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AN INTERVIEW WITH G. GORDON BONNYMAN

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INTERVIEWED BY  
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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with G. Gordon Bonnyman on April 20, 2000 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and Tim Bracken. I guess I'd like to begin by asking a little bit about your parents ... beginning with your father, who you earlier were saying ... he had come to the United States at a very young age from Scotland.

G. GORDON BONNYMAN: Yes, he was born in Edinburgh, but he was brought over as an infant. My impression is that he was about two years old when they came. I don't know whether that was—that is sort of lost in the list of times. But anyway, he was raised in Lexington, and I gather that he was very close to his mother but not his father. That's the impression I get. His father had a bit of the habit. He would go on sprees every so often and my father was very adamant about alcohol because ... apparently he was sent off—he was the oldest boy in the family, and he was sent to fish my grandfather out of the bars when he would get drunk, so that made an impression on him, so he never would drink hard liquor. He drank wine finally as he got older, but that was all he would drink. But anyway, he got a scholarship to the University of Kentucky to take civil engineering. He got three years of engineering done and he was getting ready to go into his senior year and his father said, "Alex, I have entered you in the Edinburgh School of Medicine. You will catch a boat next month." My father said, "I do not want to be a doctor. I want to be an engineer." So they had a big row and his father wouldn't support him anymore at home, so he went to work. He had to drop out of school, so he got three years in and that was as much as he could get.

PIEHLER: But he only had a year to go.

BONNYMAN: That's right. That's right. But anyway, they locked horns over it. I never did get the particulars of it, but they locked horns over it. Anyway, he built railroads. He first went to work up in east Kentucky, but that was a short time. Then he built railroads in Georgia and Alabama and that area, and he had extensive experience in that. I've seen photographs of some of the construction they did by mules and scoops. The excavation was very primitive but they have some massive concrete work, foundation work. But anyway, the eastern capital had made a lot of money in the railroads in the West, and at that time, when you think about the late nineteenth century, the main source of mechanical energy was devoted to railroads and ships. If you were going to be inland, why, you were pretty much involved in railroads. In construction work. So anyway, he built railroads and he worked up to be—like I say, eastern capital had made a lot of money in the West and they came to the South and thought they'd do the same thing, but what they didn't figure on was that the South was destitute from the Civil War and the Reconstruction and whatever. Regardless of how well built a railroad was, or how well run, it couldn't make money because there was no traffic. There was no business there. So, he gradually worked up to be ... chief engineer. He was building the railroads, and then he worked up to be general manager, and about every ten years the bondholders—the stockholders had been in receivership a long time. The stockholders had been wiped out years before, but the bondholders would appoint a committee and they would ... fire the receiver, and would fire the general manager, so he felt there was not much future there, so he came up to Knoxville and brought his family up here and

went in the coal business, working for the Campbell Coal Mining Company. And then he eventually promoted some mines of his own.

PIEHLER: When did he move to Knoxville?

BONNYMAN: 1912.

PIEHLER: When were you born?

BONNYMAN: ... Fall of 1919.

PIEHLER: So ... Knoxville is where you remember things beginning?

BONNYMAN: Yes, that's right.

PIEHLER: Did your father like being an engineer and working for the railroads?

BONNYMAN: Oh, yes. He [was] very much oriented that way.... Actually, when you got down to [it], coal mining at that point was primarily—you know, the inside of the mines, the workings of the mines, were pretty much set because everyone was on a piecework basis. I'd say about two-thirds of the people were on piecework, so they set their own pace and the outside work, construction, outside, was something that he was very naturally oriented towards and so he took to it very quickly and understood it very well.

PIEHLER: You had mentioned he initially worked for Campbell Coal Company. When did he go off on his own?

BONNYMAN: Well, he promoted the first mine in 1916.... That was the Blue Diamond Mine up near Hazard, Kentucky, and it was quite a success. It was a financial success and it was a successful mine. It fell my lot to wind it up because it worked out and it worked out. I mean it worked back. They retreated the mine. It was in the top of the hills. So, coal is like layers in a layer cake. And where you've got it cut by erosion by the valleys, why, it's just in fingers, and these fingers went miles and miles back in there. Six or seven miles to the back side of the property. And then they retreated the mine back almost to the drift mouth, to the entrance of the mine, so it was quite a successful mine. And it never was anything but hand-loaded. It was not mechanized at all.

PIEHLER: Never in the life of the mine?

BONNYMAN: No. We left it hand-loaded, because you know, the old say saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." So this was probably as efficient a hand-loaded mine as you could have. Looking back, it probably wasn't terribly efficient, but still ... for its time it was highly efficient. The secret to hand-loading was to have good haulage. If you could deliver the cars to the hand-loader, and he was reasonably productive. Now, there were certain areas where the people just didn't like to work particularly, but up around Hazard,

they were very motivated people, and they would do very well.... At that time, most of the people were on piecework. The haulage people weren't, but the preparation of the coal—what they'd do is they would send the preparation crew in and they would cut, drill, and shoot the coal, ... and they would start on the—they would use black powder in that mine and it brought out tremendous lumps of coal, the size of these chairs. And that was where the market was. People wanted lump coal, and ... they gave them nothing like the stuff that they burn in power plants today, which is where most of the market is. Some of it was given away. It was just sold for nothing. So they made their money on the big chunks of coal. But anyway, what they would do is they would start on the ventilation system at the ... exhaust end and what they'd do is, they'd move on up the current of fresh air so that the black powder smoke would always be blowing away from them. So they would cut, drill, and shoot the thing, and the cutting crews would go in about two o'clock in the afternoon, and they'd be through work by six o'clock that night.... Instead of working an eight hour shift, they would get it done in about four hours. That was the advantage of piecework. You know, they got paid so much for each place they cut, and so ... they cut a lot of coal that way. The hand-loaders got paid based on the amount that they loaded, and they were very productive that way.

But anyway ... my mother's family came from north Georgia, from Rome, Georgia, and she was a Berry, and my grandfather—actually, I am a generation removed, because my grandfather was in the Mexican War. Not only the Civil War, but in the Mexican War. He was in the Confederate Army in the Civil War, but he was a middle-aged captain at that point.... I think he was mostly in the quartermaster requisitioning unit because he was over forty years old, and as you well know, war is for the young. That's true anywhere, and so at one time when I was a battery commander in Merrill's Marauders, why, I was twenty-four years old, and I was the next to oldest person in the battery.

Tim BRACKEN: I know how you feel. (Laughter)

BONNYMAN: So, anyway ... he died when my mother was only seven or eight years old. And my grandmother was much younger than he was, fifteen years or so younger, and so she ran the place. They had a farm outside of ...

PIEHLER: When did your mother die? What year?

BONNYMAN: She died in 1968. My father died in 1953.

PIEHLER: Do you know how your parents actually met?

BONNYMAN: Yes. Well, I don't know the details, but I know that my father was a friend of Thomas Berry, who was ... my mother's brother, and he would acquire the land for the railroad, and Dad would do the construction work. So, he introduced him to my mother then. She was the youngest of a big family. A very colorful family.

PIEHLER: Did your father serve in the military at all? You mentioned your grandfather ...

BONNYMAN: No, he did not.

PIEHLER: ... You've been in Knoxville and connected with Knoxville in some way all of your life. You said you were born in Knoxville ...

BONNYMAN: That's true, but I also went off to school at an early age.... You know, I went to school here for about halfway through the sixth grade, and then I went off to school ...

PIEHLER: I wanted to ask you, because you went to a number of different places and it looks like in different ... parts of the country. What are your early recollections of Knoxville growing up, because you were here until the sixth grade. Does anything stick out?

BONNYMAN: Well, the only thing was we lived on Kingston Pike, and I vaguely remember when it was a two-lane macadam black paved road with a streetcar track on the outside, on the river side, running parallel to the road, but it didn't run down the road. And then they widened it. It had been changed from about ... 1924 or [192]5 or [192]6. It's the way it is now. They haven't improved it since then. (Laughter) It really is dreadful. I don't miss driving on it.

PIEHLER: Where did you grow up in Knoxville? Where did your parents live?

BONNYMAN: You know where the Unitarian church is on Kingston Pike?

PIEHLER: Yes.

BONNYMAN: That was the place, right there.

PIEHLER: Your house used to be where the church ...

BONNYMAN: Yeah, they tore the house down two or three years ago. After my mother's death, why, we sold it to the Teen Center and they kept it for a number of years and the place was getting more and more run down, so, you know, it's just as well that the Unitarian church tore it down.

PIEHLER: Growing up, particularly in Knoxville, before you went off to boarding school, what did you do for fun? Does any memory stick out?

BONNYMAN: No, I remember going down and playing in the neighborhood with some of the other boys.... The Mayos and the Craigs lived towards town from us, and I just vaguely remember where the Second Presbyterian Church is now, there was a fellow named Phil Brisco lived, and we was scared to death. The little children were scared to death of Phil Brisco. (Laughter) He was a mean ... SOB, as I remember, and I know we

were just frightened of him, very much afraid of him. I remember slipping through his yard trying to—because my father, when they – he [Phil Brisco] refused to put a retaining wall in or to grade out his bank there, so it was just sloughing off into the sidewalk. So my father refused to let me walk down the sidewalk because he was afraid the bank would fall in on me. So I'd have to slip through Phil's yard, so I was always scared of that. [Pause] I don't remember much about that period.

BRACKEN: Do you remember taking any summer dips at Chilhowee Park? I understand that was a community center. A lot of people would ...

BONNYMAN: I remember going to the fairs out there, but that was all. I just loved to ride the rides. That was the main thing.

PIEHLER: Did you ever go to the movies in Knoxville? Early memories of movies at the theatre, the Bijou? I don't know if the Bijou or the Tennessee Theatre—I don't know which ...

BONNYMAN: The Tennessee Theatre was brand new in my day. And there was one called The Booth, which was on Cumberland Avenue down right where the University [of Tennessee] has absorbed everything. So I remember going to the movies there and at different places in town wherever there was a good one. But anyway, I don't remember a great deal about that period.

PIEHLER: Your mother was a Roman Catholic. Was your father also a Roman Catholic?

BONNYMAN: She was an Episcopalian. She was raised an Episcopalian, and then she became a Catholic after she married Dad. He was raised a Catholic and there's this small area of Scotland up on the North Sea where ... the Protestant Reformation never took hold.

PIEHLER: Really? I ...

BONNYMAN: The Duke of Gordon. Apparently he was fast on his footwork and he was able to ... keep his land and his power and keep his religion, too, which was unusual during the Reformation. But anyway, he did, and so that's where the family came from.

PIEHLER: Well, that's fascinating. I didn't know that. Which parish did you belong to growing up? Did you belong to a parish?

BONNYMAN: Immaculate Conception, the one uptown now.

PIEHLER: Okay. How active were your parents in the church?

BONNYMAN: Well, they were not big church people as such and neither have I been. You know, I haven't been much of a joiner of organizations and things.

PIEHLER: Your parents did put you in a boarding school beginning with ...

BONNYMAN: MacJanet School.

PIEHLER: MacJanet School in Saint Cloud ...

BONNYMAN: Saint Cloud. [Pronounced "Clood."]

PIEHLER: Saint Cloud, excuse me.

BONNYMAN: Saint Cloud outside Paris, a suburb of Paris. It was very interesting. I really liked the place. I had a good experience there and I learned a lot there. Really, my early recollections start pretty much on that. MacJanet was an interesting character. He had been a member of LaFayette Escadrille. You know, those were the flyers that came over [to France] during World War I, and he stayed over there. He was a mixture, like we all are, of a very nice guy, an outstanding person, and a complete scoundrel. (Laughter) Now ... he was a little of both. But ... he had a bunch of deadbeat relatives that hung around the school and he looked after them and supported them.... Oh, I didn't like him, though, as a boy. I didn't realize the good qualities he had.

PIEHLER: What, as a boy, thinking back to a boy's recollections, what didn't you like, and what was life like at the school?

BONNYMAN: Well, I remember there was something about—I was working for my Eagle Scout and I had to get people to sign off, the different masters around the school, to sign off that my conduct had been good. Old MacJanet held me up. He blackmailed me with that. (Laughter) He was trying to get some money. There had been an incident where a bunch of us were playing and we broke a window. And, you know, I was perfectly willing to pay my part of it, but he wanted me to pay my part and his two deadbeat nephews' parts, too. So he blackmailed me on that Eagle Scout thing. I finally paid up. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And did you become an Eagle Scout?

BONNYMAN: Yes.

PIEHLER: Did you do your entire Boy Scouting in France? I mean did you go from ...

BONNYMAN: Basically, most of it.... I would come back and I would go to scout camp up here at Camp Leconte. Mr. Gore, John Gore, had a camp up there and he had a regular session and then he used the camp for a scout camp. He was the Scout executive here, and a very outstanding man. His brother worked for Blue Diamond. He was the head of sales for a long time. I can't remember his last name.... But basically, most of it was done over ... in Europe.

PIEHLER: Did you have a troop in Europe? Was there a troop at the school?

BONNYMAN: Yeah, there was a troop. Well, actually there was a part of a troop at the school. We would go down to the Episcopal Cathedral in the middle of Paris about once a month. There would be a meeting of the whole troop. That was the troop. It was an American troop. And, very fortunately, I was able to go to the jamboree in Hungary.

PIEHLER: International ...

BONNYMAN: In 1933, yes, at Gödöllő, Hungary, right outside of Budapest.

PIEHLER: That must have been very exciting as a ...

BONNYMAN: It was. It was a very interesting experience and one I remember quite well. We made a side trip. We ... were sort of lost sheep. We arrived and nobody was expecting us, and they, you know, John hadn't made arrangements or anything. He just sent the master out, one of the teachers, who was also a scout leader. He just sent him out and said, "Take five or six boys and go to Hungary." So we did. We appeared and they didn't know what to do with us. So they put us out somewhere, and we ended up on KP most of the time. Kitchen police. (Laughter) I'll say this, and then we had a few side trips and we had one down on the Yugoslav border, a place called Pecs. P-E-C-S. It has an accent of some sort over the 'e'. But anyway, I remember that trip, or I remember just being terribly tired, just so exhausted. We didn't get much sleep and we were on the train and I just remember it was a very tiresome trip.

PIEHLER: But you also met scouts from different countries. What was that experience like?

BONNYMAN: That was interesting, yes, but I don't remember that much about it. I remember there was a lot of swapping of pins and things like that, of souvenirs and things of that sort, but I don't remember much about it.

PIEHLER: The school you were in. You were there in the early thirties. Do you remember the years you were in France?

BONNYMAN: Yes, it was ... the fall of 1930, and then the fall of 1931, and the early part of '32, and then '33, '34. And I came back and went to the Portsmouth Priory, which was a Benedictine school up on [the] stern and rockbound coast, on the coast of Rhode Island near Narragansett Bay. That was in the fall of 1934. But I remember some of the things about Paris ...

PIEHLER: Yes, I was going to ask you about it. You were in Europe in a very interesting time.



BONNYMAN: Oh, it was, and ... the students were fascinated because one of the teachers—it's interesting. I ran into this fellow in India, in Calcutta. I was a hospital patient in Calcutta and he came with a friend of mine and I looked at him and I said, "Your name is Downs and you taught at the MacJanet School in Paris in 1932." He said, "Who are you? How'd you know what my name was?" I told him who I was [and] he said, "You can't be that little fat boy that was...." (Laughter) I was thin and emaciated and gaunt and in bad condition physically and what not. So anyway, we got to be friends again and it was interesting. He was the one that—he told a story. He came back. He was just out of college, looking back. And he was probably twenty-two or [twenty]–three years old.... They had the Stravinsky riots in Paris.... The Place de la Concord is right down at the end of the Champs Elysses at the other end from the Etrios. So, the Chamber [of] Deputies was on the other side of the river. They had machine guns and placements set up there to protect the Chamber of Deputies, but they had the riots and the rioters ... didn't mind the police so much and they didn't mind the mounted police so much, the Guard Republican. But the one that they hated was the Guard Mobile, which was a semi-military police force and they wore hardhats, helmets, the French World War I type helmet. The crowd just hated them.

But anyway, this Downs popped up out of the subway below the surface and he came up from the side street near the Place de la Concord and he said, "First thing I knew there was a big charge of the Guard Republican. They had horses clearing the people with the flat of their sabers, smacking the people, trying to clear the streets." He said, "I ducked into the doorway and went back down into the subway and got away the hell out of there." (Laughter) But it was the very interesting.... I was eleven years old, or just turned eleven. This was in the fall of 1930. And the thing to remember about World War I was, eleven or twelve years later, some of the ground they had fought over for four years, and some of it looked like it would never be—maybe by now they've got crops, but by that time, by ten or eleven years [later].... And we went back to Europe to see the Normandy beaches with my wife's father in 1954. You couldn't find any sign of where the fighting was except the German concrete pillboxes, because it ... was warfare of movement, like the Civil War was. World War I was stagnant, and so nothing would grow. We went and visited some of the places where the British had lost, I don't know, 100,000 people ...

PIEHLER: And it still looked like they ...

BONNYMAN: It still looked like that, that's right.

PIEHLER: Like they had just fought the battle, in terms of ...

BONNYMAN: That's right. It was very vivid. I remember picking up a souvenir. I stuck it between—the old car ... was a touring car and it had fenders and a hood over the engine and then it had fenders and I stuck down between the two. That night the car broke down and they got a mechanic to ... repair the battery. I'd never heard of anybody repairing a battery before. But anyway, he got a soldering iron and he patched the battery up some way or other. While he was doing that, I was showing off this souvenir to my

friends and MacJanet came by, he said, “What do you got there, partner?” I said, “Oh, it’s a souvenir I picked up.” He said, “Let me see it.” And it looked like a tin can. It turned out it was the business end of a German potato masher hand grenade. (Laughter) And he took it from me and carefully took it out behind the garage and dumped it in the ground. I don’t know if anybody—I remember that incident very well.

PIEHLER: What did you learn in the school? I mean, what was unique about the school? Did you learn French? Was it based on an English model?

BONNYMAN: Well, it was a school for American boys, basically. The problem with the French school, the education was excellent, but they didn’t take very good care of your health. There was a boy that was a boarding student there at MacJanet’s and he was telling a story about—he had had some dental work, and he had pus running out of a tooth or something like that, so they just didn’t worry about your health and what not. So I learned French, yes. I learned a fair amount, but we spoke English among ourselves.

PIEHLER: Yes, the curriculum was in English ...

BONNYMAN: Yeah, basically it was, that’s right.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean, it wasn’t ...

BONNYMAN: You just didn’t have to speak French, no.

PIEHLER: Why did your parents pick this school?

BONNYMAN: Well, [in the] first place, my father was fifty-one years old when I was born and my mother was forty-one and they both liked to travel.... She was very much of a Francophile. She was very interested in the French and she didn’t like the English that much, but she loved Paris and she would go over there and he would travel when she’d stay the year there. One year she stayed the whole year there. Got an apartment and stayed there. He’d come over twice a year and join her. But he liked to travel around, and he was sort of a loner. He liked to travel by himself. So, anyway, that was the reason. The first year, now, my sister was seventeen and she was in the Sacred Heart School in Rome, Italy. A boarding student down there. The next year she was in some sort of art school there in Paris and we had an apartment at 24 Place Malherbes, which is not too far from Madeline Church. But it was a very plush, posh apartment, looking back on it, complete with a staff who I’m sure were chiseling a little money under the table. That was standard procedure then. But anyway, I remember that my sister got in late one night. She’d been somewhere. She was about eighteen at that point, and so my mother just had a fit over it. And she got me up.... I was home for the weekend or something. I was a boarding student during the week and I’d come home on the weekends. She got me up and she was in hysterics about Anne. Anne breezed in a little bit later and wondered what all the fuss was about. So anyway, that’s neither here nor there.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like a very vivid memory, because you weren’t very old.

BONNYMAN: No, I was barely turning twelve years old at that point.

PIEHLER: Had your sister just been out late?

BONNYMAN: She had just been out partying late.

PIEHLER: Hadn't really been watching the clock?

BONNYMAN: Yeah.... It was about one or two o'clock I think, or something like that.  
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: Any other recollections of France? Because it's such an interesting period you were in France.

BONNYMAN: Yes. Looking back, the society was—everybody was impressed with the French record in World War I, but the society as a whole had a rotten core to it.

PIEHLER: What do you mean, a rotten core?

BONNYMAN: Well, I mean what happened in World War II, the Germans just walked all over them.

PIEHLER: But, at the time, did you have any sense of this ...

BONNYMAN: No, no, no. You didn't. You didn't. I met General [Charles] DeGaulle, apparently. I was sent on an errand by my mother and he answered the door or something like that. So, I don't know. It's what I've been told. I assume that that's true. I don't know.

PIEHLER: You mentioned going to the international jamboree in Hungary. Where else did you travel in Europe, growing up?

BONNYMAN: Well, MacJanet was a real genius at getting a good deal on a package trip. For a hundred dollars he would take us for two weeks at a posh ski resort somewhere at Christmas time. For another hundred dollars, why, you'd get a two week trip to Spain or some place like that. So, we made one trip the first year, we made a trip to Chamonix, which is in the French Alps, and then the next two years we went to a place called Villa sur Pec, which is up on the mountains above Mount Tre in Switzerland. I went back with my wife about ten years ago and it had all changed. You know, nothing was the same.

PIEHLER: What had changed about it? I'm just curious.

BONNYMAN: Well, it was all built up. And, you know, there were big open spaces then. Big ski runs and whatnot, and there were no lifts for skiing. You just had to climb

the hill and then you'd slide down in a hurry. (Laughter) But there were no mechanical lifts and whatnot. It had been very commercialized and very much built up. We also went to a place in Spain that I went to, just north of—it's called Sagaro. It is north of Sant Feliu, which is north of Barcelona. It was Costa Brava, I believe it's called. Anyway, we went back to that and at this place apparently the school found it and got it when it was just opened, and they were hungry for business and they drove a hard bargain with them I'm sure. But anyway, we went back and it was built up. There were just places all around.

PIEHLER: What about Americans? You mentioned being a part of a Boy Scout troop in Paris. Were there a lot of other Americans that you remember?

BONNYMAN: I remember my mother had very little to do with the other Americans.

PIEHLER: So your mother really didn't ...

BONNYMAN: She liked the French. She liked the French, and she got into one of what the old French ladies would have, called a salon. She got into Madame Du Saint Paul's salon. And she would go there every Sunday afternoon. They'd have tea and gossip, you know. But anyway, the Americans that were over in Paris then, and I don't know whether that was true after World War II or not, but they were somewhat known as international white trash. (Laughter) You know, there were, as a matter of fact, at this school there were a couple of Gould, G-O-U-L-D boys. You remember old Jay Gould?

PIEHLER: Oh, yes.

BONNYMAN: He was one of the robber barons in the nineteenth century, and these were descendants of his. They had a lot of money but the father had a young French wife, divorced from their mother, and so they were in school, and then there was a boy that they put in as a roommate with me named Stuyvesant Wainwright from New York City. He became later a Congressman, the last I heard of him. I don't know what he does now. But his mother was a Gould, and she was divorced. She was an alcoholic, and she was married to somebody in the British cabinet, Sir Hector McNeil, I believe was the man's name. But he was someplace in the cabinet in England. But these people were sort of trashy, very much so.

PIEHLER: You sensed this even as a young boy, that ...

BONNYMAN: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: I mean, I'm sure that, looking back on it ...

BONNYMAN: ... But I sensed it at the time, that's true, because Stobby Wainwright on time—you know, they turned the lights out at such-and-such time and then we'd talk. He asked me, he said, "Do you like your stepfather?" I said, "I don't have a stepfather." He

said, “Oh, you don’t? Didn’t your mother and father divorce?” I said, “No.” (Laughter) He didn’t like his stepfather, it turned out.

PIEHLER: And to you this was very alien because your parents hadn’t divorced.

BONNYMAN: No, but that’s what I mean about international white trash. Of course, today the standards are different, so that is not a startling situation. It was then, though.

PIEHLER: How did you feel about leaving France and leaving the school? You mentioned that the school, in terms of your material comforts, was not the most comfortable school. How good was the ...

BONNYMAN: It was all right. It was all right. But looking back on it, it was an old villa that they converted into the main building, and that’s where the dormitories were and the public rooms and the dining halls and the kitchen and whatnot. Then MacJanet built some school buildings for classrooms and whatnot. It was alright. I’ll put it this way. When I got to Portsmouth Priory, I didn’t like it. That was the one, the Benedictine monastery.

PIEHLER: Yes.

BONNYMAN: I didn’t like it at all. I got off to a bad start with the people there. They had a Doctor Bateman, who was the British headmaster, and he used to beat the boys, cane ‘em. My mother told me, she said, “Gordon, you do not have to tolerate that.” [She] said, “You just walk off when he starts to cane you.” Anyway, he never did try to, but one time I got involved peripherally in sort of a flap there at the school and they tried to get me to rat on the other boys, which was a thing you just don’t do. Anyway, he called me out on the floor and he started to give me hell, so I spoke up to him. As he was sort of shooing me out of the room, as I left I said, “I want to clarify something.” And he wouldn’t listen to me, and so I never liked the damn place. Looking back, it was a much nicer place than I thought it was.

PIEHLER: How did the education compare?

BONNYMAN: Both excellent. I had an excellent education generally. Every time I changed schools, I would be ahead of the people. When I got to Princeton, ... taking freshman engineering, I was ahead of my contemporaries, which is unusual.

PIEHLER: Yes. My sense from engineers and people in sciences is that they are usually trying desperately to catch up with the curriculum in whatever school.

BONNYMAN: But they moved so damn fast, what I was doing, I was drifting along, and all of the sudden, I realized I was starting to flunk, and they caught up and passed me so fast that I was just way behind.

PIEHLER: But initially you were ahead, you were well prepared?

BONNYMAN: I was excellently prepared.

PIEHLER: You mentioned one teacher that you encountered in Calcutta, but [do] any other teachers in either school stick out in any subject?

BONNYMAN: There was a man named Halsey, who ended up at the Connecticut University for Women. I think it is now just plain Connecticut University, but anyway, it's the one that beat the Lady Vols [UT Women's Basketball Team] here.

PIEHLER: Oh, yes.

BONNYMAN: Anyway, he was very outstanding, and a very nice person, and he had a very stable marriage and a nice wife who was pregnant one year. He had a sister-in-law. She had a sister who was kind of unstable, I believe. She was a maiden woman. She was homely as hell, but I remember she had beautiful hair and she posed for her hair. They'd have some model with a good looking face and ugly hair and then they'd switch out and put this—I don't remember her name, but I know she posed with her hair for some of the artists around there. I didn't like the priory, but, looking back on it, it was a much nicer place than I thought.

PIEHLER: And the education was first ...

BONNYMAN: Excellent, excellent.

PIEHLER: And the boys who were at priory, you mentioned the international white trash in Paris, and that dovetails on the school. What about ...

BONNYMAN: There was a lot of Boston Irish, and I don't like the Boston Irish too much. There was a streak of hard-shelled Catholics, what I call hard-shelled. You know, down here we have hard-shelled Baptists, but up there they had hard-shelled, what I call hard-shelled, Catholics, and I never did like 'em very much, because one thing about being in as small a minority as you are here, you learn to be tolerant. You know, you respect other people's opinions. I've got five children and not one of them's a Catholic, but it doesn't bother me, as long as there's something. My wife and I both feel the same way about that.

PIEHLER: And you sensed the Boston Catholics were not tolerant.

BONNYMAN: No, I think they were sort of hard-shelled, yeah. Well, they support the IRA in Northern Ireland. The terrorists in Northern Ireland, they send them financial support, which I think is despicable.

PIEHLER: Why Princeton?

BONNYMAN: Well, it's interesting. My father ... wanted me to go to MIT. There was a boy a couple of years ahead of me who went to MIT and he didn't like it. He said it was known as 'The Grim Gray Factory on the Charles River.' I had seen enough of New England industrial towns where ... that turned me off. So next I was supposed to go to Yale, Sheffield Scientific School at Yale, and then they had a Father Beckley, who gave a retreat at the priory. He had been a Marine Corps chaplain in World War I and was a great guy. I guess he influenced me to go to Princeton as much as anything. I never regretted it. I thought I had died and gone to Heaven when I got there, because they treated me as an adult. At the priory they treated you like you were dirt under their feet, or six years old, or something like that ...

PIEHLER: What class were you at Princeton?

BONNYMAN: '41.

PIEHLER: I guess one question I have, even though it's sort of out of order, but I want to definitely ask you is, do you have any recollection of the Veteran's For Future Wars?

BONNYMAN: I just remember that they had such an organization, and that ...

PIEHLER: Lew Gorin, I believe it was. Lewis Gorin, G-O-R-I-N, I believe, founded it.

BONNYMAN: I don't know.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you do have a vague ...

BONNYMAN: I think it had pretty much died down by the time I got there ... but I wasn't really in the mainstream of things at Princeton because ... my theory was that if you were a liberal arts student, they started out real easy and it got harder as you went through. An engineering student, they just put your nose to the grindstone and kept it there for four years. So, I enjoyed the last two years much more than I did the first two years.

PIEHLER: So, the curriculum was very rigorous for you, it sounds like.

BONNYMAN: Yes, it was, and I was not supposed to take ROTC, but I was able to, and the dean of the engineering school—see, I had a drafting course and then I had to go to ROTC, and I had on a uniform. And the dean said, "You're going to have to get out of that."

PIEHLER: Why?

BONNYMAN: Well, they basically didn't allow engineering students to take ROTC because they said that there was too much conflict. I was supposed to have one elective, and it was supposed to be a language ... so I convinced them that I knew enough French to where they waived that, and so I was able to take ROTC.

PIEHLER: So you had also a very structured curriculum. I know a lot of people in engineering programs ...

BONNYMAN: Well, I think they've changed that now.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but in your day—you're not the first engineering student to ...

BONNYMAN: It was very structured, extremely structured. A lot of drawing. Just minutiae. You know, they don't do that anymore. I think the pendulum probably swung too far the other way with it.

PIEHLER: But still, in your day, the pendulum was—as I said, you're not the first engineer to tell me in talking about their education in the thirties and forties that ...

BONNYMAN: That's right.

PIEHLER: I guess it's interesting because Princeton, I know in this year, there were a lot of wealthy students and there was something from what I've been told, at least from the liberal arts students, that there was something of a "gentleman's C" tradition at Princeton. Is that accurate?

BONNYMAN: A gentleman's what?

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

PIEHLER: ... in the liberal arts, who didn't really apply themselves very strongly. Is that an accurate statement?

BONNYMAN: Well, let me put it this way. I had a roommate who took psychology as a major because he thought it was going to be an easy course. It turned out it was not that easy. But, like I say, they started out easy and then they got harder and harder. Then you had to write a thesis in your senior year. And at that point engineers did not have to write a thesis. They do now. But that's hard to do.

PIEHLER: Yes, now, the Princeton thesis is a very intimidating experience. How did people do with the thesis, your liberal arts people that you knew? You mentioned the one who took psychology ...

BONNYMAN: I don't know. They got by, most of them did. I never talked to any of them. I just was glad I didn't have to fool with it.

PIEHLER: Did you ever join an eating club at Princeton?



BONNYMAN: Yes, but it was what I'd call a very lower middle class eating club. It wasn't the lower class eating club, but as far as the pecking order, the social thing, it was a lower middle class. The emphasis was on good food. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... Your friends at Princeton. Were they mainly ... fellow engineering students?

BONNYMAN: Well, let me put it this way. Some of 'em were, and ... actually, I took civil engineering, because it was the easiest form of engineering. I started out in geological engineering, and they had a lot of chemistry in that, and I didn't do well in chemistry. I was ahead to start with, and they were the ones that caught up and I found myself flunking all of a sudden. I got a C average for my freshman year, but that was because I got an A the first half and barely squeaked by the second half. But anyway, ... I'm sorry, what was the question?

PIEHLER: Your friends. Did many of them come from engineering, or you mentioned ...

BONNYMAN: We had a very small group and in the last year or so, yes, we became good friends.

PIEHLER: ... I know engineers have a busy schedule. Were you involved in any campus activities? Any sports?

BONNYMAN: Not much. Not much. I'll tell you why I joined ROTC. I got to ride on the government nags, and I learned to play polo that way. I never was any good at it, but I played it, ... and if you took ROTC, at that point it was horse-drawn artillery, and we had polo ponies. So, that was ...

PIEHLER: So that was the initial inducement to join ROTC, was to ride the polo ponies?

BONNYMAN: That's right. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Had you ever played polo before?

BONNYMAN: No, I never had.

PIEHLER: So this really intrigued you to ...

BONNYMAN: Well, it intrigued me and I enjoyed it very much, and when I got in the army afterwards I played a little bit. I played it initially in 1942 at Fort Sill, and then at the end of the war, 1945, I played a little bit at Fort Riley.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you enjoyed it immensely.

BONNYMAN: Well, I did enjoy it very much, but I tried a lot of different sports because they gave the opportunity. I tried lacrosse and then I finally realized that that was hopeless, because I'd get out there about—I'd have an engineering lab and I'd get out there about an hour late, and my impression of the game was they just beat each other over the head with the lacrosse sticks. That was the main purpose of the game. I don't know, but I lasted about three weeks on that. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I guess, turning a little bit to politics, were your parents Republicans or Democrats growing up? Do you remember?

BONNYMAN: I think we'd probably call them Independents.

PIEHLER: They didn't really have strong affiliations either way?

BONNYMAN: No.

PIEHLER: What did your dad, particularly, think of Franklin Roosevelt? Did he have strong feelings either way that you can recollect?

BONNYMAN: I don't think he had strong feelings. He was not a political animal.... I don't think he approved of a lot of his economic policies. But you know, I don't think he felt one way or the other.

PIEHLER: So you wouldn't be over the dinner table with a really strong [opinion] either way?

BONNYMAN: No.

PIEHLER: I'm curious. You were in France in the early thirties ... and your mother had lived in Europe periodically. There was a lot of traveling. What did you think as you were growing up about what we now look at as the coming of World War II? Did you have any thoughts about it that you can recollect now ... [from] your thinking at the time?

BONNYMAN: No. Actually, I left Europe in 1934 and Hitler had not come to power by then.

PIEHLER: Well, he had just barely come to power.

BONNYMAN: He was just a vague threat then.

PIEHLER: Yes, yes.

BONNYMAN: It was very vague. England and France were riding the top of the wave still. The Russians, you know, the Bolsheviks, were not very popular, but I don't think there was any very strong feeling one way or the other about it.

PIEHLER: When did you have the sense that things were really heating up? Because you were in the class of '41, which we now look—you're the last peacetime class.

BONNYMAN: The last class that finished—I feel we were very fortunate, because the Depression was over. For instance, we had janitors that made our beds in the daytime, you know. You had a suite. You had a roommate, but you didn't share a room with him. You had your own little bedroom and then you had a sitting room between the two of you. I feel very fortunate ... that it was that time because the following year, the class of '42, they had some interruption.

PIEHLER: Well, things got accelerated in most colleges.

BONNYMAN: Yeah, that's right. [I'll] put it this way. The only time I was conscious of it was in ROTC. The regular army people who did the teaching, looking back on them, they were very excellent. They were the top of the line, and they said that there was going to be a war, and you and your contemporaries are going to be the company grade or the battery grade officers and the battery commanders of the army during that time. He was so right. I don't remember who said that, but ...

PIEHLER: But you distinctly remember in one of your ROTC ...

BONNYMAN: I remember it was an ROTC instructor, yes.

PIEHLER: What about fellow students? Do you remember any strong activists for intervention or against intervention at Princeton?

BONNYMAN: No, not really. I don't remember any at all.

PIEHLER: You mentioned trying a range of different sports and joining an eating club for the food, and not necessarily for the status. Any other things you remember you did for fun? Any trips to New York or Philadelphia?

BONNYMAN: Well, at that time you were not allowed to have an automobile, but I was able to swing it my junior and senior year. They organized a skeet club, shooting. I got involved in that, and I was able to get permission to have a car to haul the ammunition and the targets back and forth to the skeet range. Every once in a while I'd slip the car out of Princeton. I didn't use it to run around campus, because it was really a liability there. I kept it in a garage there, and looking back, it was dirt cheap. Everything was cheap. But I would go on trips every once in a while, and it was a big luxury then to have a car like that.

And then I worked at the mines. As part of the engineering requirements you had to work one summer, so I worked at the coal mines between my sophomore and junior year, and I bought a Model A Ford for forty dollars from a secondhand dealer up there in

Princeton. I got it home. It turned over once on the way back to Virginia. The headlights didn't work very well. You were driving in the middle of the night and just looking at the road in front of you (laughter) about half asleep and this big white post loomed up. It was a post in the center of a crossroad. It was a real hazard, looking back on it. Some of the ideas of highway engineering were just ridiculous, (laughter) but anyway, the car, I got it home, and it was beat up and had cardboard in one window where it had just turned over on its side and slid down the road. That's all it did. It didn't hurt anything. It just knocked out the glass, so I got it home and my father looked at it and he said, "Go down to the garage and get it fixed up and I'll pay for it." (Laughter) But it drove better after it had been turned over than it did before, because the front wheels and the back wheels ... had a bad shimmy. If you got over thirty-five miles an hour it started shimmying on you. A Model A Ford wouldn't go much over forty or forty-five miles an hour anyway; about forty miles an hour was about the limit. But after it turned over there was a leaf spring that held the front wheels and the bolt had sheared, and instead of making two tracks it made four tracks. The front wheels and the back wheels were like this and they were aligned improperly, so it drove much better though. It didn't shimmy. Anyway, ... as far as Princeton was concerned, they had a good set-up there, because it was a men's college at that point. It wasn't coed, but you'd have big social events and you'd bring in girls, dates, for those. I think it worked out real well.

PIEHLER: So you regularly attended the different social [functions]. What were the big highlights of the social season?

BONNYMAN: Well, what they had was they had the junior prom and then the senior prom. The junior prom was in the middle of the winter or in March. I don't remember when it was. Then the senior prom was at graduation. I never was there for that, because I'd always go home as soon as my exams were over.... They had one called "house parties," which was mainly in the eating clubs, and that was a very good event. Then ... at the club I was in was in they had what they called section parties. Now, some of the section parties were stag affairs, and they just tried to get the other students, the new ones, drunk and just staggered around. But the ones that we had, where we got permission from the university to have some dates in and they had a dance and they were watched very closely for the alcohol, so the university monitored it because they were trying to get away from these drunken brawls, and so it turned out very successful.

PIEHLER: Did you have a military ball at Princeton?

BONNYMAN: No.

PIEHLER: You don't remember going to a military ball?

BONNYMAN: No, I don't remember that.

PIEHLER: You mentioned having this job between your sophomore and junior year. What did you do in the other summers when you didn't have a job?

BONNYMAN: I have always loved to hunt, to shoot birds, and I still do. I'm not able to do it much anymore, but I still try. But anyway, I would usually take a trip to—my brother married a woman from South Texas and she had a sister who lived over on the Mexican side, and I would go to Mexico to hunt in August. And I did that even through college. I made some good friends down there.

PIEHLER: ... I take it that this job that you had to take as part of your engineering degree at Princeton. Was that your first job?

BONNYMAN: I had a job at one point in a garage here, the Kerr Motor Company, being a mechanic's helper, and it was a miserable job.

PIEHLER: When did you have that job?

BONNYMAN: I was about fifteen or sixteen years old.

PIEHLER: Why was it such a miserable job?

BONNYMAN: Well, it was hot, and it was greasy and just sticky. It was just a miserable job; that's all. And then I didn't have good work habits. When I got back out of World War II I didn't have good work habits. And that was the thing about when they called people up for the Korean War. The thing I dreaded about going in the army and the thing I think you will find is, it is "hurry up and wait." You develop very bad work habits, particularly if you are in a hospital patient for any period of time. Because you learn to kill time. You learn to just fill up your time with nothing. When you go to work for a civilian company, they put your nose to the grindstone and you are expected to stay at it, you know. But at the job at the mines, mostly we were running outcrop survey. They had gotten some new acreage and it was outside work, and it was very pleasant work. I didn't like the inside work very much.

PIEHLER: You preferred to be outside?

BONNYMAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You joined ROTC and you signed up for advanced ROTC for a commission.

BONNYMAN: Oh, yeah, I got a commission there. That's how I got in the army. I was graduated in June, and July I was called up for active duty.

PIEHLER: When you initially signed up for ROTC, you mentioned wanting to play polo. Did you expect that you'd actually be put on active duty status when you first signed up?

BONNYMAN: That would have been in '37 or '38. I would say it was not anything imminent.

PIEHLER: Were you surprised that now you were in ROTC and you were not necessarily—it was very likely earlier to be put on reserve status permanently, in a sense, and never to be called up. Were you surprised that now you were going to be, in 1941, your career option was going to be a commission in active duty service?

BONNYMAN: Well, at that point I was rather enthusiastic about the military anyway, so ...

PIEHLER: Really?

BONNYMAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What made you so enthusiastic?

BONNYMAN: Well, in the first place, we had excellent senior officers and teaching staff there, and just from what I knew of the army, I liked it.

PIEHLER: I guess one or two last questions before really talking about your early army experiences. Does any professor stick out in your mind? Favorite professors or least favorite professors at Princeton?

BONNYMAN: Yes, there were some of them in civil engineering.... My experience was that we got excellent teaching in the engineering department from the engineering professors, but that in the physics and math departments ... [Albert] Einstein had just moved to Princeton, and there were these graduate students that couldn't be less interested in teaching a sophomore or freshman course, but they had to eat. So they talked over our heads, you know, they weren't interested in really getting down to really teaching something. So, I think the ones in the engineering department were excellent. There was one named Phil Kassam. There was one named Gregory Chebitariof, who had been a third lieutenant in the Don Cossack Horse Artillery of the White Russian Army. He was a very interesting, very dry character. He taught foundation and soil mechanics and was very confident at his job. He taught me a lot about it, and stuff that we used later around the coal mines.... Kassam was sort of a typical professor type that was sort of bumbling. He couldn't add two and two and get four, but he would detail the most intricate ... railroad switch, about the trigonometry of the switch, which is fairly complicated. You know, a switch on a railroad is quite complicated. So he would get into these very technical questions and just a hundred percent, but when it came to adding numbers together, why, he just was . (Laughter) Anyway, he was excellent. There were a couple more that were very good in the engineering department. The ones in the math and physics I was not impressed with, because they talked over your head. One basic of good teaching is to be able to identify with ... the level of knowledge of the student that you are trying to get across to. I learned that, too, in India.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that these young physics teachers you were having, or really the graduate students, that there was a lot of buzz about having Einstein at Princeton. Was that ...

BONNYMAN: Oh, yes. There was a big thing. He was a big prize at that point, yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you ever spot him at Princeton?

BONNYMAN: Oh, yes. I broke an ankle. I broke a little bone in my leg when I was a freshman, so I got a car for six weeks. It was a car from home that they brought up. So I had a friend drive me around and I lived in a boarding house. I couldn't get on campus at that point. I lived in a boarding house on Mercer Street and Einstein lived on Mercer Street, and he would stumble along and [have] his head in the clouds and he would not know where he was going or anything else. He'd be thinking about all these big thoughts that he had. The fellow that was driving me around almost ran over him. I said, "Joe, don't hit Einstein! They'll lynch us! The place will lynch us if we hit him!" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I guess, as a last [question], unless there is something we forgot to ask you about Princeton, any recollections of the great football games at Palmer Stadium? Did you go?

BONNYMAN: I went fairly often, yes. I was not a football fan and am not today. I'm not a big Tennessee fan, but some of my family are. I remember one game in particular, I had decided I could get fifty-yard-line student tickets, and I scalped them. So I got in on a student pass at the end zone, and I gradually started working up at the half and got to about the forty-five yard line up in the stadium, and somebody came to claim their seat again, and it was my brother-in-law from New York City. [He was] married to my older sister. So, hell, I got involved with him. He was a real rounder. He was a womanizer and he was an alcoholic, and he was a compulsive gambler and everything else, just, whatever. So, he had a couple of floozies with him and we ended up with the floozies, taking them to dinner that night. I remember that game, but I don't remember how the game came out. (Laughter) The game was incidental to the rest of it.

PIEHLER: Well, it's a post-college experience. Do you go back to reunions at all at Princeton?

BONNYMAN: I've been only to the major reunions, but I enjoyed the twentieth and the twenty-fifth and the fortieth and the fiftieth, but I did not care much for the thirtieth or the thirty-fifth, and I didn't try the forty-fifth, and I didn't try the fifty-fifth, but I'll probably go to the sixtieth, which is next year.

PIEHLER: I want to start moving to the military.... You mentioned you had some first-rate instructors, military history and science instructors at Princeton. How useful was what you were taught at Princeton in terms of your military career?

BONNYMAN: ... Very, very useful, because the artillery ... was field artillery and the Princeton ROTC was good enough to where once you got out and got commissioned as second lieutenant, they sent you a certificate of proficiency for first lieutenant. So, it was very good. It was very practical. When I went into the military, why, the first thing they

did was send me to battery officer school in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. I did exceptionally well in gunnery, having been an engineering student, and didn't do well in some of the other courses, which is just as well because I got assigned back later as a gunnery instructor, and I really liked the gunnery. That was a wonderful experience, which I used overseas later. Anyway, it was an excellent course and it was considered outstanding at that time by the army.

PIEHLER: You were in the pre-Pearl Harbor army, which people who have reflected on that experience have said it is a very different army than when Pearl Harbor breaks out. Could you talk a little about being a junior officer in the pre-Pearl Harbor army, particularly some of the social expectations and customs of the army?

BONNYMAN: Well, actually, the social things didn't amount to much, but the ...

PIEHLER: But I've been told, for example, that you had to drop your card off at the senior officer's house and a card for each unmarried woman ...

BONNYMAN: Yeah, you went through sort of a song and dance thing. Yeah. But, see, when I went into the military, the first thing they did was send me to the battery officer school, and then I was supposed to go to the replacement training center at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, but at that point I was in love, I wanted to get married, and I wanted to get as close to where my wife lived, in Knoxville, as I could. So I ran into a fellow from Brooklyn who had been assigned to the 97<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion (Pack)... It was a mountain artillery battery with all these animals, and he was very glad to swap with me. So, you know, the whole thing about the army ... is the sergeant major goes ahead of the steps and he throws the files all down the steps and whichever step your file lands on is where you end up in. It doesn't make any difference what you want or what you're qualified for, you know. That was just the typical way of doing it. So anyway, this fellow, he was scared of animals and had never been close to a mule or a horse of anything, so I swapped with him and I ended up in the 97<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion (Pack).

PIEHLER: When did you join them? What month was that?

BONNYMAN: That was in October of 1941, and I was in that outfit when the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor.

PIEHLER: Let me let Tim get in here with some questions about ...

BONNYMAN: Let me step in the bathroom just a minute.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: I'll let Tim take over and ask some questions now.

BRACKEN: You said you were in the 97<sup>th</sup> ...



BONNYMAN: 97<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, right.

BRACKEN: Where did you all train at?

BONNYMAN: Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

BRACKEN: You were training at Fort Bragg?

BONNYMAN: Right. I joined them and they were on maneuvers. They had big maneuvers in the fall of 1941. They had one vehicle in the whole battalion. There was one command car, which belonged to the colonel, the commanding officer. Since I had just reported, they sent me out to the maneuver area. I reported a Fort Bragg and then they sent me out to the maneuver area, and I had gotten there pretty late in the day, so he [the colonel] said, “Well, just ride with me.” So, he was bragging about what a great job they all did and how the service battery had a herd of loose mules that carried supplies, and they had a bell mare. These mules ... followed the bell mare, and they had some people herding them. They were some enlisted men on mules, on animals. I think they were mules, because officers had horses, but the noncoms [noncommissioned officers] had mules, mostly. Looking back, a riding mule is a much better form of conveyance than a horse, because a damn horse—I got no respect for a horse, because a horse is a stupid animal, and a mule is smart. You know, you can ride a horse over a cliff, because they do it in the movies all the time, but a mule won’t go, because he knows it’s dangerous and he’s going to get hurt. (Laughter) So anyway—and a mule is tough. I learned this about mules. They’re smarter and they’re tougher, and a horse is sort of a stupid creature. Anyway, the colonel kept bragging about these animals and about this service battery and their loose herd, and they came out—they tried to keep them on the dirt road. It was ridiculous.

They had wooden guns for some of the infantry, wooden rifles, and ... they were using this pack battalion as the anti-tank unit! The pack howitzers were completely unsuitable for it. The country was flat, and they came out—it was mountain artillery—they came out onto the highway, U.S. 1, and went parallel to U.S. 1. They tried to keep them on the dirt roads, but they had to go for about a quarter-mile, and then they came to a cut-off on another dirt road. Well, the main line, the Atlantic coast line, went down right parallel to the thing. They had old steam engines, and the freight train came along and the engineer just saw this flickering in his lights up ahead, so he leaned on that whistle: WOO-WOO-WOO-WOO! And the mules didn’t like it a damn bit and they all took off. (Laughter) The service battery herd took off. They went back through the gun batteries.... They got loose and they just had mules scattered all over the whole damn countryside, and the colonel was kind of like this [facial expression].

PIEHLER: He was stunned.

BONNYMAN: He was not very effective, anyway. He had a fellow, a major, the battalion executive named Lynch, and his father was the chief of infantry. At that time,

they had the chief of the different services, and so he was chief of infantry. This fellow Lynch was pretty sharp, but he also ... had sort of a sour personality, and sort of a cynic. They would have a meeting and the colonel would say, "So-and-so and so-and-so. Isn't that right, Peter?" And Peter would say, "Yeah, I guess so [grudgingly]" or something like that. You know, anyway, he was smart, but he was kind of a sour guy. But they had mules scattered all over the place. I ended up in a battery and I didn't do much, looking back on it. But it was a pleasant existence.

BRACKEN: How long did you stay with that ...

BONNYMAN: I wasn't there very long because I got sent back—I guess I was there about three or four months, because I got sent back to Fort Sill to teach gunnery. It turns out that I was the head of my class in gunnery, and I almost flunked! I was able, being on the staff there later, I was able to go back and get my grades, and in gunnery I was the top of the class, and in tactics and communications and motor transport I just barely squeaked through. So, that's fine. It suited me, as long as I got by, that's all right. So anyway, I got sent back to teach gunnery and I was there from January or February of '42 until October of '42.

BRACKEN: So you were quite an asset, then. You knew exactly what you were doing, as far as—you knew the gun quite well.

BONNYMAN: Well, actually what happened—the hardest part of field artillery is to teach people to get up on their feet and conduct fire. In other words, you locate the guns in a protected place and you fire and you observe through binoculars and you adjust the fire. That is the hardest thing to do. And that was the thing that I really got a lot of at Fort Sill, at teaching gunnery, because you really learn a lot about that, and it stood me in good stead later on, a great deal.

PIEHLER: Why is it so hard? It seems sort of obvious just listening to it, but why is that so hard to ...

BONNYMAN: I don't know. You've got to make a decision immediately, and you've got to be right. You've got to be over or short, or you've got to give a command to correct the thing. I don't know. It just is hard to stand on your feet and do it. It's like giving commands. You are drilling people, which is hard to do. The 97<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, I don't remember too much about it, except I remember the first sergeant in the battery, and his name was Sergeant Brooks. And he was not a big man. He was kind of wiry, and the minimum height at that point in the pack artillery was five foot ten, because they had to walk a little faster and they had to handle loads and whatnot, and I guess Sergeant Brooks just barely qualified. But anyway, he had a voice like a whip, though, and I looked back and I learned right quick that the way to get along in the army was to listen to the old NCOs [noncommissioned officers]. He'd say, "Lieutenant, you know, so-and-so and so-and-so ..." and I'd say, "Yes, Sergeant Brooks," whatever it was. And I listened to him, and it paid off, too, because I got along all right. But he had a saying. He said, "I never talk to a private except to give him an order." You're talking about the

old army. This was old army. See, the 97<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion had been a battalion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, which was an old regular army outfit, and I think that they'd been in the Philippines at one point.

I know there was a story that went around about the—you know, at that time, the battery commander, the company commander, had to sign for everything that belonged to the battery and all of the equipment and everything else. So that if some of it was lost when he got transferred, it came out of his pay. That was the theory. Well, there was a story about this pack artillery battalion in the Philippines, and they had a mule go over the side of a cliff somewhere. It fell a thousand feet and killed him, and they lost all the load. They couldn't even get to it, so they surveyed it. That was a legitimate accident, so they could do what they called "survey" at that time, and that meant that the battery commander did not have to pay for it. So, they sent the survey in about the mule and his load, and they came back about a month later and somebody in the quartermaster department wanted to know [about] the breeding certificate on the mule. They said, "What do you want that for? The mule is sterile anyway. There is no hope of progeny. You are not going to breed the mule. What do you want with it?" He said, "Oh, well, we just want to know where the mule came from, because we want more like him. Because our records show that the mule was carrying five thousand pounds and he was only supposed to carry five hundred pounds." They had surveyed everything the company had lost for the past ten, fifteen years! So, anyway, that's the old army game.

BRACKEN: Did your experience as being an instructor at Fort Sill, did that land you in Burma?

BONNYMAN: Well, it landed me in India. First I was sent to a place called Ramgar, which was a training camp in India. It was an old British Italian prisoner of war camp. The British set it up as a prisoner of war camp for the Italians they captured in North Africa. The junior officers occupied the quarters that had been designed for the noncommissioned officers of the British army, the guards. I got bored there, and the artillery didn't do anything. You talk about "hurry up and wait," that was the waiting part, and I was restless and I was sort of a nonconformist anyway, and finally they transferred me over to sort of a catch-all department, and the first thing they did was to give me a job that nobody else wanted. It was to teach a ... Chinese quartermaster pack regiment how to pack ... mules and animals, and instead of decent mules they got the sweepings of India. The British furnished them with the stuff, and then they had Tonga ponies, you know, pulling the carriages and whatnot, and they had a just awful collection [of animals]. One animal, I remember, was so mean; he had a worm swimming around in his eye. He had a white eye and a dark eye. [He was] blind in one eye, and he had a worm swimming around in there. Every once in a while that worm would come to the front and kind of look at you, and you couldn't get close to this animal. (Laughter)

But anyway, I was sent over there, and was supposed to teach them a Philips cargo hitch, which was something the cavalry was proud of. I went to a friend of mine who had been in the 4<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery or some old [unit], some captain who had been in it. I said, "Would you show me how to do the simplest hitch?" and he said, "The squaw hitch is the

easiest.” It turned out the squaw hitch was—I never saw anything but a squaw hitch used in practical experience. Everything was used with a squaw hitch. Anyway, it was something simple, and I was able to learn it, and I was able to teach it to the Chinese. Well, they had the Chinese minister of war [who] came down to review the troops, so the quartermaster pack regiment went through the routine of packing the animals and they didn’t make a mistake. So, all of the sudden the job that I was the first lieutenant holding became a call for major, and it became a desirable job. Well, I didn’t have the inside track, so I got shuffled off somewhere else. Then the colonel in command of the thing, he was from Nashville, Tennessee. I remember him well. Campbell Brown was his name. He called me in and he said, “Bonnyman, there’s been a little flap up in the jungle.” He said, “They’ve got a requisition from this group [for] one officer, a young, energetic, and able-bodied, who wants to volunteer to go in the jungle. Do you want to volunteer?” I looked at him and said, “Colonel, you know I don’t care if I go to the jungle or not. You know I don’t like it around here, but I’m not volunteering to go anywhere!” So he did the tick-pull army thing....

Well, the way I got to be a captain was because he volunteered me and put me in for promotion. That was the way, if you had nothing against somebody, professionally, that’s the way you got rid of them. You volunteered them and you shipped them out and put them in for promotion. So, that’s how I go to be a captain. So, I was sent—the first thing in the jungle, I ... was put with the Chinese engineering company that was supposed to improve the trail. Well, hell, they improved the trail, but it was ridiculous. They did improve the trail, but the first time somebody came over it, another unit walked over it in the rainy season, it just ended up being mud and slush anyway, so it didn’t make any difference.

BRACKEN: With you engineering background, did you try to communicate with them and tell them how ...

BONNYMAN: No, hell, no. I knew by that time there wasn’t any use. (Laughter) They were going to do it their own damn way. Looking back on them, they were nothing but labor troops. That was what they were. They were laborers. Anyway, so I was called back in. They got through with the project they were working on, and I went back down to headquarters and hung around there for a while, and then there was a quartermaster mortar transport battalion, a Chinese battalion, and they were located, and they had recruited—there were very few Chinese who knew how to drive a vehicle, so they were very much in demand. Well, they recruited these people and most of them were bandits and smugglers from the first Burma Road. You know, they had driven on the Burma Road back before World War II, and so, one of these drivers had a Thompson submachine gun and he ran amok. He killed a lieutenant platoon leader and he tried to kill his company commander. The company commander took off, as discretion got the better of valor, and he took off into the jungle and got away. (Laughter) Anyway, there was an American with the unit, a Captain Zust, and he had worked for one of the automobile companies and he was older than the rest of us. You know, most of us were under twenty-five and he was in his thirties, and ... the Chinese had threatened him with an ax, one of them had a hatchet or ax, and he [Zust] pulled a pistol on him, a .45

[caliber] pistol. So, he got in trouble. The Chinese didn't get in trouble for threatening him, but he got in trouble. Anyway, it was too much for him. He went blind in one eye and they couldn't find anything wrong with his eyesight. They came to the conclusion that it was psychosomatic. His mind just couldn't stand it any longer.

So, I was sent over to take his place. (Laughter) I got a lot of these little cute assignments. But anyway, he had an interpreter named Richard Wong, and he was an overseas Chinese. The Chinese-Chinese hated the overseas Chinese. They just despised them. I don't know why, but they just hated anyone that had emigrated from China, and this one came from Singapore, or somewhere down there in Malaya. But anyway, Richard and I got along fine, and Zust and Richard had built a camp isolated from the unit, and it was back in the jungle. It was back in the rainforest jungle. It's kind of like the Smoky Mountains, but this was flat in this particular area, down before the mountain started. They had built a camp back there and they had a tent and a little cooking area and whatnot, with a latrine. So I moved in there with Richard and we got along fine, no problem. I got along fine with the Chinese, because I decided I wasn't going to carry a pistol.

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

PIEHLER: ... This continues an interview with G. Gordon Bonnyman on April 20, 2000 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

BRACKEN: Tim Bracken.

PIEHLER: And unfortunately, the tape just ran out and you said you didn't carry a pistol, but you were describing what you did carry for self-defense.

BONNYMAN: I carried a kukri, which is a Gurkha knife.... It had a curved blade and it was short handled. And the blade was about, oh, fifteen to eighteen inches long, and it was a good chopping knife. Anyway, I carried it for protection, I assume, but the only—I got along fine with the Chinese. I didn't have any trouble at all. The only problem was that this camp was down at low ground and I would go in and take a bath in the creek close by, right at dusk, and that was fine, except I caught a real bad case of malaria. And the incidence of malaria at that point was about ninety percent. Eighty-five or ninety percent of the Americans caught malaria that were in that area. So the next year, they had been spraying the swamps and I thought they were just pissing in the wind, frankly. But it turned out that they had cut the incidence down to less than fifty percent, so it had done some good.

PIEHLER: So, that DDT spraying really did work?

BONNYMAN: It really did work. I was surprised at it, really. But anyway, I got along fine until I got malaria, and I just vaguely remember going to the hospital and there weren't any beds in the officers' ward and they said, "We got to put you in the enlisted men's' ward. We'll move you when we can." And I didn't care. At that point I just felt

so awful. So I woke up four days later in the officers' ward. I don't know what happened those four days. My fever must have spiked at 103 or something like that.... So, anyway, I was in the officers' ward, and at that point, they gave you a course of ... quinine for so many days, and then Atabrine for so many days, and then some stuff called Plasmocin for so many days, and the Plasmocin would kill the bug, but the Atabrine and the quinine would not. It would still stay in your system. It would suppress it, but it wouldn't kill it. The Plasmocin, they stopped using it a year later, or when I got [malaria] again, when I got back from overseas. The Plasmocin would cause sickle-cell anemia with some of the black troops, so they stopped giving it. It killed some of them. So anyway, when I got it again, it kept on for about five years after World War II.

But the interesting thing in the hospital, finally this major came to see me, and he ... had been sent over to the motor transport battalion. And at that point, the battalion commander, the Chinese lieutenant colonel in command, was so scared of the drivers that he never would come out of his tent. He wouldn't come out to go to the latrine out of his tent. He would have them bring a bucket in to him. And so he had a guard with a submachine gun patrolling around, walking around the tent twenty-four hours a day. So anyway, this major, this American major, he had a motor transport background. I had no motor transport experience at all, and, like I say, I almost flunked the course when I took it at Fort Sill a couple of years before. But this major came to see me and he said, "Oh, will you be out of the hospital soon?" He said, "I've been sent over there and you'll be under me." And I said, "That's fine." I said, "Where are you located? Is Richard around? Where's Richard?" He'd never heard of Richard. What had happened was, the rumor was that the Chinese had gotten after Richard. They started shooting up the camp and Richard hid down the latrine hole and waited until they got away and then he went to the G-2 at the headquarters, the American G-2 and got assigned as far away as he could get, which was a place called Chimbiang. It was down right at the edge of the valley at Burma. It was right through the mountains. But anyway, this American major said, "Oh, no, I'm in with the Fifth Company." I said, "The Fifth Company?" The Chinese did not use letters on their companies like the Americans did.... I said, "That's the worst bunch of reprobates in the whole Chinese army. They're the ones that killed the lieutenant and tried to kill the company commander." Well, he said, "I don't know anything about that." I said, "What about the captain that was in command of the company?" He said, "They got a major in there now as company commander."

Well, I moved in with him, when I got out of the hospital, and ... this Chinese major was very nice and very gracious and we had a tent set up right next to his and whatnot, and they had the formation in the morning. They had a reveille formation and they got up and he [the Chinese major] started making a speech, a longwinded speech, which they love to do. I turned to the interpreter and said, "What's he saying now?" "Oh, he's saying that he wishes to be a father to them, and that they need to be sure that they obey him" and this that and the other. And I thought to myself, "This bunch of bastards! You can't appeal to them like that." I found out that night at retreat ceremony how it worked. He had them eating out of his hand. What happened was, in the Chinese army, the warrant officers are the ones that do all the dirty work, and so there was a burly warrant officer [that] pulled this guy out and his hands were tied in front of him, and [he] tied him up to a

stake and just took a bamboo pole and beat the hell out of him that night. He got all through, and the major got up and he said, “Now, I’m sure the rest of you, everybody wants to be a son to me” and this that and the other, and they were eating out of his hand. He just beat the hell out of them, and that was typical treatment in the Chinese army.

At one time, when I was teaching the quartermaster pack regiment at Ramgar, a mule kicked one of these soldiers and broke his leg, or did something to his ankle or leg. It hurt like hell. I could tell that.... I had a motorcycle at that point. I had to learn to ride one. I put him in the sidecar of the motorcycle and was going to drive him to the doctor. The Chinese did not like to have their soldiers taken to the hospital, because they’d lose them, because they didn’t have serial numbers, so, you know, they only had about twenty-five or thirty family names in China. Lee and Wong and Liu and Liao and a few others, and so they’d lose them and they’d go out to another unit, or they’d stay at the hospital. They liked it there. So I put this fellow in the sidecar and somebody got him out and they were running him up and down, making him walk on the [leg]. “Yah! Yah! Yah!” That’s the way they’d yell.... And he was yelling because the thing was hurting like hell and they were just laughing and the colonel was laughing, and the whole crowd of them just laughing. So I thought, “It’s not up to me to straighten this thing out.”

So anyway, going back to this quartermaster motor regiment—and at the time that I first went over there, most of the trucks were deadlined because the drivers would get tired of driving, so they would cut the brake lines and drain the fluid out on the ground and then there was a big shortage of brake fluid, hydraulic fluid in that whole area. The American units didn’t have it and nobody else had it. But that was the typical Chinese approach to things. But anyway, this ... Chinese major, he had them eating out of his hand. Then, I hadn’t been over there, but about two weeks and they had a killing out at one of these outposts out in the mountains. An American sergeant had been killed, shot, by a Chinese sentry, and the question was, was it murder or was it an accident? So they sent an investigating team of two American officers and two Chinese officers, and the American investigating team, I was put on it. I was very much the junior member. I was a captain at that point, a junior captain, and they [had] two Chinese lieutenant colonels. Fortunately, the American major, I thought he was an old man at the time. He was probably in his thirties. He was somebody who had been on Wall Street. I remember that about him. Anyway, he was in charge of it. I was under him, so—nice guy, but anyway, I don’t remember much about him. But we ran into these two Chinese lieutenant colonels on the first night on the trail going out there. We had to walk two or three weeks to get there to this place. But anyway, we had plenty of porters, which were natives they’d hire to carry your luggage and carry your stuff. We had plenty of porters, and the Chinese, they would not let ‘em have porters, because they had started out letting them have them and they’d beat them, when they didn’t like something they were doing or they wanted more work out of them. They’d beat them. So the British complained about it, and so they just set up a policy that no Chinese can have a porter. So we had plenty of porters and we carried some of the stuff for these [Chinese]. They had one orderly and the poor guy was loaded down. I mean, you talk about a pack mule with five thousand pounds on him, this guy had about five hundred to a thousands pounds on him.

But anyway, we made friends with these two Chinese lieutenants colonels, one of whom had been educated in the United States, at VMI [Virginia Military Institute], I believe it was. Spoke perfect English. The other one didn't speak English. Anyway, we got out to this place called Hpatchet Hi and it was at five thousand feet. I loved it. I was told to go out there on an investigating team and to stay there. So I kept getting all these little dirty jobs. Anyway, the investigation was interesting. Everybody's story agreed until the first shot was fired, and then no two stories were the same. You know, we'd question one person, then we'd go and question somebody else. After the first shot was fired, no two stories kept the same. The big flap was not over the shooting, because we never did find out, nothing conclusive about the shooting. It had been done down in a Nogha village.

There were two of these noncommissioned officers, and the two of them, they were both blacks, black quartermaster soldiers, and they found out that what happened was, they had put out American troops, American quartermasters to handle the airdrop. All supplies were dropped by air from the airplanes, and when we got up to the jungle, they did a very, very smart thing. They made us go and handle the cargo on a plane, DC-3, and we began to learn a little bit about what they were up against from the air, trying to find these drop fields. Anyway, I ran into Colonel Seagraves, lieutenant colonel in the American army, Gordon Seagraves. He wrote a book called The Burma Surgeon. He was an American missionary and he set up a—but that's another story. But anyway, the investigation, it was rather complex, but the main thrust of the thing was that the Chinese had killed a pig that belonged to the Noghas. They killed it with a bayonet and there was a big flap over that, and this was at a Nogha village and they had an outpost at the Nogha village. And the Chinese would build what I called "castle in the air." They'd build a fortification. Instead of digging a hole in the ground, they'd build it up. They'd put in a wall, a double wall, and pack earth in between. It was a dead suit for an explosive shell, but for small arms, it would turn them all right. In China, they were probably effective, but the trouble, over there in north Burma, is they had something like three hundred inches of rainfall a year, and the stuff would ooze out and it would come out the bottom. (Laughter) It wouldn't have any dirt in between.

Anyway, a big flap over this, and it was a very complicated negotiation, because you had a nurse, a Burmese nurse, on the Seagraves unit that would translate from Jingpao, which is Kuchin language, into English. Then we had to have somebody translate from English into Chinese and then back again. So, it was a very complicated three-way proposition. So, the Noghas wanted to get paid for the pig, and the Chinese didn't want to pay them. Well, we told the Chinese colonel, you know, the policy of the American government is to get along with these natives. They could do us a lot of harm. So the Chinese finally agreed to pay for the pig, and then they said, "Where is the meat?" Well, the pig had been dead for two weeks in the tropics, but the Nogha head man clapped his hand and a woman came out, and he sent her back in the back and she brought out one slab of meat. That was all that was left of the pig, and it was grey and green and it was nasty. It stunk like hell. They said, "Where's the rest of the pig?" [The Noghas said], "Oh, we ate it. It was going bad and we ate it." [The Chinese said], "Well, we're not going to pay for a pig that you ate!" So we started all over again in the negotiations. (Laughter) So, anyway, the poor sergeant that got killed, he got lost in the shuffle in the pig controversy.



PIEHLER: Well, what did happen to the—to the best of your knowledge, what did you figure out had happened to sergeant?

BONNYMAN: At that time, I thought it was an accident. Later, when I was with the same group of Chinese, I wasn't so sure, because I saw what they did to their own wounded.

PIEHLER: What was your hunch afterward? What did you think did happen to him, the sergeant?

BONNYMAN: I don't know.

PIEHLER: Why would they have reason ...

BONNYMAN: I don't really have an opinion. But ... I was convinced it was an accident, and the American lieutenant, who was what they call a liaison officer with this Chinese unit, he had gotten hysterical and he was sending off these radio messages that didn't make sense, so they told me to stay, so I stayed with them. And I really enjoyed it at Hpatchet Hi, because it was above the mosquito line. You didn't have to worry about mosquitoes and malaria, and I had a shotgun and a few shells. Shells were hard to come by, and I had some British hand grenades, which I found were better for fishing than TNT blocks (laughter), because the British hand grenades were much more effective than our hand grenades, because they had TNT in them, and you'd drop them in the water and they'd go WOOMP!, and they'd just stun the fish. They wouldn't kill them. The TNT blocks would blow the damn things, and they'd just kill them. You know, it really was better just stunning them, because we got down later to a river and we found a boat, a couple of boats, and we'd go out in the boat and throw in some grenades and then swim after the fish. You'd see a big fish in front of you, just sitting there, stunned. You grab him real quick. You touch him, he'd dart off. You learned to grab him and throw him in the boat real quick. But anyway, we ate fresh fish for a while. You know, I got put with this Chinese infantry company, and I didn't know anything about infantry, but on the other hand, I knew as much as the Chinese did. The Chinese soldier was basically a good soldier. He was tough. Those people are tough like we never will be tough.

BRACKEN: The 38<sup>th</sup> Division?

BONNYMAN: Huh?

BRACKEN: You were attached to the 38<sup>th</sup>?

BONNYMAN: Yeah, this was the 112<sup>th</sup> Regiment, which was part of the 38<sup>th</sup> Division. 112<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, and you could always tell what division a Chinese unit was in, because you take the division number and multiply it by three and then deduct. Let's see, 38 times 3 is 116. I'm wrong.... It was 114, and then you deduct one, 113, and two

would be the 112<sup>th</sup>. This was part of the 112<sup>th</sup> Regiment, and the battalion commander's name was Major Chen. That's a wild story, but anyway ...

PIEHLER: Please tell it.

BONNYMAN: Well, Major Chen woke up dead one morning. (Laughter) And what happened to Major Chen became a big mystery in both armies. Anyway, this was several months later after this investigation. But what happened was I stayed out there, and it was really a very pleasant place. I really liked it because, like I say, it was above the mosquito line and I didn't have much to do. I didn't have any brass staring down my throat.

PIEHLER: You were sort of out by yourself.

BONNYMAN: I was out by myself, and there was an air warning group there. The Air Force had put an air warning [group]. They put about ten men, heavily armed with nothing but small arms at a group, and when a Japanese plane would come over, they'd radio in and they'd follow the planes that way. They called them the air warning stations. There was that, and there was Seagraves' hospital unit, and then there was a Chinese reinforced company with a machine gun section or platoon. There was a Chinese company with a machine gun section or platoon. I'm not sure to which it was attached. So anyway, it was a very pleasant life up there. Then the Chinese moved off. They got orders to go and they moved down towards the Japanese and I didn't know what to do, so I just sat there. So I radioed back to base and said, "What are my orders?" And they said, "Go join your unit." So I went down.... I traveled down and joined this unit, and the battalion had dug in on a hill. They had an objective where two rivers came together, but the Chinese battalion commander would not go down there. He dug in on the first hill back toward the mountains, and he sent a company down there. This company had come in at Hpatchet Hi, and they occupied this area and this is where we fished out of the boat. It was a big river at that point. One evening they decided to pull up and pull out and go back to the battalion. The first action I was in was there, because they got ambushed on the trail, and looking back, they completely went to pieces. The officers, the company commander, who had a hot shot reputation, the company commander lost control completely. They'd come up with the baseplate of a mortar and then they couldn't find the tube. And then they'd find the tube and the baseplate and they couldn't find any mortar shells. They just fell apart. And there was machine gun fire coming down the trail from here, and then there was more coming up the trail from somewhere else. So, I think what they'd run into was one coming across the river, because the trail ran right along the river. Looking back, I think what it was, they ran into two combat patrols, because the firing died out and the Japanese could have wiped them out, but they didn't and they pulled out eventually, and the Chinese went back to the position where they had abandoned. They'd been dug in there and they had holes and everything, so they filled that position. So the company commander called me over that evening.... There were three Americans. There were two aid men and myself. The sergeant was killed, one of the Americans was killed, and the other one—and I patched up the Chinese that were hurt. There was one officer, one lieutenant, who, he had a hole through one

wrist and then a bad wound on the inside of his thigh. I think probably a mortar fragment or something. Anyway, I think they took good care of him, and he died. I think he died from his wounds, because he was pretty seriously injured. Then there were two of them that had been bent over moving around, and they'd been hit by glancing bows in the back by, obviously, machine gun or rifle fire, because one of them had—they'd gone in and they just skimmed along.... One of them had come out and he had some pink lung tissue exposed. It's a lighter color than the rest of the meat. So the other one, it smashed his shoulder blade. Now the one with the shoulder blade smashed might have died. There was another one that was shot. The bullet went in here and came out right down there. He was disabled, but it was not fatal by any stretch of the imagination. He disappeared during the night. I think somebody knocked him in the head. That's my own theory. That's when I began to be suspicious of them.

BRACKEN: You think the Chinese didn't want to deal with their own wounded, so they ...

BONNYMAN: I think so, yeah. And so we dubbed this one with the pink lung tissue, we dubbed him One Lung Pete. One Lung Pete walked for four days. We were cut off for four days with no food, and he walked the whole way. And there was a sergeant, who carried normally a submachine gun, and he had been hit in the arm, and ... the upper part of his arm looked alright, and his hand looked alright, but this part looked like hamburger. Now, all we'd know to do was to strap his arm, put sulfa powder on it and strap it to his body like this. He came by three days later and stunk like hell, and I thought, "Uh-oh, we've let this thing get infected." We finally got back to the battalion several days later, and they said "No." It turned out it was fine. [They said], "It was the best thing you could have done. Changing the dressing too regularly would have been bad for it." So I learned right then, don't mess with a bad abrasion, just leave it alone ... if it's not infected. So anyway, the lieutenant at daybreak—we started out at midnight and they stayed off the trails. They started chopping their way through the jungle. Now, you got to understand the undergrowth is so heavy it doesn't die down once a year, like it does in the Smokies. Very similar to the Smokies in terrain, steep terrain, but the jungle just grows and grows, but you don't have thorns in it. But you got to chop your way, and it's very slow going if you're not following a definite trail. So anyway, I got suspicious about—I told this Corporal Taylor who was with me, he had a submachine gun, I said, "Taylor, if I tell you," I said some sort of password, I said, "You let loose with the submachine gun." I didn't know what the Chinese were going to do to us. They took very good care of us, actually. I said, "You just cut loose with that submachine gun and just go downhill. When you get to the river, turn upriver, and I'll meet you along the river somewhere. I'm going to head for the jungle, too."

PIEHLER: And the corporal that was assigned, was he an orderly, an aide for you, or ...

BONNYMAN: No, he was an aid man. He was a trained medical.

PIEHLER: Trained medical, but he carried a weapon.

BONNYMAN: Everybody carried a weapon in those days.

PIEHLER: Medics carried ...

BONNYMAN: Oh, yeah, because, you know, the Japanese never signed any Geneva Convention, and it didn't make any difference to them, so everyone carried a weapon. So anyway, he had a Thompson submachine gun, and I just said, "Cut loose with it and just take off and go downhill until you get to the river and then turn upriver." Well, actually, they were very nice to us and what they'd do is once a day at noon—and they were used to starving.... A few soldiers had a bag with rice in it, dry rice that was like a bandolier. It was a tube and it fitted around their shoulder like this.... Not everybody had them, but a certain number had them, and they would empty two or three of those. They'd empty several of them and cook up a big pot of rice at noon each day, and they gave us some rice, and I had some chocolate bars which I shared with Taylor. And I gave him his. I told him, "This is it. This is all the food you're going to get." And so, I never did get terribly hungry. I've been without food, but I didn't get terribly hungry until I ran out of chocolate. The old D-ration. I don't know if they still got them. Do they still have them?

BRACKEN: They're called MREs, but ...

PIEHLER: They're much better than what you had to eat. Having had one—not that they're great, but compared to the ...

BONNYMAN: Actually, the thing that would kill you was the K-ration. That was the dehydrated rations, but those things, you couldn't live on them for long. But anyway, the Chinese were very nice to us, and we got back eventually. After four days, we got back to the battalion. It was three and a half—it was about the middle of the day one day, and we had—but this sergeant that had the arm, he carried a submachine gun normally, but that's a very awkward sort of weapon, and so he swapped it with somebody for a rifle, and he carried that rifle for four days with that arm mangled up like that. That's what I mean about those people being tough. They are tough. They've had generations and generations of being tough. It's just been bred into them. But I'd heard that theory from a man who was [an] ROTC instructor at Princeton. He was talking about the Russians and the Poles.... This was right at my senior year, and they had moved out the regular army instructors and they were putting them in more active units, and they had brought in as a reserve. This man had been in the reserves, but he had stayed active and he had been in the army at the end of World War I. He had gone to Poland, to Warsaw. General [Maxime] Weygand was sent to Warsaw to help the Poles when the Red Army was attacking Warsaw, so he went and he gave the dispositions of what they all should do. I want to say as students we would get this colonel, he was so interesting to talk to. We'd get him talking instead of giving what he was supposed to teach us. (Laughter) Anyway, General Weygand went to tell the Poles what to do, and he told them, "You put this unit there and that there, and this position." He said, "I'm ready to go back to Paris. They said, "Aren't you going to wait and see if your plan works or not? Aren't you going to stay here with us?" "No," he said, "If you follow my instructions, you will win. If you

do not follow them, you will lose.” Typical French attitude. He went back to Paris and they won. So that’s why Poland was an independent country ... between World War II and World War I....

We got back to battalion and Major Chen was a real horse’s ass.... There was a medical unit from the 73<sup>rd</sup> Evacuation Hospital, which had been sponsored by—now, what would happen is a hospital, like the UT Hospital here, would sponsor a unit, an evacuation hospital or a general hospital, and the 73<sup>rd</sup> had sent two doctors out with this Chinese battalion and they were actually operating on wounded people when they were mortaring. So they told the battalion commander, they said, “We’re going to have to have some protection,” so they dug them a dugout, and they would operate in the dugout. Anyway, at that point, they had learned that what you do, you do not put one American out by himself with a Chinese unit. They’d put out an officer and then two or three noncoms or enlisted men. Just to give you somebody that you could depend on. Don’t misunderstand me: the Chinese soldier was an excellent soldier. He was tough. Defensively, he couldn’t be beat anywhere. You take an American unit, you they go somewhere, and you tell them to dig in, they’ll dig a hole. They’ll sit in that hole for a week or two weeks. They won’t change the hole. At least that’s the experience that I saw. But a Chinese unit, the first thing they did the hole, the first day. The second day, they connect the holes with shallow trenches. Then they put in a trench system. Eventually, they will have covered dugouts for machine guns. They’ll have overhead things for protection against mortar or artillery fire. They’ll just keep digging and digging and digging! They just keep on doing it and they’ll put up a barrier in front and they would put in a punji bed. Punji is a sharpened bamboo stick that you jab in the ground, and it will go through the sole of a boot or a shoe. It is very crippling to somebody, particularly if you put it in a pit. And I’ve stepped in one of those pits, but fortunately, I realized what it was and I threw myself back and I caught on the edge of it. But anyway, the Chinese were excellent defensive soldiers, but they were not very aggressive, and eventually the American troops had ... scouts ahead of them and they used Chinese units to come up.

PIEHLER: It sounds like the—if I could just interrupt, because we just love your stories. But it sounds like the problem wasn’t really with the soldiers, but with the officers. With their leadership.

BONNYMAN: Yeah, their leadership was modest, to put it mildly. To give you an idea, now there is big talk about the big threat that Red China is. Maybe Red China is a big threat. I don’t know. I’m not up to date on that. But, I’ll say this, that the Chinese within their culture were very backward people. The Chinese that came to America were very smart, aggressive, intelligent people, and they’ve excelled. They have done very well in our economy. To give you an illustration of the culture, Madame Chiang Kai-shek had Roosevelt’s ear. She had a lot of influence over him. She wanted air protection for the Chinese army, which they did not have, against the Japanese. They sent Chennault and started the 10<sup>th</sup> Air Force.... Then, the next thing she wanted, she wanted the Chinese to have their air force, so they gave them some airplanes. Well, they couldn’t fly them. So they took some of the junior officers, the younger officers, and

they brought them over to the United States and ran them through training over here. They turned out very, very well and they were well qualified. The only problem was, when they got back to China, they grounded them, because ... a major or a lieutenant colonel or a colonel didn't want a lieutenant to be able to fly better than they could. That was the typical attitude of the Chinese. That's why I say, within their culture, they are a very backward people. Outside of their culture, they are very smart, talented people. Napoleon said it. I've heard him quoted as saying, "Let China sleep. When she awakens, the world will regret it." I think he's got a good point there. So, Major Chen—we sat on this hill from early in November ...

PIEHLER: November of forty- ...

BONNYMAN: '43, until January of '44. Two or three months, we were on this hill. And the doctors, they had their dugout at that point, and they slept down there, on the operating table, probably. And I had a sergeant with me then, I think, and we had a slightly—we had a shack that was built over a place that ... wasn't really a trench or anything, but it was just a little place where the ground was dug out a little bit. So anyway, we would get up early and the doctors were a little bit later, and so one morning, right at daybreak, why, the doctors came up and they both sat down with big eyes, and one of them said, "Major Chen is dead." I said, "Fine. What happened to the old bastard?" The old bastard probably being around forty, but anyway. So they said, "Well, they called us in the middle of the night. The interpreter called us and they said, 'Major Chen has been wounded.' We went there and Major Chen, the whole side of him had been blown off with a grenade, with an explosive." So, it turns out, ... he said, "Nobody was looking. I picked this up off the floor." He handed it to me. It was the flip lever, the cocking lever, off of a British hand grenade, Mills Bomb, which was standard issue. And, like I say, they were much better, more effective grenades than the American [grenades]. Anyway, they tried to put out a story that Major Chen had been killed by a mortar shell, but hell, he had a damn dugout that had logs and dirt, about six feet of logs and dirt over him, and he had a zig-jag in the entrance, and he had bench cut out and he had an air hole up at the end. Somebody had just dropped a grenade down the air hole. (Laughter) Anyway, when I built a dugout later on, I put a jog in my air hole. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Learning from first-hand experience.

BONNYMAN: Right, right. (Laughter) But anyway, the story was, "What happened to Major Chen?" Well, they tried to put out a story, but they buried Major Chen. Then, about three days later, they dug him up again. And back up in the hills, they issued a lot of kerosene because they had kerosene lanterns, but down at the front, you couldn't use lights, or down near where the Japanese were subject to be. So they took Major Chen and they built a big pyre and they burned his body and they scratched around and got some ashes, and the interpreter came to the doctors and said, "Captain Ewing," he said, "we would like to have a bottle." [Ewing replied], "Well, Mr. Liau, we'll be glad to give you a bottle. We get a lot of bottles in here of medicines and plasma and whatnot. Tell me what size you need." So finally, he said, "What are you going to do with the bottle,

so we can get you the right size and shape?” [They said], “We are going to put Major Chen in the bottle.”

Now, the rumor has it that Major—I know from experience that when General Sun would set up his headquarters someplace—you know, he was the division commander, Sun Li-Riu. When General Sun would set up his headquarters, he would set up a little shack. They’d build a table in the middle and they’d have a bench on either side of it, or seats, and so he would invite you in and they’d have a bench on either side of it or seats, and so he would invite you in and they’d give you unsweetened green tea. That was the standard procedure. I’ve had it several times. One time I’ve had it with General Sun. I don’t remember what the occasion was, but anyway, rumor has it that when he called in one of his regimental commander who had goofed up some way or another, he’d say “Colonel So-and-So,” he said, “I know you would not bring disgrace upon your unit and on the 38<sup>th</sup> Division and on the Kuomintang and on the motherland of China,” and he’d put Major Chen in the bottle right between them. I don’t know. That makes sense to me, because the regimental adjutant, the Fu Guan came down and he stayed about two days and he and the – they had a dual chain of command in the Chinese army, like the Russians. You know, they had commissars, and they had ...

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

PIEHLER: ... structure much like the Russian, Soviet army?

BONNYMAN: Right, yeah.

PIEHLER: And the political officers were called ...

BONNYMAN: Political officer or educational officer, he was called a political officer, and I asked what he did, and he said he makes the soldiers think straight. (Laughter) That’s what they said. But anyway, the regimental adjutant of the 112<sup>th</sup> Regiment came down and he was cloistered with this educational officer for a couple of days and then he disappeared again. And then this American lieutenant colonel, who’d been on this investigating committee, he came down with the Chinese colonel that had been on the investigating committee. No, the American lieutenant colonel had not. He was the G-2 back at headquarters. They came in. They found out Major Chen was dead. They turned around and went back. They’d walked three or four weeks to get where they come to and they stayed all of two hours. So anyway, the interesting follow up on that thing is that at the end of the war, I was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas and ... you know, you stand around a lot. I was teaching tank gunnery. I had never been on a tank before, but that’s alright. (Laughter) They were teaching them how to conduct fire, these motorized cavalry officers. So anyway, I was standing around and there was this lieutenant, and I got to talking to him, and he said, “Where were you?” And I said, “Oh, I was over in India and Burma,” and I said, “Where were you?” And he said, “Oh, I was, too.” And so he tried to—I said, “Where were you?” and he tried to give me where he was, and he asked me where I was, and he said, “Oh, I know who you are. You’re the one that killed that Chinese major, aren’t you?” And you know, I looked at him and I said to him, “Hell

no, I didn't kill that Chinese major!" I never did convince him, because we saw him socially that night and he looked at my wife kind of funny, [as if to say] "You're married to someone who committed murder!" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But that was the rumor that was circulating?

BONNYMAN: That was the rumor that circulated, right. But anyway, Major Chen went to his reward, whatever that was.

PIEHLER: And then who took over the unit, and how long did you remain with that unit after Major Chen had gotten ...

BONNYMAN: I didn't stay very long. I don't remember. I don't remember who took it over. He had a second-in-command and I think he was a captain, I'm not sure. But anyway, he had a second-in-command that took over immediately, and then I don't know what they finally did. The rumor was that he'd gotten in trouble because of some sugar. The Chinese were great on stealing things. They had lived off the land, and you know, they had no system of supply. They lived off the land, so they would steal anything that wasn't nailed down. And the story goes that this unit was a long time at a place called Khalakga, and that Major Chen had a basha built for him there, a building, a shack, and then they were stealing sugar and that he was a part of that, that he would have people steal for him, and they'd stored it up above the ceiling on this, and it got wet and then it collapsed. The rainy season came and the sugar got heavy and the ceiling collapsed, and he was in trouble over that. And there was another rumor that he didn't go ahead and go where he was supposed to, didn't send his unit where he was supposed to, back there at Taro Valley, but I don't know which it was. That's just rumor. So he definitely was—there was somewhere that he was in trouble on, and the story that we got was that he could not be removed from command or touched in any other way besides getting him out of the way. You know, a final solution, because he was a member of the revenue guard that had put Chiang Kai-shek in power back in the early to middle thirties. You know, the Green Gang, the gangsters of Shanghai, and the revenue guard were supposed to have put him in power, and he [Major Chen] could always appeal over somebody else's head to the generalissimo. And that was another rumor. I don't know whether there is any truth to that or not, but you know, you live on rumors in the military anyway, 'cause you haven't got anything else to do a lot of times.

PIEHLER: So what happened to you next? What happened when you left, because you said you didn't remain with the unit very long after Major Chen ...

BONNYMAN: Yeah, I got put in with an artillery unit with the 38<sup>th</sup> Division, and then they went into division reserve at one point, and I was there for a while, and then they got—this would probably have been—I was there from February and March of 1944, and then they called me one day and had me report.... The American unit, the 5307 Composite Unit, which was later labeled by the press Merrill's Marauders, they had two pack howitzers dropped to them to relieve—they had a battalion trapped in a place called Napumga. They had two pack howitzers dropped to them, and they had some enlisted



and some noncoms from the 98<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, because what had happened was, this unit, the American unit, one battalion came from the U.S., one battalion came from Panama, the second battalion. The third battalion was recruited out of the troops in the South Pacific ... and that was the one that they had broke through to. The second battalion was trapped, and they broke through and they couldn't do it with the light weapons they had, so they dropped a couple of pack howitzers, and they had—there was a sergeant named John Acker who first took command. He was a staff sergeant, and he was in charge. There was enough technical side to the artillery, they said they needed an officer to go over and look at it and see what the story was. And so, I went and I got tapped for that. Then, the question was, did I want to stay? And you know, I said, "Yeah." I'd do anything to get away from the Chinese at that point. I was sick and tired of them. But anyway, we formed a battery, because that is the smallest tactical unit, or smallest administrative unit that you can really have, so I said, "Well, that's fine. We'll form a battery." And we were sort of half a battery, really.

PIEHLER: So, how many men?

BONNYMAN: There were fifty men, and you know, looking back on that whole episode, the big thing was how unhealthy the climate was. I look back, and to give you an illustration, out of the fifty men, I was wounded two and a half months later at a place called Michenau in North Burma, and out of the fifty men original, there were two of us left. I was the first battle casualty.

PIEHLER: So you lost forty-seven ...

BONNYMAN: Forty-eight men, roughly forty-eight men.

PIEHLER: From disease.

BONNYMAN: From disease and malnutrition and whatnot. Yeah.

BRACKEN: Was this the offensive of February to October, I think it was? The offensive south? Were you all moving south?

BONNYMAN: No, we were moving east. We were moving east, and this was the following year. They sent an American brigade, which had two regiments, the 124<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and there was an infantry regiment, called the Mars Task Force. They moved south. They moved east and south, but we had moved mostly east. But anyway, like I say, it was just an unhealthy place.

PIEHLER: ... Since you're reflecting on how unhealthy a place [it was], could you—Tim and I were talking, in fact, about what your experiences must have been like. I've read, in fact, disease was a real problem. Could you give a little impression at this point, when you are with [the] Marauders, what conditions were like, both in terms of health, but food and supplies and just daily routine?

BONNYMAN: In the first place, you were always—you were sort of on the verge of starvation. We had enough food, but we just adjust. Disease was a real problem, and the main thing I see, looking back on jungle warfare, was, it had been compared to the war—what was the war in colonial times, 1760? The French and Indian War. It was compared to that, and there is some truth in that, because it was mostly, the big thing that I look back on and see is, there was a lot of movement and there'd be a skirmish here and a skirmish there and a skirmish somewhere else, but there wouldn't be a lot of heavy fighting somewhere.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you were, in many ways, more fighting the jungle.

BONNYMAN: Yeah, yeah, that's true, and it was hard living. That was the main thing.

PIEHLER: Well, for example, when you said—what kind of food would you get?

BONNYMAN: Well, the trouble was that they gave us K-rations, and they're dehydrated food, and you can only take so much of that. And then it got to the point where they had one unit, they had some biscuits in there and they were kind of greasy biscuits, and then they'd come out and it was in a waxed box. It was waterproof. There wasn't any problem with getting them soaked, and you could build a good fire with that waxed box. But you get to the point where ... they had a little can of meat or cheese or something like that in there. You could open—I remember one of them was called “corn pork loaf with carrots and apple flakes.” And some of those units, you could open them and wave them under my nose, and I'd start throwing up. You get to that point, and it's true of the greasy biscuits, too. We had generally enough food, but I got to the point where at Michenau, I would do mostly forward observing. I would always make it a point to go get—I would get a lot of forward observing for the Chinese and I'd make it a point to get there when they got fed, twice a day. They got hot food. A Chinese company had roughly 180, 190 men. They had ten or fifteen cooks. The cooks were not soldiers, they were coolies. If a soldier got wounded and his rifle was surplus, they would not give it to a cook. They let the cooks have hand grenades, and I want to say that some of the cooks were just one step above being a moron. (Laughter) Generally, the Chinese soldiers would have their head shaved. One of them had a lumpy sort of head and sort of a silly grin on his face and he walked around the camp down there in Taro Valley, where Major Chen got it, he'd walk around with two hand grenades with the pins pulled out of them, the safety pins pulled out of them, just holding down the [grips]. You see, you've got a safety pin and then you've got a flip lever that comes up like that and arms it.

PIEHLER: Yes.

BONNYMAN: When you throw it, why, that's supposed to arm it, but anyway, he'd just stand around like that. Anyway, if he'd stumbled, why, he'd have blown himself and everything in the area to kingdom come. But anyway ... I don't know. Where was I? I ramble a lot.

PIEHLER: Well, we were talking about food and how bad—and you, in fact, wanted to be a forward observer because you got to eat some of the ...

BONNYMAN: Yeah, I did a lot of forward observing when I was down at Michenau and I'd make a point to get to the Chinese units when their hot food would come up to the front. See, what would happen is, the Japanese had the same system, and I spotted some Jap positions from the air.... I'd go to the main field at Michenau and catch one of these liaison planes that was picking up the wounded and taking them out, and I'd catch it and ask the pilot if he wanted to do—they were tired of just flying back and forth, you know, shuttling, so they were always interested in doing it. We went up one day, I remember it very well. We were flying fairly low and I had binoculars and I was in the back seat or front seat, wherever the passenger rode, and I was looking down, and we just saw holes. There was holes dug everywhere. Everybody dug holes. It didn't mean a damn thing. You had to see if the holes were occupied, so we went out and we had had a mule collapse on the trail and that was the main thing that I look back on. It was just exhausting. You're just exhausted the whole time, and then the water—you had the canteen, and you were supposed to put a Halazone tablet in water and they made the water taste horrible. Finally, I came to a spring that came out of a rock, and the water was cool and clear and I just drank it like hell. Turned out there was a Nogha village up the hill that had been shitting on the damn—it had seeped down through, and so anyway, I caught the ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You caught a bug from that.

BONNYMAN: Yeah, I got bad then. But anyway ...

PIEHLER: I also imagine that you were wet all the time.

BONNYMAN: Huh?

PIEHLER: Was that the case? Where you always wet in the field? I mean, because you mentioned earlier that Burma has three hundred inches of rain.

BONNYMAN: Yeah, you were wet most of the time. Put it this way. I tried letting my clothes dry on me after a rain one time, and I found I got prickly heat pretty badly, so I learned not to do that. To pull the clothes off, and then dry your skin, and then dry the clothes.... But the K-rations—actually what happened was, I was sick enough to get evacuated, but there wasn't anybody to take my place, and so I stayed with it, and I would go up at Michenau, what happened is they took the airfield, and then the Japs were holed up in the town, so it got to be static warfare. They were bringing in American troops, and it was ridiculous some of the things they did. They'd set up what they called casual companies, you know, just for administrative purposes, going overseas. These people were replacements that were supposed to be worked in and they were casual companies, and they said, "This is a company just for administrative purposes." Then they got them over there over there and they said, "Now you're a tactical company." And so they had no training. They didn't know how to load a rifle. It was ridiculous. But a

good soldier's always got some stuff he's not supposed to have, so I would go—nobody wore any rank or insignia or anything like that, so ... there was a pile, where the people that had been evacuated would dump their equipment, rifles, and I got to the point where I would pick up a rifle when I would go forward observing and then I would put it back in the pile when I got back. And I kept another one at the gun position. I got sick enough where I slept in a jungle hammock, because I could stay dry that way. They had a little roof over you.

PIEHLER: But also, if you were attacked, you were exposed, sleeping in this hammock.

BONNYMAN: Very much so. Very much so.

PIEHLER: I mean, you're very ...

BONNYMAN: Very exposed, and I dug a trench under it and I had a rifle slung under the thing, so I could just roll out the side of the mosquito net.

PIEHLER: Nonetheless, if there is an attack, you may be the first casualty.

BONNYMAN: That's right. So anyway, I learned something about—one night, I learned something about shooting yourself in the foot, though, because, you know, the soldier that shoots himself in the foot, a self-inflicted wound is a real ticket to a court martial, and you get no veteran's benefits. You're just a pariah from there on, and what would happen is these people would shoot themselves in the foot and they wouldn't realize that a high powered rifle would do as much damage to the foot, as delicate a piece of equipment as it is. There's a lot of bones, so they'd end up with a mangled foot. One night, I was sleeping in this hammock, and I heard a boom, sort of muffled. Then I heard Somebody go "Oww, oww." I was about ready to roll out of the hammock into the hole and finally I realized ... what it was. So that guy, what happened is, the medics would always get them to admit it, because they would be surprised at how badly the foot was mangled up and once you got that on your evacuation tag, you were dead meat.

PIEHLER: What happened then?

BONNYMAN: Well, you would be a pariah and you would get a dishonorable discharge, and you know, whatever went with it. Anyway, going back to the food, what I would do is, I'd take an entrenching shovel and I'd go up to some of these people sitting around that were ... these replacements, and I'd say, "Anybody got any canned milk?" They'd look at me and they'd say, suspicious as hell, "Why you want to know? What for?" I'd say, "I'll swap you this entrenching shovel for two cans of milk." The shovel didn't belong to me, and they weren't supposed to have the milk anyway. And I did all right. I started getting better.... I'd gotten so weak I couldn't walk across the airfield to the hospital unit to get my pills. I'd have to sit down part way. So, anyway, but I got better, and you learned to sort of get along on things like that.

PIEHLER: How was discipline overall with the Marauders?

BONNYMAN: Lousy. Let me put it this way. I felt that they were good troops to command in action, but they would have been hell to fool with back in garrison duty. They just were trouble from the beginning.

BRACKEN: Was there a sense in the Marauders that it was Frank Merrill's army and not Uncle Sam's army, because they were so detached.

BONNYMAN: I never saw Frank Merrill. I never saw him and I was with the unit for two and a half months. He had heart trouble, and he would keep getting evacuated, and there was a Colonel Charles N. Hunter who really commanded the unit and he was a very excellent officer. He was the top of the line as far as I'm concerned. I never saw Merrill.

BRACKEN: But was there that sense that this army was ... kind of doing its own thing, independent of the U.S. army?

BONNYMAN: I don't know that that's—I wouldn't say that, but I do know that they had a bad reputation wherever they went after they got out of Burma. You know, there'd be a small detachment of them here and a small detachment of them there, and they stayed in trouble with the MPs all the time. I don't know that it was attitude like that, but Colonel Hunter was outstanding and he got his career blighted because he stood up to the brass on evacuating these people. There's a new book out. My wife just got a copy yesterday, about Merrill's Marauders. It's written by James Hopkins, and John M. Jones is collaborating on it. John M. Jones lives in Greeneville, and Hopkins is one of the Johns Hopkins people. Excuse me, I'm going to the bathroom again.

(Tape paused)

PIEHLER: You had mentioned about—this colonel had his career blighted and a new book came out.

BONNYMAN: Well, I haven't read the book. It's a big fat book. It's written by Hopkins, who was the medical doctor. He was one of the Johns Hopkins family, the Hopkins of the Johns Hopkins, and he was the doctor with the third battalion. John M. Jones lives up in Greenville and he is the publisher of the paper up there and he was a major in charge of the rear echelon. I met him at the time, you know, when I went over there. So, I haven't read the book, but I'm sure it's well qualified. I can tell Hopkins didn't like [General Joseph] Stillwell. You know, my impression of Stillwell is he was a good general, good tactician. The main criticism I'd have of Stillwell is that he would put up with incompetent people under him, and he would get his favorites and they would get ahead. Anyway, Hopkins stood up to him and [that] doesn't get you anywhere in the army.

PIEHLER: I'm curious: is there a memorable experience or a very close call in terms of ... combat? Because you mentioned your first incidence of being under fire.

BONNYMAN: Yeah, probably that was the most dangerous situation I was in, but I was wounded at Michenau and I got hit with mortar shell. My theory was, I never fired a small arms at a Japanese. My theory was I that I was much more effective at the end of a telephone line with a couple of cannons back there throwing explosive shells at them. Directing the fire. And so what happened was, we had accumulated a bunch of ammunition.... At Michenau, in spite of everything they could do, they couldn't hold the troops up there, the original trained troops, because they were just melting away because of the disease factor, and so they threw in some combat engineers that had had some infantry training back at basic training, but they had been building roads for two or three years, so they had forgotten a great deal of it. They were thrown in as infantry troops and they threw in these casual companies and said, "You are now a tactical company." I got to the point where I got more antagonistic towards the rear echelon, the brass, than I did towards the Japanese, really.

PIEHLER: ... It sounds like you were really angry at the situation at the time. Is that a fair ...

BONNYMAN: Well, put it this way. That time where we went out and we saw nothing going out and then coming back the Japanese had started cooking fires. We saw columns of smoke all over this valley and we got down low to the ground and I started looking with field glasses and I saw a Jap standing in the shadow of a tree. [The] thing to realize is that if somebody's in the bright sunlight, if you get in the shadow, in the shade, you're about as hidden as you're going to be. And that is the best hiding you can do. Anyway, so we located these Japanese and I went back and I called the intelligence officer back at base, somebody I knew, a major that I knew, and I told him about it, and so he said, "That's not possible." I pointed out on an air photo where he was. He said, "That's not possible. Our spies tell us that so-and-so and so-and-so." I thought, "Hell. Damn spies. Most of them are natives and they are opium smokers and the Japs give the opium and they spy on the Americans, and the Americans give them opium and they spy on the Japs. Anybody [that] gives them the most opium, they're going to tell them what they want to hear, or what they think they want to hear...." He said, "That's not possible." I said, "Well, come out and look at the airplane. There's a couple of bullet holes in the wings." He wouldn't do it. So, I got to the point where I really took a dislike to him. Anyway, you sit around, you know what I mean, you sit around and you grouse about everything, and you complain about everything and it's something you're unhappy about all the time.

PIEHLER: Though it does sound like you had some things to really be unhappy about. I mean, this doesn't ...

BONNYMAN: Well, but you know, when you're young, you're adaptable ... and you're strong, and once I got over this dysentery that I had pretty bad coming to Michenau, why, once I got settled down on that, I was doing all right. And then I got wounded. I suppose that I was—I got shot in the lung. I was hit by a tree burst of mortar fire, and we had saved up ammunition and we were going to soften up the Japanese position in front of us, this engineer company. I heard a bang behind me and I looked back and didn't see anything, and I went back just for curiosity, just to see what the hell was going on, and

about that time, WHAM! One hit the tree right behind me and there I went on the ground. Anyway, that probably was as threatening a situation ...

PIEHLER: In fact, you were wounded.

BONNYMAN: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: How long did it take to evacuate you? Where did you go next?

BONNYMAN: Oh, I was close to a battalion aid station and ... the amazing thing was ... I was in shock. And you feel like you're dead or dying, and then when I got back to a battalion aid station, they gave me plasma, and that brought me out of shock and that was just like bringing me back to life. It was terrific. And then they took me from battalion aid station to a field hospital close to the gun position, and the doctor in charge, I knew him personally, because he was a friend of mine. You know, we didn't have anything to do, we'd just hang around in the evening. So, he came to me and he said, "I'm going to let so-and-so, Captain So-and-so, work on you if it's all right, because you have a very simple case. I've got a man here who's been shot in the penis," and he said, "It's a very delicate operation. I think I'd better do it." So, I said, "You go ahead, Doc, and you handle him. You take care of him because I'm all right." So, I wasn't all right, it turned out, but what happened was, I was very fortunate, because most of the wounded got hauled by bullock cart from there eight miles over to the airstrip for eventual evacuation. I started having trouble breathing, so they had a bunch of coolies carry me on a litter, which was a much easier ride. You know, I was very fortunate there. So, you talk about where was the most threatening, probably that was it, because one of the fragments had hit me in the back. I had several hit me there. One of them went in my right lung, close to my backbone. I was worried about being paralyzed and whatnot, and when I was down on the ground, I started kicking my legs around, making sure I could move them. And they thought I'd been hurt in the leg, the people with me.

PIEHLER: And so you were carried to the airfield and then flown out?

BONNYMAN: I was flown to the 73<sup>rd</sup> Evacuation Hospital and then I got flown back to the 20<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, which was back at Lido in India ... and it had a big hot-shot reputation, which I did not think was—I didn't like it much.

PIEHLER: What was the hot-shot reputation?

BONNYMAN: Well, it was the University of Pennsylvania Medical School, they sponsored it and they had a Colonel Ravin, who was commanding officer. He was bucking for brigadier general and he was involved in some of the business of sending the wounded back into action. I think he was.

PIEHLER: You mean rushing them back, rushing them through the system?

BONNYMAN: Yeah. Matter of fact, I know there was some of that. I got put on duty twenty-nine days after I was wounded. Shot in the lung.

PIEHLER: That seems pretty quick for a lung. I mean, I don't know a lot about medicine or the army, but that seems—lungs are fairly serious.

BONNYMAN: Yeah, that's right. I think it was serious.... I'll tell you the most obvious example, though, was that I got on a convalescent ward and there wasn't a nurse on duty. So, being bored, I'd go down and read the charts at the end of the hall in the evening.

PIEHLER: You *were* bored.

BONNYMAN: Yeah, so I'd read the charts. There was an infantry captain, a company commander, who had been shot in the shoulder. He could raise it—I asked him to do it—and he could raise his arm this high with it bent [gesturing]. He could raise it this high with it straight out [gesturing]. The damn doctor had filled in his chart five days ahead of time. In other words, say this was the first day of August, he had filled it in through the fifth day of August, and he said, "Subject has recovered one hundred percent use of the shoulder joint. Discharged to duty." So, I didn't like the 20<sup>th</sup> General [Hospital] very much.

BRACKEN: Were these doctors regular army or were they ...

BONNYMAN: I don't know. I don't think so. I think they came from the hospital unit. But anyway, I had sort of a cynical outlook on some of the people.

PIEHLER: So, you were discharged after twenty-nine days.

BONNYMAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Where did you go then?

BONNYMAN: Well, I was given leave and I wanted to go to the mountains. I wanted to get out of the heat. It was the middle of the summer in the tropics.

PIEHLER: This was the summer of 1944?

BONNYMAN: Yeah. Anyway, it was miserable. Anyway, this was the end of July, so I started out and I got as far as Calcutta. Got a ride on an airplane to Calcutta, and then I never got out of the hotel room in Calcutta, and then I finally went into the station hospital there and they sent me back to the States as a hospital patient.

PIEHLER: So, in other words, you were clearly discharged prematurely.



BONNYMAN: I think so. That's my own opinion. I think I antagonized the doctor because he come looking for me and I was restless and I'd be gone from the ward, wherever he was looking. So, anyway, that's the story.

PIEHLER: When did you come back to the States? When did you arrive back?

BONNYMAN: In September of '44. Some time in September, I'm not sure when.... When you travel as a hospital patient, at night—see, the planes would fly in the daytime, and at night they'd put you in a hospital unit—and the first thing they'd do is stick a thermometer in your mouth. And so, you know, hell, we were all convalescent. “Forget it. Forget it.” We got back. I got as far as Nashville, Tennessee and I came up with a one hundred and a half or 101, so they said, “You got a temperature.” I said, “Oh,” and I looked at the thermometer and sure enough, I did. So they said, “What have you been exposed to?” Well, I thought of all the horrible tropical diseases that were there, and there was a bunch of them, and I thought of filariasis. Do you know what that is?

PIEHLER: No.

BONNYMAN: It's caused by a day-biting mosquito. They're mostly in the Fiji Islands, and it causes elephantiasis. You know, your limbs swell up.

PIEHLER: That I've heard, yeah.

BONNYMAN: Your balls swell up, and so anyway, they—I said “filariasis,” so they looked it up in a tropical medicine thing and it said take a blood sample after the subject has been asleep for so many hours, so in the middle of the night, they woke me up and stuck my finger and I went back to sleep. And the next afternoon, they said, “Pack your things. You're going to the isolation ward.” I said, “What have I got?” They said, “Malaria.” I said, “Malaria is not catching.” [They said], “Do what you're told; pack your things. You're going to the isolation ward.” Do you know why they took me there? They were taking my blood out of me and infecting these people that ... had neurosyphilis. They had syphilis that had not been treated in the bloodstream. It had got in the spinal column and the only way they had been able to treat it at that time—I don't know whether there's anything subsequent or not—was to let the temperature go to one hundred two and a half, or go above one hundred two for so many hours without treatment and then it would burn it out. And they were taking blood out of me. And I never did like the Thayer General Hospital in Nashville for that reason.

PIEHLER: So you were a blood supply for them?

BONNYMAN: That was my interpretation that put on it.

PIEHLER: Yeah, because malaria isn't catching.

BONNYMAN: No, hell, no, it isn't catching. You catch it from a mosquito. It is to the extent ...

PIEHLER: Yes, in that sense it is, but not back in the States.

BONNYMAN: No. But anyway, you know, if you get me on the subject of socialized medicine, I say in the army I got socialized medicine in spades. Some of it's good, some of it's poor. You got no control over it at all, you know? If you get poor treatment, you just have to grin and bear it if you get bad treatment. You know, if you get good treatment, that's fine. I think I got good and bad.

PIEHLER: How long did you remain in Nashville at the hospital?

BONNYMAN: I got out about the end of January, so I was there about four months.

PIEHLER: And where did you go then, after ...

BONNYMAN: I was sent to Fort Riley, Kansas, and they put me first in the department of horsemanship to teach mule packing, (lowering voice to a whisper) I never did know that much about mule packing. (Laughter) The commanding officer of the department of horsemanship was a man who I knew over in Burma named Danny Still. He and I became good friends, but I didn't like him over in Burma. So he came in to see me when I came down with malaria again. I'd get it about once a month. I came down with it when I first got there, and he came to the hospital to see me. He said, "You know, you've got to get this stuff regulated. I need people I can count on." And the only people that were working hard, the war was winding down at that point, the only people who were working hard were the department of horsemanship, because they were spending two weeks in a row out on the range at Fort Riley in the middle of the winter. And the wind blows out there, you know. So I didn't want any part of that. So I scouted around and I finally found a slot in the weapons department teaching tank gunnery. I didn't admit I'd never ridden on a tank before. But that's all right. But it was a good post and a good slot, and I enjoyed it.

PIEHLER: And how long did you remain at this post?

BONNYMAN: I was there about seven or eight months. What happened was, they first came out with a point system. You got out based on the number of points you get, so much for how many times overseas, so much so many years in the army, and so much for decorations, so much for this, that and the other, and so I had about 110 points. Well, the first people they let out, the first standard was 140. The second one I came out. I qualified. I don't remember what I had, but it was 110 or 120. The second one, I came out. I qualified. They sent me over to a processing unit that they had set up to get people out. By the time I left, they had gotten down to about fifty points.

PIEHLER: How long were you in the processing unit?

BONNYMAN: A couple of months. That's typical of the way the military works. You know what I mean.

PIEHLER: You were just ...

BONNYMAN: Hurry up and wait.

PIEHLER: So you literally were waiting.

BONNYMAN: Oh, there was no question of waiting.

PIEHLER: I mean, what did you do to kill the time, and where was the processing center where you were waiting?

BONNYMAN: The processing center was right there at Fort Riley. No, you know, it wasn't like I had been shipped somewhere.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but you were waiting for your paperwork to ...

BONNYMAN: Yeah, to get done. That's just typical military. I'd say a couple of months. It might have been a month. I'm not sure what it was.

PIEHLER: But it wasn't two or three days?

BONNYMAN: No, no, hell, no. Nothing was two, three days. They called people up. I had joined the reserves and I tried their correspondence course and I flubbed it. I tried a couple of meetings and they were terribly boring, and so I was put on the inactive reserve, but they had my name and address. So when the Korean War started, why, they called a bunch of people in and they gave them physical exams. They took them up to the Acuff Clinic. Do you remember ...

PIEHLER: No, I'm new to Knoxville, so I don't ...

BONNYMAN: Well, it was a place up here. He was one of the first people to start a group practice, and they ran people around and gave them a physical exam, and I remember there was a fellow named Harry Jenkins that I knew. He was a lieutenant colonel in the reserves and he called everybody up and when they got through you went before this group. And he said, "Gordon," he said, "I'm going to give you a break. I'm going to mark you down as unfit for duty." And you know the thing that worried me the most about going back in the military at the time of the Korean War? By that time, I had learned work habits and when I got out of the army, I had very poor work habits, and uh ...

PIEHLER: Well, you had mentioned that, and I guess the impression I always had was that the army teaches you such good discipline that you would have good work habits.

BONNYMAN: Nah, nah.

PIEHLER: No, that's not ...

BONNYMAN: Nah, it didn't with me, because you work in spasms. You work hard now, and hurry up and wait. Particularly if you're a hospital patient, you learn to kill time. You just do nothing. There's nothing to do all day and when the end of the day is, you haven't done it. Anyway, but that worried me more about being called back in the military than anything else, was that ... by that time, I had learned some work habits, and the idea of going back to this "hurry up and wait" business worried me.

PIEHLER: I want to ask you a few general questions about your military experiences and one—just before we resumed taping, you said you did have a lot of respect for the Japanese soldier. Not that you loved the Japanese soldier ...

BONNYMAN: Yeah, they were very good soldiers. They were very effective soldiers, but they were like ...

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with G. Gordon Bonnyman on April 20, 2000 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

BRACKEN: Tim Bracken.

PIEHLER: And you were saying that the Japanese soldier also was just like any other soldier in a sense.

BONNYMAN: He'd get sick or starved and isolated from his unit.... A few that I saw were as meek as lambs.... When I got to the 20<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, I went up to the headquarters there at Lido, where I'd been stationed at one point, and I had some stuff there in storage, and so I came up to the headquarters and I saw this stockade out here with barbed-wire fence, and I looked at it and there was a slouchy guard inside the fence with a bunch of Japanese prisoners, with a gun.... There was a Lieutenant Colonel Slatery, I believe his name was, Slater or something like that. But anyway, he had been a tech sergeant in the old army, and they'd made him a lieutenant colonel. He was an adjutant, and I complained to him. I said, "Colonel, it's ridiculous, this guard is inside this fence with these prisoners." He said, "Ah, they don't want to go anywhere," and they didn't. And there was an officer with them, which I thought was a very stupid thing to do. But anyway, the Japanese soldiers ... were dedicated. They were good. They were particularly good, I think, in jungle warfare.

BRACKEN: The 18<sup>th</sup> Japanese [Division], in a book that I checked out, they called the 18<sup>th</sup> Japanese [Division] a crack outfit. Do you agree with that?

BONNYMAN: Yeah, probably.

BRACKEN: Those were who the Marauders primarily went up against?

BONNYMAN: Yeah, the 18<sup>th</sup> Division was the one that occupied north Burma. I think they were very good troops.

PIEHLER: What about when you were out in Burma, how often would you get mail from home?

BONNYMAN: It was sort of quixotic. I came in out of the jungle in the middle of the winter between 1943 and 1944. I don't know whether it was the end of December or whether it was the first of January, when it was. But anyway, there was a hell of a big bunch of packages my family had sent me. They had stale cookies. I remember there was just a tremendous number of stale cookies. They were seriously stale, too. Anyway, but the thing that would do the best would be the V-mail, which was not very satisfactory because everybody read your letters.

PIEHLER: Well, they were on microfilm ...

BONNYMAN: Yeah, that's right. We got it fairly often. I'll tell you, one time, when I was down at this place in the Taro Valley, when Major Chen got killed, we were back of beyond. I mean, you talk about isolated, it'd be like the headquarters was up at Gatlinburg, and we would be the other side of the mountains on the North Carolina side at Cherokee or somewhere down in there, but anyway, these two Nogha porters appeared down the trail, and they had a—there was a lot of parachute cloth and so everybody used parachute cloth for everything—and they had a big bag around their shoulders, a parachute cloth bag, and so they were interested to see somebody, and it turned out they were looking for me, and they got very suspicious when I said, "I'm the one." They had a piece of paper with my name written. They couldn't read or write, needless to say. They got very suspicious, but what it was was a bottle of gin and a bottle of bourbon. It was my ration from somewhere. And you know at that point, when you're hungry, you crave sugar. I crave sugar. You don't want alcohol. Anyway, that was the ...

PIEHLER: Your liquor ration had arrived. (Laughter)

BONNYMAN: My liquor ration had arrived. We had a British, I think we got a British liquor ration or something like that, or maybe I left money with the PX. I don't know where. I think it came from the PX. When I went out in the jungle, I left money with the PX. But anyway ...

PIEHLER: ... When you were with the Marauders, were there any chaplains attached, do you remember, or any services, religious services, at all, [during the] time you were attached to the Marauders?

BONNYMAN: I never saw any, but I'm sure there were some.

PIEHLER: Uh huh, but you never went or saw a chaplain?

BONNYMAN: No, I never saw one.

PIEHLER: Particularly when you were attached to the Chinese, you were very much isolated and you've talked about your isolation. How much did you know about what was going on with the war in China, Burma, India, and just the larger war in the Pacific and in Europe? What did you know?

BONNYMAN: Well, you would get, say, a month or two months old magazines every once in a while. You didn't know up to date, but you'd know generally what things ...

PIEHLER: But often very old. It sounds like you were a month or two behind.

BONNYMAN: Yeah, very definitely that. When I came in, in the end of '43, early '44, I came to a place called Chimbiang, and I had a big jag of mail and stuff there, and I had a notification that my brother had been killed.

PIEHLER: Why don't we take a [break] ...

(Tape paused)

BONNYMAN: ... about my brother, who was killed at Tarawa. As far as I'm concerned, you know, the war was—it was a different experience, and it was a difficult experience in some ways, but, you know, it wasn't that bad. It wasn't like in World War I, where they were in the trenches, and just people getting blown apart all the time and everything. This was mostly, like I say, there would be a skirmish here and a skirmish there, a lot of hard work and walking and distances and things in between, mostly.

PIEHLER: I'm almost reluctant to trigger a bad memory here, and I feel sorry, but since it is partly for the historical record, but also for your family, could you maybe reflect on some of your happy memories of your brother before you went off to war?

BONNYMAN: Well, he was ten years, nine and a half years older than I was. He was very successful in a lot of ways. Academically, he didn't do well. He flunked out of Princeton, but he made his football letter his sophomore year, which was unusual. And at that point, they wouldn't allow you to play as a freshman. But he was a reckless sort of person, and he married a tramp. When I say tramp, I think that was a fair—I think that was a polite, fair reference. Anyway, he joined the Marine Corps at thirty-two, went through boot camp, got a field commission on Guadalcanal and then he got killed at Tarawa.

(Tape paused)

PIEHLER: You mentioned that it took you several years to get over your malaria.

BONNYMAN: Yeah, it took four or five years.

PIEHLER: When did you finally ...

BONNYMAN: About 1949 or something. I'd say around '49 or '50. It got down to the point where I would have it every thirty days, and then it got down to the point where I'd just get a headache about that time. I don't know, but anyway, it finally wore itself out.

PIEHLER: You mentioned you stayed in the reserves but eventually, in inactive reserves ...

BONNYMAN: For a short period.

PIEHLER: For a short period of time. Did you ever use the Veterans' Administration medical?

BONNYMAN: No. As a matter of fact, it's interesting, because right now, I'm covered by Medicare, but I'm on a good bit of medicine and it does not cover prescription drugs, so I signed up for the Veterans' Administration last December. Before you can get anything done, you've got to go into their clinic here, so I signed up early in '99 and the first date they could give was in December and I missed it, and they turned around and they said, "We can give you one now in December 2000," so I'm supposed to go back to them in December this year.

PIEHLER: So to miss that appointment this December means you have to wait another ...

BONNYMAN: Another year.

PIEHLER: Which I have a strange feeling reminds you a little of the army! (Laughter)

BONNYMAN: I think there's a very common denominator there.

PIEHLER: Did you ever join a veterans' organization when you got back?

BONNYMAN: No. I've never been much of a joiner.

PIEHLER: You mentioned, and it's been an interesting observation about [how] it took you a while to get back into work habits, a regular work habit.

BONNYMAN: Yeah, that's right.

PIEHLER: After you got home and after you got discharged, what happened to you next? Where did you work, or when did you ...

BONNYMAN: Well, I worked at Blue Diamond Coal Company. I worked in the engineering department, and I didn't like it and I was very restless. I wanted to be back

in the army. I really flirted with staying in the regular army, but my wife was from here. As a matter of fact, she came from up here on Melrose. Do you know where Melrose is?

PIEHLER: Oh, yes.

BONNYMAN: It's about a quarter mile from here. She was born and raised there. But it took me about five or six years, but I began to see some results of the efforts I'd made. I began to settle down and enjoyed my work.

PIEHLER: And how long did it take you to, in a sense, as you would say, settle down?

BONNYMAN: About three to five years.

PIEHLER: And ... from my sense of it, you had a—there were parts of the army you didn't like. Why did you want to stay or why did you think of making it a career?

BONNYMAN: Well, in the first place, the last several months, I had a very nice setup, but I was also realistic enough to know that you get a good settlement one time and you get a bum one the next, and you know ...

PIEHLER: So that was leaning against staying in was the ...

BONNYMAN: Yeah, so against staying in was the—and then my wife wanted to come back. I knew she did.

PIEHLER: Was your wife with you at any time while you were in the army?

BONNYMAN: Well, when we first married, she came out to Lawton, Oklahoma, when I was at Fort Sill, and then she came home when I was overseas, and then she came out to Fort Riley, Kansas towards the end of the war.

PIEHLER: How did she like Lawton, Oklahoma and Fort Riley? She was eager to come home, but how did ...

BONNYMAN: I don't think she minded them, particularly. We lived in Lawton. We were very fortunate to have a garage apartment, rent a garage apartment, at the junction of two alleys in Lawton. It wasn't just one alley; it was two. Anyway, people were standing in line trying to get the apartment when we left. Housing was very short. This was in 1942.

PIEHLER: Was it any better in '45?

BONNYMAN: You know, I don't know, because I had quarters on the post at Fort Riley.

PIEHLER: So you were living on the post with your wife in '45?



BONNYMAN: Yeah. They had quarters there available.

PIEHLER: But in '42, you definitely remember the housing.

BONNYMAN: I remember the housing, yeah. We were behind—we were on an alley. We were behind the principal banker in the town's house, and he had a swimming pool. Somebody broke their neck diving in the swimming pool, and it was closed for a long time that summer, so I don't remember. I just remember vaguely. I don't remember the whole story.

PIEHLER: It's jumping way ahead chronologically, but given your experiences in Burma, what did you think of the Vietnam War at the time, say, '65, '66? Did you have any thoughts one way or the other?

BONNYMAN: Not any very definite thoughts, no. No, I didn't approve of the people that were against the war. I sort of took the attitude, well, if the United States is involved, then we should support it, but by that time, I was far removed from it.

PIEHLER: I'm also curious. You had a lot of experience with the Chinese army, and this is backing up again, but what do you think about the fall of China to the communists? The communists coming to power. Because you would know the nationalist army or at least part of the nationalist army.

BONNYMAN: Well, I'll tell you, I was surprised, because I figured that those two divisions, the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the 38<sup>th</sup>, could take on the whole Chinese—whatever was left in China and whip them, because they had the equipment; they had the training, you know, and people like Major Chen had been eliminated one way or the other.

PIEHLER: So the army that increasingly survives is well-trained and well-equipped?

BONNYMAN: I thought it was, yeah.

PIEHLER: And it was a fairly effective army.

BONNYMAN: But I was surprised when the Communists won, but you know, an army has got to have support of the people, and we saw that in Russia when the Russian army was ordered to fire on the crowds in Moscow and they wouldn't do it. So I assume that the Nationalist army did not have the support of the people.

PIEHLER: You were in India and you were one of the last group of Americans and also the English, who see British India. Any general impressions of India and British rule?

BONNYMAN: You know, I'll tell you. I look back on it, and I'm an admirer of the British way of doing things. The British administered these places. They went all over to the remote ends of the earth, and they administered them effectively. They had a system

of administration in Burma that, I didn't appreciate it at the time, but I did later. What they would do is, they would have a political officer that would reside down in the valleys, the more habitable areas, and he would be over a vast area of mountains, and he'd have these Nogha tribes. Now, the Noghas were very primitive people. They had been headhunters and the British had made them stop hunting heads, and they had gotten them tamed down a good bit, but they were very primitive, and the political officer would—once a year during the dry season, and over there, you know the monsoons, we were first out in the jungle in the monsoons.... I said to somebody, I said, "When's the monsoon over?" They said, "The 25<sup>th</sup> of October." And I said, "You mean somewhere between the 29<sup>th</sup> and the 30<sup>th</sup> or the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 30<sup>th</sup>?" And they said, "No, on the 25<sup>th</sup>." I didn't believe them, but sure enough it quit raining on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October and it didn't rain for two or three months. (Laughter) So anyway, he would wait to the dry season, and he would make a tour with about thirty or forty porters and they would take his traveling bathtub and his tent and all his junk, and he would go around and make a tour of inspection of his territory. And he would adjudicate questions that came up during the previous twelve months, and if, during the off time, before he made his trip around, if he had any trouble, he would send a platoon of Gurkhas in there and they'd beat the hell out of a few people and they'd burn a shack or two down and that would be it. But they generally left the people alone, and they left their culture, and they left their way of doing things alone, and I got to where I admired the British. And I still think the people that they colonized would be better off today if the British were still there. I don't know that they would be better off today than they were back at that time, but, you know, fifty years is a long time, and forty or fifty years—and looking back at Africa and India and all those areas.

Now, there was a Catholic priest named Father Stewart, who was a—he worked with the Kuchins. Now you got to understand, right along the India-Burma border, they were Noghas, and a little further East they were Kuchins, and Kuchins dominated the Noghas, and nobody learned the Nogha language, because if you learned the language here, you go to the next hill over there, they speak a little bit different dialect and you couldn't understand it. But there's always somebody who could speak the (Jingpau), which is the Kuchin language. The Kuchins were ninety-nine percent pro-Ally and the Noghas were just, you know, they'd work for anybody that would give them the most opium. But the Kuchins furnished guerillas for the—and I think the Kuchins got very shabby treatment by the British and the Americans, because they helped us a great deal. But this Father Stewart—I'm digressing. He came over here in 1949 and just before our third child was born, my wife was eight and three-quarters months pregnant, and, you know, it was not an appropriate time to come, but he told me an interesting story. He said after the British separation of India, you know, when the British pulled out of India and Burma, he said the first dry season they lifted three hundred heads, the second dry season they lifted six or seven hundred. The third one, he left in the middle of it, and they had already lifted over a thousand. So, the British maintained order, and they had their own rough and ready way of doing it, but the worst thing you could do to one of these people was to incarcerate them. They were wild. They were used to being free and you know, loose in the jungle, and the worst thing you could do was to put them in jail. And that was the

most heinous crime that they would incarcerate them for. But anyway, I think the British did a tolerably good job. Now, they weren't very popular with people.

PIEHLER: Because you said at the time you didn't think very highly of the British.

BONNYMAN: No. No. And the British army was sort of a laughingstock. But actually it was the British Indian army that did most of the fighting over in—but you see, the Japanese created an offensive in the spring of '44 and they came through Jingpao. Now that's where Stillwell walked out. You've got high mountains up against the Himalayas and then you've got high mountains down in south Burma and it's not as rugged in through Manipur State and Jingpao, and the Japanese mounted a big offensive in there in the spring of '44 and they got as close to the railroad at Kohima and they almost cut off the railroad, which would have isolated the Chinese and Americans up in the Lido area. So the British were kind of a laughingstock, but actually it was the Indian army, and you read accounts of it, most of the fighting in Burma was done by the British. It was done by the Indian army, actually. Once they got good leaders in there—I just don't think the British army was very well led in World War I and the early parts of World War II.

PIEHLER: ... To start concluding the interview, could you tell a little bit about your career with Blue Diamond and what happened? It's a fairly open-ended question.

BONNYMAN: Well, what happened was, I came back and went to work in engineering, and then in about 1950 or '51 or '52 or somewhere, '50 or '51, I was made assistant general manager, which was really a nothing title. But what happened was, the man I worked for had been a real good mine superintendent and they put him in as general manager, which was one step—generally, you would go in as general manager of mines and then you would step up to operating vice president. He never made that final step, because he was not—he was effective as a superintendent, but the higher he got, the less he could play the black keys and the white keys at the same time, is what I say. That's an expression that I've used. And I've lost that touch, by the way. I can't play the black keys and the white keys anymore. But anyway, he got sick, and I filled in for him and at that point, I must have gotten by all right, because he got me a salary increase, a substantial salary increase, that helped with the living situation a good bit.

And then we had a mine fire out here at Washburn, Tennessee, which is just above LaFollete, and it was an old, old mine, back from the early 1900s, and this was in ... '52, early '52, and he went out and fought that mine fire. Here was a man in his sixties, who slept on the drafting table in the office and was right on top of the situation with the mine fire. The damned old equipment in the mine, it was a slope mine. It went down. He collapsed and he was never able to work after that, and I got put in his place as general manager, and the first thing I did was to pull the pumps and let the mine fill up with water to put the fire out. To hell with it. It wasn't enough coal left in it to—and the equipment was nothing but scraps. It was just junk equipment....

So I was general manager of mines for a year, and then I was made operating vice president, but I was only in that job twenty-four hours. My father dropped dead and there

was a big vacuum there, because he was eighty-four years old when he died. And I look back and he was much more effective than I was, because I would see the faults, you know, in somebody that old, I would see the faults, but he never made a big mistake. He made a lot of little mistakes, and I could see the little mistakes. But organizationally, the place when I walked into the presidency of it was in a shambles, organizationally, because what would happen is, there was this woman, a secretary, Clara Hood, and he leaned on her a great deal, but she could not run it. I had my problems with her, but after I got in the driver's seat, why, I made it a point to get along with her and so we got along all right. It worked out fine, but she was a very helpful person. She knew a lot about business, had a lot of experience, but she didn't have the quality it took to run things. I have seen that in other organizations. There are a lot of secretaries that are that way. People get to leaning on them and they think they hung the moon, but they really are limited in what they can do.

PIEHLER: In other words, they know a lot of the day-to-day operations, but then what they lack is the vision where to go.

BONNYMAN: Well, not only that, but I'll tell you what I realized was, when I first went to work, the people that were working around the mines that I had worked with in the summer and whatnot, they knew so much more than I did. I was impressed with them and I felt very much at a disadvantage. Two or three years later, I realized that by that time I had caught up with them and passed them, because they learned by making mistakes and I had been educated and had a good education, and you learn to think. I have got a friend right now, who is going to Paraguay with me at the end of May, going on a hunting trip down there to Paraguay and Argentina, but he's got a business out here in Lake City he built up himself and he's doing very good at it. He kept saying, "I've been trying to train people to take over," and he said they just—I said, "Harry, the problem is those people don't know how to think. They've learned by repetition, and that is where your education is so important."

PIEHLER: So when I tell my students it's important to think critically ...

BONNYMAN: That's right. You learn to think. You learn to think, and so you, you know, one way is to say you play the black keys and the white keys at the same time, but I've gone beyond that point.

PIEHLER: What was it like to be president of the company that your father had started?

BONNYMAN: Well, I look back on it and I did a fairly good job up to a point. The company did well for a while. It's a tough business.

PIEHLER: I was just ready to observe that. I mean, you—Petroleum was really the wave of the post '45 period. I mean, I think I've read—I don't know first hand, but coal was—a coal strike, for example, in the 1930s and '40s could paralyze the country, and now ...

BONNYMAN: Yeah. Well, it would do it now if there was a coal or a rail strike, because of the electricity. You take that for granted, but let me tell you, ninety-nine percent of our electricity comes from coal. I say ninety-nine—it varies around the country, but in this part of the country, probably over ninety percent does. There's a few plants on natural gas. That's the more desirable fluid, but residual oil is fading fast. Fuel oil is not a desirable fuel. Gas is, but gas is low labor. It's clean burning and has a lot of advantages, but there's just so much gas. Anyway, those old coal fired plants are what's keeping the lights burning. But anyway, go ahead.

PIEHLER: No, any observations you have about your career, whatever you ...

BONNYMAN: Well, like I say, I did reasonably well at one point. I made up my mind early on that I would not hang on like my father did. But you know, I can see—he was sort of an egoist. Egotist. He loved to say that he did everything in the company. Well, he didn't do everything. It was a team effort, but he got results out of people, and that's what counts, and so I'd say this, that probably my biggest mistake was picking a successor. I don't think I made a mistake picking him, but in not watching him close enough. He tended to be a little on the reckless side. Very capable younger man, who is about fifty years old now, and extremely capable. One of the most capable people I have ever run into, but two things: one is he's a gambler, and the other is he won't draw a line and stick to it. He will negotiate. He is the best negotiator I've ever run into, ever seen. But every once in a while, you've got to draw a line in the sand, and this is it. And you know, people respect that. I think they do. Anyway, after I got out of active management, why, the company went into Chapter Eleven. The stockholders got hurt, but the creditors came out very well. They came out like bandits, any that didn't bail out early.... They came out way ahead. Way ahead.

PIEHLER: When did Blue Diamond go into Chapter Eleven?

BONNYMAN: 1991 or '92, something like that.

PIEHLER: So, on your watch ... while you ran into some rough spots, it was still a viable company.

BONNYMAN: Yeah, yeah, it was. Well, one thing I had done that my father had—one thing I had done was not to borrow money. These damn banks, they want you to borrow money when you don't need it, and then when you do need it, they're gone. They want the money back. So anyway, be that as it may, I think that—I don't think I was as good a businessman as my father was.

PIEHLER: ... You but you mentioned that you wanted to be stationed in the Knoxville area, as close to Knoxville as possible, because you got married after graduating. How did you meet your wife?

BONNYMAN: Well, I had known the family growing up, but I hadn't paid any attention to her. She was just somebody a couple years younger, but I went to a Christmas party in the Christmas of my senior year, and I met her and was impressed with her there, and one thing led to another.

PIEHLER: ... You've had five children, and two have served in the military.

BONNYMAN: Yes. One was in the reserves and the other was in the regular navy, submarines, nuclear subs, for about five years. Whatever the minimum period is.

PIEHLER: There are fairly high standards for the nuclear navy.

BONNYMAN: Oh, yeah. He was very bright, very bright. He *is* very bright. The other one, he was in the reserves, but he didn't do much.

PIEHLER: How have you liked retirement? That's an open-ended question, too.

BONNYMAN: Well, the big thing about retirement is, as I see it, is first place I've got more—time is the biggest problem I've got. I've got more to do than I can possibly do, and another thing is, the only fault with retirement is, you lose your secretary. (Laughter) And let me tell you, I was lost for a while, and finally, I located things in my office. I set up an office at home. My wife set it up. And I had a bunch of files that I had brought from the company, and I couldn't find a damn thing for two years. Finally, I set up a system and I can find things now. Not very quickly, but I can find them. I had a chance to get a secretary part-time, and I thought to myself, "Each secretary sets up her own filing system, and ... I want to keep the one I got," so it never worked out. She was busy and so it did work out fine, so I just didn't—she said she had more work than she could do with somebody else to work for, ... that suited me just fine. I'm just saying that retirement's fine except ... I would not hesitate to do it when the time comes. I think people complain about not having enough to do. That has not been a problem.

PIEHLER: Yeah, because it sounds like you've been very active. You still like to hunt.

BONNYMAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What other activities do you like to participate in?

BONNYMAN: That [hunting] probably is the one thing I've done. I used to fly an airplane, a small airplane, but I've been grounded.

PIEHLER: Did you stay in touch with any of the people you served with after you got out of the army?

BONNYMAN: There was one person that I kept in touch with. Really, mainly there were

Christmas cards, that I knew over in Burma. And then there was—I'd say the answer is no.

PIEHLER: And you've never been back to a reunion, a unit reunion?

BONNYMAN: Well, I went to one at Myrtle Beach and I got there a little late and I didn't know anybody and it was a disaster, so I just never went back.

PIEHLER: What year was that reunion?

BONNYMAN: Oh, that's been thirty, forty years ago.

PIEHLER: Oh, it was a long time ago.

BONNYMAN: Oh, a long time ago. I remember I flew over there in a Cessna 182 that I learned to fly in and I quit flying it in 1962, so that's probably about forty years ago.

PIEHLER: When did you take up flying? You mentioned that ...

BONNYMAN: I started when I was thirty-six years old. I know exactly when I started because it was when my middle son was born. My wife was in the hospital, and I started—at that point, I didn't like to drive much and I had a lot of traveling to do, and I just took up flying. I'd always wanted to fly, so I just dodged the weather for several years, and then I got an instrument rating in 1963. I think it was '63. Might have been '64. I think it was '63.

PIEHLER: Tim, do you ...

BRACKEN: No, I don't have any more questions.

PIEHLER: Is there anything we forgot to ask you?

BONNYMAN: I don't think so. I don't know if you've got all the information you want.

PIEHLER: Well, we've got plenty for one day, I can definitely say. We really appreciate all that you've shared with us.

BONNYMAN: Well, that's fine.

PIEHLER: And we'll definitely make a copy for you to share with your family, and of course, we will be giving you a copy of the transcript.

BONNYMAN: That's fine. You know, we've talked about doing this, and never gotten around to it. The closest thing was my oldest son drove me down to South Georgia to

hunt this last winter, and he had a tape recorder, and he asked me a bunch of questions, and I don't think he's ever done anything with it.

PIEHLER: Tim will be—he needs to get a grade, so he will be doing this as a transcript. Let me thank you again. I really do appreciate it.

BONNYMAN: Well, thank you. I'm sorry I rambled so much.

PIEHLER: No, no, we like that rambling, and we in fact encourage that.

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

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