

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS N. PARLON

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VETERAN'S ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

INTERVIEW BY

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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Thomas N. PARLON on April 27th, 2000 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt PIEHLER and ...

JOYCE MILSAPS: Joyce MILSAPS

PIEHLER: And I would like to ask you to begin with when were you born and where were you born?

THOMAS N. PARLON: I was born in 1912 [on] June 29th. I was born on a farm at what was known as South Raub, Indiana, which is a few miles from Lafayette, Indiana.

PIEHLER: And ... did you have any brothers and sisters?

PARLON: I now have just a brother who lives in Indianapolis. I had two sisters who have passed away.

PIEHLER: Were your parents farmers?

PARLON: My father had been a farmer. He is a veteran of the Spanish-American War and ... didn't qualify then for World War I. And during World War I he went back to the farm to operate the farm for one of his friends who was going in the service. So ... we lived on that farm during World War I and that's about where my memory starts.

PIEHLER: So you remember World War I? Vaguely?

PARLON: Uh. I don't remember any of the details of it. The only thing I positively remember is traveling to Indianapolis with my family and my Grandmother to visit with my Uncle who was my mother's brother and was about to ship off for Europe. That's the only thing I really remember from World War I.

PIEHLER: ... is a family member shipping off to war.

PARLON: Yes.

PIEHLER: Your father was a Spanish- American War veteran?

PARLON: Yes.

PIEHLER: What did ... he tell you about the war growing up?

PARLON: Very little. He like most veterans don't talk much about it. But he served as a private.

[He] went in below the legal age and um, became a corporal before he finished. He served three years. I think from ... 1898 to 1901. I have a copy of his discharges here.

PIEHLER: Oh wow! So he signed up as a regular?

PARLON: Oh yes. He just volunteered.

PIEHLER: Your father had a number of, besides being a farmer and being in the military, he had a number of different jobs over the course...

PARLON: Yes.

PIEHLER: ... of his life. Could you tell us a little bit more about him?

PARLON: Well, when he came out of the service he became a fireman on the Monon railroad. And how long he was at that I don't know, uh, but then he came back and started farming again in this South Raub, Indiana, that I mentioned and that's where I was born, on that farm. And after awhile he opened a hardware store in the town of Romney, Indiana. And that was ... his occupation during the years that I remember well. You know as a youngster coming up through grade school. And he had me working in that hardware store when I was (Laughter) [young]. Well I learned a lot about tools and things just from that experience.

PIEHLER: So sounds like you were very young when he started to give you chores in the hardware store.

PARLON: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: How many days was the store open?

PARLON: It was open six days a week then.

PIEHLER: So just closed Sundays then.

PARLON: Yes. Yeah, of course it was selling to the farm trade they handled the farm implements and nails and hammers and that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: Was your father able to keep the store, the hardware store during the thirties?

PARLON: He was not able to keep it. The Depression hit that part of America, long before the real Depression.

PIEHLER: Um hum.

PARLON: And that business actually was pretty well decimated by Sears-Roebuck and Montgomery Ward who moved branch stores out of Chicago. And they had an operation in Lafayette, Indiana and just priced the little guy out of business.

PIEHLER: Your father even in the twenties was hit hard by the chains?

PARLON: About 1928. His business had to fold up.

PIEHLER: And then what did he do after that?

PARLON: He sold insurance for a little while and then he got involved in the country grain elevators and wound up managing a country grain elevator in Otterbein, Indiana, which is also near Lafayette. And that's the last profession he had in his business life. He passed away just ... shortly after I got home from World War II.

PIEHLER: In 1946?

PARLON: Forty-six, yeah. I think that he was really very much interested in the war particularly because I'd been places that he had been and he liked to compare notes....

PIEHLER: So he had been to the Philippines?

PARLON: That's where his service was primarily. Would have been Cuba and....

PIEHLER: So you could compare notes?

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You were writing him home.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: He had first hand experience.

PARLON: Yeah and ... during that period he began to have heart troubles and.. But he held on a little until I think I got home about December I think of forty-five and he passed away in January of forty-six.

PIEHLER: How did your parents meet do you know?

PARLON: Well they both grew up in that area. My mother had grown up in West Lafayette and my father had grown up on a farm right near Lafayette. Where they met I'm not sure but ... the thing that seemed different to me was that over their entire life neither one of them ever lived

more than fifteen miles from where they were born. (Laughter) In my day you traveled all over. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You've named a number of different towns that you can associate with growing up but they were all within a fifteen mile circle basically.

PARLON: Yeah. Right. Of course West Lafayette is the home of Purdue University and that's where I wound up.

PIEHLER: So there was not that great a distance between the different towns that you lived in.

PARLON: Oh no.

PIEHLER: Your mother actually went to college?

PARLON: She went to Valparaiso [University] and got a teacher's license there. And she taught in a one room school ... still within this radius.

PIEHLER: How long did she teach school for?

PARLON: I am not sure. I think she taught school until probably after my younger brother was born. And then she became just a homebody.

PIEHLER: But at one point she became a bookkeeper?

PARLON: She was good at bookkeeping. She did really that type of thing for the hardware business.

PIEHLER: So she really did the books for the business.

PARLON: She did there and for the grain elevator too.

PIEHLER: Oh okay.

PARLON: Ran that part of it.

PIEHLER: Oh okay. That's very interesting.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So she never really was a official employee of, well the store was a family store.

PARLON: Family store and no other wise she did what had to be done I guess.

PIEHLER: Now your parents were Methodists?

PARLON: Yeah. My father was a Catholic.

PIEHLER: And your mother was Methodist.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And so?

PARLON: I was born a Catholic but we lived in this town of Romney at this time and the Catholic Church didn't have churches in these little villages. You had to go to Lafayette. Well that was a trip over gravel roads at best. So they became part of the society in this small town and they were all Protestant people and they joined ... went with the Methodist church which was my mother's background.

PIEHLER: But you were originally baptized in the Catholic Church?

PARLON: Yes. My wife is a staunch Catholic, too. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So?

PARLON: So I've seen both sides of that. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Your parents were, was your father Republican, too? Like your mother?

PARLON: Good hard Republicans.

PIEHLER: Even in the hard times of the [Depression]?

PARLON: Oh yeah. Oh sure. They were staunchly for Herbert Hoover against (laughter) Franklin Roosevelt. You know.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so that is a test of the staunch.

PARLON: Right.

PIEHLER: On the staunch Republican. And this is more directed ... I've never experienced it, but I have read a lot about the twenties but could you for my students, who particularly for the students who will read this in years to come. Could you tell us a little about the life in 1920s growing up because it's now for them...?

PARLON: Uh-uh.

PIEHLER: ... it's almost ancient history.

PARLON: Right.

PIEHLER: Could you give any?

PARLON: Well, where we lived in this small town in Indiana, there were two forms of entertainment. One was, would be your church and the other would be Friday night basketball with the schools. (Laughter) Uh, I was never an active basketball player but did fool around at it you know. And, uh, took piano lessons which was a thing to do. My Mother was pretty strong on that sort of thing and uh, I didn't really take to the piano but I like music and ... I became a trumpet player. I found an old cornet and took that up. And during the twenties became a pretty good trumpet player, if I say so myself. (Laughter) That is how I happened to get into the National Guard.

PIEHLER: Was your trumpet playing?

PARLON: Yes, there was a 151st Indiana ... National Guard. [They] had a band based a (New Richmond, Indiana, which is about six miles from where I lived, and they were in need of a trumpet player (Laughter) so they came after me to join the band and I was fourteen years old then.

PIEHLER: Which is under ... well little under age? (Laughter)

PARLON: So I signed up in 1926. And I went to Fort Knox every summer with them for a couple weeks. Did the things that you would do.

PIEHLER: But you were how old in 1926? You were?

PARLON: Fourteen.

PIEHLER: Fourteen, and how could you?

PARLON: Well.

PIEHLER: Did they?

PARLON: They were that desperate for trumpet players. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So... on your paper it said you were fourteen or did they nudge the date a little?

PARLON: Well. It was all rigged. I was to be eighteen years old. I, of course, would have to remember if somebody asked me which they would, you know inspections, when were you born.

Well, I'd have to know to move 1912 to 1908. That sort of thing you know.

PIEHLER: Well what ... I mean you were pretty young; fourteen is your first year in high school.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What was it like to be with a bunch of grown men?

PARLON: Well, I guess fortunately some of my father's good friends were also involved and they in fact were just like my father when we were down there they saw to it that...

PIEHLER: That you were ... didn't [get into trouble]....

PARLON: Right, so it was a good experience. I enjoyed it.

PIEHLER: I guess I wanted to ask you something. You were obviously playing in the band, but what was the ... monthly meetings like? How often would you go to meetings?

PARLON: It seems to me it was maybe weekly or biweekly.

PIEHLER: Oh, it was that often.

PARLON: Yeah, we'd have just rehearsal; learn the different marches.

PIEHLER: So you just, you basically learned to march and ... continued to play....

PARLON: Um hum.

PIEHLER: You didn't do any other military training did you?

PARLON: No, we weren't. All we did was play for the parades and inspections and that sort of thing and we went to camp. We also played in this town New Richmond. All the little towns had a band stand in center of town. We had a weekly concert there in the summer months.

MILSAPS: What type of music did you play? I mean that's kind of pre-swing.

PARLON: Pretty much marches and patriotic things. That wasn't much of the popular music, played by the band.

MILSAPS: Right.

PARLON: Although I had... prior to that time I had a friend in 1st grade whose mother was a classical piano player and she taught piano. I took piano lessons from her and she put together

her son, Paul Sheridan, another boy Byron Miller who played the violin and I played the trumpet and she played the piano and ... we became, we called ourselves the Three Eight's. We were all in the eighth grade. (Laughter) But we became the entertainment for Church events and school events around the whole ... anything within I suppose eight or ten miles of Lafayette. So we became a popular entertainment group and I guess that's where they, the band people, decided well there's a guy that can play (Laughter) the trumpet.

PIEHLER: Did you ever get paid for any of these...

PARLON: Well.

PIEHLER: ... these performances?

PARLON: Well, you were paid something like a dollar and a half for the military part of it. I later played in the town band in Otterbein, Indiana and we played at other villages around who didn't have a band but had a band stand, you know. And so we played two or three nights a week and got paid there, I don't know five dollars a night or something like that.

PIEHLER: Um-hum.

PARLON: But ... it was income of that kind that made it possible for me to go to college.

PIEHLER: So you were saving that money ... for college?

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... Did you go to the movies growing up?

PARLON: Yeah, once in a while we would go to Lafayette for where you see a movie ... which was a twelve mile trip. That would be an event for the weekend maybe.

PIEHLER: Um-hum is to go to a movie.

PARLON: Um-hum.

PIEHLER: Do you remember going to the advent of sound? Is that a distinctive memory?

PARLON: Sound?

PIEHLER: Sound Pictures?

PARLON: Yes, I was in Chicago at that time when the first picture was shown at the ... was the Riviera Theater in North Chicago and ... I was living with, that summer, with the Sheridan

family. The lady who taught the piano. They had moved to Chicago. They had lost the farm in the Depression. And so the father went to Chicago and got into real estate business and they moved there. And Marguerite, the mother asked me to come up and spend the summer because she didn't like Paul being exposed to all of this stuff in Chicago. (Laughter) So I went to Chicago and got a job in the Chicago for the summer.

PIEHLER: What ... did you do?

PARLON: I was a delivery boy for a firm that was, made direct mail advertising and then we would print this stuff up at the shop and I would deliver it to Marshall Fields or Gimball's who ever we were working for at that time.

PIEHLER: It sounds like a very exciting summer.

PARLON: It was.

PIEHLER: Particularly for someone from a farm ... basically a small town.

PARLON: Yeah, Marguerite would take Paul and I and he had a younger brother too and take us to Field Museum and the Museum of Science down in South Chicago and a trip to the stockyards which was something to see in those days. So it was entertaining and instructive.

PIEHLER: Did ... your family own a car?

PARLON: Uh-huh.

PIEHLER: When did they get, do you remember the first car your parents got?

PARLON: I'm not sure what the first one was. I remember the trip to Indianapolis in World War I was a big touring car, a Reo. Then the old Dodge and I guess [my father] finally wound up buying his first car, a Chevrolet after that. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What about radio? When did ... your family get radio? Do you remember?

PARLON: My Father took on a distributorship for radios when he still had the hardware shop in 1922, probably. ... We got our first radio then. I guess we had the first radio in that town.

PIEHLER: How often growing up, how often would you listen to the radio?

PARLON: ... I remember using the radio quite a bit. We'd get a lot of good music on it. They would have good bands, a big band era, you'd get a lot of that music, and you'd get news. You wouldn't get a football game or anything like that.

PIEHLER: But sounds like you could remember getting the old ... KDKA

PARLON: KDKA

PIEHLER: Yeah, I can't remember the famous Pittsburgh....

PARLON: Pittsburgh, yeah and then one in Kansas City. The Coon Sanders Orchestra there was the entertainment I remember.

PIEHLER: Growing up ... Music was very important to you.

PARLON: Yes.

PIEHLER: [Besides] going to an occasional movie. What else did you do for fun growing up? And you had chores?

PARLON: Chores, yeah, there was chores. (Laughter) As a youngster ... I would work at the hardware store.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

PARLON: And then when my father went to the grain elevator it was a steam operated operation and they fired a boiler and I got a job firing a boiler which wasn't too bad until late in the fall when the corn crop came in and the farmers would bring their ears of corn in and the elevator would shell them and you wind up with a pile of corn cobs and so that became the fuel. There was no stopping by the time you filled it up the fire was gone. (laughter) You just kept shoveling (Laughter). I also remember at that time that he was also a coal dealer and I can remember when I was going to college during the summer, unloading, taking the job of unloading a fifty ton car of bituminous coal. That was a job, getting it up over the side of the railcar, over my head!

PIEHLER: Yeah. (Laughter)

PARLON: There were plenty of things to do. And then there were jobs for all the farmers needing a hand doing something around the harvest season for example and then work in fields.

PIEHLER: Were you ever a Boy Scout?

PARLON: Yes, a Boy Scout and became a assistant leader of a Boy Scout troop. This is back in Romney.

PIEHLER: What rank did you make?

PARLON: I don't recall how they ranked them then.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

PARLON: First class or first grade, something like that.

PIEHLER: Um. What else did you do for fun growing up? Does anything else stick out?

PARLON: Oh, nothing really stands out particularly. We'd maybe get together at somebody's house, something of that kind. There wasn't much other than the basketball.

PIEHLER: Basketball Friday night and then the church.

PARLON: Church, yeah, had activities.

PIEHLER: What about the Y[MCA]? Were you involved?

PARLON: There was no Y.

PIEHLER: There was no Y?

PARLON: No.

PIEHLER: What ... did your parents expect ... or want you to go to college?

PARLON: Probably would have insisted I think. Primarily due to my mother. She was the educated part of the family.

PIEHLER: ... Did your sisters also go to college?

PARLON: One sister ... was handicapped from birth ... she died about 1928. My other sister became, went to nurses training at the hospital in Lafayette. [She] became a registered nurse ... and worked at that profession for several years. Even after she was married she worked as a nurse.

PIEHLER: And ... your brother?

PARLON: My brother ... he wasn't a great student and he didn't take too much to the university and after a couple of years my father said (Laughter) let's better cut this off until you get smart about it. (Laughter) So he went out to work, and in a couple years time came back to Purdue and finished, as a distinguished student then. So he learned his lesson the hard way. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What are your memories ... I guess starting with ... the Romney school. Cause you started school in 1918.

PARLON: Right as a first grader and we lived in this....

PIEHLER: So you didn't have a kindergarten?

PARLON: No, no kindergarten, I don't think. ... We lived on a farm which was just below the town of Romney. So the first year I guess I mostly walked from there to the school. ... That of course, school became the center of your activity. I fortunately was a pretty good student and I enjoyed school. So I, it was a satisfying life to me what was going on in those days.

PIEHLER: ... Eventually ... you graduated from Otterbein your last year.

PARLON: Yeah, [in my] last two years my family moved to Otterbein.

PIEHLER: Do any teachers stick out, elementary, junior high, or high school teachers?

PARLON: ... Probably my pick would be the manual training teacher at the Romney ... first ninth and tenth year that I spent there. And ... he was ... a real gentleman ... and good and I have several pieces of woodwork, it was everything wood then, but we were working with walnut as if it was a piece of maple. You know it wasn't quite as valuable back then. I have a number of pieces at home that I made primarily from walnut that today would [look] like something you might buy, cause it was made to his specifications.

PIEHLER: It sounds like he was pretty exacting.

PARLON: He was.

PIEHLER: And walnut is an expensive wood now. ... Having shopped for furniture recently and having to do some more, it's....

PARLON: Yeah ...

PIEHLER: Did you date at all growing up in high school or in junior high? Did you have dances or other?

PARLON: Not much in high school. When I got to college dancing was popular. I enjoyed it. At Purdue, they had, ... I guess, a hop every weekend, you know good music ... nice crowd. It was held at the Union building at Purdue. It was a nice event.

PIEHLER: One question, Indiana had a very big movement of Ku Klux Klan. Do you have any memories of that growing up?

PARLON: I remember the threat that the community felt of that. But I don't have any direct memories. I know my father could identify people who were members of the Klan.

PIEHLER: But your family, he viewed it as a threat.

PARLON: Mm, hmm.

PIEHLER: And...

PARLON: Oddly too this small town had a sign posted at ... city limits that any colored person had to be out of town at sunset.

PIEHLER: Mm, hmm. So growing up ... there were no Black families in town?

PARLON: No.

PIEHLER: Did you ever see a Klan march in town? Was there ever a[n] actual march?

PARLON: I had seen them having a parade.

PIEHLER: Uh-Hum.

PARLON: I never was closely enough involved...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

PARLON: ... or excited about it to have much of a memory about it.

PIEHLER: ... Before ... going to college is there anything we forgot to ask about growing up in a small town?

PARLON: Well off hand I don't remember.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

PARLON: But if I do ...

PIEHLER: Yeah?

PARLON: I'll jump in.

PIEHLER: ... Why [did you attend] Purdue?

PARLON: Well ... financial reasons if for no other. You know a state university was the place to go and I was able to work, get jobs doing work at a gas station for example or my college, played in this town band, and that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: So you had a lot of odd jobs.

PARLON: It added up to a lot of experiences.

PIEHLER: Did you get any scholarships at all at Purdue?

PARLON: No you didn't hear much of scholarships in those days like you have today but probably I am sure there were some around. But they never came to my attention I guess.

PIEHLER: Um.

PARLON: I lived at home in Otterbein for the first couple of years and ... bought a Model T Roadster Coupe. I drove that back and forth from Otterbein to Lafayette everyday during the school year.... [My] second year in school one of my friends who had graduated from high school with me, ... his family bought him a Model A Ford, which was the latest thing then. And he drove there with three or four of us that rode back and forth with him. Then the last two years I moved into my fraternity house in Lafayette at the University.

MILSAPS: ... How long did it take you to get there the first two years?

PARLON: It'd be about a half hour.

MILSAPS: A half hour?

PARLON: Yeah about twelve mile or thirteen mile trip. It was hard roads then. Gravel road area.

MILSAPS: What did you study at the University?

PARLON: I became a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering. I started out; my mother wanted me to be a doctor. She thought I was cut out for a doctor and I started out with that curriculum and it included biology and we got down to where we were cutting up worms and I figured well, this convinces me I'm not cut out to be a doctor and I switched over to engineering my second year.

MILSAPS: What fraternity were you in?

PARLON: Pardon?

MILSAPS: What fraternity were you in?

PARLON: It was Phi Kappa Sigma. There is no chapter of that at Tennessee, but it's a national fraternity. I became president of the house and, uh, I got a lot out of college, out of fraternity life at college.

MILSAPS: That's no easy task. I was the president of my sorority....

PARLON: Oh were you? (Laughter) Then you know you have a few chores.

MILSAPS: The responsibilities keep coming to you. You attended the University during the Prohibition era and I have done my research and someone made the comment...

PARLON: We got 3.2 beers while I was there. (Laughter).

MILSAPS: I mean it was consider[ed] the wettest city in Indiana. I mean if you traveled to Chicago and Fort Knox. Did you see it as that?

PIEHLER: How much alcohol was around with prohibition, I guess?

MILSAPS: Right.

PARLON: Oh, well... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You won't get into trouble anymore. (Laughter)

PARLON: Alcohol ... in I guess five gallon tins was popular in those days. This was when I lived in the fraternity [house]. And we got acquainted with some of the people who drove us back and forth from Chicago and Indianapolis and we would buy a can of this and we made our own gin. (Laughter)

MILSAPS: Self-sustaining.

PIEHLER: Before going to college ... I mean in Indiana growing up was ... how much drinking was around, how much defiance of prohibition was there? Did you know?

PARLON: Well there was once 3.2 beers came in, it became popular but it'd be hard to get hurt drinking much of that, you know.

PIEHLER: But growing up you didn't know any bootleggers?

PARLON: Oh, yes. We use to go even when I was in High school. I guess we would occasionally slip into Lafayette. Some lady would make homebrew and get a fine bottle of homebrew. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So there was some....

PARLON: There was some, yeah....

PIEHLER: Did you know where the Speakeasies were in Lafayette.

PARLON: Yeah, we knew how to do that. (Laughter).

PIEHLER: Go ahead.

MILSAPS: ... How big was Purdue at that time?

PARLON: Just a little over 4,000 students.

MILSAPS: So it was big but pretty small considering today.

PARLON: Right.

MILSAPS: How big was your fraternity?

PARLON: We were around 40, 45 members who lived in the house.

MILSAPS: Lived in the house?

PARLON: Uh-hum

MILSAPS: What ... was your biggest memories I mean from Purdue? Was it academics, your classes or was it...?

PARLON: Well I guess it was the fraternity life. Of course, I played in the Purdue band then played in their marching band, played in their concert band and for a couple years I qualified for the ROTC part of it. I didn't do, go through it.

PIEHLER: So you were exempt ... you had band service which counted.

PARLON: Right ... so I remember the activity with the band, both the concert band and the marching band. We would go off to Michigan if they were playing football there and the band would go along or to Bloomington or Champagne, or Columbus, Ohio. We traveled those as a freshman year, you handled the instruments. All of them, everybody's instruments was in a big pile and then freshman...

MILSAPS: Got to tote them.

PARLON: ... took care of that. Purdue had a big band, big drum; I don't know if you ever watch the Purdue Band, they still use this world's largest drum. It's on a cart and the kid that beats the drum walks along side and he hits way over his head with this thing. That's been a trademark in Purdue. Of course the formations then were not computer generated. They were what came out of

the director's mind I guess. They were fairly simple and I remember the first one we did was a block letter P that moved back the field. The band director at Purdue was well known and recognized as the originator of marching band formations.

MILSAPS: Oh really.

PARLON: Ummm.

PIEHLER: How did...

PARLON: Also about the band, let me just tell you the band, John Philip Sousa, who was a band king, came to Purdue every year for a concert and ... the Purdue band was the only other band who he would let sit in with his band for a number or two. And so I played with John Phillip Sousa a few times.

PIEHLER: Wow, that's quite a...

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... quite a privilege.

PARLON: Yeah, right.

PIEHLER: Now he was, at that point was a fairly old ... guy.

PARLON: He was nearing the ending of his...

PIEHLER: Career.

PARLON: ... his active career.

PIEHLER: Oh wow, that is a good story.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What the ... You were going to college in the real depths of the...well you said the farmers were clearly in the Depression in the Twenties but...

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: But thirty-two and thirty-three were pretty grim. I mean banks were collapsing.

PARLON: Oh yeah. It was tough getting the where-with-all to go to college, unless you worked

yourself, unless the family had money and so it was Depression living is something different from what you would understand today.

PIEHLER: For example, the fraternity, how tough was it to keep the fraternity going?

PARLON: Well it, it took a lot of recruiting but we drew a lot of members out of Chicago for example and Chicago boys could round up some of there buddies who had the where-with-all. We did Indianapolis the same way and that's about the way we kept it going.

PIEHLER: Now ... When I ... used to be at Rutgers, I did a number of interviews about people in fraternities in Rutgers and it was common in fraternities and I am curious if this was the case in your fraternity, that some fraternity men they supported themselves, could become fraternity members, because they became the paid waiters or they could earn their room and board by being waiters.

PARLON: No.

PIEHLER: You didn't do that.

PARLON: Didn't have that. No, just had a Houseman who took care of the house and his wife was the cook and that was it.

PIEHLER: That was it.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So you didn't have an elaborate structure of waiters.

PARLON: No.

PIEHLER: When was ... You mentioned coming from a rock solid Republican family.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Sounds like a fairly rock solid Republican area.

PARLON: Yeah it is.

PIEHLER: Yeah ... still overall is. What about Purdue?

PARLON: Politics wasn't much of a topic at the University in those days. You just had other interests I guess. I would get a dose of it every time I went home. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So our father did like to talk about it?

PARLON: Uh-hum.

PIEHLER: About Politics?

PARLON: ... He didn't talk a lot. Politics was something he was interested in. Often times he was somewhat instrumental in picking a township head and that sort of thing and getting him elected.

PIEHLER: When did you ...I guess this is a two part question, what did your parents think of Roosevelt over the course of the Thirties and what did...

PARLON: I don't think they ever learned to like Roosevelt, the whole country frankly was either for him or you'd rather have him shot. (Laughter) So they were always strictly for the Republican. Of course when Wendell Wilkie came along, he was their favorite.

PIEHLER: Did you ever see the Wilkie campaign in Indiana ... in the 1940's? Do you have any memories?

PARLON: No ... he uh I didn't attend this but his acceptance ... his speech was down at his farm in Elwood, Indiana. And that was a big event at that time. In 19 ... I forget anyway when Roosevelt was running I believe for his fourth term...

PIEHLER: Against Dewey.

PARLON: I guess that was against Dewey

PIEHLER: In [19]44.

PARLON: Yeah, my wife's family had strong Democratic connections in Pittsburgh and ... an Uncle became a delegate to that Chicago convention that year and I got ticket to the convention, so I attended that one day.

PIEHLER: That becomes very famous because they select Truman over Wallace.

PARLON: Yeah, now this was when Roosevelt was still running.

PIEHLER: Yes.

PARLON: Well you mean for Vice-president.

PIEHLER: Yes, for Vice President.

PARLON: Yeah, I didn't sit in on that but ... it was quite a race then.

PIEHLER: Since we're on that, what do you remember about the convention? I assume ... it was a lot of fun.

PARLON: Yeah it was ... they; a lot of things were settled in what they called the smoke filled rooms. You know, that was the way politics was done then. The delegates just voted the way they were supposed to vote. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: How quickly did you figure that out?

PARLON: Well, I guess you could see that, quickly then.

PIEHLER: So you could see some literal smoke filled rooms.

PARLON: Yeah. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Your parents were staunch Republicans and as you said you were either for him or against him, how did you feel in the Thirties about Roosevelt? Did you share your parent's views?

PARLON: Pretty much yeah, [that's how] I felt. It wasn't until really into World War II and ... particularly, particularly after his death that we all began to realize this guy was pretty capable and did a hell of a job running this thing. So a lot of people I think turned over and ... began appreciation as they did with Harry Truman.

PIEHLER: Yes, yes. I guess ... and this is ... I partly ask this more for the students who will read this transcript, but you can probably very vividly remember getting a Social Security number.

PARLON: Yes.

PIEHLER: A social security number which now you have to have ... in terms ... you know children have them.

PARLON: Right.

PIEHLER: But ... you grew up and there was no Social Security.

PARLON: Was none, it was after I'd gone to work after I was out of college... I think in 1936, I believe, when I got my first Social Security number. I still have the same number.

PIEHLER: But ... You ... hadn't worried about ... paying this kind of tax before to the federal government.

PARLON: No, no. But the end result of Social Security seemed to be much more promising then ... young people look at it today, a lot of the young people I talk to today think, well hell that's gone ... they don't expect to get anything out of it at all. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: At the time you thought it was a promising....

PARLON: Ummm...

PIEHLER: Thinking back ... what made it so promising?

PARLON: Well in the later years that there would ... be something to fall back on.

PIEHLER: Um- hum.

PARLON: During the Depression years you could wind up with nothing and this kind of opened the door to a whole new way of living.

MILSAPS: What else did you think about other New Deal programs, like the Civil Works Administration ... at the time? Did you think they were very beneficial for the community?

PARLON: Well, it seemed pretty liberal, many things seemed liberal to hard rock Republicans. So we had a rather dim view of things I would say. A number of the things when they came aboard, but many of them turned out to be pretty good, too.

PIEHLER: ... But you give the sense that Social Security was widely popular.

PARLON: Yes.

PIEHLER: ... You thought it was a good idea.

PARLON: I think so and I don't think it had the resistance or the numbers of people who just brought it down. But for problems because there are a lot more problems today than there were then. But they all look solvable. I don't see these young people who have a dim view of it, I don't believe they realize that that's not going to go down the tube. There's just no way that a political party could let that happen. As I see it.

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

-----BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE-----

PIEHLER: Fraternity life was pretty important at Purdue.

PARLON: Yes it was. The fraternity crowd, there were probably forty different fraternities at that time. ... And they ran the social life, there were independent clubs and things but they just weren't the factor those fraternities, who kept their heads together and....

PIEHLER: ... I know on some campuses ... fraternities really ran a lot of the campus in the sense that they, the fraternities would often dominate the student government and would elect [or] appoint the editor to the school newspaper....

PARLON: Um-hum. That's pretty much the way it was...

PIEHLER: That was the case at Purdue. That ... a lot of the key positions....

PARLON: Yeah, you know the editor of the paper was going to be a fraternity man, and every office there would be run by fraternity people.

PIEHLER: Do any ... you mentioned you originally went to college to be a doctor ... or at least your mother would have liked you to be a doctor....

PARLON: Right.

PIEHLER: But then you become an engineer. What ... Do any professors stand out from college?

PARLON: Well, I remember several of them that leave distinct memories. I don't think that I had any one that was just the one; I had four or five that I could.... Probably if I recall one it would probably be G. A. Young who headed the mechanical engineering department and was pretty active. Purdue was quite active in railroad engineering. They had a test locomotive right on the campus and developed couplers for freight cars and brakes and that sort of thing. So he was probably the outstanding one. He and A. A. Potter, [Dean of the Engineering School] who was pretty outstanding in engineering. They'd probably be the ones that would be outstanding for me.

PIEHLER: I mean engineering is not an easy curriculum. How...?

PARLON: No, it wasn't easy and I had to double up some because I had wasted some of that time in the freshman year. Courses that didn't count in engineering. So I wound up taking twenty hour semesters. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And you worked quite a bit, so....

PARLON: I worked quite a bit and also took a summer school one year in order to squeeze it all in. But I finished in my four years.

PIEHLER: Any other memories of Purdue?

PARLON: Oh, a lot of memories of Purdue. That was my life for four years.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you really enjoyed going to college.

PARLON: Well I did. I think any youngster who doesn't scrap whatever is necessary to get there is really kidding himself.

PIEHLER: Uh-hum. What kind of career did you hope to have in college. I mean you went into engineering.

PARLON: Right.

PIEHLER: But what type of engineering did you hope?

PARLON: Well, I took as a major the automotive engineering and secondary accounting, thinking probably that I would wind up in the automotive industry. The Fords and General Motors and Chryslers were hiring directly out of college - rubber people and so forth. But when I graduated they would offer you seventy-five dollars a month. Well that didn't look like too promising and that wasn't really what I was after so I went to Chicago. Lafayette was no place to get an engineering job. I was taking a bus following some want-ads up there one day and sat down on the bus next to a young fellow, who turned out to be a graduate of Wisconsin. And I told him what I was doing and he said, "I tell you what you ought to do, go down to the Pierce Arrow sales corporation." He says, "I've got a better job and I am going to be leaving. Put your application in there." Which I did and I got a job with this Pierce Arrow Sales corporation - that was an old time quality automobile you know.

PIEHLER: ... That was really quite a car.

PARLON: It really was... I think I went to work there about August and somewhere around October, November; Pierce Arrow went out of business. I never know exactly what I had to do with that,(Laughter) but that's what happened. So I was out of a job in a short time and then had through a fraternity connection, got a job in Detroit with a company called Ready Power Company. It was a smaller company that deals with engine generator combination. Which they took an industrial engine and the fly wheel would be removed and you put an armature on there and a field ring around it and so forth. And you generated generally something like thirty-six volt of electricity. The head of that company was a Phi Kappa Sig and this connection got me started there and I just went to work as a shop ... something, at fifty cents an hour on a thirty-six hour week. On eighteen dollars a week, I roomed and fed myself and paid off a little on my student loan. I'd borrowed some at the university. That's what you could do with a little money in those days. It seems kind of relative to today, only the numbers are bigger.

PIEHLER: You can spend easily eighteen seventy-five for lunch without really trying that hard. (Laughter)

PARLON: Yeah you're right about that. So, I ... I got out of this training course ... This unit was built to replace storage batteries on electric industrial trucks. At that time, the fork truck was a real novel; you didn't see fork trucks around. There were platform trucks and crane trucks, tractors and so forth. But the storage batteries that would run them were low cells and they didn't have enough steam for anybody that was on more than a light eight hour shift, if you had longer shifts and so forth. ... The ready power unit was quite saleable. I went to Pittsburgh as a service man for the one man who was the Ready Power salesman there. I ... at that time anybody that had a ready power unit that had a service problem they just called and you went out and did it. And you didn't bill them, that was part of the deal. And he had big accounts like U.S. Steel, [U.S. Steel Corporation] and people like that. So I spent a lot of time being the repairman. They had developed in Ready Power a control system so when the operator wanted to move his truck or to lift his platform, it would throw a load and the voltage would come down and the throttle would open from that and the engine would speed up and then you would get the thirty-six volts to operate and then it would idle and you would shut it off. So it was a good thing. I took a liking to that and could see the possibilities and did well with that. In time decided that the horizon wasn't big enough, that somebody had to sell the electric truck before I had a chance. So I went into the electric truck business and became a salesman for the Elwell Parker Electric Company in Chicago. Sold lift trucks there ... some in the city and down state Illinois was primarily my territory. In 1940 the, uh, this is a franchise business kind of thing. The dealer in Indianapolis was going to quit. So I sold the general sales manager on giving me the Indiana territory. Which I signed up for and I would be the exclusive dealer in this line of trucks. I got a couple of other lines to go with it, electric hoist and walking hand trucks and so forth. It was all set to get into business in 1941. I had signed up everybody late summer that year and I was committed to take over in January. So I was in the process, had rented an office there and found an apartment that we could move to and the war came along. So I barely got that business off the ground, and uh, 'til I remembered the draft had come around of course ... not that I was ... a particularly candidate for it ... but

PIEHLER: The peace time draft of [19]40.

PARLON: Yeah, it became a serious question when the war started. What, whether I belong. I remember talking to my Dad about that ... I had been getting a lot of opinions from a lot of people, you know. He said you don't have any choice; you've got to get in and do your part. So I guess I took his advice. I got my brother, who now lives in Indianapolis, and brought him into Indianapolis and turned this over to him, and I went off to war.

PIEHLER: How well did the business do after you left?

PARLON: It was doing well. There was enough use for industrial trucks that it was low capital requirement. You didn't stock parts. You didn't run a service department. The things that I later got into, but you could do it with your hat, you know.

PIEHLER: So you don't have a big inventory that could really....

PARLON: No, but these electric trucks were burning contacts all the time or one thing or the other so there was a parts business. When you got the parts ordered you sent it off to the factory and they filled the order for you. (laughter) Well that wouldn't work today, of course, but that's the way that worked.

PIEHLER: So in other words the business was there when you got back from the war.

PARLON : Yeah, it was there when I got back. Actually we moved to Indianapolis, early I guess, January of [19]41 and Peg was in a completely strange town. She didn't know - had no friends there at all, and she was pregnant then. Our only son was born in July of [19]42. Which means he wasn't generated (laughter) - he got started ahead of the....

PIEHLER: He was a Pre-Pearl Harbor baby...

PARLON: Yeah. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... as the term used to be used.

PARLON: Uh-hum.

PIEHLER: So in many ways you could have claimed exemption because of your son. At least initially?

PARLON: I suppose, I don't think one son would probably have given you, once you have volunteered. You know they may have come to you and forced you....

PIEHLER: But really have the sense, and a lot of this came from your father, that you should go.

PARLON: Yeah, I think he was the motivating thing when he ... told me that. Where we lived in Indianapolis in this apartment, the recruiting officer in Indianapolis lived in that building and he was a ex-Pontiac salesman in Indianapolis. So I volunteered for the Navy. It just seemed better to me than the Army.

PIEHLER: What ... Why did you think the Navy? I mean your father had been in the Army.

PARLON: He had been in the Army, but the Army they had a big base, I don't know forty miles out of Indianapolis. Fort Benjamin Harrison was there and so forth. It just looked liked you were going to get stuck in one of these places. And in the Navy you had a good chance of moving around anyway.

PIEHLER: You had, you had been in the National Guard.

PARLON: Yeah, I had been in the National Guard just as a band man.

PIEHLER: So you just ... let that lapse...

PARLON: Yeah, I had served my three years. That ended in [nineteen]29. But I did see military maneuvers and that sort of thing in the Armed Guard, and I guess maybe I wasn't impressed with that much either. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Did you ...ever see any war movies before ... 1941?

PARLON: I don't recall.

PIEHLER: Did you see something like All Quiet on the Western Front ?

PARLON: I don't believe I saw that movie. I really don't recall movies having that much influence on me there. I had orders, I guess while Peg was about to deliver, that I had to report to Treasure Island at San Francisco to the Armed Guard Center. So I took this thing to that recruiting officer and I said "well what you think of this?" He looked it over, armed guard, and he said "I really don't know," but he says, "its sea duty you'll like it." So (Laughter), so that's what I started out as Armed Guard officer then, and went through some training at Treasure Island, and then at San Diego and then was assigned to a Liberty Ship that was being built at Kaiser shipyard and...

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

PARLON: ... sailed from there.

PIEHLER: Well, before we ... talk at length about your Navy career, you were married before the war?

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: In 1939.

PARLON: [19]39 Yeah.

PIEHLER: How did you meet your wife?

PARLON: Well, I was in Pittsburgh. And one of my close associates who was a lift truck salesman, and I sold Ready Power units through that channel. I had connections there and we wound up and I dated a girl there for awhile. And she brought her; my friend brought, knew other couples and so forth. And I was having dinner with him one night at the Webster Hall Hotel and this girl comes in with another boy and she looked alright and we started dating and in awhile it

turned out to be what I was looking for I guess. (Laughter) We've been at it for sixty years now. It's still working. (Laughter) [I met Peg in the spring of 1937 near the end of her Sophomore year at Mount Mercy Academy in Pittsburg. I was having dinner with Neal Leary, a Yale and Towne lift truck sales man who lived at Webster Hall Hotel in East Pittsburg.]

Both Neal and I were acquainted with Peg's close friend and class mate who had told Peg about Neal's friend, so she knew who I was when her boyfriend bought her to Webster Hall that weekend. I was very favorably impressed with Peg, and shortly thereafter called to ask her for a date.

Unfortunately she spent her summers with a maiden sister of her fathers, at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, so it was the next fall before she returned to Pittsburg and our romance could get underway. It did just that and increased in intensity resulting in our marriage August 26, 1939.]

PIEHLER: How did your wife feel about you joining, enlisting?

PARLON: Well, it was really a sad situation for her. The war of course had come along at uncomfortable time for me anyway. I was...

PIEHLER: You were starting a new business.

PARLON: ...eight years out of college and on a career. So that was kind of an unfortunate situation. But here I had moved here to Indianapolis and she had this infant. And I was leaving in about ten days after Bobby was born. So she wound up closing the apartment and putting furniture in storage and moving, going back with her parents in Pittsburgh. So that's where she spent the war years.

PIEHLER: So she never tried to follow you ... to California or...?

PARLON: Well, when I was in San Diego in training I got her to come out and she brought Bobby with her. At that time the Navy had taken over the Coronado Hotel. And we wound up at number one suite at the Coronado Hotel for a few days. Coronado had been the playground for the movie people you know and so forth. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah, I have heard that it was a very nice hotel.

PARLON: Lovely place.

PIEHLER: You were very fortunate to get....

PARLON: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: Cause housing was very....

PARLON: Oh yeah, you can say that again. I remember Peg arriving at San Diego and I think she had thirteen boxes of paper diapers with her in her luggage. (Laughter) Anyway we finished San Diego and then she went back to San Francisco where we stayed at the Fairmont Hotel there and, for a few days and then it came time for me to ship out. So I recall one sad night putting her and Bobby on the train at Oakland to go back to Chicago, and, she had an Uncle there. Of course we had lived there, too. And, uh, she stopped off there and eventually went back to Pittsburgh.

PIEHLER: When ... Your son was born shortly before you went...

PARLON: Un-hum.

PIEHLER: ... into service. And then saw him ... when your wife came out to California. When would be the next time you would see your, see your son?

PARLON: Well I, I was on survivor leave after an incident in May of [19]43. That's when I became the commanding officer of one of the most cost effective, decisive naval engagements of World War II to that date. That's when I was an Armed Guard Officer on this S.S. William K. Vanderbilt. And at two o'clock one morning we were on our way from the New Hebrides to Fiji Islands and in between we got a torpedo hit and in those days the merchant ships in the Pacific traveled alone - there weren't enough escorts. And you just ran a route until the enemy discovered what it was and if you happened to be there then, well that was too bad and that's what happened with us. So we caught this torpedo, which took the propeller and the rudder out of action and so the, the merchant crew had no responsibility, they can abandon ship.... So they decided to abandon ship. Incidentally there was a young captain of the ship at that time. I had sailed my first trip with a wonderful guy, Danish, his life time career was the sea. He was a good ship handler. A good seaman. He could scoot around through the islands down there without radar, without anything. He could smell land. (Laughter) He was that kind of guy. Well, so I had this young guy who wasn't, well he came out of the academy and got a job. So uh, he, he was all rattled, didn't know what to do. I said well you might as well abandoned ship. You don't have any responsibility. So they took all the lifeboats. There were no rules in those days. They didn't assign a lifeboat to the armed guard Crew. You were just scattered into the four lifeboats and they figured that was going to take care of the situation. But ... in about another twenty minuets we got the second torpedo hit. And I had the responsibility of handling the, the coding/decoding information, routing instructions, things like that, in a steel perforated box which you were supposed to get over the side, you know. And I had finally remembered and that thing was sitting in my quarters and I had just gone down to pick that up when the second torpedo hit right below where I was. If you want to know something and hear a loud noise (thump) and the farther you get over the torpedo there isn't any place to go but up, you know. It threw me back against the bulkhead and I thought the deck had probably blown up, it was that severe and uh, so I just, I forgot the box and I just felt my way along the bulkhead to an exit and got back on the bridge. And it wasn't long then the, the after gun was beginning to go under water, so I ordered our crew off the ship. And that's when we found out there were no life boats. That there was one life raft

that had jammed in the slide going down. And then my crew were able to release that and it was on the, the torpedoes had come from the port side and the raft was there. Well, it was against the, what we called the painter which was a line that tied it to the ship. That was pretty close to where this, the gap was in the ship. So we had to, you, with a raft, you'd go over board in the water and get yourself to the raft. It's not like lowering a lifeboat. So, uh, I remember the last, uh, young man that was in my crew was, sailors didn't know; have to know how to swim in those days either. And he didn't know how to swim and he was scared to death. And I remember grabbing him by the seat of the pants and with my best effort getting him over the side. And then I went over. And we got in this and we got paddles out and started pulling ourselves away from the ship. And the, shortly thereafter we, I guess we were maybe fifty yards off the ship, and the submarine began to surface ahead of us... watching it surface. It come right back toward where the ship had gone down. Came back through with the search light over there and cruise around. And we heard him use his machine guns and, uh, scouting around passing the lifeboats ... no sustained fire just firing as he goes by and there was no casualties from that, but he circled on around and he came in directly at the raft. And I had this crew on board and one of things that I knew I didn't want to be was a prisoner, or whatever. And, uh, so I had ordered everybody off the raft, again and out of their life jackets. And just said, "hey just keep your nose above water and we'd just scoot around behind the raft as he (the submarine) came up, and stay out of view. I don't yet know whether they knew if anybody else was on there. But anyway they fired into the.... They pulled right along side and stopped. And I could hear the talking and chattering aboard. And I knew it was a Japanese crew that was on a big German sub. Been furnished to them somehow. And they fired a few rounds, four or five bursts and idle their engines up and went across where the ship had gone down and submerged and that's the last we saw of them. But we got back on course. And the next day and during that night we just held our positions as best we could and the next day, there was one motor lifeboat on that ship and the Second Mate happened to have it and he rounded up the boats and picked us up and we got rid of the raft and that's when we found out that what they had done was shot up the material we had, tubes of blankets, and water kegs, had shot those up. So we would have been in a pretty tough situation if we hadn't been picked up by the....

PIEHLER: Because your, so all your supplies in the raft was useless?

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Because they had been shot up.

PARLON: Right. So we were, we were adrift there a couple more days, but we had aircraft coverage out of Suva, Fiji. And I had one signalman with a mirror and they were able to signal back and forth and know that we were located.

PIEHLER: So you were located pretty quickly then?

PARLON: Yeah, it really wasn't....

PIEHLER: You didn't have the sense of being out there and no one knows.

PARLON: No, not very long. We were fortunate in that respect.

PIEHLER: How, oh no, [go ahead].

PARLON: Well... That's the engagement I was talking about. There's no question about it being a decisive engagement, that's all I was claiming.

PIEHLER: I guess, I want to go back to some other things earlier. But did you lose how many were lost on the ship?

PARLON: There was only one casualty. And it was the second engineer who had been a problem for me all along cause I was responsible for keeping the ship darkened at night and that sort of thing. And he insisted on having his port hole open and the light on and I'd have to go down and close it every night for him. And he was a bravo you know, one of those guys. Well when the torpedo hit he comes out of his quarters naked, with a life jacket on, really disturbed. And we yelled in between one of the life rafts if they'd come by, we'd would get him over the side and into the boat, and they could pick him up. Well that took a little doing but he finally decided to go down the ladder over the side of the ship and he was on the side of the ship when the second torpedo hit. That was his undoing, but that was the only casualty on the....

PIEHLER: And no one was lost at sea after....

PARLON: No, no we were quick, relatively a quick pick-up, you know.

PIEHLER: But it was a very close call.

PARLON: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: Particularly when the submarine surfaced.

PARLON: I tell you what it did. The end result for me had to do with the question of prisoners of war. I have a great respect for anybody who got caught in that box. But I, they did realize that there's a difference in prisoners of war as there are differences in people in the service. Some who never see action and some who do? And this was a situation where you, that I was in, where you make up your own mind. The option seemed to be you could surrender or you could get shot. So. But this thing of getting the crew off of there. They were actually telling me, oh let's surrender ... then we heard the machine guns. I'm not going to surrender. And it turned out to, to be the right thing to do. But that's a decision you make on your own, that you're going to be a prisoner or you're not. So many prisoners are bunches of military or, who are, become prisoners through a commanding officer. But they suffer the consequences. So it's just a different attitude about them that I have.

PIEHLER: Hum, hmm. Well I want to, it's a really, a really incredible story. I want to just back up a little...

PARLON: Alright.

PIEHLER: ... and fill some things in. I guess, you reported initially to California, not say, because I know the Navy had, ironically a big facility at Great Lakes.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And they had a big training, officers training center at Notre Dame. But you didn't report to....

PARLON: No, I was assigned to this Armed Guard and they had a center in San Francisco and one in Brooklyn. And I think one in New Orleans maybe.

PIEHLER: And where did you ... in a sense ... your basic training ... your officers training is at San Francisco, is then at San Diego?

PARLON: Yeah, it was actually Treasure Island...

PIEHLER: Treasure Island.

PARLON: ... which had been built for the World's Fair? We actually ... The headquarters were in a World's Fair building.

PIEHLER: What was your training like ... I mean how many weeks of training? And what did you learn?

PARLON: It was ... pretty intense. You were full time with courses and night work to do. And so the week was filled and you occasionally have the duty over the weekend. So you're stuck on the base that time too.

PIEHLER: I'm most familiar with ... the officer training people went through in Notre Dame ... in South Bend. How ... do you know how your training differed from that of people received going in, um....

PARLON: Well ours was, I'd say strictly gunnery training.

PIEHLER: So you didn't learn navigation, or...?

PARLON: No.

PIEHLER: Or...?

PARLON: No, what navigation I learned. I learned from the merchant crew. The Second Mate was the navigator. So I was able to pick up what I needed. But I wouldn't have been a navigator.

PIEHLER: So in other words they didn't try to make you a ... "Jack-of-all-trades" in the Navy. They gave you very specific [duties].

PARLON: Not, not in that Armed Guard. It was a specific thing. They, the country had actually started to put armament on the merchant ships before the war was actually on us. But, the, it was really a token of protection for a ship. The, the guns that I had, there was one three inch gun on the stern, and there were five twenty millimeter guns. And not one of them would depress below the horizon, horizontal you know. A sub could come up and throw rocks at you. (Laughter) And you couldn't do anything about it. (Laughter) So, that along with the poor regulations about life saving equipment and that sort of thing, it was a sketchy....

PIEHLER: When did you, when did you realize, I mean you obviously had first hand experience but ... did you realize this after the incident or did you have a sense of this while you were training? How...?

PARLON: How it could happen?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

PARLON: Oh you had to know that the ... you were going to be in a possibility of this sort of thing. It, you never prepared as much as you need to be. But that's about what it is.

PIEHLER: How much training do you have in Navy protocol and Navy rules and regulations?

PARLON: Oh ... just enough to know that you salute a superior officer and that sort of thing. Not much of it. Just gun training. You learned to disassemble and reassemble; different guns and you go out to the firing range and teach your crew how to operate the equipment.

PIEHLER: Because ... I know at Great Lakes, I mean they're very rushed for time. Both at Great Lakes for the enlisted men and then at places like South Bend for the officers. They were trying, for the officers they were trying to recreate a mini Annapolis. It sounds like you didn't have that.

PARLON: No.

PIEHLER: It was a very much, "We're going to teach you what you need to know and get you out."

PARLON: Right.

PIEHLER: If that's a fair characterization.

PARLON: Yeah, it was all done you know in a matter of a couple of months.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

PARLON: Had to stick with the principles there.

PIEHLER: How many ... did everyone make it in terms of the officer candidates in ...your training? Do you remember?

PARLON: I believe they all ... finished. Some were unfortunate enough to be assigned the Atlantic. And I was fortunate enough to be, to get the Pacific, as I look at it.

PIEHLER: So some from ... Treasure Island went to [the Atlantic]?

PARLON: Yeah. Wherever the demand was.

PIEHLER: When did you meet your crew?

PARLON: At San Diego.

PIEHLER: The unit ... that you would....

PARLON: Yeah, the experience at San Diego was primarily getting together and picking a crew. You know when you leave there, who your crew is going to be. You have had them under your wing right there. You go through military maneuvers and parades and so forth.

PIEHLER: When did you ... So how many weeks into the Navy did you meet the gun crew that you would serve with?

PARLON: Well I guess ... it was probably six weeks at Treasure Island, go to San Diego and You get put together with the crew, uh; actually I had come through Norfolk. We worked there with crews, but not necessarily our crews. And then I got assigned to the [USS] William K Vanderbilt at Orange, Texas. And the crew that I had at San Diego was assigned there too.

PIEHLER: How many ... was the naval complement on your ... first and then the second ship? How big was your ...?

PARLON: Total of fourteen, uh thirteen, twelve of them were gunners and one signalman.

PIEHLER: And then yourself?

PARLON: Yeah, I was also the ship doctor. (Laughter) That's another job you have.

PIEHLER: So your father, your mother in some sense ... (Laughter) there is a certain premonition.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And I take it you were probably also the Chaplin and number of [things].

PARLON: Well, yeah. I wouldn't be too good at that. I wasn't particularly good at the medical either.

PIEHLER: In terms of, your medical, I mean, what kind of cases came up? Because I guess you didn't have a Navy Corpsman then?

PARLON: No, didn't have any of those. Most of it would be routine ...head problems you know, colds, and that sort of thing. I did have one boy that came up with some kind of infection in his groin area. I had done everything I could think of.

PIEHLER: Was it venereal disease, or...?

PARLON: No, it was ... I forget what they called the thing, but in any event when we got close to a Navy ship, that would have had a fleet medical unit and got him transferred there and that was the end of that boy as far as I was concerned.

PIEHLER: Un-Hum.

PARLON: And ... but that was the only major thing that I had. The other recollection I have of that was that the kit that you took as the medical officer included a package of twelve Hennessy three star brandy and (Laughter)...

PIEHLER: Medical brandy. (Laughter)

PARLON: Yeah, and when you get to a port, you'd refill. Mine was always, those twelve, that was the only thing missing. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: The crew you had, the naval people ... that served under you, what were their backgrounds? And were any of them regular Navy?

PARLON: Oh, no. They were just kids from the country.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

PARLON: Yeah, when I came to Knoxville there were three people that I had known. These ... were people I had known later on in the destroyer escort (USS Abercrombie). They had all come from here. But the Armed Guard crew was much the same. After I ...lost the Vanderbilt I had this leave when I mentioned I went back to Pittsburgh and saw my son there. I went back to report for duty and was assigned to the Mormactern. Which was a C-1, a bigger ship that was to handle some troops and cargo. So I made a couple trips with her and then my time ran out with that. And I was, got assigned to the Sub-Chaser Training Center at Miami, and finished that. And from there did the Washington D.C., the Navy Gunnery, and had a course there. From there, to Norfolk, and on to Orange, Texas. And the ship was commissioned on May 1st, 1944. One of those books that I got at the ... Ed Stafford, wrote some military books. He wrote The Big E, which became a pretty popular book. And he wrote one on the submarines, the history of submarines. And he also wrote this book, Little Ship, Big War, which was about this destroyer escort and it does a pretty good, he's good at telling what life is like aboard a small ship in a war zone. You know it's a, it's a good account. The only exception I had with the things in there, were that there were things that were strictly involved with the gunnery part, which was my responsibility. And the things I did. That were, you might get his information from somebody else, and I might have a little different, but other than that, as far as ship board life he has it pretty well documented.

PIEHLER: I want to back up a little bit to the other ships you served with. Although you've told us a lot about, the Abercrombie was your first ship when you were on after....

PARLON: After armed guard.

PIEHLER: No, before armed guard.

PARLON: Oh, it was the Mormactern....

PIEHLER: The first ship you were on?

PARLON: The first one was the William K. Vanderbilt. She was owned by US Steel Shipping.

PIEHLER: And you said you had a Danish Captain for your first?

PARLON: Um-hum.

PIEHLER: And you said ... as you described him, he could smell land?

PARLON: He could, he just, and you know when you're traveling without much. About all you had was a depth finder.

PIEHLER: Um-hum.

PARLON: And ... He could get around. Some of the passages, you know, were fairly tight. And you'd do them at night and you wouldn't have the visibility that you....

PIEHLER: I'm just curious, your first ... voyage where was it to? From which points did you go?

PARLON: Well, I left San Francisco to [go to] Wellington, New Zealand. Which was at that time a forward area. And that trip was ... we just hugged the coast of South America down, 'til you're about the latitude of Wellington and you make a run across. That trip was almost a month.

PIEHLER: And you didn't sight any subs?

PARLON: No, no. You weren't in the war zone. And, speaking of that, the war zone, one of the problems for an Armed Guard officer was keeping peace aboard between the merchant people and the Armed Guard.

PIEHLER: How difficult was that? That sounds....

PARLON: Well, it was touchy. Because you know, nerves get a little edgy under the circumstances. It took some really policing of our activity. Because you really couldn't allow my crew to get in the way of the merchant crew. But, merchant people were, by the time they boarded the ship were well paid compared to the Navy. And the minute you got into the war zone their pay doubled. So, (laughter) it wasn't much of a match.

PIEHLER: Yeah... I often tell my classes the expression a "Dollar a day" comes from, you know, if you're an enlisted man you're, you're getting paid basically a dollar a day.

PARLON: Right.

PIEHLER: One I interviewed reminded me it was even less before Pearl Harbor.

PARLON: Right.

PIEHLER: But merchants, they were well paid.

PARLON: Yeah they were, and deservedly so. That was no bargain either.

PIEHLER: Yeah. ... You were also in many ways ... I guess I'm curious, ...you are a Naval Officer, you have clear command of your men, but you don't control the ship.

PARLON: Oh, No.

PIEHLER: You're sort of guests in some ways of the ship.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And so how does that relationship with the Captain go? And you served under three Captains?

PARLON: Well, they were all different individuals of course. The first one being was not a sociable kind of guy, but he was good at his trade. And that's what I was looking for, I guess, at that time. The next fellow, who had little experience, uh, just fortunately had good mates who knew how to do the things that needed to be done. Then the ... the Skipper of the Abercrombie was a character of his own.

PIEHLER: Why was he such a character? (Laughter)

PARLON: I'll get into that in a minute, after a little break here.

PIEHLER: Oh yeah. That's fine.

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

-----BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO-----

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Thomas N. PARLON on April 27th, 2000 at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt PIEHLER and...

MILSAPS: Joyce MILSAPS.

PIEHLER: We ... just paused and returned to the interview.

PARLON: Right.

PIEHLER: You said the third Captain was something of a character and I had asked you to elaborate.

PARLON: His name was Katschinski. And he had changed his name to Kitchens. I think his wife persuaded [him] to do that. (Laughter) He ... was a good seaman. Knew how to handle a ship and think fine. But he had a very short fuse on his temper. He would just literally chew crewmen out in front of ... right on the bridge. [He] had no managing skills, you know. He was not popular with the crew, but recognized as a good ship handler, which was important. We got along alright

there. One of the things, Ed Stafford had in his book, incidentally ... Edward Perry Stafford; he is the grandson of Admiral Perry who traveled to the North Pole. On one of Perry's trips he insisted on taking his family with him and Ed's mother was born up in uh, I think Iceland, I believe it was where they based.

PIEHLER: Um-hum.

PARLON: So Ed is a grandson and was pretty much responsible for getting that established that Perry was in fact the one. They did that with photographs which showed the sun line and shadows of ... and pinned down the location was right. Anyway that's Stafford. But one of things that I said that came to gunnery matters; I might have a little difference of opinion. We had a uh, a shake down cruise after we left Orange [TX]. We ... stopped in Galveston and had the....

PIEHLER: This is with your ship ... the regular Navy ship.

PARLON: Right.

PIEHLER: The destroyer's ... escort.

PARLON: Right. From there we went to Bermuda for about of month of shake down. On which you're testing everything on the ship and when it gets to the gunnery part that's where I get involved and ... What Ed accounts for there is when we were doing the anti-submarine work, and that, of course, involved the depth charges that I would have. We had torpedoes at that time too. And we had what we called the hedgehog which was a forward throwing gun. When the ... depth charge run was being made, my crew is required to, on orders from the bridge to set depth charge for them to blow up you know. And ... the skipper gave that order but then hardly before they got their chin away from the cans going up, he just says fire, you know. There was a normal procedure for orders that give the men instructions to get clear. Well, that kind of shook me up and so then we came to the hedgehog run and we came to the ... had it loaded. The hedgehog was probably the most dangerous thing we had on board. They're very sensitive and you didn't want to jiggle them too much until you're well clear of the ship. And he all of a sudden gives an order to fire. And ... I said "Belay" [Navy language for don't fire!] that we're not going to fire ... they hadn't got clear and so forth. Well the next thing I know the exec. ... He sent the exec. Down to chew me out and rake me under the bridge. And I went up there and he's ranting and raving about why you can't [do that]... He had taken a lot of my gun crew and made them ship...

PIEHLER: Ship's crew.

PARLON: ... ship board crew to make his ship look good. But he had hurt my operation, too. Well, I just made it plain to him that we're not going to ... kill off our crew in gunnery practice. (Laughter) We have to eventually, but well that's all that went wrong. Well ... he didn't have much argument in that and ... so I ... that was the first time I had crossed with the Skipper. I had forgotten about it. But that's one that Ed recorded in there that, uh, didn't quite tie in with mine.

Another was when a Kamikaze attacks we had ... involved a Kamikaze plane that made passes at us, you know, during the night and uh, we were of course prepared for it. But this Kamikaze made what I know to be three passes at us. He came off the starboard porter and skimmed across the bridge area and missed his contact and swung around, and went around again and then came in from starboard beam and just skimmed by the mast of the ship. And then he gave it one more try and came around and crossed over again and after the second time I had told this ... twenty millimeter crew off to the port side, I said, ... “when ... he comes across everybody drop,” you know, even the skipper would have gotten there. He dove into the wheel house and so I said, “you fellows stay at your guns and have it up there. If he misses you’ve got him.” And we did get him that time. Well Ed’s report was that ... I forget ... he had it two passes.

PIEHLER: Un-hum.

PARLON: Just little things like that. That’s the only exception I had to his book.

PIEHLER: You had been on merchant ships. What struck you as the difference between being on a merchant ship and then being on a regular Navy ship?

PARLON: Well, the merchant ship you had a lot of the merchant crew, who were just plain draft dodgers. (Laughter) And they were going to sea because they got out of the clear and so you had a lot of rather incapable, unlikely people really as a part of that crew. We were fortunate that we had good mates, who could do their job. But the Navy, everybody who was there has been trained to do his job. And you could pretty... you get kids out of country they, they can learn take a gun apart and put it together and to shoot it when the time comes, and that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: What about the food? A more creature comfort but...

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: How did your merchant ships compare to your Navy ship?

PARLON: Well, they fed you well on a merchant ship, too.

PIEHLER: And the Navy food?

PARLON: And the Navy food also. We, it was so much better than what the armed forces ashore were getting. You had to like it. (Laughter) I remember one day asking about that. I was ashore at ... in Leyte, the Philippines, getting some gear for something. And I had to go up to a base in Leyte and then get back down to where our ship was at ... port anchored out there. ... When it came lunch time, I was in the area of the army facility there and I stopped and had lunch there. And I remember having some lunch and sitting at a table across from me were a couple of Army officers. And one of them says to the other, boy this Spam is good when it is fried. (Laughter) We didn’t eat Spam on the ships. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you were stunned that officers would think Spam was almost a delicacy.

PARLON: I didn't mention what I had been eating at all to them. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What ... would you typically eat?

PARLON: They'd have, you know, a roast occasionally and have a steak, stews and things of that kind. The chef was ... the head man was really ..., a good provider in that area. And we got ... anytime we were in port or fueling at sea or something like that, we could get supplies from a Navy ship that was better equipped than we were with supplies.

PIEHLER: What about showers?

PARLON: Showers you would get ... you were very limited in fresh water, of course. If you took a shower, you got yourself wet and turned the shower off and soaped yourself and turned off and turned on again long enough to rinse yourself off. And that would be your shower. So that was the only difference. The crew had showers with, you know, groups. I would have a cabin or access to the officers' shower.

PIEHLER: I'm curious; you initially were ... almost sort of off on your own. You were the only officer and then you're ... gun crew. With single men.

PARLON: Right.

PIEHLER: Now you're part of the ship's crew and you've mentioned some tangling with the captain and the exec.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Because you're basically trying to follow the book because it is safer in terms of training exercises. What about ... being now part of a Navy crew what other thoughts do you have about that and remembrances.

PARLON: Well it takes some doing, getting, working as a team. You, you become very close with these people you're working with under these circumstances. The ... Sound Operator who had the underwater sound responsibility in the communications was a college professor who was teaching at Carlton College in Minnesota when he went in the service. He came out and became ... attached at Northwestern. He passed away recently. Brilliant guy. He had ... he knew good literature for example and when we would get to where we could get to a library, we would always send him inside, because he could pick stuff. And I read things during that period, well War and Peace and Anna Karenina. And I forget what all. All good literature. Ed Stafford was a uh, a real serious Navy. He got his training at Dartmouth. And, of course, the Navy background

and so forth. He was the most geared to the...

PIEHLER: The Navy.

PARLON: ... operation, yeah.

PIEHLER: Because I have been told that bigger ships were pretty formal affairs, battleships...

PARLON: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: ... carriers, cruisers, a lot of Annapolis people. And a lot of.... But I got the sense smaller ships, like destroyer escorts could be ... the Navy is not a very informal branch, but by Navy standards they could be a little bit more relaxed.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Is that ... am I [right]?

PARLON: Right, well, of course, they were all reserves.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you had no Annapolis, you had no?

PARLON: No ... it was a little bit different life I'm sure than you would aboard a big ship.

PIEHLER: I also ... you may just as a Navy person ... accept this as reality, but I have often been struck going on Navy ships how ... confining they are.

PARLON: Oh, Yeah.

PIEHLER: Even the officer cabins are not....

PARLON: Oh no, they're not spacious by any means.

PIEHLER: Even the officers are not....

PARLON: Well at least you had a good bunk. You know ... I had no complaints about the facilities aboard the ship. I wouldn't have wanted to be a crew man on there though. That's not as nearly as comfortable.

PIEHLER: Did you have ... any steward mates?

PARLON: Um-hum.

PIEHLER: How many stewards did you have?

PARLON: They were the only blacks that we had. I guess ... only two or three.

PIEHLER: Uh-hum.

PARLON: That was their job. But they ... regardless what their job was aboard ship. When you're in general quarters, they had assignments on the guns, much as anybody else.

PIEHLER: Did you ... you didn't have a Chaplin aboard I assume?

PARLON: No.

PIEHLER: But you did have a Navy Corpsman on.

PARLON: The only time our people ... could get to a religious service would be when we went along side a big ship that had it.

PIEHLER: Uh-hum.

PARLON: Or a port facility.

PIEHLER: Uh-hum.

PARLON: So I use to say ... when we'd have to do the provisioning you know. All the Catholics had to go to Mass. (Laughter) Hope I didn't step on your toes.

PIEHLER: But ... on your destroyer, you also had a Navy Corpsman.... You didn't have to be ship's doctor again.

PARLON: No, no. We had a Pharmacist.

PIEHLER: A Pharmacist, excuse me, not a Corpsman it's a Pharmacist mate. Any ... you mentioned this close call with the... Kamikaze, that ... Stafford writes about. Given ... you had a very close call ... when you were torpedoed. But did anything ... what was the most memorable experience in terms of the destroyer escort in terms of danger? Does anything, is the Kamikaze the most?

PARLON: The Kamikaze, yeah.

PIEHLER: Any other close?

PARLON: Well I think ... we probably were shot at by everything that shot. Rockets ... baka

bombs, underwater ...

PIEHLER: Mines?

PARLON: ... Individual water... when you're in some port in the war zone, we might have explosive devices that, which was a form of a Kamikaze, you know. But the principle would be the Kamikaze. That first showed up at Leyte, not to much extent, but that was where it was born. When we were also made a part of what was called the Western Attack group that was sent to... Kerama Retto [Ryukyo Islands], the islands just south of Okinawa, which became the junk yard out there, you know, all the damaged ships wound up there. So we were there a week ... before the Okinawa invasion and joined up with the ... invasion fleet, for the real invasion which happened on April 1st, Sunday April the 1st, which was Easter Sunday. And the invasion, there was not a lot of resistance. We had been a control ship on the Lingayen Invasion. It meant that they had put a lot of radio gear on board the ship and some people to operate it and ... we would take position just short of the beach. And ... send the waves in as they were unloaded from the transports. At Okinawa we weren't involved in that kind of an action. It was just anti-aircraft and anti-submarine. Our only part had been, we established this picket line which was just a line of ships were anchored...

PIEHLER: Uh-hum.

PARLON: ... at two different points and protected this harbor area. That's where the Kamikaze attack became ... the first line of attack for those raids that [had] come in and some of them were very sizable. There were a lot of planes in them. We had the good fortune of missing a couple of them - had been sent on other missions and just didn't happen to be there. But ... otherwise it was twenty-four hours a day, day and night, and you might be at general quarters three or four times a night. They were ... the game I guess was to wear you out.

PIEHLER: Uh-Hum.

PARLON: That was the most trying part. And in time it gets the best of everyone ... I recall we went into Saipan one time, and I reported into the Navy medical facility there. Actually wound up, with them pumping my stomach and ... putting some kind of alcohol solution in, and finding out it, [they] determined it was a lack of hydro-chloric acid. That was just from strain and stress from this thing and ... for a while there I had to sip ... some hydro-chloric acid along with my meal. (Laughter) But that was the only...

PIEHLER: That was the only....

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Real health effect ... not that ... that's pretty serious.

PARLON: Right, and after the sinking, I told you about, I was in the Army hospital in Suva, Fiji. There I had been ... my eyebrows and eyelashes were burned off. [I had] been covered with fuel oil when going over the side, so I was there I think about a week in that hospital. And then got moved out of there, I don't know where I went from there anyway.

PIEHLER: Well you eventually, got back to Pittsburgh.

PARLON: After the war?

PIEHLER: No after ... your ship's sinking.

PARLON: Yeah, I got back there ... on a survivor's leave.

PIEHLER: Had your wife been given ... notice that your ship had been sunk. Did she think at one point ... that you were unaccounted for?

PARLON: Not, well, I think when I first got back and phoned her, it was quite a surprise at the time. And by the time I got home and spent some time and I had this year and a half old boy then. So uh, it's uh, it's an experience you wouldn't want to repeat. But, it's a valuable experience, too.

PIEHLER: I want to make sure that Joyce gets a chance to ask a question.

MILSAPS: I was just wondering what your wife did while you were away. I mean did she...

PARLON: She just returned to her home.

MILSAPS: She just stayed with her family then?

PARLON: Stayed with her family. She's never been a business woman. Her brother was in the army, and his wife came there and lived at her family's home too. Just a war house there, they were involved in much of the war. I [have] always felt that the women never got the credit or the acknowledgment that [they deserve]. I think that Tom Brokaw's book The Greatest Generation, does probably as good of job of pointing out some of the things that the women, even those that were staying at home you know, put up with. I, it must have been a kind of dull existent I think. You know, she never had much other to do than with some of her girlfriends. She could have a visit with from time to time.

MILSAPS: Now, she also received a formal education. She went to the university. What did she study?

PARLON: She went to a Mount Mercy Academy in Pittsburgh.

MILSAPS: Uh-hum.

PARLON: She didn't finish there. But ... she fell for the wrong guy before that happened.
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: Is your... oh.

PARLON: I was just going to say that I have ... the greatest respect in the world for her for what she went through. I really felt for her. And I have at home a shoe box full of the letters I wrote her. I brought here, some letters that I wrote to my mother during the war. She saved them. Some of them anyway, I don't know. When Peg closed our apartment she spent some time with my family in West Lafayette. And she went back there a time or two for a visit. But the ... setup we had, was that I would be corresponding primarily with Peg and Peg was to pass the information on to Mother.

PIEHLER: Uh-hum.

PARLON: So Mother got much fewer letters than Peg did.

PIEHLER: How often did you try to write during the war?

PARLON: Well, you could write more often than you could send. (Laughter) That was, the hard problem was having the letter ready when you did have the opportunity. And sometimes you did have a handful of them going out and that's the same way your mail came to you. You got the right place.

PIEHLER: Did you ever have to serve on any court-martials?

PARLON: [I] served one. Which again was not my calling ... over a ... one of the crew members who had gotten himself into fights aboard ship or one thing or another. He was ...sentenced to a court-martial. I sat on it part of the time. I don't recall just how that went. Ed Stafford became his legal aide and ... managed to get him off scot-free.

PIEHLER: Which is pretty hard to do.

PARLON: Right. It was nice to have it behind you instead of keep it going.

PIEHLER: What have, you've talked a bit about the people ... who have served under you ... on your first duty as an armed guard. They were all Navy Reserve.

PARLON: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: What about ... the destroyer escort?

PARLON: They were mostly reserve.

PIEHLER: Again mostly reserve.

PARLON: Uh-hum.

PIEHLER: No old chiefs to...?

PARLON: We'd have ... a good deck man, an engineering head and a good chief ... and a couple of warrant officers.

PIEHLER: But otherwise....

PARLON: But otherwise a green crew, really. And those, the people we had were very capable and did a great job of ...teaching them what they needed to do but also being a morale builder which became pretty important too. It's pretty dull and these young guys have ambitions to do something else.

PIEHLER: That leads me ... to a natural follow up question ... what it like was when sailors, merchant men sailors did get into port. Because it sounds like they were pretty itching for....

PARLON: Oh yeah. They knew the places to go. (Laughter) Well ... they were ... some of the things I wouldn't repeat even. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Any ... How difficult is it to get them back on ship, after. I mean did you ever have to...?

PARLON: No, we never had any body AWOL. They had the time they had to be there. I'm not sure that we may not have had a shore patrol round them up at times, something like that. No, no serious problems.

PIEHLER: But some of them it sounded like they were worse for the wear from a lot of carou[sing]

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Would you say there was quite a bit of carousing?

PARLON: Yeah, quite a bit once you got ashore. You know, you bottled up maybe for a month at a time and you turn them loose you're going to have some action. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What did you do when you went ashore?

PARLON: Most of the places there were officers clubs.

PIEHLER: So you would generally go to the club and....

PARLON: Go get together, usually you're in the tropics, in the islands. They'd have large areas with a bunch of tables and you'd get together with all the different ship people. Swap sea stories I guess. (Laughter) Occasionally you'd have the duty to take the crew ashore for a beer outing.

PIEHLER: So your ship, you did have some beer outings.

PARLON: Yeah. We got ... they weren't allowed any on board, of course. But they would have beer...an area set aside just for that.

MILSAPS: Any areas that stood out like you said you went to New Zealand and then obviously you were around all the islands. Any, like any places that you visited on shore leave that just like stick out in your memory as...?

PARLON: Well I recall my first stop at Wellington, New Zealand. We were discharging there with cargo we had taken down from the states. We were there for probably a week or more, I don't know. But ... we'd get the chance to get off and visit some of the local pubs and so forth. The natives there are Maoris, M-A-O-R-I. They're Polynesians. They're a happy group of people. I recall going to their bars and having some beers. And every night when midnight came they, the places closed and the Maoris always got together and they sang a song. It was a beautiful tune. And they ...were good musically ... and that song was ... local. That ... it was just a new, new to everybody down there. But shortly after the war was over some enterprising Yankee came back with that tune, and it became what is called "Now is the Hour." You probably have heard it, "Now is the Hour ..., Soon you will be leaving far across the seas ..." and it became a very popular song right after the war.

PIEHLER: And you remember hearing it in these local bars in New Zealand.

PARLON: Yeah and I remember too going into New Zealand before we had arrived out at sea. I used to spend a lot time in the radio shack, getting, chatting with the operator, picking up a little bit of the codes. We picked up several native ..., out New Zealand we picked up this New Zealand station. They had a male quartet on there and they were singing "On the Banks of the Wabash." (Laughter) It told me something. They were about as ill informed as we were, I guess.

PIEHLER: Did you ever listen to Tokyo Rose?

PARLON: Oh yeah. We listened to her, just for the amusement of it. I got acquainted to ... with a lovely family in Wellington. He was in the electrical business and was interested in the possibility of doing electrical work on the merchant ships that were coming in there. I don't know where I met him, but we became friendly and he had a daughter that ... I recall. But we

would up... he invited myself and a couple other Armed Guard people who were around to their home for Sunday dinner. They had their morning tea, lovely dinner and so forth. You got a feeling that you were somewhat at home. And ... it was spring time in New Zealand then, I guess winter time here. They had a lovely garden. A city operation. I recall one Sunday taking the trolley up and just walking around and admiring the flowers up there and pass the time a day here and there with the different locals. They're friendly people ... very ... military people. Both them and the Australians were tough people.

PIEHLER: Any encounters during the war with the Australians?

PARLON: Yeah with traveled with the Australians ... they didn't have destroyer escorts. They had Corvettes I think ... that's what they had. I recall on time going into Biak little island in the Schouten Group. We would have plenty time when we were anchored some place. We have movies and they had booze. (Laughter) So we would invite them over for movies and ... then night and fantail we would go over there for cocktails. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you could drink on their ships. It was on your own ships you couldn't drink on.

PARLON: You couldn't drink on your own.

PIEHLER: Seems like a very equitable...

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... exchange.

PARLON: Then we would have ... the crew would have softball games between ships and so forth. So I invited a group of these fellows one time to go over to a baseball game and we went and sat through I think three innings and they said "well, you change sides too bloody often in this game let's go over to the officer club." So as far as baseball went with the....

PIEHLER: The Australians didn't take to it.

PARLON: No it wasn't ... what baseball was to us.

PIEHLER: So this was a cricket game that ... the Americans had gone to take part in?

PARLON: No [it was] softball.

PIEHLER: Softball?

PARLON: Softball, yeah. Although one of the boys on a sister liberty ship had been ... pitched for the ... one of the beer companies in Milwaukee, on the softball [team]. He could throw that

thing like a rocket. I don't think he ever lost a game to any other ship. Nobody could see it. (Laughter) He was good. He was killed though on a trip to Leyte. ... He had been assigned aboard a, one of the old Four Pipers, [W.W.I destroyer] and they were actually ... [caught in a] typhoon on the way up there. They just simply couldn't button those ships up. ... They just sunk themselves. There were several of them [that] were lost.

PIEHLER: You actually anticipated one of my questions. Did you ever have to ride through a typhoon?

PARLON: Yeah, I think we were in a couple of them anyway. They'll give you a scare.

PIEHLER: Was that ... how would that compare with the confrontations with the enemy? Not that either one isn't great, but which?

PARLON: Well, the typhoon you were always able to take care of yourself somehow. It was scary from hearing the wind would whip through the lines, you know. And rolling, the way the ship would roll and so forth. I've actually sit in the ward room on that ship and seen the coffee pot go from this side of the boat to over here. (Laughter) And you would have to use the what we called fiddle boards, on a ship, a place for the plate and cup saucer I guess. That [would] keep it in front of you or you would be all over the place. (Laughter) Another funny thing to me anyway, the engineering officer on the destroyer escort was a hard Navy buccaneer I guess you'd call him, and he sat just across the table from me in the ward room and every morning he ordered the same thing for breakfast. He ordered two eggs sunny side up, I don't know what else went with it, bacon I guess, and every morning when it was served he would sit across from me and take his fork and he cut around the yolk and all that was left was the yolk sitting there and then he could maneuver his fork under that and then he'd popped that thing in his mouth. (Laughter) I guess it just struck me as funny. I watched him everyday do that. (Laughter) He was in Ed Stafford's book, you find that he and Stafford crossed swords a number of times. They just weren't cut out of the same pattern.

PIEHLER: You mentioned earlier that you and your Dad, you shared something in common ... very much in terms ... What do you tell him about the Philippines and what stories did you exchange and ... you spent a good time off the coast of the Philippines...

PARLON: Right.

PIEHLER: ... in an invasion and then you got on land for different assignments.

PARLON: Right. He had been on Lingayen for his time there and I was on ... mostly Leyte became the base after the operation, after the invasion we were based there pretty much for, [we'd] go on to do different assignments but usually [we'd go] back to Leyte. We later of course made the Lingayen Invasion above Manila. And... He was familiar with the Manila area and the Corregidor, things of that kind. My mother belonged to a literary society in West Lafayette and

she often times presented different topics for their meetings. And, while I was out there, I remember she wrote me and told me she was going to have this paper on the Philippines. And ... asked me if there was anything I could give her and one of those letters, one I wrote her, told her about the observations you had. The thing that had struck me was the Philippine women. They would all be dressed in bright colored gingham dresses, I guess. Just living in horrible conditions, having sweated out the Jap invasion there, they were kind of a striking thing to me, I thought. Other than that ... he had come back to Honolulu on his way home and he was ... as long as I can remember he looked forward to going back someday to Honolulu. He really thought that was the tops, but he never got there. And I have never gone back either.

PIEHLER: You've never. Did you like Honolulu as much as he did or had it changed?

PARLON: I think it had become so much navy when I was there, that it was just pretty much a Navy operation. I think when he was there it was more of an... [The] natives were still in charge.

PIEHLER: Yeah. It would have been very different. I've gotten the impression that Honolulu was simply ... overrun by Army [and] Navy.

PARLON: Yeah, it was. It wasn't the Honolulu that you dreamed about I tell ya. (Laughter) I picked up...

PIEHLER: Oh yes.

PARLON: Just some stuff here that I had laying around ... I thought if it was something that was of interest to you, you're welcome to it.

PIEHLER: Well, we would love to add it to our collection. ... Or we could make copies of it.

PARLON: Here ... Well that was a gift I got from one of our friends after the war, it's an Admiral Nimitz Memorial down in Texas ...

PIEHLER: ... Oh okay the Admiral Nimitz. Okay, these are the first days of issue.

PARLON: Yeah. (Sounds of flipping through papers) In 1984, that was forty years after we commissioned the Abercrombie, we held a reunion here. That was the first reunion we had gotten together. ... The people on the East Coast came up with the idea that they'd ought to have a reunion. And they decided that they'd like to go to Nashville because of, they all were country music fans. So they called me and asked me if I could set up a reunion for them. Well this was right after the World's Fair here and Nashville was a high cost type of place. And hotels here were a giveaway after ... it made so much more sense and then there were three other people here, that we could work together on. So we switched them over to Knoxville for that.

PIEHLER: What was that reunion like? What had happened to people?

PARLON: Oh, I'll tell ya, they are interesting and a lot of fun. We've got another one coming up in July in Philadelphia. Which I'm going to do my best to get to again. I have gone to all of them.

MILSAPS: How many have there been, I mean reunions...?

PARLON: About sixteen since then I guess.

MILSAPS: Oh really.

PARLON: Uh-hum.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you had ... a lot of southern boys?

PARLON: Yeah.

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

-----BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO-----

PIEHLER: You said ... a lot were from the South? The South and Southeast?

PARLON: Right. And we would always hold them where some shipmates there who could make the arrangements and so forth. So that winds up that the South and the Southeast is where we get our people who can come to it. (Sounds of flipping through papers.) And ... there are paper, stories on the ... on the war that you ... might be interested in taking a look at. Back in 1987 there was a symposium held here at the Historic Society and I was asked to ... present the, I guess the small ship Navy and somebody else had battleship, and you had army ... and so forth. And these are notes that I put together, which pretty well is the itinerary that I was on from day one to the end of the war. If you want to make me a copy of it...

PIEHLER: That would be great if we could.

PARLON: You can have that, which I think might tie the things together for you. That was the schedule of that symposium. (More sounds of going through papers.)

MILSAPS: Did you ever question your decision to join the Navy instead of joining the Army?

PARLON: No.

MILSAPS: Never?

PARLON: No, I figured that was the best birth for me. (Laughter) The only question I ever had about it, it wasn't a question of whether you're going to be in the Navy or not. After I ... [lost] the Vanderbilt, merchant ship, I came to the conclusion that the submarines were holding all the aces. I told you we didn't have any protection, we didn't have any modern equipment really to speak of. So I made application for submarine service. But I was too old. Then they were only taking ... twenty-eight I think was the limit, and I was past that by that time.

PIEHLER: The one thing I notice on your itinerary is that you got to do training at Miami Beach in December.

PARLON: That's Sub-Chaser Training.

PIEHLER: ... Well actually in October, November, and December, doesn't sound like a bad time to be in Florida.

PARLON: No, it wasn't. It was pleasant. Except the only problem we had ... Peg came down there. She left our boy at home with her mother. But she came down for awhile there. We had an apartment over on the beach. We had all these well-to-do Yankees coming down there in their big cars and we couldn't buy enough gas to get ourselves around town hardly. It was hard on us. It was hard on her. Joyce if you're going to be working on this you might if you're interested, you can take this and look it over and anything that's of value to you, you can have. ... For example ... at one time .. Just took what I had from 1943, [19]44, [19]45, and [19]46. There are copies of all sorts of thing, letters, one thing or enough. I don't know whether they tell you anything, but you're welcome to any of this stuff.

PIEHLER: We ... anything you liked to give us, we would take... Joyce and I.

PARLON: I tell you, I can give you these letters, I wrote my mother she is no longer with us. And the ones that I have at home, that I wrote to Peg, when Charles [Johnson] was starting this [the Center for the Study of War and Society] up at first, I suggested to Peg that I might just donate those letters. And at that time she didn't take too kindly to that. So I've never approached that subject again, but I would think by now that it wouldn't make a whole lot of difference.

PIEHLER: Well the other thing, is if your wife was reluctant to part with the originals, we could make an arrangement to make copies of those. And deposit those. I am often reluctant to take, I know for some it's a family heirloom.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And that's very understandable. So I don't....

PARLON: Well I think ... she never looks at them, anything of that kind.

PIEHLER: And if you put them here, it it's a safe place. This will be here for your family to look at, years, and generations from now.

PARLON: We just have the one son, no other family around here. And I just took the position that the best thing I could do with this, I know our son is not going to spend a lot of time scrounging through this stuff. If he is he can come down to the University and take a look at it, you know.

PIEHLER: I want to ask you, I guess ... a few questions to wrap up the Navy and ask you before we let you go? If that's okay? And a little bit about what happened after the war? But ... what did you, I mean this is a very general question, what did you think of the Japanese? You had a pretty close call with Japanese submarines? It's sort of a simple question but it...?

PARLON: Well, we were pretty well instructed to hate them, you know. I had basically no use for them at all. If I ... it didn't hurt me to fire at their ... if they're attacking me. I wouldn't go out of my way to shoot one of them. ...When we traveled with the Australian Corvettes for example, they would talk about having ... gunnery practice, if they found a Jap in the water somewhere they'd get the guns out and take pot shots at them. We never thought of doing anything like that.

PIEHLER: So that really did strike you, as ... you didn't have that kind of attitude.

PARLON: Oh no. I'd say the only lasting; the thing that lasted with me was that I would never buy a Jap car.

PIEHLER: And have you?

PARLON: Never have.

PIEHLER: Never have. So that....

PARLON: So they had this big campaign about how the Japanese were building such better cars than American cars. And I was using a car regularly in my business and ... I didn't see anything wrong with what the American people were doing. And I, there was no question they built good equipment.

PIEHLER: Had you ... thought of staying in the Navy?

PARLON: No, I didn't.

PIEHLER: No. And I see from your chronology ... you got home pretty quickly after the war and ended relative to other, other service.

PARLON: I had my time in before the war ended actually. And had a relief ordered out by name

... he was supposed to meet up with us and I would be relieved and get another assignment and it went on and on. And I think I got the notice in June, and the war didn't end until sometime in August. So from June to August I kept my fingers crossed that we didn't get in any difficulty then, because.... Anyway, he came aboard when we pulled into Leyte. And we arrived at Leyte on the evening of the surrender, the Japanese surrender. We arrived too late to get into the submarine nets. So we steamed around in the night and laid off and watched the huge fireworks going off. They were shooting off everything they had in celebration. We pulled in and anchored the next day and my relief showed up. So I spent the day turning stuff over to him and I think it was the 15th of August, and the 16th I got relief and went to the airport in Leyte. Of course there was an awful scramble on for airspace, but I was able to get on and get, Leyte to Guam to Kwajalein. And then got bumped there by the brass. And went to look around there and ... around port I saw this ship loading there. And having the experience of a Port Director and what they did, I went to the Port Director and asked him what the chances were to get on board, to get in that ship. Well it turned out they were going to be having some troops going back. So I got myself assigned on in charge of the troops. And ... so I got my ride home that way.

PIEHLER: You were, you were in some ways very lucky that your relief did ... just come at a good time.

PARLON: Yeah, because you got relieved by the point system.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you had fairly high points.

PARLON: Yeah, my points were sufficient that....

PIEHLER: This is a ... very basic question. But it strikes me that you probably got a lot of points for having a ship sunk from under you. Is that....?

PARLON: I think it was keyed to time and service, and maybe operations.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I knew you got points for operations. I was just wondering. I'm more familiar with the Army point system. I'm wondering ... if you losing a ship?

PARLON: I don't think so except if you were involved in the invasions. That sort of thing.

PIEHLER: How much ... When did you start talking about the war?

PARLON: I don't know. I guess most all veterans who are in the war, are not inclined to talk about it much. You just are ... glad to have it [over]. So, I rarely talk about it. From time to time I think of it. I have a calendar at home, daily and through the year and I have noted in there for example that May 17, 1943 the Abercrombie [actually the Vanderbilt] that sunk. And the Okinawa invasion and the Lingayen invasion and those sort of things. But ... that's for my own personal use. ... If I happened to be with people on those days then I might mentioned well this

was the day....

PIEHLER: Yeah.

PARLON: That's about all. I've talked more about it today than I've talked all the time I guess.

PIEHLER: What about ... you're now involved in with a ... Destroyer Escort Veterans Organization and I noticed your tie has destroyer escorts on it.

PARLON: Yes, Destroyer Escort Sailors Association.

PIEHLER: Yes.

PARLON: DESA. I belonged to that. I don't pay the dues any longer. Their information was primarily about ships that I had no particular connection with, and so forth. And we were more involved in our own reunion. Matter a fact one year we went to Philadelphia for a reunion in conjunction with DESA's convention. It had none of the meaning that our own individual group. You get a close attachment to the people that you served with, even regardless of what their job was on the ship. They're good friends from then on.

PIEHLER: So you kept some friendships from the ship.

PARLON: Oh, yeah. All of those. I don't have much from the Armed Guard.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

PARLON: It's not that kind of a, there was no association for me, other then with the ships officers who were merchant people. I maintained a relationship with the radio operator. ... He lived in Philadelphia when I lived there. And we'd get together at times.

PIEHLER: So when you came home you didn't join any veteran's organizations? Like the Legion?

PARLON: No, never belonged to the American Legion or the Veterans....

PIEHLER: Was your father in the Legion or any of the...?

PARLON: No, he had kind of an association with some of the people he knew. He had a very good friend in Dayton, Ohio. I remember going with him to visit them one time.

PIEHLER: Who had served with him.

PARLON: Uh-hum.

PIEHLER: But he never joined any veterans [organizations].

PARLON: No, not that I have anything against them. I go to their clubs once in a while.

PIEHLER: No. Oh, yeah, No.... I should also add it's a fact not widely know, but the majority of veterans never do join veterans organization.

PARLON: I ... you know ... it's just another organization that's not going any place. It's like our reunion. It's going to be a dead end some day. It's getting that way pretty fast.

PIEHLER: Did you ever use any of your GI Bill benefits?

PARLON: I used it to ... to the company after the war. I had this business when I went in the war. My brother continued to run that alone. He also went into service before the war was over. So the business wasn't really active when the war ended.

PIEHLER: Uh-hum.

PARLON: But the franchises were mine. During the war, the Chicago office of Elwell Parker [Electric] Company had taken over the Steel mill industry in northern Indiana, Gary area. That was the part of my territory that was the best for me. So, when I came back I took a look at this thing and thought well, I've got a right to it and can get it, but a month later they can take it away again. So I passed that up. I had good friends with the Yale and Towne manufacturing company that I had made when I was in Pittsburgh. And, knew them well and they recommended the headquarters, who was getting ready to expand their business after the war. They had been very limited in what they could build. So I, they wanted, they were looking for somebody who could be a liaison with their dealerships, and teach lift truck to these people and survey plants and find applications, that sort of thing. I found that plant survey thing to be a pretty easy job. All you had to do was watch where people put things down and you knew that they had to pick it up and usually they could have avoided a pick up or two and got the job done. They could have stacked material instead of spreading it out. And they could have used containers that fit into a lift truck. So it was very interesting, but I traveled the whole country doing that again leaving Peg at home ... by herself most of the time. But ... that was the business I had started and I felt that I about had to pick that up. It didn't make sense for me to go into a new industry.

PIEHLER: Uh-hum.

PARLON: So I did that, and became the manager over their electric truck division, later on. Operated that and after that, at that time most of the big corporations had headquarters in New York and I became a national account sales person for the Yale and Towne Manufacturing Company. And at one time had an office in the Chrysler building and then had a little branch over on 43rd street.

PIEHLER: How long did you stay in New York?

PARLON: Well, that time I guess I was there about five years maybe. Yale got themselves into problems and next thing you know they had new management who just saw things so much different. Brought in people who were really inexperienced in the industry. So I decided to then go out on my own, you know. I couldn't get a Yale franchise, but I got the franchise for the Baker Rauling Company out of Cleveland who were also electric truck manufactures. So I set up a business in Philadelphia, and in a while the Baker people got in trouble and Otis Elevator bought them out. They wanted to run their own place. So I again sold and went to business for Baker Rauling Company in the Otis Elevator operation in Philadelphia. Well, it turned out that in the lift truck business we did a lot of things that the elevator people didn't think were too good. For example, we remanufactured a lift truck. We'd bring it in and completely disassemble it, and repaint it and so forth. Well that was kind of dirty work for them. They just didn't match. So that, that didn't turn out, because of the restrictions that Otis was putting on it. It would be, it was typical of the take-overs that could happen. You would get whole new management and then, no one in the industry at all. So, in the meantime the Yale people again needed some help in their electric truck business. So I went to work for them in charge of the electric truck, again. In a while ... I became their national account representative in New York and still lived in Philadelphia. And ... for a couple years commuted from Philadelphia to New York by train.

PIEHLER: So you have something of a revolving door, particularly with Yale.

PARLON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You had been their national account executive.

PARLON: The only reason I left there was...

PIEHLER: Was new management.

PARLON: ... the new management. And that cleared up in time. So ... (Laughter) this organization I knew well and they knew me. And ... so I did that and the national account I personally only handled about ten to twelve accounts. But they were all big corporations headquartered in New York. We did contract business with them you know. They'd buy a hundred lift trucks, where the dealership would sell one, you know that sort of thing. After a while you're dealing with a purchasing headquarters and they would bring in people they had trained at plant level, young college graduates who had gotten a handle on the business. And they would put them through the purchasing. And, I began to realize that they were all getting younger and I was getting older. I could see where that wasn't going to be a life time proposition. So the dealer here in Knoxville, decided that he wanted out of business. And he had a profitable business going. I took a look at that and went oh, that looks like a possibility. So I needed finance by that time, this is a, you know, a highly capital intense business. You had to have inventory,

and you had to have parts and you had to run a service department and so forth. So, in the mean time, Eaton Corporation had bought the Yale business and they like everybody ... that buys something else, get their own ideas about what they want to do. And they thought they wanted to have all direct offices. Well it doesn't make much sense. My Yale franchise covered the tip of Virginia and tops of Georgia, Alabama, and Chattanooga and Knoxville area and so forth. So I built a branch in Chattanooga. I ran that business till about , ... [19]82.

PIEHLER: When ... did you come to Knoxville?

PARLON: 1970.

PIEHLER: So from [19]70 to [19]82 , twelve years.

PARLON: Yeah, I remember going home when I was considering this and I told Peg, I am interested in a business down in Knoxville, Tennessee. And she says where in the world is Knoxville, Tennessee. (Laughter) She had never been to the state even, I don't think. Anyway, she has become ... a good loyal native.

PIEHLER: But there was something of a culture shock.

PARLON: Yeah, there was. So ... it was a successful business and then we began to run into Japanese competition. They were just dumping equipment over here at a ridiculous price. The only way we sold any new equipment was with the help from the factory. They had to get their flag too.

PIEHLER: Uh-hum.

PARLON: It got down to where that wasn't enough in it and you couldn't make any money in the new equipment business. So I started a rental business. That was ... a bit profitable. I established a fleet of seventy or eighty lift trucks here, when I got out of business. That was really carrying the lift truck part of the load. I also had a Bobcat franchise. And that was a good one, too. I had an opportunity to sell it to the Eaton Corporation. Again they decided that they wanted to run a direct office and they ... were interested in buying this thing back. And ... so I wound up striking a deal ... and sold the Yale part of it back to them. And then the ... another part of that agreement was that I wouldn't be back in the business for the next year I think. So I spun off the rest of the business and closed it up, about 1983. It was around the World's Fair time here. And after I got out of that and I was retired and looking for something to do. The World's Fair people needed somebody to operate their warehouse where ... their exhibitors would warehouse material. And you delivered over night to the fair site for the next day. So I volunteered to do that. And did it for what you are allowed to make on Social Security...

PIEHLER: Social Security.

PARLON: ...at that time. So it was a bargain for them and it got me off the street. (Laughter) That was kind of a fun operation while it lasted, and then I was ready to retire. I've just been retired since.

PIEHLER: So that was your gradual decompression.

PARLON: Yeah, but in the mean time my son now has a box making plant out in South Knoxville, the old Camel manufacturing plant. And ... he has a growing business, and I get involved.

PIEHLER: So you give advice?

PARLON: Yeah, and ... collateral as he has needed to get ... he is getting in a business where, you know, you could spend a million dollars on some of that equipment. So he ... needed collateral and the banks, they don't understand a piece of machinery is at all. So I would ... I was in a position that I could back him to that extent. It's been successful.

PIEHLER: So ... it's worked out for him?

PARLON: Yeah, it worked out. He had started with the walk-in mailing, shipping places you see around town.

PIEHLER: Oh yeah, the mailboxes.

PARLON: Yeah. He had the first one of those around here. Called Express Packaging. And he went from that into making the boxes and he now supplies all these walk-in places around with boxes, as part of his business. Otherwise he is dealing with this smaller type user. He couldn't go after... he couldn't compete with major companies in big orders, but they don't take to the small orders either. So he has a niche there that's...

PIEHLER: Yeah. That's very interesting.

PARLON: ... turned out to be a good business.

PIEHLER: How many people does he employ?

PARLON: He's got about ... sixteen I think now on his payroll here. In the meantime ... he bought a half interest in a business up in Cookeville, [TN] where they cut foam for the furniture industry.

PIEHLER: Uh-hum.

PARLON: And that's a growing business now, too. I got out ... I go to Rotary on Tuesdays,

you've been there.

PIEHLER: Yes, yes I have, yes.

PARLON: After Rotary, I go out and do his payroll; it's on a computer system. That's the extent of my computer (Laughter) [knowledge]. Early, last year, I thought well everybody is doing this. I better get ... the world is getting away from me maybe; I better do something about it. So I bought a Gateway computer and printer and so forth, for my home. And after while I decided that was the biggest time waster that I had. (Laughter) And I didn't particularly like looking at a little screen to read everything I wanted. So I gave it to my son for his condominium. I am out ... of the computer business myself. That's silly to get out of it because you know it's here to stay, but I'm not so.... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well ... is there anything that we forgot to ask or something else you would liked to add.

PARLON: I really don't think of anything, off the top of my head.

PIEHLER: Well, we are definitely going to process these letters, and put them as part of the collection and ... I might really put on the record that they're really an invaluable adjunct to your oral history. The two will go very well together.

PARLON: I think in time that Peg will decide that....

PIEHLER: And as I said, you ... can always tell your wife that we don't necessarily need to have the originals, we would be glad to work arrangements.

PARLON: I think it's just sentimental.

PIEHLER: Oh, I understand sentimental well, so I don't.... Well, thank you, thank you.

MILSAPS: Yes, thank you.

PARLON: Well it's a pleasure, I enjoyed it really ... You can have those now and anything else.

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