

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE  
KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTHUR J. ARSENEAULT, JR.

FOR THE  
VETERAN'S ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
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INTERVIEWED BY  
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AND  
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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Arthur Joseph Arseneault on ...

ARTHUR ARSENEAULT: Junior.

PIEHLER: Junior, on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

VINCENT JONES: Vincent Jones.

PIEHLER: And I'd like to begin, you were born in Somerville, Massachusetts in 1924.

ARSENEAULT: Correct.

PIEHLER: Could you talk a little bit about your parents?

ARSENEAULT: Well my parents—my mother was from Somerville. At the time I was born my dad was in the Navy, he was at sea on a ship and that's why we were in Somerville because women usually go home when, uh—like when their husbands go out to sea. I was born at Sunnyside Hospital on top of Winter Hill which is very close to Lagoon Square in Somerville. All I can say about that particular point is Paul Revere galloped up over that hill on his way out to Concord and Lexington. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And your father was a Navy man.

ARSENEAULT: Yes.

PIEHLER: How long was he in the service?

ARSENEAULT: My dad was from southern Maine, from a town called Sanford, and in 1918 he joined the Navy, went to Hospital Corps School and became a pharmacist mate, and put in thirty years in the navy. So by the time he got out of the navy I was already in the Navy because I went on active duty in '44 and he came out in '46 and then fully retired in '48 with thirty years' service. He went back to his hometown in Sanford and I used that as a home of record for many years, but I never lived in Sanford.

PIEHLER: Sanford, Maine?

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: Um, do you know how your parents met?

ARSENEAULT: Yes, they met at, uh, at Wells Beach. Either at the bowling alley or at a dance when my mother was up there on vacation with one of her friends from Boston and he was—I'm not sure exactly when they met but as far as the date on it.

PIEHLER: The date of it, but they ...

ARSENEAULT: I think he was home on leave from the navy.

PIEHLER: And she was with her friend?

ARSENEAULT: And she was with her friend, right.

PIEHLER: Sort of, sort of hanging out it sounds [like] ...

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: As we would say.

ARSENEAULT: See, my mother worked for the Boston & Albany Railroad, and as I understand it her office took care of all the expenses on the dining cars and balanced up everybody to make sure that the fellow collecting the money was turning in the right amount and, you know how money goes.

PIEHLER: Yes. So she was in a sense, a bookkeeper, sounds like or ...

ARSENEAULT: I'm not sure if that is the terminology, but anyway, she had charge of that office which had about six gals in it.

PIEHLER: Oh, so she was, she was actually in charge of the office?

ARSENEAULT: She was the supervisor.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

ARSENEAULT: After a few years she worked her way up.

PIEHLER: Worked her way up.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Um, and your parents married in 1920—1923.

ARSENEAULT: Yes, and the reason it was delayed until then after having met back in 1918, was that my dad was, after sailing back and forth across the Atlantic during World War I in a troop ship, he got sent to a battleship in the Western Pacific and he sailed around out there on China and Japan and Vladivostok, Russia and this sort of thing. For several years they had a very, very good relationship going with the mails.

PIEHLER: So they wrote each other ...

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah ...

PIEHLER: So they, they ...

ARSENEAULT: Mom wrote to him every day.

PIEHLER: They had a long, long courtship ...

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah ...

PIEHLER: That's what they ...

ARSENEAULT: This was all done through the mail.

PIEHLER: So they didn't, because a lot of marriages people describe, they met one week and they got married the next week and then ...

ARSENEAULT: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: No, this was they met and then they ...

ARSENEAULT: They corresponded over the years while Mother was working in Boston and he was floating around out in China.

PIEHLER: And then, then when he returned ...

ARSENEAULT: When he returned it didn't take him very long to decide that now they were both back together then and they got married.

PIEHLER: You mentioned earlier on that Arseneault, when I asked you how to pronounce the name and you said, "Its Arsen-nay" ...

ARSENEAULT: "Arsen-no"

PIEHLER: Arseneault, because it's French. Is your father's ancestry French?

ARSENEAULT: Yes, grandpa came out of Prince Edward Island, uh, in the late 1800s and you can track where he lived in New Brunswick and Maine by where my aunts and uncles were born. In St. Johns and this sorta thing, and they worked their way right down to Sanford.

PIEHLER: And what about on your mother's side, is there similar French ancestry?

ARSENEAULT: Uh, yeah but they came out of an area in Quebec up near Montreal, and I've always wanted to go up in that area and chase down the genealogy from that part of the family. I've got a lot of stuff in there that Mother has passed on to me.

PIEHLER: Does your mother, your correspondence between your mother and father, did that, did your mother or father save that when they were courting?

ARSENEAULT: Did it what?

PIEHLER: You know, the letters that they sent back and forth when he was sailing in the Western Fleet.

ARSENEAULT: Oh, they never kept any of those letters, I've never seen them.

PIEHLER: Oh, those, you don't have those?

ARSENEAULT: No.

PIEHLER: Oh they ...

ARSENEAULT: I wish I did.

PIEHLER: No, that ... sounds like a remarkable ...

ARSENEAULT: It would be a great treasure, it really would.

PIEHLER: It sounds like one of the earliest memories you have, is this correct? Is of your father sort of coming home and going away. Is that when you were ...

ARSENEAULT: Yes, and that would be probably when I was between three and four because at that period of time my dad was on a ship, a mine layer, out of Boston and although it didn't go anywhere for any length of time it was always going out to sea, and Dad would be gone for the week or something. And we lived on Century Street in Somerville while he was based there on that ship going out of Boston. I was about four at the time so that would make it about 1928. Of course, I was five when the stock market crashed in '29.

PIEHLER: Did you remember—what did you remember of that as a five year old?

ARSENEAULT: I really didn't have anything to do with it but I've heard later on that the family just lost their shirt from all the stuff that they had invested in '29.

PIEHLER: Your father, or ...

ARSENEAULT: My Mother lost at least five-thousand dollars ...

PIEHLER: Oh, okay so ...

ARSENEAULT: ...that someone had put in stocks and bonds for her and you know five-thousand dollars in '29 was a lot of money.

PIEHLER: Oh, no that would be the equivalent of at least fifty-thousand today.

ARSENEAULT: Oh, gosh, yes.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so you had some awareness of this crash?

ARSENEAULT: Well, it didn't affect us as a navy family too much because Dad had a job, and Dad was getting paid every month.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: Even though the Navy did have a cut in pay, of about ten percent pay, in the early 30s. But it was an across the board and everybody took a ten percent pay cut.

PIEHLER: I'm curious because sounds like Somerville was for you very much the home, although you spent, when you look at where you went to elementary school, you went to Newport, Guam, and then back to Somerville and then to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, um, could you talk a little bit about your earliest memories of Somerville ...

ARSENEAULT: And then on to Concord, New Hampshire and then back to Somerville to graduate.

PIEHLER: Okay, so ...

ARSENEAULT: Started and stopped in Somerville.

PIEHLER: In Somerville. Could talk about sort of, you mentioned, did your parents own or rent their home?

ARSENEAULT: No, this was Grandpa's and Grandma lived there.

PIEHLER: Oh.

ARSENEAULT: My mother's family.

PIEHLER: That was your mother's family. So you grew up knowing your mother's, your grandfather ...

ARSENEAULT: I never knew my dad's mother and father because they both—well his mother died in 1918, that was why he went off and joined the Navy.

PIEHLER: Did she die in the flu, influenza of ...

ARSENEAULT: I don't think so, I don't know.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you don't know.

ARSENEAULT: My dad had five brothers and two sisters so it was a big family. And as far as I know, she was born in Mount Poley in New Brunswick and Grandpa was born—wait a minute, I got my grandmothers mixed up. My grandmother DeLorme, which is my mother's family name, came out of Worcester [Massachusetts].

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: And those folks came out of Montreal.

PIEHLER: Yeah, uh yeah, Quebec area ...

ARSENEAULT: I forgot what the question was.

PIEHLER: Well, I guess you were living with your grandparents in your grandparents' home when you were born?

ARSENEAULT: We, uh, we lived there with Grandpa ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ...and then my dad got quarters over at the naval hospital in Chelsea, which is just north of Somerville and he—when I went to high school for example, I used to get the bus from Chelsea into the Elevated [Boston Elevated Railway], take the Elevated to Somerville and go downstairs and get the bus up to high school. I did that every day, both ways. I spent a lot of time ...

PIEHLER: That's quite a commute. (Laughs)

ARSENEAULT: I spent a lot of time and I did a lot of homework on the Elevated, which was good.

PIEHLER: Um, it sounds like you got to know your grandfather. Was your grandmother alive?

ARSENEAULT: Yes, my ...

PIEHLER: It sounds like you ...

ARSENEAULT: My grandfather and my grandmother lived on Trull Street in Somerville which is just off of Magoun Square, and he died in '41 and she died in '42. And yes I knew them because you know at that time I was approaching twenty.

PIEHLER: Yeah, no, they lived quite a long time.

ARSENEAULT: And at one time, we actually rented a house across the street from them and lived there for four or five months.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: Again, waiting for quarters at Chelsea where my dad kept getting stationed.

PIEHLER: Did your grandparents speak French?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, oh yes.

PIEHLER: Did, did you pick ...

ARSENEAULT: But they didn't speak French in front of their children, so my mother and all of her sisters and brothers didn't speak French. And in fact she is the only one of five sisters and two brothers that married a Frenchman. The other ones all married Irishmen—it's terrible family. (Laughter) All mixed up between Irishmen and Frenchmen. I have Flinns and Rockwoods, and ...

PIEHLER: Oh, um—how often did you attend church, how often did you go to mass growing up?

ARSENEAULT: Every day, when Dad was at sea we would march down to the little Catholic Church and ...

PIEHLER: Every day, I mean ...

ARSENEAULT: Well, sometimes we wouldn't, yeah but ...

PIEHLER: But definitely every weekend.

ARSENEAULT: Oh yes, yes. You don't miss Mass.

PIEHLER: Yeah that was ... (Laughs)

ARSENEAULT: Not, not a lot.

PIEHLER: And you obviously had a first communion at—how—were you active in any other church organizations growing up?



ARSENEAULT: No, and as a matter of fact I was ... I went to first communion I think in Newport.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: And walked about four blocks from the house to an enclosed area where the nuns taught school and Sunday school and this sort of thing. I remember going there and doing things with those nuns and they were cloistered, they didn't come out ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ... and if you went to Mass down at their little chapel, you could see them behind a screen over on the side, but they didn't come into the church *per se*, and that always impressed me when I was a kid. Now, now I am only five, six, seven years old.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: But I—I never did get a chance to go to Catholic school.

PIEHLER: So that wasn't your ...

ARSENEAULT: Every time we moved and went to a new place, the grade I was in was always full.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm, so your parents ...

ARSENEAULT: My younger sister, who was six years younger than I was, always went to Catholic school. Now guess who goes to church every Sunday now? (Laughter) She is up in Maine and does her thing with something, I don't remember.

PIEHLER: But, in other words ...

ARSENEAULT: That doesn't mean she is any less a Christian than I am but she doesn't go to church on Sundays like I do.

PIEHLER: So you would have ended up in Catholic school, but for the fact that there was no room and your sister went.

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: I just, so I don't forget to ask, because you spent most of your growing up, you really essentially grew up in New England although you moved between Somerville, Chelsea, Portsmouth, Concord ...

ARSENEAULT: That's right, except for the two years in Guam.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I have to ask, you know, what was that experience of living in Guam like?

ARSENEAULT: Guam was interesting. We went across country, my mother and my sister and I on a train. It took three days to get across the country, riding in the Pullmans and sleeping on the train. Then it took two weeks to go from there to Hawaii on a ship, we were in Hawaii for about three or four days then it took two more weeks to get to Guam. Back in those days when a ship was going ten knots it was really steaming along. (Laughter) On the way out to Guam we were on the [USS] *Chaumont* which later on became AP2 I think, which is, AP is a transport.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: And when we came back two years later on the [USS] *Henderson*, that was AP1. And these were the two ships that ran dependents and servicemen back and forth across the Pacific for many years. It's fun to read the reunion of these folks and I've been to one of them which is funny because I went because I was a passenger on these ships, I wasn't one of the sailors. (Laughter) And I was probably ten years younger than all the rest of this crowd. It was a very interesting group. Some of them were Marines that were being transferred out to the Philippines and this sort of thing. Guam was a real interesting place in '32 and '33. For example, the ship that we went out on, [USS] *Chaumont*, was the last one to hit Guam before they took all the guns off it, I mean the big guns. And Guam didn't have any armament at all, they had about two hundred Marines and they were the police. The speed limit was twenty-five miles an hour and there was only paved roads in the city of Agaña. When you got out of town it was just a coral strip that had been beaten down, of course it comes out like concrete. It was about seven miles from Agaña down to Piti, and Piti was where the boats were that went out into the harbor to service the ships. There were no docks, no ships could come alongside, that came in and anchored in the big bay and were serviced by these fifty foot barges, they had barges that the tugboats would take out to the ships and offload stuff. When we went to Guam my dad bought a new car, and shortly after we arrived there our new car arrived, and my dad was really something driving around in that new Ford.

PIEHLER: So they transported the car for him?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: What about the furniture?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So you picked, you literally picked up the house ...

ARSENEAULT: Well, it was even worse than that though, because one of the barrels of dishes that mother wanted to go into storage ended up in Guam, and the dishes were all broken and the bucket with all the pots and pans, which she desperately needed, got put into storage. (Laughter) That's the kind of things that get mixed up once in a while.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but none the less, she had all, except for this mishap ...

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: ...all her furniture.

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: Well, what kind of accommodations did you have in Guam?

ARSENEAULT: When we got there, for the first two weeks or three weeks they put us up in a temporary place that hadn't been occupied, except by the bugs. (Laughs) The lights were drop cord with a single bulb in the kitchen, in the dining room, in the living room, very, very simple electricity. And I can remember, the first night we were there my mother had her hair in a hairnet, and she was doing something in the kitchen and she came tearing into the dining room. One of these flying cockroaches had flown into her hairnet and was fluttering, and I can remember her going round and round and round that dining room table, now remember I'm only about eight or nine at this point. (Laughs) I can remember that, my dad was chasing after her trying to get that bug and you can imagine what she said when this finally all calmed down. She says, "I want to get out of here." (Laughs) But, we had a house that we rented, took a couple of weeks to get that organized, and we lived right down in the center of town. Interesting that the street out front was about a foot higher than all the rest of the ground. (Laughs) We found out why during the rainy season. You would have eight inches of water under the house...

PIEHLER: Oh.

ARSENEAULT: ... and you could wade through it out to the street then you were okay. (Laughter) And it would rain, rain, rain, rain. Same time every day, and then it would go for six months without any rain, and it would be dry, dry, dry. It was interesting; the temperature would go up pretty warm every day. School ran from seven o'clock to about eleven-thirty and they would let us out because it got too hot, we would all go swimming.

PIEHLER: In the ocean?

ARSENEAULT: Well, in the ocean or down at Piti where they had a little swimming area that was a little safer because it didn't have any sharks in it. (Laughter) But interestingly enough, on the way out to Guam on the [USS] *Chaumont* they rigged up a canvas swimming pool up on the forward well deck and filled it with sea water and everybody was in there swimming and having a good time, I couldn't swim a lick. I spent

two years on Guam and I learned to swim like a fish. The blasted [USS] *Henderson*, on the way back to the States, they didn't have a swimming pool.

PIEHLER: No swimming pool on the ... (Laughter)

ARSENEAULT: It killed me.

PIEHLER: Guam, I guess growing up, what did you do for fun, and I'm particularly curious, you mentioned swimming in Guam, what else did you do?

ARSENEAULT: I had a twenty inch bike that my dad bought for me just as we left the States, and I rode that bicycle all over the place. 'Cause Guam is only about six, seven miles wide and it's about twenty miles long, but in those days when we were there, there wasn't anything north of Agaña. You couldn't go up there. You could go down to the south end of the island by going up and over to the other side and taking the road along the thing and get down to Merizo, I think that's how you say it, Merizo. Anyway, the southern end. The hospital had a corpsman stationed down there who took care of all of the natives from that area. Dad was in charge of the outside part of the hospital, the grounds, the ambulances, the garage, and all this kind of stuff. And the interesting part of that was, when he drove in with his brand new car, the senior mechanic came to him and said, "Chief, I want to buy your car." He said, "I will bring you money every Friday, and eventually I will own that car and when you leave, it'll be my car." And Dad said, "Okay, that sounds good." So they set up their little book on this and my dad said every time he drove his car over there to the hospital, when he wasn't looking the oil got changed or something. (Laughter) And when all the ambulances got washed, his car got washed too, and he said every once in a while this mechanic would borrow the car for the weekend and to go to a wedding or something, and he said he was real proud driving his car. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So he did buy the car?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, he bought the car, yeah. But of course while we were there it was our car. One other thing I can remember about Guam was the German battlecruiser *Köln*, K-O-L-N, showed up and spent a couple of days there one time, and the thing that impressed me the most was not the guns on that thing, but they had a lion in a cage on the deck.

PIEHLER: On the deck?

ARSENEAULT: And you know, I just wondered if they ever let the lion out. (Laughter) It was an interesting thing. Now we took a ride down to look at the ship out in the harbor, and on the way back to Agaña we picked up a couple of the German sailors. And Dad didn't speak German and they didn't speak English, but my Dad spoke, spoke up in French and one of them was a real French talker and boy, from then on no one could get a word in edgewise. (Laughter) But they had a great time. We fed them and then took them back to the ...

PIEHLER: Your dad, even though your grandparents didn't speak French, your dad had picked up French.

ARSENEAULT: Oh, my dad was raised in a French family, French up to here. (Gestures with hands)

PIEHLER: Ok, so it's your mother's side that didn't speak French.

ARSENEAULT: Mother's side didn't.

PIEHLER: But your father's side, he spoke fluent French?

ARSENEAULT: Mother always said that she couldn't get in a word edgewise when dad was visiting her house because her father and mother would talk to dad in French.

PIEHLER: And she didn't know what ... ?

ARSENEAULT: And she didn't know what they were saying. (Laughter) But, you know, that is a terrible thing to do to kids, if you speak a language you should teach your children that language. At any rate, she always said that she knew there was something going on in the kitchen when they were talking away. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I'm curious, in Guam did you parents have any help, outside help in the house?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yes. We had a young lady from way out in one of the outlying villages who actually came and lived in the house with us, and she—did a lot of the cooking, but of course mother did also. And I think one of the things that impressed me most about that was anytime that she was serving us at the table, whatever she brought in would go in front of my father, and he kept trying to tell her, "No, put it in front of Mother," but she never did, never did change her custom. (Laughter) Daddy got first bite of whatever was there. It was an interesting time for me, for example the newspapers only came once a month when the ship came. There were no airplanes at that time.

PIEHLER: So you were waiting for the ship?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, because it had four weeks of funnies [newspaper comic strips]. (Laughter) And we'd take all the funnies out of the Sunday papers and we would lay them up on the front porch, and the kids from blocks around would come to our house to read the funnies. Of course you had to read them in order because they all hooked on each other. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So, you would get mail once a month. You would get the newspaper once a month, and the food was?

ARSENEAULT: The food brought in and put in the frozen food locker and storehouse, as far as meats and that sort of thing. Then you would go down there and buy it, just like going to the commissary [store catering to soldiers and their families] now.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: But there wasn't much to pick from, and the stuff that came out of that frozen food locker down there was just like ice blocks, you know. It was cold. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And what about, was there radio in Guam?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah. And we had a station that came up with the news and stuff and they had a newspaper that was published but it came out like this, is what it looked like. (Gestures with hands)

PIEHLER: Like a mimeograph?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, it was the *Guam Eagle*. I don't know whether the *Guam Eagle* was one of those cockroaches or not but that's what I thought. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And your playmates in Guam, were they fellow, sort of dependents, or did you have any contact with islanders?

ARSENEAULT: Yes, in fact, one of the neighbors that lived close by was about eighteen or nineteen, and I used to run with him every once in a while, and we'd go fishing. He worked for the telephone company and we'd go down to the reef and we'd put a couple of electrodes out in the water and crank it up there and the fish would go pow! And they would all be floating and we would run out there and get what we wanted. (Laughter) That didn't happen very often.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but enough to ...

ARSENEAULT: Enough that I remember it. And we used to go up into the hills and knock down a coconut or something and we would work on coconuts. It's a real chore to open a coconut as it falls out of a tree. It's not like that little round thing you find in the grocery store, that's inside the husk.

PIEHLER: Oh okay.

ARSENEAULT: You've got to take that husk off first, but you know, I still don't like coconut on anything because I got so used to eating the fresh coconut.

PIEHLER: Oh, that you could never get used to ...

ARSENEAULT: I don't like this stuff that you find on top of cakes and stuff like that. Little dried coconut, it's bits of dried coconut as far as I'm concerned. Make soap out of it or something like that. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Um, and then you left Guam. I mean, did you—were you, how did you feel about leaving Guam?

ARSENEAULT: Uh, I was ready to come back to the States, because 1934—it was kind of a bad time as I remember it. I was ready to come home. I don't know whether that's a good answer or not?

PIEHLER: No, I just, I just ... it's so striking because most people I interview, they really don't, they never really live—have much to do outside a hundred miles of their home and you would have—you would go halfway around the world ...

ARSENEAULT: Yeah. Right.

PIEHLER: ...and live there.

ARSENEAULT: And I can remember the earthquakes, when you're sitting there and the next thing you know everything's moving.

PIEHLER: In Guam?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah. Big, big time. It's like the tsunami that just went by. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So, did it do any damage while you were there?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, not real bad stuff.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: Guam was moving all the time.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, your journey to Guam, was that the first time you'd really been on a ship for that extended?

ARSENEAULT: Well, I had been on ships with my dad.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but actual traveling.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, one time I went on board the minelayer [USS] *Oglala* in Boston, and I didn't step high enough going through the hatch door, and I fell in on my face, and I used every piece of gauze they had there getting the blood to stop. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Oh.

ARSENEAULT: But I didn't do any shipping other than that, no. Going out of San Francisco, the very first day—the Pacific really moves, it's got big long swells. And this ship climbs up down and down and rocks and rolls. They made the mistake of leaving all the donuts and coffee cakes and stuff on the table after breakfast and a couple of the other kids and I helped ourselves, you know. (Laughter) Man, I got so sea sick you couldn't believe it. (Laughter) And I got no sympathy whatsoever from dad or anybody. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Going back to sort of New England, what would you do for fun growing up?

ARSENEAULT: Well, the part that I can recall best was in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in junior high school, and then in Penacook, New Hampshire, in senior high school, because those were the days that I was a boy scout. And when we were up in Penacook, which is just north of Concord, New Hampshire, I'll bet I walked on every road within twenty miles of Penacook, and the ones I didn't walk on I rode my bicycle on, but it was all during scout stuff and passing merit badges for hiking and camping and this sort of thing.

PIEHLER: What rank did you make?

ARSENEAULT: Eagle.

PIEHLER: Oh, you made Eagle Scout?

ARSENEAULT: With silver palm, which is as high as you can go.

PIEHLER: Did you, did you go to the national jamboree?

ARSENEAULT: Never made one of those, no. By the way, you know, when I retired from the Navy in '65 ...

PIEHLER: I saw you went to work for a time for the Boy Scouts.

ARSENEAULT: ... I went to work for the Boy Scouts as a scout executive, or as an assistant scout executive, and that only lasted about a year and a half because at that time I had seven children aged three to thirteen and I needed a job that paid more money.

PIEHLER: More money than a scout executive.

ARSENEAULT: More money than a scout executive. That didn't mean I wasn't interested in scouting, and I'm still interested in scouting, and I'm still registered having gone to my first camp reunion in 1937, and I've been registered ever since.

PIEHLER: Ever since, as a scout.



ARSENEAULT: And last month I went to the Smokey Mountain Council Eagle Banquet and I sponsored one of the boys and I just heard from him yesterday, he has been accepted at the Naval Academy.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) Oh, so very nice. I'm curious, Boy Scout, why not a sea scout?

ARSENEAULT: I was a Sea Scout.

PIEHLER: Oh, you were a Sea Scout.

ARSENEAULT: Oh yes, in Chelsea.

PIEHLER: What led you to join the boy scouts, how did that come about? Do you remember what was the—did your father or mother encourage it, or ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Well they must have, because somebody had to get me to the scout meetings and back. And at the time when I joined, we were living on the naval shipyard at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, which is in Kittery, Maine.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah it's ...

ARSENEAULT: And to get to that shipyard you had to go over to Kittery and then go over the bridge to Portsmouth, and that's where the scout troop was. So it was probably a seven, eight mile drive ...

PIEHLER: Oh, that's a ...

ARSENEAULT: ... to get to the meeting and then you had to come back and pick me up. But I did my real scouting up in Penacook.

PIEHLER: Penacook, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: Which is up in central New Hampshire.

PIEHLER: And that's where you made Eagle Scout?

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: What year did you make Eagle Scout, do you remember?

ARSENEAULT: 1940.

PIEHLER: 1940. How old were you then, you would have been ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Sixteen.

PIEHLER: Sixteen and then you made your Palms before your eighteenth birthday?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah. Back in those days you had five more merit badges and six months' service to go to bronze and then five more merit badges and six months' service to go to silver—to go to gold, and then to silver.

PIEHLER: Um, you moved to different schools and different—even though, except for Guam you stayed in New England, what was the experience of sort of going from school to school in terms of both learning, but also your friends?

ARSENEAULT: Well, I'll tell you the one thing that happened to me was when I came back from Guam, I skipped a grade. And the reason for that was in Guam there were only four children in the class, and the class was the second, third, and fourth grades. Two of us were in the fourth grade, one in the third and one in the second, but you always listen to what's going on no matter who's—what thing, what book they're working on. And when I got back to Boston, to Somerville of course, I went over to the school and came back home at the end of the week and I told my mother, I said, "I've had all that stuff." She said, "Well let me go talk to the teacher." They had a talk and the teacher said, "Well, we'll put him up in the next grade, and if he can hack it we'll let him stay there." Bad news, don't ever do that to a boy. I graduated from high school in 1941 at age sixteen. I was too small to get out and fight with all the other guys and I couldn't play football, I couldn't do this, the girls were all older than I was. Bad news.

PIEHLER: So socially, the skipping a grade was ...

ARSENEAULT: Was a big mistake for a boy. You might get away with that with a girl, but don't ever do that to a boy. I came out of high school in June of '41. In September, I went back to school. In my high school in Somerville they allowed postgraduate work, and I took second year chemistry and mechanical drawing and all the things I wanted to do that I had not done before. And this led to a job in Boston, 'cause my chemistry teacher got me a job in a chemistry laboratory on Wilson Street, and I worked there, oh my gosh, five or six months. Then my dad got transferred from Chelsea to the Naval Air Station in South Weymouth, Massachusetts, which is about twenty miles south of Boston, and we moved. Well, when we moved that shut down my job in Boston.

PIEHLER: Ah, okay.

ARSENEAULT: And I went out to the naval air station in South Weymouth. And I was still not eighteen and I still transferred to a Boy Scout unit and that's where I got my final Palms.

PIEHLER: Was, was in South ...

ARSENEAULT: South Weymouth. I can't even remember the name or the number ...

PIEHLER: So you stayed with scouting as a member, active member until your eighteenth birthday?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, and then after that I stayed active. But any rate, down at South Weymouth I went to work for a construction company that was working on the air station itself, and I became a member of a transit crew to rod and then paint and then transit. We were building landing areas for blimps, and then I got over in the area where the big hangars were, and I played in there for a while.

PIEHLER: And this is in 1940?

ARSENEAULT: '43.

PIEHLER: '43 ...

ARSENEAULT: Early.

PIEHLER: Because you were still, you were not—when did you turn nineteen?

ARSENEAULT: Well, from October 29<sup>th</sup> of '44, the age of nineteen, that comes in after I went in the Navy. I forget exactly when it happened.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: When I became an ensign I was nineteen. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Nineteen.

ARSENEAULT: And the first ship that I went onboard was an amphibious ship, one of these that had little Higgins boats [LCVPs] hanging all over it. Used to carry about eighteen hundred Marines and all their equipment. The executive officer gave me the first division, which is everything from the bow to the superstructure with three cargo holds, a five inch gun, about seven or eight boats, all the booms and riggings. I knew how to run all that stuff from the Merchant Marine Academy, but the gang that I had, the seventy-five people that were in my division, half of them were older than I was. (Laughter) But I still knew more than they did.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) Yeah, but the age.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: Before we go into sort of the Maritime Academy, your Navy—what about sports, did you follow any teams growing up or any—you mentioned you were too young for football.

ARSENEAULT: The only thing that I played in high school, I realized that I was too small to compete with these guys, so I went out for track.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: Track, you do all by yourself. You don't compete with these other great big guys, and I learned how to run like mad. The last—as a junior I played soccer. Now, soccer is running and the only time I ever tangled with a great big guy, he stepped on my foot and broke my shoe lace in six places, but the rest of the time I was able to move away, and I made one fantastic corner kick, kicked it into the right place and made a goal out of it and I got my letter.

PIEHLER: It's interesting because soccer was really not very popular in the States, I mean played very often.

ARSENEAULT: It is in a small high school in the middle of New Hampshire where they don't have the money for all that equipment. All you have to do is have a ball. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Yeah, but still, it's interesting because you know, for most parts of the country it doesn't come until the 1970s. You didn't follow any professional teams or...?

ARSENEAULT: Not really, except the Red Sox, everybody knows them.

PIEHLER: What about your ...

ARSENEAULT: One of the players, Red Rolfe, lived in Penacook, New Hampshire and had a gas station and we used to go over and sit at his gas station and talk baseball, you know. I wasn't really into it but that was the thing to do.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, your friends—it sounds like a lot of your friends, if this is correct, were with the Boy Scouts, is that ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: And how many of the Boy Scouts were navy dependents or ... ?

ARSENEAULT: No, one of my good friends up in Penacook, [his] older brother was an ensign in the Navy and actually flew blimps, but that was only just a short period of time and then he was back home again. There were no career people that I know of.

PIEHLER: What's the difference, I guess—because sometimes in New England you would live on base, in base housing, and sometimes you lived outside the base. What's the difference between the two, from your—as a kid growing up? Or is there any difference?

ARSENEAULT: Not too much difference, because we still had access to getting on the base, and we would go over there and do things on the base. But it is nice to live on a base that has a swimming pool and has a Red Cross hut that has pool tables and ping pong tables and this sort of thing and the patients weren't there all the time. Remember, all this medic—it was all medical stuff. All these corpsmen, and my dad was the chief pharmacist mate, so they had to work, and this stuff was there. (Laughter) So we would go to the swimming pool and we were the only ones there, you know, and there were all kinds of things like that, like a movie every night. That was only one movie, it had one short subject to start it off with, but that was all you needed. At the Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, there was a bowling alley that we had access to. Well, the only thing wrong there is, when you went there after hours, you had to come up with somebody to set the pins, see? (Laughter) So you would flip a coin to see who would bowl and who would set the pins. (Laughter) And there was a shooting range there and we all got our marksmanship merit—shooting badges that the NRA [National Rifle Association] used to have. But that was—we always tangled with the marines. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Even at a young age?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah. Well they manned the gate, and you don't go out the gate without them calling home and telling your mother where you went, you know.

PIEHLER: So, literally, they kept a watch on you?

ARSENEAULT: Oh, yes. (Laughter) One incident at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, which I probably shouldn't tell you this but some of the kids had BB guns, and one day we went out with these BB guns and we picked out a warehouse that had windows across the top. (Laughter) And one gun was shooting those windows on the right and the other gun was shooting those windows on the left to see who could get to the middle window first. (Laughter) And the marines showed up. There was about half a dozen marines in khakis chasing us. We retreated to the big coal pile down at the bow house, I mean this is a big pile of coal, and every time one of the marines would start up the pile after us we'd throw hunks of coal at 'em. (Laughter) And they didn't like that with their khakis. Finally got them all on one side of the pile and we all went down the other side and went home. (Laughter) It was funny because they knew who we were, and the next thing you know, the captain of the shipyard called all the fathers and had them all standing in a row in his office. He said, "Now I want you all to go home and get all the BB guns, bring 'em back here and we'll tag 'em with your name, and when you get transferred you can have your gun back, but if anyone else comes up with any guns around here, you guys are gonna to suffer." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you had to turn in your BB gun?

ARSENEAULT: I didn't have one. My dad was sitting there smiling. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But you were part of the gang?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You were part of the ...

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah. (Laughter) There must have been eight or ten of us in this little crowd, but we're all about the same age. The shipyard only worked during the day, at night, at 4 o'clock all the workers gone.

PIEHLER: So it was very much, most of your ...

ARSENEAULT: We would go down to the building ways and climb in and out of submarines they were building and ...

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

PIEHLER: The Navy, at what we would now call the interwar period, was in many ways, particularly stateside on land, sounds like as you describe it, very much a nine to five quote, unquote nine to five. In other words, at night the base essentially shut down?

ARSENEAULT: That's right. Now, when the base was going and things were happening, of course people were right in the middle of it. For example, when you fill the dry dock with water and you take the caisson out and you put a ship in there and put the caisson back, you get more than a ship, there's fish in there too, and as they pump the water out the bottom you can down in the dry dock, and with a bucket you can catch these fish as they come swimming out. (Laughter) And we would get buckets and buckets of fish and we would go up and go along the dock and sell them to the crews of the submarines and tug boats and stuff and we made many a quarter that way.

PIEHLER: What you're also describing was in some ways a very informal—in the sense that you as a kid could go out into all these places that I think now would be off limits, I don't think you could ...

ARSENEAULT: Well, they were off limits then, too, but who's gonna keep you out except the Marines.

PIEHLER: Oh, so you really—it sounds like there is an element of a game and chase?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

PIEHLER: So you're not supposed to go to some of these places but ... ?

ARSENEAULT: And it was dangerous to go climbing in and out of some of those places. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: And we knew enough to not go into the real big ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: The real—yeah ...

ARSENEAULT: That was a fun time, it really was. It was '37, '38, '39, and I was in junior high school and just getting ready to start high school, it was, it was great. The school bus was a panel truck, and it would come into the base and come up to the naval hospital and pick up the kids, that's where I was. Then it would go into the gate at the jail, the prison facility, and pick up the kids that lived there. Then it would go out the other gate and pick up the kids around on the main side of the base, and then we would go over to Kittery and over to Portsmouth, and they'd dump us out at school. Now, you wanted to make sure you got on that school bus coming home, too, 'cause if you didn't make it, it was about a seven mile walk home. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: And you would ...

ARSENEAULT: Or you could call home and try to bum a ride, but that didn't always work. If you missed the bus, my dad didn't have very much patience with you. (Laughter) He says, "Well you know where supper is, come on home." (Laughter) What I liked about Portsmouth is that you get about three or four feet of snow in the winter time, and you get all kinds of snow that you can make big huts out of ... You could run off the end of porch and jump into the snow and disappear. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Of all the places you lived; Providence, Chelsea, Somerville, what was your favorite?

ARSENEAULT: I guess Portsmouth. We had more fun in Portsmouth.

PIEHLER: Portsmouth, yeah. Was there any place you didn't like of the—'cause it sounds like you have a, except for the age problem in high school, your overall ...

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, because in high school, remember, the senior year I was living in Chelsea going to school in Somerville.

PIEHLER: You mentioned the commute.

ARSENEAULT: That commute every day, course it only cost a nickel each way on the subway, they didn't expect a student to pay, so there was no problem with it money-wise, but it is a long haul to go and I had to carry my lunch. I ate lunch a lot of times.

PIEHLER: Did you, were you active—you mentioned sports, except for soccer and track and field, were you active in any clubs or any other organizations in high school?

ARSENEAULT: No, I played tennis in my senior year. It was my sophomore and junior year that I was in track and soccer. There wasn't any time for that after-school stuff because I had to commute to get back home.

PIEHLER: And it also sounds like Boy Scouts was your big activity when you were, you know. What did your parents think of Franklin Roosevelt when you were growing up?

ARSENEAULT: I don't know, he was the president. You can't say much about the commander-in-chief—if you're in the military.

PIEHLER: Did your parents vote?

ARSENEAULT: Oh, I'm sure they did.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but you really didn't talk about politics?

ARSENEAULT: No, I didn't have any interest in it at that time either. I couldn't tell you a Democrat from a Republican.

PIEHLER: So Franklin Roosevelt, for your parents and for you, was the commander-in-chief ...

ARSENEAULT: Sure.

PIEHLER: ... and that was basically—let me make sure before we move on to your Navy, Maritime Academy.

JONES: I was just going to—whenever, I know you were still in school I guess whenever the war broke out in Europe, but was there any kind of certain reaction that you guys had, especially since—between the people and all the kids that you knew when it happened?

ARSENEAULT: No, I don't recall that being an earth-shaking kind of—I remember when war broke out December of '41, I was back in high school, and I don't think I went to work at the chem lab until about March of '42.

PIEHLER: '42.

ARSENEAULT: Then in that summer was when my dad got transferred down to the Naval Air Station in South Weymouth, and at that point he went from Chief Petty Officer to Warrant Officer, Chief Warrant Officer. And later on, he made Lieutenant Junior Grade and was transferred to Quonset Point, Rhode Island, but by the time he got transferred down there, I was in the Merchant Marine Academy because I went in in March of '43.

PIEHLER: I'm just curious about your father because he was a career-enlisted rank in the Navy, but then became an officer.

ARSENEAULT: Correct.



PIEHLER: What was that experience like, you know, for him?

ARSENEAULT: Uh, he actually became the administrator of a hospital in Coney Island, New York the last couple years he was on active duty. And when he came out of the Navy in '46, he reverted back to Chief Petty Officer and then in '48 retired as a full Lieutenant and it made a tremendous difference in his retired pay.

PIEHLER: Making that officer rank.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, but he should've stayed with hospital administration. He could've gone into running a hospital somewhere up in New England. Instead he went back and joined a classmate of his who had inherited a drug store and who was a pharmacist. Now Dad took the registered pharmacist exam in Maine and made the highest mark they'd ever seen and he worked in the drug store for another fifteen, twenty years. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: As a pharmacist?

ARSENEAULT: As a pharmacist. He should have been over at the hospital ...

PIEHLER: Running the hospital.

ARSENEAULT: ... running the hospital as a hospital administrator.

PIEHLER: Because he did that during the war?

ARSENEAULT: That's what he did.

PIEHLER: Which is a tremendous, tremendous job.

ARSENEAULT: Well I, think he started with a hotel, Half Moon Hotel on Coney Island, and went in there and had to clean it out and set it up as an auxiliary hospital to St. Albans, which is in New York on Long Island. One of the problems they had when they took over the hotel was one of the floors was occupied by the mafia, and they had to go in and tell these guys, "You're out." (Laughter) And they didn't want to leave. (Laughter) And in fact, for several months after they were actually removed, they would come back every morning to the little coffee shop to have their coffee and doughnuts and decide what they were going to do today.

PIEHLER: And they really were ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Finally, my dad had to call the police and tell them, "Look, get these people out of here. If they're not patients or there not part of my staff they can't eat in this coffee shop." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And they really were mob?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: Oh they were, they ...

ARSENEAULT: Oh, I'm sure they were, yeah. (Laughter) You can imagine my dad going in there and telling these guys that they've gotta leave. (Laughter) Now, when they started getting patients, the patients they got from St. Albans were the patients that had their arm in a cast or something like that.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: We had some in a wheelchair, and they would turn them loose on the boardwalk every morning at nine o'clock and, you know, you've gotta be back by four o'clock. Guys would go wheeling off down the boardwalk. That was an interesting job, a neat one. The biggest problem he had was not with the patients, but with the doctors. 'Cause all these doctors were all reserve ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: ...and they all outranked him, but he got more money than they did, because he had thirty years of service, you know twenty-six years of service. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: They couldn't understand why a Lieutenant would get more money than a Commander.

PIEHLER: But the years of ...

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, you get longevity time that really hooks your pay up.

PIEHLER: Well, growing up did you think you would join the Navy?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah. I had already picked out the fact that I was going to marry a navy nurse.

PIEHLER: Really, that was ...

ARSENEAULT: At Chelsea, we would watch those Navy nurses climb up the stairs going to the hospital from the nurses' quarters. (Laughter) And I had made up my mind that I'm going to get one of those. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And, um, I'm curious because you were still in high school when the war broke out. What about the Battle of Atlantic—the Atlantic in 1941, when they had the warfare in the Atlantic. How aware were you of that?

ARSENEAULT: Not too much, the papers didn't carry too much stuff at that time.

PIEHLER: And you would never hear scuttlebutt from your dad or from others you hung out with about what was going on?

ARSENEAULT: No, no, I don't recall that.

PIEHLER: So for you it was just as distant as someone with no Navy connection?

ARSENEAULT: It was just like people going to the moon, you know.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: If you were in high school and people were flying off to the moon, you might say, "Oh, look at that."

PIEHLER: Yeah, but none because of your Navy ...

ARSENEAULT: No.

PIEHLER: What led you to ...

ARSENEAULT: And it's funny, the reason I got into the Merchant Marine Academy was because one of the other postgraduate students, like myself in high school applied, and he had an extra copy of the application and he said, "Listen, here, fill it out, just see what I'm going to do." Well, he didn't make it, but I did. (Laughs) But that was just by chance that I went that way. I was trying to figure out whether I should go to a D-12 program somewhere and become an aviator or ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ...you don't know what you're gonna to do when your seventeen. But I ended up at the Merchant Marine Academy, and back in those days it was an eighteen-month course, and at the end of that the end of that period of time you passed the Coast Guard test for third mate or third engineer and got a commission as an ensign and away you go.

PIEHLER: And you started in March—you listed as reporting in March 28, 1943 to the Massachusetts Maritime Academy in Hyannis, Massachusetts which is on Cape Cod.

ARSENEAULT: That's right. Right. The school had been moved from a ship that they had in Boston, and had moved to Hyannis to the state teachers' college campus. And

that's where it was all during the war, and then after the war it got moved to Buzzards Bay, where it is today. And it's fantastic what they've got at Buzzards Bay in the way of buildings and dormitories, playing fields. We didn't have anything like that, it was just bare buildings.

PIEHLER: Had you thought of, I guess—two obvious questions, had you thought of just enlisting in the Navy, and did you try for the Naval—had you thought of trying for the Naval Academy?

ARSENEAULT: I didn't at that time. Strangely enough, later on I did, and I went and took the exam as an ensign. I walked into the room in New York to take the exam and everybody thought I was running the thing. (Laughter) They all stood up.

PIEHLER: They literally did stand? (Laughter)

ARSENEAULT: Oh, yes. (Laughter) But I didn't pass it, because this was about three years, maybe four years after high school and you do tend to lose some of the algebra and physics and chemistry and stuff. It goes in the background if you don't use it, and I didn't pass it. Of course, it's one of those things you either pass or fail, they don't tell you why.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ... but I didn't make it.

PIEHLER: But, you didn't, in 1943, think to try for the Naval Academy or?

ARSENEAULT: That didn't come up because I just didn't look into it.

PIEHLER: Well, it's interesting how you described how you ended up at the Massachusetts Maritime. It wasn't something you had planned, it was your friend saying, "Here's an application."

ARSENEAULT: That's right. And it came after I had moved from there to the job in Boston, and moved from there to the job in South Weymouth, when I got the letter saying, "You've been accepted." I only had about a week to report.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: And boy, that was a shock, going in there.

PIEHLER: Well yeah, could you describe what that was like?

ARSENEAULT: Well, the upperclassmen, just like at the Naval Academy, would take that fourth classman and really work him over. (Laughter) They make you learn all kinds of strange things, and I don't know how many dozen shoes I polished every day. (Laughter) But the upperclassmen really took advantage ...

PIEHLER: You really had hazing?

ARSENEAULT: Oh, it was terrible, it was terrible. And uh, there was all kinds of things the upperclassmen could figure out to make your life uncomfortable. For example, I think the first night we were there, the new incoming class got put up in the attic. That's what I called it. (Laughs) At about two o'clock in the morning, there's a fire drill, and they made us get up and put our rain coats on, and they were squirting water all over the place. (Laughter) Of course the officers were all gone somewhere else, we don't know where they were, but this was first classmen who were doing all this. It really made it uncomfortable for a while.

PIEHLER: And how long did the hazing last, through the whole first year or did it?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, you, uh, our salvation was, they sent half of the school off to New York, to the New York school ship, and they were gone for three months, and when they came back, we had already gone through that period of time, and then we were upperclassmen. (Laughter) There was a new class that came in the bottom for them to pick on. My class only had thirty-six people, but the class after that had about seventy-five, and there were lots of people to pick on, and they just forgot us, which was great. (Laughter) Then, the next year, or the next session, or whatever you call it, we were the upper classmen. Now I didn't get into the hazing bit because I was selected to be the battalion adjutant, which was the number two guy. We had six companies and each one of them had a company commander. So I was the guy that stood out front and barked all the orders, but I was also the guy that went to class and always talked Navy. Everyone else is talking Merchant Marine. And that was probably one reason why at the end of the period of time I got selected to go active duty in the Navy.

PIEHLER: When you said ...

ARSENEAULT: Only three people went.

PIEHLER: When you say you "talked Navy," what do you mean by that?

ARSENEAULT: Anytime a navy question came up I had my hand up. Any time that there was an answer that was needed the professor would ask me.

PIEHLER: And how did you know the answer? From studying or just being surrounded by the Navy?

ARSENEAULT: I had a Bluejacket's Manual [basic handbook for US Navy personnel] and I learned all of the stuff I was supposed to know.

PIEHLER: From the Bluejacket's Manual?

ARSENEAULT: Sure. Good book.

PIEHLER: I know, I've seen it and I keep thinking I should get some of the World War II copies for our Center library.

ARSENEAULT: That would be like getting an old Boy Scout Manual. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I have one from the '40s. What, what was the curriculum like at the Maritime Academy?

ARSENEAULT: Well, reveille [wake-up call] was at six, you had a clean-up period of time, assembly, breakfast at seven, clean-up period of time, eight o'clock, marched off to class and classes were about an hour long and they—mornings were really classroom doing stuff. Afternoons was usually outside, physical stuff like painting and rowing and sailing and the practical things that we learn. A boom yard-and-stay, picked up where you run the winch, picked the load up, and put it down over there. We learned to do all those things so when I went on board that first ship, and I had those seventy-five men I told you about, I said, "How many of you guys know how to run a winch?" And two out of the seventy-five had ever run a winch before, so we went into a training session right off the bat. (Laughter) And luckily the first place we stopped that we had to run the winches was the supply depot, and we just picked up crates of food and cans, and this sort of thing, and bounced them all over the place. And once they learned how to do that, the next stop was the ammo depot. (Laughter) Hopefully, they knew how to do it by then. We didn't bounce the projectiles quite as bad. And then we went to the fuel depot and filled it up with fuel, and then we took off on a shakedown cruise. It was a brand new ship.

PIEHLER: So you had considerable, at the Maritime Academy, on-ship experience?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, yeah. Well there was a three month period where we went down to New York and went aboard their ship, and we would drive the ship, you know, we would be the helmsmen and watches. But you don't learn too much when there's two hundred cadets on board the ship ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ...and only one or two people could do anything, the rest would watch.

PIEHLER: Well, the reason I ask is because, when I've interviewed a lot of Navy people who go in Naval Reserve in World War II, they're sent to places like Indiana, to Bloomington—to Notre Dame, to South Bend.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And the way they described it is, it's mostly classroom and just sort of general, you know, inculcation of Navy discipline, they really weren't on ships. I mean

they don't—they have very little contact often with a ship until they are actually deployed somewhere, but as for you, you really are on ships in the ...

ARSENEAULT: Well, I also learned how to paint. We had an old barge down there at the Academy that always needed painting. Chip the paint off one side ...

PIEHLER: You would paint ...

ARSENEAULT: ... and we would paint. You learn how to paint when you're painting. We also learned how to row a boat. If you've got an upperclassman whose coxswain and he's up there with a tiller handle beatin' on you, (Laughter) you learn how to row. And sailing was a lot of fun. Even more fun as an upperclassman 'cause then you got to drive.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: But uh, the engineers got into in the same boat. They had a whole bunch of diesel engines and stuff there, and they were always tearing the stuff apart and putting it back together.

PIEHLER: So in terms of curriculum, you could go into an engineering track?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: But, and you were—were there different tracks?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, deck or engineer.

PIEHLER: And you were deck?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And what, I guess in terms of skills, you learned—you mentioned some of the very specific ones, but did you learn navigation?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You manned the helm.

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: You learned some very, like very practical—how to row a boat, as you described it, how to be on the bridge and steer, you know, literally take the helm.

ARSENEAULT: Well, we did strange things too, like what do you do when the gyrocompass doesn't work? They sent us to a special gyrocompass course to learn how to

get that gyrocompass back working again. If you're out in the middle of the Atlantic and the gyrocompass quits, somebody's, got to fix it.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm, and you even knew how to ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Right. If you're out in the middle of the Atlantic and somebody gets sick and needs an appendix removed, it's the officers that have to do it. The skipper is the chief nurse, and the number one is the surgeon, and the number two is the anesthesiologist, and the number three is nurse again, handing stuff. You need to learn a little bit about how to do this, because as you go through the process, eventually you're going to run into somebody that breaks a leg, and you've gotta fix it. There you are in the middle of nowhere, with no pharmacist mate on board, and it's the officers who have to do that. If you run out of steam and the deck officers reach down into the engine room and grab one of them up and put him to work.

PIEHLER: And in some ways, I just realized, you know, they are training you not for the Navy, but for maritime.

ARSENEAULT: That's right.

PIEHLER: You're right, so there's not—you're right, there isn't the pharmacist mate on a maritime.

ARSENEAULT: That's right.

PIEHLER: You were, because ...

ARSENEAULT: You have four deck officers and four engineers, and probably the same number of deck hands and wipers ... and that's it. Oh, and you might have a cook.

PIEHLER: But that, yeah, so I mean, maritime ...

ARSENEAULT: Somebody's gonna take care of the purchases, take care of the money and supplies, but it's amazing how few people can run a ship.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: And the Navy is beginning to find that out right now. They're cutting back, cutting back, cutting back. There were always too many people in the Navy, in a way. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Now, you mentioned in terms of ... being at the Academy—you wanted Navy, and that was a track ... from the very beginning that you ...

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, yeah. Anytime they asked a question I was the one who stepped up.



PIEHLER: And who determined whether you would go Navy or Merchant Marine?

ARSENEAULT: I'm not sure which one of the people at the academy did that ...

PIEHLER: ...but they, they decided ... ?

ARSENEAULT: ... the Naval Science instructor, I'm sure, had a big to-do on that.

PIEHLER: But in other words, was it something you applied for or was it something they just assigned?

ARSENEAULT: You applied for it. What happened to our class was, so many of the previous classes had gone into the Navy, the Merchant Marine was screaming for people.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: And so the Maritime Service that had a good hand in ... our operation said that only ten percent of the class could go into the Navy, well what is ten percent of thirty-five?

PIEHLER: Yeah, three point five, you can't cut someone in half.

ARSENEAULT: So only three people went to active duty. And strangely enough, it was the top deck guy, when I say top, the guy with the highest average, the top engineer, and me. And I wasn't anywhere near the top, but I had been talking and shouting Navy for eighteen months. And so they slipped me into it.

PIEHLER: So your training was not accelerated at the Maritime Academy by the war, it had been an eighteen month program before the war?

ARSENEAULT: No, it was a three-year program.

PIEHLER: Three year—oh, okay. So they took a three year program and made it eighteen months.

ARSENEAULT: That's right.

PIEHLER: It sounds like when it was three years you also got summers off or was that ...

ARSENEAULT: No, uhh ...

PIEHLER: ...or did they go sailing?

ARSENEAULT: Remember, I said that before the academy went to Hyannis it was on a ship. When you live on a ship, twelve months around ...

PIEHLER: Twelve months around.

ARSENEAULT: ... you learn how to set sails and everything else, so this was a sailing ship and it's a little different, but you end up being a sailor, sailor type.

PIEHLER: And the eighteen months? So the eighteen months was continuous?

ARSENEAULT: Yes.

PIEHLER: You didn't have a summer or ...

ARSENEAULT: No, no. There was a war on.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so how much leave did you get?

ARSENEAULT: Just weekends.

PIEHLER: Just weekends.

ARSENEAULT: But not every weekend.

PIEHLER: Yeah. And military discipline. And obviously hazing like as you describe it.

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah. I lived with these guys twenty-four hours a day.

PIEHLER: What was—it sounds like a basic question, how was the food?

ARSENEAULT: Pretty good, but back in those days there wasn't much beef. We ate a lot of fish. Could you hold up?

PIEHLER: Yeah, oh yeah.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: One of the things you said earlier is that you were trained well at the academy, particularly when you got aboard a ship, and you described, you told a great story about training your men on how to use a winch and ... sort of moving from, you know, cans, to ammunition, to fuel.

ARSENEAULT: That's right. The same thing applied with things like the lead line. The first time we rigged out the chains and got out there and swung lead, not a one of those seventy-five people had ever swung a lead before. And I got out there on the platform, and I wound it up and threw the best one I ever threw in my life, hauled it back up on

deck, and I cut the lead off the end of the line. Told the boatswain mate, “Go up to the sail locker and make a sandbag and fill it with sand, and hook it on there. And every morning, get out there and get that thing going until everybody knew how to handle it.” And I said, “When you wear it out and the sand falls out of the bag then we’ll put the lead back on again.” For the next week, that sandbag was up in the rigging, it was up on that fo’c’sle [forecastle, part of the upper deck], it was in the gun tub, it was up on the bridge. (Laughter) People wouldn’t come out when we had our sandbag going. (Laughter) But I did teach everybody how to run it.

PIEHLER: You didn’t have an experienced chief when you were ...

ARSENEAULT: No, I had second class boatswain.

PIEHLER: But how—it doesn’t sound like he was that experienced, or was he?

ARSENEAULT: Oh, McNutt was pretty good, he had been on a supply ship and had—and he knew how to do the things. He was my right-hand man.

PIEHLER: But that was about it?

ARSENEAULT: About half of the people in my division were from a small boat handling school and came aboard to drive these boats that we had. So when we had a landing going on, they were in the boats making circles and riding out and going to the beach. And the rest of my guys were on board handling the winches and getting the boats in the water and this sort of thing. It was almost like two different ...

PIEHLER: Two different ...

ARSENEAULT: ... divisions.

PIEHLER: And I guess we should—you’ve done such a nice chronology, I mean you graduated from the Maritime Academy in September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1944 ...

ARSENEAULT: Correct.

PIEHLER: And you reported to COM One Boston for, on active duty on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1944.

ARSENEAULT: That was a mistake, taking that two weeks off, by the way.

PIEHLER: Why, what?

ARSENEAULT: I should have gone right on active duty because I didn’t pick up my precedents until the eighth of October. and there were two weeks of people who beat me out.

PIEHLER: You know, I actually—it's interesting, Captain Rosemary Mariner talked about how, when she graduated from college and was commissioned the ROTC route, the one nice thing about ROTC, you beat out all of the academy people for commissioning, so for that class of academy people, for precedents.

ARSENEAULT: That's right.

PIEHLER: So that two weeks?

ARSENEAULT: That two weeks is very critical. Now, I don't know if you realize it, but during the war, we had a serial number that you picked up when you were commissioning. We picked up our serial number when we went into the Merchant Marine Academy, eighteen months earlier than that ...

PIEHLER: So you're ...

ARSENEAULT: I've got a fantastic serial number that was, put me way senior to a whole bunch of people, and I didn't, never had a real chance to use that. (Laughter) But my number was 27-35-66. It wasn't until way into the 50s before we switched over to social security numbers ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: ... which they use now.

PIEHLER: And instead of ...

ARSENEAULT: It don't mean anything.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: But the 27-35-66 supposedly said when you were commissioned.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: Well in our case, it was eighteen months earlier. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Huh.

ARSENEAULT: I don't know how they screwed up on that.

PIEHLER: But they, nonetheless.

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, you know when two ships meet at sea, the first thing the signalman does is find out what the serial number is of the other captain. Is he senior to us or not? If he's senior, then theoretically you fall in behind him and chase him until he

tells you to go on. If he's junior, he falls in behind you. Awful strange things will happen out at sea like that when these two guys meet.

PIEHLER: Now, you mentioned, I mean, when you said it was a mistake not to report right away. Do you know exactly what the consequence was in terms of the ...

ARSENEAULT: No, I just wanted a couple weeks off. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: 'Cause then you first reported to Boston, and then it sounds like you were sent to New York. Is that ... ?

ARSENEAULT: I was sent to New York to the Third Naval Base district.

PIEHLER: And it was ...

ARSENEAULT: And then they assigned me to a ship in Newport, and I went back up again to Newport.

PIEHLER: Newport, Rhode Island?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, I went from Boston, to New York, back to Newport.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you reported—departed for US Naval Training Station in Newport, Rhode Island on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1944 and then on October 22<sup>nd</sup> reported to pre-commissioning detail USS *Griggs* AP 1-1-0. It's so funny because you describe ...

ARSENEAULT: A-P-A 1-1-0.

PIEHLER: APA. 'Cause you described being on AP ...

ARSENEAULT: AP is a large troop ship ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ...and APA is one of these transports that takes the men and equipment ...

PIEHLER: ...to the shore.

ARSENEAULT: ...to the shore, yeah.

PIEHLER: I just commented on terms of the numbers. You know, being on AP2 ...

ARSENEAULT: AP1 and AP2, yeah.

PIEHLER: This is way into the war, and we're now into the hundreds for these, these types of vessels.

ARSENEAULT: That's right.

PIEHLER: Umm ...

ARSENEAULT: AP1 and AP2, by the way, I think, eventually became hospital ships, but I'm not sure.

PIEHLER: And you, you're ... the way I understand ... you first took the ship—you reported in Newport, and then what happened?

ARSENEAULT: We went through a series of trainings. In my case, I was—just took things from the deck department, rigging and this sort of thing. The CIC officers went to special training, the engineers went to special training. Late in November, some of the engineers were sent down to the ship in Pascagoula and learned something about the engine room on that ship. Because in December, when we went by rail, it took three or four days to get from Newport to Mississippi, anytime we'd meet a troop train with tanks or something, we got put on the side. But anyway, we got there eventually. We went aboard the ship at ten o'clock in the morning, commissioned it at two, and sailed at four. (Laughs) When they sailed, almost everything that we needed, even mess trays, typewriters—was all locked down in the lower hole, and it took a couple of days to get that stuff up.

PIEHLER: Literally, to get it where it's supposed to be?

ARSENEAULT: To get it out to where it was supposed to be, yeah. We didn't have any coffee cups for the first six or eight hours, a ship with no coffee cups. (Laughter) We sailed from Pascagoula [Mississippi] over to the Mississippi River and went up the river to New Orleans. And that was where we loaded the stores, and the ammo, the fuel. I think the first thing they did when they went up there was put it in dry dock and sand-blasted the bottom and painted the bottom of the ship cause it had been sitting in the water in Pascagoula for several months. And from New Orleans we sailed to Galveston, Texas, and on the beaches of Galveston is where we made our runs in and that was our shakedown cruise.

PIEHLER: So Galveston was where you practiced a landing on a beach?

ARSENEAULT: That's right. And from there, I remember Galveston was a riot because they threw a big dance for us and all the sailors were in there dancing with all these pretty girls, and the engineers and the deckhands got into a tizzy over some of the girls, and the next thing you know we had a riot going on, and I was shore patrol. (Laughter) Imagine, nineteen years old and I got shore patrol. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And it was, it was your crew?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, that is right.

PIEHLER: It wasn't another crew or another service it was your own crew that was ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, they had a real tizzy going. Luckily, my boatswain mate, McNutt was with me at the truck where we were loading people in, and one of the engineers took a swing at me, and McNutt decked him right there. (Gestures) (Laughter) "You don't swing at my ensign!" Whack! (Laughter) That was an interesting night.

PIEHLER: So the split in your crew was between the engineers—engineering section and the deck?

ARSENEAULT: Oh, every ship's like that.

PIEHLER: The split?

ARSENEAULT: The engineers know they can't get up on the bridge and drive the ship. The people up on the bridge know they can't get down in the engine room and make it run either. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So there's this mutual ...

ARSENEAULT: It's a mutual admiration society, but they're on different sides of the ocean. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Um, so after the shakedown cruise—let me ask one question so I don't forget. What was your captain like?

ARSENEAULT: Well, first of all, he had four stripes on his sleeve. There's no question that he was senior. Because the next senior guy only had two, and I only had one. But he was an old Navy guy from pre-war stuff.

PIEHLER: Was he a mustang [officer who rose up from enlisted ranks], or was he ... ?

ARSENEAULT: I don't know.

PIEHLER: Or was he academy?

ARSENEAULT: I don't know.

PIEHLER: You don't know his background?

ARSENEAULT: He probably was a Merchant Marine type, called back.

PIEHLER: Who'd been commissioned, yeah. But you're not sure of his?

ARSENEAULT: No.

PIEHLER: But he is a four-striper, so ...

ARSENEAULT: That's right, but remember now, this was a merchant-hulled ship. APA's were converted merchantmen so you don't need a Naval Academy graduate who only can drive a battleship to drive one of these things.

PIEHLER: And what was ... his executive officer, what do you remember?

ARSENEAULT: He was a mustang ...

(Knock on door)

PIEHLER: Hold on just a second, an interruption.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: Sorry for the interruption. The executive officer was a mustang?

ARSENEAULT: Yep. He was a tough cracker. (Laughter) I got along with him alright. The only time he ever chewed me out was—I thought that front end of the ship belonged to me.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: And the chief boatswain thought he owned the whole ship. We used to tangle over what was happening up in my end of the ship. And finally he called me in and told me to back off and let the chief boatswain do what he wanted. (Laughter) He had a lot more experience than I did. The chief boatswain, for example, chewed me out one day because I had grease on my foul-weather jacket, and I said, "You can't work around all these wires and stuff without getting grease on 'em every once in a while. I know how to do that stuff, and I'm teaching these other people how to do it, and I can't do it by standing back. I have to dive in and do it." I had the five inch gun up on the fo'c'sle, and when I say I had it, I was the director officer that would pull the trigger and shoot. And one time on the way between Galveston, Texas and Newport, which was what happened after we had our shakedown cruise. We were up off Cape Hatteras [North Carolina], I'll mention now this is early '44, and submarines were operating. And the engineers lost the load on the boiler and shut it off. There we were, floating off Cape Hatteras with no power, and you know, the gun operates with hydraulic power and if it doesn't, you have to do a lot of cranking. But we went to general quarters for about two hours—floated there until the engineers got that boiler lit off again. If anybody had popped his head up anywhere I think I would've shot 'em. (Laughter) I wouldn't've asked permission to fire. (Laughter) I was sitting there with that gun loaded. (Laughter) Lucky for me, nothing happened.



PIEHLER: I'm curious, what your comment about, you know, when you got ... chewed out for some grease on your uniform, because I've interviewed a lot of junior naval officers from World War II, and I remember one—I remember this story very distinctly, because he said it was after the war, and he was supervising a bunch of men painting, and as he described, "I was just so board. I just started to paint, 'cause I just was tired of standing there watching." And he said he got so chewed out by his ... senior officer in his division for breaking—it sounds like you were sort chastised for that same—you know, getting grease on your uniform. Was that the same officer, enlisted ... ?

ARSENEAULT: No, no I don't think so. I think that was just the boatswain trying to tell me to back off and let the men do their work. And I was trying to tell him that they didn't know how to do it.

PIEHLER: Didn't know how, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: And was trying to show them how.

PIEHLER: Yeah, after your sort of shakedown, um, where did your ship go next?

ARSENEAULT: It went straight from Galveston, Texas, to Newport to be the training ship for the next cruise coming along for the pre-commissioning process. And it stayed there for three or four months. And that ship eventually went down through the Panama Canal and went out to the Western Pacific and was engrossed in the last final invasion of Japan. And then it was involved in bringing people back from the Western Pacific, but I wasn't on the ship then.

PIEHLER: Yeah, what happened—you didn't stay with the ship after you came back from ...

ARSENEAULT: Remember, we mentioned earlier that I applied to the Naval Academy? That's what happened. I was sent down to COM Three in New York.

PIEHLER: Oh, so this was on March 30<sup>th</sup> ...

ARSENEAULT: 30<sup>th</sup> of March.

PIEHLER: And that's when you walked into the room and everyone stood up because they thought you were the senior?

ARSENEAULT: That's right. And I was there all of April and all of May before my new orders came in reporting, sending me to Treasure Island in San Francisco. And during that six, eight weeks, I worked for the superintendent of shipbuilding in New York and went across to New Jersey, where they were building destroyers. And I would pull a twenty-four hour watch over there every four days. The other three days I had off. Imagine New York as an ensign. (Laughter) An ensign with nothing to do, with my dad

stationed in Brooklyn. So I was living at home, having a great time in New York, and only working one day out of four, it was a lot of fun.

PIEHLER: Did you ever go to the Stage Door Canteen [Broadway entertainment venue for US servicemen]?

ARSENEAULT: No, but I went to the Junior Officers Club, which I can't even tell you the address it was on, and used to dance with all these beautiful girls. And they were all looking for husbands. (Laughter) So I learned how to waltz and this sort of thing. Another activity that I had was to go to Madison Square Garden, ice-skating. Of course, from New England, I knew how to ice skate. And I would pick out the prettiest girl there and then skate behind her until she fell down. (Laughter) Sometimes I helped, you know. Then I would pick her up and offer to skate with her, and we would have a great time. (Laughter) One night I picked out a cute little blonde that came from Pennsylvania, and she was a good skater. She also skated professionally for the Ice Capades [travelling show featuring ice-skating performances], but you know, I managed to get her tripped up too, and we got along great. And I saw the Ice Capades probably three times over the next couple of years when I was in New York. (Laughter) She would always get me in the back door and I'd sit in the front row.

PIEHLER: So this was pretty good duty in a lot of ways?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: Even, despite pulling these twenty-four hour watches?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah. Well that was terrible, because the watches we stood, we had to go from ship to ship, and check the people who were on the ship that were only standing eight-hour watches, but they had to stay alive, and they had to watch the equipment.

PIEHLER: So you were on literally the whole twenty-four hours?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: This was your—you weren't sleeping, you couldn't, you were literally ...

ARSENEAULT: No, I had three watchers that came by during that period of time, and they would shift off, but we had to guard all of the communications equipment and the gunnery equipment, and this sort of thing that was installed in the ships, but the ships hadn't been turned over to the Navy, so they didn't have any crews yet.

PIEHLER: And these were still in the shipyards ...

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ...of the companies in Newark Bay. Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: One of the ... things I meant to ask you earlier, because you mentioned being—when you were on board the [USS] *Griggs* as first division officer in charge of the deck gun, had you had gunnery training at the Maritime Academy?

ARSENEAULT: Uh yeah, we got a little bit of gunnery training. We didn't shoot any guns, but we had gunnery and naval science classes.

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Arthur Joseph Arseneault, Jr., on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005, at The University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

JONES: Vincent Jones.

PIEHLER: And as you were saying—you were just talking about gunnery, that you had some, books—naval science gunnery ... ?

ARSENEAULT: We got Naval Science at the academy, but there was no shooting, of course.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: And we tangled with guns on our training ship, but we never shot it there, either. But when I went to Newport for the pre-commissioning training for the [USS] *Griggs*, we actually went to sea on the APA that was there as the training ship, and we did shoot those things. That's an interesting point, by the way, you've got a ship that's got a complete crew on it, I think, two hundred and fifty people, and you put another two hundred and fifty sailors on the same ship, okay. You don't know who's on which crew. You don't know your own guys well enough that you could spot them all ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ... and you don't know the people from that ship. And you tell somebody to do something, and he's liable to turn around and say, "I'm not in your crew." (Laughter) And how do you know? It's better to carry Marines or Army than it is to carry other Navy guys.

PIEHLER: Really, because there you can tell who's who?

ARSENEAULT: You know who's who. (Laughter) I just thought that was ...

PIEHLER: No, that's a good story. So you're electing to try to go to the Naval Academy, really you would have stayed with this ship, is that, the [USS] *Griggs*?

ARSENEAULT: If I had gone to the Naval Academy ...

PIEHLER: If you hadn't applied to go to the Naval ...

ARSENEAULT: From that time on, if I hadn't applied for that I would've ended up in the West Pacific.

PIEHLER: Yeah, with the ship?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: But applying for the Naval Academy switched everything ... ?

ARSENEAULT: They took me off the ship and put me back into the process, and I started over again, because as you can see, I went right on to pre-commissioning training with the [USS] *Concho*, which was an oilier.

PIEHLER: So a very different ship?

ARSENEAULT: A very different ship, and this time I'm going to be the CIC [Combat Information Center] officer. And I went to Treasure Island [California], which was a training base just like Newport, and we went through all of the same processes. And this time when I went over to Sausalito, which is on the north side of the Golden Gate Bridge, where they were building the [USS] *Concho*, I asked the guy at the gate I said, "Where is the [USS] *Concho*?" And he says, "Oh, she's down on ways number six." I went down there, there was nothing there but the keel. There was no ship there yet. (Laughter) And over the next month or six weeks, the ship took shape, they built it up, and pushed it up onto the—and I was able to go over there and ride down the ways into the water. I was a real plank owner on that ship.

PIEHLER: So you were aboard it when they put, you know, when you see the scenes of them putting it in the water.

ARSENEAULT: Yes! A great ride, I'll tell you. I was right up there on the bridge and shoo! (Laughter) But any rate, before that ship got commissioned, the war ended. And they cancelled that ship and gave it to the Maritime Service, and I ended up waiting for another assignment. And during the period time we were waiting, they had already dropped the atomic bomb, we were now in August. The skipper said, "It'll be a month or six weeks before the Bureau of Naval Personnel catches up with you officers. All the men, the enlisted men, have been transferred over to the enlisted pool and they'll be gettin' new assignments, but you guys are gonna have to wait for new orders, to be given a new set of orders." Now he says, "If you want to take any course that's available here that doesn't cost me any money, I'll send you to it. And try to pick something that's three

weeks or less.” (Laughter) And I picked deep sea diving school, and I spent the next three weeks in San Francisco Bay, most of it on the bottom of the bay. And the last deep dive, when I was between Angel Island and Alcatraz, there was about a two knot current trying to sweep me off the bottom when they called down and said, “Ensign you better come up here you’ve got a set of orders to the East Coast, and you’re done, this is your last dive, you’re done.” (Laughter) And unfortunately I got put on board a large troop transport involved in running Army troops from New York to Le Havre [France], dumping them out and picking up four thousand Army troops in Europe and bringing them back to New York. The trip over to Europe was like going to Coney Island, all these guys here, “We’re going to Europe!” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: They were excited.

ARSENEAULT: And then coming back, it was like being in Chicago with the crime family because these guys had fought their way across Europe and been shooting people. (Laughter) It was dangerous, you didn’t go out on deck at night.

PIEHLER: Really?

ARSENEAULT: I didn’t. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: What was going on—when you compared it to Chicago?

ARSENEAULT: Ah, just gangsters and thugs.

PIEHLER: So, well ...

ARSENEAULT: They’d shoot you before they’d ask you any questions. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So how much—I mean it sounds like, one image I have is lots of card games, is that ... ?

ARSENEAULT: There were games going on, and when you get to New York somebody would obviously be carrying a couple of duffle bags and have two big guys behind him guarding him.

PIEHLER: And that was cash?

ARSENEAULT: The duffle bags were probably cash, I don’t know. (Laughter) They threw away all of the junk that was in these things. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And it sounds like trying to keep these, you know, these guys disciplined was not an easy ... ?

ARSENEAULT: No, and you had to be real careful where you went, especially after hours, because you didn’t want to interrupt one of these games. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: You felt that—so it almost sounds like, you get new Army guys, “Just leave us alone and you can do your” ...

ARSENEAULT: Right. Unfortunately, I was in charge of the R division, which is all of the carpenters and the ship fitters and stuff, and we were responsible to keep all of the heads and latrines going. And when you get four thousand Army guys in a ship, there’s always a head or latrines blocked up somehow. and I got tired of that. And that speaks for the next assignment, because I ...

PIEHLER: How long was this—how long were you on these—what ship was this? This was the [USS] *LeJeune*?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, from the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, I went to New York and went aboard the *LeJeune*, and I was the repair division officer. Unfortunately, this ship went back and forth to Europe on a regular basis and never spent any time at either end to speak of, and I never did any deep sea diving, which I had just qualified for. So when I was in New York I would always go over to Pier 88, where they had a diving school, and I would dive over there and try to maintain my qualification. And I stayed aboard that ship until March 14<sup>th</sup> of ’46. Because, frankly, in the middle of February, I was tired of cleaning all these latrines and heads, and getting them running and I volunteered for mine and bomb disposal. And the school was at the ... Navy Yard in Washington, D.C., that’s the Naval Ordnance Laboratory [NOL]. And in March of ’46 I reported in there. And from March until September, I went to school on a daily basis, learning contact mines and torpedoes. And then during the summer period, for about six or eight weeks, I was sent to San Juan, Puerto Rico to clear a range at Culebra, which is south of Puerto Rico. We would walk along and if it was small enough we could pick it up, we would pick it up. If it was too big, we made a pile there. And during the morning we’d probably end up with six piles, and we’d set six explosive charges on the thing, then light that one, and this one, and this one, and this one and walk down and count. If we got six bangs, we were done for the day, and we’d go swimming. If we only got five bangs, we were still done for a while, and we’d go swimming, and then we had to go back and charge that last one that didn’t go, and fire it off. The second would always go, because we would charge the first charge (smacks hands to imitate explosion), and we got along on that. It was interesting to do that area because it was a bombing range and a firing range that had been used since World War I. And there was scrap metal all over the place. Well, they sent us down with mine detectors ...

PIEHLER: (Laughs)

ARSENEAULT: ...and we’d put these things on and wherever you pointed it “buzz, buzz, buzz.” (Laughter) It would sound off in any direction. We finally put them back in the box, and we figured that if we can see it, we’ll pick it up. If we can’t pick it up, we’ll blow it right there. And we blew a lot of ordinance that had been there a long time. What happened is, the people who used to go in and service that area had gone in there with a bulldozer, and they’d run over a smoke bomb, and when it blew. they quit. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: That was it.

ARSENEAULT: And they wouldn't go back until we had certified it had been "clean"! But one thing I learned in EOD [Explosive Ordnance Disposal] years later is, you never can certify a lane as being cleaned.

PIEHLER: Really?

ARSENEAULT: As soon as you say it's clean, they'll find another bomb one inch below the ground, and you just don't ever certify "clean." Gets you in a lot of trouble. So I spent that time in the Caribbean, and when I got back to the Naval Ordnance Laboratory, they had moved the school to Indianhead, Maryland, which is about twenty miles south of Washington, on the Maryland side of the Potomac. And they didn't know what to do with me, so they put me in the class. And I went back to school and I learned all about the mines again.

PIEHLER: Literally, the same curriculum?

ARSENEAULT: And did a lot of strange things, including deep sea diving was part of the course. I ended up as part instructor in that session.

PIEHLER: You really like the deep sea diving?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, except in the Potomac you can't see your hand in front of your face. It's much better down around St. Thomas, the Virgin Islands. (Laughter) You can see a hundred and fifty feet. You can see the shark coming. (Laughter) Well, that kind of gets me off the large troop transport, which made—I think I made six trips to Europe on that, and one of them, went all the way to Bremen in Germany.

PIEHLER: Bremen, Germany

ARSENEAULT: And uh, that was an interesting cruise, because they gave us two minesweepers, and they put a tanker in front of us, and we're following the tanker. and the very first time that the minesweepers caught a mine, and the mine popped up, the tanker quit. (Laughter) He turned around and went back. (Laughter) He said, "We're not gonna go that way." And he went back. And we just followed on and went all the way to Bremerhaven. That was Christmas of '45. Amazing the way they had bombed some of that city there in Hamburg, whole streets, blocks were gone, and you go over another hundred yards, all the houses were still there.

PIEHLER: What ... I mean, just sort of taking—you did bomb disposal, um ...

ARSENEAULT: Mine and bomb disposal was two different schools during the war ...

PIEHLER: Okay.

ARSENEAULT: ... and at the end of the war at NOL [Naval Ordnance Laboratory] they put 'em together into one school. Then they went down to Indianhead [Maryland], and even though they called it the mine disposal unit, it was the EOD, it was the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit. And it didn't pick up that name until after we finished. I was there six months in that course.

PIEHLER: And then you reported, after Indianhead, you reported—you were designated an EOD officer on?

ARSENEAULT: I was sent to the USS *Taconic*, to the staff of the Commander [of] Amphibious Force Atlantic fleet.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: And I was his only EOD officer.

PIEHLER: And this was, this was in May of 1947?

ARSENEAULT: Correct. And in June they sent me over to Little Creek [Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, in Virginia Beach, Virginia] to the Underwater Demolition Team because I told the commander that I needed to have some place where I could dive once a quarter and some place I could blow up something once a quarter in order to maintain my qualification. And he said, "Well, the only people who do that are the frogmen [diver]," so I said, "Okay, I'll go over there." So they sent me over there, and about a week, maybe two weeks later, I had a set of orders from ... assigning me to Underwater Demolition Team. I spent two years there. I went from EOD officer, to ordnance officer, to executive officer, to commanding officer, then a lieutenant commander showed up and relieved me and I became exec again. And then another lieutenant commander showed up and I became the ordnance officer again. (Laughter) It was kind of a waste of time, but I, I did tangle with that commanding officer who was a Naval Academy lieutenant commander. I went down to the club one day for lunch, and somebody said, "Is everybody in the team a volunteer?" And I said, "Well, yeah except the hospital corpsman who runs the decompression chamber, I don't think he volunteers, for UDT, he's there to run the chamber." And I said, "The only other one that I know of is me. I never volunteered. I'm the EOD officer, and that's what I was sent here to do." Word got back to the skipper and he went up one side of his office and down the other and around and around. He said, "I won't have anybody working in my team that's not a volunteer. You go to your typewriter and type a letter volunteering for UDT, or request a transfer." I went my typewriter and requested a transfer. Told him I wanted to be transferred to a cruiser. And he sent it on forward, and the next thing you know I had orders to the Battleship [USS] *Mississippi*. And that ended my frogman training.

PIEHLER: The one thing I wanted to ask before going to the [USS] *Mississippi* is, while still embarked with UDT in USS *Ponoco* in the Mediterranean Sea—the Persian Gulf area ...



ARSENEAULT: The *Ponoco*

PIEHLER: *Ponoco*, got it.

ARSENEAULT: Excuse me. The *Po*—I don't even know how to say it myself. [The ship name was actually the USS *Pocono*] But any rate, I was the commanding officer of the team at that time.

PIEHLER: And you went to the Mediterranean—what were you doing in the Mediterranean Sea and Gulf?

ARSENEAULT: In the Mediterranean we were just going to liberty ports and having fun ...

PIEHLER: (Laughs)

ARSENEAULT: ...but in the Gulf we actually recon'd beaches and established where the best landing beaches were and where the obstacles underwater were.

PIEHLER: This is in—the Persian Gulf?

ARSENEAULT: The northern end of the Persian Gulf on the west side, yeah.

PIEHLER: You were looking at landing sites?

ARSENEAULT: Kuwait and down into Saudi Arabia. I don't think we had permission to do that, but that's what we were doing. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: It's sort of interesting because when you were doing this, this was a pretty obscure region.

ARSENEAULT: Back in '48 there wasn't anybody there.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and I think the average American—this could've been ...

ARSENEAULT: We went through the Panama Ca—no, the Suez ...

PIEHLER: The Suez Canal.

ARSENEAULT: The Suez Canal, and this was in '48. And we went down into the Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean into the [Persian] Gulf. When we got through the Straits [of Hormuz] into the Gulf, I went to the skipper—by the way, he was very understanding of my situation, where I was the commanding officer of an Underwater Demolition Team that was a part of his ship. And he said, "If we get into any problems with your troops, I want you to handle it, but I want you to use the same criteria that I use." And he gave me

a list of what you do if they're fighting and what you do if they're drunk and what you do if they're fighting, and what you do if they're drunk, and what to do if they're this. And I ... went to Captain Demarest and said, "My guys have been here now for a month floating through the Mediterranean, and I haven't had anybody in the water." I said, "I need to get them in the water at least for a couple of hours. Would you stop the ship long enough for us launch a boat, and we will run up and down and show everybody on the ship the cast and retrieve situation"—how we put people in the water and pick 'em out and this sort of thing. And so we did that, and we had a hundred guys up on the ship all watching us, how we went by and dropped everybody off, and then went around again and picked them all up. I never even thought about all the sea snakes and stuff. (Laughter) But anyway, we didn't have anybody get bit, so we were alright. We went up to Kuwait and spent a couple of days there, which was real interesting, but then we reconn'd the beaches on the way out.

PIEHLER: When you say—what did you see in Kuwait, a Kuwait of 19—, This was 19—?

ARSENEAULT: '48.

PIEHLER: This is 1948. What do you remember?

ARSENEAULT: The things that—we didn't know anything about the oil.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah, no, I mean ...

ARSENEAULT: Nothing on that score. In fact, everybody impressed upon us that if you drilled a well for water, you didn't get water, you got oil. And if you wanted water you had to go drill out in the middle of the Persian Gulf and find an area where there was up, well, freshwater. And you'd fill your tanks there, and of course the guy who owns the water has got control over everybody.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: So the guy, the head sheik or whatever you call him, came out to us to visit us, he had a yacht that was real beautiful. And I remember looking down on his yacht, and there's probably six or eight of these Arabs standing around, each one of 'em with a Tommy gun [Thompson submachine gun]. (Laughter) They weren't gonna put up with any foolishness, the boss.

PIEHLER: Did your men have liberty in Kuwait?

ARSENEAULT: Yes. And the ones that got into trouble, strangely enough, were not my people, because we were pretty well acclimatized. The engineers that had been, not in the sun, but had been working down below with blowers and fans and stuff, they dropped like flies when they got out.

PIEHLER: They ran into problems just from the heat? Not ...

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, that's what I thought, too. But, when we went into the Med [Mediterranean Sea], I called my exec and said, "I want our men up on deck every day. We will start the first day, fifteen minutes, and the next day thirty, the next day forty-five, the next day—now, I want them in their swim gear, no hats, no glasses, no sunglasses. I want to get everybody a good tan, and I want them to get acclimatized to this heat that we're gonna run into. So when my guys got to the Persian Gulf, they all were brown and they were all just great. We didn't do our operation in the water. We did it from rubber boats, running up and down with lead lines.

PIEHLER: Checking the beach?

ARSENEAULT: The beach, yeah, grading it ...

PIEHLER: And these beaches were deserted, it sounds like?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, yeah. Well, we would set up a transit and establish a baseline at another point, and then put transit here and go on with the base line. And every hundred feet down this thing, we would put a stake in the ground, and then we would run, a flutter board is what we called it, with a knot every fifty feet or so, and we would take a reading at each one of those. And we'd come back and then build a chart, which showed how deep the water is and what the gradient was, if we found any rocks or anything. It would all be on the chart. And all of this was tied in to some aerial photography that was done from the carrier that was with us. They took pictures of this shoreline and tied it in with trees or buildings or whatever you had, and we would tie that into our baseline, too.

PIEHLER: Do you remember which carrier was part of your ... ?

ARSENEAULT: (Shakes head "no") It was a little—it was a baby carrier ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Left over ...

ARSENEAULT: ... left over from World War II.

PIEHLER: Okay, yeah, so not one of those big ...

ARSENEAULT: No, no.

PIEHLER: I think they call them auxiliary carriers?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah ...

PIEHLER: I can't—there's a special—I know what you mean.

ARSENEAULT: It was a merchant hull.

PIEHLER: I just, it's just such a fascinating—I mean, any other recollections you had?

ARSENEAULT: Well, I think the [USS] *Carpellotti*, one of these frogmen carriers was the ship—it was an APD [destroyers converted to use for amphibious assault], was with us. And a detachment from UDT 1 [Underwater Demolition Team], from California, was in that group. They did the deep water stuff where we left off, they picked up and went on. It was interesting.

PIEHLER: And you—partly because you didn't volunteer, and you requested transfer, you did get your transfer?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, as soon as that request for transfer went in, and I said that I had been there for two years and it was time to move on. And being a frogman, back in those days, was a dead-end street.

PIEHLER: Really?

ARSENEAULT: There wasn't anybody higher than lieutenants, lieutenant commanders.

PIEHLER: So you knew this was not going to last—this was not a career?

ARSENEAULT: Well, by that time I had also learned that EOD was that same kind of ...

PIEHLER: A dead end.

ARSENEAULT: Although, I came back to it a couple times as a lieutenant commander ...

PIEHLER: But at that particular point in time, you wanted to get out, out of that. And you did, you were transferred not to a cruiser, but to a ...

ARSENEAULT: A battleship.

PIEHLER: ... a battleship, the USS *Mississippi*.

ARSENEAULT: Right, but now, the *Mississippi* at that point was not operating as a battleship.

PIEHLER: What was it operating as?

ARSENEAULT: It was operating as a test and evaluation platform for new fire control equipment and new guns. Three-inch fifties, six-inch, eight-inch, this sort thing, were put in place of the big guns that were taken off, and I ended up with a gunnery division, I was the 5th Division. (Coughs) And my division belonged to the three-inch fifty battery, but when we went to GQ [general quarters, "battle stations"], my [officer] spot was mark six

director up on top of the bridge. And they'd blow the whistle and I'd be down at my quarters on the stern, and I'd have to fight my way up to the main deck and get through the hatches before they slam 'em shut. Otherwise you can't get out. Then you have to run the length of the ship and up about eight levels. By the time I got to my director, I couldn't talk. (Laughter) I'd run out of steam.

PIEHLER: As you, you were never aboard the *Mississippi* when it was actually deployed. It was a training ...

ARSENEAULT: No, it was a research development ...

PIEHLER: Research development, excuse me ...

ARSENEAULT: ... platform.

PIEHLER: ... platform.

ARSENEAULT: ... and even after I left there, they shot missiles off and this sort of thing. Uh, [future president Jimmy] Carter came aboard there as a junior grade lieutenant after I left there. He was on board the ship.

PIEHLER: But you never met while you were ...

ARSENEAULT: No. I met him later on.

PIEHLER: And um, you didn't stay long aboard the *Mississippi*, because by 1950 you were detached en route to the US Naval Hydrographic Office, and then to the ...

ARSENEAULT: When I went aboard the *Mississippi*, the first stop, of course, is the ship's office where you turn in your orders. And I applied for post-graduate training in law or oceanography. I'm sure I didn't have a chance at law, because at that point I didn't have a degree.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: But after I had been on the ship a couple of months, a reserve lieutenant commander that I knew from my frogman days invited me to participate in a oceanographic cruise on his eighty-seven foot yacht. He was a commodore of the yacht club in Philadelphia and had a beautiful yacht. But we went out of Norfolk, down the coast, over the Bahamas, down to Cuba, over to Mexico, and around the Gulf [of Mexico]. But that happened later on, because the first thing I had to do was get off the *Mississippi*. Well, I applied for this training when I first went on board the ship in early September and then I forgot about it. But then I got invited to go on this oceanographic cruise, and—I applied for sixty days' temporary additional relief to accompany this scientific expedition for the Smithsonian, and the last paragraph I put down, "If this T&D [training and development] is not deemed appropriate, I hereby request sixty days' annual

leave,” which I have on the books. I had leave tied up from all this other stuff, but I didn’t go on.

PIEHLER: You never used it, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: So uh, this went approved on the ship, went to CinCLantFLt [Commander-in-Chief, US Atlantic Fleet], went up to BUPERS [Bureau of Naval Personnel], came back approved, approved, approved. And the gun boss said, “I can’t spare ya.” I said, “What do you mean you can’t spare me? I’ve got leave that’s been approved by BUPERS.” He says, “Yeah but I’m the one says whether you go or not, I can’t spare you.” I say, “Can I have permission to speak to the executive officer?” He says, “Yeah, won’t do you any good, but go ahead.” I went up to see Commander Parm and I said, “Commander, if I had the duty tonight, and we were anchored out, and something happened down on companion ladder between the boat, and I went down there to try to unscramble it, and fell in the water and drowned, would the ship not sail Monday morning?” He looked at me and he said, “Good point. I’ll talk to the Gunny.” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: That’s all you said, you didn’t have to ... (Laughter)

ARSENEAULT: I didn’t have to beg or ... (Laughter) But I went on this sixty day cruise, and we went from Norfolk, to Charleston, to Jacksonville, to Fort Lauderdale, to Nassau, down to Cuba along Havana, because back in those days Havana was still open to us. And we went straight across the Gulf of Mexico, the Alacranes Reef [Scorpion Reef], which is north of the Yucatan Peninsula, and then we went down into the bight and went up Tampico, Veracruz, Brownsville, Texas, Corpus Christi, Pensacola, then ran out of time. In Pensacola, I told the skipper, I said, “There’s no way I can stay past my sixty days. If I get an extension, it’ll be without pay, and I can’t afford that.” He said, “I understand, we can make it back to Norfolk without you.” I went over to the operations department at Pensacola, and I said, “Do you have anything going to Washington or Norfolk? Because I need to get back to the ship, my sixty day leave’s running out.” And he said, “Nah, we don’t have anything.” A kid over in the back shouted out, “Hey Chief, how ‘bout the admiral’s plane? It’s going to Washington tomorrow.” And the chief says, “Yeah, that’s right, the Admiral’s in Washington, and the plane’s going up to get him, but it’s going up empty. You want to ride in the admiral’s plane?” I said, “Well, sure!” (Laughter) So I got out of there the next morning with my little bag, and I flew to Washington. Got to Washington, I flew down to Norfolk, got to Norfolk, I went in and reported, and I asked the officer of the day at the naval base in Norfolk where the *Mississippi* was. And he said, “Oh, she’s out in the operating area this week, won’t be back till Thursday.” He said, “You report in here every morning at eight o’clock and you’ll be covered, and when the ship comes in we’ll send you down to it.” I said, “Okay.” But before I went on leave, I had been dating the daughter of the admiral who was the commander of the naval base. And I left her with my convertible. And I went by the admiral’s house to see where my convertible was, and I didn’t see it anywhere, and I knocked on the front door, Mrs. Olsen came to the door. And I asked her, “What did Betsy do with my car?” She says, “Oh, well you know Betsy’s gone back to college. She goes to Duke ...”

PIEHLER: (Laughs)

ARSENEAULT: "... and before she left, she made her daddy put his official car outside, and your convertible is in the garage out back." (Laughter) Oh no! I said, "Give me the keys and let me get that car out of there before the admiral catches up with me!" (Laughter) That was a strange one. (Laughter) As you can see, back in those days as a junior-grade lieutenant I wasn't afraid of admirals. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: No, no. (Laughs) I'm just curious before we move on, the cruise—this scientific ...

ARSENEAULT: The *LC Finamore* was the name of the ship.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and what were your duties aboard and what was it doing?

ARSENEAULT: It was doing oceanographic work, about every six hours or so we would stop and occupy an oceanographic station which—water temperature, water solidity, water transparency, this sort of thing. And there were just a couple of us that were involved in that part of it, but everybody helped drive the ship. I was the officer in charge of the starboard watch. When we were at sea, four hours on and four off, four hours on four hours off. And then when we hit an oceanographic station, no matter where you were in the watch situation everybody stopped and went that way. (Hand gestures)

PIEHLER: Yeah. And the crew was Navy?

ARSENEAULT: No, no.

PIEHLER: It was ...

ARSENEAULT: Only the skipper, who was a retired lieutenant commander who had been in the naval reserve during the war, but he owned an oceanographic, photographic laboratory in Ardmore, Pennsylvania and built underwater cameras. His company built the cameras that they filmed *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* [1954 science fiction film], the original ...

PIEHLER: Oh okay.

ARSENEAULT: ... and this sort of thing. It was pretty, pretty good really. But he and I were the only scuba divers on board, and he had a couple of scuba tanks and we did that along the way.

PIEHLER: So this was part of your leave that you were ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You were not—this was your leave?

ARSENEAULT: It was leave.

PIEHLER: So you—it sounds like you obviously like the sea, to take your sixty days and basically go to work? I mean ...

ARSENEAULT: Well, the good part about that is and it popped up later on when I got back to the *Mississippi*, I walked up the gangway and the navigator was there on the quarterdeck and he said, “Art, who do you know in Washington?” And I said, “Well, what do you mean?” He said, “Well you got a set of orders up in the ship’s office that detaches you in August to go the Hydrographic Office for a month and then on to post-graduate training in oceanography.” I said, “Oh yeah, I applied for that last fall. I forgot about that.” (Laughter) And that worked out very well, I went back to the gun boss who didn’t want me to go on leave in the first place, and he said, “I don’t know what to do with you now! I’m not going to give you back the fifth division. The guy that I gave that to is doing a good job, we’ll just let him keep it.” He said, “I’ll tell you what, you are now the assistant first lieutenant in charge of paint.” (Laughter) Now, there’s a lot of painting goes on on a battleship, and I took care of all the painting. I had to approve it before they would issue the paint. So I went up to the paint locker and I asked the chief painter at the paint locker, I said, “What’s your biggest problem?” He said, “Well, the biggest problem is they never bring the brushes back. And I have to buy brushes every week.” I said, “Oh we’ll settle that. You don’t issue a brush to anybody unless you get his liberty card.”

PIEHLER: (Laughs)

ARSENEAULT: “You get his liberty card, when he brings ... the brush back, you give him his thing back, unless he’s got a real good excuse, and I let you be the determiner on that.” You’d be surprised, our loss of paint brushes went almost down to zero. (Laughter) But I had to go to a compartment that they wanted painted and say, “Yes, it needs painting. Call me when you’ve got it ready for the red layer.” And they would go in there and chip off all the old stuff, and cover up all the valves and things they did not want painted, and I’d go back and inspect it and say, “Ok it’s ready for the red layer.”

PIEHLER: Now when you came back to the *Mississippi* was it still doing—was it still in a sense a research platform?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, yes. It would go to sea every Monday, come in every Thursday. Every four weeks, they’d be in port the whole week. Uh, but we did that on a regular basis.

PIEHLER: And did it have, just so I understand correctly, did it have a full crew? Or was it a smaller crew because it was a research platform?

ARSENEAULT: It had a full engineering crew.



PIEHLER: Full engineering.

ARSENEAULT: Gunnery was very minimum.

PIEHLER: No, so it wasn't as full as it was ...

ARSENEAULT: But we had enough gunnery people to run the directors. We had an extra ten or twelve ensigns and jg's [lieutenants junior grade], most of them Naval Academy, that were the directors ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: ...because they were trying to get these new directors to operate well. And we'd go out and shoot Tuesday and Wednesday, almost every week.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: Monday was go to sea, Thursday was come in, but Tuesday and Wednesday we'd be out there shooting, and there'd be airplanes going by, dragging targets to shoot at. So I got into trouble one day when I was up there with my director and I was shooting. And as this plane went across, I was supposed to stop shooting when it passed the bow. (Laughter) I was still shooting, and now that pilot's gettin' anxious 'cause I'm shooting towards the plane, see? (Laughs)

PIEHLER: And that was a no-no.

ARSENEAULT: My gunnery captain would come up off the bridge and he shouted loud enough I heard him. (Laughter) I only did that once.

PIEHLER: What was, even though you didn't have a full ship's compliment, you still had a very large ship's compliment. What was life aboard a battleship—a large ship?

ARSENEAULT: This was a ship left over from World War I ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, no it's ...

ARSENEAULT: ... and it had all of the tradition and everything of a battleship.

PIEHLER: It really did have the old ...

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, you went into the wardroom and you sat there at attention until the exec came in and took his place, and ...

PIEHLER: Oh so it was very formal?

ARSENEAULT: They didn't say any blessing or anything, but until he picked up his fork, nobody picked up a fork either (Laughs). And they put me in charge of the bachelors, the ensigns' table, and I sat there at the table with a whole bunch of ensigns that were always raising Cain. And they'd get me in trouble. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What would they do to get you ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Making noise and ...

PIEHLER: Just, being dis- ...

ARSENEAULT: ... shouting back and forth and this sort of thing, and the exec would call me over, "Get those ensigns under control." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So this was a—when you would eat at the wardroom, this sounds like this was not the most comfortable ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Very formal.

PIEHLER: Very formal.

ARSENEAULT: Very formal, yeah. You didn't show up there in shirt sleeves.

PIEHLER: You have to be in uniform?

ARSENEAULT: You had to get dressed before you went.

PIEHLER: And you had ships—did you have ship stewards serve you?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: Were they still all black when ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Most of them, yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: There were a lot of Philipinos.

PIEHLER: Okay, so you had Philippino and black ...

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: One other—I've been told, I've sort of gotten this from both the officer and the enlisted perspective on battleships, that it was very hierarchical. I mean the Navy, all

the services are, but there's a real difference between officer and enlisted on a large ship. That they're—I mean, enlisted people often talk about “officers' country.”

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, that's true. There are some areas enlisted people don't go unless they've got business there.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: But the officers don't go up into the captain's cabin either unless they've got business.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Um ...

ARSENEAULT: There's a lot pecking area there.

PIEHLER: What about the—how many Annapolis [Maryland: location of US Naval Academy] people were aboard the *Mississippi* when you were there?

ARSENEAULT: I'm guessing, but I would say of the forty officers on board there were probably fifteen Annapolis people.

PIEHLER: And how did—what were the divisions?

ARSENEAULT: Remember, in 1950, there were still a lot of leftovers from World War II, like me ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ...and they didn't all get run off. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: When you say they didn't all get run off, I mean, did you feel like after the war ended that there was—that the Naval Reserve people, it was tough to stay on?

ARSENEAULT: A lot of the Naval Reserve people were anxious to get back to where they were before the war broke out. It wasn't a matter of the Navy kicking them out they were the ones that blew the whistles. And ... this was what happened in the EOD. All of the guys that had gone through mine and bomb disposal training, they all wanted home. And they all had a lot points, and they all had a lot of seniority, and they all left. And they looked around the Navy one day and didn't have any left, and they still had lots of bombs left, lots of projectiles laying around the Pacific.

PIEHLER: And that's, in some ways that's why, it'd be fair to say, that's one of the reasons you ended up in this specialty was they all went home.

ARSENEAULT: That's right.

PIEHLER: ‘Cause it sounds like something they ...

ARSENEAULT: They put out an all-nav [all-Navy] in April of '46, I think it was, requesting people to apply for this, and the bottom line says, “You will have to be qualified to be a deep sea diver.” I went to the exec and I said, “Look I’m already a deep sea diver and you’re not using me as a deep sea diver, we’re going back and forth to Europe like a yo-yo.” And I said, “As you know, I go over to the diving school every time we’re in New York to dive.” And I said, “I’d like to get back in the business.” And they put me in it.

PIEHLER: I’m just curious because—were there divisions within the officers? I mean, what kind of, sort of cliques or divisions existed aboard the *Mississippi*? Was it the World War II people versus the—you know, the new people who came in after?

ARSENEAULT: Uh, I don’t think so, not at that time. I don’t recall.

PIEHLER: What about the Annapolis, was there any sort of ... ?

ARSENEAULT: I had two different people on the ship that were graduates of the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, and we’re still pals.

PIEHLER: Oh okay.

ARSENEAULT: We still e-mail back forth. We still visit when I’m in New England or they’re—both of these guys, by the way, went all the way to captain, because they didn’t specialize like I did. I specialized and ended up in the dead-end street.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And so there’s something to be said, in your period, for being a generalist?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah. And they went on and commanded ships and went all the way to Captain.

PIEHLER: Yeah, which is a high ...

ARSENEAULT: Well, it’s a lot better on pay—retired pay. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well you, you mentioned you had applied to be, for oceanography, and you got your orders, and where did you go?

ARSENEAULT: I was ordered to the Hydrographic Office for about six weeks. And while I was there the Korean War broke out. And I was just there to learn what was going on in the oceanography area, but I ended up working with one of the senior civil service types, and one of the things that we did, I’m not sure whether we did all the thinking, but I helped. We went to the Japanese fisheries reports from 1900 until 1940, and we took out

information for each month on the Sea of Japan of the oceanography needs for submarines. There was nothing in writing on that material, and ...

PIEHLER: Anywhere?

ARSENEAULT: No. So we took all the stuff for all the—every January. And then we averaged it, and we took every February, and we averaged it, and every March, and we averaged it. And we came up with a set of thermographic readings ... of the ocean water and temperature and this sort of thing. And I'm sure that submarines went in there and used it. That's the only thing they had. But we developed that over a period of about a month while I worked there.

PIEHLER: So that sounds like a very productive month, and that ...

ARSENEAULT: I thought it was.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah no, and ...

ARSENEAULT: And then I went to Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla [California], and we were supposedly ...

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

PIEHLER: You said it was supposed to be a one year degree for a master's, but you didn't have an undergraduate degree?

ARSENEAULT: That's right. And halfway through the course, I—and now the Korean War's really going. I called Washington, my contact point, and told them that I thought I was in the wrong place, that I needed to be out in Korea with my frogmen blowing up things and working on tunnels and whatever they had going on there. And he said, "Well, I'll see." And about two weeks later I had a set of orders to an oceanographic ship, and the explanation was they had trained me in oceanography to be on that ship for that billet and there wasn't anybody else being trained for it, so I had to do it. So I spent the next year floating around Iceland ...

PIEHLER: (Laughs)

ARSENEAULT: ...and then Mediterranean and Europe, and the North Atlantic on this oceanographic ship. Well, the Korean War is still going on. But the skipper of the ship, the oceanographic ship, was appalled that the Navy had sent me to the postgraduate training in oceanography without a degree.

PIEHLER: He thought this was just ...

ARSENEAULT: He said, "That's terrible. They've shot you down." So he went back to Washington to BUPERS, and the next thing you know I had a set of orders to

Northwestern University to get my degree. And I spent two years at Northwestern and when I got orders to Northwestern, the first thing I did was propose to my wife that I had met when I was in Scripps.

PIEHLER: So that's how you met your wife?

ARSENEAULT: She was in the hospital at Scripps as a—I mean, San Diego as an ensign.

PIEHLER: So she was a Navy ... ?

ARSENEAULT: She was a Navy nurse, one of those white ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You really, you really had ... (Laughter)

ARSENEAULT: Yeaah! She walked into that room with her white uniform on and my heart fell out on the floor. (Laughter) And if it hadn't been for the US mail, we never would have gotten together, because we corresponded ...

PIEHLER: So again, much like your father and mother had courtship, you had a similar correspondence courtship?

ARSENEAULT: Right. I had five dates with that gal before she left town. She went to flight nurse training, and then she was ordered back to Moffett Field [California] and she flew up to Alaska and around. Meanwhile, I said, "I'll call Washington," and they sent me to the ship in the North Atlantic. And then she got transferred a year later to Patuxent River, Maryland also flying around to the Med, and Caribbean, and England and so forth. So if it wasn't for the mail, we never would have got together, except we had made a pact that we were going to meet on our birthday. We have the same birthday: 29 October. I'm a year older than she is, but 29 October is the magic day. And shortly after that is when I got my orders to Northwestern, and I knew this was going to happen, and I went down there and told her that she needed to join the Navy and she got very upset, "I'm in the Navy." I said, "No, no, no, you need to join the real Navy." (Laughter) That got her really jawing at me. (Laughter) And she told me "No" and sent me packing, and I went off to sea brokenhearted. Two weeks later, I came back in and the mail was there, and she had written letter saying she'd changed her mind. If I still wanted to get married she'd go along with it. So I got mad at her and I sent the ring in the mail. (Laughter) I had the ring in my pocket when I proposed, but she said no. At any rate, that was my Navy nurse story.

PIEHLER: So ...

ARSENEAULT: And I proceeded to get her pregnant, and in May they released her, you couldn't be pregnant ...

PIEHLER: You couldn't be pregnant in the Navy?

ARSENEAULT: No. And we started raising children, of which we have seven now.

PIEHLER: I want to just go back, just a little. It sounded like ... how were you doing in this master's program without a college degree? Could you ...

ARSENEAULT: There were four major subjects: there was geology, chemistry, biology, and mathematics, and hydrographing—hydrology, that's what it is. I didn't have a degree in any one of those things, but everyone else in the place had a degree in one of those things. So that meant I was studying for four subjects and they only had to study for three, because they knew the other one already. And I managed it, I passed everything.

PIEHLER: So you were passing when you ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: It also sounded like, it would be fair to say you wanted to get into Korea because there's a war on ...

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ...and both there's a war on, but also promotion. Did you have a sense that for career ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Not so much that as the fact that I had this training as a frogman and an EOD and I wasn't using it.

PIEHLER: Yeah. And the Navy decided to send you though to an oceanographic ...

ARSENEAULT: They picked me out of the group of ten that applied that fall, I discovered later on, because they found out I was on a sixty-day leave on an oceanographic cruise.

PIEHLER: So that sixty day leave ...

ARSENEAULT: That's probably what got me ...

PIEHLER: That really like put you ...

ARSENEAULT: There were only two officers selected that year for oceanographic training, and the other guy was a Naval Academy Class of '38, was a submariner, he had been skipper of a submarine, lieutenant commander. And her I was a jg with nothing but underwater work. And his wife is the one that got sick and went to the hospital and introduced me to my wife.

PIEHLER: So you were aboard the same ship, and that's—that more senior commander played a pretty important role in your life?

ARSENEAULT: Well, he was the other person in the program—the oceanographic program.

PIEHLER: So you knew him from the oceanographic school?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: At ... Scripps?

ARSENEAULT: Right, a real nice guy. He was best man at my wedding.

PIEHLER: Oh, so you ... became quite good friends?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yes, yeah.

PIEHLER: Do you remember his name?

ARSENEAULT: C.N.G. Hendrix, Charles Nelson Grant Hendrix.

PIEHLER: And Class of '38 from the Naval Academy?

ARSENEAULT: '38, he's been dead a number of years now from radiation exposure he got in '46.

PIEHLER: Right. From the Bikini test [Bikini Atoll Nuclear Testing Program]?

ARSENEAULT: Right. He was on a ship that got really rained on ...

PIEHLER: Rained on by one of the ...

ARSENEAULT: ...by one of the blasts.

PIEHLER: On board this oceanographic—you're not even close to Korea, you're in the North Atlantic. What was your ship's missions?

ARSENEAULT: It was oceanographic work, being done with Lamont Geophysical Union out of New York on underwater sound, and underwater photography and deep ocean stuff.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: I was the assistant hydrographic officer on the ship that I was on, but I spent a lot of time on the sister ship that was usually ten miles away. (Laughter) They would set off a blast, and we'd listen. Then we'd set off a blast and they'd listen. Did all kinds of strange things to the bottom, it was way above my head.



PIEHLER: So you had very specific missions, and you weren't even quite sure what they were doing this for, the way you're describing it.

ARSENEAULT: No, not completely.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: I knew about the explosives part of it 'cause I could spot the bomb that made the noise on the other side.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: And the guy on the other ship, the hydrographic officer, left, and I got sent over there temporarily to run the job over there. But these two ships ran around the place together. And twice during the year I was onboard, the ships came into Philadelphia for new equipment and for a kind of an overhaul, and we repainted the bottom of our ship one time. Fairly interesting.

PIEHLER: How did it—I'm just sort of curious on a ship like this, what is the sort of science contingent aboard the ship, and are they—is everyone Navy on the ship or are they civilians?

ARSENEAULT: There were half a dozen civilians from the hydrographic office from the oceanographic division that would come with us, and they would be the ones collecting specimens and keeping up with the data. And I was kind of a liaison between them and the ship's company and what they needed. They'd ask me, and then I'd go get it. (Laughter) It was quite an interesting year. And one of the things that hurt—didn't hurt, but at the end of the cruise we all had to go up to Washington and they'd take me with 'em to unscramble the data that we'd collected and make sure that it was all in the right folders and files and everything else. I didn't ... stay with that business. I probably should have stayed with oceanography, even though I only had half a course. Because now it's a complete—I forget what you call it, but there's a complete set of people that are just oceanographers.

PIEHLER: In the Navy?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: But in your day this was not a major?

ARSENEAULT: No. That year there were only two people sent to the course.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: Now the course is at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey [California], and they have thirty or forty in the course every year, and they also teach it at the Naval Academy as one of the degree programs.

PIEHLER: In oceanography?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah. And Captain Hendrix, when he retired he went to the Naval Academy and was an instructor.

PIEHLER: In oceanography?

ARSENEAULT: The laboratory down where the sailboats are at the Naval Academy is named "C.N.G. Hendrix Laboratory."

PIEHLER: I'm curious aboard—you've been aboard a battleship and a ... transport vessel. What sort of the different—how do they compare in terms of how they, the sort of cultures of the crew? You described how formal the *Mississippi* was, in terms of, particularly, dining in the wardroom. What's an oceanographic vessel like?

ARSENEAULT: Oh, there's no comparison at all. I don't know how to explain it to you. But you can't compare it.

PIEHLER: Much less formal?

ARSENEAULT: You haven't even touched on my two years on a destroyer.

PIEHLER: No I haven't—well I don't think we've gotten to the destroyer yet.

ARSENEAULT: Oh right. But I was the senior officer on that thing except for the captain and the exec. As a senior watch officer, I was running the watch bill and ... And that's a little bit more formal, a destroyer.

PIEHLER: Than an oceanographic vessel.

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: But as formal as a battleship?

ARSENEAULT: Well, on a battleship, for example, the Captain doesn't eat in the wardroom. He's got his own mess upstairs, got his own people serving him, his own cook, he's ...

PIEHLER: So he's even ...

ARSENEAULT: He's way ...

PIEHLER: ...he's way aloof.

ARSENEAULT: The exec runs it. But when you get on a smaller ship, now, then the Captain comes in to eat in the wardroom. The decor is a little bit different when the Captain is at the dinner table.

PIEHLER: So in many ways ...

ARSENEAULT: You don't raise Cain. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Since we're on the point of what different ships are like, what else—'cause you've been on so many different types of ships, what else would you comment about shipboard life from your perspective as an officer, but not the commanding officer?

ARSENEAULT: Well, you're restricted in area, of course. You have a stateroom. If you're a junior officer, you probably got one or two people in the stateroom with you. Triple bunks and ... there's not much space to have anything extra.

PIEHLER: So, because I've been aboard, in ships' museums, one of the things I've always been struck by is even on big ships, how little space there is.

ARSENEAULT: That's right. And you learn to keep everything in its place.

PIEHLER: Because ...

ARSENEAULT: You can't just lay it down and leave there,; It'll disappear. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Literally. Well, 'cause I remember I was going to the [USS] *Constitution*, there's a destroyer nearby in Charleston Navy Yard. And I just went into this World War II era destroyer, and I looked at where the ship's crew was going to sleep, and it looked—I don't think it was a room maybe twice the size of this office, and I was just sort of aghast, but then even when you go to the officers', you know ...

ARSENEAULT: No, there's not much space. I mean, you have to use judiciously what you had.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. How do you sort of get—because you're in such close proximities, without naming names of people, did you always get along with your fellow officers in your state room? Was there ever a ...

ARSENEAULT: I did. A couple of times on the battleship *Mississippi*, my roommate was a Merchant Marine Academy graduate from a year behind me. I knew him from school. (Laughter) And he knew me and that I didn't haze him, so ...

PIEHLER: So you were on good—that was ...

ARSENEAULT: We were on good terms, right. I worked for a couple of Academy people, later on in my business and I hated their guts, because I knew what they were as upperclassmen.

PIEHLER: So you were ...

ARSENEAULT: They sold me a set of white uniforms that I never used. (Laughter) I never forgave him for that. He knew we weren't going to use those white uniforms.

PIEHLER: So you were sold?

ARSENEAULT: He sold me down a river. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What was it like to go back to college as—with all this Navy experience—I mean you started college in 1952 ...

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: ...and you had been in the Navy for about, I think about eight years?

ARSENEAULT: Right, so I ended up on Northwestern University campus. The first three or four months I was there I was alone. My wife was still on active duty, and she hadn't become pregnant enough for anybody to notice it. So I lived in an upstairs apartment on the third floor with a little old lady who kind of turned her house over to me. She said, "Put anything in the fridge you want, eat there if you want, and if you want to play the piano go ahead and play the piano." (Laughter) I used to spend most of my time studying there anyway. After Willidean [his wife] came out and joined me in May or June, we lived in an upstairs apartment in Northbrook, Illinois which is northwest of Northwestern, which is in Evanston. And the folks that lived in the downstairs apartment, in the basement—we still correspond ...

PIEHLER: You're still in ...

ARSENEAULT: ... still know him. He was an ensign, and I was a junior grade lieutenant, but he, uh, moved down—he lives in Georgia and has a mountain place over here north of Asheville, and we go over there and spend a couple of days with him every once in a while. You maintain friendships over the years with some of the strange people that you don't really think you're going to maintain.

PIEHLER: Yeah, like your downstairs neighbor.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah. And other folks that you're real buddy-buddy with, they disappear. So, it's strange. And We've picked up a lot of extra children along the way. The kids bring in extras and we just adopt them on the spot. (Laughter) We had three exchange students, one from Germany, one from Brazil, and one from Russia. And we

still keep in touch with two of these guys—I don't know where the Russian went, he must have joined the army or something.

PIEHLER: When did you ... have the Russian come?

ARSENEAULT: Oh ... about ten years ago.

PIEHLER: Oh so that's—so fairly recently?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, yeah. Now, the kid in Germany went on to law school and is now a judge.

PIEHLER: Oh wow.

ARSENEAULT: And the gal down in Brazil went on to law school and is now a practicing attorney. So we picked up a lot of extra kids along the way. Spectacular.

PIEHLER: Did you finish your degree at Northwestern?

ARSENEAULT: No. I came close though. I was telling Vince earlier that I took French and I made the mistake of taking a speaking French course instead of a written one, and when I was almost finished, I was halfway through the second year of French, I got infectious mononucleosis and turned into the naval hospital in Great Lakes for three weeks. I had the blinds drawn and I didn't do any studying, and that French got away from me. I wasn't able to complete it. So when I left Northwestern, and the Navy wouldn't let me stay on for another six months, 'cause they already had me lined up to go on to the postgraduate school. And I've been a graduating senior at Northwestern now since 1954.

PIEHLER: So you never were able to finish the degree?

ARSENEAULT: I finished it to my satisfaction at the University of Maryland, passed two years of French, transferred it to Northwestern and they refused to accept it.

PIEHLER: Really?

ARSENEAULT: And I took it again at Georgia State in the late '60s, and took the exam again and failed it. In both cases the professor told me that there wasn't any way I could pass the written test because they were both based on other books, other French literature that I had never read, and therefore I didn't know the vocabulary and wouldn't know the idioms or anything. So he said, "You just can't do it." But I took the test and I flunked it both times, so I wrote a letter to the president of the Alumni Association asked them to intercede for me with the academic board and see if they could waiver that second year of French in residence since I had finished it at Maryland, and I got a Dear John [curt letter] back from them saying they couldn't do that, so I said, "Well to hell with them," pardon my French. (Laughter) I am not a Northwestern alumni and you don't have to send me

anymore duns for money, and you don't have to expect me to go to the alumni meetings in Atlanta and recruit football players for you, I'm done. That was my answer to that. But I did get a degree from the Massachusetts Maritime Academy by transferring all these credits back to them and they added that to what I had there.

PIEHLER: So you did get a bachelor's?

ARSENEAULT: I have a bachelor's in seamanship and navigation.

PIEHLER: Because if you had stayed—it had been the regular course you would've gotten a bachelor's degree, but the war accelerated ...

ARSENEAULT: That's right, that's right. I think I got that bachelor's degree in '57.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. How did you—I mean, you had a falling out with Northwestern, but it sounds like you liked Northwestern quite a bit?

ARSENEAULT: It's a good school, except it's about a mile from tech at the north end to humanities at the south end, and if you set up your courses wrong ...

PIEHLER: (Laughs)

ARSENEAULT: ... you've only got ten minutes to get between classes and it's a run all the way.

PIEHLER: And what was your major?

ARSENEAULT: Geography and geology, based on my interest in the oceans, that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: And normally college is a four-year degree, but you were only given two years to finish it, so that sounds like a very demanding ...

ARSENEAULT: It was, because I never had any electives that I could pick what I wanted to take. It was strictly what had to go. You had to take all the math courses and all the English courses, and when you took your geography and geology courses, there wasn't any time left.

PIEHLER: And were you able to transfer any credits in from...Scripps or from Mass ...

ARSENEAULT: I didn't try it.

PIEHLER: So you were doing college in—basically four-year college in two years.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And so it sounds like you did summer work?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, you go 'round the clock.

PIEHLER: 'Round the clock. How many ...

ARSENEAULT: And that's why, probably, I got infectious mononucleosis and crapped out at the last minute. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: How many—you mentioned there was a Navy ensign in your apartment on the similar...program, how many other Navy and other Armed Service people were there at Northwestern with you?

ARSENEAULT: At Northwestern?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: I don't know anybody besides the Navy people, because we all had to go to the Navy ROTC office to get our mail.

PIEHLER: How many were you, roughly?

ARSENEAULT: Oh, probably eight or nine.

PIEHLER: Oh okay. So now that you've ...

ARSENEAULT: Just a small group. I still correspond with one of those guys who was a helicopter driver. He was number four helicopter driver in the Navy. He said he should have been number one but his boss paced him out. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What about Korean vets going on the GI Bill [college funding for veterans], did you know many of them? Were they ...

ARSENEAULT: No, I never had any time to do anything like that. When I came out of the Navy in '65, I stopped playing and went to work. See at that point in time I had seven children that were aged three to thirteen, and the retired pay that I got, plus what I was able to earn, wasn't really enough, and I just kept changing jobs until I got off to an area where I was making enough money.

PIEHLER: So after Northwestern, you were sent where next?

ARSENEAULT: I went to the Naval Post Graduate School ...

PIEHLER: In Monterey, in California ...

ARSENEAULT: ...in Monterey, with a quick stop in at Treasure Island [San Francisco, California] for ABCD [Atomic, Biological, Chemical Defense and Damage Control] School for a month. And that was just until the course at Monterey started. But I got a chance to go into the gas chamber and all that stuff on Treasure Island. And I knew my way around Treasure Island 'cause I'd been there at the end of the war. Treasure Island is closed now and that's a shame. Nice spot right in the middle of San Francisco ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah I know the Presidio is no longer, is gone.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, I was at Monterey for six months. And at the end of that period of time I had a set of orders to a destroyer. But I had to go to Key West, Florida for a month to ASW [Anti-Submarine Warfare] School and I went from there to the destroyer, got on board the destroyer, and I was the senior watch officer. And I had taken the ASW course, so I knew a little bit about shooting torpedoes at submarines and this type of thing. But you know, you pick that up in the school as you go along. I don't know how else to describe that ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. Well I—I'm always sort of curious when I do interview people is, how would you sort of learn in formal training, and how much you sort of learn—because you're on deck, and there's this job to do?

ARSENEAULT: You take correspondence courses for one thing, I must have taken fifteen or twenty of 'em.

PIEHLER: To learn the specialties?

ARSENEAULT: To learn the specialties, yeah. Your uniform, code of military justice and all that sort of thing. It just doesn't fall on you. You have get into books to find it. And there are certain things that are required reading along the way that you have to satisfy before you can even say so you're qualified for promotion. And this all takes up ...

PIEHLER: One thing—and I meant to back up and just—it sounds like the captain you had aboard the research vessel, the oceanographic research vessel—he took a real interest in your career when he looked at your record and said they should have never sent you to graduate school without an undergraduate degree?

ARSENEAULT: That's exactly right. But I don't know other than he went back to BUPERS and did something about it.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but he could have done nothing. I mean, he—it sounds like he was very active in doing this?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah. Yeah. He could've left me there to rot or whatever. (Laughs)



PIEHLER: In other words you could have—this was not a one-year stint aboard the oceanographic ...

ARSENEAULT: It was a two-year tour, but I only was there one year.

PIEHLER: Because he deliberately got you into college?

ARSENEAULT: Yes, yes. I thought that was interesting that he did that, and I've always felt kindly toward him for that.

PIEHLER: Now, you were aboard—you were in Monterey, and then you were sent to Key West in 1954 ...

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: ... and what—and then you were in sonar [sound navigation and ranging] school at Key West. How long were you—what did you?

ARSENEAULT: That was a month course, six weeks of looking in the sonar, tracing the submarines, and making attacks on them. Make believe you're a destroyer and you're going after him with a torpedo or a depth charge.

PIEHLER: And you, after that, you were then promoted. You were detached to Norfolk?

ARSENEAULT: I was sent to the USS *Haynesworth* DD770.

PIEHLER: And that's your destroyer duty.

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: And you were navigator and operations officer, and you—I think you just said you were number three in the ship's crew.

ARSENEAULT: I was only the navigator for about two months, we made a trip down to the Caribbean and back. And the exec got transferred, and a new exec came onboard. But I was the operations officer.

PIEHLER: And then you were...lieutenant commander, you were promoted in 1956 ...

ARSENEAULT: In the Mediterranean.

PIEHLER: ...to lieutenant commander.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So you were aboard the...*Haynesworth* for two years ...

ARSENEAULT: That's right.

PIEHLER: And um, anything else—it was mainly the Mediterranean?

ARSENEAULT: We made two trips to the Med while I was on there, and these were six months long. And on one of those trips we actually went down the Red Sea and into the Persian Gulf.

PIEHLER: Again, for you this was your ...

ARSENEAULT: [My] second time around. And this time when we went through the Suez Canal, we painted the ship white, as we went down the Red Sea. We painted it white, so it would reflect the sunlight and not absorb the heat. And we got into the Persian Gulf and did our thing there for a couple of weeks. We came back out again, and going north up the Red Sea, we painted it gray again. We painted a lot of paint on that. We went through the Suez Canal and the people that went down and relieved us in the Gulf got stuck there, 'cause we were the last ships that went north before they had that fight going on and closed the canal [1956 Suez Crisis], and those guys that went down and relieved us when ... it came time for them to go home they had to go around the south of Africa.

PIEHLER: The Cape of Good Hope.

ARSENEAULT: (Laughs) That's a long way to go.

PIEHLER: You were there just then before the '50—you were out of the Mediterranean by the time the Israeli—the British and French tried to seize the Suez?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, yeah. That happened I guess '57, '58.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so you just missed that.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah. Well, we were on the right side of the canal anyway.

PIEHLER: What besides—did you have any specific missions besides cruising?

ARSENEAULT: A destroyer always chases an airplane crash ...

PIEHLER: So you were ...

ARSENEAULT: ... wing-guard and you guard the carrier.

PIEHLER: So you were guard—you were on carrier ...

ARSENEAULT: Yeah. Now I was the only air control officer on the *Haynesworth* in the Med crew, at one at a time there. Anytime they sent an airplane for us to take control of, when I stuck my head into the scope, the rest of the Combat Information Center [CIC] would just disappear as far as I was concerned because I was worried about that airplane. And finally the captain had to send the exec down to man the CIC position, like the operations officer because I was over there with my head in the radar. One time they lifted me in the little buoy thing over to the carrier and I spent four days on the carrier in their CIC, controlling airplanes all over the place, and lots of CICs and lots of radar. But, when I was over there, I discovered one of my classmates from general line school in Monterey had control of a group of airplanes, and he talked me into going for a ride. (Laughs) I flew up with him and then took off from this carrier, and turned around and came back and landed on it again. I had never seen anything so small in my life than that airplane carrier, coming in to land on it, it was really something. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well I—I don't know if you have met her but Captain Mariner ...

ARSENEAULT: I know of her.

PIEHLER: Yeah, she's involved—she's affiliated with the Center and I've always been impressed with the fact that she's landed planes on aircraft carriers and taken off, because it seems like one of the most difficult jobs.

ARSENEAULT: That would be a trick. I never did get a certificate that I did that, but I did it. (Laughter) Now you don't really understand that tricky, maneuver, until you're in the destroyer following two-thousand yards behind the carrier watching these planes come around and land on the carrier with the lights out. I mean we've got one red light on our mast, the carrier's got one red light on their mast, and there's another plane guard out there a couple miles that's got a red light on it. Those three red lights are the only thing they've got going until they approach the deck. And I'm sure there's little lights along the deck.

PIEHLER: In other words, it's very black?

ARSENEAULT: It's very scary. And you know, here we are getting ready to fish this pilot out of the water if he doesn't make it.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: (Laughs) But it takes guts to land a plane on that carrier in the dark.

PIEHLER: How often would you have to fish out a pilot?

ARESENEAULT: Uh, we never did fish one.

PIEHLER: You never had to fish one out?

ARSENEAULT: No, no, luckily.

PIEHLER: I'm sort of curious—you're in the Navy, in some ways, at the height of the Cold War in the 1950s and early '60s. I guess, what did you think of our potential enemy, the Soviets, as enemies? Or did you even give it much thought?

ARSENEAULT: I wasn't really concerned with it because I knew we had enough destroyers and everything to go after them. I don't know much about the submarine service, for instance although I spent five days on a submarine when I was a frogman. When you take fifty frogmen and stick them on a submarine that's already got eighty people on it there's not much room. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: This was back in the late '40s that you were on a sub?

ARSENEAULT: Uh, yeah...

PIEHLER: Because you were one of the World War II submarines.

ARSENEAULT: It was the USS *Raton* SS 2-7-0, and that was in February and March of '49.

PIEHLER: Yeah—when you say there is not a lot of room, could you maybe just elaborate about being aboard a submarine?

ARSENEAULT: Well, I had a special bunk. They set up a cot for me in the forward torpedo room, and I would get on my cot and they would slide it under the torpedoes. (Laughter) Well I was close enough to the torpedo that I could not roll over.

PIEHLER: You literally couldn't roll over?

ARSENEAULT: If I wanted to roll over I had to get somebody to pull me out, I'd roll over, and they'd put me back in again. (Laughter) I felt like I was sleeping in the bottom drawer.

PIEHLER: And you got this special cot because you were an officer?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So what were your men ... ?

ARSENEAULT: They had to hot bunk it. Anybody that went on watch, there's an empty bunk, somebody would grab it. And when that guy came back and he had to go to sleep, he would kick you out and you had to go find someplace else to sleep. (Laughter) Now we were five days on that ship. The poor guys in the galley were cooking all the time.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: One day we stopped the ship and flooded it down and had a swim call. The captain said, “I’ve never had so many lifeguards onboard in my life.” (Laughter) Forty lifeguards, you know.

PIEHLER: So he let his men go swimming?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, ‘cause we all wanted to swim too. I made the mistake of making a dive off the bridge, and I didn’t realize how far out that submarine goes underwater. When I dove off, I don’t think I missed that hull by more than an inch. (Laughter) But it was a nice swim.

PIEHLER: Where was—this was in the Persian Gulf?

ARSENEAULT: No, no. We were down south of Puerto Rico, that’d be in the Caribbean.

PIEHLER: Oh, so that was ...

ARSENEAULT: It was nice, clear water.

PIEHLER: What was the coldest water you ever dived in?

ARSENEAULT: Probably at the EOD School in December, with ice on top of the swimming pool. (Laughter) And we had to get in it and swim so many times around that pool, and it was cold, it was cold. We didn’t dare stop. We always seemed to end up playing around Iceland in January, and they’d eventually send us down to St. Thomas for the summer.

PIEHLER: So you dove off Iceland?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, but just one trip, you know.

PIEHLER: In other words the diving in Iceland was just to keep your ...

ARSENEAULT: They always had us figure out some way to do it, but when I was on the oceanographic ship we went into Iceland. And the first night we were there, somebody came down on the dock with axes and cut our mooring lines, and we drifted out into the harbor. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: They literally, you literally ...

ARSENEAULT: Yeah. So we lit off the engines and fought our way back to the dock and then they set up guards.

PIEHLER: So this was done by civilians?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, somebody didn't like the Navy. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Was this common, or was this ... ?

ARESENEAULT: I don't know, I don't know.

PIEHLER: After you sort of—after your duty aboard the submarine, you were sent back to, you had mentioned earlier in the interview, back to ordinance disposal and a refresher course at Indianhead, Maryland ...

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ...in 1957.

ARSENEAULT: When I finished on the *Haynesworth* I was sent to the EOD School for a three-month refresher course. And I remember, I hadn't had a refresher course since I graduated from there in '47. This was nine years. Anybody who stays in the EOD business about every three or four years goes back for refresher courses, well I hadn't been to one, and the refresher course is normally six weeks. They practically gave me the whole course over again because there was a lot of new ordinance coming on board. And I was going on to be the officer in charge of the Explosive Ordinance Disposal Unit in Charleston, which at that point was a major unit, the other one was in Pearl Harbor. EOD1 was in Pearl Harbor and EOD2 was in Charleston. Now, we split the world in half. The Mississippi River, west, belonged to EOD1, and going the other way was EOD2. I don't know where we met, over there in the Indian Ocean somewhere. But that was—we had seven complete teams, EOD teams. An EOD team basically was an officer, a chief petty officer, and four other enlisted people, and they had a complete set of tools, everything. And if you found one of these in a place, there were seven of us. And we always had people in the Med, we always had people in the Caribbean, and we always had people going any place there was something going on. We picked up extra jobs along the way sometimes, clearing bombing ranges and that sort of thing. We worked on Cedar Keys off the Florida coast for several months and Pinecastle, an old Air Force bombing range in Florida.

PIEHLER: I'm curious in sort of disposal—how much of this, it sounds like a lot of your missions were bombing ranges.

ARSENEAULT: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: What about deep sea in the second tour, in demolition as EOD, how much was underwater?

ARSENEAULT: Well you know, if it falls in the water it belongs to the navy, If it falls on land it belongs to the army, If it falls on an Air Force base it belongs to the Air Force. And the Navy and Marines kind of work together. A lot of the world is water. Even though the deep water you can forget about.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah, but the ...

ARSENEAULT: But there's a lot of water along every coast, and rivers and lakes and stuff. One of the biggest jobs we had when I was in Charleston, was fishing drowned bodies out of TVA lakes and Florida caves and this sort of thing when people went scuba diving and didn't come back. And they'd call us up and we would go in there ...

PIEHLER: You got this job?

ARSENEAULT: ... and pull them out, yeah. I never did any of that stuff personally but it was my teams that were going after them.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. How much were you disposing of World War II stuff that was leftover—what was sort of ...

ARSENEAULT: Well, the biggest one that I remember was the one off Cedar Key, Florida, where they had used a series of telephone poles as the target area. These high-level bombers would drop bombs on it. And every once in a while, one of them wouldn't go off. And it was a closed, restricted area, they wouldn't let anybody fish there. And the fishermen were mad about that because there was good fishing there and they would sneak out and go fishing anyway. But we were sent down there to clear the bombs, and every time we found a bomb, we'd put a charge on it and blow it right there. These are two-hundred and five-hundred pound bombs, they make a big bang. But how do you certify that a bombing range is clear? You just never can do it.

PIEHLER: Really?

ARSENEAULT: And every place you go where you got an ex-range that you clear, everybody wants you to say that everything's cleaned up. Well, it's not, you don't know. It might be an inch below the ground.

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like when they said they wanted you to give it a clearance, you seemed like you were very reluctant to.

ARSENEAULT: Oh, I could never say it was clear.

PIEHLER: You never put anything in writing that said ...

ARSENEAULT: No, no.

PIEHLER: But you were asked to do that?

ARSENEAULT: No, no. For example, down on the battery in Charleston, you know there's a place with grass down there.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: One day, a lawnmower clipped a little piece of metal and they went down and dug it up. They had a projectile about that long. (Gestures with hands) Civil War ...

PIEHLER: Civil War, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ... parrot round. But they'd been driving the lawn mower over it for years. We found cannonballs up in attics, where you could go up in the attic and you could see where it came through the roof, and they fixed it, but the cannonball is still sittin' there. We found—let's see, one day, one of my chiefs came in and said, "Commander, we were just down in an antique store down on Meeting Street, and we think we've seen a half dozen cannon balls, projectiles that may be live." So I went down there and looked. And sure enough, they looked like they were live to me, too.

PIEHLER: (Laughs)

ARSENEAULT: And I went to the proprietor and I said, "We would like to take those cannon balls up to our demolition range and open them up. And we'll bring 'em back empty, stamped 'inert.' Unless they blow up, in which case we can just bring you back the pieces." He says, "No you can't have those! They're worth a hundred dollars apiece to me!" I said, "Well it's probably worth your whole business if one of 'em blows up after you sell it. You'll kill people, you'll get sued." [He said], "Ah, I don't know, I don't worry about that." Well, I said, "I'll tell you what. To my recollection, the Union Army won the Civil War."

PIEHLER: (Laughs)

ARSENEAULT: "I'm in the Union army, those are my cannonballs. Now do you want to argue that point? Because at the end of the war everything belonged to the Union." I said, "If you don't agree to that, we'll call Chief Kelly, Chief of Police, and argue it over." "Oh, if you're going to be like that," he says, "go ahead and take the cannonballs and just bring 'em back." And I think, of the six or seven that we worked on, only one of them blew up. But it—it blew.

PIEHLER: It blew.

ARSENEAULT: Boy, it blew hand grenade stuff all over the place. (Laughter) Those cast-iron cannonballs blow up with explosives inside of them, and people don't realize that that black powder is just as live today as it was when they put it in there.

PIEHLER: So there's no such thing as a dud? You know, if it's ...

ARSENEAULT: It's a dud, but it's a live dud.



PIEHLER: No, yeah exactly—age doesn't diminish its ...

ARSENEAULT: No. Well, maybe it does, but how do you know?

PIEHLER: No, no—yeah, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: And it may be that the fuse blew through right but didn't fire enough fire in there to light it off.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: But the black powder's still in there.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And you were based in Charleston for how long?

ARSENEAULT: About two years.

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Arthur Joseph Arseneault on April 5th, 2005, at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

JONES: Vincent Jones.

PIEHLER: And several things that sort of came up during lunch I just want to sort of go back to. And one of them, you told an interesting story about your grandmother and grandfather on your father's side, and how your grandmother insisted that your father go to college and sent him to college in 1918, to Van Buren College, which is on the Maine-Canadian border, but after your grandmother died, your father's mother died, your father took him out of college?

ARSENEAULT: I think it was 1916 ...

PIEHLER: Oh, 1916 ...

ARSENEAULT: ...when he went up there to Van Buren, and in 1918, his dad decided it was time for him to go to work.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: And he brought him back to Sanford, and he got a job in a drug store and worked there for a few months and then joined the Navy, and went into Navy as a pharmacist's mate.

PIEHLER: So that working in the drug store played a key role?

ARSENEAULT: I think that's what got him started, yes. When he came back to town in '46 after so many years in the Navy, he didn't go to work in that drug store, he went to work in another drug store, but you know, same people. He also spoke French so that all the people coming in he could talk to. And used to get the boss mad, 'cause he would try to talk to the people and they said, "We don't want to talk to you, we want to talk to Arthur." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: One of the things—we were just talking about Charleston over lunch, and you mentioned—which I should've thought of it when we...were first talking about Charleston. You were there when the Air Force plane went down with the fully-loaded, basically, nuclear weapon.

ARSENEAULT: No, the airplane got in a collision with a F-86 and the B-47 went on to Savannah, and at the last minute decided not to land with a nuclear weapon onboard.

PIEHLER: Okay.

ARSENEAULT: It went over the ocean and dropped it and turned around and landed. They gave him a medal for saving his crew, but uh, I always said I would've court-martialed him for dropping the bomb in my water. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Okay, I think I'm confusing it with another incident with a crash, but—and you were in charge of the team to recover this ...

ARSENEAULT: That's right.

PIEHLER: And over lunch, you were describing this team, both the Navy team, but then other military teams. Could you talk a little bit more?

ARSENEAULT: When I showed up in Savannah at Hunter Air Force Base and reported to the general. The first thing he said to me was, "Commander, would you like a cup of coffee?" and I said, "Yes, sir." From then on we were friends. But he said, "Anything you need on this base that you want, you call and ask for and I'll get it for you if I can." And later on I used that statement a couple of times, with his supply officers were a little bit blocky. But I had about three of my EOD teams in Charleston with me, and we had Army EOD and Air Force EOD teams that came and showed up, too. So I turned the search along the coast, in the islands and swamp areas to those guys. And I had another detachment of frogmen from Little Creek that showed up, and I let them work on the shoreline in the shallow water along the coast, and then my guys were working in the deeper water in the channel. From what information we had though, we never did really put our finger on where the bomb hit, but it was a seven-thousand pound thermonuclear weapon that was dropped from seven-thousand feet and it didn't stop when it hit the water. It went down in the bottom somewhere.

PIEHLER: It embedded?

ARSENEAULT: It's probably—anywhere from ten to fifteen to twenty feet underground. I don't know how you find something like this other than running radiation stuff. We didn't have the equipment back in those days to do this.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, how long did you continue the search?

ARSENEAULT: Ten weeks.

PIEHLER: Ten weeks?

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: And then you just ...

ARSENEAULT: We were there from February, all of March, into April. And the—I think the first week we were there it snowed an inch to two inches of snow. Can you imagine Savannah in the snow?

PIEHLER: So this bomb was dropped in Savannah, in Savannah's bay ...

ARSENEAULT: Off Savannah.

PIEHLER: ...off Savannah.

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: Not Charleston ...

ARSENEAULT: Somewhere between Tybee Island and Wassaw Island there's a channel that goes out to sea that's—heads down southeast, and I think it's in that channel somewhere. And uh, a couple of years ago, probably in 2002, an air force lieutenant colonel got interested in this bomb again and contacted me, and we've been down there looking for that thing a couple of times ...

PIEHLER: You still ...

ARSENEAULT: ... within the last year. And the first time we took some radiation equipment from Oak Ridge with us, and we think we've got it pinpointed down to an area about the size of a football field, but this is still some place where you wouldn't want to run a dredge.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you mentioned that over lunch.

ARSENEAULT: Because this seven-thousand pound weapon has got thousands of pounds of uranium in it, and tritium. And it's got three hundred and sixty-five pounds of

TNT in it. That's what sets off the initial implosion, starts the chain reaction. And you don't want to mess ...

PIEHLER: So wait a minute, this ...

ARSENEAULT: ... with three hundred and sixty-five pounds of TNT that has about eighty-five detonators in it. Even if you set off one detonator, you would not get a thermonuclear reaction.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: You'd get a bang and it would spread that radiation all over the place. That's a dirty bomb.

PIEHLER: It's—what's striking to me also, in telling me this, you earlier said that if it's in the water it's Navy, so you were in a sense coordinating all these teams?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, I had charge of the operation. I was the Navy on-scene commander. I had a diving ship, came down from New London with deep sea divers on it. I had an APB that came from Little Creek with frogmen. I had several mine sweepers from Charleston. I had a blimp with magnetic airborne detection. If we'd been looking for a submarine we would've found it. (Laughter) That thing wasn't that big.

PIEHLER: Ugh, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: And it is not steel, it's mostly aluminum. It's just not the right kind of stuff to find. It's still there.

PIEHLER: It's still there?

ARSENEAULT: And the Air Force says, "Leave it alone."

PIEHLER: It'll just?

ARSENEAULT: It won't do anything. Well, it'll degenerate over a period of time, and I suspect that the plutonium that's in there will generate some plutonium-oxide, which would give you radiation readings. And that's what we probably found last year ...

PIEHLER: Is the degeneration.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah. Every once in a while you see something in the paper about that.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean, I've heard about that case and there's another case, I think over the Atlantic.

ARSENEAULT: No, the other case was over in Spain.

PIEHLER: Yes, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: There was a tanker, ran into a bomber, and they dropped four bombs. But three of those landed on land and they recovered them. But one out in the water took them three or four months, until they finally believed the fisherman who saw it splash and then they went and got it. Until that point they were looking in the wrong place.  
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: So they ...

ARSENEAULT: While I was in Charleston, there were several incidents like that, that my unit got involved in, and I was a nuclear weapons disposal officer.

PIEHLER: So you had had training for this?

ARSENEAULT: Yes.

PIEHLER: So there have been other incidents of ...

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: 'Cause I have always heard, I've heard of the one off of Spain in the Atlantic, and I know I've heard of this incident, but there ...

ARSENEAULT: There's another ... I think it was Mark 1510, whatever—there's only one other one that's unaccounted for, and it went off the side of an airplane carrier out near Okinawa. And it's in a hundred-thousand feet of water, it's way down. Nobody's going to mess with that one. But this one off Savannah, theoretically, it's in shallow enough water that you could go find it. And you hear these stories about dirty bombs and the Tom Clancy thing about the bomb in Israel. It's right there off Savannah. And it's probably within two miles of shore, just south of Tybee Island, just north of Wassaw. It's an interesting process.

PIEHLER: Yeah, no, I ...

ARSENEAULT: The guy that's looking for this thing by the way is going to be in Knoxville on the sixteenth of April and is gonna come by and visit me.

PIEHLER: Oh okay. And is he still active duty or is he retired ... ?

ARSENEAULT: No, he was Air Force Reserve lieutenant colonel, flew B-47s, and now works for Delta out of Atlanta, and he's in the testing department—not testing, qualifications renewal or something like that—certification, I think. People who fly Delta Airlines have to go by his shop and ride in his simulators and pass the test. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: After your duty in Charleston, where were you sent to next?

ARSENEAULT: Well, I was sent to Little Creek for a course in naval gunfire liaison. They figured since I'd been on a battleship, I must know all about ordinance and firing from ships and stuff. And they sent me there to take this course to go on to work with the Marine Corps at Camp Lejeune, called 2<sup>nd</sup> Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company. When I got there I discovered, much to my surprise, that this outfit did not work for the Marine Corps. They worked for the Army. And we spent a lot of time at Fort Bragg and Fort Campbell with the 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Divisions. This dictated that I become parachute qualified, and so the very first thing I did when I got to Camp Lejeune was go up to Fort Bragg for three weeks and become an Army parachutist. And a few months after that I made five more jumps with the Angel Corps people and that qualified me as a Navy parachutist. You have to have ten jumps and be in an outfit that has parachutists. But I spent a very interesting two years in that outfit.

PIEHLER: And that was in, when, that was 19?

ARSENEAULT: 1963, 1964, and 1965. Um, made a few special trips with the 12<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps, which is the 82<sup>nd</sup>—101<sup>st</sup> to ... down at Vieques [Puerto Rico], parachuted into Vieques among all the cows and barbwire.

PIEHLER: This is also the period where they're starting to think about airborne war—a new phase, the helicopter. Were you involved in any that?

ARSENEAULT: No, but they're doing that helicopter bit rather than the amphibious landing over the beaches.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: You don't run up on the beach and ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, no, I know.

ARSENEAULT: You don't have to clear any of the obstacles, you just fly them over the top and drop 'em down where you want 'em. Course, you lose helicopters every once in a while, too.

PIEHLER: One of the things I want to go back to in your duty because you had such a great story over lunch—when you served as an executive officer aboard...a supply vessel, when was that?

ARSENEAULT: That was the [USS] *Denebola*. I went onboard the *Denebola* in October of '59.

PIEHLER: And you said that you were shocked at the wardroom for only paying ten dollars a month for their food—the officers.

ARSENEAULT: Right, and I called the mess treasurer in and I said, “Mike there’s no way you can feed these guys for ten dollars a month, they’re all overweight.”

PIEHLER: You said substantially, too.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, substantially overweight. And he said, “Well, no, I can take care of that alright from my cargo loss that we have when we go to the Mediterranean.” I said, “Wait a minute you can’t do that. I don’t want to end up in the jail in Portsmouth, New Hampshire with all the other supply officers. We will start paying our mess bill like we’re eating the food, not getting it from somewhere else.” And I don’t know how extensive you want to go on this?

PIEHLER: I mean as you said you really did, as you recalled over lunch, you really said that everyone will pay the stated—what should be the general amount, I think forty-four dollars a month?

ARSENEAULT: \$47.88 a month is what the Navy allowed us for eating, and I said, “If everybody’s on the ship, the mess bill’s going to be \$47.88. Now, if everybody is going home at night and the ship’s in port, and only the duty section’s eating here every night, we can have it less than that, but never less than \$25.” I said, “It’s only fair that we pay our way.” Then I called the cook in and told him that he was cooking twice as much food we needed, because those guys were obviously all overweight. And I said, “When they—when you send the tray in with the food and it goes around the table, it’s going back into the galley. It’s not going to be put on the table for people to take seconds and thirds and fourths.” And I said, “People will not get seconds unless they ask me and we have a discussion about it,” and I said, “It will be rare that the tray is ever called back, so save yourself some time and don’t cook so much.” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I mean it’s interesting because you talked earlier about the wardroom on the battleship, and here you now are the executive officer using that, sort of, you control led the wardroom?

ARSENEAULT: That’s right.

PIEHLER: You also told me you put them—you had the pharmacist’s mate in a sense weigh them in and really ...

ARSENEAULT: Well, we set up a scale on deck in the wardroom in front of the bulletin board and put everybody’s name down the left hand side, and across the top, the date every Friday. And the deal was they had to weigh in Friday morning before they ate. And anybody whose weight stayed the same or increased, automatically they became a part of the physical training team with the pharmacist’s mate. And I told the pharmacist’s mate, I said, “I want you guys to work these guys over and I don’t know how you do it, but get the weight off of them.” And I said, “We’ll make these guys feel better. They may not like it.” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: It's interesting, because you said over lunch, one ensign did come up to you and thank you for, in a sense, his weight loss program.

ARSENEAULT: About six months later he came to me as he was being detached to go somewhere else and said that he appreciated what I had done for him and that he was feeling better, even though he had to take in his uniform twice in the past six months. But he said some of these other fellows will tell you the same thing, but they may not be brave enough to admit it.

PIEHLER: What—there's an interesting comment you made about supply officers ending up in the brig, so to speak, up at Portsmouth. I've driven by that facility, uh ...

ARSENEAULT: The prison is still there.

PIEHLER: Yeah, no I know, it looks pretty stark. I mean it—it looks like a prison.

ARSENEAULT: They probably made it into a school or something.

PIEHLER: I think it's still is a brig.

ARSENEAULT: Still a detention facility. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: I think so, I think I was up there I think a year ago. Um, how come—I mean you say that does happen quite a bit, the supply officer has his hand in the till, does ...

ARSENEAULT: No, he just—that's a temptation.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and it's ...

ARSENEAULT: If he's the pay master and has all the money in the safe, you know, you gotta be careful how you handle it.

PIEHLER: So that...it does happen? In the sense that that's ... ?

ARSENEAULT: It's just accountability ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ... of equipment and money. And that happens probably in every way of lunch.

PIEHLER: Yeah—but it seems like, the supply officer, it would be more than a lot of other ... ?

ARSENEAULT: There's more temptation there.



PIEHLER: I mean did you hear, as you were going through the Navy, reports of a supply officer in a sense getting in trouble, or it was just your instinct that this ...

ARSENEAULT: That's the joke, anyway.

PIEHLER: So it was more just instinct that ...

ARSENEAULT: Right. The supply officer never leaves the ship with his satchel of money if he doesn't have a long line and a buoy hooked to it, so if he falls off the ship and drowns, at least you can get the money back. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You had the experience at Savannah working with different services. And then in 1963, you worked intensively with the airborne, Army airborne.

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: Well, what's that—you've been in the Navy now, this is nearing the end of your career ...

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: What did you learn about the Army, versus—the Army way of doing things and the Navy way, 'cause you were really with them quite a bit ...

ARSENEAULT: Well ...

PIEHLER: ...even to the point of doing jumps.

ARSENEAULT: I had worked with the Army in EOD, for example, joint training, joint instruction. Army instructors and Army students.

PIEHLER: When was, way back in?

ARSENEAULT: In '46.

PIEHLER: Oh, '46, so this was ...

ARSENEAULT: And then in the refresher course. And also, while I was in Charleston we had very good relations with the Army EOD people in Columbia, is it—South Carolina. And we'd go up there and help them with their, exer—drills and things, and they'd come down and do us. The funny part there is, I went up there one time and I found that every piece of ordinance that they had was painted Navy gray. On a previous visit we had given them a five gallon can of gray paint. (Laughter) They had bombs and rockets and all kinds of things out in front of their EOD shack all navy gray. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I'm curious, I'm sort of skipping around just a little bit—but being on a supply ship, it strikes me that this would have one of the smaller crews for a Navy vessel, or am I wrong about that?

ARSENEAULT: No you're wrong, because the first thing you do before you sail out of Norfolk is pick up a twenty or twenty-five man Seabee [Naval Construction Battalions] detachment to go along to handle cargo.

PIEHLER: Oh okay.

ARSENEAULT: So your crew was actually bigger when you're on a trip. One interesting point though. One time we checked into the Mediterranean and got the list of stuff that people wanted. And a destroyer had ordered toilet paper. Well, toilet paper comes in a thousand rolls in a carton, and he wanted so many thousands or something like three thousand. (Laughs) But he hit the wrong key, and he ordered more toilet paper than we had on the ship. If we had given him all the toilet paper he wanted you wouldn't've been able to see that destroyer for all the toilet paper. And there was a lot of joshing between the two skippers about that, and the supply officers caught heck for it. It was funny. They ordered more toilet paper than we had.

PIEHLER: And even needed.

ARSENEAULT: Well, no, of course, yeah. He wanted three cases of toilet paper and ended up with three hundred. (Laughter) That's a lot of toilet paper, a thousand rolls to the box.

PIEHLER: You—as part of the detail to the airborne, you took part in the Dominican Republic Intervention [1965 Dominican Civil War], is that ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, yeah. I was airlifted in with 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. And we maintained a corridor through the center of the, I forget the name of the city, the capital of the Dominican Republic, anyway [Santo Domingo]. At any rate, we had a two-block area right through the center of town that we occupied, and the rebels were on one side and the nationalists were on the other side, and they were shooting at each other across our lines. And we didn't like that. One night one of my captains, a Marine captain, went down into the rebel zone and fired a bazooka into a store that had been sniping at us. Wiped it out. And before he got back to the line, somebody in Washington called down and called him by name and told him to stay in his lines, not to go out and shoot the other people. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So you were in the middle of this?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, we were on the line. And one night, somebody broke into the laundry and stole all our uniforms. I had three sets of uniforms down there and two of them got snatched. And you can't just live in one set of uniforms, so there was an emergency issue of fatigues from Fort Bragg. So I ended up with one Marine uniform and

two Army uniforms, and no insignia on it. (Laughter) You had no idea who I was. (Laughter) I used to get the Army guys all upset about that anyway.

PIEHLER: Because you were in the Dominican Republic for three months almost?

ARSENEAULT: Well, it wasn't quite that long.

PIEHLER: Not quite, but April, May, June.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: And, what's interesting about your career, because you start in World War II, you're in during the Korean War, and Vietnam has just begun, but the first time—it sounds like this is the first time people shot at you in anger?

ARSENEAULT: As a matter of fact, one day I relieved an Army guy in a helicopter. He was a naval gunfire liaison type with the Army. And he'd been flying every day, and he was pooped, so I said, "I'll go up for you today." We got out there in this little two-man helicopter, only one guy can drive it, the other guy is just a passenger. And I had a pair of binoculars, I'm looking. We went swinging by over town, and I said, "I think I see a tank over in the corner of the plaza under those palm trees." He said, "Well let's go down and look." And we went down and looked and there was a fifty caliber machine gun on the fire department roof, took off shooting at us. And you know, it only takes one bullet to put a helicopter down. (Laughter) I don't know, but that that pilot had that helicopter doing everything you could think of to try to get away from that thing. And that was one item or one time that qualified me for a Combat Action Award.

PIEHLER: No I mean, that's ...

ARSENEAULT: I was getting shot at! I didn't shoot the guy back, but it was pretty close! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you were with Army and Marine—and how many other Navy people were with you?

ARSENEAULT: There were ten Navy, there was one lieutenant, three jg's and the rest ensigns that were in this naval gunfire group of mine. And when we went to war with the army, I would go at division level, the lieutenant would go at brigade level, and the other guys would be down at company and forward levels. And we had a better communications network between our guys than a lot of the Army guys. Every once in a while the Army guy would come over to me at the division headquarters table and he'd say, "Would you send this down to Company so-and-so for me?" And I'd send 'em a message and it would get delivered. If he put it on his Army thing it ...

PIEHLER: So in other words, even though you were assigned to Army units, you maintained separate communications structures even as sort of integrated into the ...

ARSENEAULT: Right, we had our own jeeps with radios. And the radios we had, for example, we could talk from Camp Lejeune [North Carolina] to Puerto Rico.

PIEHLER: Yeah, no, that's very—one of things that I should have asked you in general, because the Dominican Republic was the first time people were shooting at you in anger—one of the things that strikes me about Navy is weather. Did you ever have any close calls aboard ship with weather, any typhoons or any other hurricanes or any ...

ARSENEAULT: One time, we went out of Norfolk in a destroyer, and we hadn't been gone six hours when the hurricane showed up. And you know hurricanes—you always put the weather on the port quarter and stay away from it. That weather chased us all over the South Atlantic there for a couple days, and by the time it stopped, it was time to come back into port again. We didn't do anything except duck the weather.

PIEHLER: Duck the weather ...

ARSENEAULT: Now, on the large troop transport, the [USS] *Lejeune*, in '46 in the North Atlantic, we went over one period of time when the weather was so bad and the wind blew so high and the waves were so high, that the ship actually lost ten miles in a twenty-four hour period. We were going over the things but we were actually going backwards. (Laughter) You had to slow down when it gets like that ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ... because if you go too fast over this wave, you go into the next one, and that's like a crash. So what you do you is you slow down and you just let the wind push you along.

PIEHLER: But ever any close calls in terms of being washed off deck or ... ?

ARSENEAULT: On that particular one where we had that weather in the North Atlantic, from one of the bangs into the water the stocks on the starboard anchor broke. And the anchor slid out of the hawsepipe. And every time that we'd hit a wave it would slam it back again into the ship again, so the captain sent me and half a dozen sailors off to the fo'c'sle to engage that anchor, pull it back in again, and wire it in so that it in so that it wouldn't go sliding back out again. And several times that I was up in the eyes of the ship watching this water come up. (Laughter) Several times it almost came over the front, you know. And what I would do when I see it coming and it looks like it was coming up too high, I'd shout and everybody would grab whatever they had to hold onto in case that water came right over the bow and washed you right off.

PIEHLER: Hold on.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: And you didn't have any lines holding you doing this job, so you were ...

ARSENEAULT: We had a life jacket on.

PIEHLER: But that's it? I mean ...

ARSENEAULT: And this is North Atlantic in January.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So you're not gonna ...

ARSENEAULT: Your time in the water is gonna be down to minutes.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: Very, very dangerous. And then I discovered that the top of my paint locker had blown away, and there's an open pipe there. And so I got a piece of canvas, and I'm trying to tie it on to block that off, and the captain up on the bridge is going, "Hey," because I'm sitting up there on the bow all by myself now, trying to tie this thing up. And he could just see me getting washed over the side. (Laughter) A few angry words came over the PA system and I gave up what I was doing, headed back. (Laughter) That was an interesting job. We had a USO [entertainers for servicemen] troupe come with us over to Europe one time. Twenty beautiful girls. And some of them played violins and danced, and everyday they would put on a little show on the hatch top and we would bring the boys up from down in the compartment. It was a riot. Then at night they had to lock 'em up. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: How many of the vessels that you were onboard had Marine Corps detachments?

ARSENEAULT: Well, of course the *Mississippi* ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah, that ...

ARSENEAULT: And in fact I had the starboard quarterdeck of the *Mississippi*, and that's where the Marines fell in every morning. I used to get mad at 'em for messing up my deck. (Laughter) Starboard quarterdeck always had to be cleaned and shining. That's where all the VIPs come in.

PIEHLER: And they'd mess it up?

ARSENEAULT: Well, they weren't that bad but they—every once in a while they would fall out and leave and you would look around and there'd be cigarette butts on the floor and I can't have any of that. (Laughter) On the *Mississippi*, by the way, if you found somebody putting a cigarette out on the deck, you marched him up to the master-at-arms shack, and he was issued a half a bucket of sand. And he had to carry that sand until he found someone else doing that, then they would go up and there would be an official

transition, “You take the bucket now.” And once the bucket of sand was out, the word got out all over the ship that the bucket of sand is out! And the poor guy, you know—several hours later the chief master finally felt sorry for him would take the bucket back. (Laughter) But that was the bucket of sand to put cigarettes out in ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: No matter where he was, people were putting out the cigarettes there. (Laughter) Today that doesn’t happen, you don’t smoke on the ship anymore.

PIEHLER: At all? Which, when you first joined the Navy, I mean, I get a sense that ...

ARSENEAULT: It was a nickel a pack.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah. Did you smoke at all?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah. I smoked until 1982.

PIEHLER: Wow. Did you start in the Navy, or ...

ARSENEAULT: Yes.

PIEHLER: What—there was another question I had about sort of Navy—you were part of the Navy when it was first segregated, and then it became integrated. When did—what was the first sort of—either stateside or ship that was integrated when you were ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Never ran into that, really. Never served in a ship that had females.

PIEHLER: But what about African—black sailors?

ARSENEAULT: Uh, in the ‘50s I think. We started to see blacks in the ranks, other than ...

PIEHLER: The ship’s stewards.

ARSENEAULT: The ship stewards, right. But uh, you didn’t find—I didn’t find any in EOD, although there probably were a few.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: They never served with me.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: I don’t know, it happens, you go by the rules, you don’t—that wasn’t a good question. The black that made the movie?

PIEHLER: Oh yes.

ARSENEAULT: A lot of bunch of bologna. There was never anybody in charge of a diving unit or a diving school that I know of that operated like that commander. That was for the birds.

PIEHLER: I can't remember the name of that movie.

ARSENEAULT: And the language in there was out of line too.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: I never served with people who talked like that.

PIEHLER: I forget the name of the movie but it was a movie about a black diver.

ARSENEAULT: That's fine.

JONES: Was it *Men of Honor* [2000]?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, that's it.

PIEHLER: You thought the movie was completely unrealistic from your ...

ARSENEAULT: Not from where I came from.

PIEHLER: Yeah, from your experiences. Did you ...

ARSENEAULT: Now the equipment was fine and the training was alright, but the plot was lousy and the language was terrible. Maybe some people talked like that, but they never did around me. I'd shut 'em up.

PIEHLER: Um, did you for example, on your last shipboard assignment—how much of the crew was African-American, how many black crewmen did you have?

ARSENEAULT: I don't recall any to speak of. There may have been one or two ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ...but not like it is today.

PIEHLER: But very small.

ARSENEAULT: Today there's twenty percent maybe.

PIEHLER: Did you ever encounter a fellow black officer while you were in the Navy, in any of your posts, stations?

ARSENEAULT: The only one that I can recall was an Army Major and this was in 1946 at the EOD School. We all were called into the auditorium for a lecture on females and hygiene and this sort of thing, and the doctor was saying something and he called something "a nigger," and a major stood up in the back of the room and put up his hand and the doctor said, "Yes, sir?" And he started giving him a lecture on "why you don't call niggers, niggers."

PIEHLER: This was in 1946?

ARSENEAULT: '46. And boy, that really stuck with me. And I never had used that term before, but I never did after that.

PIEHLER: No, no but I mean this ...

ARSENEAULT: He said, "Now, if you get two black men and they're mad at each other and they call each other niggers, that's alright. But you don't have a white man calling that black man a nigger." (Laughs) He says, "That's not right." (Laughs) And it was really quite an interesting discussion this guy came up with. The doctor apologized to everybody he says, "I was wrong, I'm sorry. I won't do that again." He said, "I've learned my lesson today, I hope you guys learned your lessons and leave these females alone", or whatever. He was talking about syphilis and this sort of thing.

PIEHLER: Um, you came from a real Navy family, I mean your father had been in the Navy, but you over lunch, were talking about your brothers, and several ...

ARSENEAULT: My next younger brother went into the Navy and went to radio school. He was assigned to a large, heavy-attack wing airplane outfit out of San Diego. And after he had been there about three months, he was on a plane going to Hawaii and it crashed. And he floated for twenty-four hours out in the middle of nowhere. The plane was gone. And he put in for submarine duty. And he went to New London [Connecticut] and went to submarine school, and for the next twenty years he served in submarines. And when he retired he went to work at Groton, Connecticut, building submarines, and specifically radio rooms, and that's what he did when he finally retired. The other younger brother went to the Maine Maritime Academy, and he served on a merchant ship for a couple of years, then he went on active duty with the Navy for a couple of years. Then he went back to sailing merchant and sailed around the world a couple of times in these ships that were carrying grain and this sort of stuff. And then he got involved in the Naval Reserves. And over a period of twenty years he went all the way to captain. And both of these guys died at age fifty-nine, and I think smoking ...

PIEHLER: Smoking was what got ...



ARSENEAULT: ...got both of them, they both died of cancer, heart attacks, that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: How hard was it for you to quit smoking? I mean, you were a veteran smoker.

ARSENEAULT: Uh, I just decided one day that I was not going to smoke anymore, and I made a pact that I would not buy any, I would not bum any, I would not stay in a room with anybody smoking. And when anybody lit a cigarette, I'd leave. But it wasn't hard. But if you're not gonna smoke, you can't be standing there with people smoking.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: You gotta leave.

PIEHLER: Vince, did you, were you going to ask a question?

JONES: I was sort of wondering, I know you're—during a lot of the service you sort of began a family while you were in the service. I was just wondering what it was like raising a family while you were in the service.

ARSENEAULT: Well it was easy since I had a nurse sitting at home taking care of them. One time I remember I got in trouble with this young lady because she wrote and told me all the things that were happening to the children here on the farm in Tennessee. I had gone to the Mediterranean for six months on the ship. And she told me about one of them running his arm into the washing machine wringer and chewing it up, and one of them going up into the hayloft and getting stung umpteen times by the bees, and another one who fell down the stairs. And I wrote back and said, "Hey, if you can't tell me some good stuff, don't tell me anything" and boy did I get in trouble. (Laughter) She didn't appreciate that at all. But no, she pretty well ran the show whenever I was gone.

PIEHLER: It also strikes me that she had been in the Navy, so she knew a lot about your world. More so than a civilian would have.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, and she also knew something about the aviators and the flyboys, you know. When I got into the Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company and became a parachutist and started flying around in these planes and jumping out of them, she thought that was fantastic ...

PIEHLER: She thought ...

ARSENEAULT: ... anybody who would jump out of a good airplane, you know, was crazy. (Laughter) But she used to give me a lecture on that. And once in a while at Camp Lejeune, she would bring the children over to the drop zone and watch to see me come down. And one of the kids said, "Well Dad, how are we gonna know who you are, they all look alike?" I said, "You will know which one I am. You just watch for the one that's got a long white tail." (Laughter) I took a roll of toilet paper with me, jumped out, and

then I opened it up and took the end of the roll, and dropped the roll, and I had a big, long white tail coming down. And everybody goes, “Ah, there’s Daddy. The one with tail.”  
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: What—since we’re talking about children, you have seven children and four went into uniformed services?

ARSENEAULT: Well, the oldest one was an Army captain, the next one is a Navy lieutenant commander. The next one is a female, and she was a public health service, now she’s a captain, which is the same as an Army colonel. The next one is a master chief petty officer, and the other two married Marines.

PIEHLER: So five out of the seven have some military—either military or married to the military?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

PIEHLER: I almost, I almost should ask—the two who didn’t ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Well, they both married Marines and ...

PIEHLER: Well, you had seven children, but two didn’t go into the service or marry.

ARSENEAULT: Right.

PIEHLER: So what did they end up doing?

ARSENEAULT: Well, the one that I didn’t say anything about just now, just finished nurses training and is now a second lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corp. And she’s on active duty over in Augusta, Georgia at age forty-six. I didn’t think the Army would take you at that age.

PIEHLER: So she, number six, and that leaves I think one civilian, who is now ... ?

ARSENEAULT: Well, that’s my son in Orlando who has been working on computer software stuff, and he’s been involved in a lot of R&D [research and development] stuff and does top secret work all the time, but has never been in the military. That’s Stephen.

PIEHLER: Were any of your children drafted or did they all volunteer?

ARSENEAULT: No, no drafts. I got drafted by the way!

PIEHLER: When?

ARSENEAULT: About six months after I joined the Navy I got my draft notice.  
(Laughter) And I went in and showed the exec, and I said, “What do I do with this?” He

says, “Don’t worry about it, the Navy’s got ya.” (Laughter) So they notified my draft board that I was on active duty. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: How—what was it like to leave the Navy? What led you to retire?

ARSENEAULT: Well, I finished twenty years and was forced into retirement, because you couldn’t continue on if you were twice passed over for commander. And I was passed over because they didn’t need explosive ordinance disposal, nuclear weapons disposal, frogmen, divers, oceanographers—that’s the old navy see, they didn’t need ‘em. Now today there’s a whole section of people who are doing that kind of stuff ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. So, ‘cause you ...

ARSENEAULT: ... and it’s joint service that they talk about now. If you don’t have joint service, you’ll never make admiral. Well, I was in the joint service way before they even started it. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So in other words, you were pushed out?

ARSENEAULT: I was pushed out because I was in a large group of people that came in on active duty at the end of World War II, and as we went forward, they had to cut ‘em back.

PIEHLER: Which is sort of an irony, because this is just when Vietnam is escalating.

ARSENEAULT: That’s right, that’s right. I took my uniforms and hung them in the closet down in Smyrna, Georgia, for two years after I got out, thinking that I’d get recalled. Never happened, so finally I gave the uniforms away. Now I’ve got a complete new set of uniforms. I go in uniform all the time to swear people in and this sort of thing.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: But you know, I’ve gained a little weight, so I had to buy new ones. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I should say, because people won’t see you saying this, you’re still a fairly trim individual, so ...

ARSENEAULT: Well, thank you. When you get to eighty, you think you can sport that ...

PIEHLER: No, I hope so, I hope I’m in as good a shape. (Laughter) So you—what was it, you know, you were pushed out. What was it, you know, you had spent basically most of your life, you’d always been in the Navy in a sense, because your father, even growing up as a kid.

ARSENEAULT: I got a job in Atlanta with the Boy Scouts of America. And I was assigned to Cobb County, which is to the northwest of Atlanta. And every once in a while I would go by the Naval Air Station in Atlanta and watch the planes go out and after that wore off, then I'd go back to work. But I always called on the CO [commanding officer] at the Navy base and got to meet the executive officer and various flight detachments there. Got to be real friendly with the CO and XO [executive officer], and the dental officer one time, who always needed a fourth for tennis at lunch. And so I'd go and play tennis with 'em. And that helped me along the year after that, because I lost all my teeth, and he fixed me up with a new set of teeth. So that paid off.

PIEHLER: And you mentioned you—I mean in some ways it's not surprising you went into scouting initially, but you talked over lunch—you just couldn't afford to survive on the salary of the scout executive?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, and I went to the boss and told him that, and he said, "Well, being a scout executive is kind of like being in the ministry. You don't get much pay, but you get a lot of satisfaction." I told him, "You can't feed seven kids and send them to college on satisfaction. I've got to earn more money." So he went so far as to offer me another job down in the south of Atlanta, where I would have to sell my house in Cobb County and buy a house down there, and move and this sort of thing. And I finally said, you know, that's no good, I can't do that. So I got a job with the health department in the state of Georgia, and a year later I got a job with the Georgia Science and Technology Commission as a research associate running two desks. One desk was anything that had to do with medicine and doctors and nursing homes and biotechnology. The other desk was anything that had to do with water, water resources, oceanography, coastal development management. And I balanced those two desks a while.

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

PIEHLER: I think, over lunch, after leaving the Boy Scouts in '66—you retired in 1965 as a lieutenant commander and you worked for the Boy Scouts for a year, but then you recruited, for the Department of Health for Georgia, nurses.

ARSENEAULT: I went into a project which was recruiting nurses who were already nurses who were not working at nursing for some reason. And we talked these gals into coming back into nursing, offered them a free refresher course, even paid their way to and from the training and took care of their children while they were doing this. And we probably, well my office talked to about five hundred people who were already nurses who kept up their nursing certificate, but were not working for some reason, they married doctors or lawyers or something, had children. And we set up two or three of the major hospitals in Atlanta and got them to set up child care facilities in the hospital run by a nurse so they could bring in twenty or thirty other nurses. And it worked. We did that for over a year, it was on a federal grant, then the grant ran out and I transferred over to the Science and Technology Commission.

PIEHLER: And you were there until 1972?

ARSENEAULT: No, no, '70. I think I moved over to the State Crime Commission.

PIEHLER: Okay.

ARSENEAULT: What happened there, Governor Carter came along and reorganized the state government and did away with the Science and Technology Commission.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: And we transferred to other places.

PIEHLER: Is this when you met Carter? Did you have any dealing with Carter when he was governor?

ARSENEAULT: Oh yeah, yeah. I was in his office a number of times. We were working on the Chattahoochee River and environmental stuff. At any rate, I transferred to the State Crime Commission. And then in '72, got an opportunity to transfer from there to the Cobb County Police Department. And I spent fourteen years in that job. Right after I got there, I convinced the boss that I should go to police training to become a police officer, because nobody would talk to me. I was that strange guy from the director's office who had a red badge who looked like he might be internal affairs. (Laughter) And nobody would say anything. (Laughter) I would walk into a room and everything would stop. (Laughter) So I went to the police academy and started packing a gun and wearing the same badge, but now there was a whole new story. A lot of the guys I went to the Police Academy with in '72 and '73 are now running that department. They're the chiefs and the colonels and the people who are running it. And the director of public safety was one of my classmates.

PIEHLER: You went to the police academy, in some ways you were much older than the rest of the recruits.

ARSENEAULT: Much, much. I was age fifty. And I kept up with everybody and jumped over hurdles just like they did.

PIEHLER: Did you ever make an arrest?

ARSENEAULT: No, I wasn't allowed on the street with my gun, because the boss said, "I don't want you sitting in the courthouse. I want you over here running the budget."

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. So you were basically budget officer for ...

ARSENEAULT: I was the budget officer. I took care of the precincts repairs and facilities, building new precincts, ordering uniforms, ammunition, cars. You name it, I was involved in it. I redesigned the 9-1-1 center and oversaw the people building that. Just did all kinds of strange things.

PIEHLER: It sounds, the way you described it, a great job.

ARSENEAULT: Oh it was. Not only that, right after I got there they gave me a car, and I used this police car to drive all over Atlanta to the other places to see what was going on. Then one time he didn't like the car he had, and he decided to buy him a new one. And I said, "What are you gonna do with your old one?" It was a Ford Mustang. He said, "Well, we'll give it to the detectives." I said, "They don't need it, they've got two others just like it." I said, "How about me, can I have it?" So he gave me the Ford Mustang. Man, I was riding high. (Laughter) Now this is interesting, because he was a frogman in '52, '53 and '54. And he knew of me from my '47, '48, '49 tour, and we knew a lot of people together that had spanned over in that time. And you know, we'd go out to the frogman reunion at Little Creek and this sort of thing. He was a little different than I was because he was a Second Class Aviation Ordinance and he worked for the enlisted and I was already an ensign when I went to this thing, and jg worked with a little different group but frogmen are frogmen, a fish doesn't know one frog from another. (Laughter) I used to hate barracudas and sharks on the bottom.

PIEHLER: It's also striking, you were in Cobb County, in the Atlanta area, during the real explosive growth of that.

ARSENEAULT: It's still growing.

PIEHLER: Yeah, it's still—my sense of Atlanta is, even until the early '70s it was sort of a quiet little place, and from the '70s on is that a correct?

ARSENEAULT: In '65 when I went there, there were probably 196,000 people in Cobb County.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: Now there's probably 600,000. And it didn't expand this way, it expanded up. (Gestures with hands) All these apartment complexes and stuff. There's some land there that you can't build on anyway, like Kennesaw Mountain for example.

PIEHLER: Yeah, even if you wanted to ...

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, you couldn't even get there. And there's a lot of apartments built up.

PIEHLER: Yeah. You are from New England how—what was the relationship with the other people in the police force, were there any other Yankees, as they would say?

ARSENEAULT: Well, when I went through Boy Scout training in '65, I remember one of the instructors saying, "Anytime you face an audience, there's four kinds of people looking at you. There's Yankees, damn Yankees, rebels, and rednecks. Now be careful

what you say, because you're liable to alienate one fourth of the crowd if you say the wrong thing." (Laughter) And a Yankee of course is somebody from New England, a damn Yankee is somebody from New England who came down south and married somebody from the South, and of course you know the difference between a rebel and a redneck. But it was an interesting discussion that I remembered all the time.

PIEHLER: It's a great point.

ARSENEAULT: When I went down and did my Boy Scout training. One of the biggest fun times I had in scouting was—I was in charge of the training for den mothers, cub scouts. And once a month I would go into Rich's, and we'd go upstairs and they would have a little special room up there, and we'd talk about what the program themes are for next month, what the games are, what the songs are. And I had a chance to lead all these den mothers in all this. It was fun, it was a riot. (Laughter) But there were some nights, parts of it, you know, going to camp and camping out. I was even sent to Philmont [New Mexico scout ranch] once and they paid my way.

PIEHLER: Was this while you were a volunteer scouter?

ARSENEAULT: Oh, no no. When I was a professional ...

PIEHLER: Okay, so you ...

ARSENEAULT: ... what happened was one of the fathers couldn't go at the last minute and the scout executive turned around and he says, "Art, you're going Philmont." I said, "What?" He says, "Yeah, the bus leaves Monday." (Laughter) And we had thirty-three scouts and two other adults, so each one of us took eleven boys. And my eleven boys, ten of 'em were Eagle Scouts, and one was a Life Scout and he could cook better than the rest of us. (Laughter) But we had a great time, we made our fifty-mile trek up there and so on.

PIEHLER: Yeah, Philmont's a beautiful place. I went in '75 I know—I can definitely identify ...

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, that was a fun trip.

PIEHLER: You retired in 1987, and then when did you move to Knoxville?

ARSENEAULT: In 1987. I told my wife I would move one more time. You tell me where and we'll move there. And she said, "Well, I want to go home." And she's from Knoxville. She has five sisters and two brothers, and they all lived here in Knoxville, except for one younger sister who lives in Washington, D.C. And she now, today, is getting ready to move back to Knoxville because everybody she knows up in Washington is getting old.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And have you liked living in Knoxville?

ARSENEAULT: Oh, it's a great place, the weather's strange. You know, everything north of here snows and everything south of here rains, and nothing happens in Knoxville. Fantastic. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: And you mentioned over lunch you're involved with the Military Order of World War II and you're ...

ARSENEAULT: No, not World War II. General Pershing [John J. Pershing] established the Military Order of the World Wars ...

PIEHLER: Of the World Wars, excuse me.

ARSENEAULT: ... in 1921. And when World War II started, all they did was put an 'S' on the end of it.

PIEHLER: Okay, I stand corrected.

ARSENEAULT: But, you do not have to have been on active duty during either one of those times to be a member. You only have to have been a commissioned officer on active duty. Any Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard, Reserves and NOAA It's a neat outfit. Tends to get old, because the younger people are still working earning a living they don't have time to mess around. We put on a massing of the colors, we put on a youth leadership conference, we provide medals and certificates to junior and senior ROTC, we support the Navy League. That's just one of the things I'm involved in, I'm also up to my ears in the Navy League. I'm also in VFW. I was in the American Legion, but I discovered they didn't do anything, so I only did that for a year.

PIEHLER: You mentioned, for the VFW you're the liaison with the Boy Scouts.

ARSENEAULT: I am the Youth and Scout Coordinator.

PIEHLER: Okay.

ARSENEAULT: And as such I'm responsible for a cub pack with about a hundred cub scouts in it in Seymour [Tennessee]. And whenever they want anything they come to me, and if post wants anything they come to me. I'm kind of in the middle. For example, we're getting ready now to have a cookout in May, where the VFW and the pack cook hotdogs and beans and chili and the cubs can come with their parents and meet all the people there ...

PIEHLER: (Laughs) Yeah that's ...

ARSENEAULT: ... and serve them hotdogs and beans till they drop. (Laughter) But that's a fun time, we do that once a year.



PIEHLER: You also mentioned that you still travel quite a bit, you often make it to New England once in the summer.

ARSENEAULT: I try to be in New England on the second Wednesday in July for my Maritime Academy Alumni meeting. But this is gonna come to a screeching halt though, because we're all getting too old. I'm one of the younger ones in the class, and I'm eighty. And we've got people that live in San Diego, people that live in Texas, and people that live in Florida, and they're just not coming anymore. A lot of people in Massachusetts, of course it's just a two-hour drive down to the cape and you're there. ... But I use that as an excuse to visit my friends up and down the coast and relatives. I can go from here to Maine and back in a two week, three week period and never stay in a hotel.

PIEHLER: Well, one of the things I think you said, because of your large families you were born into, you have something like 41 first cousins, I think you said over lunch.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah. Well, my dad had five brothers and two sisters, and my mother had five sisters and two brothers. And every one of 'em got married and has lots and lots of kids.

PIEHLER: And you've also, you've mentioned, in the course of the interview—you've stayed in touch with a lot of people you have encountered, in particularly your Navy career. You stayed in touch with people from the Maritime Academy, but then your Navy ...

ARSENEAULT: I had eight emails on my computer this morning. And I get up in the morning and I turn on the computer, and I see who's there and I answer 'em back. And before I go to bed at night, I bring up the computer again, and whoever's there, I answer 'em back and turn it off for the night. But I'll have anywhere from ten to fifteen emails a day from people. Some of them doubles some of them people sending me strange things. (Laughter) Once in a while, if it's bad, I just click it off. But most of it is from these friends. I have one person who's written me an email every day this week. And I wake up in the morning and there's an email from him, so I answer him back and send it off. I met them in Dover Air Force Base in Delaware in 1988 on the way to Europe going Space-A [air travel for military personnel], on a military airplane. And they were hitching a ride too, he's a Navy Commander. And we sat there for thirty-six hours waiting to get on a plane, you know. And we just set up a conversation and become buddies.

PIEHLER: Because of just hanging out for thirty-six?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah. He had a farm in Massachusetts and a house in Texas and a summer place in Mexico. And so as they traveled back and forth, he would stop in Knoxville to see us, and when we'd go to New England, we'd stop and see him. Now the scoundrel's sold his place in Massachusetts, I don't know what I'm going to do ... (Laughter) But we have been down to the Yucatan Peninsula to visit him and his wife. But you pick up these friends along the way and keep in touch with them.

PIEHLER: It's interesting, a movie came up in discussion which was not very accurate about the Navy. Is there any movie or novel, or even a memoir that sort of accurately reflects the Navy, your Naval experiences, or the Navy you served in?

ARSENEAULT: No.

PIEHLER: I mean it may not be out there.

ARSENEAULT: Not anything that I can put my finger on. There's been several movies years ago of frogmen and explosives, where they just go into the ship and torpedoes didn't go off and they put a tongue depressor in, probably pretty realistic. Ninety percent of EOD, in not getting blown up, is common sense.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

ARSENEAULT: Analyze it, see what you got, do something to correct it.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you did not have too many close calls in bomb disposal, or did you?

ARSENEAULT: I've got all my fingers and toes. That's because I always was very aware of all the safety precautions. You never pick up anything with three or four people and inspect it. Send the guy out you don't like to pick it up. (Laughter) No, seriously you don't mess with these things when there's not room for people to get hurt.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: And if you don't do that, you're gonna lose somebody.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: I've been on several diving situations where somebody got killed. And you examine what happened and what went wrong, and every one of 'em has had either one or two or three very, very serious violations of standard rules. You don't do this, you don't do that. If you do that, it's going to catch up with you eventually. It's a serious thing when people take chances when they shouldn't, when there's other people's lives involved. One of the things that I can remember about the basic EOD course was, they had an ensign or a jg in Southern France at the end of World War II that was working on a mine in the harbor at Marseille, and he came up and said, "I don't think we should be diving on that." And the commander that was there was not EOD, "Go down and do your duty!" And he went down and he blew himself up. And this generated a memorandum from the Chief of Naval Operations saying in effect that nonqualified seniors shall not dictate to qualified juniors what to do.

PIEHLER: So it made it all the way to the top, this incident?

ARSENEAULT: Yep, it went all the way up to the boss. And it's interesting that safety precautions should go number one. And we were told at the school at the time to take a copy of that CNO directorate with us wherever we went, and if anybody pulled it on us, show it to them. Even though it was a CNO back in '60s, or '50s ...

PIEHLER: You carried that with you ...

ARSENEAULT: It was good. I had a piece of paper in my possession when I was the officer in charge of EOD2 that was almost a blank check. It directed anybody that I showed this thing to, to give me whatever help I wanted, and give me whatever equipment I wanted, whatever finances I wanted, whatever I wanted. (Laughter) And of course the admiral told me when he gave me this, "Be sure and use this judiciously. It won't get you a ride to Spain," or whatever. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah. But in the right circumstances that ... ?

ARSENEAULT: He said, "Don't be afraid to use it, you have it on my authority." It was interesting.

PIEHLER: Is there anything we forgot to ask you?

ARSENEAULT: Well, I don't know I've had a wonderful time.

PIEHLER: No, we really have enjoyed it. Your memory is wonderful and we really appreciate you spending so much time with us, particularly because you said your wife is really not well, is quite sick.

ARSENEAULT: Oh, I've got a bunch of children that are taking turns coming in and guarding the fort. I really shouldn't have come over here and spent this much time.

PIEHLER: Yeah no, I won't hold you up longer, but we really appreciate it, and we hope you will come to some of our lectures and other events over the coming years.

ARSENEAULT: I'll try. I've been noticing these things as they happen ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: ... have been meaning to get along with it. I'm sorry that Rosemary and her husband haven't ...

PIEHLER: Well, I will put in a good word for you, I assure you.

ARSENEAULT: Tell her that we've got a lot of good things going and they like female aviators.

PIEHLER: Well she's teaching our basic course in military history, so ...

ARSENEAULT: Oh is that right?

PIEHLER: So she's been very involved, and she's also consultant for ABC news. And she also has a young child so, I think she's a fifth grader now so that I think keeps ...

ARSENEAULT: That keeps her occupied.

PIEHLER: That keeps her—yes.

ARSENEAULT: Then, of course they probably live up in the north side of town.

PIEHLER: They live in Norris, so that also.

ARSENEAULT: That hurts.

PIEHLER: But thank you again. We really very much appreciate it.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

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