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AN INTERVIEW WITH FRED DAVIS

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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Fred Davis on September 4th, 2000 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

ERICK CLIFFORD: Erick Clifford.

PIEHLER: ... and since Erick is eager to get started I'll let Erick throw out the first question.

CLIFFORD: Pee Paw, did your father come from a large family?

FRED DAVIS: Not too large. There was just eight children. (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: What about your mother?

DAVIS: Seven children.

CLIFFORD: Do you know how your father and your mother met?

DAVIS: No, not really.

CLIFFORD: Why did your father move to Kansas right after they got married?

DAVIS: To work. He got a ... seasonal job, and was out there for about a year or so.

CLIFFORD: So he moved back to Tennessee after that?

DAVIS: Yes.

CLIFFORD: What was your father like?

DAVIS: Well, he was like a strong man, a very ambitious man, a business man, and a farmer, and a real good guy.

CLIFFORD: Was he involved in politics?

DAVIS: Somewhat, yes.

CLIFFORD: How involved in politics have you been in your life?

DAVIS: Not too much. I have a lot of fun about politics, and can see all of the mistakes that one side makes, and the other side don't make too many. (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: Can you explain your strong ties to the Democratic Party?

DAVIS: Sure, because they're the right way to go. That's the only reason I'm with them.

PIEHLER: Going back a little bit, when you say your father was active in politics, how active was he? Did he ever run for office?

DAVIS: Uh, he ran for one office in the county, just a small one. They called them squires at that time, and he was defeated by a few votes ... for political reasons. When it came to the national, and the state, and this thing, why, he always got out there and supported his man, regardless of the party, but most of the time it was the Democratic Party, and he took a big hand in it.

PIEHLER: Which county was this that he ran for office?

DAVIS: Union County.

PIEHLER: What did your father do for a living growing up?

DAVIS: Uh, He was in the general merchandise business. Started in—I believe it was 1922, and he was still in the business when he passed on in 1969, and then he was kind of a large farmer. He grew cattle and tobacco, and this type of thing. Just general farming to a pretty big scale.

CLIFFORD: Can you tell me about your sisters?

DAVIS: Well, I have three sisters. One of them is deceased, and the other two are still with us. They're all three married. The one that passed on was married, of course. Uh, just good sisters.

CLIFFORD: Did ya'll go to Horace Maynard High School?

DAVIS: Yes, uh huh.

CLIFFORD: What was Horace Maynard like when you were there?

DAVIS: Well, it was just like the average school in a small town. Very athletic, good teachers, and different programs. It was a good school.

CLIFFORD: What was your favorite subject in high school?

DAVIS: I guess math would be my favorite subject all the way through.

CLIFFORD: Did you date much in high school?

DAVIS: Not much, but all I could. (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: How were your summer vacations spent as a child?

DAVIS: Well, ... most of the time working in a store, and I didn't do any of the farm work, but they always relied on me to help in the store, and I guess that would be to the extent of most everything I did. Other than [that] I played ball like everybody else, and had recreation here and there, but that's about it.

CLIFFORD: How old were you when you had your first job?

DAVIS: Twenty-eight.

CLIFFORD: What did you do?

DAVIS: What did I do?

CLIFFORD: Yes, Sir.

DAVIS: Just the normal thing, just act like I knew father.

PIEHLER: Just backing up a little bit, what about your mother? Did she ever work outside of the home?

DAVIS: Oh yes, my mother worked in the business with Dad, and I, and the sisters. It was a family business.

PIEHLER: So you had a farm, and a cattle farm, and a store.

DAVIS: Yes, uh huh, yeah.

PIEHLER: And it was a general store?

DAVIS: General store. We had everything from a pair of shoes to a box of soda.

PIEHLER: And did you have in the store—I mean, this was in Union County, your store?

DAVIS: Right, Sharps Chapel, Union County.

PIEHLER: How long were you open until? What were your hours?

DAVIS: From daylight to dark.

PIEHLER: Six days a week, seven days a week?

DAVIS: Seven days a week.

PIEHLER: So, Sunday, too.

DAVIS: Yes, because it was near the lake, and it was good business on the weekend for sure.

PIEHLER: That's a lot of hours.

DAVIS: Yeah. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: Did you keep people on account?

DAVIS: You mean like a jot-em-down store?

PIEHLER: Yes, did you ...

DAVIS: Very much, very much.

PIEHLER: And how many of your customers might owe you money, particularly in the thirties? I mean, people didn't have a lot of money then.

DAVIS: Well, quite a few. I'd rather not go into that, because they're still friends.

PIEHLER: They're still friends. (Laughter) Did you face any competition from any chain stores?

DAVIS: No.

PIEHLER: No, you were still pretty much—it was still just small general ...

DAVIS: Yes. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: General Stores?

DAVIS: Until later on, when I got in business, in the forties, and fifties, and sixties. Why, then I was in business in Maynardville, which was a city up there and that was close enough to town. I did feel some competition from the stores in Knoxville.

PIEHLER: As someone who is not from Tennessee, and just recently moved here, could you tell me a little bit about what Union County was like when you were growing up? I mean, for example, did everyone have electricity?

DAVIS: No. At Sharps Chapel, where I was born and reared, and lived until 1954, why,

we didn't get electricity until 1950. And that was one of the brightest things that I ever saw in my life, when I come home one afternoon, and all the lights—one night, ... and all the lights at home, and all the lights in the store, and all the outside lights was on, that we had wired in and ready to go, and that was the brightest thing you ever saw.

PIEHLER: And I assume this was an REA project, a Rural Electrification Project, or was it a ...

DAVIS: It was some kind of a governmental funding project.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

DAVIS: Yes, uh huh.

PIEHLER: So, growing up, you didn't have, how did you get light? Did you use kerosene, or?

DAVIS: Well, we had a Delco system that gave us light, and gave us water, with a pump from a pump water system. It wasn't all that bad, but you had to maintain it. It was limited to what you could do, but most essential things, it would take care of.

PIEHLER: I assume a lot of your neighbors didn't have such systems.

DAVIS: About ninety-nine percent of them didn't have them.

PIEHLER: ... Did any of your neighbors have outhouses? How common was that?

DAVIS: They either had an outhouse, or didn't have one. (Laughter) You didn't have a place to go.

PIEHLER: Politically, the county, your father was a Democrat. Were most Democrats or Republicans in Union?

DAVIS: More Republicans than Democrats.

PIEHLER: Even in the thirties?

DAVIS: Oh yes, uh huh. Yeah, but people in those days—there was a few that couldn't cross the line, but most of them was for the person. In their political beliefs, it was about like some people's religion. They know the other party's religion is good, so they go along with it you know.

PIEHLER: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

DAVIS: Real bad. My father was in business at that time, and he was the only one that we could ever account for that didn't go below six cents per dozen in buying eggs from the farmers. The farmers used to depend on their chickens and eggs a lot for their grocery money. And, a lot of the stores had to drop their prices down to five, but he stayed up to six all the way through and that was something.

PIEHLER: He must have earned a lot of loyal farmers from that. I mean, that must have been remembered.

DAVIS: Oh, he really had friends, my dad did, yeah. And, a lot of the stores in town, they couldn't buy a whole case of eggs, but we would get up as many as like a hundred cases a week. That wasn't back during the Depression, but later on. But, during the Depression, a lot of these stores couldn't buy a full case. They would just have to buy a few dozen, because that was all they could afford to pay for. It was that rough.

CLIFFORD: Pee Paw, how did you meet your wife, Jessie Davis, at that time Jessie Weaver?

DAVIS: How did I meet Jessie Weaver? Well, I saw her different times. But, then, I finally got the nerve to have one of my sisters, I think it was, to ask her if I could take her somewhere, and she sent word back that I'd have to ask her myself. (Laughter) And that's how I met her.

CLIFFORD: How old were you?

DAVIS: I was twenty.

CLIFFORD: Did you know she was the one? Did you know that she was the one you were going to marry?

DAVIS: Oh, from day one.

PIEHLER: I'm curious: growing up, what did you do for fun?

DAVIS: Well, [we] went to the movies, and played ball, and played checkers, and we had parties in the neighborhood at different times, and candy pullings, and dances, and just the normal things that everybody did.

PIEHLER: Where would you go to the movies? Which ...

DAVIS: At Tazewell.

PIEHLER: Tazewell?

DAVIS: That was the nearest. Of course, [we went] in Knoxville quite a bit, but Tazewell was about every Saturday night business, going to see the movie.

PIEHLER: What [were] your favorite movies?

DAVIS: Westerns.

PIEHLER: So, you probably liked Tom Mix and ...

DAVIS: Mickey Rooney, and Judy Garland, and all of those good shows, you know.

PIEHLER: Did you ever see All Quiet on the Western Front or any war movies before 1941?

DAVIS: Not to pay any attention to them.

PIEHLER: So, none stick out in your mind.

DAVIS: None sticks out in my mind, no.

CLIFFORD: What sparked your move from Sharps Chapel to Fountain City?

DAVIS: What sparked it? The two daughters. The oldest one was first year in school, and we wanted to send them to Fountain City schools. And that got us there on a Saturday, before school started on Monday.

PIEHLER: ... Did you or any of your sisters ever think of college, or was college ever an option?

DAVIS: Oh sure, college was an option. My grandfather on my father's side was a doctor. And he talked to me different times about going on to school, and my dad talked to me about going on to school. But, as I had been in that business with the family, why, I guess I just kindly got sold on it, and didn't want to take the time to go on to school, but I had the opportunity.

PIEHLER: So do you think that if you had really expressed a desire to go, you could have ...

DAVIS: Oh, definitely, definitely.

PIEHLER: Your family were, I think the expression is "Yellow Dog Democrats."

DAVIS: I don't know about the yellow dog, but ...

PIEHLER: Not dog, but pretty loyal ...

DAVIS: We were good Democrats, and still are.

PIEHLER: Your family must have thought very highly of Franklin Roosevelt.

DAVIS: Oh, definitely, definitely.

PIEHLER: What did you think of the approach of war? How much did you follow that growing up?

DAVIS: I didn't follow that too close, you know. I guess a lot of peoples are different, but you've never seen any war and you've always heard of it and its just another thing that people talks about, but it's kinda like having something happen to every body else but you. But it finally come around.

PIEHLER: But in other words you didn't follow say the debates over the peacetime draft or lend lease?

DAVIS: No, no, uh-uh.

PIEHLER: How often—did your family get a paper?

DAVIS: Well, we had a post office in the same building our business was. We had a paper every day, just like all normal people.

PIEHLER: So you did read. Which paper would you read?

DAVIS: The Knoxville Journal at that time.

PIEHLER: How active—were your parents and you active in any church growing up?

DAVIS: No, no. We would go to church at Old Grove and that was our church. We were just normal people in it, but not as active as I guess we should have been.

PIEHLER: Were you active in the Y, or the Boy Scouts, or any other ...

DAVIS: No.

PIEHLER: Did you play any sports in school?

DAVIS: Basketball.

PIEHLER: What—in terms of describing your growing up in the 1930s, what have I missed? What memories stick out? It sounds like you spent a lot of time fishing and you liked hanging out with friends a lot and going to movies.

DAVIS: There is not any special thing that sticks out, other than just the normal activities of growing up with your friends, neighbors and family, and that type of thing.

CLIFFORD: How long had you been working before you were drafted?

DAVIS: From '39 to '43, only four years.

CLIFFORD: Do you remember when and where you were when you were drafted?

DAVIS: Sure, I was—you mean when I got my letter? (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: Yes, Sir.

DAVIS: I was home. I was home at Sharps Chapel.

PIEHLER: And you were working in your father's store?

DAVIS: Yes, uh huh.

CLIFFORD: How old were you when you enlisted?

DAVIS: When I enlisted I was twenty years old, and the second week I was in Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia—my birthday was the second Sunday after I was inducted.

CLIFFORD: Do you recall your parents' reaction when you enlisted?

DAVIS: Just the normal reaction. They tell you to go get it over with and get on back. Of course, they was broken up and sorry. That was just normal things for parents to be.

CLIFFORD: How did you get in the Quartermaster Corps?

DAVIS: The Quartermaster Corps that I got in was a new company that had never been, and it was set up for the purpose of supplying a great number of men with food, clothing, and different supplies of this kind. But, because [of] my experiences growing up in the store, they scheduled me for it because of my experience.

PIEHLER: When you were inducted, how soon did you know you were going into the Quartermaster Corps?

DAVIS: I didn't know I was going into the Quartermaster Corps. After I got in service they were setting this company up.

PIEHLER: Had you started basic training somewhere, or had you ...

DAVIS: No, no, uh-uh.

PIEHLER: So it was at the induction center that this ...

DAVIS: We waited there at the induction center until they got this company set up, and then we all went in together. And, I might add we had 151 men in this company, and there was 151 Tennesseans.

PIEHLER: Where did you report? Where was your induction?

DAVIS: Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia.

PIEHLER: How long did you have to wait at Fort Oglethorpe?

DAVIS: I was there for about four weeks, I believe it was.

PIEHLER: Before they put you into ...

DAVIS: Then, they shipped us out to California.

PIEHLER: What did you do in those four weeks?

DAVIS: Whatever they told us to. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah, but what did they have you do? Did you have your share of KP?

DAVIS: Uh, very little.

PIEHLER: Very little?

DAVIS: There was so many fellows there without a job waiting to ship out, why, it wasn't any problem. Just killing time mostly.

PIEHLER: I am curious: growing up, where did your family go on vacation?

DAVIS: We didn't take too many vacations.

PIEHLER: Before the war what was the furthest south, east, west, and north you had gone?

DAVIS: Well, that would take a little bit of thinking. I just can't recall what the farthest places I would be. I'd been in Virginia, and I'd been in Kentucky, and I'd been all around in the counties and in different states immediately around.

PIEHLER: But, really it was just the immediate states around Tennessee.

DAVIS: Not any ...

PIEHLER: You never made it to Chicago or New Orleans?

DAVIS: I'd been to Indiana, and a few places. But, no, not very far from Tennessee.

CLIFFORD: Did you have any friends that went with you to enlist at Fort Oglethorpe?

DAVIS: Oh yes, there was a whole busload of us left from Union County. But, after we got there, why, then there was only ... two that went into the same company I did. And the other guys was dispersed to other companies.

PIEHLER: Had you thought about other branches of the service, like the Navy? Or did you hope to get into the Army Air Corps?

DAVIS: No. I was offered an opportunity to go to Officer's School, and I turned it down because I wasn't in the Army to make a career out of it. I was just there to do my job and get back home, because I had things that I liked to do at home instead of that.

CLIFFORD: What was basic training like at Camp Cooke, California?

DAVIS: Well, the roughest part was when we moved out of there and went to San Bernardino Desert, and we had to do some extensive training in the desert, where the sand was ankle deep, and it was pretty rough marching there. And the weather was extremely hot, and we were there until we were shipped out to New York to go to England. [We] left there in real hot weather, and went to New York, and the snow a being on the ground. That's a pretty good change in weather.

CLIFFORD: Before you went to New York there was a rumor floating around that ya'll were going to go to the South Pacific. Why do you think that changed?

DAVIS: I don't know. But, I was supply sergeant at that time in the company, and this

rumor got so strong, why, we had to issue all the men uniforms and equipment and so forth for the Pacific. And then it got cancelled. We were going into the European Theater, and we had to pull all that clothing and everything from the men and give them a new issue of the same thing for the different theater of war. That was quite a job. And I think they piled all of that first issue up out there, and it was still there when we left. I don't know what happened to it. But I don't know why the change was made.

CLIFFORD: What was your salary during service?

DAVIS: Very small. (Laughter) I can't remember exactly, just to be honest. But, it was less than fifty dollars a month, I believe, to start with, but I'm not sure. It was not anything to speak of.

PIEHLER: The people in your company, they were Tennesseans?

DAVIS: At the beginning.

PIEHLER: At the beginning?

DAVIS: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: And, they were Tennesseans from all over Tennessee, or just from East Tennessee?

DAVIS: From all over. From Memphis to Virginia. Right.

PIEHLER: And I've been told, and I've observed that there are real differences between the three states of Tennessee. I've heard that phrase. How did all the Tennesseans get along together?

DAVIS: A hundred percent.

PIEHLER: A hundred percent?

DAVIS: Just like when someone got a letter and someone else didn't, well, it is just like everybody getting a letter. Yeah, a hundred percent.

CLIFFORD: When you went over to England your role was to supply Patton's Third Army. Is that right?

DAVIS: No, when we got in France we were supplying his Third Army.

PIEHLER: But going back just a little, could you tell me a little bit about your memories

of basic training? After you got to California—you did your basic in California?

DAVIS: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: What was basic training like?

DAVIS: Basic training was pretty rough. And, we went on a twenty-five-mile hike. I guess it was about the roughest thing. And, that was twelve and a half miles one way and ... twelve and a half miles back. And, we had a few of the men couldn't make it all the way, but I was fortunate enough to be pretty strong in those days. And, me and another old long-legged boy like myself, well, we led the company there and back. In fact, we were back to camp, I guess, thirty minutes before anybody else showed up. But that was about the roughest trip that I'd made.

PIEHLER: What do you remember—you became a sergeant, but what do you remember of your first sergeant you had in basic?

DAVIS: Well, I'm not going to say too much about him, because when I got discharged, I was first sergeant, and they might be talking about me. I will add this, that I was the first sergeant that never had a company formation. I had a cooperation with the men enough to where I didn't have to call them out and bark at them and chew them out, and so forth like that. That is something that I never could understand. To start with, I think that's just kind of to show off a little bit, or something.

PIEHLER: But, It sounds like in basic you remember some company formations.

DAVIS: Oh yeah, we had a lot of company formations. In fact, I was the second man, or the first man in the second platoon. I'm sorry, the first platoon. I was the first man in the second line. And, one other guy was taller than I, and he was the first man in the first line. That's the two of us that got back to camp quicker than anybody else. But, it wasn't too bad. It was just [the] formality of doing this and doing that, and making sure that you all did the same thing at the same time. It wasn't too rough.

PIEHLER: How much weapons training did they give you? You were going to Quartermaster, but ...

DAVIS: We had to be a rifleman and practice shooting rifles, and that was it.

PIEHLER: How good of a marksman were you?

DAVIS: Well ...

PIEHLER: Had you hunted growing up?

DAVIS: Yes, I hunted some growing up, but shooting a rifle, I was pretty good. I was average, I would say, yeah. I got me a little marker on it.

PIEHLER: What do you remember—you had never really traveled. I mean, you had traveled sort of [in] Tennessee and through some of the nearby states, but this was a big trip to California. What do you remember?

DAVIS: Oh yes, yes. Me and a friend of mine from Knoxville here, we got to come home on vacation from California, and ride a train from California to Tennessee. Here and then back, and that was a little bit exciting too.

PIEHLER: Did you take coach or were you lucky enough to get a Pullman?

DAVIS: No we weren't in a Pullman. We was just in the coach.

PIEHLER: Because I've been told that particularly the troop trains were pretty uncomfortable.

DAVIS: This wasn't a troop train.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but when you initially went out you were ...

DAVIS: Oh yeah. No, it wasn't comfortable at all. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: When you were out in California did you get any passes to go into the nearby towns?

DAVIS: Very few. Went to San Bernardino a few times. That was it.

PIEHLER: When you got off base, did you get any invitations to people's homes?

DAVIS: Didn't have.

PIEHLER: You didn't have that much time?

DAVIS: It was just a one-day pass, there and back.

PIEHLER: And, how long were you in California? How long were you based [there]?

DAVIS: We were there about—I don't remember exactly, but I'd say six months.

PIEHLER: Six months. So you had your basic, and then you had what after your basic

training? What happened after that, at the base?

DAVIS: Then we were shipped out of New York to go to England.

PIEHLER: So, in other words, you just continued training.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm, sure.

PIEHLER: In that period, when did you become a sergeant?

DAVIS: That period I was a corporal. I was assistant supply sergeant, corporal. And then, before we—well, about the time we left there, why, they made me supply sergeant. Then, from there on I was supply sergeant until I was first sergeant.

PIEHLER: And what, um, they obviously taught you how to be a soldier, but what do they teach you about being a quartermaster in the quartermaster unit? What kind of things did you have to learn how to do? What army ways of doing?

DAVIS: Well, you just, uh, it is more or less like a business. You order your supplies, and then you distribute them according to the regulations. And a soldier comes in, and he broke a shoestring, why, they want you to ask him to turn his old one in before he gets another one. That kind of thing. But it wasn't bad.

PIEHLER: It sounded like you really took to it, because, I mean, you had had experience with a store.

DAVIS: Oh yeah, that's no problem with me, that part, at all.

PIEHLER: And you could figure out Army paperwork?

DAVIS: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: What made a lot of sense with army paper work and procedures, and what at times do you think ... they could have done a little differently?

DAVIS: Well, the army's got a saying that there is just two sizes of the clothing. One is too big and one is too small. So it's not too hard to fulfill that order. That's about it.

PIEHLER: So, you distributed clothing to new recruits while you were in California? Or you were just a victim of ...

DAVIS: No, just to our company. I was in the headquarters all the time. The men, they worked in the warehouses all the time, and they were the ones that shipped the food and

clothing, and different things like that. But, my job was just within the company.

PIEHLER: So, in others words, once you got promoted, you were with headquarters company?

DAVIS: I was with Headquarters Company from day one.

PIEHLER: Day one?

DAVIS: I went there as a private, and right away I got a PFC, then I got a corporal, and then I got a sergeant, all in the supply company, there, of the company.

PIEHLER: So, you didn't, in your army service, you didn't actually run the warehouse?

DAVIS: No, no.

PIEHLER: You were, in a sense, very much concerned with the distribution of the whole supply picture for that ...

DAVIS: For the company.

PIEHLER: For the company?

DAVIS: Yes.

PIEHLER: In California, ... was your company in charge of any warehouses? Or, were you just in training?

DAVIS: Yes, the company was, but I wasn't.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

DAVIS: My job was within the company headquarters. I was a company man.

PIEHLER: Being in the company when you were in California, what was a typical day like? Was there a typical day?

DAVIS: Well, I guess, get up, and go to work, and come back, and go again.

PIEHLER: You would obviously get up early in the morning. But, would you largely spend it behind a desk, or would you have to go out ...

DAVIS: No, no, not behind a desk. Well, part of it was that, but part of it was getting the

men supplies, whatever they needed. And contributing to their needs.

PIEHLER: You had this rumor you were going to the Pacific, and then you were going to Europe. Where did you want to go?

DAVIS: I didn't want to go to the Pacific, for sure. Europe was fine with me, but not the Pacific.

PIEHLER: What about the rest of the men?

DAVIS: I believe it would be a hundred percent.

PIEHLER: That they'd rather—why Europe over the Pacific?

DAVIS: Because the Pacific, the terrain and the climate and everything over there is so much different, and so much more chances to take, in my way of thinking. Besides, that they can't speak English either. And, we went to London and we lived there for nine months right in the city of London. Yeah, that was a good break for us, I would say, except buzz bombs falling all around us. Our building was the only one standing on the whole block that we were in.

PIEHLER: So, you saw the block get leveled?

DAVIS: Yes. Part of it was already leveled, then the rest of it got leveled.

PIEHLER: Was there any close calls in that?

DAVIS: Oh, yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: So, you would go into the shelter when the attack came?

DAVIS: Never went into the shelter.

PIEHLER: You never went in? You just stayed ...

DAVIS: I don't think they had enough shelters for the civilians.

PIEHLER: So, the military people didn't take advantage ...

DAVIS: Our company didn't.

PIEHLER: You didn't. Would you get under your desk, or?

DAVIS: No, there wouldn't be any need of that. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So, you were, at least with the buzz bombs, you were clearly in harms way. I mean ...

DAVIS: Absolutely, yeah. Every night at ten o'clock.

CLIFFORD: Before you departed for England, what was the mood around camp?

DAVIS: What was there to do?

CLIFFORD: What was the mood? Were they fearful of going off to a foreign land?

DAVIS: No, not any more than we expected. They knew they wasn't going on a joy trip. They wasn't looking for any excitement like that, so no use sitting around worrying about it. When you got to go, you got to go.

CLIFFORD: The ship you set sail on was English. Did this make a difference in your accommodations?

DAVIS: Very much, the ship's name was Highland Chieftain. And, it was supposed to accommodate 1,000 people, and we had 3,500 on it. In our company, we had to sleep in the dining room on top of the tables, the dining tables. So we had to get up real early, and eat our breakfast and get out of there so everyone else could come in, and eat their breakfast and dinner and so forth. And the kitchen was down under us, and I believe they cooked cabbage every night, and it would smell terrible. But anyway, we got there.

CLIFFORD: Did you get sick on either the trip over, or the trip back?

DAVIS: Going over about halfway out, I got appendicitis and had that taken out ...

PIEHLER: Did you have a doctor on board?

DAVIS: We had an English doctor. He was a real good, young doctor, and we were expecting an attack. And they told me that just before the operation, said, "We can't put you to sleep because you might have to take care of yourself." And, they give me a spinal injection, and operated on me, and [it was] very successful. Then the sergeant, who was the nurse, apologized to the doctor that he couldn't hand him the right tool because it was the first operation that he had assisted in. And, the doctor said, "Well, you done real fine," and said, "It's my first operation that I have done by myself." Said, "I have assisted in some, but this is my first one." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And you were listening to all of this?

DAVIS: Yes, I was listening to this. And, I said, “Well, I got news for both of you.” I said, “It’s my first, too.” (Laughter) But, he took care of me, and when we got in England he went right on to the hospital with me. And, I could never had a better operation than that. And then, the bad thing about it, and I guess would have really worried me if I known it, but because of my condition, they shipped me out of my company. Transferred me out, and I didn’t know it. And, my company commander, why, he requested that I get put back in the company, which they let me do that. Now, that was a great day for me when I was back in there. But, I was out and then back in before I had ever known that I was ...

PIEHLER: That you were going to be transferred?

DAVIS: Man, let me tell you, there ain’t no telling what would have happened.

PIEHLER: Because, what company were you going send you? Did you know, or ...

DAVIS: I guess some infantry company. I don’t know.

PIEHLER: Oh, you don’t even know if it would have been ...

DAVIS: No, I don’t want to know. They just send you some place like a group of men out here that the other company just say, “Send me so many men,” and they’d put you in that company.

PIEHLER: You were fearful that they would send you to a replacement depot?

DAVIS: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: How long were you in the hospital once you got to England?

DAVIS: About two weeks.

PIEHLER: And while you were going to England—they said they couldn’t ... put you under because of U-Boat threat. How serious was the U-Boat threat? Had you spotted any U-boats going out?

DAVIS: No, No.

PIEHLER: Were you in a convoy, or were you on a passage ship that was on its own, making a run?

DAVIS: I don’t think that we were in a convoy. If we were I never did see it. Of course,

I was—I believe it was the fifth day out when this happened. So, I was up on deck a lot, you know. But, I got seasickness real, real bad. I think that is what set up this inflammation in my appendix. I think that is what caused it, and I don't think we were in a convoy.... But we could have been, because convoys weren't run real close together. Too dangerous of planes, you know.

PIEHLER: You did not eat much particularly after your appendix, but you mentioned that the food smelled terribly, at least when they cooked cabbage. How was English food on the ship, because ...

DAVIS: It would put you on a diet. (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: What was the mood like in England when you arrived in December of '43?

DAVIS: Well, I went from the hospital by train to my company. There was no one with me that I knew at all. It was just like traveling alone.... Of course, I had never talked to English people before, and they all wanted to talk, and it was kindly hard to understand them, you know, exactly. But, it was very pleasant and I was just picked up at the depot, and taken on into the company, so there wasn't any mood there to explain.

CLIFFORD: So, the English treated you very well?

DAVIS: Oh, yes. Very well.

PIEHLER: Where were you billeted, you and your company?

DAVIS: I can't tell you that, because I don't remember the name of the street.

PIEHLER: Were you in an apartment?

DAVIS: We were in a big warehouse building.

PIEHLER: A big warehouse. That had been converted into barracks?

DAVIS: One floor. And the rest of it still was supplies.

PIEHLER: But, was it a street where civilians were living?

DAVIS: Oh yes, just like uptown. You could walk right out and get on the subway and go right up to Piccadilly Circus and whatever. All the time we were, the men all had Class A passes. And then, after their work time, they could go anywhere until work time again. They didn't have bed check or anything.

PIEHLER: So, in some ways it was something like an eight-to-five or nine-to-five job. In the sense that you did your job and unless there was some reason, you could just go to a pub or you could go ...

DAVIS: You were on your own. Sure.

PIEHLER: There must of been some fun had by you and your men in your company?

DAVIS: Oh, yeah, we enjoyed it, sure.

PIEHLER: What did men do with their time?

DAVIS: Different men did different things. Most of them just went sightseeing, and—well, ninety percent of them went to a pub. (Laughter) Eating fish and chips. Didn't get bread, you know, just fish and chips.

PIEHLER: What sightseeing did you do, or did you do sight seeing? Did you remember, [did] anything stick out?

DAVIS: Yeah, I went to Piccadilly Circus, and I went to the palace, the park, places like that. But, I didn't do any extensive traveling.

PIEHLER: Did you see any plays or go to any movies?

DAVIS: No, no, I didn't see them.

CLIFFORD: Now while you were in England eggs were under a real tight ration. Do you have any stories about the egg rationing?

DAVIS: Yeah, this friend of mine, he got him a girlfriend. He would go see her every Sunday. And, they would fix him two fried eggs. And then, ... he found out after a few weeks, why, that was their egg ration for the whole week. They would save them for him.

PIEHLER: So, he probably thought he was more special than he realized?

DAVIS: Yeah, that was really nice of the British people, I mean, the English people.

PIEHLER: How much dating was going on between people in your company, and English women, for example?

DAVIS: It was mostly one-night-stands. Unless they had two eggs. (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: What was your first Christmas like during service?

DAVIS: Well, my first Christmas, we always had turkey. It didn't make any difference where we were. And, outside of a big meal, that was about the extent of it.

CLIFFORD: What was your reaction the first time you heard the air raid sirens?

DAVIS: I guess you are looking for some place to run, and you didn't know where to run. So, you just stood there and looked. That is it.

PIEHLER: You mentioned your whole block was—you started there and some of the block had already been bombed out or buzz bombed. And by that time you left, you were the only building left standing. What was the closest experience that you had? I mean, during a buzz bomb attack ... in London?

DAVIS: Well ...

PIEHLER: Were you outside, for example?

DAVIS: No, no. I was always inside. These buzz bombs, most of them come over at night. And, it was for days there that they didn't really know what they was. They thought they was pilotless planes, that the guy flying the plane, why, he was just suicide, you know. But, it was quite something, yeah. And even though that you were outside, which I was sometimes, you see one a-coming and coming pretty close to you, you wouldn't know what to do because sometimes it went straight down, sometimes it went to the right, to the left, sometimes it went back. So, you just stood there and prayed for a few minutes 'til it went off.

PIEHLER: I have read that London was just full of servicemen and servicewomen in this period from '43 to '44. Not just the Americans, of course the British, but all these other Commonwealth countries. Do you have any recollection of all the different people just in London?

DAVIS: No, you just see different people. I wouldn't know where all of them was from because there was so many of them. You just didn't pay any attention to them.

PIEHLER: Now, did any of your men ever get into fights with any British servicemen, or ...

DAVIS: Yeah, yeah, there was a few fights, uh huh.

PIEHLER: Over girls, or?

DAVIS: I don't know what it was over. I was fortunate enough to not ...

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PIEHLER: You'd mentioned there were some bloody noses every now and then.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm. That would be [while] coming from some pub. Then they said, "Well, there will be a pub out of business tonight," because they will take a gang and go back and close it up, you know. It wasn't too bad. They wasn't there to fight each other. They was there looking for the Germans. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: While you were in England, what was your company's mission? Was it just simply getting ready for the invasion and waiting, or did you just have to supply American troops in England?

DAVIS: Yes, we had some troops in England that we supplied. We were busy. The whole unit was busy, what time there was there.

PIEHLER: So, while they had this great pass, they still had a lot of work to do?

DAVIS: Sure, yeah, yeah. As long as their work got finished, why, that was good.

PIEHLER: What kind of things did you supply, and how did that work? How many units did you supply, and how many men was that?

DAVIS: I don't know how many units that we supplied while we were in London, but we were supposed to be equipped to supply 84,000 men in Class One, Two, and Three supplies. [We supplied] no chemicals or no ammunition and stuff like that. Clothing, food and tents maybe, or something. When we got on over in France, why, then we supplied General Patton's army while he was going on up into Germany.

CLIFFORD: How long before the invasion did you find out about the fact that we were going to invade? Were there rumors floating around?

DAVIS: That was a top secret. We read about it in the paper the next morning, or something. That wasn't talked [about] at all.

CLIFFORD: So you didn't hear about it until the day after we invaded?

DAVIS: Right.

PIEHLER: So, for your unit, you had no preparation to be sort of part of ...

DAVIS: No, no.

PIEHLER: You were just a supply unit, and you were surprised as anyone that D-Day came when it did?

Davis: I'm sure that we supplied a lot of the soldiers that went over there. Or, maybe all of them, I don't know, but our units supplied a lot of men.

CLIFFORD: What was the date you arrived at Omaha?

DAVIS: Fourteen days after D-Day, which would have been the 20th.

CLIFFORD: Explain the scene as you walked onto the beach.

DAVIS: Well, when we got to where we could see the beach, we had to sit out in the ship there for all day and all night; I think it was. 'Cause, I remember this guy lit a cigarette back there somewhere, and when he struck that match, why, you could have seen it for miles. And, that wasn't too exciting. And when we got on the ground, why, the scene wasn't too bad. You didn't see no bodies at that time. It was just an ordinary beach that had litter, and things like that on it. But, it wasn't too bad at all.

CLIFFORD: Were there white crosses on the beach?

DAVIS: What?

CLIFFORD: Were there white crosses on the beach?

DAVIS: I didn't see any.

PIEHLER: You didn't see the cemetery in Omaha?

DAVIS: No, no, they wouldn't have been on the beach. They would have been over somewhere else, yeah.

CLIFFORD: Were you surprised that our troops had overcome German fortifications?

DAVIS: Um, not surprised.

CLIFFORD: Were mines a concern?

DAVIS: Sure, there was a concern.

CLIFFORD: What did you do to avoid the mines? Were they marked?

DAVIS: Well, where we were, it had already been checked for mines, and the troops had moved on up there. You see, this was fourteen days after they first landed there, and they had pushed them on back. And, they were on up quite a little bit. In fact, we didn't see them or anything, because they were already gone on up. And, we had to wait there until they got up far enough for us to have an adequate place to get started with our part of the program. And we were there for about two weeks on the beachhead, and then we were moved on up to Reims, France, to this big white house. We set up there and stayed there until after Berlin was taken, and then from there I took a convoy and went up through France, Belgium, and on into Germany and on into Berlin to the place that we were designated to go. The men was already there when we got there with the convoy. Then there was a different convoy that they went in, and we were there until we got shipped out to come home. In Berlin. We lived in London for nine months, and I think I was in Berlin for nine months, so I've seen part of the world.

CLIFFORD: What was the French population like?

DAVIS: The French people were—they're good people. They're friendly, and, nice, and they all carry a jug of wine. They're just nice to be with.

CLIFFORD: Did it seem like they had been affected by the German occupation?

DAVIS: Of course, you didn't know them before, but they seemed a little bit odd. But, still, they didn't seem nervous, or anything like that. I guess they had already been through that long enough to get settled.

CLIFFORD: But, they still had their cattle in the field, and were going on with their daily business?

DAVIS: Yeah, the farmers did, yeah. Of course, they didn't have that in Paris.

CLIFFORD: Can you remember watching the hundreds of planes fly overhead on their way to St-Lo?

DAVIS: Yes. We were on the beachhead there playing ball when that happened. They came over from St-Lo, and they came over from England. And, they said there was 3,500 of them up there at one time. Just like a big flock of big birds going over, just rumble, rumble, rumble. Big sight of the war.

PIEHLER: How long were you actually on the beach as the quartermaster unit?

DAVIS: About two weeks.

PIEHLER: Two weeks? And then, where did you go to next?

DAVIS: Reims, France.

PIEHLER: And how long were you in Reims? Sounds like you were there for a while.

DAVIS: Yeah, we were there all the time that they were pushing across France, and also Belgium, and then on through to Germany until ... they surrendered.

PIEHLER: When you were in Reims, where were you based? What kind of facility? Were you in tents, or did you move to buildings?

DAVIS: No, in Reims we were in tents. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: For the whole ...

DAVIS: For the whole time.

DAVIS: That's a long time to live in tents.

DAVIS: Yeah, yeah.

DAVIS: Those tents are pretty large, and I believe it's four men in each tent. It's not all that bad.

CLIFFORD: Were ya'll the focus of nightly air raids? The supply lines?

DAVIS: No, after we got out of London, why, we didn't have any raids to speak of where we were. Because I think that we were so much stronger than they, why, they couldn't get to us.

CLIFFORD: Had the mood kind of shifted by the time the planes attacked St-Lo and we broke out at St-lo? Did you feel like we were winning the war? Did the troops feel that way?

DAVIS: Sure. See, you had two big armies coming together when that happened, and that's what gave us the big push. They had the power then.

PIEHLER: How did you, men in your unit, get the news when you were in France about how the war was going? Did you, for example, read Stars and Stripes, or ...

DAVIS: Well, yeah, the newspaper, and radio, and people talking, just like you would at home.

PIEHLER: Mm-hmm

CLIFFORD: Was the radio broadcasted from London?

DAVIS: It was broadcasted from everywhere.

PIEHLER: Did you ever listen to any of the Berlin stations for music?

DAVIS: Yeah. (Laughter) Yeah. I listened to all of it.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you also had some good humor with, I forget the ...

DAVIS: The girls ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, Axis Sally, wasn't she?

DAVIS: Yeah, something like that. (Laughter) Yeah she had us whipped three or four times. (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: Did ya'll believe here, ever?

DAVIS: No.

CLIFFORD: Ya'll knew what she was up to?

DAVIS: Yeah, yeah. She was comical.

PIEHLER: Troops in the field have often—I mean, it's tough to supply a lot of people with so much material. How tough was it from a quartermaster's perspective? How tough was your job to get supplies to people who needed it? Because the army did have a lot of problems, particularly when the American units got so far ahead of the supply lines, and moved so quickly.

DAVIS: You know, I can't answer that truthfully because I wasn't in the warehouses, but I do know that we, our men, loaded a train out every night called the Red Ball Express in Reims, France, right on up into the line, wherever Patton's army was. They call it the Red Ball Express. And I don't know how large the train was at that time either, but that was every night's job.

CLIFFORD: So, did you ever actually come in contact with Patton?

DAVIS: No.

CLIFFORD: Did you have any friends that did?

DAVIS: Yes, a guy that worked with me back at the store was his chauffeur for a while. I don't know how long, but during the time he was going across this route we've just been talking about.

CLIFFORD: What did he say Patton was like? Did he have any stories?

DAVIS: I never did talk with him about it. No, I didn't.

CLIFFORD: Did you ever come into contact with any German soldiers?

DAVIS: No, nothing other than the one time we had different prisoners, but this one started to run off, and I grabbed a rifle and went and scared him back. But, that's the only contact I'd had.

PIEHLER: The prisoners, did you have them working for the unit, or ...

DAVIS: No, I don't know. I don't remember why this prisoner was just out there without someone being with him. But they must have had him doing a little job or something, you know. But, it wasn't our job for prisoners at all. He must have just been attached to us. Although, during the Battle of the Bulge, we were scheduled to be active in that, even though we wasn't combat soldiers, and fortunately we got cancelled out again.

PIEHLER: You were ready to move out? You were getting ready to move?

DAVIS: Yeah, we thought we were going out, and our orders got cancelled. They had us to guard 3,500 prisoners there at that time. And that was quite an ordeal, but we had the advantage on them, of course, you know.

PIEHLER: How long did you have to guard 3,500?

DAVIS: It must have been two or three weeks. It was a long time.

PIEHLER: And this was in France?

DAVIS: Yeah, this was in France.

PIEHLER: Where you were based, Reims? What's that like, to guard 3,500 people? That's a lot of people.

DAVIS: A lot of people, and they were all in a fenced in area, you know. Kind of like a big prison. And the men walking around it guarded, seeing that nobody'd ever get out.

PIEHLER: And, what about food and feeding them?

DAVIS: I wasn't in on that. I don't know, but I am sure that they was fed.

PIEHLER: But, it sounds like a lot of your men had a—'cause you still had the supply duties to do? You know, loading, or did ...

DAVIS: Uh, no, not right there, I don't think. I don't remember exactly what happened there for just a few days, but I can't answer that truthfully.

PIEHLER: And then the 3,500, where did they go? Were they sent further back, or ...

DAVIS: That I don't know.

PIEHLER: You don't know what happened to them?

DAVIS: They was shipped out, and it was goodbye, and that was it. I don't know what they did with them.

CLIFFORD: While you were on the continent, how often did you get to bathe? And, how did ya'll bathe?

DAVIS: We had these trailers that had showers in them, and you would have your day to take your shower. Each company would have their specific time, and the thing that happened there one time was that all of us start out alphabetically, and me being Davis, why, I was pretty close up to the top, and I got in and got out and the people in A, B, C, D, was in and out. And they started on down the line, and one group got in there and got all soaped up real good, and the water ran off. (Laughter) They hadn't had a bath in about three days, I believe it was. That was something else.

PIEHLER: What about the food? How was the food?

DAVIS: The food, most of the time, was good.

PIEHLER: How much fraternization between men in your unit and the French, French women?

DAVIS: Well, quite a bit. I guess you'd say what was kind of expected and normal.

PIEHLER: Any marriages? Any war brides? Because you were in a fixed place in

France for a long time, compared to a lot of units.

DAVIS: Not that I know of. Neither were they in England or France in our company, that I know of.

PIEHLER: When you were in England, you said that you had a Class A pass. What about in France? How often could you get off ...

DAVIS: Not very often, but you get a break every now and then, and kind of like a little vacation. I got a ten-day leave to go to Switzerland one time. And, I got to go to Paris a half a dozen times or something, and other little burls around.

PIEHLER: Well, what do you remember about Paris and Switzerland particularly? I mean, Erick's just been to Paris?

DAVIS: Well, I remember in England, I mean, Switzerland, the milk tasted mighty good cause I hadn't had a glass in two years. (Laughter) And that's one thing they cautioned us about was not drinking too much milk, because it'd make us sick cause you hadn't had any, you know. In Switzerland, why, we were over in the Swiss Alps, and it was kindly like a vacation place, and just different things to do over there cause they got their things to do over there kind of like our things over here. And, Paris is the same thing. Go see this, and go see that. After it's all over with, why, you've just seen it. (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: Could you tell a difference in the soldiers who were involved in combat and the ones who weren't?

DAVIS: No, no. I didn't. Of course, those people that had all the nervous spells and that kind of thing, why, they were in a hospital or something. And you know, in the army you're either well or you're sick. There is no in-between. If you're sick, you're in the hospital. If you're well, you're out. So you don't have any contact much with those at all.

CLIFFORD: What was it like traveling through Germany?

DAVIS: Not much more difference than traveling through the United States, being on the roads. Is that what you're speaking of?

CLIFFORD: Uh, well ...

DAVIS: The highways?

CLIFFORD: The people. Do you think—you mentioned to me earlier this year that you thought that Germany, the people, and the American people were the most alike out of all

the places you'd been.

DAVIS: Yeah, yeah they seemed to like the same things more, and their way of life seems to be more the same than any other countries.

CLIFFORD: How did the German citizens treat you as an American soldier?

DAVIS: Real good. Had no problems with any of them. Real good.

PIEHLER: How devastated was Germany? I mean, driving through, did you notice?

DAVIS: Yes, you'd see lots and lots of people walking, you know. Look like starvation is either there or about to be, but their way of life was just about a thing of the past for them, and were just about to give up, as well as the soldiers had to give up. And the citizens was right along with them.

PIEHLER: The convoy that you took to Berlin, how long did it take you to get to Berlin?

DAVIS: I believe it was three days.

PIEHLER: Because I imagine also there were a lot of bombed out bridges, or those ...

DAVIS: Not the route we took.

PIEHLER: Not the route you took. You were able to ...

DAVIS: Yeah, we went through France and Belgium and on into Germany. Of course, they had our routes scheduled out for us, and that wasn't no problem.

PIEHLER: That was in, in some ways a very smooth trip. You were based in Berlin for nine months, which is a long time. When did you arrive in Berlin? Was it June of '45?

DAVIS: Lets see, '44, '45, I left there in January of '46, so it had to be somewhere along about May or June of ...

PIEHLER: So, pretty soon after the surrender?

DAVIS: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: You were ...

DAVIS: We set up the first supply depot after the war in Berlin.

PIEHLER: So literally, the ruins, you know, the ruins had barely cooled.

DAVIS: Just when the shooting stopped, why, they shipped us right in.

PIEHLER: And, um ...

DAVIS: And the Russians, we could've got there earlier, but we had to wait for the Russians to get in there first. That's what made General Patton so angry, because he wanted to go on in, and they wouldn't let him because they had an agreement with Russia that they let her to go in there first because of the bad treatment that the Germans had given Russia. Now, that was a month or so.

PIEHLER: What were your first impressions of Berlin as one of the first Americans, one of the first Americans to enter?

DAVIS: Well, it looked more like the city of London than any other place I had been. [Its was] bombed out.

PIEHLER: Because of the bombed out ...

DAVIS: Because of the bombed out [areas], yeah, mm-hmm.

PIEHLER: Where were you based in Berlin?

DAVIS: Right—kind of in the heart of the city, and I don't remember the name of the streets or things like that anymore.

PIEHLER: Were you near, for example, the Brandenburg Gate, 'cause that's a pretty big ...

DAVIS: No, no.

PIEHLER: Or, near the Reichstag, or any of those ...

DAVIS: No, no.

PIEHLER: But it was still really in the center of the city, you weren't in the outskirts?

DAVIS: I don't think so.

PIEHLER: Were you in a building, based in a building?

DAVIS: Oh yeah, we were in a huge building where they had manufactured these buzz

bombs.

PIEHLER: So, a factory?

DAVIS: Uh huh. And it was a huge building. We had our supplies and our company headquarters and everything right in that one building. It was so big, it covered about a block.

PIEHLER: Throughout the war were you ever aware of Hitler's persecution of the Jews, or was that a kind of a secret throughout the war?

DAVIS: It wasn't nearly as well known as it was after it was over, and you learned all about it.

CLIFFORD: So, you never encountered any Jews who had been victims?

DAVIS: No, no.

PIEHLER: You're in Berlin, and your job was to supply American units stationed in Berlin? Or, were you also responsible for people in West Germany? Or was it just the Berlin—what was the area of responsibility for your company?

DAVIS: I don't know the area of responsibility.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

DAVIS: Its just wherever the armies were that was on our schedule to supply.

PIEHLER: So, anyway, they were just units on a piece of paper, I mean, you didn't quite know where they actually were, except ...

DAVIS: No, no I didn't.

PIEHLER: How much fraternization went on between ... German civilians and men in your unit while you were in Berlin?

DAVIS: Oh, quite a bit. The boys and girls got along real good. The men, I never saw anything [bad] happen between the men. They got along like civilized people you might say.

CLIFFORD: Did the German citizens ever invite men into their homes?

DAVIS: I'm sure they did.

PIEHLER: 'Cause I've been told you could go a long way with a few chocolate bars or packs of cigarettes. That, that ...

DAVIS: That would help you get there. (Laughter) Yeah.

PIEHLER: Now, you were, after V-E day, were you destined to go to Japan? I mean, was there ...

DAVIS: No.

PIEHLER: No, you were never ...

DAVIS: No.

PIEHLER: What about your points. I mean, you were obviously eager to get home, particularly after ...

DAVIS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: V-J Day.

DAVIS: Yeah, you had points, and where it qualified you, so many of them qualified you to be discharged first, or second, or third, or whatever.

PIEHLER: What was happening to the company, particularly after V-J day?

DAVIS: I was just doing the same work that they know to.

PIEHLER: But, did people start disappearing you knew, and new people came in, or?

DAVIS: No.

PIEHLER: Or, did roughly you all have the same ...

DAVIS: My company, as I told you before, had 151 Tennesseans, and later on before we went over, why, there was a few of them couldn't meet the grade for some reason, health-wise or whatever. And, then, our T.O. was changed to 186 men, but those two things together, why, then that took part of our Tennesseans away. And, when it come time to be discharged, there were still ninety original Tennesseans in the company, and we were all discharged at the same time.

PIEHLER: So, you went over as a group and then you came back as a group?

DAVIS: Yeah. Came back on the same ship. Well, not the same ship, but ...

PIEHLER: Yes, but you came as, you came back as ...

DAVIS: Yeah, right.

PIEHLER: So you didn't—'cause a lot of people who, they sort of—their points came up and they left as ...

DAVIS: Yeah, well, a few of ours did because of age or something, but ...

PIEHLER: But, most ...

DAVIS: But, most of us come back together, yeah.

PIEHLER: What about—you said you got along well with the Germans, both the women, but even the men. How much contact with the Russians?

DAVIS: Well, I sold one of them Russian soldiers a watch for eight hundred dollars. I thought I was doing good. (Laughter) My dad never did forgive me for it, because he sent it to me, and he said, "I don't care how much you got for it." He said, "That was a gift from me." (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: You're the consummate business man, Pee Paw.

DAVIS: But those Russians, they hadn't been paid in so long that they had a shoulder bag on them with their money in it, they had so much money. They was just buying anything and everything, you know. But, you couldn't have too much conversation with them, because they couldn't understand you, and you couldn't understand them. But they were all nice, but you wasn't very close to them.

PIEHLER: But, there was no animosity? You don't remember ...

DAVIS: No, no.

PIEHLER: In fact, you had quite a business deal with one.

DAVIS: But, they were your friend. I mean, you was fighting the same cause, you know.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So you viewed them at that time really as allies?

DAVIS: Sure, yeah, just like brothers.

PIEHLER: Any contact with any other occupying [forces]? Because the British were there, and French?

DAVIS: Different British—you'd have a little bit of contact, but not very much.

PIEHLER: But not very much ...

DAVIS: They were—seemed like harder to get acquainted with than anyone over there, the British soldiers were.

PIEHLER: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: But, you didn't need them. You had all your men. That's all you needed.

PIEHLER: What were some of the problems you faced in your position? What were the problems and the successes? I mean, what was an individual day say like, say, when you were in Reims or in Germany? What kinds of jobs did you do in the company? You said you never had to have a command formation, so things obviously went ...

DAVIS: That was after I ...

PIEHLER: Became first sergeant?

DAVIS: Became first sergeant. Why, it was more like a civilian job. You had your office to take care of, your men to account for and take care of, and your sick call to make, and all that. Just routine things. As far as problems, there was no problems, just regular duties to perform. That was it.

CLIFFORD: How do you feel about President Truman?

DAVIS: I think he's a great man. I think he pulled the right trigger at the right time.

PIEHLER: You probably remember, or do you remember when Franklin Roosevelt died?

DAVIS: Sure.

PIEHLER: Where were you? Do you remember?

DAVIS: Hmm. What year was it?

PIEHLER: 1945.

DAVIS: I was in Germany.

PIEHLER: And, did your unit do anything special that you remember?

DAVIS: No, not that I remember, course it was all sad, but as far as doing anything special, I don't remember.

PIEHLER: How did you come home?

DAVIS: I came to Fort Atterbury, up in ...

PIEHLER: Massachusetts?

DAVIS: No. Kokomo, Indiana.

PIEHLER: How did you come home? You came home by ship again?

DAVIS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What ship was it this time? Do you remember?

DAVIS: I don't remember.

PIEHLER: Was it as comfortable or as uncomfortable as ...

DAVIS: Very much more comfortable.

PIEHLER: So, you didn't have to sleep in the kitchen, in the dining room?

DAVIS: No, no. And, I didn't get seasick coming back.

PIEHLER: And, you didn't get an attack of appendicitis?

DAVIS: No. No. I had an enjoyable trip. There's a difference going to something you want to, I guess, and going to something you have to, probably.

PIEHLER: And, you landed [at] which port? Was it New York, or ...

DAVIS: I think it was New York. I can't recall that right now.

PIEHLER: But, they shipped you to Camp Atterbury as your final ...

DAVIS: Mm-hmm.

PIEHLER: How long were you at Atterbury for?

DAVIS: Oh, a couple of days.

PIEHLER: And, then, you left the military?

DAVIS: Went out on the street and caught me a bus and got to Tennessee.

PIEHLER: Had you thought of re-enlisting?

DAVIS: They offered—my C.O. offered me in Germany a brick house to live in, a jeep to drive, and you know, during the war all of your promotions are temporary.

PIEHLER: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: To make my promotion as first sergeant permanently. And I turned him down.

PIEHLER: But, you could've had, at least temporarily, basically a house, a car, and a permanent promotion.

DAVIS: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you were a civilian in uniform. You wanted to get back to being a civilian.

DAVIS: Well, now, I didn't think too harsh about the uniform. It was an honor to wear it and all that, but I'm just not a man that likes that kind of life, I guess you would say.

PIEHLER: Mm-hmm.

DAVIS: Some of the men do.

PIEHLER: Had anyone tried to talk you into staying in the reserves?

DAVIS: No.

PIEHLER: No? So you didn't stay in the reserves?

DAVIS: No.

CLIFFORD: What was the first thing you did when you got back home? Remember?

DAVIS: The first thing I did when I got back home? I went around to see all my people, yeah.

CLIFFORD: Did things seem different back home?

DAVIS: Not much. Just about the same.

CLIFFORD: Was it hard to adjust back to civilian life?

DAVIS: There's nothing hard there at all. (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: Did you ever speak with your mom, or your dad, or any of your family, or Mee Maw, about your time in the war?

DAVIS: Oh yes, different times, yeah. That wasn't the number one subject, but occasionally it'd come around, and we'd have a discussion about different times, and different things that happened. Very often.

CLIFFORD: How long after being home was it before you got married?

DAVIS: Not very long. I got married March 9 in the same year I got home in January.

CLIFFORD: Did you and Mee Maw correspond during the war?

DAVIS: Oh yeah. Uh huh.

CLIFFORD: Did you write letters?

DAVIS: Wrote letters.

CLIFFORD: Did you miss her?

DAVIS: Everyday.

CLIFFORD: You'd better say that. (Laughter) Did you talk to Mee Maw about the war when you got back?

DAVIS: I'm sure we had many conversations about the war, and many more.

CLIFFORD: Have you kept in touch with anybody you served with?

DAVIS: Yes. We had a 488th Quartermaster Corps Depot Company, that was the name

of the company that I was in, and my twenty-fifth year, we had a twenty-fifth-year anniversary down in Columbia, Tennessee. And they was, I don't know, about 150 people there, but that was a lot of men and their wives. And, the guy that got this up, well, everybody contributed something, but the one that was really behind it was a guy that worked with me in the supply office. And I was in close contact with him. His name was Gene Strong. I was in close contact with my friend, Neil Brogdin, who is from Knoxville here, and two or three from Union County and different things. But that is the only reunion we have had with all of them. And I am sure that part of them is gone now.

CLIFFORD: When ya'll all got together, what was it like?

DAVIS: It was like coming home. It was like a big homecoming.

CLIFFORD: Did you carry a Bible during the war?

DAVIS: A what?

CLIFFORD: Did you carry a Bible during the war?

DAVIS: Well, I had a small one I had in my pocket most of the time.

PIEHLER: Did you have much contact with chaplains? Did you ever go to services?

DAVIS: No, never did.

PIEHLER: Did you ever go to services?

DAVIS: Yes, I went to services.

PIEHLER: By the chaplains? Because when you were in England, did you ever go to any of the English churches?

DAVIS: No.

CLIFFORD: Did you carry a good luck charm of any sorts during the war?

DAVIS: No.

CLIFFORD: What stands out most about the war?

DAVIS: Well, it'd be hard to say, other than it's over. That stands out more than anything. But, you forget about what few hardships you have had, and just kindly erase that from your mind, just like you can't remember what street you was on sometime, or

you can't remember over here all these years, because it's just gone and we don't dwell on it anymore.

CLIFFORD: As far as war experiences go, would you describe your experience in the war as a good one?

DAVIS: Extra good. Anytime you're back it's extra good.

PIEHLER: What about people you grew up with? How did your experience compare to them? Did you know some people from your county who really had some tough time, I mean, saw combat, or ...

DAVIS: I've never talked with anyone about that, to speak of. I just don't think that their experiences was—I know some of them was a lot more than mine, in that respect, but they just don't talk about ...

PIEHLER: It sounds like you didn't talk a lot about the war when you came back. I mean, you talked a little to your family but that, even with the store you didn't spend an afternoon talking about the war.

DAVIS: No, no. I didn't tell any tall stories. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, it sounds like there weren't a lot of tall stories told to you, that you remember.

DAVIS: No, no.

CLIFFORD: Did any of the 151 Tennesseans you served with become casualties?

DAVIS: No.

PIEHLER: No accidents? No car accidents, or ...

DAVIS: No. I believe that one of those guys from somewhere, I don't remember his name, I don't remember which town he was from, got shipped out from our company into another company. I believe he got hurt in service, but that's the only one that I know about.

CLIFFORD: Did you ever receive any honors for your service?

DAVIS: No, nothing other than the usual little old buttons that they put on you for being a good boy. (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: While in service, you were able to see America from the East Coast, the West Coast, Europe from England to Germany. What did all the different cultures and traditions reveal to you about humanity? People?

DAVIS: Well, you know, I just don't see too much difference in people. Whether they're from the North or the East or the South or the West, after you get to know them, well, they're just people. I can't tell any difference in them.

PIEHLER: I'm curious: did you ever see a USO show when you were overseas?

DAVIS: I never did have an opportunity to see one of those. Now that would've excited me real good.

PIEHLER: So you just never got ...

DAVIS: No, no.

PIEHLER: Did your unit, do you think, ate better or got better supplies because you were a quartermaster unit?

DAVIS: We could have, but if we did, I don't know it. Because you have your ration printed out to go by and that wasn't done by the company, I don't think. I think it was done by someone else. But, we always had good eats. I don't mean extra-good eats, but I mean good eats.

PIEHLER: Talk to me just a little bit—because you were here for a little bit before you went to the service in March of '43. You were running a store when rationing was coming. Without naming names in the county, how big was the black market? All of a sudden farmers, a lot of their supplies are—and you don't have to name names, but I guess, what was your sense of ...

DAVIS: I wasn't involved in that. No way. And I wouldn't work with anyone that was involved. And I just don't know what they did. But I do know that a lot of grocery men would sell different items at too much money, and people that would need, well, for instance, sugar, to make moonshine whiskey and things like that, at an extra, extra big price. And, that just wasn't right to take it away from the regular trade to do that. So, I'm just not familiar with the black market.

PIEHLER: But, you knew it was definitely out there?

DAVIS: Definitely. Definitely, and strong out there.

PIEHLER: What about gasoline? Were there places in the county that you could get

gasoline without ...

DAVIS: Not in the county, I don't think.

PIEHLER: But, Knoxville, you ...

DAVIS: I don't know about Knoxville. We had gas in our place, so I don't know about other places.

PIEHLER: Your store, you mentioned that you had a lot of the weekend trade. How did the war affect that?

DAVIS: You never slow down fishing. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: That didn't ...

DAVIS: A lot of Kentucky people ...

PIEHLER: Came, yeah. So it was still close enough that, even with their travel restriction ...

DAVIS: Yeah, uh huh.

CLIFFORD: What would you say is the biggest difference between your generation and your grandchildren's generation?

DAVIS: Why the grandchildren's got it so good, why, they just don't know how well they do have it, you know. In our generation, we had it good also, but we just didn't have the opportunities that the generation has today.

CLIFFORD: Are there any significant changes in farming today, compared to when you were younger?

DAVIS: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

CLIFFORD: Good or bad?

DAVIS: Good. More production, yeah.

CLIFFORD: What is your feeling on the government's intervention on tobacco farmers?

DAVIS: I think it's terrible. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, I guess, how has farming changed? What do you remember? What's so different about farming?

DAVIS: Well, farming went from a team of horses or mules to tractors and equipment.

PIEHLER: So, you remember horses and mules?

DAVIS: Oh yeah. My dad kept two or three teams at one time. He kept two or three teams at one time of horses and mules. And then he got his first farm tractor ... right after the war.

PIEHLER: So, even through the war it was—so you know how to ...

DAVIS: He couldn't buy a tractor. He had his down payment, that they would take your request for to buy a tractor. And they require so much money down to make sure you'd take it, and he'd have it down in three different places for about a year before he ever got a tractor. And, from then on, why, it eased the work.

PIEHLER: It sounds like there was a lot of days in the field with a mule team.

DAVIS: There were. Yeah. But I didn't get in on that.

PIEHLER: You were mainly in the store?

DAVIS: I was in the business. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Had you thought of using the G.I. Bill to go to college or other education?

DAVIS: No, no.

PIEHLER: Did you use the G.I. Mortgage to buy a ...

DAVIS: No. No way.

PIEHLER: And, did you use it to try to get a small business loan, or?

DAVIS: No. No way.

CLIFFORD: When you got back, there was a period when you could go without work and still be paid. Did you take advantage of that?

DAVIS: They call it mustering-out pay. I got that mustering-out pay.

PIEHLER: But, did you ever get the “Fifty-two and twenty?” Where you got unemployment insurance?

DAVIS: No, mustering-out pay was all I ever taken, and it was I don’t know how many months, but it wasn’t very long. And, that was kindly a going away present, I took it as.

PIEHLER: Did you ever join a veteran’s organization after?

DAVIS: Yes, I belong to the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

PIEHLER: Did you join that right when you got back, or ...

DAVIS: Yes.

PIEHLER: Were you active in the local chapter at all, or ...

DAVIS: No, not too much.

PIEHLER: And you continued to work in the store, then, after you got back? Or, what happened after the war?

DAVIS: After I got back, I got married, and Jessie and I, why, we took over the business completely, and I am still in business.

PIEHLER: With the same store?

DAVIS: No, no. No, I went from Sharp’s Chapel to Maynardville. Then in ‘76, I sold the business and was out until ‘89. Then went into the hardware business, and I’m still there.

CLIFFORD: How old were you when you started the hardware business?

DAVIS: Well, that was ‘89. Twenty-two from ‘89 would be sixty-seven, I guess.

CLIFFORD: So when your average American retires at 65, you were starting a new business at 67.

DAVIS: Yeah, I’d already retired. I started the second round. (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: And, now you’re seventy-eight years old and you go to work six days a week.

DAVIS: Six days, yeah.

CLIFFORD: And you're still building new buildings, and running a farm, and raising tobacco. You think all that work keeps you going?

DAVIS: Well, it keeps you going, alright. (Laughter) Yeah, it helps.

PIEHLER: ... Why did you move to Maynardville? What led you to ...

DAVIS: Well, Maynardville is a bigger area with more people than Sharps Chapel.

PIEHLER: And then, maybe, why did you leave in '76? You mentioned you sold out the Maynardville ...

DAVIS: I wanted to get out of the general merchandise business. I'd been in it all my life, and I was ...

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Fred Davis on September 4, 2000, in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

CLIFFORD: Erick Clifford.

PIEHLER: And, you were saying you had built a building in ...

DAVIS: Yes, this property I have in Maynardville. I was building up a little place there with different businesses on it, and I built this building especially for this guy to go into [the] hardware business. And, he was there for nearly nine years, maybe a little more than nine years, and he done a tremendous amount of business. And he decided to retire, and did, and sold out. I thought I'd like to try the hardware business for a while, and I just got back into business.

CLIFFORD: So, what were you doing in this period from the time you got out of general merchandising to hardware?

DAVIS: I was taking care of my farms, and building buildings, and taking care of my rental properties and upkeeping them, and raising cattle like always.

CLIFFORD: So, when you say you retired, you never really retired.

DAVIS: Well, from the general merchandising business. I retired from that.

PIEHLER: How many farms do you have that ...

DAVIS: Four.

PIEHLER: And, Erick was saying you have a new project to build a horse farm, if I ...

DAVIS: Yes. My daughter, Debbie, she has a daughter, which is my granddaughter, of course, that's in[to] hunter/jumper horse riding things, and we were fixing a place for her to have a place at home. And, she has done real well in this horse jumping. And the fact is, she made the national this last year, and we're seeing if she'll keep on at it.

CLIFFORD: Are there any good stories from your service or from your life that you want to tell us, and you can share with your family for a long time coming?

DAVIS: No. I know a few good stories, but I like to keep them with me. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I guess, one general question about what happened after 1945, is what did you think of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, both then, and in retrospect?

DAVIS: You know, there's so much controversy about that. And to me, I just couldn't understand why it was going on to start with, and I thought it was just a bloody thing that should never have happened. And, you can't do anything about it so, what are you gonna do? You just can't sit around and worry about it. It's bad, awful bad.

PIEHLER: So, ... you didn't think Vietnam was going well back in the '60s?

DAVIS: No.

PIEHLER: You've been a Democrat in a very Republican area.

DAVIS: Yeah. You've got to have a few good people in all these things. (Laughter) I'm the only Democrat in my wife's family. I've took care of them all these years. (Laughter) This one guy told me that—this is a good story—we was sitting, having coffee, me, him, and his wife, and he was much older than I was at the time, and we was just casual talking. And, he said, "Fred, when me and Bee, there, got married, she was a Republican." He's a strong Democrat. He said, "I changed that the first night." (Laughter) I don't think that Bee agreed with him though.

PIEHLER: With regard to the Democratic Party, how did you feel about—I mean, the party's been through all kind of changes. For example, how did you feel about George McGovern back in '72?

DAVIS: George McGovern?

PIEHLER: Yeah, were you able to still remain a loyal Democrat? Cause a lot of Democrats ...

DAVIS: Well, you can't have a hundred percent, you know. You've got to give a little bit at times. But, you can't recall too many of those, just maybe had one or two more.

PIEHLER: One or two more?

DAVIS: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So I guess, I could probably guess who you're voting for this election.

DAVIS: Well, if you can't, I can tell you. (Laughter)

CLIFFORD: I guess the role of parents is to teach and rear their children, but what did your two daughters teach you about life?

DAVIS: Well, they taught me that life was much greater than I ever expected it to be, with them helping me along. A very much enjoyable life with them. But, they just teach you that family is about the biggest thing in the world to you, just family.

PIEHLER: Anything else? Is there anything we forgot to ask?

DAVIS: If there are, why, you write me a letter. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, I've really enjoyed it. It's been a lot of fun.

DAVIS: Well, I enjoyed going back over the years, but there's so many things that I've forgotten, you know?

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

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