't just some two year community technical colleges. Then, about the third day I was up there—I don't if I told you this or not…. I had gone up to work at the headquarters, standing around waiting for somebody to tell me to do something. One of the colonels was just leaving. This was in the morning after breakfast. He says, "If anyone wants me, tell them I've gone to Alaska." "Yes sir." He leaves. Five or ten minutes later, another fellow comes in, a couple of Alphas finally come in. This major says, "Has anyone seen Colonel so-and-so?" I finally said, "Yes sir." "Where is he?" "He said to say if anybody wanted him, he's gone to Alaska." This major said, "What the hell kind of an answer is that?" I said, "I don't know, sir. That's what he said." The major turns to another officer sitting at the desk next to him and he says, you know, "The kind of recruits we're getting these days, we won't ever get anything done around here." And I thought, "You stupid son of a bitch." That's what I thought. I didn't say it; I was too smart to say it. But he thought that I, as a recruit, and the other six of us there were so dumb that we couldn't tell him were the colonel had gone. Well, we found out later, when the colonel came back, somebody had the nerve to ask him, "Well what did you mean by Alaska?" He said, "Well, that's the igloos out there. That's the ammunition…." The ammunition is kept out at the igloos, and he went out there to check on some artillery, and that's where Alaska was. That was a sort of mentality that really was hard to take. Let me go check on that—can we eat now?

(Tape paused)

PIEHLER: Before we move on to the Army, what was it like to grow up in New York?

ALEXANDER: Well, it was great, primarily because there are so many interesting things to do. There were good schools that I was—I was going to a very good school. A lot of activities in university. Baseball teams, you know. My Giants were there. Museums. A lot of interesting things. I think the salvation for the whole experience in New York was that we didn't stay there all the time. I mean, we were gone a good deal. You know, four years abroad. We never spent summers there.

PIEHLER: Where did you summer?

ALEXANDER: Well, my folks would sublet the apartment when we were going to Europe, and sometimes we would go early in June, or sometimes we would go in September, and we would sublet it for a year…. That's why we were gone for a year, because they had sublet it, and then they wouldn't have to pay rent here and also in Germany. That way we could live as cheap, if not cheaper, in Berlin in those days, as we could in New York. By going for the whole year, we could pretty well defray the passage with the difference, because the dollar was pretty strong then. So, I liked it very much.

PIEHLER: So would you go to Europe every summer?

ALEXANDER: No, no.

PIEHLER: So, when you weren't going to Europe, where would …

ALEXANDER: Well one summer, '32, we went to the Olympics in Los Angeles. We would always come down to see my grandparents and relatives in Nashville. We had relatives in Charlotte. We would go to my grandmother's in Missouri, and we'd stop, perhaps, on the way home in Meadville, and see relatives there. We would freeload. (Laughs) My dad had a lot of friends, former students, at Greeley, Colorado, you know. We spent one summer, of '32, at the Olympics in Los Angeles, and then we decided we wanted to go to Germany in '36 to see the next year.

PIEHLER: So it was very deliberate that you were in Germany in '36?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, that's one reason. 'Cause I was out of high school then, and I was going to spend a year in Germany anyway, so we went in time to see the—we went after I got out of high school, and then we went—it was part of my teachers training program, anyway. That's why we were there in '36. So I don't ever remember spending … a total summer in New York. So we got a change of pace, and we lived in a nice part of New York.

PIEHLER: How big was your apartment?

ALEXANDER: Well, it got bigger. We lived in four different apartments in that period of time. The last one we had, it was four-bedroom, and the first one was much smaller. The first year we were there, my dad was just an incoming assistant professor, I guess…. The first year we didn't live in a university building. He just couldn't get in. And then we finally—when we came back in '26, we got into the university-owned building. We had a back apartment. There was a pecking order.

PIEHLER: So you stayed in university-owned apartments? Moved up the ladder.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. We started out on the sixth floor, then we moved to the seventh floor, then we moved to the ninth floor, and we had a front overlooking the park, out looking east. It was very handy, 'cause my school—I could see the school from the front window, and my dad was very close. We—my sister and I enjoyed the fact we didn't have a lot of traveling, because some of the kids had to come from the Bronx. One boy came from Staten Island. (Laughter) Terrible! I think he had to catch the South Ferry at about 6:30 in the morning, you know.

PIEHLER: And did he take the subway up?

ALEXANDER: Then they finally gave him dispensation to come in seven minutes late, because the first—he just couldn't make it any earlier than that. But he traveled from Staten Island. Had to go down to South Ferry, you know, and catch—oh it was terrible.

PIEHLER: What was it like to go to Columbia? Your father was teaching at Teacher's College. Did you want to go elsewhere, or did you want to go to Columbia?

ALEXANDER: No, I wanted to go to Columbia. Well, it was—I wanted to, 'cause it was a good program. There was a good relationship between the lab school and Columbia. I thought a little about going into engineering, but I changed my mind. I had a very good friend, high school friend that—his father was an engineer, starving to death. (Laughs) The only employment he could get really was in the Soviet Union, you know, engineering jobs. In '29-'30. They lost their car, you know, and they had to move out of their apartment to a smaller apartment. It was—my dad took two salary cuts at fifteen percent each. Then we had the—that was time when the bank holiday—nobody had much cash for six weeks or so. But we never wanted.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you remember the bank holiday pretty vividly.

ALEXANDER: Oh, yes.

PIEHLER: Could you talk about that a little?

ALEXANDER: Well, the banks were closed.

PIEHLER: Quite literally.

ALEXANDER: Actually closed, and accounts were frozen. You couldn't write checks or anything. It was very hard on people who got a weekly wage, 'cause they probably didn't get paid. It didn't hurt my dad at all, that I recall, because we traded with … a local butcher and grocer, and two or three other people, you know. The newsstand people always delivered the papers, and then there was the German—Schwanewede was the grocery man. My dad paid monthly anyway, so there was no problem there. Credit was good. But New York City issued script that was honored by some people. Not everybody took it. If you were expected to get paid on Friday evenings, you know, and you didn't get paid, you didn't have anything to take to the market. It was pretty tough. I can't remember exactly how long it went on, about a month.

PIEHLER: I'm not sure the exact …

ALEXANDER: I don't remember, but as I say, I don't think it affected me at all, 'cause I—most of my spending money, I used to make by returning milk bottles.

PIEHLER: That was your spending …

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Two cents on a milk bottle, and the best money, though, was on liquor bottles. (Laughter) See, this was during prohibition, and liquor bottles—most of the drug stores in town did the—probably over in Queens, the same way. Of course, you came up after [prohibition]. But during prohibition, the druggists—there was a drugstore practically on every corner, and we would go through the park, particularly after a weekend, and climb in the bushes and pick up these bottles and any liquor bottle, wine bottle, liquor bottle would bring a nickel. A milk bottle was only two cents. That was a deposit anyway. That was a regular deposit. But if you got a little tiny flask, a flat thing that would go in your coat, that was a dime. That's a lot of money. And so we would scrounge in the bushes where some of the drunks, you know, would pitch them back in the weeds and the shrubbery. We would watch—the ashes would be put out by the superintendent of the building, with ashes from the furnaces and the trash, and we would look for milk bottles and things like that. In bad weather, we would get ashes from the apartment buildings and go down on Amsterdam Avenue on the hill there, that drops off from 116th to 125th street, and we'd have—we'd put ashes under cars, and people would throw us nickels and pennies. (Laughter) Let me go see how that griddle is doing.

PIEHLER: Actually, I'm think I'm going to thank you for lunch before I flip the tape. That was very, very kind of you. So I want that to be part of the documentary record.

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

PIEHLER: Before we move on to the war, I just want to ask a few more questions about New York and Columbia, and one of them is—your father had a very prestigious career at Columbia. Could you talk a little bit about Columbia, and your own education at Columbia? And then you had told us a great story over lunch about the Butlers, and particularly Mrs. Butler and Madame Chiang Kai-Shek.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, well, my dad was first at Columbia when he finished normal school, and was there pretty much through the—he spent some time—after he finished the undergraduate

work, he spent two years—one year in Turkey teaching at Robert College, outside of Constantinople.

PIEHLER: When was he in Turkey?

ALEXANDER: Pardon?

PIEHLER: When was he in Turkey?

ALEXANDER: 1910. After he—uh, 1910-1911, and taught at Robert College. He taught English and was there for about a year. And then, instead of coming straight home, he went up the Balkans into Germany and was in Stettin, taught in a secondary school there … in the Baltic area, in Stettin. Then he came back to Columbia in 1914. Then he went to Peabody. In '24, he went back to Columbia for his career there. He … had been a very good friend, and was always a very good friend, of the Teacher's College. He was in Teacher's College. That's where the … International Institute was, in Teacher's College, which is all a part of Columbia. He was very close to Dean James Russell, and then his successor, Will Russell. They had been together—Will Russell had been together in Nashville, Peabody. And all the time that my dad was there as an undergraduate—his diploma is signed by Nicholas Murray Butler. My wife and I both have degrees signed by Nicholas Murray Butler in the '30s, late '30s. So he knew Butler quite well. Mrs. Butler was a very close friend of my mothers. She is the one that got her involved with the kimono deal, with …

PIEHLER: Well you mentioned—just sort of backing up, your mother was sort of involved in this women's faculty group. What was it called? The Columbia Dames?

ALEXANDER: Something like that, Columbia Dames. It was a group of faculty [wives]. I think there was also a Teacher's College group of women, too. I just don't remember that. I don't remember differentiating. But Mrs. Butler was the one that was always asking my mother to do things for her. My mother was quite an angel food cake maker, and Mrs. Butler would call—they were having some kind of a reception, and they'd need a dozen angel food cakes. And my mother would say, "Yes, ma'am, I'll get them to you right away." And we would eat custard, egg custard. You know, all you use in angel food cake is the white, and we would eat egg custard for about a week.

PIEHLER: So you knew when there was a demand for …

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Well, Mother would make more than—I think it took about a dozen eggs for a cake. Some ungodly number. But Mrs. Butler was very nice to my mother, and they got along very well together.

PIEHLER: You mentioned—over lunch, you were telling this story about Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, and she apparently had a request for kimonos.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. She had been here—I think it was in '43, when she was visiting in the states. She was here, I think, for medical reasons, and also to raise money and to get support for

the Chinese nationalists. She'd been educated in this country, and she had spent a lot of time with—she spent some time with the Roosevelts, she spent some time with the Butlers, and some other friends in the east. Before she was to go back to China, she wanted … to present some presents to some people who had been nice to her, and she wanted these kimonos made. Mrs. Butler suggested that my mother could tailor them for her. My mother took these garments. They were not just bulk silk; they were just garments that had to be dismantled and re-sewed into these kimonos. I think there were twelve of them, and it took my mother about two weeks to get them all done, but that's the sort of thing Mrs. Butler used to get my mother to do. My mother was always doing something like that for Mrs. Butler.

PIEHLER: I'm curious about your dad. Politically, where was he in the 1930s?

ALEXANDER: Where was he? Well, he was brought up in Missouri, and was influenced by the Lafollettes and the progressive group. He was a Teddy Roosevelt, … Bob Lafollette [supporter]. He was a Republican, but a rebel Republican. I mean, in today's terms he would turn over in his grave if he were associated with some of the Republican politics of the last fifty years, almost.

PIEHLER: Clearly since Reagan.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. But really, I think I am quite certain he voted independently, quite independently, and voted for the man he wanted to see in the office.

PIEHLER: What did he think of Roosevelt?

ALEXANDER: He really was not terribly political. He never ran for office any place. Though he did get into trouble though when he was at Peabody during World War I, because as director of the Peabody Demonstration School there in Nashville, he was encouraged and told to discontinue the teaching of German in the high school, and he utterly refused. Had the war not ended when it did, he might have had some legal battles. But he never backed down, and said that one problem we were having with our enemy is we didn't speak their language well enough. He thought it was not academically sound. There was tremendous backlash of German music and composers.

PIEHLER: Oh, and the renaming of sauerkraut.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and it was much worse then than it was in World War II. Because in World War II it was more of hating Hitler and his minions, as opposed to ethnic Germans. But anyway, he was something of a rebel in that respect.

PIEHLER: You were raised Presbyterian.

ALEXANDER: Yes.

PIEHLER: What churches did you go to in New York?

ALEXANDER: I went to the Broadway Presbyterian Church, 114th street and Broadway. I was baptized in Nashville. I can't remember the name of the place, but it was a Presbyterian church. My maternal grandfather was a—what is it, a Universalist. But I think my—his wife, my grandmother attended, I think, the Methodist church. But in … our family, they're mostly Pennsylvania Presbyterians, as far as—now on my wife's side, they were even more so. They were Rankins and Pittses, and so forth. Several of them were preachers over in Dumplin Valley. My wife's Rankin family, they have the little church over there just west of … Jefferson City. It's just out there, not far from where that—is that Jefferson County? There is a high school out there just off of the interstate, and there is this Presbyterian church that belongs to—the cemetery belongs to my wife's Rankin side of the family. So they're all Presbyterian, but mostly Presbyterian.

PIEHLER: How active was your family in the church?

ALEXANDER: How active …

PIEHLER: How active were you in the church?

ALEXANDER: Not very. I don't think I ever saw my dad go to church. (Laughs) He went to some weddings, I think, occasionally. But when I was in Indiana, I was on the board of deacons. I was an elder, but I'm not that fundamentalist. I'm more like … my grandfather Andrews.

PIEHLER: Universalist.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and "to whom it may concern." (Laughs) But I go to the Presbyterian Church here in Waynesville. But I don't go for the music, necessarily. Next Sunday, I go to help cook for the breakfast with the men of the church. But I'd say I—but I used to go regular to Sunday school. I have all kinds of pins, bars for six years without missing, that sort of thing. I enjoyed it.

PIEHLER: We're you a Boy Scout growing up? I saw that some of your sons …

ALEXANDER: No, I was not a Boy Scout, primarily because they didn't have one at the church where I went, and they had a Boy Scout troop, I think, for a while at the school where I went to elementary school, [and the] junior high school [where] I went. But I was doing so many other things that I just really didn't have time. I played basketball, I played soccer, played baseball in the afternoons at school, and there were just too many things going on. But my three boys—I was a Boy Scout father, pack father. I used to drive the bus for the—we used to take trips, and I was on the Girl Scout council in Delaware County, Indiana, when I was there. So I have been involved in Scouting, but I've never been a Scout myself. But the oldest boy, the sheriff, … is an Eagle Scout. The other two boys didn't go quite as far. They didn't have quite the interest. They had busy school lives. You can't do everything.

PIEHLER: I'm curious. Do you remember seeing any movies like <u>All Quiet on the Western Front</u> before …

ALEXANDER: Did I ever see what?

PIEHLER: Did you ever see All Quiet on the Western Front when it came out…

ALEXANDER: Oh, I saw it when it was first run on Broadway.

PIEHLER: Really?

ALEXANDER: Yup. Remember it very well. I saw it the night before I sailed for Germany in 1930.

PIEHLER: Really?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and I was—you know what I remember about it most? I've seen it a dozen times ever since. But there is a Richard Alexander in the show. (Laughs) I don't know what part he played. He was one of the German soldiers, I think, but I recognized that. But we sailed at midnight. We were living in New York. That would have been 1930. It was still first run down near Times Square…. I remember it very well, because the lobby, when you came in, had been reconstructed to look like a trench. Barb wire and parapets and—just as if you were in a …

PIEHLER: In a trench.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. They had the lobby. There is a ticket booth out front on the street. And then you go in the lobby, and before you get to the usher that takes you to the seats, it was—they had constructed—they had machine guns, and they had all kinds of barbed wire, and you had a feeling—you were supposed to feel like you were going into a trench.

PIEHLER: I think you just told me, but what theater was this again? Do you remember? It was a Times Square one.

ALEXANDER: It was down there on Broadway, but I can't remember it. It was on the west side of the street, you know, where 6th and Broadway cross. It was down there close to the Astor Hotel.

PIEHLER: I'm trying to think of the famous—I think there was Paramount.

ALEXANDER: No, it wasn't Paramount. It wasn't the Capitol. It was between—the Capitol was up near 50th…. The Paramount was down near 42nd, 43rd street. But it was in there, maybe 46th street, maybe, someplace.

PIEHLER: No, the reason I raise is it is—there is a colleague of mine who is …

ALEXANDER: You're talking about the one that …

PIEHLER: Oh yes. I just wanted to try to pin it down, because a colleague of mine is working on a book on All Quiet on the Western Front, and that's [a] fascinating point.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, but my dad took us to supper at one of the hotels where Ozzie and Harriet—you know, Ozzie Nelson and Harriet Hilliard, at the New Yorker Hotel, I believe it was. He took us to dinner. It was—they had a restaurant on top of the hotel. Ozzie Nelson and Harriet Hilliard—they weren't married then, and she sang in his orchestra, and he was the orchestra that played for the dinner. He took us to dinner there, and then we went to see the movie, and we got out about 10:30, 11:00, and went to the pier, which was over there on [the] Hudson River, and we sailed some time after midnight. I remember it very well because, see, I was thirteen. It wasn't as if I was a little kid.

PIEHLER: Well, that also strikes me as very memorable.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. I'm sure there must have been some kind of a program they gave us, but …

PIEHLER: What did you think of—did you know German friends who had seen All Quiet on the Western Front in Germany? Did you have any recollection of that?

ALEXANDER: Did I see it in Germany?

PIEHLER: Yeah, or did German friends ever comment on it?

ALEXANDER: Oh it played in Germany. It wasn't very popular. Because [Erich Maria] Remarque, you know, he left Germany soon thereafter.

PIEHLER: You had mentioned—I had asked you about the Boy Scouts, and I realized I should ask you…. Any recollections about the Hitler Youth?

ALEXANDER: Oh, yes, yes.

PIEHLER: Any stories that come to mind?

ALEXANDER: Well, yeah. I've got a uniform. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You have a Hitler Youth uniform?

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: That was yours?

ALEXANDER: I wore it. (Laughs) Now, let me tell you, though, what it was. It's an interesting story. My father's assistant, John Taylor, who … had been in the Demonstration School at Peabody, had started out at Vanderbilt when he graduated. My dad brought him to New York. He went to New York, to Columbia, and became sort of—well, he was a big brother.

He was about seven years older than I was, so he was kind of a big brother to me. My dad sponsored him at Columbia. He finished Columbia and became sort of an executive assistant for my dad in my dad's position at Columbia, and was involved with the foreign study groups. John was. The winter—every time I was in Germany with my mother and sister, John was always there, and John eventually finished his doctorate, and his doctoral thesis, he wrote at Columbia, was on youth welfare in Nazi Germany…. He was over there in '33 on, studying the Hitler Youth and other social agencies in Germany, and how things were changing, and so forth. Of course, when he went over there to do his study, and he was there for the whole year we were there, he had all kinds of letters of introduction to people all over Germany who had something to do with the schools, and with anything that had to do with youth welfare. He was not only Hitler Youth but also the schools, and so forth.

We were on a trip, and we were down in Bavaria. This was in 1933. This was six months after the takeover. John had a letter to the people in Bavaria, the main Hitler Youth—now, he was studying these youth organizations. We got down there, and we were a couple of weeks in Munich. They were having the tenth anniversary celebration of the Hitler youth in Bavaria. Started in 1923, and this was '33. This was ten years later. They were having a big rally…. Fifty thousand of these Hitler youth were meeting in Munich for three days. It was being held out north of town at the big zeppelin field. They had this tent camp village there, to house all these kids coming in from all over Bavaria. Not north Germany, just Bavaria. So we—I was with John, and we went down to see this man at his headquarters, and John was explaining to him what he wanted to find out about the Hitler youth, so the man said, "Well, we're having our rally." And he looked at me and says, "Why doesn't he come and join the group? You can see what we are doing."

So the guy took me in his Mercedes, about a 1915 Mercedes, with all of the controls on the outside of the door, you know. A bright, open thing. And he took me down and got me a cap and a brown shirt, and I got a pair of just lederhosen, you know, just—they were just off the rack. They weren't part of the uniform, but … they were just lederhosen. And I got a shirt, and an armband, and a hat, and that was it, I think. He took me out there to the airfield, and turned me over to a young fellow who was one of the leaders of one of the troops outside of Munich. He knew the group, and so he just assigned me to this guy for two days. I was out there two days with them, living in this tent camp with straw on the ground and everything else. And they [had] field kitchens [where] they fed us.

Then on Saturday there was a big parade. I think I went out there on Friday, some time Friday. They got me in my uniform, and I went out there. They took me out and dumped me, and turned me over to this little troop from some little village outside of Munich, and left me. That was on Friday. Then on Saturday, the big parade. We walked—I don't know, we walked all day. We had to walk in town, and there were 50,000. And these tents weren't little pup tents. They were circus tents that went—they were probably 150 feet long, and there were about forty of them out there and we were just billeted out there in this big airfield. It was a place where they used to land the zeppelins north of Munich. So I was with these kids Friday night, and then I paraded with them on Saturday, and, as I say, we had breakfast, and it seems like we started walking. We walked all the way back into downtown Munich in front of the Brown House…. Are you familiar with that? It was the headquarters. *Braunes Haus*. It was the headquarters of the Nazi

movement where it started, in that area. Munich. See, it didn't start up in North Germany; it started down in Bavaria. So Baldur Von Schirach, who was the head of the Hitler youth, was downtown, and … there was a big monument there where they had a *putsch*, you know, where everybody got shot and the martyrs were buried there. We went down in front of that, in front of—we walked through downtown Munich just in columns, you know, with our group, and there were just thousands of us, and then we walked back out again.

We had just gone in front of Von Schirach—that was [at] the reviewing stand—and the most awful windstorm came up. Thunder, and lightning, and rain, and we walked back in just this torrential rain. It was about six or seven miles each way. We must have walked fifteen miles that day. We walked all day. By the time we got back to our camp, it was time for supper. We hadn't had any lunch. And the rumor started back—we were sort of toward the end—we weren't in the front. We were probably the last twenty percent of the column. But the word got back to us that the camp had blown down, which was reasonable, because of the terrible wind. Well, as it turned out, ours was one of about four or five that didn't blow down, and so I spent Saturday night there with them, drying—oh, then we walked some more. They took us out to a big fireworks exhibit. They had fireworks that Saturday night. I spent Saturday night there, and Sunday, everybody was going home. So I wasn't going with them, I was going back to my *pension* there in Munich, so I said "Good bye" to everybody, and thanked the young fellow for—the leader. He was a young fellow. He couldn't have been more than eighteen, nineteen years old, and I was about sixteen, I think. Fifteen, sixteen. I said goodbye to everybody, and I took some names and addresses. "I'll write you a card," that sort of thing. So I said "Good bye."

I walked all the way across this airfield. It wasn't just a parking lot. It was a quarter of a mile or more across this airfield to go out the gate, the main entrance, to catch the streetcar that I was going to ride back into town. Well, I just got started out the gate, and (popping sound) some big fellow grabbed me from behind, and [said], "Where are you going?" "I'm going home." "Get back in here." They thought I was just taking French leave. So I walked all the way back to where I had these friends, and I said, "They won't let me out. The big SS man stopped me." He said, "Oh, don't worry about that." So he looked around and he saw a column walking out, so he said, "Just walk out with them." So I got into the column and walked out with them. Didn't know who they were, they didn't know who I was, and I walked out through the gate and took off to the left, and got on the streetcar and rode home.

PIEHLER: And you kept your uniform?

ALEXANDER: I still have it, yeah. It's a collector's item now. All it is is the hat, an armband—oh, I think there's a bandana. There's a black bandana with a little slip, you know, with the Hitler youth insignia on it, and armband. But the pants were just the things that most of them wore anyways. I don't think—you know, there was a time before the Nazis took over that brown shirts were forbidden. You couldn't wear a brown shirt. And they forbade the brown shirt, but they didn't forbid the armband, and you'll see pictures of some of these early Nazi meetings back in the late '20s where the guys don't have any shirt on. Just have the armband, and they're bare from the waist up. (Laughs) They went around with just their armband. But anyway, then John—we went on, and this man that—he was—he'd been … a flyer in the First World War and was one of the top men in the Bavarian Hitler youth, but this was before they had

absorbed most of the other organizations, because, see, by the time the war started, there weren't very—there were one or two Catholic groups that still operated. There might have been some evangelical groups that still maintained their youth organizations. We in this country have a little bit of difficulty understanding how active the religious organizations were in youth activities. We don't have much—they had a lot of organizations. They weren't military necessarily, like the Hitler Youth was, or paramilitary. But they were highly organized scout groups and church groups that were much more active than most of our American …

PIEHLER: I'm curious: how did you feel about … the outbreak of war in '39?

ALEXANDER: [How] did I feel about it?

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean …

ALEXANDER: Well, I didn't like it, but I was not at all surprised, because my wife, in '38, was doing her—see, … at New College we all had to do some foreign study. It varied. Mine was longer than hers was, but she was at Cambridge for a semester. She was there in '38 when they had the Munich crisis, and she came home early because they said, "You better get home, 'cause it's going to break out any time," and it didn't, but it did the next year.

PIEHLER: So her semester was interrupted at Cambridge because of the Munich crisis?

ALEXANDER: Well her actual—the … academic work she did there was over, but she was going to stay longer, because, well—but anyway, it was truncated about six weeks, and there wasn't anything to do about it. She wasn't going to get home, I think, until Thanksgiving; she got home [at the] end of September. But it was because of the threat. And of course, the next year, in '39, nobody went. I had a very—well, he—I knew him quite well. I wouldn't call him a close friend, but he was a Columbia grad that was taking a—he got a Rhodes Scholarship, and he got over there in the summer, but they canceled it, and he didn't come home. He was over there. They chopped off the scholarship, but he went into Berlin and got a job with William Shirer….

PIEHLER: That's a good story. And he spent the first years of the war …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and he was in Berlin. I … used to hear him on the morning broadcast from—Russell Hill, his name was. And he was a correspondent, and I knew him, because he dated my wife's roommate.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

ALEXANDER: So that's how I knew Russell. But Russell was a very bright student, and he had received a Rhodes Scholarship…. He got over there, but it was—'cause they went over early … in the summer, and then they—and before the academic year started, they cancelled everything…. He refused—well I guess they couldn't make him come home. But he got a job in …

PIEHLER: How do you feel about the effort to aid the allies?

ALEXANDER: The what?

PIEHLER: How did you feel about efforts to aid the allies in 1940-'41?

ALEXANDER: Oh, I was …

PIEHLER: Yeah, where did you stand on all of those debates?

ALEXANDER: I was in favor of it. I didn't have—and I think I understood the problems that the president and the Congress was having, because … people don't realize how much antagonism there was against it. You know, [to] stay out of the war. "America First." But I—as I say, I was a little surprised in August of '39 when the Germans and the Soviets—was it in August?

PIEHLER: Yes.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, it was in August. 'Cause I was down here in our summer camp program. It was mid-August wasn't it? Couple of weeks …

PIEHLER: Yes.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and I was a little surprised with that.

PIEHLER: You didn't expect that?

ALEXANDER: No, but I knew that … the Germans, of all descriptions, were not hostile to the Russians; they were hostile to the Soviets. Because the lady I lived with, for … three of the years that I was there, was a refugee. Her father had been a German businessman in Moscow before World War I, and she had married a German and come back to Germany, but her two sisters … had stayed and married Russians. So all the time I was living with Frau Betz in the late '30s, and then during the Nazi period, I was aware of the many, many people who had business relationships, Russians and Germans. Frau Betz's place was a refugee post for a lot of white Russians, stateless Russians, people that didn't have—they had left the Soviet Union, but were either in Paris, or—Berlin had, after Paris, probably had as many Russians as anybody else. So I was aware that there was a great commercial interest that these Germans had always had with the Russians, and when you read some of the things that went on with the German army and the German high command, that they wanted strong relations with the Russians, and less with the French.

PIEHLER: I'm curious. The 1940 peacetime draft, did you have to register, and did you register?

ALEXANDER: Oh yes, October.

PIEHLER: And you weren't called up?

ALEXANDER: No, not then. My number was …

PIEHLER: Too low.

ALEXANDER: But I registered…. It was sometime in October, and everybody registered, and I was registered in Canton. We had two Selective Service offices in Haywood County. One in Waynesville, and one in Canton. I was in the Canton one, number two. My number was—I think there were about 1500—I forget the exact number—about 1500 numbers in each, and I was down probably 1200 somewhere.

PIEHLER: So you weren't subject to it?

ALEXANDER: [Not] right away. Yeah, [not] right away. The first year they didn't do anything. Then … then in '41, they had "Over the Hill in October." That was the movement—they were drafted for—the National Guard people were federalized, many of them, for one year, and the one year was up in October of '41. The saying was "Over the Hill in October," 'cause in the summer of '41, it was very obvious the Germans were fighting, and it was obvious that they weren't going to release these people, and they started this movement saying. "Over the Hill in '41." If they didn't let us out, we were going to go over the hill. About that time in '41, they sent me my first card reminding me that I was 1-A, and that I would be subject to draft, and that they were going to take me—let's see—probably by the end of the year. Christmas, or the end of the year, '41. I was teaching school here, and our principal was also in about the same problem, and so the school was looking forward to losing two of us, of a staff of eight or nine, and that was quite a shock. So the school wrote a letter asking for deferment, which they gave me, not to the end of the school year, but for six months. So that took me to early May, and they said six months was all they ever gave.

PIEHLER: This was before Pearl Harbor, this deferment?

ALEXANDER: This was—the letter was written … a day or two before.

PIEHLER: So like December 5, you got the deferment.

ALEXANDER: December the 7.

PIEHLER: Yeah December the 7 was Pearl Harbor.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, but this letter was written about Thanksgiving.

PIEHLER: Okay, so November.

ALEXANDER: But we hadn't heard anything. It takes a while to get things back. I had heard before Pearl Harbor that they might get me by Christmas or, if not in January, some time of … '42. So the school requested deferment on the basis of hardship for the school to the end of the school year. They said, "Well, we won't give you that long. We'll give you six months." And

they said, “Come back in the spring, and we’ll probably be able to give you another month,” which they did. But they said, “Well, we’ll certainly get you in June.”

PIEHLER: Things changed.

ALEXANDER: No they didn’t. No, things really didn’t change. It got worse, as far as I was concerned. My wife and I were trying to get married. She was teaching in Ohio and I was teaching down here. We’d been trying since June of ’40 to get married. Still didn’t have any money, and it was just a question of when we could both get off at the same time, and they told me in the May of ’42 that when my deferment ran out at the end of the school year, that I could expect to go in June. That meant that trying to get married that summer was probably not going to be possible, and we decided, “Well, let’s wait and see where I end up.” Well, June came along. I hadn’t heard anything, and they kept procrastinating. They said, “Well, we don’t need you now, because we’re getting volunteers out of the public high schools, and we fill our quota with volunteers. We don’t need any draftees.” So we frittered away the summer, and then they said, “We’ll certainly get you in September.” Well, my wife and I kept saying, “We’ll just have to wait and see where you go.” Well, September came along, and they still didn’t need me, but they got me in October. But you see …

PIEHLER: You had started the school year again even.

ALEXANDER: I did, yeah, yeah. Then when I got … drafted on [October] 20, was the day I had to report in Canton, they hadn’t told me very much about the procedure. I thought when they said “Report at 5:30 in the morning there at the bus station in Canton,” that was it. So I reported at the regular time, as the card said. They sent me a card thing that said, “Be there at 5:30.” They had a party for me at the school the night before, and I was all packed up. I moved out of my room, and somebody had moved into my room already, and so I left, got down to Camp Croft, which is down near Spartanburg. They gave us another physical, and sent—I think there were three bus loads—about a hundred of us. They gave us another physical, and I think they kept pretty much everybody. There were one or two that might have—but they said, “Do you want your pay to start today,” which was [October] 20, “or two weeks.” “What’s this two weeks business?” “Oh, you get two weeks to go back and settle your affairs.” I thought, “I’m not going to go back to school. There won’t be any place for me to sleep tonight, and they don’t expect me. They’ve had a party.” So I said, “Start today.” There were three of us out of the whole bunch that stayed. They didn’t have enough to ship to—Camp Croft was just a reception center. They didn’t …

PIEHLER: So what did they do with you for those two weeks?

ALEXANDER: I stood underneath—it poured like hell, and I stood underneath a barracks for two days, keeping out of the rain. The corporal [who] was there in charge of us didn’t like … the three of us staying, because it caused him trouble, ‘cause he had to get a place for us to sleep. (Laughs) So he had to go—he was mad about that. So he takes us over and gets us a mattress and some blankets and takes us to a—says, “Bunk here.” Next morning, he said, “Turn everything in again,” and the next evening we got to go pick up stuff again. And so we stayed

[like] that for two days. Then they finally got enough of us together to swear us in and ship us to Fort Jackson.

PIEHLER: So you hadn't even been sworn in?

ALEXANDER: Huh?

PIEHLER: You haven't even …

ALEXANDER: No. So I lost two days' pay then. I never forgave them for it. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I just—before we really continue on with the army, … your first job out of Columbia was where? Was it …

ALEXANDER: First job? Down here.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Could you explain how you ended up in Canton, North Carolina?

ALEXANDER: Well, I was on a teacher education program at Columbia, New College, as was my wife. We both graduated from High School the same year, but we were on a little different sequence, because I went to Germany, and we had to do foreign study. We had to spend … at least a summer down here at this New College Community. We had to have a "Period in Industry." We had to have student teaching, all the other stuff. So when I finished high school, I came down here to New College Community, and New College Community, in addition to being an orientation experience for incoming freshman, where we had some science courses in geology, rural sociology and we worked on the farm, … was [also] an orientation program that was run by the faculty, some of the senior students, and the incoming students. We also had a recreational summer camp that was started. We had a daycare nursery that was started for some of the people interested in early childhood education. So I sent my first summer down here in '35, went to Germany, came back, then put my time in at campus and so forth. We also had a year-round boarding school, Springdale School, after which the golf course is named. So when I finished, I had an opportunity to come and teach here at Springdale, and I taught the sciences. Taught junior high biology, and taught physics and chemistry, and that's where I was teaching when I was drafted.

PIEHLER: So you weren't teaching in the public school system?

ALEXANDER: Not then.

PIEHLER: No, this was a Columbia-owned school.

ALEXANDER: Right, and then when Columbia withdrew, we took it over.

PIEHLER: … When did Columbia withdraw?

ALEXANDER: In ’39, when they discontinued the New College program. And then in 1940, we kept the school, the camp, going. Our family, my dad and my sister and I, and some other New College people, my wife included, we kept the place going here for twenty-six years.

PIEHLER: Because New College—I have never heard of New College before.

ALEXANDER: No.

PIEHLER: This was an experimental college …

ALEXANDER: Right. And it was started in ’32. It was seven years. The concept was to offer these particular experiences during the usual four years, then require at the end—we’d have student teaching as a fourth year, and then you had an internship, a supervised internship and a thesis for your fifth year, and you’d end up with a masters degree rather then a bachelors.

PIEHLER: And this was part of Teacher’s College?

ALEXANDER: Yes. See, Teacher’s College generally took normal school graduates, or graduates.

PIEHLER: But this was for—first year students could enroll. In many ways, it was very traditional four-year college? And it was coeducational, whereas Columbia was …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, but we took courses everywhere.

PIEHLER: But New College was coeducational, which the undergrad Columbia College was not.

ALEXANDER: No, but Columbia Extension was mixed. But at the time, anybody—see, New College had a small faculty of its own, and they didn’t have a full complement of courses. We had the head of the math department, but he couldn’t teach everything. We had a … head of the biology department, and if you needed a biology course that was offered at Barnard, you took it, or if it was offered at Columbia Extension at night, you took it. Or in Columbia College during the daytime, you took it, or in Teacher’s College, you took it. So we had that latitude of being able to take courses wherever they were, because we had some languages that students wanted to take that we just didn’t have the staff to—for some of the more exotic languages.

PIEHLER: And you met your wife at—was it high school or New College?

ALEXANDER: Pardon?

PIEHLER: Your wife, where did you meet your wife?

ALEXANDER: Well, at New College. She was a Tennessean by birth. Fayetteville, Lincoln County. You know where it is. Her father was a farmer there outside of town, and they lost their farm in the …

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

PIEHLER: … This continues an interview with Richard Thomas Alexander in Canton, North Carolina on April 4th, 2003, with Kurt Piehler and …

WHITE: Jake White.

PIEHLER: And you were saying how your wife's father lost the family farm, and …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. They had difficulties during the Great Depression in the '20s, and they spent some time in California, where he didn't have any more success in California than he had—he was raising chickens in California, and had no more luck there than he had at home in Tennessee. So my mother-in-law and the two girls moved to Ohio, where they had two brothers, and my wife's mother got a job, eventually, taking care of … the elderly parents of the head of the art department of Ohio State. That's how my wife got to Ohio. And she finished her last two years at North High School in Columbus, and then had planned originally to go to Ohio State for college, but she got this offer to go to Columbia on a scholarship, and she took it. I'm very grateful for that! So we graduated from high school the same year, but because I was down here in '35 at the New College Community, she registered too late to get down here that summer, and then I went to Germany in the fall of '35, was not on campus, and she came to campus in '35 and was down here in '36, so I didn't meet her until I got home from Germany at the beginning of, really, our second year in '36. But we were on the same program, and that's where we met. Then when New College closed, it closed after we had completed four years, and we did not have the opportunity to finish our masters in the five-year program, because they lopped off …

PIEHLER: The fifth year.

ALEXANDER: But they—I transferred into Teacher's College directly, and she decided to come back to Ohio, [to] be with her mother, and she took her master's at Ohio State in … '39-'40. So …

PIEHLER: I'm going to now turn it over to Jake and see—or I'm going to still ask questions, but Jake has been waiting for this moment.

WHITE: Well one question I had specifically about being drafted, had you not been drafted, do you think would have volunteered for the service?

ALEXANDER: No. No, I don't think so. But that's why I thought they had the draft, because I don't think very many people would have. I mean, if they had had everybody gung-ho, ready to go, they would not have had to have the draft, like Canada. Although the Canadians did draft some. Because what they're saying with the draft is, "We don't get enough people, and we've got to have a system that is supposed to be fair and equitable," and everybody is—it's sort of a raffle, and you take your luck.

WHITE: So you arrived in Fort Jackson … October [22, 1942].

ALEXANDER: … 22, that's in Columbia, South Carolina.

WHITE: Right. Then you moved to Camp Atterbury on the 26th to begin training?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, I spent one night on the train and got off very late the second night, and I got to Atterbury, I think, on the 27th…. But I went to Fort Jackson to Atterbury, and I know there was one night on the train, and we didn't get there until about 11:00, and we didn't go to bed at Atterbury. I think it was the 27th when I got there.

WHITE: How did that winter, being at Camp Atterbury and then moving on to Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky, how did the weather then, that winter, compare to the winter in Germany?

ALEXANDER: Oh, the weather in '42 is the winter … when I was at Atterbury, and it was ghastly. It was worse than anything we had in Europe in '44-'45, including the Bulge. We had more snow, it was colder. They were both very bad, but actually it was more discomfort at Camp Atterbury, because they had us living in pup tents. When we were in France or in Luxembourg, and in Germany and Holland … during the Bulge in that time of year, we lived in basements, and we were better protected in Europe. Now, I'm not talking about some poor guy out there on a rifle company in a slit trench, but even infantry groups, they stayed wherever they could. Maybe not on the firing line, but they found basements, and they found buildings that were still better than being out in the open. I slept in a pup tent on the continent twice. Once when we were in France in the summer. It was very nice. And once for a couple of days when I was coming home, in redeployment in France, before we shipped home. The rest of the time I slept in either a slit trench—not often—or in some basement or in some house, where I had some protection when the weather was bad.

WHITE: You did your training with the 83rd …

ALEXANDER: Infantry division.

WHITE: Right. How well do you think that training prepared you for … your jobs in Europe?

ALEXANDER: Well for my job, it was very good. I got on the job—I didn't go to any school or anything. They just told me what to do, and I did it. There were some things in the training that didn't make much sense. A lot of the physical training was unnecessary. Some of the things we had to do—I don't know how many times we jumped on trucks, and off trucks, and went to ditches, and every—they'd drive a half a mile and they'd blow a whistle, and it would be a simulated air raider, and we'd hit for the ditches. We'd to that sometimes fifteen, twenty times in an afternoon, and we dug innumerable foxholes and slit trenches, and I was there on the continent eleven months, and I didn't dig one. I didn't. I filled some in, but the first foxholes that we used—slit trenches, not regular foxholes; slit trenches is different—that I used in Normandy had been dug by the 101st Airborne, and we had to cover half of them up, because there were so many. I think every man had at least three where we took over from them. It was treacherous. You could fall and break your leg, so we filled, I know, half of them in. I did sleep

in a slit trench there in Carentan, but not very many from that time on. But it was dug thanks to some paratrooper.

WHITE: Now you mentioned that you went through Ranger training, and you and I talked about your Ranger training in Knoxville.

ALEXANDER: That was a waste of time.

WHITE: So what all did Ranger training include when you went through it?

ALEXANDER: Ranger training—I don't know where the concept came from, but it probably was a reflection of the difficulties we had been having with the Japanese in the Pacific, to where there was a lot of bayoneting, and chop chop karate, or something, I don't know what it was. (Laughter) They were starting Ranger Battalions down at Tullahoma, Tennessee. That was the home of Camp Forrest, was that the name of the thing? Yeah, in Tullahoma. They had the First and Second Ranger Battalion, and somebody got the idea that every division ought to have some Rangers. Not necessarily a Ranger Battalion, but everybody should have Ranger experience. So they required in the 83rd, from every company and battery, to identify two enlisted men and one officer to attend this Ranger school at Camp Atterbury for about ten days. They sent up … a cadre of instructors from Camp Forrest to teach us how to be Rangers. They nearly killed us. They killed a couple, and injured several others. Everything from forced marches to climbing bluffs on nets, going over conditioning courses with your bayonet and jabbing into things that came out of trees, and just ran us to death. Hand-to-hand combat, throwing, you know. This slinging each other over each other's shoulder. Somersaulting 150 yards across a big field, then back again. It was hellish. The weather was bad. In fact, the weather got so bad that they had to cancel it for about two weeks, and everybody prayed for bad weather because—those of us who were participants. I happened to be one of the enlisted men identified, primarily because I was in the second bunk inside the door. The first sergeant come and said, "You and you," the first two, "Go to … the battery office. You're going to Ranger school." I didn't know what it was, he didn't know what it was. We thought it had something to do with demolitions of bridges, or something like that. So we went, and as I say, I finally finished, and I got a little certificate. Then that summer, on maneuvers—this was after we left Atterbury—they were still recruiting for Ranger battalions, and they came around and offered us an opportunity to volunteer for one of the new Ranger battalions. I turned it down, 'cause they said you couldn't … volunteer at a higher rank than corporal. Well I was a master sergeant at the time. I didn't think it made much sense to take a reduction in pay just to get—but anyway.

WHITE: So you left early. You went with the advance party to England, right?

ALEXANDER: I went to the advance party several times. I went to the advance party to maneuvers. Whenever you move 15-18,000 troops, you just don't pick up and say, "Let's go." So before we moved into [the] Tennessee maneuver area, which was southeast of Nashville, you know, Lebanon, Murfreesboro, all the way through there. You had to send down an advanced group to be told where you would put this battalion, that battalion, what fields we could use, and so forth. I went down with a major and a couple of drivers to—we reported to the headquarters there in Lebanon. They told us—they gave us goose eggs of where we could put our troops. We

were there, oh, four or five days before the others came. The night … they came down, we had to go out and pick them up on the highway, and lead them in to where they were going. Then that was for maneuvers. I also was on the advanced party that left Camp Breckenridge. That would be in March of '44, see. We went [to] Atterbury first, [then] we went on maneuvers [during] the summer of '43. We went from September until the next March at Breckenridge in Kentucky, and I left with the colonel. We were the two from the artillery, and we went as a small group of sixty. I think there were sixty officers and enlisted men representing the division. And we sailed from Fort Hamilton in New York as a small group. We didn't go as a whole division; we were just an early party. We got there—we went on the Mauritania, which was the passenger ship that the British were using for troop transport. We didn't go in convoy…. Those big ships like the Queens and the Mauritania and the Lusitania, they all were fast enough to go by themselves. We landed in Liverpool, and then we did the same thing with the British liaison officers, as far as camping areas were concerned, and we were in the midlands up in Stoke-on-Trent area.

WHITE: Right. You said you spent about two months in England.

ALEXANDER: Yeah…. Well, we left England on the night of the 18th of June [1944], and we were there about two months from April, and the division got there a little later, but the artillery was kept over—if you know where Liverpool is, that's kind of the Midlands. Manchester, Liverpool. We were south of Liverpool, Manchester, but they sent us over to—into Wales, where they had one of the major artillery areas. Artillery was used mostly in Wales, or up in Scotland. The division was—the regiments were mostly in England. Market-Drayton area, Stoke-on-Trent, and that's where we camped, and we went out to the ranges a couple of times in Wales before they moved us to the coast.

WHITE: You said you worked in the fire direction center. How did you make that transition in England, from working in fire direction center to being an aerial observer?

ALEXANDER: Well, that started back in the states. They—the chief reason that I did it was that, in division artillery, you had the four organic battalions. We had the 155, and then the three 105s and the 105s were identified with the regiments. So you had a combat team of one regiment and the 105s. The 155 was not assigned to any regiment, as such. They assigned—we didn't have any planes on maneuvers in Tennessee. A couple of battalions had planes and pilots that we never had anything to do with. When we got to Camp Breckenridge, they then started sending us all our planes and our pilots. Each battalion—[of our] four battalions—had two pilots and two planes. These were the L-4Hs, L-4s, the Pipers. Division Artillery Headquarters had two L-4s and one Stinson, an L-5. It meant we had eleven planes and at least eleven pilots, and three of these were assigned to DivArty. So it meant that when we got—when I say DivArty, [I mean] Headquarters, because [we had the] Headquarters and Headquarters Battery. I was in the battery, but I was also in the Headquarters. When we got our planes, it meant that we had to identify somebody to fly with them. We had the pilots.

In Camp Breckenridge, after we got off maneuvers, they called a bunch of us, probably eight or ten, I don't remember exactly. There were two or three of us enlisted men, and the rest of them were junior officers in the headquarters. They said—we didn't have an airfield; we just had a

blacktop at the far hand of the camp that they used to take off and land—"Go out [to] the airplanes, and they'll give you some orientation flights." I flew three or four times. Thirty minutes, just get up, fly around, land, didn't do anything to speak of. Did fly—never flew a mission. I had had some radio experience; we all did on the ground. It was the same radio, just on the plane. But we never used radio to the fire direction center. We just went up, flew around, to see if we could recognize things on the ground, and see if we could navigate, and tell the difference between north and south, and fly back…. Say, "Now get me home," and that sort of thing. Thirty minutes. I do remember flying over the impact area one time, and I saw some shells bursting. I didn't know where they were coming from. We weren't firing any missions at all, and that was it. Three or four times, maybe five. I don't remember. It became something of an issue in my family with my wife. (Laughter) I wrote her that I was flying, but I told her that we were doing just orientation, you know.

So anyway, that's all that happened in Breckenridge. We got over to England, the battery caught up with us, Headquarters caught up with us, and we'd been there—I don't know, just a couple of days, and General Montague, who was the artillery commander, we were doing something. I don't know what we were doing. He said, told me, he said, "We just put you on flying … status, and you'll be one of the two official observers." "Yes sir." I mean, that was—that's the way I was told of it.

PIEHLER: Your wife wasn't happy.

ALEXANDER: I had never dreamt that they would pick me, because I was … an enlisted man. I'd never had any gunnery. I'd never fired a mission. Now I'd been around. I'd been out to the range, and I'd been there with some of the other officers when they were having—but these were some of the Fort Sill graduates who were being tested, and so forth. I knew something of the procedures, but I had never fired a mission. Much less on the ground, not on a plane, either. So I said, "Yes sir," and that was in England, and it meant that I was going to get flying pay. So that was all right. But I didn't write my wife, because I hadn't flown right away. We had just gotten word that my cousin, who was a West Point captain, had just been shot down by friendly fire and been killed over England. He was a fighter pilot, P-47 pilot. About the same time that General Montague gave me that assignment, I got this notice about Bob being killed. I knew that if I wrote my wife—I hadn't flown yet, you see—that I wrote her about that, she'd be all upset, and they would identify and equate my flying with Bob's. The difference was black and white.

PIEHLER: Friendly fire incident. What did you ever learn about that incident? The friendly fire incident that happened to your cousin.

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah. He had been—this was before the invasion, and he was in one of these P-47s, and had been apparently attacking some things in France … in the pre-invasion activities, and was coming back at night. Apparently [he] was having some trouble with his radio, or his plane, or something…. He was trying to land not at his own field, and apparently he was unable to identify himself, either because his radio didn't work, or he didn't know the password. You know, the air force had ways of identifying planes. And the field that he was eventually trying to land on, they mistook him for a hostile, and they shot him down. It was quite clear. I mean, they knew after he—that it was wrong, but it was one of those very sad

things…. It just happens. So my family was all upset. So I decided I wasn't going to write about my flying yet, just yet. Well, anyway, … the next thing that happened was that the division caught up with us. General Montague put me on flying status, and then within six weeks or so, we were ready to go. The invasion came. In fact, on D-Day we were out calibrating our guns there, at this big artillery range on the west coast of Wales. We went over there on the 5th, and lined our guns up on the morning of the 6th, and … you know, by calibrating the guns you fire them all from the same spot with the same—to see which are the long shooters and the short shooters, so we could then group the guns. No two guns shoot exactly the same distance, and so they were going to regroup any of them they had to, or get rid of some, if they were too erratic. That's what we were doing when the British told us that the balloon was up, and that the invasion was on. We got back that evening, and we had our orders just to be alerted, 'cause we were in the first group—some of the first groups to go in to relieve the ones who had dropped on D-Day. So, eventually, on the 18th, we boarded the LSTs.

WHITE: Now, that evening when you crossed, there was a huge storm, wasn't there? Can you tell me about the storm, and what it did to the beaches?

ALEXANDER: Everybody knows about the storm on the 4th and 5th of June, and that Eisenhower delayed the landings one day. But very few people know about the storm that hit the night of the 18th-19th. We sat there for four days before we could land, primarily because it took—did away with the Mulberries, especially the American Mulberries at Omaha Beach, and so they had told us when we got down to the channel area that we should waterproof our vehicles with snorkels, because we would probably be landing in water. We got about half of our vehicles waterproofed. You know, just take this putty kind of stuff, and cover all electrical connections and—it's quite a little job. We got about half done, and they said, "You don't need it, because they have the Mulberries out there, and we'll be able to land you on this pier. Take it all off." (Laughter) So we took all of the stuff off, and we boarded the boat, the LST, … the night of the 18th there, in Weymouth. We sailed that evening, and we were supposed to get off at 0800. And the storm hit. Oh, it was terrible. But they didn't tell us we weren't going to land. I was in charge of the vehicles on the tank deck, 'cause I had—the operations truck was this six-by-six. That's all we had, the biggest we had. And we had—our two Piper Cubs were [each] on the back [of a six-by-six]. They took the wings off, you know. They had to fly the L-5s over, 'cause they were too big to tear down. We had been told the night before, as we were leaving the harbor, that we would land at 0800, and at 0745 we were supposed to start all of our motors and have them warm, and at 0800 the door would open up, and we would hit the beach. Well, I was sick as a dog—sea sick—and I slept down there on the tank deck in the truck, and I was on duty, but I didn't go get anything to eat or anything, and was very sick. I started—I had the trucks all started [at] 0745, and waited for the doors to open. Well, about 8:30, they hadn't opened, and you could cut the atmosphere there, and I staggered up to the deck to where the captain was, and I said, "Captain, we're either going to have to get off this ship or turn those motors off, or we're all going to be dead." He said, "Cut the motors. We aren't going to land right away, just now." He said, "Just now." (Laughs) So, then we landed three days later. We were out there four days. Then they had to beach us, and we went through water, but not much. It came up to the running boards, but—then we went over and … started taking over the positions of the 101st.

WHITE: Now when you landed on Omaha beach, did you receive much resistance?

ALEXANDER: None.

WHITE: None?

ALEXANDER: No, no.

WHITE: There was no artillery fire, or anything coming from the Germans?

ALEXANDER: I don't think so. I slept through a lot of it. They gave me some kind of a—what would they give me? They gave us pills that [were] supposed to keep [us] from getting seasick, but made me very sleepy. And I slept pretty well; that was my salvation. I slept through—I don't know how many general quarters that they had. I never knew there was one at night. They told me about them, but I honestly can't say I ever heard them. My buddies tell me they blew the whistle about every other hour for three nights we were out there. Additional nights we were out there. I think that they were just air—I don't remember any artillery fire at all. When we landed, we went through very little water, because we landed at high tide, and there wasn't much beach…. The LST was pretty high and dry there, and we drove off. We went down the ramp, you know, that opens up, and it has a ramp you go out, and then we went up the bluff there on Omaha. I don't know. I was in the first big truck, but there was a command car in front of me that was leading the parade, and somebody gave him some information, and told him where to turn, and we drove and got up there to Colleville Sur Mer, [France]. We ended up in a big … apple orchard, and the first night on land, I spent in a glider that had landed and was torn up, but it was drier than—I didn't put my pup tent up that night. I slept in this glider. Then we moved over to Carentan to take over from the 101st.

WHITE: When you moved into Carentan, what impressions did the 101st leave with you? Did you ever meet or speak with any of them?

ALEXANDER: What impressions?

WHITE: Did you speak with anybody from the 101st when you moved in? Did you meet …

ALEXANDER: I don't know. I didn't have anything to do with it myself. I was just in charge of the truck convoy that was behind me, and follow the ones in front. (Laughs) That's what convoys are. You don't know where you're going, necessarily. But they took us out right north of Carentan. Carentan is a river, and also a canal that parallels the river. The canal has a levy, and the water is controlled in it. The river varies, but the canal is pretty much—and we were on one side of the … canal, on the west levy. Division headquarters was right on the other side. We were there about a week. That's where we had so many holes to fill in. The town was pretty badly banged up. The bridge was—they had a bridge across the river that was alright. The 101st was not where we were—they had moved from we were camped, and they were still in the line, but we started firing in support of the 101st before the 83rd took over officially, because they needed artillery support. They didn't have much. And we did fire very soon after we got there, because all we had to do was get some coordinates to shoot at…. We were firing our battalions, but in support of the 101st regiments that were somewhere on the south side of Carentan. And

then, in the meantime, in the next few days, our regiments gradually took over the forward positions of the 101st, and then they went back to England.

WHITE: Is that when the 83rd took over …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, the 83rd took over from …

WHITE: And at that point—I've got a map of the 83rd, and it looks like you guys moved to St. Malo. Is that right?

ALEXANDER: That was later.

WHITE: That was later?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. St. Malo is in Brittany, and Carentan is in Normandy. We didn't get down to St. Malo until after the breakout. They had the big bombing. That's when [General Leslie] McNair was killed, you know, in late July. We were in Carentan in June, and all of the rest of June and July. Then the Third Army took over on the first of August. That was Patton, and then we were attached to Patton on the 1st of August, and we didn't get to St. Malo until about the—oh, I guess it would be about the 8th or 10th of the month. You had to go all the way down and then turn, and this is the Brittany Peninsula. Then eventually, the Ninth Army took there in Brittany and the Third Army went further east…. We were in [the] St. Malo area twice. We went up there initially after the breakout. The 30th division, by the way, that—you know, they were in that Mortain battle, when they stopped the attempts of the Germans to cut us all off…. We had gone—they headed east, and we headed west. We were there in St. Malo for about two weeks. They took the Citadel, which was the fortress on the mainland. But there was an island out—Island of Cezembre, that was off coast, that was still blocking—the Germans still had it, and it was out in the harbor, and made St. Malo useless, although we had the town. They had moved us down into a Loire Valley [in] late August, and we got down in the Loire Valley, and then they brought us back. I say us; they brought a fire direction center, and one battalion back to fire on Cezembre. In addition to some core artillery, we had .240 howitzers and we had eight-inch guns. They were bore sighting them. They really didn't need us; they were just looking down the bore, at this island about a mile and a half, two miles off—then we were there about three days, and finally reduced them to rubble. Then they surrendered. Then we went back east.

WHITE: So I guess the first Germans you encountered in combat was at Carentan?

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

WHITE: What were your first impressions of combat?

ALEXANDER: Well, I don't really remember. I was glad to be on land, because I was so seasick. (Laughter) That was one of my—really, I'm serious. When you read in Eisenhower's book, Crusade in Europe, he mentions—he comes to Normandy about the same time we did, and he mentions meeting some of the seasick people getting off. [He] mentions us, some of the 83rd

people, getting off. Seasickness is that you're afraid you're going to die, and then you're afraid that you're not going to die. (Laughter) That's a little bit of a joke, but … everybody was super cautious. I remember when we took over that first field where we camped that first night, everybody was tiptoeing around, to be sure they wouldn't walk on land mines or something, that they wouldn't touch anything, for fear it might blow up on them. I got my first job as [an] interpreter—I don't know where they came from. They must have hit some kind of supply truck, but there were all kinds of little leaflets in German. When I first saw it, I didn't know if we had dropped them. When I read them I knew what they were. They … they thought they were some kind of secret message. What it was, was telling the German soldier how to avoid dysentery. There was some kind of a—I don't know whether there was a medication that went with it or not. The first one I read had nothing to do with anything really deep, secret.

WHITE: So when did you fly your first mission?

ALEXANDER: … It was June [27]…. We were in Carentan, still there, and we were supporting the 101st…. The 83rd took over on the 1st of July. We had our first—we were totally responsible for that sector. This was before that, probably the 26th or [2]7th of June. Again, in one of those very informal orders from General Montague, I was in the fire direction center, down in a big trench. They'd bulldozed [it] out … and our tent was down just below the ground, and we had been operating for two or three days. We'd been firing missions. We were receiving some shelling. General Montague said, "Go out to the airfield and we need a registration." I think the 322nd was firing. This was not firing a mission; this was just firing a registration, which was necessary before—you have to register on known points before you could shift within your sector. So they needed a registration for the 322nd. Go out there and—he just said, "Get a plane and do it." "Yes sir." (Laughter) Well, I had never fired a mission. I had seen them done, you know, on the ground. I said, "What procedure should I use, sir?" He said, "Forward observer methods." "Yes sir. Forward observer methods." I knew what he meant, but I had a mental block. I did not remember—I had seen forward observers fire, and all you do on forward observer—it's really very simple. You simply sense where the rounds fall, in relation to range and deflection, but for the life of me I couldn't remember whether you did range first or deflection first, and I wasn't about to ask General Montague. So I said simply, "Yes sir," and on the way out of the tent I grabbed a field manual. We had a stack of them on just forward observer techniques. On the way out to the airfield, I looked up real fast the page number that I was supposed to find out, that told me whether it was range or deflection first. By the time I got there—I don't remember to this day which comes first. I've forgotten. I think you give range. The procedure was to give range first. But that can still be tricky. Because in some cases, depending on where the observer is—if you're way off—if you're right behind the guns, its one thing, but if you're way off at an angle, their range can be your deflection if you're looking at it from a ninety degree angle. But I knew where the guns were because I was in the fire direction center. I knew where the battalion was, and I knew the sector they would be firing in, so that wasn't my problem. But anyway, I briefed myself on the way out to the air plane. And we registered [June 27, 1944].

WHITE: At what point did you remember first firing on German troops?

ALEXANDER: First firing on …

WHITE: Calling in fire from your airplane …

ALEXANDER: When we found it?

WHITE: When you first fired on German troops, or tanks, or emplacements.

ALEXANDER: Oh, I can tell you two or three times when they wouldn't let us fire. In fact, I was flying right over a tank. I could have almost reached down and touched it. They said, "It couldn't be." (Laughter) I didn't fire very many, initially, because it was flat there, you see. And they could see sometimes better than we could. Where we were really helpful was when the terrain was hilly and they didn't have a high point to see. We could see beyond hedgerows that they couldn't see. But when I first fired on troops—you almost never saw German troops. Almost never. You could always tell when you were over the line, because when you stopped seeing American soldiers and you stopped seeing American trucks, you knew you were probably too far. But you very seldom saw the German troops. Very seldom. Because they would see us, and they would hide. In some cases there weren't very many, anyway. I can't remember the first. As I say, I can remember two or three times when I knew exactly that there was a tank right below us. If I'd spit out the window, it'd hit them.

WHITE: Was it frustrating not being able to fire on them?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, because they—well, you can't question the fire direction center, because they are going by what they have been told are the front lines, and this is what we are telling the regiments, that we won't fire beyond this point. If they've got the red line there, and there is a German tank that's inside of it, we can't fire on it. Because that red line says that this is where the infantry groups feel it's safe to go. We can fire beyond it. And that's what, basically, the fire direction center did, is to—we had to clear things. Anytime a battalion was firing outside or even close to its boundaries, it had to clear it with the fire direction center. In some cases we weren't certain and we'd have to correct—maybe with another division, even, and that was one of our major functions.

WHITE: Did you encounter any noncombatants in Carentan?

ALEXANDER: Did I do what?

WHITE: Encounter any French civilians, people who weren't in combat, just average French citizens?

ALEXANDER: Didn't see them in Normandy.

WHITE: Didn't see any?

ALEXANDER: Almost never.

WHITE: When did you first encounter French citizens?

ALEXANDER: After the breakout. Because, you see, the Germans had cleared them out. We didn't clear them out; the Germans had. It was very seldom—there were a few in Carentan, but most of them were in the basements … and they didn't come out…. I did see a French civilian—he didn't save my neck, but he explained some things to me, when we were attacking St. Malo …

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

ALEXANDER: … But see, the landing areas—the Germans had evacuated most of the civilians, the ones that hadn't fled. There were some they kept. They worked them, worked some of them. There weren't very many big communities. Carentan is not a very big place. Cherbourg, of course, is big. St. Malo is a pretty good size place. Brest. I remember when we finally broke out and we went down to Avranches, and started out that way, and we went—when we got into the Loire Valley, there were a lot of civilians. I met a lady—we were going towards Orleans, and I was in the scout car, and we were putting out road markers. You know, I had a scout car, and it had a couple of truckloads of people with signs. Every time I came to an intersection where there might be some question, we would say, "Get out here and hold a sign," and they would know to go that way rather than that way. That was a very important job, when … you were moving sometimes forty, fifty miles, particularly after the break out. We pulled into—it wasn't Orleans, but it was somewhere near Orleans. Pretty good size town. It was in good shape. It hadn't been hit to speak of. There was sort of a little plaza, and two or three roads, and our maps—for some reason, I wasn't sure which way we were supposed to go. I stopped, and there were civilians along the side of the road waving to us and saying, "Hello." There was sort of a little traffic island, where the roads split, and so I told the driver to stop. There was a lady, middle-aged lady, standing there, very well dressed. I started in my high school French to ask her which was the better road to go. She said—she was an American—American woman [who] married a Frenchman. She was from Milwaukee, I think, and she was out there saying hello to us, and she told us.

WHITE: So for the most part, when you interacted with noncombatants, French citizens …

ALEXANDER: My battery must be dying on me here.

WHITE: I'll speak up.

ALEXANDER: No, it's down—it was on one.

WHITE: So when you interacted with noncombatants and the French citizens, were they for the most part glad to see you Americans?

ALEXANDER: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Yeah. There were some people in St. Malo, though. I didn't know any of them, but one of my—our anti-tank officer went back there some years after the war with a group of veterans going back, and he got some awful nasty reactions from some of those people in St. Malo. He wrote a very nasty article for one of the local papers or magazines accusing of us of unnecessary ruthlessness, and that there was no need to—and St. Malo was

pretty well plastered. He just excoriated the 83rd for our butchery of their medieval town. 'Cause it was an important town, even in the Napoleonic periods, you know, and even before that. Saying that it was totally unnecessary, that there was no need to—well, that wasn't quite right. A lot of our guys got shot, I can attest to that. But anyway, this came some years after the war, and of course, it's easier to welcome an invading force—even a force that's coming in to relieve you and to free your county…. If your house has been bombed, it's harder to be accepting and say, "Thank you so much for coming, but my house is gone." We ran into the same problem with the German civilians. Some of them … were very indignant.

WHITE: Along those—I'm sorry.

PIEHLER: No, no, go ahead.

WHITE: Along those lines, would you say there was any unnecessary destruction in Europe, or did you witness any?

ALEXANDER: If you say "wanton." Of course, … there was destruction. There always is. Right now, today, there is destruction that is taking place that is not really necessary. But that isn't the question. Are you doing it because you aren't certain? In other words, if you're absolutely certain there is nobody hostile in that building, then blowing it up or firing a shell point blank into the window, and blowing the thing up, if there's absolutely nobody there, is one thing. But if there is the least doubt there might be somebody hostile in there, then it's a totally different thing. So I know there were a lot of buildings were hit that there were no hostile people in it, but you just don't know. Some of the casualties we've had in this recent conflict is where soldiers were trying to be cautious, but they were too cautious. When you get to a point you aren't sure—if it's at night, or its getting dark, you can't see too well, and maybe the information you have—somebody may have told you they saw some Germans going in there. Well, maybe they did. Maybe they went out the back door as fast as they could. If you blow the thing up, you could say that is unnecessary. But, in terms of—if it's your neck you're trying to protect, it's a different thing.

WHITE: Where in France would you say you encountered the biggest German resistance?

ALEXANDER: Normandy.

WHITE: Normandy was the biggest, in Carentan?

ALEXANDER: Oh, yes, yes.

WHITE: Then after the break out you moved fairly rapidly through France?

ALEXANDER: Oh yes. It was—we didn't do any real fighting. Well, St. Malo we did, but that was not anywhere near as vicious as it was in the hedgerows. Oh, the Normandy—not at the beach. See, that's another thing that upsets some people in divisions like mine that came in a little later, is that when you see …

PIEHLER: Saving Private Ryan.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, that story. Most people think that that was Normandy. People don't realize that the 83rd lost more men in Normandy than the 101st did. They landed on D-Day, sure. And they lost their men in a shorter period of time. But in terms of total casualties, we lost more, from the time we landed until the breakout, than they did. And, you see, most people think that Omaha beach, Utah beach, was the battle of Normandy. It wasn't. It was the landing. The thing went on until the very end of July. We were there much longer than the 101st was. Now, I'm not—I wouldn't have jumped out of an airplane for love or money, and I honor their feat. But that isn't the question.

WHITE: You say you moved fairly rapidly through France, and then it looks like you moved into Luxembourg.

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

WHITE: Did you experience much German resistance in Luxembourg?

ALEXANDER: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, because, you see, Luxembourg was a grand duchy that the Germans took over, really. It … was on the border of the Moselle River. The eastern boarder of Luxembourg is the Moselle. We weren't the only ones there, but we finally—we were there from about the 23rd of September until the 4th of December. [We] were there quite a while. Cleaning out Luxembourg and then firing into Trier and Bitburg, and some of those other places. Thionville. That was a problem of supply, largely. We ran—see, we were still getting our supplies … pretty much from the beaches, Omaha. Bringing it all the way across France. With the failure of the British to clear the estuary there in Holland—you know, the Bridge Too Far.

WHITE: Operation Market Garden.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, that's where the Rhine and the Maas all dump into the Channel and into the North Sea. We weren't able to use Antwerp, and then having to bring everything with the Red Ball Express. You've read about the Red Ball Express.

WHITE: Along the lines of supply, how would you say the supply system worked in Europe? I mean, all things considered, do you think it worked well?

ALEXANDER: Oh, it's unbelievable. That's—of course, that supply route was one thing. But the—when you're talking about supply, you've got to think of not necessarily from the beach to the front. You've got to think from Michigan, the manufacturers where they manufactured things in the Midwest, to England and to there. It's that supply that really is so fantastic. I mean, it's what—the Germans to this day don't understand the accomplishment. And right now, in this present war now. It's unbelievable. Just think, when did the 4th Division leave this country? A week ago?

WHITE: From Fort Hood?

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

WHITE: Yeah, about a week ago.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and where are they now? They're in Kuwait, aren't they? Now that's—it boggles my mind. And so when you talk about the supply system, you've got to think of the total system. The Germans were pretty good, but they were simply located in the middle of Europe, and they had Autobahns, and they had railroads that went to the Russian border and the French border. But when they got over into North Africa, their supply system was not all that great, and that's one reason why Rommel just withered on the vine, really. That's where the British and the Americans were far superior. A friend of mine, this Dr. Mönnig, who got my dad out of trouble back there with being expelled from Germany, he was a middle aged man, but they had him in the army for his language ability, and he was an interpreter with the German army in the West, and was opposite me for—almost to Berlin. This friend of mine. He was a German. Mönnig told me after the war, when I saw him in Bonn, he said that he had the job to interview some of the paratroopers they captured in Normandy, some of the 101st, I think. He said, "When I saw the first American paratrooper," he said, "I knew the war was over."

PIEHLER: Well why did he think that?

ALEXANDER: He said they were so big, so well equipped, well fed. He said the real thing that shocked him was they apparently picked up some packages or letters or something…. But I think it was a package that had come to one of these paratroopers in Normandy that had been posted somewhere in Toledo, Ohio. Some place—it wasn't at the major post office in New York; it was somewhere inland, and it was less than a week.

PIEHLER: And they were just shocked that you could move a package that quickly.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and he said—anybody who used his brain could say, "If they can get those things here, it's over." And it was true. When we were in Normandy we got the best—of course, the lines were pretty short there, and they were flying, apparently, things right smack dab into Normandy, some of these V-letters. You know, with film. They had a laboratory that printed them, and I was getting letters from my wife in less than a week. Now, as we got into Germany the next spring, the letters came in all kinds of irregular—my wife used to number her letters. Number … 117 came long before fifty-five, and fifty-five, something had happened to it. And it had to do with where we were, and they moved us around a lot. But Mönnig said that when he talked to these prisoners …

PIEHLER: I'm curious. You're bringing up your father's friend. How did you feel about serving—you know, fighting the Germans? Germany was not a distant enemy. You had lived in Germany, you had had German friends.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Yeah. It really didn't bother me.

PIEHLER: You didn't think like you could be fighting someone you had …

ALEXANDER: Well, now, really, I learned later where he was. I didn't know at the time. If I thought about it, I would have thought, "Well, he's too damn old, and he won't be there." But he was in his forties. But he was there as an interpreter.

PIEHLER: But you had … gone to a Hitler youth rally, you had gone to school …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, but that—I didn't really know—they weren't school friends. I realized that I couldn't help it. It wasn't my fault that I was having to do this. It wasn't any individual's fault. After all, the Germans had some responsibility. If they hadn't done certain things, I wouldn't be asked to do certain things, and if anything, I might have been even resentful. "You stupid Germans, look what you've done. You're embracing Hitler here, and Hitler is the cause of all this, and if it weren't for you—" that's a great deal of truth to that, you know. The people who are dominated by—the Iraqis who are dominated by Saddam Hussein have certain responsibilities. Granted, it's hard to stand up and resist a dictator. It's easy for me to say that here in this country. But I know that people did stand up to Hitler. Some little men just can't do it, because they don't have any power. But there is a certain responsibility of the general population.

WHITE: Speaking of the general population, since you grew up in Germany in the '30s and you'd seen some of the …

ALEXANDER: Well, I say I grew up in Germany. That's not quite right.

WHITE: Well, you spent time [there]; you went to school there.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, there is a difference. That might imply—a person might read into it that I spent all my time there. But I had experiences in Germany, as I was growing up, but I didn't grow up—I grew up in New York.

WHITE: Right, so you spent several years in your school career in Germany. Were you aware of the things that were happening to the Jewish people?

ALEXANDER: Yes! Oh yes!

WHITE: So you were totally—would you say for the most part the American army was aware of what was going on?

ALEXANDER: Well, yes, I think so, but I don't think that the average man in the army was aware of some of the real bestial conditions that existed, because you must remember that the real horror took place after the war started. Now, I saw—at this rally I attended in Munich that time, there was a small concentration camp that later they moved to Dachau. See, Dachau was just north of there, about four or five miles. But there was a compound with wire, and these kids told me what it was. It was not a huge place, but it was a compound at the east end of this airfield, and it was just about within ten miles of where Dachau was being built. See, they started pretty much from scratch with those places. But this was some kind of a compound,

they'd call it the *Konzet* [*Konzentrationslager*, "concentration camps"], you know, and that—I knew that that existed, because I saw it. We were about three tents from where this fence was, and some of us went over there and looked in it. It looked like a—you know, a little prison. You could tell it was a prison. But it wasn't these extermination things there at that time.

WHITE: So your time in Luxembourg—looks like you spent quite a bit of time right there … through most of the winter, actually, before you …

ALEXANDER: Well, then we went up there to Huertgen forest. That's up around—east of Aachen. That was the real nasty one. After Normandy, that was the worst.

WHITE: Can you tell me a little bit about it?

ALEXANDER: Well, it preceded the German offensive. It was up north, up there—Aachen had been taken, and that was where they first started hitting the Siegfried line, that was all of the—Huertgen is a forest. Little town of Huertgen and there is Huertgen forest. Very thick pine forest there, at the headwaters of some of the big reservoirs that were power plants for the rural area. A very important area in Germany, because of the hydroelectric facilities. It was very heavily defended with all kinds of natural things, because of the rough terrain. It was very hilly, nothing flat, with very dense—like Black Forest, almost, as black as Black Forrest down in Würtemburg, in Baden. So the Germans defended it very vigorously, to keep us from getting into the plain towards Cologne and the Rhine. They started up there in September, with any number of different divisions that just got chopped up. Then the weather got bad, and snow, and they finally took us out of Luxembourg and about the 1st of December, early in December, and moved us up through Bastogne and up into the Huertgen, and we replaced the 4th Division that had been chopped up, and put them down into Luxembourg to rest, because Luxembourg was—then, about two weeks after that, in come the Germans again through Luxembourg and through southern Belgium, in the bulge.

WHITE: What I read about the 83rd, it looked like your division held off the German offensive. Is that right?

ALEXANDER: We were on the northern … sector, on the north part of it. It was obvious they were going to have to move some troops around. The Germans penetrated westward. We were cut off, pretty much, from the First Army, for communication purposes, so they attached us to the Englishmen.

PIEHLER: Montgomery.

ALEXANDER: Montgomery's command. Then they moved us. We slipped down back through Liege, and went out towards the leading point of the Bulge. We weren't the furthestmost west, but we were northwest of the—and there was a British unit there, and then the 83rd and the 84th, and then … the Second and Third Armor were in there.

WHITE: On this map, would you say you were somewhere over here?

ALEXANDER: Let's see. It says, "U.S. Second Armored Division." That's where we came in. That's as far as they got, and we were right about in here. They brought us back from—I don't have my reading glasses yet. I can show you in my—I got a little better map, I think.

WHITE: Okay.

(Tape paused)

PIEHLER: I want to just—before we continue sort of going through where your division had been, could you give us a sense of what typical days were like for you? It sounds like, unlike some other people in the division, your days varied. Some days, you were spotting artillery by air, but you mentioned at one point your putting out …

ALEXANDER: We generally always had something to do, because we were [the] headquarters, and we had to maintain communications at all times, even when we were moving. We had a truck that was an advanced fire direction center that would go forward with radio capabilities. Not telephone, but radio capabilities, that would set up in the forward position, so we could tear down the other one…. It was always leapfrogging. Even when our division was out of immediate action, we had to maintain communications with higher headquarters and with all of our battalions and with our divisions. And so it wasn't a question of going back to a rest center for a week. They'd pull some of the companies out of the line completely, and they wouldn't have a thing to do, but we always had something going on. [In] the wintertime, my personal activities were a bit more limited, because we didn't fly very much. The days were short, the weather was bad, and during the Bulge, I don't think I flew more than two or three times. At the very end in the summer, well …

PIEHLER: Spring.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, in the spring, in April and May when the war was winding down, and up in the northern latitudes, daylight is very long, and we had to fly patrols all the time. I'd fly sometimes three times a day, whereas it might be a week I wouldn't fly at all. When we moved, we very seldom did any flying. That would vary. But as far as being in the fire direction center, I was always there. There was always something to do. Now, the real workhorses in our battery were of course the wiremen, the telephone wiremen. That was terrible. They just really had a terrible job. Radio people, not so bad, because they had to stay with the radio, and they were generally with a truck or something, or a car, and they were always close to the headquarters. But the wiremen were just every which way.

PIEHLER: It sounds like often getting lost.

ALEXANDER: Oh, and it was always—nothing would happen when the weather was good, or it was daylight. It was always at night, and very dangerous. Extremely dangerous.

PIEHLER: Being part of headquarters, you had probably had a better sense of how the division worked than your average …

ALEXANDER: Oh, yes.

PIEHLER: Can you give us some sense of that? You—for example, you knew the general of artillery, the divisional—Montague. It sounds like you …

ALEXANDER: That's what's so interesting, is that when I go to these reunions, and a majority of them are infantrymen, and the majority of them are replacements. It's amazing how few fellows were at Atterbury on maneuvers, at Breckenridge in England, and in the five campaigns. Very few infantrymen … make it. In the artillery, a much higher percentage went the whole route, and in our battery, [the] overwhelming majority of us were there from A to Z, because it was a safer job, and we had very few casualties in our battery. Very few. Most of them were not life threatening. A lot of them didn't come back; they were redeployed. And most of them happened at the very end of the war. (Laughs) The battery commander got shot about a week before the war was over. It was one of those things. He shouldn't have been shot; he shouldn't have been where he was. But anyway, that's pretty much the situation where they—we knew where we were at all times, because we were a map room.

PIEHLER: Yeah, because I mean, most soldiers say they have no clue where they are.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, they don't know how to spell the name, if they know the name. They're not sure if they are in Germany or in France. And of course, I had the advantage in that I had been to some of these places…. It's amazing how few places I went that I did before. I mean, I was shocked when I got back to Munich where I'd stayed. I saw that. I saw Düsseldorf from the air. On the way home I went through Mainz and Frankfurt, where I'd been. But on the whole, a lot of places I had never—but a lot of places I knew about. The night before we got on the LST, we spent the night about as far as from here to where your car is, from Stonehenge. You know the …

PIEHLER: Oh yes.

ALEXANDER: Have you ever been there?

PIEHLER: No, but I've …

ALEXANDER: But you know what it is.

PIEHLER: Oh yes.

ALEXANDER: Do you know that I was the only one that knew what that was, in the whole thing? We had driven down from the Midlands. We had driven all night, and it must have been 3:00 in the morning. We pulled of to the side of the road, and we didn't set up everything. We just had one tent up, had our maps out. I knew where we were, because I saw it on the map. This boy came in—he was a messenger—just a kid came in. [You could] just barely see the horizon. This kid came in and said, "You ought to see the crazy god damn rocks out there!" (Laughter) Somebody else, one of the officers said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, go out and look at them." And it was Stonehenge. And there wasn't an officer in the place …

PIEHLER: No one had known about …

ALEXANDER: No. Of course, I had been there, and so I explained to them what it was. But that was those crazy god damn rocks. (Laughter) And it was Stonehenge, and right—I've been back there several times since then, and they've made—where we parked was where the refreshment stand and where the parking lot is now. And they don't allow people to go on up there. It had a little wire fence that wouldn't have held a dog across the road there, and that's right on Salisbury Plain area, and that's where we parked for about an hour, maybe an hour and a half, and then we went from there down to the port.

PIEHLER: I mean, along those lines, you had been to Europe many times before. What was the attitude of a lot of your comrades? You know, people you served with towards—I mean, you have a great story about Stonehenge, but towards Europeans. Englishmen, Frenchmen, and the Allies.

ALEXANDER: Oh, they much preferred the Germans to the French. They thought the English were kind of crazy. England was probably—the English were very friendly, but with the exception—though we had some problems with black troops, and the American white troops. Very unpleasant. A lot of hostility, and in fact, the American army had to step in and decide that on certain days only white troops would be given passes to go to this town, and black troops on alternate days, and the British were really quite resentful, because of the fact that our racial prejudice—'cause … two American troops from different units—and a lot of the service troops in England—were black. Disproportionate number were black, and then most of the combat troops were all white. There were some nasty situations in some of those towns, and some of them had been there two or three years, you know. It was much long than—I was just there a couple of months. But there were some troops that were there for years, and that was kind of bad. But Britain on the whole, people liked it.

PIEHLER: But they thought they were a little crazy.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, they thought they were kind of …

PIEHLER: In what ways?

ALEXANDER: Well their language was funny. We're separated by our common language, you know.

PIEHLER: So this really did throw off some …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and the facilities in Britain were terribly run down, overcrowded, and they liked Germany. The Germans were cleaner and neater than the French, the Italians. They were more orderly and more like us than the French were. The Germans liked beer, which most Americans did, and the Americans didn't care much for wine. They drank it, but they did care [for it]. They preferred beer, or something stronger. Of course, at the time, there were more of us in this country of German extraction than any other—more than English or Irish.

WHITE: Since you could speak German, were you ever used to speak with POWs?

ALEXANDER: Very little.

WHITE: Very little.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. Once or twice. I spoke to—just casually at Breckenridge, when some of the Germans were there. We had Italian prisoners at Atterbury. At Breckenridge, they had German prisoners, and most of them were North African, *Afrikakorps*, and they were a surly bunch. Still thinking they're going to win the war. It was sort of disgusting.

PIEHLER: How did it come that you talked to them? Where you just talking to them casually, or were you …

ALEXANDER: They were used on some kind of police detail, picking up papers or something, and they stopped them right outside of our supply room and our orderly room, in the shade, there. Give them a drink of water. And some of my friends in the supply room went out there, and they brought me out to talk to them, and ask them some questions. These were young—they wouldn't admit it, but they were glad to be in this country, and that they were …

PIEHLER: But they were still very arrogant.

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah. They knew that we were training, and we hadn't been overseas yet. They were telling us, "Well, wait until you get over there. We'll show you how to fight." I thought it was kind of disgusting.

WHITE: So in April is when you received your battlefield commission.

ALEXANDER: [April] of '45.

WHITE: Right. How did your relationship change with the officers and NCOs in your battery?

ALEXANDER: Well, I was concerned about it a bit. But it went very well. It changed—I had to eat some place different. I had to eat with the officers, and I had to move my bedroll. I was leery about it at first. What I was leery about most, though, when the colonel—we hadn't crossed the Rhine yet, and he called me and said they were going to—they'd sent papers forward to commission me. We were still in Holland, hadn't crossed the Rhine. The war was—we could see the war was coming to an end. I didn't get the actual promotion until we were just a week away from the Elbe. I said, "Wait a minute. Whoa." I wasn't interested in it, because—I said, "Where are you going to send me?" 'Cause I didn't think they were going to keep me. They didn't generally keep you. I had the best job in division artillery, as an enlisted man, and I had gone that far, and was making good money. Best money I'd made in my life, really. I didn't see that it made much sense, at that late date, to become the very bottom man on the totem pole in some artillery battalion. I didn't know where it was going to be, and I would be starting at the very bottom again, where I was really—I was the top NCO in division artillery, and I had some

rank, and I had some experience, and I liked it. He said, "No, they're going to keep you." I said, "Can you?" He said, "Yes, we can keep you." So, I didn't think so. But that did go through my mind, because I didn't think—it didn't make much sense, because I knew what happened to second lieutenants, you know, when they come out of OCS or they join an outfit already in existence, but see, I'd joined the army when my unit was being trained, and these positions all opened up as the cadres were pulled out, and we moved into them…. I might have been in a replacement training center, and they could send you—after three months, they could send you to North Africa. As it was, I stayed in the states another year, or year and a half, and worked my way up in my division…. By that time, I understood how the army worked, and so that's why I had reservation about it.

WHITE: What prompted them to give you the battlefield commission?

ALEXANDER: Well, they had always said they were going to send me off to school, and never did, which grated on my nerves and bruised my ego a bit.

PIEHLER: 'Cause you were supposed to go to Fort Sill, for example.

ALEXANDER: I was supposed to go to artillery school, and they kept saying, "We'll send you next month." They didn't know. Of course, the division didn't know, because these schools had quotas, and they [had] call-ups, you know. And I hit it [in a] time when I think they probably were pretty well filled up with second lieutenants in all services. So the reason I think they did it was that General Montague knew he was getting me pretty cheap, because I could do things that he couldn't do in terms of language, and he knew that we were going to be in occupation eventually, and I had been able to do things all the way along the line. In fact, they had me giving classes in German history and German geography, when we knew we were going to Germany. They had a little syllabus that they wanted us to cover, and had some maps that we would show them and talk about the Germans, and so forth.

PIEHLER: This was to …

ALEXANDER: Back at Breckenridge in Kentucky.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay, way back in Breckenridge. So you were sort of going around to different companies.

ALEXANDER: No, no. I just did it in my battery.

PIEHLER: Just your battery, but you still …

ALEXANDER: Yeah. But they were telling us to inform—and they were showing us films about our enemy.

PIEHLER: So you saw <u>Why We Fight</u>?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah, but …

PIEHLER: I'm curious … 'cause you had been in Germany. What do you think of Why We Fight, particularly when they described Germany?

ALEXANDER: Well, I thought it was fairly accurate. I don't think they—I can't—I'd have to look at it now. I haven't seen it for twenty years.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I'm just curious if anything jumped out. In some ways it seems, and they're—I mean, they are very well done, but they are at a very basic level, and I'd be …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah, but basically, I don't think—when you have a dictatorship like that, especially when you know after the fact what took place, I don't think that the propaganda was altogether inaccurate. There is no doubt that they—they were trying … to get you to understand that the Germans were a dedicated army, and that they were—soldiers were committed to the Fuehrer. There wasn't any doubt about that. That's what some of my classmates in school at Lincoln didn't really understand. That same sort of thing, in terms of their nationalist spirit that was not National Socialist; it was national.

PIEHLER: What about your fellow soldiers? How did they perceive …

ALEXANDER: The which?

PIEHLER: How about your soldiers—before you deployed overseas, what did they think the German soldier was going to be like?

ALEXANDER: I really don't know. I don't know. I just tried to tell them something about the country, just the facts, and the fact that many of us had German names and had German ancestry. This fellow's coming now—as I used to call him, he's a "square head," but his folks got smart enough, and they left. (Laughs) So I really don't know. I didn't have too many sessions—I didn't give them a test or anything. I wasn't able to evaluate, and I didn't pass out a sheet asking them how my presentation went over, you know. But the captain asked me to do it, and I did several times. Then, of course, when—any time anybody—we didn't pick up very many prisoners, and when we did, we didn't have time to really interrogate them, and we always sent them back to the prisoner of war compound where they handled them.

But I did go one time—after St. Malo, I went back to Rennes, which was the Brittan capital. [I] went to the prison there, where they had the prisoner of war [camp], 'cause the colonel was writing a summary of the after action report for the reduction of the island of Cezembre, and we wanted to know why they quit. I went back and talked to—well, the lieutenant wouldn't talk to us, but I talked to two—they were low-rank enlisted people. We got some—we knew pretty well why they'd quit. They'd quit because we were burying them alive. On this island, it was basically a rock, and they'd dug—the French had dug entrances from the landside to protect against naval attack. We were attacking from the shore, and we were blowing up all the rock, making little pebbles out of the concrete and the rock from the back side, and some of these things went down fifteen or twenty feet, and all this rubble was going down this chute, and it was covering up their doors so they couldn't open them. They were going to be buried in there, and

so that's why they gave up. And they were running short of water. But it was basically the fact that … all this rubble that we were creating from the shore—see, normally the naval vessels wouldn't have hit the back side easily, unless they were—now, aerial might do some damage, but we were filling up all these passageways, and we learned that, which we knew anyway.

WHITE: Now in April, after you had been commissioned, and you were moving through Germany towards the Elbe River, that's when you won your Silver Star, and you told me a little bit about that in Knoxville. I was wondering if you could recount that story.

ALEXANDER: Well, it was—as I told you there in Knoxville very briefly, I was doing something I had done dozens of times before. I was there—this time we did see tanks, and we did see infantry with them, one of the few times we did. We had established a bridgehead across the Elbe. The 19th Corps of the Ninth Army was spearheaded, and we had been told—we were supposed to go right down the middle of Berlin. We had the maps. We were told to get to the Elbe. The 2nd Armored and the 83rd. We were the 19th Corps. The 2nd Armored got there, I think, on the 13th, and got across. We got there the next day. Maybe it was the 12th and 13th. But anyway, they got there one afternoon before we did. They got a bridgehead across the Elbe to the east side. We got there the next day. Well, while we were getting ours across, theirs was damaged, was destroyed by German planes and artillery fire. They had a battalion that was pretty well stranded on the east side of the Elbe, below Magdeburg. We got across and we stayed. The 2nd Armored was able to get … some of their elements back over the bridge, and some of their units and ours, we built our bridgehead up and we maintained it. It was that day when I went up there and was flying with two other pilots. For four hours we directed fire against, I guess, about the last tank attack. Knocked out some tanks and infantry that—and as I told you, it was something … that I'd done before, and there was nothing spectacular about it. Only thing was it went on for a long time. Four hours is a long time in a Piper. It meant I had to go back and get …

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Richard Thomas Alexander on April 4th, 2003, in Canton, North Carolina with Kurt Piehler and …

WHITE: Jake White.

PIEHLER: You were saying …

ALEXANDER: Now, but anyway, this thing went on for four hours, and we succeeded. It got dark, and then we succeeded in protecting the bridgehead. And as I told you in Knoxville, awards are very dependent upon two things. One is some action that maybe has a little meaning. The other one is that somebody survives to report it. In this case, the battalion commander—excuse me, the regimental commander, Colonel [E.B. "Buckshot"] Crabill, was on the ground with his regiment, and he saw us flying around up there. He was appreciative. He said, "Who's that up there?" And they—that was it. As I say, it was not all that spectacular, really. It was not unusual. Probably not … the best. (Telephone rings) I hate to—just turn it off for a second.

(Tape paused)

That was the circumstances, and if Colonel Crabill hadn't been there, or somebody hadn't seen it—and that's true of everything. Sometimes the most disserving people are the ones that don't survive, and nobody tells anybody about it, officially. And you know, we had quotas. We got notices … very often, reminding the battalion commander or the regimental commander that "You have been in action so many days, and according to the formula, you're due this many Purple Hearts, you're due this many Silver Stars and Bronze Stars, and if you haven't filled your quota, send some names in." So the availability of a quota, and somebody—that's the important thing. Somebody there to report it. 'Cause they have to write all kinds of recommendations and so forth.

WHITE: As far as winning that award, did that contribute a lot to the point system?

ALEXANDER: Oh, yeah. Five! (Laughs)

WHITE: So you watched very closely the points, and your points?

ALEXANDER: I didn't right at that time, but shortly thereafter, when the war ended, everybody was watching points, because you got five points for a lot of things. You got a point for every month in the army, you got an extra point for every month overseas, you got five points for a Purple Heart, you got five points for all battle stars you had, and every award…. The Congressional Medal, they generally sent you home, anyway. It transcended the tabulation. But that became very critical, and it probably got me home probably a day and a half before some others. (Laughs)

WHITE: When you were moving through Germany, did you liberate any concentration camps?

ALEXANDER: Well, it wasn't a concentration camp. It was a barn that they had put some workers in, and lit the thing. Burned about 600 of them in a barn. But we went very close to—and … there again, a lot more people report having been to concentration camps—there are too many people who—it's like how many people landed on D-Day. (Laughs) Their memories. This is one thing that sometimes doesn't ring quite clear. They've seen too many articles about it. And I don't think they're necessarily falsifying, but if you hear a story long enough, you internalize it. The only thing I had ever seen was that little compound I saw there in Munich that time. That was back in '33. But that was not—I never—I had a friend who lived with me in Berlin. He was a Russian refugee, and he didn't have a passport, and he ended up in Sachsenhausen. Or no, not Sachsenhausen. What's the one northwest of Berlin?

PIEHLER: Bergen-Belsen?

ALEXANDER: No, that's up near Hamburg.

PIEHLER: Actually, I know what—I just read a paper on this yesterday, and I can't even think of it.

ALEXANDER: Well it was the one outside of Berlin, northwest of Berlin.

PIEHLER: Nordhausen? Not Nordhausen.

ALEXANDER: Nordhausen?

PIEHLER: I'm not sure.

ALEXANDER: No, I don't think so. But anyway, this man didn't come home one night for supper at the *pension*, at the boarding house. I don't know what the explanation was, but about a week later the little maid there who worked with—served dinner, she called me aside and she said, "Do you know where Bondarenko is?" I said, "No." She said, "He's in the *Konzet*." He'd been picked up without a passport. He came back all tanned. He'd been out in the wind for a couple of days, I think, cracking rock or something, but he came back. That was … back in '36.

WHITE: So once you all encountered that barn that had been burned down—how close were you to that barn?

ALEXANDER: Oh, just rode right by it.

WHITE: Did that stir up any anger among the American troops, that they took out on the Germans?

ALEXANDER: Oh! Yeah. Yeah. Oh, yes.

WHITE: Did you witness any retaliation, for lack of a better word?

ALEXANDER: No, I don't think so. I don't remember. There weren't very many around. But it was a barn that they had burned, that they locked them in there and lit it, some of the retreating troops. These were not—I don't think this was technically a concentration camp. There were a lot more people in work camps, that were not free agents, than there were people actually in a concentration camp. There were very many millions who were working in everything from coal mines to manufacturing concerns that were housed—they were foreign nationals that were housed in barracks. They were not free agents at all, but they were not the same thing as in Auschwitz and Dachau. They were not in the extermination route. They were simply—it was a labor camp in an area where—some industrial workers, some of them were farm workers—that they had rounded up, and they used them, and took them out to the fields in the day, and brought them back and fed them.

WHITE: How did you feel about a potential invasion of Berlin?

ALEXANDER: The what?

WHITE: How would you feel about a potential invasion?

ALEXANDER: Oh, I was glad they didn't. The ones—I know General—what's his name—McClain, who was a corps commander, was all upset, because he wanted his troops to go in there. He said, "We're ready to go," you know, that sort of thing…. If you're the general, you can be excited about it, but people, I think, were glad. They'd like to go. And when the war was over, General Montague, he called me—I was his aide then. The war had just ended, and he said, "Can you find your way around?" I said, "I think so." He said he was trying to get permission to go, just to go.

PIEHLER: Just to sightsee.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, 'cause we—Magdeburg was the crossing point, and we were just outside of Magdeburg. We were in Helmstedt, which was the Autobahn, and we could have been in Berlin in probably little or no time after the war was over, but they wouldn't let him go. I don't know who turned him down, whether it was the division commander, but he said he was going to take me to get him there.

PIEHLER: I'm curious. What were your creature comforts like while you were serving in this headquarters, in this battery, in terms of food …

ALEXANDER: Food was pretty good, considering everything. I mean, I'm not—it was quite horrible—it was probably worse in garrison than it should have been. But when you consider the facilities, and trying to feed out of a truck, and cook, it was almost a miracle …

PIEHLER: So you generally got hot meals?

ALEXANDER: Yes. But not always. We had a lot of c-rations and k-rations, that you could heat the—but the k-rations were pretty good. When the dysentery hit, you know, when it was going around, you get trots, you know. It was always smart to avoid the common kitchen, and so sometimes your other meals were safer to eat.

PIEHLER: That's interesting. You're one of the first to tell me that.

ALEXANDER: Well, on maneuvers in the summertime, particularly, it was bad. It was terrible in Tennessee.

PIEHLER: Really?

ALEXANDER: Oh, yeah, yeah. The hot weather. It was worse—maneuvers were worse, as far as the cooks were concerned, than it was overseas. 'Cause we moved sometimes three times a day. Set up camp and move, set up camp and move.

PIEHLER: In the maneuvers.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. We very seldom stayed one day in Europe. It was always three or four days, until the very end, when we moved across towards the Elbe. We moved probably … eight or ten times the last ten days. So the training we had in Tennessee was more of just giving us

practice of putting the tents up and taking them down. Digging holes and covering them up, and the poor guys in the truck, in … the mess hall truck, they were just unbelievably bad. They didn't—they weren't able to keep things clean, and I remember—I'm not a coffee drinker, but … the big coffee thing had a spigot on the end, and they used to just pour more coffee in, and more bags of coffee, and drip it, and more water. And it got to where it was just a trickle. I didn't drink the stuff, so it didn't bother me. But everyone was complaining because it wasn't flowing fast. Well, they finally found that somebody had his tent poles and all of his tent down in the coffee thing, and it was blocking the spigot. Been there probably for a couple of weeks.

PIEHLER: You mean one of those—a pup tent type of …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah, it's a shelter half. We didn't have a full tent; we just a half. We had … one front pole, and half the pegs, and half the tent. Somebody had put it down in that thing, and they poured coffee in it, and it got down to where it was blocking the—so the captain was terribly concerned about it, 'cause everyone was sick, including the general. On maneuvers, they were eating out of the same stuff we were. In garrison, they had an officers' mess. So … the captain had an NCO meeting, and was talking about the importance of sterilizing the mess kits. So they assigned one officer to stand at that barrel with the boiling hot water and they were timing you. You had to hold it down there so many seconds. I said, I told the captain, I said, "Captain, that doesn't make any sense. You're saying the enlisted men don't sterilize their stuff okay. Well, why are the officers getting sick, too?" I said, "It transcends the mess kit." Because they didn't eat out of the mess kit. They had plates. I said, "It's something in the common pot." They didn't understand what I was talking about.

PIEHLER: They didn't believe you.

ALEXANDER: No, no they didn't. So those of us who used our heads, we ate something else. Then they finally … realized that it was the common pot that wasn't getting cleaned. There was a lot of that I found very difficult to get along with. 'Cause when I first went in the army, the—in our headquarters building, they had two entrances. One here and one there. It was just one long, low building. Officers generally had the colonel—had the officers here.

PIEHLER: On one side of the building.

ALEXANDER: And over that door, they said, "Officers." Over this door, it said, "Enlisted Men." That meant that enlisted men went in this door and officers went in that door.

PIEHLER: So they had separate doors for officers and enlisted men.

ALEXANDER: Right.

PIEHLER: Really for no good reason.

ALEXANDER: No. And then what really galled me was I saw—I figured, coming from the south, I saw white and I saw black or Negro drinking fountains, and I was use to discriminatory signs, and I recognized it for what it was. But I was inside one day, and down towards the

general's area and the S-1-4 had his desk there, right by the door, and some young kid walked in, you know, enlisted man. Boy, that captain said, "Get the—back out there. Didn't you see that sign up there? That's for officers only." And he threw the kid out and made him walk down, and he had a message, and he had to walk down this way and come back in this door, and back up, and give him [the message], then he had to go back this way now, you know. It was idiotic. What was worse though, what really got me, was when officers came in either door indiscriminately, and nobody ever said anything to officers. "That's for enlisted men; you stay the hell out of there."

Then, of course, at Atterbury, we had a black combat team up there, the 94th … Division was up there. They had separate facilities, and they were up in the north part of the camp. Then the liquor allowance was another thing that used to gall everybody. Enlisted men had no liquor allowance; officers did. And it got very bad in Europe. They finally decided to make a change. So they decided to divide the liquor allowance fifty-fifty…. One half to the officers, one half to the enlisted men. But there were fifteen officers and 150 enlisted men. So it got to be sort of a joke. When the bottles would come in, there would be the same number of bottles for the 150 as there were for the fifteen…. When the allowance would come in—this was in Europe after the war was over—it caused so much trouble, that they finally changed it. And so you'd take your mess canteen cup, and they'd pour [it], and if you didn't drink it right then, it would evaporate. There was so little in there, compared to what the officers were getting, and … the officers thought that was an equitable distribution.

PIEHLER: That they get a bottle and the enlisted men get a cupful.

ALEXANDER: No, they were dividing it. Let's say the officers got two bottles apiece. There were fifteen officers, there would be thirty bottles. Well, fifteen bottles would go to the officers, so the officer was getting one whole bottle. Yeah, and the other 150 men were getting …

PIEHLER: A cupful.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. It's like the hamburger, where it's fifty-fifty, horse and rabbit, you know. So those things grated. Then that officer. I think I mentioned earlier about the officer complaining about the caliber of recruits they were getting.

PIEHLER: Yes.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Yeah. I went with a major down to Tennessee in the advanced party we talked about. We were out looking … over some fields that had been assigned to us, as possible places. We weren't supposed to plow, or roll down a big cornfield, and we were supposed to look at the crop and see what it was. Well, there was this beautiful field of lespedeza about like that. It looked like a good field. From the air it looked like a carpet, like a putting green. But when you got down on the ground, it was a hay crop that some fellow was going to put up, because the army had to pay for any damages, and that lespedeza was worth a hell of a lot more than a cornfield. We looked at it. The major thought, "Well, that would be good for this battalion." Boy, we'd park all the trucks out here, you know, and run all this stuff into the ground. And I raised a question. I said, "Major," I said, "That's lespedeza." "How do you

know that?" "We used it." That crop was ruined in about two days of driving trucks over it, with all the guns, and trucks, and ammunition trucks. The same guy, the next day or two, we were out—this was before the division got there, and we were looking at another field … outside of Lebanon, [Tennessee]. We were standing along the field, and there was a barbed wire fence with some nice fence posts. He took out his knife and kind of just took a sliver off of that. It was not a cut; it was a split fence post. It was a cedar post, which was common then. He looked at it, and he gave it to me, he says, "Do you know what that is?" "Yes sir." "What kind of wood that is?" "Yes sir." "What is it?" I said, "It's cedar, sir." "How'd you know that?" I said to him, "I was born in Nashville, and just down the road here is Cedar's of Lebanon Park, where I've been many times. There is a little … cedar bucket factory on the south…." I don't know if it's still there or not, but it used to be just off of 70, just—well, it's out near Martha. I had family I knew lived out there. I said that they claimed to make the most cedar buckets of any place in the United States. He said, "How the hell did you know that?"

PIEHLER: Why was he so surprised at your knowledge? Did he figure you were a New Yorker who …

ALEXANDER: I don't know what he thought…. But just the fact that he was so condescending in asking me, and the way he did it. And so I was not rude, but I let him know that I knew something about wood. Then he said, "Well, how'd you know that?" I … eventually—I used to get very mad about it. Not only with me, but with the other fellows who were equally well trained. That I knew a lot more in terms of language. And one man in there that taught English at the Boston Latin Grammar School in Boston, the most prestigious prep school in New England! Then to say that the quality of people he was getting was so substandard, and didn't know anything. I got to the point that really, I think, the only salvation was that—I eventually got to the point where I took a great deal of pleasure in knowing that they knew that I knew more than they did. You know what I'm talking about. You can be awful nasty and selfish that way, and I was a little ashamed of myself, because it was a little bit of arrogance to have some fellow who is, let's say, your military superior, hesitate, or know that he's asking for help from somebody who is subservient. There were one or two of them that got to the point where they wouldn't ask me to do things, because they didn't want to show their ignorance. But that was a salvation.

WHITE: So along those lines, how well would you say the officers that you served with were trained?

ALEXANDER: How were they trained?

WHITE: How well were they trained?

ALEXANDER: Well, there's no doubt—this has been done for many years. You ask soldiers that, and they will rank—they will tell you that the West Point people were by far the best trained, and were the best military soldiers. Not everybody, because one of the dumbest … executive officers we had was a West Point man that they would just—he was in the club, you know, and they were keeping him. He was a disgrace to everybody; he was just dumb. Then came, at the other end, the worst ones. The most intolerable ones were the National Guard.

They were the poorest trained. They were generally much too old, and they'd gotten what they got in rank by local politics, who they knew. Then you come to the ROTC people. Probably after West Point, [they] were the best, next to the best. People that had been to college and … were still relatively young, and were not yet completely instilled in the military frame of mind, you know, like you are. You've come up through an educational institution that is respectable, and you've done well. They rank second. Then some of the reserve officers that had sort of a funny kind of a training. Some of them were veterans, and some of them weren't…. The poorest were by far the National Guard.

PIEHLER: There are two groups you haven't mentioned. I'm just curious. The OCS graduates. Where did they fit into that?

ALEXANDER: Well, the OCS ones were again, and some of them—a lot of them were, had come through—were college graduates, and had come through OCS, as opposed to the ones who were ROTC and come through BOC, Battery Officer School. They were about the same…. A lot of them that way—they were realistic about it. In other words, many of them had come up through the ranks and had gone to OCS. Some of them had come—see, that's what I would have been if I had gone to school. I'd come up and had a good education. They were pretty good, generally. They were realistic, and in terms of their relationship to the enlisted man, the biggest problem I … experienced with the better-trained West Point people was that they were a bit clubbish. They were capable, but they were more standoffish than I think they should have been.

PIEHLER: Even to other officers, were they standoffish? The West Point officers? It was not just an enlisted man officer standoffishness?

ALEXANDER: No, they relied a lot more on chain of command. Now, General Montague, who was a fine officer, well trained, he relied … much too heavily on his executive officer, who was … his major, and so forth. There was a chain of command. General Montague was too much of a West Point person to really be as critical as he should have been. Now, he got rid of a couple of colonels, that everybody just cheered when he got rid of them, but he never said a word about it to anybody other than himself that I know of. Maybe he talked to the division commander about them. But, boy, he shipped a couple of them out post-haste.

PIEHLER: When did he ship them out? Was this still in maneuvers, or overseas?

ALEXANDER: No, it was before we were on maneuvers, and after on maneuvers.

PIEHLER: Oh, so this was pretty early.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, they were still—but … the General had a cross to bear. But he took the responsibility, but he never really … talked to me. He didn't tell me he was going to have me commissioned, or that he was going to make me his aide…. He wouldn't talk to me about that. He had his colonel tell me about it. Eventually, the captain gave me my promotions in the battery, which was the—that's the way it went. In other words, the captain promoted the people in his battery. The colonel is the one that did a lot of personnel work within the headquarters….

But I'm sure that Montague was the one that made the decision. But that's what I'm saying, that they relied too much on the chain of command, and you just didn't have the …

WHITE: Where were you on V-E day?

ALEXANDER: Where was I on …

WHITE: V-E day, Victory in Europe.

ALEXANDER: I had just gotten back from Paris. I had been to librarian school. That's the only school they ever sent me to.

PIEHLER: There just seems to be a story that's—when did you leave for librarian school?

ALEXANDER: When?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ALEXANDER: I left after—well, it was late April.

PIEHLER: So while the war was still going on.

ALEXANDER: Oh yes, yeah. We were across the Elbe. It was after my flight that won the citation. It was about four or five days. And General Montague called me in and said, "You're leaving in the morning for Paris." "Yes sir." (Laughs) You know. He said, "We're sending you and Lieutenant [Quentin] Pease. He's going to be the recreation officer, and you're going to be the librarian officer." "Yes sir." So I was gone for two weeks, and got back the night before Armistice, the next day. I went at the University of Paris and stayed in a residence hall, just right next to the one I stayed in 1935 when I was there. It was a week. We got in on Sunday, started classes on Monday, and … classes ended on Saturday noon. They gave us lunch and then they threw us out, so the next group could come in on Sunday, and then we drove back to—it took us three days to get back, so we were gone two weeks. So I was in Germany, but they had moved us out of the line…. When I got back, they were not where I'd left them, and it took us a couple hours to find out where they had moved.

PIEHLER: You had been an enlisted man through much of the war. Only towards the end of the war do you get commissioned. Then you go from that to being an officer. You go to the other side, and you're also a general's aide. What was that experience like? Is it better on the other side?

ALEXANDER: Well, I never really—I was still an enlisted man …

PIEHLER: At heart?

ALEXANDER: Oh yes. Yeah. And I never did have a complete uniform. I couldn't buy anything overseas. I didn't have all the—they gave me $300 to get my basic uniform, and I

spent about thirty of it. When I went to Paris, I got a cap and I got an Eisenhower jacket, and I think a tie, and maybe an insignia or two. I don't know.

PIEHLER: So you never got the full …

ALEXANDER: No, the pinks and all of that business, no. The Sam Browne belt, and all that business. No. Where did you get it? I did get a pair of low quarter shoes, though, in Munich. I pocketed the other money. But then I took a cut, you know, in my flying pay. It went from eighty-six, something, to sixty. But my wife—see, another inequity. My wife got an increase in her subsistence.

PIEHLER: When you were an officer.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and the assumption was that an officer or a second lieutenant's wife needs more food to eat than a master sergeant's wife. You know, that's hard to demonstrate, and considerably less than the general's wife, who probably is overweight anyway, and is middle aged, and shouldn't eat anywhere near what she is eating, and yet the enlisted men gets crumbs compared. So those are the kinds of things I remember. Most of the general public, they don't think about that. They don't know what the pay scale was.

WHITE: What was the troop ship like, when you were coming back to the United States?

ALEXANDER: It was almost as bad as going over.

WHITE: Was it?

ALEXANDER: Going over was horrendous. The British fed us twice a day, and the bread had been baked when they had left the previous trip coming west. When we got off of the ship in Liverpool, we were probably ready to fight the British, rather than the Germans. Because they had, at Fort Hamilton—again, another thing where the military never had any flexibility. And they treated—in this case, they treated everybody—there were some officers involved, as well as the men. But it was the kind of treatment that the men got all the time, and the officers seldom. At Fort Hamilton they prepare you to get an overseas assignment, and you spend two or three days there getting your equipment. They give you a lifeboat drill, and they give you film, show you films on this and that, and they showed you a late movie with Dinah Shore, when she is singing, and she is a nurse, and they're going overseas, and everybody is having a big ball on this ship. They drum into you [that] when you get on shipboard, you go to your bunk and you stay there. Don't move. Well, we didn't have bunks. All we had were twelve hammocks. There were sixty of us—no, not quite sixty. About fifty of us. All we had were—we were in a dining hall—not a dining hall—an eating place with picnic tables in there, for the crew to eat. That's where the crew had been. And we slept on the benches. We slept on top of the tables, under the tables …

PIEHLER: They make the bunks even look comfortable.

ALEXANDER: Yeah…. There were twelve hammocks that you strung up some way between the posts there. The plumbing was clogged up. The latrines didn't work, the showers didn't work, and we got these awful meals at five in the morning and five at night. Most of us ate hard-boiled eggs and biscuits that were terrible. Ungodly bad food. And it was winter. Storms. And everybody was sick. About the second or third day, one of the colonels in our group came down to check on us. He was very upset that we all hadn't had showers that morning. We hadn't shaved, and the place was—well, the latrines were overflowing. It was terrible. He never came back when he saw it.

PIEHLER: That was it. That was his last time.

ALEXANDER: Last time he came down. He didn't bother about us anymore. The only way you got out of that place, was—at certain hours of the day you had to go on deck, so they could clean up. I don't know whoever cleaned our place, but it never was really clean. A bunch of us decided we were going to volunteer for kitchen duty, and would work in the kitchen. We saw them cook breakfast. Fried eggs, pancakes, bacon strips that had been degreased on brown paper, and the officers were having meals up in the dining hall, being served. They were just throwing this slum at us, and then these sailors would come around with Hershey bars. Baby Ruths, and Hershey bars, and Milky Ways, and about half way over through the trip, they sold us these bars. We existed on candy bars, and then they ran out. So when we got off at Liverpool, we were really—and then the latrines, ours, we stopped using it. But they had latrines up on the deck that had been—they had taken some of the outside railings. Not at [the] closed promenade deck, but on—they had welded these brackets that stuck out over the side of the ship, and they had these long planks, oh, they were long as this room. Forty feet, with the toilet holes there. There you looked down about sixty, seventy feet down into the ocean. And you couldn't use the ones on the upwind side, because these holes acted just like funnels, and the wind would blow from the windy side up the through these holes, and anything you tried to do just didn't go down to the ocean. (Laughter) So everybody would use just the ones down the leeside, 'cause they were the only ones that would allow anything to go into the ocean. And talk about sitting on that little plank up there, with a little iron rail, and see, here was the deck. You were about eighteen inches, two feet, … off the deck. And here was the deck, and here was this—oh, what a thing. (Laughter) They had these all down the sides of the ship. Now, you never hear anybody tell you about that kind of stuff.

PIEHLER: No, that—you are the first. I've heard about how horrible the voyages over and back are …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and coming back, it was not quite as bad. The sanitation was better. But the sea was very rough.

PIEHLER: You were an officer now. Where you getting the better food now?

ALEXANDER: But I was the bottom man on the—the one fellow had a higher serial … number than I did, and there were three of us, and the first thing we were told when we got on that ship, they found us and they made us mess officers. We had nothing to do with the mess. We had to do with the kitchen police, and we had to have sixty to sixty-five men every morning. They gave

us a list of names, and there about 3,000 on the ship. It was a little victory ship. It wasn't an aircraft carrier; it wasn't a big ocean liner. It took us ten days. They gave us this list of names. Well, these were not organized units. These were just 2,000 guys that were put on this ship, and nobody knew anybody else. There was no authority there. There were just these guys who had fought the war, were coming home, and "To hell with you, buddy." Nobody—they'd broadcast these names over the PA system, and of course, what idiot would respond? (Laughter) So finally, what happened was—there were three of us, three lieutenants. That meant we had three or four days apiece. We alternated. I was seasick most of the way home, and one of the other fellows was a pretty good sailor, but he was—the third fellow was sick too. I found a young fellow, a corporal. He was on the first list I had. He reported. Out of sixty-five, I think eight or ten would show up for duty. This young fellow showed up, very nice kid, and very energetic. And boy, he loved authority. So the three officers—I found this guy—the three officers, we decided that we would make him the recruiter. This kid wanted to be on every day! He said, "I'll be glad to the whole trip, every day." So we gave him the authority. He said, "But Lieutenant," he said, "I don't have much authority. All I've got—I'm a corporal." I said, "I'll take care of that." So I got him a field jacket with master sergeant stripes. (Laughter) That boy went around, and if … sixty didn't show up, then—probably never had more than eight or ten that showed up—he'd go out and get the other fifty. He'd go out on the deck and say, "You. You. You. Down in the [kitchen]." And he'd round them up, and it solved our problem. (Laughter) But it was a—and in these—they had a few cabins on the ship, but mostly they had taken the cargo holds, which are just a big open—and they had built stories. They had planked them in and welded together cots…. It had about [a] triple-decker, and then they'd put more planking, and another triple-decker. There were probably seventy-five or a hundred feet from the top down to the bottom, and they had these floors there, and that's where everybody was. Down on the deck. Now, some of the officers had better quarters than we did. But trying to find some individual on that ship was just impossible. So this guy would—he'd go around, and he was a master sergeant for the trip home, and …

PIEHLER: … Since you have such great stories, I want to go through somewhat mundane areas like—when you were overseas, how often would you get a shower?

ALEXANDER: Oh, well, let's see. We took showers the night that we were waterproofing our cars. That was about the 16th or 17th of June. I had a shower about the 15th of September.

PIEHLER: That was your next one.

ALEXANDER: Next one. That was when we were—and that was in a public bath … somewhere along the Loire River.

PIEHLER: That sounds like you just did it—that wasn't part of the armies doing, that public bath.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, well, see, there were civilians there, and the town hadn't been damaged, and public baths were very common…. We used to go to public baths in Germany, when I was a kid, 'cause the house where I lived, in Iserlohn—a very good friend of mine, he was the chief executive officer of the school system there, and a very good friend of my dad, and he let us use

his house for about a month. They didn't have bathtub in the house. They had a galvanized tub that we used to use. But it was easier just to go down, and you could rent a towel, and go in. Just for a few *pfennigs*, you get nice hot water, and we'd take a shower and go to the movies or something like that, or come home. But then that was in France. The next shower I took, well, we had a place in Luxembourg, where they had shower rooms. It had been an *Arbeitsdienst*. You know what I mean? You know the *Arbeitsdienst*, the Work Service? This had been an *Arbeitsdienst* camp, but the water didn't work. I don't think I ever had a shower there. Then the next time I had—I don't know. It probably was after the Bulge some place. I don't know.

PIEHLER: So showers were pretty infrequent.

ALEXANDER: Oh, very infrequent.

PIEHLER: And it sounds like you never had a shower truck.

ALEXANDER: Oh, no, no, no. We had a water truck.

PIEHLER: And what about laundry, while you were overseas?

ALEXANDER: Frankly, I—you know, I asked Chris, this fellow that's coming next week, if he remembered [that], and it's almost a blank in my mind. Now, see, during the Bulge, when it was very cold and nasty, they came around and picked up every bit of clothing we had that we weren't wearing, the general included. They just commandeered it, and they took it to these drying stations, where they would bring the infantrymen back at night and let them have—they had some kind of hot water for them, and dry clothes. Then that—everything was replaced.

PIEHLER: But they were so desperate for dry clothes.

ALEXANDER: Dry clothes, yeah. I don't … remember how we got it back, but when you were issued the clothes, they just issued you new clothes. And so having laundry service …

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

ALEXANDER: … laundry service, I don't remember.

PIEHLER: So in other words, not only had you washed, but your clothes were …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, but you got pretty good at a helmet, taking a sponge bath in a helmet. That was one thing a lot of people don't realize. The differences in the equipment. And it is a social reflection there. If you've ever seen a German helmet—are you familiar with a German helmet? I'm not talking about the modern ones; I'm talking about the ones the Germans had [during World War II]. They had the sweatband that held it off your head. [It] was riveted into the—it was permanent. They didn't have the concept of the liner. Now, do we have a liner now? Our helmet had a helmet liner that separated, and you could use the steel part for cooking, and for washing, and everything else. The German one, you couldn't. You couldn't cook in it, because you'd fry the leather sweatband. I think that had a lot to do with the fact that we

encouraged our soldiers—when they had enough water, they could bathe in their helmet. That the Germans couldn't do. Our helmet was more expensive, because you had the liner and the helmet. I know I used to—in some of my graduate classes, for some of my teachers coming in when I was at Ball State, I used to bring my two helmets together, my German helmet, and had them look at it.

PIEHLER: It's a very interesting observation.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and to say to them, "Now, what are the differences in these, and what do you discern from these differences?" Well, most of them were women, the teachers I used to work with. Most of them had never worn a helmet, and you know, they didn't understand what I was getting at, that there was an indication of cultural values in the fact that it was separable, and could be used for everything from cooking to being reused as an emergency toilet, you know.

WHITE: How often were you able to scrounge things … like food, or trinkets, or souvenirs.

ALEXANDER: Oh, just all the time. Food sometimes was hard to get, because very often, particularly initially, at the landings in Normandy where the Germans had evacuated everybody, a lot of the valuable things had been taken. The foodstuffs had been taken. But when we got into—in France, you had to be very careful, because France was not an enemy territory, and you had to ask permission all the time: "May we use this barn, or may we do this? Will you help us out?" In Germany, you said …

PIEHLER: You just threw people out.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. And you'd go in—if the house was still standing, you'd go in—I've cleared many houses, and people got very upset, you know, because they had their supper on, and they said—they'd start to whine about it. But in Germany you didn't ask. You just told them, "Do this, do that." But we were always finding things. We had a lot of German equipment. We had a water tank that I'm sure had been in Rommel's *Afrikakorps* in Africa. It was a beautiful big tank. It was a trailer, and it held lots and lots of water. It saved us from having to go to the wellhead so often. That sort of thing. And then we didn't have very good lighting equipment. We had Coleman lanterns. Useless. You know those little—silk ash wick, what do you call that? The thing that you had to burn down. And every time you'd hit a bump on a road—it'd be in a box, and we'd always [be] running out of wicks. You know, you have to tie the little thing up, and you light it with a match. Useless. So we finally found a lot of—any time any community—there would be a railroad yard, and we'd go and find wire, we found generators. We found equipment we could use. Mattresses, bedding, and so forth. Radios. See, our radios weren't—American-made radios had different … frequencies on it. We were always improving our radios. We would find one that was better in this house, and we would take the one we had and put it there, and take the other one. They'd come back and find a different radio there. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: When you were listening to—what radio were you listening to? When you were taking these radios, what … stations …

ALEXANDER: Radio Luxembourg, and London. The frequencies that were in Berlin. You could get all kinds. Some of the radios were very good.

PIEHLER: So did you ever listen to Axis Sally, and those other …

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Yeah. We'd hear her, and Dr. O.K. Dr. Otto Koischwitz. He was a German instructor at the Lincoln School I went to.

PIEHLER: Really?

ALEXANDER: Dr. O.K. He was like Lord Haw Haw.

PIEHLER: Yeah, Lord Haw Haw I've heard of.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, Lord Haw Haw was [an] Irishman, wasn't he? Well, anyway, he was British. He broadcast from England, and Dr. O.K. was a German-American. I don't know if he was ever naturalized or not, but he taught—I never had him.

PIEHLER: But he taught at your school …

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Yeah. He taught there at Columbia. He wrote a very well known, a very interesting—he was a very interesting man. He wrote a primary text in German language. Very clever, very well done. I have a copy of it, called *Deutsche Fibel*, or something like that. But Otto Koischwitz.

PIEHLER: Dr. O.K.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and he went back to Germany, and stayed, and got into broadcasting. He finally killed himself somewhere in Leipzig, or—as the war ended. He knew he would be picked up, I guess. I think he shot himself.

PIEHLER: That sounds a little weird to listen to someone that you could have had …

ALEXANDER: And he spoke American English. He would—he was hired to take care of the American soldier crowd.

WHITE: Did you hear a lot of American music on the radio?

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah. Tommy Dorsey. They had quite a band. He was the one that—he disappeared, didn't he?

PIEHLER: Yes. Oh, no, it was Glenn Miller.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, Glenn Miller's band. I said Tommy Dorsey.

WHITE: What else was popular other than Glenn Miller? Do you remember?

ALEXANDER: Bing Crosby, of course. Then there was one record—they sent us records. There was one that—we didn't play them much until the war was over. We didn't have the time, but the radio we did listen to. Some of our operators … had crystals that could pick up some of those nonmilitary channels. Glenn Miller Band …

PIEHLER: I'm curious. During the occupation—what were your duties during the occupation?

ALEXANDER: Oh, terrible. I really worked then. Course, we … were stationed first in Helmstedt, which was a big checkpoint. We weren't there too long. The British took over. Then they moved us to Passau, which is on the Danube. That's where the …

PIEHLER: Yes. I've been to Passau. Oh, I know … exactly where …

ALEXANDER: Yeah, well, we were in Passau from—let's see. When was it? Well, it was June, middle of June of '45, until I came home in September. I was there most of the time. They had us training for Japan, however. Have you every been to any of the military installations there in …

PIEHLER: No, I've never been to the military installations.

ALEXANDER: There was a big—and still is, Graffenwoehr, which is up near the Czech border. We had us up there for a while, … having combat team maneuvers, and we stayed up there, and they brought the battalions up, and we fired missions, just doing stuff we had been doing for a year, but they wanted us—we had to draw flying pay, and everything else.

PIEHLER: So you were likely to go to Japan? Was that the …

ALEXANDER: We were—I think everybody was eligible to go to Japan, eventually. It depended on how long the—we were in a division that was not going to go directly to Japan. There were some divisions they didn't even land. They just went through the Mediterranean, through the Suez, and went directly. There were some that had just gotten there, had never seen any action. They had high priority for Asia. Some divisions were going to go home immediately, like the First, I guess, and Second, some of those that had been in Africa and been in Europe, too. We were in the middle group. We were not high priority to get home, but we were not in high priority to go to Asia. So they were going to keep us in occupation.

PIEHLER: You were doing maneuvers … to train?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. We were still training, 'cause see, we had a lot of replacements. So were to be held in occupation, and then sent back to the states for reequipping, and if needed, then to Japan. So we weren't going directly to Japan…. If we went to Japan at all, we'd be going through the states. That was pretty much it. But then, of course, in August, everything ended, and they really started counting points. The whole thing was off, and you went home according—pretty much as individuals. The division stayed on for a while, just as a holding

unit. They moved a bunch of them out into the Fifth Armored. I came home with an engineering battalion, just as an attached—just for purposes of manifest.

PIEHLER: So did you—in terms of occupation duties, did your division—did you have any specific occupation duties?

ALEXANDER: Oh yes. Yeah. We were in charge, up there, of a great area outside of Helmstedt, and then we turned it over to the British, and of course, my job—I was working mostly with the local civilian authorities, because they controlled much of the food stuffs. And we had prisoner of war camps, and we had displaced persons, foreign labor. We had to repatriate Russian prisoners, and we had to kind of keep control of the foreign workers, and we had to keep control of all the motor vehicles that were in the area. Outside of Berlin, they had an enormous—there in the Helmstedt area, had an enormous parking lot for trucks and things, that supplied Berlin. Then when they moved us to our zone, to Bavaria, we were in Passau, and we were in training for a while. We were back in Third Army, and see, Patton was down there getting in more trouble. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: I'm curious. In terms of various occupation duties, it strikes me that you would have been very valuable, because of your German …

ALEXANDER: I was. Yeah. Well, that's the chief reason I think General Montague had me commissioned.

PIEHLER: What were some of the issues and problems—what would be a day-to-day—when you were in direct occupation duties?

ALEXANDER: Well, in Passau, the first thing were Displaced Persons and prisoner of war camps, and trying to get control of the mass of—'cause that was a place on the Danube there, where Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Bavaria met. The Inn, the Alz, and the Danube. There was a big railroad junction there, and people were coming in all directions. Some wanted to go down, some wanted to go up the river, wanted to get back into Germany. We had—I don't know there were—we had a lot of Hungarian army people there. We had white Russians, we had Russian soldiers. We had orthodox Russian church groups, orthodox priests. To say nothing of other foreign nationals, we had six or eight displaced persons camps that we had to keep separate, because of the ethnic differences. It was a rat race, and we had some of the military people…. The CIC [Counterintelligence Corps] people that were looking for …

PIEHLER: War criminals.

ALEXANDER: Yes, but we had the military control of the thing, but we didn't have much—we'd had not much help. We didn't know who these were. We took over from another division that had made some arrangements that were very unfortunate.

PIEHLER: What do you mean by unfortunate?

ALEXANDER: Well, they had gotten into bi-national agreements with the Russians. One particularly bad [was] the exchange of prisoners. The Russians insisted that every Russian soldier went back. A lot of them didn't want to go back, but we were obligated to send them back. There were some people in the East, coming up the Danube from central Austria and Hungary, that wanted to go West. This division ahead of us had made arrangements to make a swap of 400 prisoners. As it turned, out it was a disaster that we had to keep, because it had already gone too far. The date had been set for the swap, and they wanted to swap at the border.

PIEHLER: Who was swapping who?

ALEXANDER: The Russians and the Americans from Austria. See, they had Austria, and the Austrian boarder was just down the river from Passau.

PIEHLER: Swapping 400 Austrian …

ALEXANDER: No, no. These were Hungarians who wanted to go home. These weren't Russians; these were Hungarians.

PIEHLER: And you were going to give 400 Russians.

ALEXANDER: We were going to get 400 Germans that were coming back, that they were going to let out…. Some of them were ethnic Germans, some of them were—I don't know what they were doing there, but anyway, they wanted to come back. They weren't French; they weren't anything else. They weren't Russians, they weren't white Russian, they weren't orthodox church people, but there were 400…. When we got there—the arrangement had been made—we were to have them there on a certain date with four days of rations at this checkpoint. And so we got them down there, and I had gone out to talk to the Hungarians, to tell them that we would take 400 of them. There were about 4,000 but they were going to take 400 of them. The colonel that I talked to, the Hungarian colonel, didn't speak any English, so we used German, and I went and talked to the—this was a … Hungarian army camp. These were all Hungarian soldiers. The colonel and I talked about it, and I told him what we could do, what we were going to do. They didn't have to go. They would volunteer to go. They'd have four days' rations, and they were going to go on a certain date. They'd be picked up on a certain morning, and be taken … ten or twelve miles down the road to be swapped.

Well, the colonel didn't go with them. He didn't want to go back. But we picked up the 400, and they were trucked down there…. I was just a second lieutenant who had done the talking, but I was following instructions, because that was the numbers that had been agreed upon. So we got down there to the checkpoint between the two. They unloaded the trucks, and men had their rations, and they paraded them across the barricade there, and *winke winke* ["bye bye"], they were gone down towards home. These were all able-bodied men. I had told the man who was there—he was in our division, but he was … in charge of the thing. I said, "Do you think we ought to let them go?" Well, we waited, and nothing came. Hour, maybe hour and a half. They kept saying, "Oh, they're coming. They'll be here." Well, they weren't trucked there. There were 400 amputees. There wasn't an able-bodied man in the bunch. There were some that couldn't walk. They were on litters…. One-armed men were carrying the litters. They had

a couple of wagons with those who couldn't walk, and I think they may have had some horses. I don't think the men were pulling the wagons, but they came up with a horse train. They had 400, but they weren't able-bodied. So our man said, "Well, we don't want them. We can't take those. They were supposed to be able-bodied." "Well, I don't remember—I had nothing to do with the able-bodied part. I'm not even sure that able-boded ever came into …"

PIEHLER: Came up, conception-wise.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, but this had been done a week or so before I got there, before we got there, I should say. "Well," the Russians said, "You don't want them? Leave them right there." They walked off and left this group of 400 there. Well, we finally had to call the medics, and we set up a hospital for them. We had to get trucks, ambulances down to pick them up. That was my contact with Russians.

PIEHLER: Was that your only contact during occupation with the Russians?

ALEXANDER: No, it was the second one.

PIEHLER: When was the first one?

ALEXANDER: The first one was up in Helmstedt. It had to do with the motor transport problem. All these prisoners of war, and these wild, freed laborers, were stealing everything. They were stealing gasoline, they were stealing trucks, they were stealing cars, anything—motorcycles—that would run. So the—our army decided we were going to register everything in the district. So the call went out that everybody had to bring their vehicles in and have them registered. Some of them were impounded, and were taken back, and were picked up without a sticker. Well, there was a Russian prisoner of war—it wasn't a camp. It was a flour mill, big flour mill. These Russians had worked it, apparently. There were about—oh, must have been two or three hundred of them, under the command of a Russian colonel. And they were living in this flour mill. They had three vehicles that were not authorized. So the general sent me out to pick them up. I went out to the camp. It was just out north of town, and I went there, and the colonel wouldn't talk to me because I was only a lieutenant. The colonel had to talk to …

PIEHLER: Another colonel.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, but he had a nice young fellow who was his lieutenant, who spoke no English, but we both spoke German. I explained to this young fellow, I said, "We are registering all these vehicles, and it will be a while before you people are repatriated." We had an arrangement that we were going to take them to Magdeburg, eventually. But until that was arranged, they were going to stay there in this flour mill. I said, "You have three vehicles here that are going to be—if you drive them on the road, they're going to stop you, and you're going to be in trouble. Please take them down to this office in Helmstedt and get a sticker for them. They'll give you gasoline, even." "Oh, that's too much trouble. We don't want to do that. We have gas enough." They had been stealing the stuff, you know. He went to see the colonel, and the colonel said, "No way. No. We don't need the stickers…." So they said, "No." I didn't get the vehicles. So I went back to General Montague and I said, "General, we have trouble here."

"What's the matter?" "They refuse to bring them in." He said, "Go get them." "Yes sir." (Laughs) So I went back. I took some more fellows. I'd been just in my jeep, you know, with … a driver, you know. Just all I had was my pistol, my side arm. I didn't have any firepower. So I went back to the camp and I got hold of the lieutenant again, and I said, "Lieutenant, we've got a problem. Those vehicles must be brought—" He said, "Oh, the Germans will laugh at us if we see us having to take these vehicles back, and you take them from us. We're friends, and our enemies will laugh at us." I said, "No, they won't." I said, "I'm not going to take them. You're a soldier and I'm a soldier. The difference is I have got a weapon." I had another truck there with some rifles there with me, and I said, "You have three minutes to get those vehicles out on the road, and I'm going to go down and park down there, just, oh, a few hundred yards down the road. If in three minutes after I get down there, those vehicles aren't on the road coming down to town, I will be back for them, and I've got the guns and you haven't." I said, "You tell the colonel that, and thank you very much." So I left, and drove down the road and stopped a while, and pretty soon here came the vehicles. I told him that all they were going to do—you drive them into town, they'd give them the sticker, they'd give him gas …

PIEHLER: And that would be it.

ALEXANDER: That would be it. I said, "I'm not taking them. You're bringing them. They can't laugh at you for bringing them in." So he said he'd tell the colonel that. Well, the colonel apparently gave him permission to take the [vehicles], so they went on down. They passed me, and I followed them into town, and they registered them, and in fifteen, twenty minutes, they were ready to come home. Well, I don't remember whether I went back out there again, but I think the—yeah, I did. I think the lieutenant said, "The colonel wants to talk to you." So I went back out again, and the colonel said he appreciated the help that we'd given him, and that he'd like to invite the general to tea. (Laughs) Would I tell the general that the colonel would be happy if the general would come out there to the place? So I went in, told General Montague. He said, "What do you think I ought to do?" I said, "I think you ought to go." So either later that day or the next afternoon, we went out there. The Russian colonel had the place all ready for inspection. He had all of his men lined up in this mill, in three or four flights of it. Their bedrolls were on the floor, and they were all standing at attention for inspection, … and he took General Montague around to every one of those beds, and went up and down. Then when the inspection was over, we went back down, and there was a caretaker's house there on the place, a nice home. It wasn't a fancy place, but it was inside the mill ground. He took us in there, and he had this German all dressed up, playing incidental piano music, (laughter) and he had the tables set with pastries and things that had been cooked, and, of course, they had the vodka there, and we had about a half hour of incidental music, and camaraderie, and drinking toasts to one another.

PIEHLER: Sounds like an actually very pleasant afternoon.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, very nice. Yeah. Then about a week later, they were all repatriated back into [Russia]. They were taken down to the bridge at Magdeburg.

PIEHLER: And they had been POWs?

ALEXANDER: Yes, yes. Now I don't know whether they all wanted to go home or not, but they were under command of … the Russian colonel. But those were the two times I had …

PIEHLER: Was there any sort of—I think it was termed "werewolf" activity, in your areas of occupation, or any continuing German resistance after …

ALEXANDER: Yes. The only thing I remember—I wouldn't call it "werewolf," though. We lost a supply truck and three fellows one evening. They went back—when we were at our final station, at Calbe, … we were on the Elbe, and they had to go back to get supplies. They came back after dark, and some Germans had come out of the Harz Mountains, and they cut down a couple of trees across the road…. When our truck got there, they got out to move the trees, or do something with the trees, and the Germans jumped out of the ditch and took them— captured them, took them captive, and stole the truck. They were gone about three or four days, and the Germans finally gave up. But you know, they went off into the Harz Mountains, and it wasn't hard to—it wasn't a big group.

PIEHLER: But they were clearly resisting.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. They were simply trying to get something to eat, and a truck or something. They weren't really—they didn't harm any of our three or four. And luckily—I don't know, our people probably had some weapons, but they didn't expect it. There was no firefight or anything, and they were back, oh, three or four days later.

PIEHLER: One of the things a lot of GIs who have been overseas, particularly in the occupation, … I've heard the observation [that] it was very hard to find a good Nazi after May.

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah. You didn't find any.

PIEHLER: You spoke very fluent German, so could really have conversations. What were the excuses you heard?

ALEXANDER: But conversations don't prove anything. If a fellow says he was—and everybody was always in the revolt in July, you know, when they tried to assassinate Hitler.

PIEHLER: So you heard that story from officers?

ALEXANDER: Oh, we heard it on the July—the day it happened. See, that was before the breakout. We were still in Normandy, and we heard all about it. We probably heard it before people in Berlin did. Because the British were the ones that, you know, shot up the—no, that was Rommel that got shot up. But we heard it …

PIEHLER: But after the war …

ALEXANDER: It was hard to find some memorabilia, because a lot of these flags were burned.

PIEHLER: You had been in Germany at the height of this, in the '30s.

ALEXANDER: And you knew they had to be—a lot of people—another thing they did, too, Germans hated to destroy fabrics and material. They dyed a lot of the stuff.

PIEHLER: Oh, interesting.

ALEXANDER: They'd—you can over-dye something, you know. Take an old flag and cut it up, and save it.

PIEHLER: You had seen the German mood, say, in 1930, and then you saw it in the '30s with Hitler. What was the German mood in 1945?

ALEXANDER: Oh, it was very passive. We didn't have any trouble. The only thing we did do was that—you know, it was very common practice—I saw a demonstration last night on television about going into built up areas, and how they would hug the buildings, and cross check for snipers. In other words, you go up both sides of the road. Well, after the war was over, you never walked up close to the buildings. You always walked right down the middle of the street.

PIEHLER: And that was because …

ALEXANDER: Because you could be waylaid. You weren't very likely to be shot at, because shooting would cause noise, and if there was somebody trying to waylay a GI or something, for his money or just to kill him, if you walked close to the building, you could stand in the doorway and club him or grab him, where you couldn't in the middle of the street.

PIEHLER: So after the war you walk in the middle of the street, whereas before the war you would never do that.

ALEXANDER: Oh, no. No, no. You'd walk down—and if you didn't have anybody on the other side, you probably might not have walked down the left side, even, because you wanted to—your idea was that the man on the left was looking up here, and the man was looking up there, but you stayed apart. And they were showing how they were doing that in—well, it's an old infantry [tactic]. But you never walked at night, particularly.

PIEHLER: You'd walk in the middle of the street.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, you'd walk down the middle of the street. There wasn't much traffic anyway, but you wouldn't walk out there with heavy traffic going on. But heavy traffic was not the problem. Walking down some of these small towns, where there might be somebody disgruntled.

PIEHLER: I'm curious. You'd seen Germany when it was a—particularly in the '30s in some ways, was a very prosperous place. Could you sort of talk a little bit about the Germany you were occupying? What it looked like physically?

ALEXANDER: Well, it depended on where you were. Some places were unscratched, depending what you mean by unscratched. But places … where we made crossings at, for instance, at Jülich, crossing the Roer there, or at the Wesel, it was just—you couldn't tell where the streets began and the buildings—it was just a jumble.

PIEHLER: Well what about Munich? You had …

ALEXANDER: Munich wasn't too bad. Course, in Berlin, when I went there many years later, it was during the—it was after the wall was up. The place where I had lived was on the east side of the wall, and was in a no-mans land where they didn't allow anybody. The … apartment building was gone. The other place I lived close to the Reichstag had been torn down by the Nazis in part of that grandiose plan they had for the new Germania. It was urban renewal, and it was gone in '38, I think. It was torn down before the war. In Cologne—I've been there—it was very badly hit, but the cathedral was a miracle.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I've seen the cathedral from the train station.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Well, the train station is right there by the cathedral.

PIEHLER: I passed it at night. It's …

ALEXANDER: Yeah. When my wife and I were there in '53-'54, which was not too long after the war, we—she had been over in England, and I was with the students in Germany, and … the sheriff, the oldest boy, had been in England and Scotland, and they joined me. They took the train, and I met them at Aachen. I went down to help them through the customs. Then we spent the night in Cologne, right next to the train station. She was just dumbfounded when she saw the hotel we were living in there. It had two floors. Had been six or seven [floors], I guess. The windows wouldn't close, because the window seal was cracked, and dropped down, and you walked down the staircase. The elevator didn't work.

PIEHLER: This is '53. This is eight years after the end of the war.

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. The cathedral was—how it lasted, it's a miracle.

PIEHLER: There are two groups there's been some controversy surrounding. What is the German POWs, their treatment, after the war? What kind of responsibilities did you directly have …

ALEXANDER: With the German …

PIEHLER: Yeah, German POWs at the end of the war.

ALEXANDER: Well, I had no responsibility for the German POWs. The responsibility we had was for the Russian, Hungarian, … and the displaced persons and laborers, and … and the one that gave us most trouble of all was a small group of orthodox priests. They were unbearable people.

PIEHLER: Why did they give you such problems?

ALEXANDER: They wanted everything. They didn't like this, they didn't like that. You know. They didn't like the food. They were complainers. I don't know who they were. They probably were high-ranking in the church, you know…. I couldn't tell—I couldn't talk with them very well. Most of them didn't speak much German. They were just overbearingly demanding, and not at all—they had nothing good to say about anything. The Russians [didn't care about] some of their own people, much less about us.

PIEHLER: What about Jewish displaced person in your zone? How many did you have, and did you have any contact with …

ALEXANDER: I don't know.

PIEHLER: You didn't have any contact?

ALEXANDER: No. I never … had any direct contact with relieving of the concentration camps, and I don't recall that we had any—I'm sure there might have been Jewish refugees in the displaced persons groups.

PIEHLER: But you don't have any direct contact or experience with …

ALEXANDER: Well, I didn't know. I didn't recognize them as—they weren't identified as Jewish refugees. They might have been Hungarians, they might have been ethnic Germans, or something like that, but we didn't have any—there weren't any in the Passau group. Passau, you know, was not a very friendly place to the Jewish community.

PIEHLER: Oh, you don't have to explain that. I got a sense of—I don't know if you've ever seen the … German movie, <u>The Nasty Girl</u>.

ALEXANDER: Yes! Tell me—I've been trying to get hold of that book.

PIEHLER: I have not gotten hold of the [book], but that is set in Passau.

ALEXANDER: I saw her … <u>Book Notes</u>. I don't know her name. [Anna Rosmus].

PIEHLER: I don't know either.

ALEXANDER: But she was the high school kid that did—yeah, <u>The Nasty Girl</u>. And I saw it on Brian Lamb's—are you familiar with …

PIEHLER: Yeah, I'll have to look it up. Was it recently?

ALEXANDER: No, it's been four or five years ago.

PIEHLER: I may try the search engine.

ALEXANDER: I'd love to have that …

PIEHLER: If I find that, I'll let you know.

ALEXANDER: Because I tried to find out about it, because you know, she started out with a paper she was writing for a high school class, and—does she live in this country now?

PIEHLER: I'm not sure.

ALEXANDER: But she was in this country. Her English was quite good. And she was on Brian Lamb's Book Notes. Then one of the—Der Spiegel, or one of the [magazines] took it up, and then she made quite a thing of it, and she was being interviewed for an hour program, and I called them, and they couldn't find it for me. I called Book Notes, and they didn't know— I didn't have enough name. I knew the German title, but it didn't …

PIEHLER: I will try to look it up for you.

ALEXANDER: *Schmutziges Mädchen* ["The Nasty Girl"], or something like that.

PIEHLER: The translation doesn't do it justice. Have you ever seen it?

ALEXANDER: She was accused of being a dirty girl, because she was a German who was looking up this horrible relationship that the Passauer people had with the Jewish community, and the Jewish cemetery, and all that business. And this was after the war, and she found out that there had been a lot of desecration, and …

PIEHLER: Well, she also found out that people were telling her lies.

ALEXANDER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: That people were not 'fessing up to what they had done.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, and she had evidence. Went into some of the files that had been destroyed, and …

PIEHLER: Yeah, it's an extremely—it's a very interesting movie…. I know after you left, there was a …

ALEXANDER: Did they make a movie of it?

PIEHLER: Yeah. The Nasty Girl.

ALEXANDER: Oh!

PIEHLER: It's in German. It's a German film.

ALEXANDER: It's a German film.

PIEHLER: Yeah. You can rent it. We've rented it in the states.

ALEXANDER: Well I'll have to look that up.

PIEHLER: I strongly recommend—I think you would enjoy it a lot.

ALEXANDER: Well, I've been trying to get hold of the …

PIEHLER: Well, no, you can rent the film, and since you can understand the German, I think you'll particularly appreciate it.

ALEXANDER: But it was not an American made—but there was a book printed in English, and she was plugging that on the …

PIEHLER: No, there is an English book, but there's also a movie. It's also very funny at times. Because after you would leave Passau, there was a pretty horrible incident. I think two American officers were killed.

ALEXANDER: Were shot, yes. Yes.

PIEHLER: So you know about that.

ALEXANDER: That's before we got there.

PIEHLER: That was before you got there.

ALEXANDER: And General Montague was supposed to live in that—were they division commanders?

PIEHLER: I don't remember who they were.

ALEXANDER: But it was very hush-hush. They weren't sure—as I understood the story, it was not the Germans that did it. It was somebody in the American army that did it.

PIEHLER: That's interesting, because I …

ALEXANDER: I know where the house was, because it was on the other side of the Inn River. You know, there are three—and there was a very bad bottleneck in Passau. The bridge had been destroyed over the Inn, just not over the Danube. It was over the Inn. This house where this man—I don't know who he was. Was he a general or a colonel or something? But he was a big shot army person. I can't think of which division it was now, but he lived in a mansion, a very fine house, on the other side of the Inn, and that's where he was murdered. When we got there,

we took over from them, and this house was turned over to General Montague, because our division was up at Deggendorf which was not—I don't know why. I think General Milburn. Not Milburn…. [General Macon].

PIEHLER: Was it Mason?

ALEXANDER: No, Macon. General Macon. Yeah, Montague, Macon and Melbourne, they were the ones. All M's. I think he didn't want to be there, because it was such a mad house, 'cause everything was coming there, and so he put General Montague and his headquarters there, and he took his division [headquarters] up to Deggendorf, a little town about twenty miles up the road, where it was more peaceful and quiet. We got stuck with Passau. Now, I can't prove that, but I know that's what happened. So General Montague was the top ranking general officer in Passau, and so they gave him that house. Well, I think he found out about the murder, and it also was a very bad place, because they had a terrible trouble getting across that bridge, and he didn't like having to wait in line. Sometimes they'd have some military—it was too small for some of the military vehicles, and he got held up a couple of times. So he said, "Hey, I'm coming into Passau." So we stayed at the Passauer Wolf Hotel, which was the prime hotel there in town. They had a big auditorium there, where a lot of big Nazi rallies—'cause, see, Hitler's mother was from Passau.

PIEHLER: Oh, I hadn't realized that.

ALEXANDER: I wouldn't say she was born there, but she lived there a long time, and it was a big hotbed of—and they got a lot of funds. When you see the auditorium, they had a beautiful auditorium there.

PIEHLER: I actually think I've been in that auditorium.

ALEXANDER: It's up on a hill there, down to the main square. And of course, that's the place, too, where General Patton came to see us, and we had a luncheon for him, and I attended the luncheon. Sorry. I don't know why I'm moving that. That's the microphone isn't it?

PIEHLER: Yes. (Laughter)

ALEXANDER: I'm sorry.

PIEHLER: That's okay.

ALEXANDER: But Patton came to visit the division. They had a luncheon for him. After the luncheon was over—it was on the other side of the Danube, up at the *Oberhaus*, where they had a recreation area for officers and enlisted men up there. We had the luncheon, and then we were going to go out through Passau, out to the airfield, where we were going to have a combat team review. Then we were going to have a live fire combat team exercise, then the general was going to come into the Passau Wolf and have a meeting with all the division officers. Well, I was General Montague's aide, so I was sitting at the end of the table with the others. I was the low man again. And after the luncheon was over, we got into our vehicles, and the MPs went out

ahead of us, blowing their sirens, and General Macon was with General Patton, taking him down. And we were going out of town on the south side, and we got down in the middle of town by the cathedral, and … General Macon's car turned left. So we all followed him, and the MPs went on. They didn't stop. They didn't see us stop. General Patton knew about the organ in the cathedral. It was the biggest organ in the world, or certainly in Germany. A beautiful—8 it was a Baroque pipe organ.

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Richard Thomas Alexander on April 4, 2003, in Canton, North Carolina with Kurt Piehler and …

WHITE: Jake White.

PIEHLER: And you were saying Patton wanted to see the organ …

ALEXANDER: Well, Patton knew about it, and I guess he said to Macon, "I want to go over there and see the cathedral." So we turned left, and the rest of the MPs went right on, blowing their sirens. They got out a town, I guess a mile or two, before they looked back and saw they had lost General Patton. (Laughs) Well, in the meantime we turned left and went there by the cathedral, and got out, and—oh, there were probably ten or fifteen vehicles there. Everybody got out with the General, and we went into the cathedral, and Patton wanted to hear the thing played. (Laughter) So they got the sexton. I don't know. The old man was there, and he was just scared to death. These army vehicles getting up into his—walking in the church, and there he had the thing pumped up. Turned the motor on, and get the thing pumped, and then he played a couple things for us. General Patton thanked him. We got back in the [cars]. In the meantime, the MPs came back and finally found us. Then we went on out to the airport. They had a formal review.

The war was still on in Japan, so this would have been in July, I guess, wouldn't it? Yeah, it must have been in July. The review we had, we had one battalion and a regiment, an artillery battalion, and a formal review. When Patton rode … his car around, and reviewed the whole thing, then he got up on a—they had a platform there, and a microphone, and the men were all at attention, and they took the final salute, and Patton … had them all come in and sit down there. It was out at the airfield. And he said, "Men, that was great. If Tojo had seen it, he'd a shit." (Laughter) And, of course, he got a—and he went on and talked about how proud he was of the division, and this sort of thing. Then we went over—another place, they had a firing mission. Then he went down into the hotel, and had a conference with the division officers. It was in the hotel where we were living, and General Montague was there, and I was there. He was asking about the problems of supply, and so forth. Was very much Patton.

PIEHLER: So I guess the popular image of Patton, how close is it to what—having seen Patton for a day, basically?

ALEXANDER: Oh, it was pretty raunchy. He could be …

PIEHLER: The idea that he wanted to …

ALEXANDER: But the charisma was there, no doubt. I remember when we were—before he came—this wasn't something that he just came, and we were up there, and said, "Hello." We practiced. I mean, they got those men out there, and they drilled, and they practiced the review. And it was delayed a week or two, for some reason or another. We were up there one day practicing, and they had the band—somebody got their helmets chrome plated. I don't know where it was chrome plated, but they looked very shiny and nice. We had our vehicles lined up, and they were—they had it all marked off where the vehicles were, and where the standard—you know, where the Guidons [unit flags] would be. And it was all planned exactly where everything would—they had staked out. It was not a—it was an airfield, but it was not paved. They had the grandstand there, with the bunting and everything, and we had these vehicles lined up, and we had three—these were Opals. Not Mercedes, but they were Opals. You know, the German company, but it had a lot of American money in it. And these were Phaetons, just mint condition, that the anti-aircraft battalion commander had found in a barn somewhere … out in the country, that somebody had stashed there. He found them and had appropriated them. He gave one to the division commander, and one to General Montague, and he kept one himself. You had to give to the commanding officers, otherwise you couldn't keep yours, 'cause you're only a colonel. (Laughter)

So we had those three vehicles lined up there. They were the ones that we were going to be hauling the division commander and General Patton—we were going to be in ours. We had one. General Montague had one, and this colonel, I forget his name now, he had one. They were all lined up there. Some young—I don't know who he was. He was on General Macon's staff. He said, "General Macon, you know, General Patton is pretty knowledgeable about … his table of organization." And he said, "Those three vehicles are not 'table of organization' vehicles." They had been painted over olive drab, but they were Phaetons, which is a—it's a big convertible. Top down type. Oh, beautiful cars. General Macon thought, and said, "Get rid of those things," and so we got the old command cars back. (Laughs) So for the parade, they hid them, 'cause they knew that—I think they were afraid of two things. One of being reprimanded for not sticking to the table of organization, and they were afraid that somebody might—that he might pull rank, and say, "I want those three cars." Oh, they were beauties, you know. Leather, oh, beautiful. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Could you talk a little bit about the issue of fraternization between …

ALEXANDER: Well, it was unrealistic. The only thing I really know about anything significant had to do with one of my truck drivers…. Just as we had gotten to the Rhine, you know, the 83rd Division was the first American division to get to the Rhine, and it got there before they took Remagen. The British had been at the Rhine, up where it hooks around—in our sector, we were the first ones. We got there a few days before they took Remagen. It was in the town of Neuss, which is right across from Düsseldorf, and [in] wine country. We ran into a lot of civilians there, because they had no place to go. They couldn't cross the river easily. They were pretty well locked in to where they were. We were housed in a lower-middle-class housing development. Three or four stories, block houses. We had nice facilities, but no water. The water was not functioning, no electricity, but we had our own electricity, and we had plenty of water. They found—across the street, there was a storefront that was a wine dealer, and he had

some enormous barrels down in has basement. Oh, I mean, they probably held three or four hundred gallons. They weren't just fifty-five gallon drums; they were big kegs. And somebody had shot holes in them, and they'd drained out into the basement. The basement was about knee deep with wine. So the fellows would take their water cans and just drag down in there, get a water can full of it, and they drank it, and they also flushed toilets with it. We were there for four or five days, firing on Neuss, and trying to—we didn't get a bridge there. We lost the bridges there. So there were some women around, and they'd had two or three parties at night. (Laughs) They got kind of rough. A lot of drinking going on, drinking this wine that was quite available. They had the anti-fraternization …

PIEHLER: I mean, the war was still going on.

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah, the war was still on, and this party got pretty loud one night, and the MPs were called, or they got there. I don't know what happened. But anyway, they went up into this building. [It] was down the street from where our fire direction center was, and I guess the fellows heard that they were—MPs were coming, or something, and they all jumped out the back window and went about twenty feet below into the garden in the back, and got away. This one fellow, who was one of my drivers, was so drunk that he was the only one they picked up, and they picked up a couple of women there, and it was obvious that they were having a party. So this fellow, [Francis] Daley, was arrested. They court-martialed him. They gave him ten years hard labor. I know, because they—since he was one of my drivers, I attended the court martial, which was the next day. It was not just—there wasn't much process to it. They got him and they tried him, and they met right across from the fire direction center, and I attended the hearing. I went there and listened to the testimony, and they had these two women who were there, that had been picked up with him. They were civilians, so they were there, and he was given ten years. So when it was over, I went out and the ladies who were there, … they asked me what was happening to this man, and they went into hysterics. They said, "Oh, he was a nice fellow. He didn't cause any trouble. He wasn't improper. He just got drunk." They were upset with the fact that—but they hauled him off, and he went back to a disciplinary barracks in France some place. Don't you know that they sent him home and discharged him, and … I think that he wrote us, back from—he was from Boston some place. He was a New Englander. And see, that would have been in March. The war had—well, it was before we came home. He was already out and back, and he said that hey had reviewed his case, and had …

PIEHLER: 'Cause ten years seems like a pretty harsh sentence.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, but that was just it. They were trying to prove a point, I guess. I mean, it didn't last—I think the party was that night, and it was the day after that they tried him. They didn't—and that was the only time I … know of anything personally, that I knew about. But he drove one of our trucks in my platoon.

PIEHLER: We probably should—I'd like to come back this summer and do a lot more about your postwar life, and particularly about your teaching career. But I do want to ask a few more—just cover a few more areas.

ALEXANDER: Well, next time I come over to one of your programs, maybe we could get together. Would that work?

PIEHLER: That would also work. We'd be glad to have you come over.

ALEXANDER: Well I come whenever I can. I can't always make it.

PIEHLER: Could you talk a little bit—you've talked a good deal about your artillery general, Montague. Could you talk a little bit about the two divisional commanders, and [General] Frank Milburn and Robert Macon?

ALEXANDER: I didn't know—Milburn was the commander when I was assigned in … Atterbury. I don't know when he left. I don't think he was on maneuvers with us. He might have been. I really don't remember. I didn't know him too well. But he became a corps commander. I don't know which corps it was [XXI Corps], but he was a corps commander in Europe. That was Frank Milburn. But he was there—he was with the division when it was reactivated in June of—in the summer of '42. Montague was his artillery commander, and Montague was division commander for a while, an interim period, and then General Macon came in, well, before we went overseas, and was with us the whole time we were [overseas]. Then he left, and he later became military attaché in Russia. I knew him very casually. I was with him several times when I was with General Montague, but I didn't really know him. I don't know much about his—I don't think he was West Pointer, but I do know he was assigned to Russia after the war. Milburn, I don't know what he did. Montague had been an instructor at West Point, had been at artillery school for some time. [He] was in charge of the missile artillery down in … the southwest.

WHITE: Fort Bliss?

ALEXANDER: No, it was in Arizona someplace.

WHITE: Fort Huachuca?

ALEXANDER: I don't know, but it was the artillery, when the artillery was getting into missiles and into rockets, and the rocket artillery. Then he was later in Panama, and was in charge of the outfit that's now working in—he was lieutenant general—this is Montague—in Panama, where he died of a stroke in 1958.

PIEHLER: Oh, the Panama canal zone?

ALEXANDER: What's the—it's the one that is now in Tampa.

PIEHLER: Central Command….

ALEXANDER: Yeah, that's what it was. I saw him—I met him by chance in Germany in 1954, coming home from my project, and I rode on the train with him, not knowing he was on the train, from Frankfurt to Paris. He was then deputy commander of ground forces, or something….

That was in '54. And in—he died in '58, and he was in Panama. He was commanding a—he was lieutenant general there in Panama. I think that's where the Central Command was before …

PIEHLER: Yeah, I think so.

ALEXANDER: Before they left Panama. Is it in Tampa now?

PIEHLER: Yes, I think it's—yeah. Did you have any chaplains assigned to your unit?

ALEXANDER: Yes. We had two.

PIEHLER: What do you remember about them?

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah. They served—they were division artillery, and they served the four battalions. We had one man who was a Roman Catholic priest. That was Ralph G. Hoffman, from Blackford County, Indiana. I'm very found of Father Hoffman, and I knew him very well, 'cause one of my secretaries at the university had gone to school with some of his family.

PIEHLER: Oh, really?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. He passed away about—well, when he got out of the service, he was assigned up in northern Indiana, up in the Chesterfield, Chesterton area, Gary, up in the lake district. I used to see him quite often.

PIEHLER: So you stayed in touch with him.

ALEXANDER: Oh yes, yes. When he retired—by canon law, he had to retire at seventy-two, I think it was, something like that. And he died about a year and a half ago, two years ago. Then the other gentlemen—well, there was a Lutheran Protestant chaplain when I first joined the division, and then he was replaced by … Captain Crawford, who was a Texan. A Baptist preacher from—he took care of the Protestants. Father Hoffman was my favorite, and we used to—when the war was over—I didn't see him very much during the war, 'cause they were out—they served the four battalions, but they were actually part of General Montague's staff. Then, of course, we had the doctors, we had the dentists, and we had the division artillery surgeon, was at our headquarters. Then we had two or three others. Had a recreation officer, had a librarian officer, which is—I never got a book one, but I did have a nice week in Paris. Another thing that might be of interest to you: when I was in Paris, I looked up my friend, John Taylor, who was my dad's assistant.

PIEHLER: And had written this thesis.

ALEXANDER: Yes, yes. And John was on General Clay's staff in SHAEF and was military government, and had been in North Africa, and was getting ready to go into Berlin, into Germany. When I was in Paris, just before the war ended—John's office was in Paris, and I went by to see him, but he was back in England. I didn't see him. But I left a note for him to tell

him I had been there, and I gave him my new address and told him where I had come from, and where I was going back. So when I got back to the Elbe, and the war ended, about a week after the war was over, General Montague called me in. [It was] the only time he ever talked about my position or my job or my rank or anything, my promotion. And he handed me a TWX, and it was a request for my services, to be—I was to be reassigned to General Clay's staff. They were going into Berlin. The war was over. General Montague said, "Do you want to go?" I said, "At this point, no." He said, "Well, you better contact your friends, because I can keep you a few days, but that's three stars." (Laughter) That's what he said to me! So I said, "Thank you, sir," and I told him why. I said, "I've enjoyed being here, and we're going home eventually, and I've been gone two years, and if I go into Berlin, points won't mean anything." See, the war was still on in Japan, but I didn't want to get caught in Berlin in a special detail there. I didn't know anything about it. I knew I would be the bottom man on the totem pole, because I … didn't have any rank. I didn't have any training, other than my German, and I knew Germany pretty well. I had more training for a Berlin assignment than I had for an artillery assignment. (Laughter) That's truthful. You see what I'm talking about. And so I said, "Our plans are to go back and to be redeployed if necessary to Japan, but at least get home for a while." My wife and I had been married for two years, but you know, I'd been gone. So I said, "Thank you very much," and I went out. I didn't send a TWX, but I did write John and say, "Thank you very much, but please call off the dogs, and this is why." And he did.

PIEHLER: What would John have wanted you to do?

ALEXANDER: I don't know.

PIEHLER: You don't know what your assignment would have been?

ALEXANDER: I don't know. I probably would have been his flunky. That would have been alright, but I would have been assigned in the Berlin office there. I didn't have a chance to talk to John. I hadn't talked to him for several years. I knew he was in the army, but I didn't know what the nature of the job was, and I wasn't really interested in a lifetime in the army, and I could have cared less about promotion.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you wanted to come home.

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah. Wouldn't doubt about that.

PIEHLER: Did you ever see any USO shows while you were overseas?

ALEXANDER: Yeah. Yeah. After the war was over. I saw Jack Benny and Ingrid Bergman. They were in a troop together. Borrah Minnevitch, the harmonica player. Well, I was on duty at headquarters in Passau. This was in Passau. The phone rang, and it was some time Saturday evening, or very early Sunday morning, I think it was, and everybody was supposed to sleep in that morning. It was division headquarters, I think it was, that called and said they wanted six airplanes, pipers, sent up to Regensburg by some ungodly hour Sunday morning. They didn't say what it was for, but they wanted six planes up there. So I had to go to the hotel and get the air officer, who was on General Montague's staff, and told Major [Jerome] Byrd, I said, "You

have to send six planes up to Regensburg to pick up some VIPs, and they have to be there by eight o'clock Sunday morning, or this morning." This was about six in the morning. So he had to go roust out six pilots out of their slumbers Sunday morning, [to] go up. Well, it was to pick up Jack Benny, Ingrid Bergman, and Borrah Minnevitch. They flew them down to Passau, 'cause that's where the big auditorium was. They put on a show there. They put on two shows, actually, and I saw one of them. I remember the pilots—this John Baker, that just died a few months ago, was a pretty big man. He was the biggest of the pilots, and they got up there, and these people had luggage. And so they had to look at the weight of everybody, and Ingrid Bergman, apparently, was a big woman. Jack Benny was pretty small, and this Borrah Minnevitch was about 5'1", and weighed about ninety-five pounds, just a little tiny fellow. Then they had two other people, I think, that were in charge of the show. John Baker—everybody wanted to fly Ingrid, 'cause she was the movie star, good-looking gal. And John couldn't get her, because he was too big. She weighed—so John always complained that he had to fly that little harmonica player. (Laughter) But they flew them down, and they put on two shows there on Sunday, then flew them back. We saw a couple others. But this was after the war. I had one doughnut wagon came up one time. That was right after the battle of the Bulge, and we were in Belgium. The doughnut—you know, the Red Cross doughnut [wagon].

PIEHLER: Did they charge you or where they free?

ALEXANDER: No.

PIEHLER: They didn't charge you.

ALEXANDER: No. They used to charge—what'd they charge for? In England, I think they charged in some of those Red Cross places, for some of the food you ate. But I did get a very nice thing—I still use it when I go on trips—is a very cute little thing. It's a little pouch, drawstring thing, that holds toilet articles. It's olive drab, and it was given to me by the Newark chapter of the American Red Cross. And they handed it to us as we got on the boat, the Mauritania, there on North River…. I still have it. It folds, it ties around your waist, and it's folded so you can reach in and get your shaving gear, and it had some razor blades in it, and a bar of soap, or something. I still use it. It has a little label on the inside. "Newark Chapter of the …"

PIEHLER: Newark, New Jersey.

ALEXANDER: Newark, New Jersey, yeah.

PIEHLER: When you were in Germany during the occupation, did you run into any Germans you had known from your previous …

ALEXANDER: No.

PIEHLER: So it would not be until '53 that you …

ALEXANDER: See, I never got back to Berlin. The only person—I never saw anybody in the Army anywhere that I knew, except at the librarian school in Paris. On the opening day, they had a formation for us all, telling us what we—there were two or three hundred of us in there, librarians and recreation directors-to-be. On the stage they had ten or fifteen chairs there, and when the formation started, these officers walked in and sat down, and there was one of the Columbia professors I knew. I had never had him in class, but I knew him. I got so excited. I was going to see somebody I knew. Don't you know, before the formation was over, he got up and left, and left early, and I never got a chance to see him, talk to him. But I didn't see anybody I knew, German or otherwise.

PIEHLER: What was your … most dangerous moment when you were overseas? Was there any particular moment when you were …

ALEXANDER: Well, I'll tell you. I really don't know. I'm sure there were a couple of times when we didn't know it.

PIEHLER: What about close calls that you did know about, or …

ALEXANDER: You see what I'm saying? There was one time when the motor stopped. We were flying over the Roer River, and I don't know—the pilot never understood it either, because those planes didn't have starters on them. The blade actually stopped, and then started up again, and he couldn't explain it. But that would have been a very hair-raising experience because we … could never have gotten back to where we were going. I think probably the most—and sometimes in the plane, if they shot at you, you didn't always know it, because in most cases, we were shot at by small arms. Unless they had tracers, you wouldn't know it. The number of times we had the flack, the "ack ack," with the timed bursts, we were generally too low. They couldn't set the fuse, except if they saw you—the ground was flat. Now, if you're shooting right above them, they couldn't set it as low as 1,500 feet. It had to be 15,000 or something, more for high-flying bombers. But if you were flying when the terrain was quite flat and the horizon was quite visible, and you were a mile away, that's 5,000 feet. They could probably set the fuse for that, and that's what they shot at us there at Düsseldorf. It was not—we were not flying over the flack, but it was an outer lying flack unit that was defending Düsseldorf, and they could see us. That was sort of scary.

But really the most—I guess the most dangerous thing that happened that I know of—you never know how close you came to a land mine, you know. You might have been six inches, but you can't prove it. You're not sure. [It] was at St. Malo, where we got a call late in the day, just dusk, that a French navel cadet had gotten through the German lines. He was stationed in St. Malo. Had gotten through the German lines, and gotten picked up by one of our regiments, and had some information about some gun emplacements in St. Malo, and he was willing to show us where these guns were. So they called us and said, "Come get him, and take him to your headquarters, and … he'll help you." Well, the colonel called me over to the map, and said, "On this hill right here is where we have one of our regimental observation points right now, and that's where the cadet is. Go get him." And I said, "Yes sir." I got a jeep and another fellow to ride with me, and we started out towards this place. It wasn't very far, but it was … not an easy place to get to, 'cause there weren't roads going to—it was up on a hill. I had the map, and I

came to this fork of the road, and I was trying to see if there was maybe just a cow path going up the hill. I stopped, and that's where I met a French civilian, came out of the basement of the thing. I tried to ask him, was there a road going up it. He says, "Don't go up there." He said, "There's *Boche* [Germans] up there." I knew better, because I was to pick this [person up]—so I thanked him and went on down the road, and took the fork. I was going to go down to another intersection, and drive back …

(Phone rings; tape paused)

We had to go down a little further in towards town. There wasn't anybody around. I hadn't seen anybody, just that one Frenchman [who] came out of the basement, and he said, "Don't go up there." I said, "Yes sir, thank you very much," and went on down towards St. Malo, and hadn't gone very far from this little—it wasn't a town, just a cluster of houses there. By that time, it was getting pretty dark, getting quite dusk. Wasn't dark, but it was—couldn't see very well, and it looked like there was a fire down there on the road, and there were some more buildings. Got a little closer, and you could see the flames flickering. We got a little closer, and it was obvious that it was burned out vehicles. We stopped, and I said, "There's something wrong here," 'cause the road was blocked anyway, and it was another quarter of a mile, I guess, to where I would cut back. So I said, "Devon, lets stop. There's something wrong here." So we turned around and we drove back about 300 yards from where we turned around, and out of the ditch came about six or eight GIs, stopping us. (Laughs) They had their rifles pointing at us. We put our hands over heads. They said, "Who are you, and where are you coming from? What are you doing up there?" They were a patrol of one of our regiments. They were coming down the road. They were going the same way I was, but I was ahead of them.

PIEHLER: So you were ahead of the line?

ALEXANDER: I was way the hell [ahead of the line]. Well, what had happened was—so we finally convinced them that we were division artillery, and we were looking for this cadet, up on that hill. They said, "We aren't up there yet." And then I realized that the Frenchman was right, that I was going to the wrong hill. So we turned around, and they went on. We found out later, the next day or so, that this was a convoy of engineer—it was a port clearing battalion, with heavy equipment to clear wrecked ports. They had landed in Omaha Beach, and had said, "You're to go to St. Malo to start clearing up the harbor there." (Laughs) They had driven from Normandy down there through Avranches, back out, just driving down the highway. Nobody stopped them. The only problem was the 83rd had not yet taken St. Malo, and somebody in Omaha Beach … looked at the map, and it looked like somebody had put the pin there…. And we were in the outskirts, but we weren't anywhere near taking the town, and they ran into a gun emplacement that was at this fork of the road, and shot them up, and killed a whole bunch of them, and ruined all their equipment. There were ten or fifteen vehicles in there. And that's what we saw burning.

So we went on back…. By the time I got back, it was quite dark, and I told the colonel, I said, "I'm sorry, but we couldn't get up there…. There's something wrong up that road, 'cause there's burned out vehicles." I told him about being stopped by the patrol. Well, what had happened, this very bright colonel had taken the message from somebody from one of the

regiments, and was given a six-digit coordinate. He had gone over to our map—he didn't give me the coordinates. He had gone over to the map and had plotted them backwards. You know, instead of using the x-axis, which is generally what the first three digits are, … he had plotted it the other way, and by some freak—it wouldn't happen again in a thousand plottings—it plotted on a prominent point. It was not out in the river some place, or out in the ocean. It made sense. But it was the wrong high point. It should have been further back. So I had gone out there with the misunderstanding as to—see, if he had given me the coordinates, I would have plotted them, and it would have plotted—'cause when I showed it to the operations officer, he said, "My god, what were you doing out there?" I said, "Colonel gave me those." (Laughs) He just shook his head, you know. That's what happened to a lot of those folks the other day, I'll bet you a dollar [referring to Jessica Lynch and the other soldiers taken prisoner in Iraq]. They said they took the wrong road. I suspect when they landed in Kuwait, they were told—it was service company of some kind—to go to—what's that town? They probably were given orders to go to the town, and somebody failed to tell them that the town wasn't secure. That happens all the time. "What are you doing here?" "Well, I was sent here."

(Tape paused)

PIEHLER: I think we need to get back, I would like to—either have you come down, or I'd love to come back this summer, and do a little bit more about your postwar experiences, but let me let Jake have the last—any questions we haven't gotten to.

WHITE: I have two remaining questions. One, what did you think—what were your thoughts when you heard about the atomic bomb on Japan?

ALEXANDER: Hip hip hooray!

WHITE: Didn't have any second thoughts about it or anything, even to this day?

ALEXANDER: No. I think that people who hash it over are addlepated. If you want to push the moral aspects of it, you've got to push all the moral aspects of killing in the first place. There are more people that died not by the bomb than did with the bomb. You know, I mean, just out of sickness, disease. That's the way I feel about it. I don't argue with them about it. I say, "Well, that wasn't your decision. I'm glad you weren't making the decision." (Laughs)

WHITE: My last question: what was your reception like when you landed in the United States on your way back home?

ALEXANDER: Oh, it was the greatest day of my life, when I got home to Asheville. But I will say this. I'm glad, in retrospect, that the process took some time, in other words, from May until end of October. Now that sounds kind of funny. But I'm convinced that all people who—it doesn't necessarily have to be a war situation. Where you have a lot of tension and a lot of danger, and you've had a wild experience, even when you're playing football, or you're in the NCAA Final Four, the euphoria of it, of going from this to that the next day, … it's necessary to have a period of time to come down from—not necessarily—overseas was not an emotional high, but it was a very emotional period, and it was delicate timing in a person's life. To get out

of your mind the horror and the activity of combat takes time, and to go from combat to get home the next day, or two days later, I think can be very difficult and very tragic in many cases. That was the—I know the difference between my experience and my son, who spent a year in Vietnam. It was thirty-six hours from the time he left the firebase where he was in Vietnam until he got home to New Jersey. Thirty-six, maybe forty-eight hours. Well that's too fast. And it's too fast to go the other way, and I think some of these people in the present war in Iraq are getting over there too fast. That's why I was asking you the question a minute ago, about "When did that division leave?" Now, they'd known that they were going to go, but the reality of going and getting there—they're going to have an adjustment that I didn't have to have, because I had things intervening between the time I left Camp Breckenridge, Fort Hamilton, England, a couple of months in England, to where you become more acclimated to what you're after, that I think we probably had an easier time adjusting in Normandy than some of these people are going to have adjusting when they get into Iraq in forty-eight hours or so.

PIEHLER: Yeah, no. You're not the first—although you hated the troopships.

ALEXANDER: Huh?

PIEHLER: You hated the troopships.

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah. But what—it's a long swim, you know. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Yeah, but let's say you had been given the option—and I know some soldiers had gotten to fly home.

ALEXANDER: Do what?

PIEHLER: Let's say you have been given the option to fly home, you know, when you were in Germany.

ALEXANDER: Oh yeah, but I didn't have that option. Also, most people realized that if you got to fly home, you probably were badly wounded, and you lost a limb, or something. They flew those people home, and I didn't have enough points. You get points by … losing an arm, you know. So that didn't worry me. At the time I … didn't really understand this dynamic.

PIEHLER: So is more after the fact that you've appreciated that time?

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. I've seen people go from very intense situations to the opposite, and I think it's very difficult for the individual to make this adjustment. This may be after the fact…. But I think there is some sense in it. I think there is some reality in it. Now, of course, if it takes fifteen years to get home—it's not as if I had to work [my] way across all Siberia and come in ten years later. I have a friend that—[his] father, took him fifteen years to get back. He was a …

PIEHLER: German POW?

ALEXANDER: No, no. He was a—it's a father of this boy—well, he used to be … the retired editor of New York Times, Max Frankel. You know the name?

PIEHLER: Oh, yes.

ALEXANDER: Frankel. Well, Max spent summers here with us, and I know him very well. Max's father got caught in Europe. See, Max and his mother got out, and went through England, and came to the states, and down here when I knew them way back. Max was just a young man, and he spent the war years here. But his father was born in the part of Europe that was Poland, but he lived in Germany.

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

ALEXANDER: Got caught. When the war started, he ended up in Russia, and the Russians didn't want him too much, because he had a German—had been in business in Germany, but he ended up spending his whole war years in there, and working his way out through … Vladivostok, and came in from the West Coast, and got here many years after the war. That kind of thing, that drags on you. But once I left, and knew I was coming home, yeah, it was aggravating to sit there on these airfields, and wait to be redeployed and get a boat, and then get a boat. Not an aircraft carrier that went by just like that, and you were on this little ship, that you were seasick. But once we hit … Hoboken, it went (snap, snap, snap) just like that. I spent a few hours there at Joyce Kilmer. They sorted us out and put us on a train for Fort Bragg. One night on the train at Fort Bragg. The second night we spent at Fort Bragg. Then I was out. The next night I was home. So in less than seventy-two hours, I was from the ship to Asheville.

PIEHLER: How did the war change your life in terms of—if the war hadn't come along, would you have gone, for example, to get a doctorate?

ALEXANDER: Oh, I think so. It just delayed it. It did not rupture my relationship with my wife. It delayed our getting married, but in some ways, it gave me the … some money that I hadn't saved up.

PIEHLER: Well, you mentioned that, for example, you bought this land while you were overseas.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, but that was when they paid me the 1,100 bucks for flying.

PIEHLER: The flight pay.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, flight pay, that they finally worked out. But my wife always was very mad with me about—well, I sent the money to the bank. She didn't know how I'd got it. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So it just all of a sudden appeared in the account one day.

ALEXANDER: No, no. It was—it's a good story. It turns out that …. my companion observer, Lieutenant [Richard] Mader, was an Ohio State ROTC graduate, and he ended up as General Montague's senior aide. The two of us were his observers. Mader, he volunteered. Apparently the General asked him if he would volunteer for it. The General didn't ask me; he just assigned me. But anyway, Mader and I were the two observers. He was a first lieutenant and I was a master sergeant. We didn't know much about each other, because he had not been at Atterbury, and he joined us at Breckenridge, before we went overseas. Very nice fellow. Had been through the same sort of sequence you're going through. He went to Fort Sill, and been at Fort Bragg for a while, and ended up with us. We had been overseas, been flying together, and one night we were both on night duty the same time all night, and the mail came in about two o'clock in the morning. We opened up the mail. We were the only two there at the fire direction center. The mailman just delivered it, and we opened it up, and we were going through the letters and packages, and there was one package that was on our chart. We used our firing table. We put [them all] on the maps. We were digging through it, and there was one package about the size of this, and I saw Marimore Candies on it. I reached for it, and he reached for it, and we did this (a tug of war). (Laughter) It turned out to be his. He said, "Why did you think that was yours?" I said, "Well I asked you the same question. Why do you think it was yours?" He said, "Well, my wife sends me Marimore Candy. I said, "My wife sends me Marimore Candy." We found [that] our two wives lived in Columbus, Ohio, and Marimore Candy was something that we had both received, and we found out at that point that our wives lived in the same town. My wife was teaching school, and his wife was working in an insurance office. So we wrote them and told them that we had found out they lived there, and so those two girls became close friends, and they used to meet once a week or so, and have, I guess, refreshments at Marimore. They had a little … tearoom, where they sold candies and so forth.

So Betty and my wife started meeting, and they used to exchange letters. This was around Christmas time of '44. One day Betty came to the little meeting, and she was all excited she had gotten a letter from Dick, her Dick. He was Dick Mader. She was sharing the letter with my wife, and Dick had gotten an Air Medal. He had flown thirty-five missions, and they gave him an Air Medal. My wife was very—"Oh, that's great!" And then Betty said, "Well, what did Dick write?" Me. "Well, nothing special," she said, "Why should he?" [Betty] said, "Well, he got one too!" So she told my wife that I had gotten an Air Medal along with her husband, and what was I getting an Air Medal for? And so the cat was out of the box, or the bag, or whatever it is. My wife was furious at me, 'cause you know, she said that—and we'd always told each other we would be very frank about it, and that if anything ever came between us, you know, anybody or anything, that we would—and I really didn't think that flying in the Army had much to do with my relationship with my wife, but she did.

PIEHLER: She didn't want you in aviation it sounds like.

ALEXANDER: No. Well, I had told her, I said—oh, she was really quite mad at me. But anyway, that was kind of a little human interest story.

PIEHLER: Well, also a very small world.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, yeah. As it turns out, we are still very close friends.

PIEHLER: You're still close friends with—Dick Mader is still alive?

ALEXANDER: Yes, he's still living. He is two or three years younger than I am. He graduated from Ohio State, I think, in '42. About the time I was drafted. He was called up when he finished. He had a very successful career as an accountant, and I saw him last October, and I'm going to see him in May when I go up to … Ohio next time. The first Christmases we were out of service, we started seeing each other, because my wife's family lived just west of Columbus, but [a] very nice couple.

PIEHLER: You've stayed in touch with a lot of people you served with, it sounds like.

ALEXANDER: Yeah, I try to. There was one fellow that was our battery—I forget what they call—but anyway, he was the general's secretary and he worked for the S-1, and was a typist. And Bill Shuman was very good about it when he got back. He kept a lot of the records, and kept the mailing list going, and he died, unfortunately, rather young. So after he died, I've been sort of circulating the Christmas letters, and keeping track of them. I've become something of the battery historian, in that I probably have more contact with more than any other single person since Bill has been gone. But it's hard, though, to keep up with everybody. Well …

PIEHLER: I really want to thank you.

ALEXANDER: Well, I've enjoyed the afternoon.

PIEHLER: I have this horrible cold, so I feel like—I've thought this was a great interview, even though at times I feel my head's ready to explode. So I'm really—I'm delighted …

ALEXANDER: Well, I hope you haven't stayed too long for your—you'll get back kind of late, won't you?

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

Edited by Patrick Leverton 7/16/03
Edited by Greg Kupsky 12/9/03
Reviewed by Kurt Piehler 1/9/2004