

KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Charles L. Seay on March 24th, 2000, at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

CYNTHIA TINKER: Cynthia Tinker.

PIEHLER: And I guess, let's begin by asking a little bit about your family history. You were just telling us about the origins of the name Seay, which is spelled S-E-A-Y.

CHARLES SEAY: We're not sure why the Y was added because it isn't pronounced. But, there are some people that think it was an Irish name: S-I-T-H-I-G-H, which for some reason is pronounced "sea." Others think it derived from the French Huguenot name DeSay or Say, but we don't exactly what that S-A-Y denotes. By the time they got to America in about 1700, between 1700 and 1750, nobody could write very well anyway, and the immigrants were not speaking English too well, probably. So it somehow picked up as S-E-A-Y. We think the first ones to arrive were S-E-A-Y, then we think our particular ancestors were Huguenot and they came over [later]. They sort of used the name Seay or maybe S-E-E. And I think they adopted the extant local spelling, "Seay," so we've been stuck with it ever since. But I was born in Lebanon, Tennessee in 1924. This was a little ahead of the Depression, but the Depression had already hit the farmers. And my father was a farmer in Lebanon and he lost his farm during the period between 1924 and the [stock market] crash in 1929. He was a strong Roosevelt supporter. He felt that Roosevelt was going to do something for the average working person, so he stayed a staunch Democrat all his life. I later changed to the Republican Party. My mother, who was also a Democrat, used to tell me, "I try not to think about it," she said. (Laughter) That I vote Republican.

PIEHLER: So they were real were real dyed in the wool Republicans, and Roosevelt Republicans too.

SEAY: Democrats.

PIEHLER: Democrats, excuse me. Roosevelt Democrats.

SEAY: Definite Democrats. In Middle Tennessee everybody was a Democrat. In fact, the only Republican I ever heard of was somebody up in East Tennessee named B. Carroll Reece. (Laughter) When I got up here I found out it was him and maybe 70,000 others just like him. So, we tend ... towards the Republican side. Now, but this was during the Depression and my father, after [losing] the farm, had a job at DuPont in Old Hickory, Tennessee. But then the Depression, after, uh, '29 [he] lost that job, [due to] cutbacks of personnel and all. And from that point on he had various, uh, jobs, primarily as a policeman in the force in Nashville, Tennessee. So we moved to Nashville ... sometime after I was born. And I grew up there. I went to high school at East Nashville High School. And there I was in the ROTC, which was fortunate

because they provided a uniform, and clothes were ... in short supply. So I [was] definitely a child of the Depression and it's very, uh, looms large in my recollections. But I was conscious of what was going on in the world. My dad was very much in politics and was a big Roosevelt supporter. He knew a lot of what was going on in Europe and he was supportive of Roosevelt in his efforts to build up the military and arm our allies in Europe. So when the war really started in 1939, I heard about it as a fifteen-year-old, delivering advertising bulletins for a little grocery store, neighborhood grocery store where I worked. A friend of mine was delivering newspapers in the same area and he showed me the headline, "War Breaks Out in Europe, Germany Invades Poland." So I knew about it at that point, but was not totally surprised. But from that point on we definitely lived in a war-oriented economy. The economy picked up, for one thing, [and] work got better ... the family finances got a lot better through that period of time and I'm sure this happened to a lot of people. The, uh, pump-priming, as they call it, that Roosevelt did, the trickle-down effect or whatever. It worked, at least as far as the economy was concerned.

So then I was, uh, conscious of the invasion, rather, the attack on Pearl Harbor, uh, December the eighth, 1941. I heard about it on the way to Sunday School, on the radio. And again, I don't remember being totally surprised or shocked. It just seemed like a natural occurrence, a natural course of history. And so, all ... my friends who had been in the ROTC, some who had been in the National Guard, and by the way the National Guard had already been nationalized by Roosevelt, perhaps in 1940 or maybe '41. But we were all very much behind the war effort and ready to do our part. I had had enough military training in the ROTC to feel qualified. So, at age seventeen I went into the recruiting station and applied to be an aviation cadet. [I] took all the tests and passed them. So, before I was eighteen I was accepted as a cadet, but I had to wait until my eighteenth birthday. So I never had to sign up for the draft. I was ... never enrolled in the Draft until after I had served overseas and came back, then I had to sign up for the Draft.

But I immediately, uh, after my eighteenth birthday went to Camp Tullahoma, Camp Forrest, rather, in Tullahoma, Tennessee. [I] had my head shaved, as all the recruits did, had a little bit of basic training there, then some more basic soldier training at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, [and] then on to Miami Beach to wait. This was a tough assignment in Miami Beach. Uh, we had to do a little, uh, marching and a little bit of exercising, but not much military training there because we simply were waiting to become pilots. So finally our orders came through. We were transferred to California, went to classification. I really went in thinking I might be a navigator. I felt I was maybe more intellectual than, than athletic. But I was classified as a pilot and that suited me fine, too. And then, uh, later on I was classified as bomber, multi-engine material, rather than fighter. But I think that was just a chance determination.... They just took so many for bombers and so many for pilots, for fighter pilots.... So, I had my classification, I had my primary training in Visalia, California, then, uh, basic training in

Chico, and then multi-engine training in Yuma, Arizona, not too far from Luke Field and Thunderbird Field, and all those good places out there. So, uh, that was my training. I seem to have gone through it without any particular mishaps and without, uh, a lot of concerns. I wish I had kept better records of it, but I did write home regularly. I think somewhere in my mother's belongings there are a few letters I wrote. And from there, uh, went to South Carolina where I trained—well, first I went to Lajunta, Colorado, for training in B-25s then to ... Greenville, South Carolina for training, operational training, [and] fighting training in B-25s. Our pilots there were the pilots who had flown the Tokyo mission under General Doolittle. And they taught us how to fly a B-25 taking off on short fields, with very little head-wind, where you push the throttles all the way forward, set the brakes, wait 'til the engines were under full revolution, then release the brakes and you kinda jumped off the ground then. And that, uh, was very useful knowledge to have when we were flying on short fields in the South Pacific.

So, some of the people I graduated with in, uh, in pilot training went from Greenville to Italy. But I happened to go with another crew to the South Pacific. When we took off from Sacramento, we had ... an Air Transport Command navigator telling us which way to go, we took off thinking we were going to the Aleutian Islands in Alaska. We had been issued full winter gear. [We] had ... foot lockers full of winter gear, which we shipped, we knew not where, to a post office address. But, we were sure we were going to Alaska. Well, we got up in the air and the navigator opened his sealed orders and said, "Well, fly west, you're going to Hawaii and Guadalcanal." So that's the first we knew [of it]. I'm sure we completely confused the Japanese with that maneuver. I'm sure it made a difference in the (Laughter), in their concepts of the war. So we went to Hawaii and later to Guadalcanal, and, uh, had the war experience. I'm not sure whether you're more interested in background at that point, or whether ...

PIEHLER: Well, actually, let me back up just a little. Uh, let me first ask you a little bit more about your parents. I guess, beginning with your father. He was a veteran of World War I.

SEAY: He was a veteran. He became a second lieutenant in the infantry. [He] got his commission just as the war ended in 1918.

PIEHLER: So he never made it overseas?

SEAY: Never. He joined the American Legion, but he couldn't join the Veterans of Foreign Wars 'cause he hadn't served overseas.

PIEHLER: So was he an active member of the Legion?

SEAY: Yes, very active. And I was in the Sons of the Legion. [I] played in a drum and

bugle corps all of my [high school years].

PIEHLER: So ... it sounds like he was very active at Post, uh ...

SEAY: He was active in the Post, in politics, uh, all those things. He was in the city government, in the police force, and at one point the state paroles program ...

PIEHLER: How important was that political connection in getting a police officer position?

SEAY: Uh, it was important to him. The mayor of the town was a personal political friend of his and it was very important in getting ...

PIEHLER: The mayor of Nashville?

SEAY: [He] was Thomas Cummings at that time, and uh, it was important. Jobs were very difficult to get and Dad had not graduated from high school. In fact, I'm not sure he graduated from the eighth grade. [He] was not illiterate, but not terribly intellectual and ...

PIEHLER: But he did get an officer's commission in ...

SEAY: He got an officer's commission.

PIEHLER: In World War I. That's ...

SEAY: He was no dummy. (Laughter)

Piehler: ... No ... that's very striking.

SEAY: He just didn't have formal education, but he had a lot of common sense and all.

PIEHLER: Did your father read a lot, or ...

SEAY: Yes. He read all of the newspapers. He listened to all of the news, uh, broadcasts. And he ... read political books. He kept up with, uh, all the things in the political field.

PIEHLER: You mentioned, um ... that he lost the farm. Had that farm been in the family for a long time?

SEAY: No. His family had had several farms around there, at that time his father was alive and had a farm. But he took what money he could beg or borrow and bought a

farm and invested heavily in pork. And pork prices dropped just at that point, and about the time I was born. And so he was so heavily mortgaged that he couldn't hold on to the farm.

PIEHLER: Why, why did he go to ... Nashville? Why not ...

SEAY: He went to Old Hickory, Tennessee. He found a job, not political, just ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, at Dupont.

SEAY: Dupont. You know, they were making rayon and rayon fiber and cellophane there. So he became a foreman there. So ... let's just say, he was a fairly intelligent person, just not, not schooled. But, uh, eventually they had such cutbacks that he was out of a job. We moved at that point to Nashville where he had some political connections.

PIEHLER: ... When did he leave? Do you remember roughly when he left for the job at Old Hickory at Dupont?

SEAY: Uh, I was a year old. So, July 25, 1924. So he left in 1925.

PIEHLER: '25. And when ... did he get laid off?

SEAY: I was ten years old, so that had to be 1934.

PIEHLER: So that must have been a very vivid memory as a ten year [old].

SEAY: Oh it is. It was rather traumatic. When your father's without a job and no visible income. So, he found a place to rent in Nashville when he had the first inklings of the political job. And Mother, of course, was quite, uh, perturbed about it too. So we ...

PIEHLER: How did you ... make ends meet? Particularly when he was between jobs? I mean, you were ...

SEAY: Uh, the little grocery stores at that time were pretty generous with credit.

PIEHLER: So you were on credit for a while.

SEAY: Oh, yeah, there's no question about it. But, he always paid 'em and all that. But ... neighborhood grocery stores, credit was a very important thing during those Depression years. I don't think that people could have survived without the little corner grocery. And, um, people that had property for rent, rent was very low. But, I recall

even there, they were fairly lenient. People were not thrown out of their rental home. We did change homes a number of times, but it was a little upgrade each time that finances would get a little bit better. One time we moved successively next door three times, from one house to the bigger one next door, to the bigger one next door, as uh, finances got better. That was in East Nashville.

PIEHLER: Your early recollections, then, are of growing up in Old Hickory ...

SEAY: Really, uh, growing up more in East Nashville. From ten years old ...

PIEHLER: Yes.

SEAY: From ten years of age, I remember more East Nashville than I do Old Hickory. I remember Old Hickory, but I remember Nashville better. I remember my first grade teacher, Miss Birdsall, and (laughter) ...

PIEHLER: What do you remember about her?

SEAY: I remember that the class was unruly one day. She went around with a ruler and spanked everybody on the back of the rungs of the chairs. She didn't hit anybody. She hit the back of each person's chair. That shocked us enough to quiet us. (Laughter) So, she was a very nice lady. And the principal was a very nice man. We used to have a little saying about him, that he flew away south and had Old Hickory School in his mouth and he dropped it and ... anyway, it was ... (laughter) a little bit of a rude poem/song that we used to sing about him. But he really was a fine man.

PIEHLER: I guess one question about your ... father.... He was a Democrat. Was he a Methodist like your mother?

SEAY: Yes. He was a Methodist. His father had been a lay minister in the Methodist Church. And Mother's father and grandfather had been ordained ministers in the Methodist Church. So there was no question that we were Methodist.

PIEHLER: You were true-blue Methodist.

SEAY: ... And there again I backslid when I eventually moved to Canada and married a Canadian girl. She was in the ... Anglican Church there. I had been in the Methodist Church. But we compromised by going into the United Church, which was sort of a combination of Presbyterian and Methodist and everything in Canada. Then when we went to Switzerland we became members of an international church, which was predominantly Presbyterian because the minister was. So, when we moved to Kingsport we sort of moved with our friends into the Presbyterian Church. So that's how we happen to be Presbyterians now. I don't think we're WASPs. We just happen to be

Presbyterians. (Laughter)

Piehler: ... How did your parents meet? Do you know?

SEAY: ... My father was on his father's farm and mother ... had been orphaned.... Her mother died when she was about four, then her father died when she was about ten. And she went to live with her aunt and uncle, on her mother's side, in Nashville, [rather] East Nashville. In fact, she had been born in East Nashville. And, uh, her parents had gone up to the farm near Lebanon, but she was raised in Nashville. She went back to visit the farm and it was very near to my father's father's farm. My grandfather's farm. And so they just met in the community. And he was about six or seven years older than she was, and she was nineteen. And they met and fell in love and got married. She was nineteen when they married, in 1919. She had just finished high school. Having been raised an orphan, we've often teased her that she was pretty anxious to get married and get a home of her own, which is understandable. (Laughter)

TINKER: How did she, um, come to work at the Methodist Publishing Company?

SEAY: Because of her father and her grandfather. They had both, as they retired from their ministries, taken jobs at the Southern, at the Methodist Publishing House. So that got her her first job there. So she worked there until she got married and then ... when the war came along, she went back and applied for a job and got almost the same job back [that] she had had as a secretary in 1919. She got the job back in 1943 or '44. So she worked until the time my father had passed away.

PIEHLER: Do you think she would have reentered the workforce if it hadn't been for the war? Um, or ...

SEAY: She did.

PIEHLER: ... Did she enter because of the war or was it just ...

SEAY: ... All of the children had left home.... My sisters, well, the youngest sister was still home. But she felt free to do it. I think she would have been in the workforce earlier, except for having the responsibility for the children. She was a good mother. And I think there are a lot of women like that today, that could work, but they really feel that their calling is to raise their children first. So she, uh, went into the workforce as soon as she could. And it was good for her. I saw her when I came back from overseas. [I] went in to visit her in her office, and I honestly didn't recognize her. She had a different personality than I recalled ...

PIEHLER: Really? How did work ...

SEAY: She was sleeked back, hair back and she was made up, and dressed, uh, stylishly. It was good for her to get back in the workforce. And she was one of many that were able to go.... I say this because the children were away from home. But the ... cultural situation was such that she could go back to work. It was respectable now. It was contributing to the war effort, wherever you were.

PIEHLER: What did she do for the [Methodist] Publishing Company?

SEAY: She did makeup of publications. She put the pictures and the text together. She didn't have to type. She could, but ... I think that's what they call it ... makeup.

PIEHLER: Yeah, or book design.

SEAY: Page design.

Piehler: ... Page design.

SEAY: Not necessarily the cover or anything, but the way things fit on the page. So that was her skill. She continued it until ... 1961. So from about '44 until 1961 when my dad died. Then she, uh, moved to be near one of my sisters. We often felt she shouldn't have given up her work. Although she lived another thirty years, thirty-two years after it. So it wasn't ...

PIEHLER: When did your mother pass away?

SEAY: In 1993. She was ninety-three years old.

PIEHLER: Oh, that's very long.

SEAY: ... It would be her 100th birthday this year so I'm going back to her ... grave in Nashville to celebrate her 100th anniversary.

PIEHLER: Um, I'm curious. You didn't have a lot of money growing up. What did ... you do for fun?

SEAY: Uh, worked. (Laughter) No, I was in the Boy Scouts. And the Scouts meant a lot to me. And I remember one year, my mother knew how much it meant to me, she pawned her engagement ring to get Christmas presents for the kids. So I was thirteen years old, say, so that had to be 1937 or '38. There was no money, so she pawned her engagement ring [and] got me a Boy Scout hatchet [and] a hat. I've got a picture at home with me [wearing] the little hat I was so proud of and the regalia that you put on. So ... in the Boy Scouts I got up to be just one merit badge short of Eagle Scout.

PIEHLER: Oh, wow.

SEAY: And I got to be nearly 16 and I felt a little above it at that.... I think I discovered girls, the trouble probably was. And my interest just went elsewhere. And so I never achieved the Eagle Scout status. Just one merit badge short. I inquired one time if I could go back and make it up and they said, "No, not after age twenty-five, you cannot make it up." (Laughter) But ... we went camping. I had a bicycle. I had a friend that also had a bicycle and we traveled all around on our bicycles. We were goin' up to the Smoky Mountains one time, but we never quite made that one.

PIEHLER: (Laughter) Well, that's, that's quite a journey.

SEAY: That is a bit too far. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: That's quite a journey.

SEAY: But we went out and camped overnight, uh, back in those days it was respectable to have a .22 rifle and shoot it. We were good marksmen. But, um, he and I stayed friends. We tried to enlist in the service at the same time, but our birthdays were a few months apart and I couldn't wait for him. And ... he was a little angry at me after that, that I didn't wait for him to go into the service. But there was a slogan or a saying that we used to have in the service that whatever you did, if you lived, was the right thing to do. And I lived and he lived, so ...

PIEHLER: Where did he end up, your friend end up enlisting?

SEAY: He went to the Air Force and became a fighter pilot and was in Italy. He got his engine shot up one time and oil pouring out of the engine blocked his view. He couldn't see. And another plane, another pilot, latched onto his wing [and] flew beside of him and talked him into a landing. I mean, that was something to go through. And I was very proud of him for that. He was quite a fine young man.

TINKER: Were you very close to your sisters growing up?

SEAY: Uh, yes and no. We were close of an age and there was a bit of sibling rivalry. The girls ganged up on the boy. The two older girls didn't want the boy. (Laughter) And I was very angry they wouldn't let me play with their dolls. (Laughter) I didn't ... know I wasn't supposed to. (Laughter) And I used to break their dolls and they've reminded me of that even in recent years. (Laughter) So we were, yes and no. But, they got married young. I went into the service [and] by the time I came back from overseas they were married and started having families. Again, they were victims of the Depression. They couldn't wait to get away from home. To get in a home, be married, [and] have their own home. It was very important to them.

PIEHLER: ... None of your sisters went to college. Do you think that had to do more ...

SEAY: Yeah, ... but it's very strange. My mother always kept saying that I was going to college. There was no doubt that I would. In fact, I worked to get this scholarship ... that I didn't utilize.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. But she didn't have the expectation that the daughters, her daughters would go.

SEAY: Didn't even care if they finished high school.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

SEAY: Then I have two younger sisters that did finish high school. But again, there was no expectation and they didn't go on to college. One became a bank vice-president. The other one married very well. She married the marketing manager for Southern Bell. And he almost became president of Bell South. He was that high up. He was executive vice-president ... [and] and lives in Atlanta. So, she ... married well and helped him in his career.

TINKER: What was his name?

SEAY: Don Daves. And your dad would probably know the name. Don Daves.

PIEHLER: Why, your father works for ...

TINKER: He works for Bell South.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

TINKER: Nearly thirty years now.

SEAY: Ask him sometime. Don Daves. D-A-V-E-S. He's from Nashville.

TINKER: I'll do that.

SEAY: And ... my sister, ... they live in Atlanta now. He's retired, of course. And the younger sister is the one that became, she was the first vice-president manager of a bank of the Wachovia System in the world. I mean, she was the first one, so [they] didn't finish college, but the girls were pretty smart. The two that married young, I think, were handicapped, but the other two did very well. And I like to think I would've gone to college, with or without the GI Bill, but it made it very nice. I was ...

PIEHLER: It sounds like it would've been much more of a struggle for your family if ... you hadn't had the GI Bill. Would that have been ...

SEAY: ... Yeah, ... I married as soon as I came back from overseas.... I mentioned earlier, that marriage ... didn't last. But, I probably wouldn't have married if I hadn't have the GI Bill to count on. Already we knew about it. Even before I was discharged I knew what I was going to do. But I wouldn't have married if had known I was goin' to have to perhaps work my way through college. But I would've gone. I mean, ... the expectation was there. It was just ingrained ...

PIEHLER: So, in high school you took a college preparatory course and ...

SEAY: I, I didn't really realize that that's what it was, but I made good grades and ... what is it? The valedictorian has the highest marks?

PIEHLER: Then Salutatorian.

SEAY: I was the next one. I didn't get the highest ...

PIEHLER: Oh. That is very good.

SEAY: I was proud of that.

PIEHLER: ... Since we're on education, how big was your high school when you were ...

SEAY: East High was fairly large. There were a couple of other high schools in Nashville that may have been a little bit bigger, but it was, uh, in the top three for size. They were rivals in sports. The school later became a technical school, so it no longer carries a status as a high school, so there are no more graduates of East High, so we have an alumni association, ... uh, that's right, not alumnus. I'm an alumnus. (Laughter) Alumni association of all the previous graduates and there aren't any new ones coming along. And we meet. There's a reunion of ... an all-class reunion this June in Nashville, which I will attend.

PIEHLER: Approximately how big was your high school? Over a thousand students?

SEAY: Uh, I have to think for a minute. No, not a thousand. But, I'm sure six or seven hundred.

PIEHLER: [That] was the total ... size of the high school?

SEAY: Yes.

PIEHLER: ... It sounds like your class was about 200.

SEAY: Yeah, it would've been.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SEAY: In my yearbook ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, ... I mean, just to get a rough idea.

SEAY: At least two hundred. And we had a junior high, which was two grades, and then three grades in the high school. They were side by side.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

SEAY: So, between the two of 'em you'd have more than 1,000 people, but you don't think of ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. Yeah.... You mentioned you were active in the Boy Scouts.... It sounds like you did a lot of side trips and a lot of camping and bicycle rides.

SEAY: Camping trips, we built bridges and tied 'em together with rope and we hiked, and uh, camped overnight. Canoeing.

PIEHLER: What about sports? Did you play any sports?

SEAY: ... One of the years during the Depression—this is sort of a side story. But, I had an aunt who needed some care and the parents saw that. This was in, I guess when I was sixteen or seventeen. They saw a chance to relieve their financial pressure and do my ... great-aunt, my mother's aunt, a favor 'cause she needed nursing. [She] needed a diabetes shot every day and needed some help with the cooking. And I loved being on the farm. It's where my parents had grown up and I loved up in that area and I used to ride my bicycle up there every summer. So, I jumped at the opportunity to spend a year with her. And I looked after her and did the cooking, did the milking the cows, and gathering the eggs, and still rode my bicycle a mile to catch the school bus.... In that school, everybody was in sports, so I went out for football and basketball. But I was not terribly coordinated. I really didn't do well, which is another reason I thought later I would make a better navigator than a pilot, because I didn't think I was coordinated enough. But it turned out I was coordinated as much as the run of the mill. So, I was active in sports that year. But then, after my aunt did die of diabetes, after that year or at the end of the year, I came back to Nashville and rather than going into sports I went into

the ROTC. And there were two separate and distinct groups. It was the ROTC group and the sports group. And we were sort of rivals for the girls and this and that, but ...

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned that getting a uniform was actually very helpful in the Depression.

SEAY: Oh yes, it was.

PIEHLER: How often would you wear the uniform?

SEAY: Every day.

PIEHLER: Every day?

SEAY: Yes.

PIEHLER: Every day you were in your Junior ROTC uniform?

SEAY: Yeah. I've ... seen pictures in the school annual. Maybe one picture in the annual ... I was not in my uniform. But, that was the best clothes I had at the time. I had some others, but they were kinda ...

TINKER: Were there any, uh, of the guys that joined ROTC just to have the uniform?

SEAY: I suspect several of them. Besides me. It was an attraction. I probably would've done it anyway because I wasn't in the sporting group and ... was not in the band group, which was another group. But although, in our ROTC group one year, I led the drum and bugle corps. I trained them, led 'em, and taught them their music, by ear. We played by ear, bugles and drums. But I was not in the band group. But, everything seemed to suit the way I was going. Seriously. The military training, ROTC. Go ahead.

PIEHLER: ... I mean, I'm curious what you learned at Junior ROTC ...

SEAY: Discipline. Self-discipline. Drill, of course, and looking smart. Smartly. I mean, you could ... salute smartly and you could do all these things that when you ... got into the mass of people that have just come in the service I think you stood out. The military bearing was there, so [you] tended to get singled out and, uh, herded along the right way. Headed along the right way.

PIEHLER: Because I've gotten the sense from people who didn't have that experience that ... joining the military was very disoriented. Because ... there's this certain culture about how you're supposed to walk and salute, the protocol ...

SEAY: I knew that and it came second nature to me. But there were others who really had trouble with it. But again, this is hindsight. I certainly wasn't thinking ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, at the time it was more the uniform. And it was a way ...

SEAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... I know in colleges ... people haven't quite admitted it that way. That they joined it because they wanted their fraternities to have uniforms for the military ball, but was there any type of military high school dance? Like the military ball at college.

SEAY: No, we wore tuxes.... They had fraternities in high school ...

PIEHLER: You didn't join a high school [fraternity].

SEAY: I didn't have the money. I didn't have the money so I never joined one. But I, I went to one or two of their dances 'cause I had friends that were in there. And I think it's fairly well recognized that it was no disgrace to not have money. People were pretty tolerant of you. It hurt me, but didn't hurt them.... And like I say, my sisters really suffered. A couple of years, when I was younger, I worked in the state senate as a page-boy in Nashville.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

SEAY: This was a great experience and [I] made some nice money, for those times. And I bought my sisters clothes out of this money, and they were able to go to their dances. It was very important to them to have suitable clothes, so ... I was young enough then that I didn't really care. Then by the time I did care, [when] I was a little bit older, the money was gone. But I [had] made good use of it. I bought a bugle and bought a bicycle and bought a rifle and probably bought some clothes.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, since ... politics has been swirling around and I'm still very new to the state. Could you reflect ... a little bit about the politicians your father knew and your recollections of them? And working as a page in the senate, ... I mean, it sounds very ...

SEAY: It was very exciting. I knew several future governors. I knew the governor at the time because he had to make the appointment. Gordon Browning was the governor and he was personal friend of my father's. And my father was able to swing votes in his ward. He was ... up in New York they call 'em ward-heelers, you know. They control the vote in that area. And he had a great politician personality. He remembered names and he had a big smile and everybody knew him. He could glad-hand people. So he could swing votes, so he was rewarded for his efforts and one of the rewards was to

appoint me as a page in the senate. I think I made \$28 a week.

PIEHLER: That is a lot of money.

SEAY: Oh, it was ...

PIEHLER: That's, that's a ...

SEAY: I had just been working prior to that, as a grocery delivery boy at three dollars a week. And this was \$28.

PIEHLER: You must have felt like your were just in the money.

SEAY: Oh, I was. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But I'm curious, 'cause you mentioned several governors. Could you just maybe ...

SEAY: ... Prentice Cooper later became governor, and he was a senator at the time. And ... Frank Clement, was not on the scene at that time. He came along later. I didn't know him or Buford Ellington who traded—see, the governor couldn't succeed himself so they just swapped off each time. (Laughter) One would be governor one year and the other would be governor the next year. But, uh, during my time Estes Kefauver was big senator and he was a candidate for the Presidency. And he was, again, a personal friend of my father's. But ... politics in Tennessee was controlled by Ed Crump, Boss Ed Crump, in Memphis. They had the Middle Tennesseans, who were Democrats, and they had some East Tennesseans that didn't count. There weren't enough Republicans. Nobody bothered about East Tennessee. But, so you had Memphis ... in the Democratic Party, Memphis with the Crump faction and Middle Tennessee with the Kefauver and Browning faction. And, um, Crump won more times than he lost.

PIEHLER: Crump is one of the few names I've actually heard, 'cause he's a national name. You hear more of Kefauver in the '50s ... But he was on the scene when you were in the senate ...

SEAY: Oh yes. Yes. Kefauver was the first one that ever had the nerve to ever go into the Memphis area and politic for Senate ... when he ran for Senate. He went down there and defied Crump and lived, so that broke the back of it. From that point on people didn't take Crump quite so seriously. I don't mean to malign his dead body but ... that's what they said at the time. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: The governor ... who appointed you, Governor Browning. Any personal recollections of him? Uh, did you like him, I guess?

SEAY: Uh, affable. He and my dad were very much alike. They were a little bit portly. They ate well. But, they were both typical, friendly, affable politicians. But he later ... He was in the war. In fact, Gordon Browning was the civilian, [rather], the military head of all the civilians in Belgium after World War I. That had been his job. To bring the civilian population ... [in] World War I. So he had great command. He had great personality. He could speak well. He couldn't sing the state song [of Tennessee], the Tennessee Waltz ... very well. But otherwise he had a commanding personality. (Laughter) But it was under him that it was named the state song and he used to try to sing it and it was not very ... (laughter) not a very good idea. (Laughter) But ... politicians. The main thing was loyalty to your group.

PIEHLER: So you were ... either the Crump faction, the Browning, or the Kefauver.

SEAY: And all your political ... favors, ... favors you gave to your friends. One time, one of the newspaper people said to Gordon Browning that he had heard that a road had been built to the farm of one of Browning's friends. And Browning said, "Well I hope it was one of my friends." (Laughter) So, politics ... like that was a way of life at the time. And it didn't really change until the Republicans, under Eisenhower, began to make inroads. It was political [and] the Democratic Party had just divided into two factions.

PIEHLER: I'm just curious, because ... the regional differences are still very pronounced here, but I get the sense they were, in many ways, very separate states ...

SEAY: Three.

PIEHLER: Yeah. You did feel that?

SEAY: Felt it very strongly. You didn't care anything about those people out in Memphis. West Tennessee. You didn't trust 'em or like 'em. And East Tennessee, you didn't even think about. I knew there were some Smoky Mountains. Like I said, I was going to go there one time. But, now it's still ... a little bit that way. There's some rivalry between Memphis and Nashville, but with the present governor, he has carried both areas. He has ... endeared himself to the Middle Tennesseans and also the East Tennesseans. He's got the—well, he's Republican ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, ... it's some ways easier for a Republican to do that ... [in] East Tennessee. At least ...

SEAY: 'Cause they are Republican.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SEAY: And so he's one of 'em. We had a Republican governor before that. A fellow named Winfield Dunn. He made a big mistake.... There was something that needed to be done up here. The medical hospital at ETSU [East Tennessee State University]. And he opposed it. Now, Jimmy Quillen, who was our representative in Congress, overran him or made an end run around him and got it. I guess through the Veteran's Administration. And so, he himself was Republican, but the next time Dunn ran, Quillen made sure he was defeated. They talked about [how] he was gonna bury the hatchet and the idea was that Quillen buried it in Dunn's head. (Laughter) So, um, in East Tennessee we say that the people in Nashville, including the rest of Tennessee, think that East Tennessee ends here in Knoxville. They forget that there's another region. So, we don't have any animosity towards Knoxville, but we don't consider ourselves [as] having the same joint interests. Knoxville is much more related to Nashville, where we are independent or even related over towards Virginia, to some extent.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. I'm curious. Growing up, you mentioned that you once tried to make it to the Great Smokies.... Before joining the Air Force, Army [Air Corps] actually, how far east, west, north, south had you traveled?

SEAY: Well, we had been past Lebanon, going to the east. We had been west, there was a lake called Indian Lake where my friend ... and his uncle had a place there, so probably fifty miles.

PIEHLER: So, you really hadn't left the state growing up?

SEAY: Oh, no. Oh! One time I did. In the Sons of the [American] Legion we had been to Chicago when I was fourteen years old. We had been to Memphis when I was thirteen or fourteen.

PIEHLER: For conventions with the Legion?

SEAY: Uh-huh

PIEHLER: So your dad went to Legion convention?

SEAY: Yeah. And the Sons of the Legion went there, too ...

PIEHLER: I can't resist following up. What was a Legion convention like? Because I've heard, particularly of that era ...

SEAY: ... The Forty and Eight, again that was a branch of the VFW 'cause they had been overseas. The cars in France would carry forty men or eight horses, so it was the Forty and Eight. But they had these little cars that tipped up on the two hind wheels and would run around. Zip around. They, uh, introduced that. They had a big time. And the

boys, ... we were turned loose in Chicago. We went to every, um, theater on State Street in Chicago. I don't know what's in Chicago now, but I know what was in Chicago then. (Laughter) And they were very revealing. It was a very revealing experience, you might say, to go to Chicago at fourteen ...

PIEHLER: And just to be turned loose. I mean, it ...

SEAY: ... I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't have done it with my son. (Laughter) Might not have had any choice.

PIEHLER: But you survived the ...

SEAY: Yeah. Uh-huh.

PIEHLER: So these two trips sound like they were very memorable. Because otherwise, you had not really [traveled]. Fifty mile circle was really the ...

SEAY: When I went to Tullahoma to join the service that was farther away than I had been on my bicycle. But I'd never been in an airplane by that time. Trains back and forth from Lebanon to Nashville is much as I'd been on a train. So, yeah, I'd been raised and kept pretty close to home. It was an experience to get out like that.

TINKER: I was just curious [about] your father and his political connections. How exactly did he initially make and start building his political ...

SEAY: ... Well, he had ... run for office one time in Lebanon, Tennessee. Before he lost the farm, he had run for county trustee, so he got a taste of politics. He got elected. But then when he moved to Nashville he had to give that up of course, ... when he moved to Old Hickory. I'm sorry, moved to Old Hickory. But when he got in Old Hickory he suddenly realized he had this political ability and he began to take sides, uh, on the Kevaufer side against Crump even then. And he was a big vote swinger even in Old Hickory before we moved to Nashville. Then when we moved to Nashville he carried this ability and built up another ...

TINKER: Just by getting' out and talkin' to people?

SEAY: That's right. He could go to fillin' stations and talk to people. And he was a good ol' boy and a red neck in a way, but a high-grade red neck. (Laughter) I didn't know the term at the time, but ... he was a good ol' boy. He knew how to talk to people. And he knew how to laugh and he could tell stories. And I remember, even in Old Hickory, he and my mother used to go.... He was in the Legion there. They used to go to the Legion meetings. And that may have been the center of his influence, 'cause he was active there then active later in Nashville.

PIEHLER: As a policeman, what kind of police work did he do?

SEAY: He was a patrolman.

PIEHLER: Did he walk a beat?

SEAY: They rode in patrol cars. He never had to walk ...

PIEHLER: He never walked a beat?

SEAY: I remember one of the things he told me. That they were always on the lookout for, uh, this was during the war years, people who were evading the draft. And even after I came back, I was back in civilian clothes walkin' down the street of East Nashville and sure enough a patrol car with two officers pulled over in front of me in the street and got out of the car and came over and ... [said] "What's your name, what are doin' here, what's your military classification?" I had to produce my draft card and that at that point I was, not 4-F, but 4-something that showed I'd already served. And they thanked me, very politely, got back in the car and drove away. But that was a big thing the officers did. Was check for that. Uh, he had a way also with what, in those days, were known as the colored people. He had a kindly way with them. I remember him tellin' the story about being with a black person that had been arrested for something or other in front of the judge. And he kept a good relationship with the judges. And he said to the judge, "Judge, we really ought not to do anything to this fellow. He works." That was his evaluation of a black person, ... [one] that would work basically could, once in a while, get off on a drunken tear and if he didn't do too much damage he wouldn't be punished. But he had a good following among the colored people, wherever he was.

PIEHLER: Did he patrol predominantly in black neighborhoods or ...

SEAY: No. Predominantly in white, but it overlapped.

PIEHLER: Yeah. I mean ...

SEAY: There was a line of demarcation in East Nashville at the time which now has totally disappeared. There's no ...

PIEHLER: But when you were growing up there was a very clear line?

SEAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Where was the line? Was there a particular street?

SEAY: ... Okay. When you got out to Gallatin Pike, going out from the center of East Nashville. [Past] the high school out Gallatin Pike, the blacks were on the side over towards town. You had to get over towards the river. And to the other side, away from the river, you went towards Shelby Park, which was gettin' to be more and more wealthy white.

PIEHLER: Now growing up did you have any ... contact with ... the black community? Any friends or any playmates or ...

SEAY: I tried to. I ... didn't grow up with any.... Let me tell you one story on my mother. In the neighborhood where we lived, I mentioned we went from one house to a larger, to a larger. Well, the next property, along the way there, had been willed to a black family by a white family that had owned it. They had been servants to the family and they willed it them. So I had a black kid livin' on my street who was my age and his father did work for the other homes. And I treated him with some respect. One day I called him sir. And mother called me off to one side and said, "Son, you don't ever say 'Sir' to a [black person]...." And so they would not allow us to play with the boy. And I remember when Max Schmelling was knocked out by Joe Louis he was out there ... having a great time. He was celebrating. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you remember the Max Schmelling ...

SEAY: Oh! Absolutely. I remember listening to it on the radio. And so he was out the next day strutting around.... (Laughter) But, I ... wanted to be friends.

PIEHLER: And your mother, ... parents really didn't ...

SEAY: Wouldn't.

PIEHLER: They made it pretty clear that you should ...

SEAY: Oh, they made it absolutely clear that I couldn't identify and associate with him. So he went to a different school because the schools were segregated, so we never crossed paths.

TINKER: Did she give you any reasons why or she just said ...

SEAY: You just don't.

TINKER: You just don't.

PIEHLER: You just don't.

SEAY: And I never did. We had ... [black] women, colored women, that came and did the laundry for mother. And I remembered another thing mother said to me. [She] said, "You don't ever point your finger at a colored person; they take offense at that. That's like you're going to shoot them or something." So there was all kinds of peculiar apprehensions or misapprehensions between the races. But ... then at the church I went to, this is through that same period, the janitor was a black man. And I was very close and friendly with him. I would go down there and help him put up chairs and do all kinds of things for him. I mean, he was my friend. But, ... that's where it ended. At the church door and coming and leaving. And I never could quite understand it and I never was in sympathy with it, but I had to adhere to it. And he probably wouldn't have let me be more friendly. He wouldn't have come to my house. Um, other black experiences. There was a blind black man that sold brooms house to house. And this was one of my Boy Scout good deeds. I used to lead him around from house to house.

PIEHLER: Oh, your good turn daily?

SEAY: That was my good turn for the day. Yeah. It was once or twice a week I would do that. So, I didn't have a built-in prejudice and I didn't come out of it with a built-in prejudice, but I ... realized that it was there and I ... didn't get into trouble by staying with the white viewpoint. But I always felt guilty about it. There was some blacks that I would've been friendly with except for just not wantin' to stir things up. I was not a crusader.

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned the Boy Scouts. Who sponsored your troop? Was it the Methodist Church?

SEAY: Yes. Yes. The church did. And I had a cousin, mother's first cousin, who was a scout leader there. The man who was coach at Vanderbilt for track was the head of the Scouts for the area. Um. They're the only two I can quickly recall, [but not] the names.

PIEHLER: Did you ever get to go to the movies growing up? 'Cause you mentioned money was tight, but I ...

SEAY: Yeah, I remember in Old Hickory we lived not too far from the downtown area. And we would take, back in those days you put a deposit for milk bottles, and mother would let us take as many milk bottles as we could carry to the store and get back the deposit. And I would do that and take the money and ... I was allowed to go ... I went to a double feature one day and I saw Dracula and Frankenstein the same day at the movies. (Laughter)

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

PIEHLER: You saw Dracula and Frankenstein ...

SEAY: And I vividly recall ‘em, but I don’t remember being terrified or having any particular nightmares or feelings from it.... To me it was just movies. It was unreal. I think kids now, now I’m really guessing ‘cause how do I know? I think kids now live with television so much that they may think it’s more real, where I knew that it wasn’t real. It was clearly a movie for me. Even the Tom Mix stories, which I went to see.

PIEHLER: Ah. Yeah. My late father-in-law used to love Tom Mix and ...

SEAY: Absolutely, ... until he died. Hoot Gibson, I remember, and ...

TINKER: Hart? Was there a cowboy [named] Hart?

SEAY: I don’t remember Hart. Might’ve been. Oh yeah! Bill Hart. William Hart.

TINKER: Right. Right.

SEAY: Sure was. Sure was. Yeah, ... I well remember them. And ... if you’d go to the movie they always had a little trailer. Not a trailer. They had a little short section each time of a continuing story. The hero would be just really killed, except that they’d show you next week he’d somehow escaped ... (Laughter) or the heroine. Could’ve been. Even after the war, World War II, there were still some of those around. At Eastman when I went to work, after college ... I went to ... college at Auburn, [earning] my degree in mechanical engineering. And I got a job at Eastman in Tennessee, a Tennessee Eastman company in Kingsport, Tennessee, as a “sales engineer.” They had adopted ... Eastman had adopted that title during the war hoping it would help them keep people out of the draft. They were engineers, so therefore they were vital. So they just continued with the term. And when I was in college I worked at Sears Roebuck. [I] was on the GI Bill, but always needed a little bit extra money, so I worked part-time at Sears. And I found I had an ability to sell. And so, when an opportunity came along to be a sales engineer I thought, “Boy that’s everything I ever wanted.” So I applied for the job at Eastman and got the job and never regretted it. I did get on to a pretty good position in management. I was one step short of vice-president when time ran out on me. (Laughter) I started too late or didn’t move fast enough.... I was ten years in Canada, then ten years in Switzerland, [and] you’re not making progress within the company when you’re gone that long. So I was trailing the people who had been here in Kingsport all during that time, which I have no regret for. It was like, whatever you did [and] you survived, [then] it was the right thing to do. But if I had started or concentrated on it a little earlier I might have made vice-president and it wouldn’t make any difference. I wouldn’t be any different today, whether I was vice-president ...

PIEHLER: Although, it seems like a rough trade-off ‘cause it sounds like being in Canada particularly, Switzerland or not, [was] very pleasant places to ...

SEAY: If you're gonna fall behind, that's the place to do it. We loved it. We had a great experience there.

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned, during lunch, that you were aware of the war and events in Europe. What did you know about the world growing up? I mean ... you obviously knew a lot about politics, at least indirectly, from your father.

SEAY: Which I got by osmosis. And he and my mother discussed it. She was in ...

PIEHLER: She followed politics just as ...

SEAY: All the way. She went with him to the Legion affairs that had women. And she was very much conscious of it. Of course, the vote for women only came in when she was 19 years old, so that was a precious thing for her.

PIEHLER: So ... voting was very ...

SEAY: Oh. Seriously. She really did. But, umm, in school we had ... Civics. Civics was the course. And I had a particularly good teacher in Civics. She also taught Latin, and her sister taught another course and later became a principal of a school, one of the first schools in Nashville that was integrated. [Her name] was Margaret Cate, C-A-T-E. That was her name.

PIEHLER: And you had that ... teacher?

SEAY: She was the principal of that school when it integrated, and she managed to carry it through. But she had been one of my teachers and her sister, Frances, had been the one that taught me Civics. And I think that she made it so interesting that I simply paid attention and absorbed it. So, I think that where I would place the blame or the credit, (laughter) would be with Frances Cate.

PIEHLER: And her sister was Margaret Cate. You didn't have her sister?

SEAY: I did, but on other courses. I think it was in English [that] her sister taught.

PIEHLER: Hm-mm. But Francis Cate really ...

SEAY: She's the one, yeah, that made the biggest impression on me. I would never have studied Latin as hard as I did for anybody else. (Laughter) She was one of my favorites.

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned also that you had some Jewish friends growing up.

SEAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And they ...

SEAY: The main one—again, I had ... friends. I was not shy, but he was the shoe repairman. Cobbler, but we didn't call him that. He had the shoe repair shop. And I used to go by and sit and talk to him. And he would tell me what was going on in Germany. And he knew. And, uh, we had some ... Jewish kids in school, in high school. But nobody treated them any different.... They went to a different church, or a different synagogue. I didn't know the difference in the terms then, but there was no animosity. I don't remember them ever having any problems at all. Uh, Genevieve Sanderson.... I remember her name, even in high school. But the cobbler's name, I can't remember his name, but I picture him absolutely. He was another portly gentleman.

PIEHLER: And you would chat with him, and he'd ...

SEAY: Yeah! He would tell me what was going on, and ... that disturbed me. And so, I think these are the things that conditioned me to be ready to go. I wondered, uh, after the war, if I would feel any animosity towards the Japanese, but I found out I didn't. I was able to discuss even the war with them. People who had been in it. What was your experience and what was mine? And I wondered if I would feel anything about the Germans, so when I was in Europe I would discuss the war. And one German in particular, who had been a fighter pilot, we used to kid each other. It's a good thing that I hadn't been in Germany, he used to say, 'cause he would've shot me down. And I said, "Oh, no. We would've shot you down in a minute." (Laughter) And [we'd] laugh about it and we were ... ski buddies.... We met several winters at the same place for skiing and would eat together and were good friends. So I didn't come away from it with any learned prejudices. It was over and done with.

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned having some inkling of Germany and people that you knew had a personal connection to what was going on before '41. What about Japan? What did you know about Japan?

SEAY: Uh, not so much.... In that sense, we knew that there was something going on politically, but none of us really equated that to an attack. I mean, it was unthinkable that they would attack us. We knew—oh yeah! We had seen the newsreels of the little baby in Shanghai, ... the little baby sittin' on the sidewalk had been burned and was crying, which we later found out was faked. Did you know that? That it was one of the incitements towards the war spirit that we had. So, we knew they were doing very bad things to the Chinese. Bombing them and bayoneting babies and all those things that ... maybe were true. 'Cause they were under such a different philosophy that these things

could be done by them, and ... I think, again, I'm really stretching the limits of my knowledge here, to think that it was more endemic with the Japanese. And I think with the Germans it was more narrowly isolated to a certain, almost criminal, insanely criminal, element.... I don't think the population ever allowed themselves to realize what was going on in Germany. But I don't think the Japanese cared one way or the other.

PIEHLER: But growing up ... it sounds like the Japanese were a very distant affair, that dealt with China.

SEAY: Yeah. I remember in Nashville there was a barge company that used to ship large shipments of scrap iron to [Japan]. And people were saying even back then, "Well, we're shipping it over there, but it's gonna come back at us one of these days. And it sure enough did, but I didn't take that seriously. I thought it was just sort of the thing maybe that people say. But people ... We were arming the Japanese to fight us.... We knew ... everybody gathered scrap metal to ship to Japan. We all knew the Japanese couldn't do anything on their own. They had to imitate. We found out that wasn't quite true. When the Japanese cars came along they could ... be very inventive. But, all the cheap toys were Japanese, sometimes Chinese, but mostly Japanese and ... usually a copy of something that we had done in America. So we had a prejudice that way. Unwarranted.

PIEHLER: I'm curious. What did your parents think and what did you think, since they were so active in politics, in Democratic politics? What did they think about Roosevelt in '40-'41, basically leading America to war? Uh, Lend-Lease and ...

SEAY: Dad would've gone in my place. That's what he wanted to do.

PIEHLER: He ... backed Roosevelt?

SEAY: All the way.

PIEHLER: All the way. Both in domestic, but then foreign policy...

SEAY: Yeah. Absolutely, all the way. Including, support for the Russians, uh, Communism's got nothing to do with it. You gotta beat the Germans.

PIEHLER: So, back in '41 he ... agreed with Roosevelt aiding ...

SEAY: Oh, absolutely. One hundred percent. No reservations. And mother as well. So, we thought it was alright. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yes.

SEAY: But even [with] what thoughtfulness I had at that age I agreed with it. I didn't have any misgivings supporting him. And in Nashville that was the general attitude.... We heard of people that opposed Roosevelt. It was in the paper. There were three names that Roosevelt used to mention in order.

PIEHLER: (Laughter) Uh, yeah. Barton, ... Fish, and I can't remember ...

SEAY: Oh, but ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, but ...

SEAY: He always put 'em together.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Yeah. ... Barton, Fish, and Martin, I think.

SEAY: Martin, Barton, and Fish.

PIEHLER: I think ... those are the three.

SEAY: You've got a good recollection. I'm sure that's it. So, uh, we knew that there was opposition, but we didn't think it was right, you know. We thought we were right. Roosevelt was right.

PIEHLER: You ... decided after Pearl Harbor.... Pearl Harbor is December '41. When did you enlist in the Air Force? Or Army Air Force?

SEAY: Well, I had to wait a few days.

PIEHLER: A few days. Because you were Seventeen?

SEAY: Seventeen and a half. This was in December, so by January I'm sure I was going down to the recruiting office.... My first impulse was to go ahead and join the Marines, because you could get in the Marines at seventeen with your parents' consent. So I asked mother and dad for permission to go in the Marines and they refused.... That was January, so then I started going to the Army recruiting.

PIEHLER: Why did they refuse for the ... Marines? Did they ...

SEAY: They didn't want me to go in until I was eighteen. They refused to let me go in at seventeen. They didn't have to sign anything for the Air Force [stating] that I wouldn't go in until I was eighteen.... I would [not have] finished high school. And they wanted me to do that.

PIEHLER: So, that was important, that you finish high school?

SEAY: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. My grades fell off a little bit at that point. I might've made ... valedictorian, except for that.

PIEHLER: That last semester sounds like you couldn't concentrate on [school].

SEAY: I really couldn't, no.

PIEHLER: So you enlisted ... and then finished high school?

SEAY: Mm-hmm. Graduated from high school in June and then I had to wait another month.... So after my birthday in July I reported in.

PIEHLER: You wanted to join the Marines, but then you joined the ... Army, with the intention of being in the Army Air Force or did you ...

SEAY: I ... signed up to be an aviation cadet, yes.

PIEHLER: So you deliberately signed up for aviation cadet?

SEAY: And if, when I went through the classification tests, I had not made the grade, then I would've automatically gone back to the service, uh, to the Army. I might have stayed enlisted man in the Air Force, but they had the option of sending [me] either way.

PIEHLER: Why the Air Force? Why not ...

SEAY: A burning desire to fly? (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You really did want to fly? I mean that ...

SEAY: Yeah, I did. I had always been excited by movies that showed a pilot in the open cockpit flying through the fog with his goggles down over [his eyes]. (Laughter) That was very romantic to me. I remember even younger than that. You know how kids' imagination [works]. There was some steps at the back of my house and one of my friends' house that I later had the problem with, because I went in [the service] ahead of him.... So you could sit on one step and then the next step was your instrument panel. And we flew those stairs all over the world. (Laughter) So I had a feeling for flying. Then when I realized it was realizable, I couldn't wait. Um, so I was ... in service really before I was eighteen.... I was a [Second] Lieutenant, Pilot just minutes after my nineteenth birthday. I almost made it while I was still eighteen, to be a ... Second Lieutenant and a pilot, but [in] one of the classes that I was in at Visalia [California], we

had fog and that whole class got set back one month. So, I graduated in what they call 43-G, which was July of '43. I would've graduated in June, so I would've been an officer and I hope a gentleman at age eighteen. As it was, I was barely nineteen. But then, by the time I was twenty, I was a First Lieutenant. I'd flown most of my missions. I was still overseas on my twentieth birthday, and then I was home right after my twentieth birthday.... I was out of the service before I was twenty-one. [In] from eighteen to twenty-one. So, it was a youthful thing.

PIEHLER: I guess, I mean, it's something I would ask later in the interview, but ... has it ever struck you, particularly when you've thought of your own children that the experiences you had before you were twenty-one? I mean, then you couldn't even vote. I mean, you did all this before you could even ... vote.

SEAY: That's true. I'm amazed how young the children at eighteen seem to be to me now. I still think of them as college freshmen and that's a certain attitude. I have to know in my heart that they would've risen to the challenge, too. But, they seem so much less mature now than we did then. I think we just grew up rather quickly. Now there's no reason. Ah, on the other hand, I think because of television [and] because of computers, I think, intrinsically, they are more intelligent. They have more basic knowledge than we had. But, I think character building ... might have been stronger in my day than now.... In fact, my wife and I say that "So and so is doing this or that at eighteen.... Imagine if that was in WWII and he was that age. He couldn't have possibly made it through the service." But, we're probably wrong. It's only speculation. I think they would probably rise to the challenge. At least they ... would go into it with a lot more information than we had. Information about the world. Information about technology.

PIEHLER: Well, ... speaking about some of [this]. You enlisted in 1942 and you finished high school. And then you enlisted in Tullahoma and ...

SEAY: In Nashville, but I was [sent] to Tullahoma ...

PIEHLER: Okay. So you initially [went to Nashville] to actually be inducted.

SEAY: Yes. Uh-huh.

PIEHLER: And then where did you report after ... you were actually inducted?

SEAY: We stayed there [in Tullahoma] for just a very few days and then we shipped to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia for basic training. And I did one day of KP. But, the group I was with were ... signed up as aviation cadets and we were handled differently. The rest of them were troops and treated as such, but we were just a little bit different. And so, they made us do Kitchen Police one day. I peeled potatoes one day, only ...

PIEHLER: That was your one day of KP?

SEAY: My whole military career. One day of KP. And then we went on to Miami, but really that was just a place to park us. We stayed in one of the big hotels. The Grossinger [Hotel], I stayed in, which isn't even there anymore. It's been torn down and a new one built there. We've been back several times to look. And so I stayed there, just marking time. We marched just to keep our ...

TINKER: Did the other troops resent the aviation cadets because they were going through less?

SEAY: They might not have. We were all together in the hotel and we watched the others, but I don't think they were quite aware. We had a different insignia on our hat. We had the little wings ... that shape ... (Pointing to picture) but it would've been on our collar. I doubt if the others gave it much thought ...

TINKER: Did you get out in the cities much? The different cities where you were in basic training?

SEAY: Yeah. We had our leaves and we could've had leave almost any evening, but we did have bed check during the week. But we'd get out on the weekends and visit around. Uh-huh. And from there we went to ... Santa Anna for classification and then Visalia. And there we got weekend leaves. We'd go into Los Angeles and ...

TINKER: What did you think about that?

SEAY: [I've] been to the Ambassador Ballroom. I've been to Coconut Grove. I saw Jimmy Dorsey. I saw Tommy Dorsey. Didn't see Glenn Miller because he was off in Europe at that time. But I saw them all. Um, Bob Crosby. And, uh, you know, we went to dance to these people at the Palladium and it was no problem to have dates, you know, some girl to go with you.

PIEHLER: I get the impression that aviators' outfits were real magnets for getting dates, too. I mean ...

SEAY: It was ...

PIEHLER: You were both an officer, officer to be.

SEAY: Well during this time I was—see, that's a cadet uniform [in the picture].

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SEAY: ... But that was ... okay. Then later this ... was in Australia. (Showing photo) That was the Eisenhower jacket that we affected. It was legal, but we could wear that ... That was really the glamour stuff there. We had our hats. They were called the “go-to-hell” hats. (Laughter) It was supposed to have a wire in it to keep it out rigid and so we’d take the wire out and that made it the “go-to-hell” hat. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... You’ve brought up a point. I get the impression doing a lot of interviews, I’d be curious [about] your thoughts, that the Air Force was the least formal of the other ... services. That the Navy was very hierarchical and very strict. And the Army. It could be very hierarchical, but the Air Force as a general ...

SEAY: Definitely loose. And the Marines would’ve been much more hierarchical.

PIEHLER: Oh yes. Yeah. The Marines are ...

SEAY: And we, we had very close relationships with our crews. Even the ground crews. And my only regret overseas [is] I didn’t spend as much time with the ground crews down there working on the plane as I should have. We played chess and we played poker. We read. Went swimming a lot. We did snorkeling around the coral reefs with masks and flippers and lookin’ at the coral; the fish ...

PIEHLER: You ... would do this with enlisted personnel.

SEAY: Ah, well, yes.

PIEHLER: Yeah. I mean, you ... didn’t, for example, create a separate beach for the officers and a separate ...

SEAY: No. No, not at all. Not at all.... The tents were different.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SEAY: They had the enlisted mens quarters and ... I used to go over to the enlisted men’s quarters all the time. I’d go into their tents and we’d have a drink or tell lies (laughter) and become friends.

TINKER: Do you think that relationship you had with your ground crew and ...

SEAY: It was very important.

TINKER: Oh, that’s what I was gonna ask. It carried over into your operation and getting ready for missions ...

SEAY: You were friends workin' together. You never ... obeyed because that was an officer speakin' to you. We'd kibbitz on the intercom, "Roger dodger, you little codger." That's what we'd (laughter) say to each other on the intercom. And it was just ... definitely an informal relationship. And, as I say, ... our lives were dependent on the service to the plane and we didn't spend enough time with the ground crews. Some people did. I wasn't aware of it, but apparently some people did. And they were more knowledgeable of the mechanics of ... the aircraft.

PIEHLER: ... I think it's a little dicier in the Pacific because ... of the nature of the war, but were people ever jealous of the ground crews? Because you flew. You were in real danger. And they're ... on the base. Now, it's a little bit trickier in the Pacific because some of those bases aren't the most secure like they say [they] were in England ... but I'm curious of that.

SEAY: ... We mixed with the ground forces to some [degree]. More anti-aircraft that were surrounding our field. We were never very much in contact with the rifle-toting soldier. I guess I didn't even see them very much. They did the landings and generally then they were off somewhere else. Where we would stay ... there would be a group of them out there guarding the perimeter. But we were not thrown in contact with the forces.

PIEHLER: But you were never jealous of the mechanics, say, who were fixing the planes. That they were in less danger.

SEAY: Oh, never, never. And we felt very friendly towards 'em, but as I say, we didn't exercise that. We did live somewhat apart from them. Our enlisted men, the crew ... people, not the ground crew, but the air crew people had their tents together and officers nearby. And these people were off ...

PIEHLER: They were really ... separate ...

SEAY: Yeah. You had to go to some trouble to find 'em. In fact, you couldn't get transportation from your place over to the plane until they took you there for mission. So that's one of my few regrets.... I could've learned more.

PIEHLER: ... It strikes me, just going back a little bit, um, you spent several months, basically, just waiting. First at Tullahoma.

SEAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And then in Fort Oglethorpe.

SEAY: Then in Miami Beach.

PIEHLER: And you didn't do your ... sort of basic aviation. You didn't do any training in ...

SEAY: None of those. It was parking.

PIEHLER: Literally parking.... What did they do with you? I mean the military ...

SEAY: ... You'd have somebody in command. Usually we'd have the ninety-day wonders. We might have ... an Air Force officer that had been trained in ninety [days]. You know what ninety-day wonders are. And that's the kind of officer we got because there was nothing we were doing that was vital at the time. So they would just sort of keep us a little bit under control.

PIEHLER: Did ... you do any marching?

SEAY: Very little. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So in some ways you were on vacation. It's almost a vacation in Miami Beach.

SEAY: It was country club. We had ...

TINKER: You must have thought the Air Force was great then.

SEAY: Oh, I did. Oh, I did. (Laughter) Because I was aware of what the others went through. We called them gravel agitators. The ones that had to march, (laughter) and really train. So, we knew we had it good. I don't know that we rubbed it in, and I don't know how jealous anybody was or how much aware of it they were.

PIEHLER: Where did ... you do your sort of basic cadet training? Did you have any? I'm curious because people have talked about being an aviation cadet in their basic [training].

SEAY: Once you got through classification, and there again you were marking time. You were taking all these tests. One of them, there would be a metal plate with a tiny little hole in it and you'd have a stylus, a metal stylus attached to a wire, and you would have to hold it in that hole. And it wasn't that you couldn't touch the sides of it, [but] you had to count how many times it touched the side. And so, the fewer times you touched it the closer you'd be to—well, that was one of the tests, which I passed. I happened to be lucky with a fairly steady hand. And they had a lot of depth perception tests. That was extremely important where they'd have the two posts. And we went

through that time after time after time, [making sure] that you get the posts lined up. So ... we [had] classroom instruction, but not much.

PIEHLER: And that took place in ...

SEAY: Santa Anna. I don't think we did much but take classification tests there. And then when we got to Visalia then, that's primary training, now we had classrooms on the principles of aerodynamics. We had camber and we had airflow and we had ...

PIEHLER: ... Because people have said [in] that stage of training, the discipline was pretty rigorous. Was that the case with you?

SEAY: Yeah. Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... You know. You were really ...

SEAY: Now ... you have to get down to work. Exactly. And you would fly almost every day with an instructor. And eventually you'd solo. And what a day that is. The day that you solo. You don't know it's going to be your day. You're flying with your instructor same as ever and you do a few landings. And you come in and stop, and the instructor would always get out first, so he'd wait until he was out and say, "Okay, take her around." And that's the first you knew that you were going [solo]. (Laughter) And the miracle of that. You got out there and you take off. And he had a Gosport tube, [which] was a little tube that ran to the ears and also ran back to his mouthpiece. And he was talkin' into your ears all the time that you were flying. Well, he was just as much there when he was on the ground. He was in your head. He was in there telling you, "You do this when you take off and you turn and you come around." You did everything just as if he was there. But that first landing, ... that was a spiritual experience. To achieve your first landing. I'm sure it's the same way with a private pilot to this day. Must be the same feeling. But it couldn't be as much fun as in an open cockpit.

PIEHLER: How many people in Visalia ... didn't make it through training? Do you have any recollection?

SEAY: Ah, yeah.... Over fifty percent didn't make it through classification.

PIEHLER: So ... It sounds like that made you also feel pretty lucky or fortunate ...

SEAY: But then through basic ... training, about eighty percent made it. But that depended on the year. They needed pilots at this point ... so about eighty percent made it.... So, I don't know what that overall ...

PIEHLER: But there was ... quite a cut ...

SEAY: We used to think that we were the top ten percent. When we got overseas we used to calculate, “Well, we must be in the top ten percent of all the people that tried.” And I think that would be fairly accurate.

PIEHLER: Any close calls when you were initially training? In terms of, you didn’t think you’d make it, or ...

SEAY: Ah, yeah. Even in my [primary training] I had my solo and I’d had my training. And then finally you have a check ride before you get on the bus to go to basic. And ... I drew for a check-rider, a civilian, who was a mean man. (Laughter) That’s all I can say. And he got me so nervous that I did make a very bad flight for a check-flight. And he came back in and he said to me, “If I were a military personnel you would be washed out, but I’m not military, so you gotta take another check-ride.” So, I said, “Yes sir.” So, I was scheduled then for ... another check-ride with a military person. And it happened to be the major M-A-P-E-S. Major Mapes, bless his soul. I hope he’s still alive. I drew him and he took me up, and ... he made me feel so calm [that] I did perfect. And he said, “Go get on the bus.” (Laughter) I had ... pretty much a sleepless night the night before ‘cause I thought, ... “I’ve washed out,” and I was really heartbroken. I thought, “Oh boy, what a shock.” So that was my worst experience, but then the next day, because I guess I was resigned, I relaxed. And then the man made me relax, so I bless him any time I think about it. He’s the nearest thing to an angel (Laughter) that I think I ever met. [As for] basic training, I don’t remember anything [else] in particular. But I used to spend more time upside down than I did right side [up]. I love to fly upside down. (Laughter) Tipping backward and looking at the earth ...

PIEHLER: You didn’t have any problem with ... vertigo. People have ...

SEAY: None whatever.

PIEHLER: ... You never encountered ...

SEAY: Different story.... I’ve had vertigo and I’ll tell you about that. There is such a thing as vertigo, but it’s under a different set of conditions. I didn’t get it just under normal conditions. But, then I got into basic training, and we got into night flying, and ... cross-country flights at night. And I got out there one night and we had a pad that we put on our knee that had the course on it.... I didn’t have it attached, and it fell off my knee. And then, under my seat there was just some open grill work and the belly was ... two or three feet below me. There was no way in the world I could reach it.

TINKER: So, it was just grill under you.

SEAY: ... Whatever you dropped was gone. There was no way you could get it. So I

thought, "Well, what am I gonna do now?" 'Cause I didn't know what to do next. I rolled [the plane] over on its back. It fell down above my head, (laughter) I reached up to pick it, put it back on my knee, ... and away I went. (Laughter) So, there's a case where what I had done prepared me for that moment when I needed it. And another thing that really prepared you for the future was the link trainer training.... It's a little machine that has all the controls like an airplane, but it's hydraulic. And all your instruments respond just the way a plane would, so you get a lot of hours in a link trainer and you learn to fly on instruments. And ... I've got my instrument rating here. (Looking through papers) I'm very proud of that.... Oh, here. Yeah. This was my instrument [qualification]. Even after you got to be an officer you still continued with it. So you had to be rated on this one and I took the instrument flying very seriously....

You asked about vertigo. I was flying one time from [Sterling Island]. We were just south of Bougainville. Another guy and I were flying down to Australia, in a B-25, to get supplies to bring back. We were not going to stay very long, just overnight or so. He had [recently] been shot down in Rabaul Harbor. And he was out there in a rubber [raft] and the Japanese [were] lobbing shells at him.... The PBY, Navy Catalina went in under the fire and picked him up and brought him out. But his nerves were shot. And this was his first flight after being put back on flight service and so I was picked.... At that time I hadn't been rated as first pilot. I hadn't been given my own crew. So I was his co-pilot and we took off and we got in a thunderstorm just off the tip of ... Port Moresby. And he went berserk in the conditions. And vertigo, you ... feel one way. Your instruments tell you something else, but you can't believe your instruments. And so, he was making a sharp turn to the right, but he had his controls [all the way to the right], which made it worse. And so there I was in the right hand seat and I realized, 'cause we're in this thunderstorm in the cloud, you couldn't see anything. And I realized what he was doing. He was white as a sheet and just rigid. And I had to mutiny. I wrestled the control. I took the controls away from the pilot and got the plane righted. And by the time I got ... it under control ... back from him, he kinda slumped. He was ... just practically passed out. So, I got lucky and flew it on instruments 'til we got out of the cloud and found a friendly Australian field, it turned out to be. A little island called Goodenough Island. I'll never forget the name of that. The Second Marine Division had been there and the hospital unit that was there lookin' after them was still there. [It] hadn't been moved up. They were invading, uh, New Georgia, off Rabaul. So, the hospital was there and they took him in, and radioed back and forth, and treated him and finally got released for me to fly him back. He couldn't fly anymore, so I flew him back. But there was a case of absolute vertigo. I didn't have it ...

PIEHLER: But he did. He ... clearly ... wasn't trusting his instruments.

SEAY: But I had it one time.... I was flying formation and we suddenly got into the thick clouds. It wasn't a thunderstorm, but it was thick clouds. I was flying wing-man on the guy and I was going like this, (motions with hand) but in my mind I was running

into him. So, I kept ...

PIEHLER: So, ... even though you were separating; going apart ...

SEAY: My mind told me I'm running into him.

PIEHLER: So you got further and further [away].

SEAY: And finally I realized, uh-oh, I'm having vertigo. So I just ignored him, went back on my instruments, and just instrument flew 'til I got myself righted. And then I spotted him and got back over in position. So it happened fairly sudden. It wasn't so far that I couldn't get back to him. But I had vertigo. And if I hadn't gone on my instruments, instantly, I would've crashed or something. Or been lost or I don't know what. I think that's what happened to John, um ...

TINKER: Kennedy.

SEAY: John Kennedy [Jr]. I'm confident that he got in the sudden set of conditions; he didn't have enough training to go on instruments. And so, fortunately, I had enough link training and also training at night, and other times that I was able to overcome it. But it can happen. And if you don't overcome it and get back on instruments, you're just a goner. So that's vertigo. It's real.

PIEHLER: No, ... a student of mine once flew me on a single engine plane and he was telling me. I never thought to ask about vertigo and then he did a test with me. And he ... did a few maneuvers and he says, "Ok, know what's up and down ...?" (Laughter) And he said, "You know, you really gotta trust your instruments then."

SEAY: Yeah. Your body tells you one thing and ... it isn't necessarily [true]. It's probably not true. You have to go on instruments. So it's pretty important.

PIEHLER: ... Your basic flying training. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

SEAY: Okay. Well, the solo I mentioned. That's a very important time. I learned to fly at my best when I was solo. When the instructor was there, you were so busy trying to please him that maybe you're not smooth. It doesn't come second nature. It only comes second nature when you're out on your own and you cause the airplane to do things to see how it reacts, how you react, and that's how you really learn. But one of my favorite maneuvers was called the lazy-eight. When you come over and around you find a point out here and you bring your wing down through that point each time you come around. It seems like you're going in one plane this way, but actually not. You're going this way. But that to me was one of my favorite maneuvers. My kids recently gave me a present: A flight in an advance trainer AT-6, as a gift two or three years ago. And I took the flight

up near Philadelphia. So the pilot [would] sit in the back, the owner, [and] I sit in the front and he let me handle the controls. Um, and that's one of the things I wanted to do. Just do some lazy-eights, but he had a different schedule in mind. So we did some loops and rolls. Didn't do any snap rolls. That was the only disappointing—where you go around like that. (Motioning) I had an instructor in basic that was doing snap rolls with me and he couldn't get it right. He kept [doing] one after the other, one after the other, one after the other. And finally, he almost got me sick. (Laughter) Just by snapping my head that many times. But he didn't.

PIEHLER: And then you did advanced ... at Yuma.

SEAY: I was assigned to bomber multi-engine training. As I say, I think this was just pulling names out of a hat.

PIEHLER: You think that was just ...

SEAY: I don't think it had anything to do with my ...

PIEHLER: Ability. Yeah.

SEAY: Ability or anything. Just, ah, you needed so many and you filled up the schools.

PIEHLER: Would you have preferred fighters?

SEAY: Well, not really. I was, uh, as it came around I was really happy about that and I loved the flying. I liked having two fans out there. And I do to this day. So I wasn't really disappointed. You can't do any acrobatics in it. Everything is straight and more precision flying.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SEAY: Although, I guess if you get into acrobatics with other planes, that better be precision. But I was never disappointed. I felt like that they ... fit my abilities to the plane pretty well.... Well, we were flying over the Yuma desert one night, and I happened to be in the [pilot seat]. We alternated students. One would be pilot, one would be co-pilot from day to day.... I happened to be pilot, and we were coming back towards Yuma and it was at night, and one engine went out. So, we had the other. So the other guy and I debated, "Hmm. Well what if we bail out here? Uh, I always wanted to see what it was like to (Laughter) go out in a parachute." So we seriously considered bailing out and letting the plane crash. But then we could see the lights of the field and we realized that even on that one engine the plane could make it. So we thought, "Oh, let's go on back." So we got in for the landing and we leveled off for our landing, and the tower called us and said, "You don't have any wheels." So, I ballooned it a little bit.

Hit the ... it was a little electric switch and (snaps fingers) the wheels go down just like that. It was on the, uh, Cessna. Not the Cessna. I'll think of—it was a Cessna, but I forget the name of it. It was a Cessna Bobcat. Not the metal one. It was the fabric model. And the wheels come down instantly. And so the wheels clicked and we hit just almost simultaneously. Instantaneously. And so I landed okay on one engine. Now if I had crash-landed it without wheels I might not be here today. However, my instructor had forgotten to put his wheels down just the day before, and he did land and he walked away from it.

PIEHLER: So you had just forgotten to put the wheels down?

SEAY: In the excitement of landing on one engine. I was nervous, I guess.

PIEHLER: So you're saying about, it's good to have two engines. You're speaking from personal experience.

SEAY: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

PIEHLER: This taught you ...

SEAY: One went out, but if [the other one] had gone out I would've had to bail out ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SEAY: I could not have glided back in with no engine.

TINKER: So is that the closest call to an accident you had during training?

SEAY: I suppose it was. Yeah. I had two chances. One, that the plane wouldn't get us back or [two], if I bailed out [and] it was at night time, ... we might have landed in the desert. They might not have found us. So ... a lot of things were favorable to trying to get it in there. I had an engine go out on a mission one time, uh, didn't quite go out, had a little bit of power, but just barely. And I ... was able to just maintain altitude just enough to make it from the target back to base there. And this again was at night. And I couldn't keep up with the squadron, so I asked one of the guys if he would stay with me 'cause I had to slow down a lot on one engine. And we made it back alright then. I probably was a little nervous. (Laughter) It was more than one engine, but it wasn't quite two. Um, probably the closest call I had in the service was flying over a target, [and] an anti-aircraft shell went off right in here (pointing to location in photo). Right between the engine and the cockpit ahead of the wing. Just that little narrow space there. And we always had a theory that the Japanese anti-aircraft ... went off [and] a certain amount of it went straight up and the rest of it went out like this. Sort of like the head of a tack turned upside down. And ... it went off in that quadrant there. Another

nanosecond, I didn't know the word back then, but another nanosecond earlier, then it would've blown my wing off. In fact my wing-man, I was flight leader that day, my wing-man said when he saw the burst go off he says, "He's a goner." But I kept on flying.

PIEHLER: That's a pretty close call.

SEAY: That was a close call. I mean that ... had to be in the category of miracle. It had to explode that way. It had to explode just there, just at the right time.

TINKER: Did you see it explode?

SEAY: Oh yeah. I saw it out of the corner of my eye, but it was very fast. But we were flying ... into such a black cloud of anti-aircraft. And that's the other thing that I wanted to touch on. How you can drive a car into a brick wall at full speed. How do you do that ...

PIEHLER: ... I've never experienced this first hand, but people have sort of ... described, what I would think is very difficult, ... flying into flack deliberately, you know.

SEAY: And ... 999 out of 1,000 do. And I only had one wing-man that didn't, in all the time I was overseas. And he got there and that black cloud scared him and he peeled off ...

PIEHLER: ... Was he a novice?

SEAY: No, he had the same amount of time I did. He just at that point ...

PIEHLER: He just couldn't do it.

SEAY: He couldn't hack it anymore. So they gave him a medical leave back to the states then he got out.... I may have a picture of him. (Looking through photos) That was my pilot that soloed me the first ...

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

SEAY: The first instructor.

PIEHLER: Your first instructor was Al ...

SEAY: Thorwaldsen.

PIEHLER: Thorwaldsen. It sounds like a great Scandinavian name.

SEAY: Oh, he was, yeah. And this is the guy.... (Showing photo) It's upside down now. I had it. Anyway, he was my wing-man that day. This one right there. (Pointing to group photo) So that's how many people were in ... There's a Quonset hut. And this is, uh, how many crews. Divide by three. Tell ya' how many people are in there. Had three men to a crew. A pilot, co-pilot, and a bombardier, navigator, uh, bombardier slash navigator slash nose gunner at times. So we had one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, and twelve.... So that would be about [four] planes [and] ... we generally had about sixteen planes to a squadron. And then [this was] the 42nd Bomb Group. We were 70th Bomb Squadron. They had the 75th. They had the 349th. They had other ... squadrons. And let's see if my captain of our squadron.... (Looking through photos) By getting to be—there I am. Right here. (Pointing to photo) I was young once. To be a first lieutenant you'd be a flight commander [with] ... three planes. And to be a captain you'd be a squadron commander. And to be a lieutenant colonel or colonel, you'd be a group commander.

PIEHLER: I'm curious. The pilot who peeled away couldn't do it. How did you view that? How did you and other members?

SEAY: We ... were not friendly towards him afterward. You just—he wasn't—you didn't associate deliberately with him. You didn't say anything 'cause it was pointless, but he was sort of ostracized from that point on, subconsciously. He could join a group and have a drink or whatever, but, uh, people didn't exactly turn their back on him, but they didn't talk to him. We had one other navigator, this one here, (showing photo) that pulled a gun on a pilot.... One of our planes was down in the harbor, and the pilot was, ah, I guess it was the same one I'm telling you about, 'cause we didn't lose that many planes in the harbor, so it had to be that one. It happened just before this. The pilot was gonna go in and circle the plane, but of course they were firing at the rubber raft in the harbor and firing at the planes around it. And the navigator pulled a gun on the pilot and said, "Don't go in there. It's too dangerous." And he held a gun on him and so the pilot had to turn around and go off. And there, they sent the navigator home after that.

PIEHLER: But he wasn't court martialed?

SEAY: No. We didn't have any of that.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So both were just sort of sent home and ...

SEAY: They considered, I guess, pilot fatigue or flight fatigue or shell-shock [as] they called it in World War I. But they were pretty forgiving of it.

PIEHLER: Though there was ostracization.... Not a severe ostracization.

SEAY: Yeah. We said about the navigator. [We] said, “If he’d pulled that on me, I would’ve turned around and gone, ‘cause I wouldn’t want him to shoot me on the spot, but I would’ve pulled a gun on him when we got back.” Well they didn’t, and maybe I wouldn’t have. You just ... kinda felt sorry for ‘em. And the reason you didn’t do it yourself [is because] you didn’t want to be disgraced like that. And if you peeled off or you did something. You ... had to be ashamed of yourself. And none of us wanted the shame. So I guess maybe I’ve hit a word that may be significant to this whole business. You didn’t want the shame of failing to do your bit there if you were afraid.

PIEHLER: ... This is switching back to training, although these stories have been just great. Your ... instructor ... sounded like a good Scandinavian.

SEAY: Oh yeah. He used to, ah, get your attention. He would take the stick and whip it between your legs.... (Laughter) He’d have his legs spread so it didn’t hit him, but, I mean, here you were getting beat about your (Laughter) knees with your own stick. You couldn’t hold on to it. He got your attention and, uh, he would hanger fly with us. He was very friendly on the ground, but in the plane when he was talking to you through the Gosport tube he was—I gotta tell one, maybe an off the record, story. I mentioned the Gosport tube. It’s a little tube. You speak into it and carries through the sound waves. In the B-25s they had a similar contrivance [and] it was called the pilot relief tube. (Laughter) And the first time anybody got in a plane with one of those you’d say, “Well that’s your Gosport tube (Laughter) to talk to the rest of your crew.” (Laughter)

TINKER: I have to tell you. That still goes on.

SEAY: Oh, you’re kidding. (Laughter) Oh, you’re kidding.

PIEHLER: Really?

SEAY: Oh, my goodness.

TINKER: Those were on the helicopters. And the new maintenance people would come out and (Laughter) we would tell them to talk into the [relief tube]. (Laughter) That still goes on.

SEAY: Oh, time marches on, but it doesn’t change much, does it? That’s funny. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned having some great experiences, ah, with Hollywood, Los Angeles, being on Miami Beach. What about the people you met? Because you ... were meeting people, I assume you were meeting people from all different parts of the ...

SEAY: ... I met a guy in Phoenix, Arizona who was one of the last cowboys on the Chisholm Trail. I mean I talked to a man that rode the Chisholm Trail. Can you believe it? There aren't any left now. But that was an experience. I was dating his daughter. Her name was Winifred L-A-H-R. And his name was Lahr. And he used to tell us about experiences on the Chisholm. Can you imagine that? I mean, it's just so far in the past [and] on the movies it's just unthinkable, but I've been ...

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

SEAY: So, I was saying ...

PIEHLER: ... Hold that thought for just a second.

SEAY: Oh yeah. You need to ...

PIEHLER: This continues with an interview with Charles L. Seay on March 24th, 2000 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

TINKER: Cynthia Tinker.

PIEHLER: And you were mentioning you got to meet Claudette Colbert.

SEAY: We were always near a USO, United Service Organization, entertainment place almost wherever we went. And there in Los Angeles the stars all came out there. We met one starlet.... We asked her what she did in the movie and she said, "My job is to scream." And she demonstrated right there in front of the place that she could scream. (Laughter) And Billie Burke [was] another one that would come down. And they were charming people. They would sit and talk to you. They were so friendly towards the service people.... Absolutely, just down-to-earth people. They didn't act like stars or anything. They would talk to us and make us feel very much welcome. And you could be walkin' down the street, two of you together, and somebody would stop you on the street and say, "Have you got a place to go tonight for dinner?" And we'd been invited to homes, with or without daughters, but sometimes with daughters that you were allowed to go out with. And everybody was [friendly]. Especially in California. It was the most friendly place in the world towards service people. There was absolutely no restrictions on being friends with you [and] making you feel at home.

PIEHLER: What about the people you met in your training units?

SEAY: You always had your friends. Not necessarily your near bunkmates, but you identified with certain people. One of my friends, Johnny Richardson, ... went on to Italy when I went to the Pacific and we were sort of sorry to split up, but that's the way the ball bounced. He went on to Italy. And he was flying over target [when] the plane,

the flight above him, accidentally loosed their incendiary bombs. And so it hit his plane and it knocked him out of the air. He had to bail out 'cause his plane was on fire. And he got captured by the Italians, who turned him over to the Germans, and they had him in a prison.... We had been just such close friends, tomcattin' around and all. But he came back after the war and he came to visit me. At this time I was just getting ready to go off to college. [He] visited me in Nashville and he was a different person. Something in his eyes ... was just dead. I think the prison experience, for many people, must have been like that, because you're living under the threat of you-know-not-what, death or whatever, constantly. And I don't think trying to escape or not trying to escape ... helps it. I don't know how [Senator John] McCain managed under beatings. He cracked too at the end, you know. He eventually signed a statement for them, which nobody held against him. Nobody said [anything] about it in the campaigns. But you have to admire a guy that can get through that and not be messed up.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

SEAY: So my friend was messed up and we lost a little bit of contact after that.

PIEHLER: And it sounds like it was very vivid.... I mean, 'cause now you've had a lot of time to reflect on it ...

SEAY: It's still vivid.

PIEHLER: You ... expected to see the friend you'd ...

SEAY: And he wasn't there anymore.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SEAY: Nobody lives there anymore. Haven't seen too many from those days, but, uh, he was one. Another one that I did see ... I mentioned it earlier to you at lunch. The man who was my gunner, that his father-in-law had all of the bars.... I haven't mentioned it here, have I?

PIEHLER: No. No, you haven't, actually. You ...

SEAY: One of the few that I really kept in touch with for some years after the war. I would pass through Salamanca, New York going from Rochester, New York over to Toronto, Canada, which was my sales territory for Eastman at the time. And I'd stop off and see him, but I eventually had to quit because he would take me to visit all of his father-in-law's bars and introduce me, "This is my lieutenant." And I would have to have too much to drink. I'd have to have a drink everywhere we went and I just couldn't handle it, so I quit going to see him. But I wouldn't mind seeing him again. It's one of

those things I plan to try to do if it isn't too late.

PIEHLER: ... After advanced flying training you actually ... you actually got B-25 training.

SEAY: Yeah. At LaJunta, Colorado.

PIEHLER: And when did you actually join your unit? Or was your unit put together when you got actually overseas?

SEAY: Oh good. Now we've introduced the subject of the 13th Air Force.

PIEHLER: Yes. No, that's where I want to ...

SEAY: Okay. From Hawaii, well, we ... outfitted a B-25 with gas tanks instead of a bomb bay, and they gave us enough gas to get from Sacramento to Oahu. To Hickam Field in Honolulu.

PIEHLER: ... During the B-25 training you still didn't know where you were going?

SEAY: Had no idea.

PIEHLER: So, [during] that training ... you could be sent anywhere?

SEAY: Yeah. Some of my friends went to Italy. I did complete my training, essentially, a little bit early. I was sort of an eager beaver and I made friends with the crew that was really a month ahead of us, but their co-pilot had gotten sick and had been pushed out of the service. They were lookin' for a new co-pilot, and I signed on with them. So I went overseas as a co-pilot. I didn't know ... where I was going, but Ted Mahl was pilot [and] it was his crew. I was signed on as co-pilot. And then when we got overseas we both were co-pilots for half of our missions and then we both got to be first pilot again. But anyway, I signed on with him. One of the reasons was [that] he had a car, and his crew and he used to fraternize. Like I was saying, there was no officer, enlisted man nonsense. You just were all friends. And so we had a great time going cross-country; taking the plane. And we got it to Honolulu, outfitted ... with gas tanks, flew it to Honolulu where it had to be re-armed. So from there we island hopped. Christmas Island, didn't go to Easter Island. Uh, I could look at a map and tell you where.... [We] eventually went through Fiji and eventually wound up in Guadalcanal.

PIEHLER: What strikes me about, in looking at the map of the Pacific and talking to veterans is ... particularly, your planes don't go as fast compared to today and even now it's a long trip. This was a long journey, even by air.

SEAY: It was twelve hours from Sacramento to Honolulu. And then these other flights, when you would island hop, eight hours was the most you could fly then. In fact, six hours was a lot safer. You had no reserve at eight hours. We flew some missions that were eight hours and we had eight hours of gas. And we always kind of dreaded those.

PIEHLER: Well, 'cause if ... you go fifteen minutes [out of the flight plan] ...

SEAY: You run out of gas.... One went in [and] didn't make it back. Fellow's name was Robin. I can't remember his last name. I thought of him the other day, but I can't think of his last name. Robin was his first name. He didn't make it back. Just ran out of gas.... And it [was] just the limit of our ... capacity. But, island hopping down to Guadalcanal. It was an easy flight of four, five, six hours a day 'til we got there. But I have flown a seventeen hour flight since then in a jet plane. I mean, I can't imagine that kind of gas capacity, but they've got it. They can fly from New Zealand to Los Angeles in one continuous flight. Unthinkable.

PIEHLER: Well, yes. Because in many ways, your conditioning was you're going to take all these little hop and skip, hop and skip [flights].

SEAY: Only way to get there.

TINKER: How long did you stay with that initial crew?

SEAY: Oh, okay. As soon as we got there, we were both split up. And that's when I went to Dark Eyes and he went to another one. Ah, ... Sweet Eloise. (Laughter) Sweet Eloise was something in the breeze. (Laughter) I won't tell you the rest of it. (Laughter) But, he went Sweet Eloise and I went to Dark Eyes. We went by the numbers a lot on what plane. 884 was Dark Eyes. And so, we were immediately ... on Henderson Field, but they opened up some other bases on an island right off of Guadalcanal called Russell Islands. We immediately moved over there, and he was with one crew and I was with another. And we flew our separate missions. He and I never flew together again. Never.... We were both in the 70th Squadron, but different crews. And eventually he got a plane and when I got the next one, ... Hell's Honey, which is not the same one I flew with here. (Reference to photo) So, we each flew about thirty-five missions and then got our own crews and flew another roughly thirty-five. We were supposed to fly only fifty. That was the regulation. And then you're considered washed up and sent back. But they did not have replacements for us, so we stayed on an extra twenty missions or as many as needed. It didn't have to be seventy. At that point, we were offered our captaincy if we would stay and fly about another thirty. We were bringing in the new [bomber], which later became the B-26, at that time was called the A-26. They were bringing 'em into service and if we would be willing to fly those for a few more missions they would make us squadron commanders and we would be captains. And most of us decided it wasn't worth it. We'd rather come home and be a live first lieutenant instead of a possibly dead

captain, so I never made my railroad tracks, and I never regretted it. As soon as I got back, I went out of service. I did not even stay in the reserve. Figured I'd made it lucky this far, let's quit while we're here, and go on to college and get back to normal. So that's the way it worked. You flew your ... co-pilot missions and then you got your own crew.... And we didn't have too many losses. We got an awful lot of lead thrown at us.

Only got ... jumped by Japs, jumped by a fighter plane one time, and that was over Rabaul. We had bombed out most of their airstrips and they could seldom get anybody in the air. But we found a slug. I was telling Cynthia that the Japanese, in their fighter planes, only had .25 caliber bullets, which really didn't do a lot of damage. So this one came into the fuselage of my plane and bounced around and was left lying there, so we found it. It didn't do any damage. One other time we were flying over a target and this is in my early stages. I was still co-pilot. My pilot was named Harry Devlin. I don't remember if he's in here or not. (Looking at photo) Must be. I don't see him in there. But there was Harry. Oh! This guys name, Petruska, ... I used to call him "the bambino." He was such a baby. (Laughter) He was my co-pilot for a while.

TINKER: (Laughter) Why was he a baby?

SEAY: He just was such a baby-looking thing.

TINKER: Oh.

PIEHLER: Oh. It wasn't his conduct. He was just ...

SEAY: He just looked like a baby. Actually, he ... was still pretty young. He was co-pilot and we were on a low-level strafing mission, bombing and strafing mission, and I had a plane [in which] the right engine ... control wasn't latched tightly. Or couldn't be latched tightly. And the throttle would drift back, so you would lose power on ... that right wing. So, before we took off I told him, "Now you keep an eye on that throttle. You keep it up there, because I'm gonna be busy with the control column and the thumb button for the guns." And he's busy, eyes are out the side there seeing these tracers flyin' around and bombs falling. Completely forgot. And I suddenly felt I was slewing this way. So, I whacked him across the side of the head and then whacked the ... control and got it back in position.

Piheler: ... It sound like he was mesmerized by the flack.

SEAY: He was. He was.

PIEHLER: ... Were you ever mesmerized by flack?

SEAY: No.

PIEHLER: Not like that ...

SEAY: Not like that. I equate it with having oxygen on. And the thing that I feared the most was the phosphorous anti-air. They had some phosphorous anti-aircraft and it would go out like fireworks. You've seen them with the long white streamers? It didn't have to burst at you. It could fall on you, so we dreaded those the most. So I remember keeping an eye out in an area where these were going off and hoping that we didn't get over into that area several times. But, you'd have to stay on track for your target. You couldn't change. But I don't remember being mesmerized.

PIEHLER: Because it's interesting, someone I interviewed said that he was told before going into combat the first time that, you know, ... you'll be mesmerized by flack. Which ... I found hard, when he was recounting the stories, found it hard to believe. But he says he got into combat the first time and he was in fact staring at the flack for a minute or two ...

SEAY: I remember being ... co-pilot on my first flight over Rabaul and I remember the flack. Just vividly.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SEAY: But I remember seeing it.

PIEHLER: But not like your co-pilot who ...

SEAY: I was completely aware of what I needed to be doin' in there, so it ... didn't, so it just didn't happen to affect me that way. I remember it, maybe a little bit ...

PIEHLER: ... I guess there are ... two sets of questions. One, about your missions. I mean, what types of missions did you fly? And then, ... what's your most memorable mission? If there's one that sticks out.

SEAY: Okay, uh, okay. I'll have to think about that one a minute, because they tended to—I guess the most memorable one was the one where an engine nearly went out over the target. I stayed on the run and got my bombs away, but I remember that one so vividly because ... I was really afraid I wasn't going to get back. I didn't think I'd have enough power. I just did. We were down pretty low when we came in sight of the field there and if it hadn't have been that close I'd never have made it.... The first one ... is very vivid for me. The first one under fire. Not mesmerized. Very conscious of it. I knew what was going on and I remember the cold air, oxygen, ... it was always cold air that you were breathing. Um. Well, the one where my co-pilot let the throttle slide back. That was scary. My tail-gunner got slewed around, and he got thrown against the side of the plane and he fussed at me forever after about that. (Laughter) I saw him some after

the war and he blamed me for all kinds of physical ailments that he had. (Laughter) Maybe it was my fault. But that one shook him up quite a bit. That was memorable. But, what was the first question?

PIEHLER: Well, I guess ... I've actually asked two questions. What types of missions did you ...

SEAY: Okay. We had ... medium altitude bombing missions where the bombardier had to be up in the nose, and we had the ... bomb sights and he had to drop. Ah, I don't know if I brought a picture of the bombs falling underneath. (Looking through photos) I meant to bring one of those. This (showing photo) was what it looked like at low altitude when you're flying across the—this is more [like] mortar fire. Short fuse mortar fire. That was not true anti-aircraft. But in one of those pictures there's a little dark spot on the corner of the field and there were Japanese in there with just a little mortar firing at us and it went off that close.... But I had another one where it was the, uh, bombs dropping underneath the plane. At medium altitude ... or high altitude when you drop the ... bombs you're lookin' [and] you can see them out the window, sort of below you, and they sort of stay with you for a while dropping away. And then suddenly your angle changes and they seem to scoot forward. They're not. They're going down and your leaving 'em behind. But it gave the impression of them scooting, suddenly scooting forward. I remember that one vividly. Um, ... at medium altitude you're under [fire from] the anti-aircraft [guns], and it gets pretty thick around you, and so you're just lucky if it doesn't hit. And then we had the ground-strafting missions where we also dropped the bombs. We'd try to skip them into a particular target. I remember one time we tried to drop them into a warehouse. And the bombardier and I had worked it out exactly at what spot our bombs had to hit here in order to land there. And they didn't. (Laughter) They went right out in the water. We missed the [target]. But I was on altitude. I was on airspeed. We had pictures of the bombs hitting the ground before they skipped, so we know we were right by calculations. We did everything we were supposed to, but the bombs tumbled over. And in that particular mission my ... wing-man was trailing me [by] two or three seconds. He should've been right up on my wing, but he was behind me. And these bombs went off right under him in the water. I got a picture of him, just ... on the edge of the bomb burst going off under the water. So he's lucky he didn't get blown out. So, that one was kind of memorable ...

TINKER: Did you ever drop, excuse me ...

SEAY: Yeah.

TINKER: Did you ever drop any of the bombs that exploded just before impact or were all yours ...

SEAY: No. All of ours were armed with a nose projection. It had a little propeller on it

that armed it. And ... they were impact explosions.

TINKER: The Fifth Air Force must have got the other ones that I was talkin' [about].

SEAY: The anti-frag ...

TINKER: Right, the frag ...

SEAY: The anti-personnel frag bombs. Uh, if we had any we were not consciously going after troops. So it was either, uh, an installation or an airfield. So, we were pretty conscious of that.

PIEHLER: And ... you never did low altitude bombing?

SEAY: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: Oh, you did do low ...

SEAY: Skip bombing.

PIEHLER: ... I'm not aware of the terminology, so I ...

SEAY: That was the low altitude bombing, where you hoped it would—and the object of the skip bombing really was to skip it off the water and into the side of a ship....

(Tape paused)

PIEHLER: You were talking about some of your missions and you actually showed us some photographs of your ... targets.

SEAY: I wish I'd brought more.

PIEHLER: But I guess ... one of my basic questions that I love to ask pilots and people in the Air Force who did missions is, how aware were you of how successful your missions were? And ... in one case you recounted a mission where ... the bombs really didn't hit, and you could see that they didn't hit, despite all your efforts. Did you have any sense of how effective you—I mean, how often did you have a sense of effectiveness?

SEAY: Most of our targets were airfields. And you could see the explosions on the airfields. Now, uh, the Japanese could get coral reef material and they could fill in the holes very fast, but it put them out of action for a day or two or three. But they could repair an airfield surprisingly fast. So, we had to keep doing it and that kept 'em down.

PIEHLER: ... And you mentioned trying to hit this warehouse. What other types of structures did you ...

SEAY: Well, there's another one I have where we were goin' after a boat.... The last mission I was on, and I don't have any pictures of this, but we were going out and we found a two-masted sailing ship. It was a beautiful schooner. White. Saw it tucked in the harbor. And we went over it, and I dropped one bomb on one side and one ... on the other, and I just ... have a vivid memory of it going up in the air. Splitting in half. Kinda sorry I had to do that when it was such a beautiful boat, but that was, that was war. Uh, that was one case where we could see the result. Mostly, and when we were bombing [Rabaul], we had pictures of the damage. And, I'd say, if we were sixty percent in the target area, ... a pretty wide target area, that was considered good. It was not a pinpoint science. It was not rocket science.

PIEHLER: Yeah.... I remember the Air Force took great pride, at least in their public material, about pinpoint bombing and talking about [it]. Did you ever hear the phrase during the war, "Putting a bomb down the barrel of a pickle barrel?" Did you ever hear that?

SEAY: Yeah. That ...

PIEHLER: You've heard that? That ... phrase is ...

SEAY: Mostly we'd say, "Down the funnel of a ship" was another (laughter) way that we would consider ...

PIEHLER: But when did you learn that the reality of ... pinpoint bombing isn't ...

SEAY: The first day you got your pictures back. You could see. There might be a runway here and the string of bombs would be here.

PIEHLER: So you weren't aware of this in training? This is something you learned ...

SEAY: Oh. No, no. 'Cause we ... dropped dummy bombs in training and you would be scored on 'em, but the target area was so big that it was more training for the bombardier. The bombardier was more conscious of it than we were as pilots. They had to get scored on it. But it was pretty lax. It was a pretty broad area. You ... did a certain amount of carpet bombing with the whole, you'd have a whole squadron. You'd have the whole 70th Bomb Squadron. ... Twelve or sixteen planes all dropping at the same time. In fact, [for] some of the missions, you'd only take one bombardier. And he'd be in the lead plane, so when he would open his bomb bays we'd all open ours. When we saw his bombs then we released. And so ... there was a little bit of time delay there, but

basically it made a carpet pattern. And those would usually get enough on the runway [and] would definitely knock out the runway, but maybe forty percent of the bombs would be off the runway. And you didn't even worry about that. You just took that for granted. One training mission I do recall. We were flying over Tampa Bay and we were ... flying out of Greenville, South Carolina and we were doing a group drop for a visiting dignitary. A general from some other country, a South American country. And the bombardier missed, and the commanding general of the base there got on the radio and he blessed us out, every one of us. Of course, all the rest of them were just dropping on ... the bombardier, just one man, was blamed for the whole thing. (Laughter) But, [he] completely missed it. So ... we were conscious of it before we got overseas that you don't ... put one in the barrel every time. The pickle barrel.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like ... there was some surprise at ... sixty percent. It's not horrible, but ... you would get a D if you, you know, did that on an exam. I mean, in the sense that that's a little bit better than fifty-fifty, but not by a lot.

SEAY: Not much. So, maybe we were exaggerating even when we said sixty, but that's what—when we got sixty percent of the target area we would consider that that was a good mission.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, you mentioned during lunch that you once bombed a target that had been marked as a hospital, but you knew ...

SEAY: Yeah.... All of the buildings along there were marked. They were just nothing but warehouses, but the Japanese put a red cross on the top of them.

TINKER: On every single building?

SEAY: Oh yeah. The whole ... thing. We called it "Hospital Ridge," but nobody had any illusions about it being a hospital. But it was not a target.

PIEHLER: And which ... base was this that you were bombing?

SEAY: Rabaul.

PIEHLER: Rabaul. And this was ...

SEAY: [That] is where most of their storage of anti-aircraft ammunition was.

PIEHLER: And you knew that it was clearly not a hospital. Because you even recounted over lunch that once ... bombs hit, they ...

SEAY: Yeah. You could tell. Too big an explosion for just a bomb, so you didn't

[believe it was a hospital].

PIEHLER: ... You talked a bit about how you don't feel animosity towards either the Germans or the Japanese. But at the time, what was your sense of the Japanese as an enemy?

SEAY: I probably only saw one Japanese prisoner in person. He'd been captured in the jungles and he was being taken from one place to another. And we all jeered at him and called him all kinds of bad names. But I don't recall more than just sort of feeling sorry for the poor wretch. He was all sunburned brown. He could almost have been a native, but we knew he was Japanese. And so you almost felt sorry for them. It was kinda hard to, even there, to have enough animosity. I mean, you did your job and you dropped your bombs and you fired your guns. [I] had one time that we were doing a shipping sweeps in some harbors and we were lookin' for barges that carried supplies from one Japanese base to another, or one side of the harbor to the other. And we were supposed to ... sink all the barges that we saw. The natives had learned if they would stand up in their canoes or their barges [or] whatever and put their hands like this, (raising up arms) so it's like an act of surrender, hoping that you wouldn't shot 'em. And I made one pass over this barge and two guys were standing up like that and I said, "Well, they're probably fakin' it." So I went around to come in and I had 'em in my sights and I was supposed to ... push the thumb trigger, and I decided not to. I probably was disobeying orders, but it just didn't seem—I don't think I have the killer instinct. And I guess I'm not too ashamed of that. I don't want to take life just for the—like, it's not like shooting a rabbit, or not like shooting a squirrel. It's a person. And it just didn't seem to be a worthwhile target to have that on my mind, that I shot up two human beings. It just ... was some bundles in the bottom of a small barge. And I don't think the outcome of the war was determined by whether or not—but my self-respect remained.... I guess if I'd reported it on my mission I might have [gotten in trouble]. For not carrying out orders. But, we were supposed to sink everything that was floating in those areas.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

SEAY: Ah, I'm not too ashamed of it. (Laughter) I think the statute of limitations has run out. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah. No, I think you safe on that.... If there's anything we forgot to ask you about your missions please let us [know].

SEAY: I didn't get into the 13th Air Force and I'm gonna leave with you ...

PIEHLER: Well, let me ... ask you. I'll ask you the basic question. I mean, we talked at lunch about the 13th Air Force, and I even said to you [that] I think you're the first person I've interviewed from ... the 13th Air Force.... It's not widely known about the 13th Air

Force.

SEAY: It's not.

PIEHLER: What's important to know about it? 'Cause you've given it some thought.

SEAY: As a historian it should be in the military records that this was an integral part of the war. And one of the places where the tide of the war changed. One the things the 13th Air Force did was shoot down General [Yamamoto]. He was the commanding general for all of the Japanese forces.... They had broken the radio code and he was flying into Bougainville. And they picked up the radio signal, but they didn't let it be known. And so, they sent some P-38s out. I guess they sent six or eight of 'em in there. And they stayed out of range of this base until he came into sight, and then they swooped down and they shot him. Him and two planes. He was in one of the two. They shot him down and killed him. And that was a blow to the Japanese and their war effort. In fact, it might have been a blow to us, because he was one of the Japanese generals that really advised against doing this whole thing. He was in command at Pearl Harbor, but he said, "You're gonna waken the sleeping tiger." But, the people that [shot him down] are not mentioned in the history of World War II, South Pacific. And this is an article about it. The article's on the Internet. It's really an advertisement to sell a picture that a guy did, but what the heck, it tells us the true story. And a group of the 13th Air Force veterans have gotten together and decided, [after] they've read the history, ... that we have been left out of the history books and so they're starting a campaign to get re-included. The theory is that MacArthur was more attached to the 5th Air Force. They were the Australian Air Force. And after he absconded, (Laughter) after he vacated, after he ran from the Philippines on a PT boat, he went to Australia and that was the air force that he was building up and General [George C.] Kenney was in charge of it too. And the 13th Air Force was out there, ostensibly under their command, but as far as they were concerned, not doing anything in particular. He was focused on what the 5th Air Force was to do.... So we were the jungle air force.... Our major target was Rabaul, to get it knocked out. And by February of '44 they had succeeded in completely neutralizing the most active base the Japanese had in the South Pacific. It was armed, uh, supplied ... second only to Japan itself. And so by continuous bombing of them we knocked them out and that enabled MacArthur then to do island hopping past there, up the New Guinea coast ... and Halmahera, and on into the Philippines. So, the 5th Air Force is mentioned in dispatches, and they got some Distinguished Flying [Crosses]. Not one single Distinguished Flying Cross went to anybody in the 13th Air Force.

PIEHLER: ... Did you feel slighted during the war itself?

SEAY: No. Didn't know it at the time.

PIEHLER: Yeah, at the time you didn't give it a ...

SEAY: The only time I became aware of it is [when] I'd tell people I was in the 13th Air Force and still nobody had heard of it. They'd heard of the 5th Air Force, 'cause 5th Air Force was the one in Korea in M*A*S*H. Everybody saw the ... 5th blazing like a comet across the screen, so they were conscious of the 5th. Then they had the Seventh Air Force, which flew out of Hawaii. But the 13th, they just never heard of. It was the jungle air force and it did its job and controlled Rabaul, which was the key to the rest. But it isn't in the history, according to these people. I haven't read all of the history. I'm gonna make a practice or point of it now. You may run into more than some of ...

PIEHLER: I mean, in fact, your interview is a part of that ... getting the historical record right.

SEAY: I'll be happy to leave this one with you. (Referring to an article)

PIEHLER: Oh, great.

SEAY: And ... I'll leave this one with you. And this is an interesting recounting of the Doolittle Raid. You may have other copies of it somewhere, but you won't find a better one. So you keep that. I've got others. You don't need to make copies of it.

PIEHLER: Um, I'm curious about on some of the mundane—what was life like in a ... South Pacific air base? You talked a bit about the base and the perimeter and the ... crews, ... the maintenance crews were very separate from the flight crews, but ...

SEAY: Well, you weren't conscious of the ground troops at all.

PIEHLER: Yeah. They were very ...

SEAY: They were out farther from the perimeter [so] that you never, you just never saw them; seldom thought about 'em. You were in contact a lot with anti-aircraft units, which would've been army, not air force, and I associated with some of these people. We used to meet them here and there and we'd feel sorry for them. When we would go down to Australia and bring back liquor supplies for ourselves, we'd always bring back some for these anti-aircraft personnel. And I knew one guy who was a captain. I brought him back a bottle of gin one time and he cried. (Laughter) His first bottle he said he'd owned in his own name in months. (Laughter) Maybe they were crocodile tears.

PIEHLER: Well I guess one of the mundane questions I want to ask is what did you eat while you were on the ...

SEAY: Yeah. Well, we had c-rations on the plane.... One meal a day when you were on a mission was always canned spam, canned ham and chocolate bar and some crackers

and, uh, water in a canteen.... It was pretty hard to have hot coffee on the flights. Wish we could've. You might take along, uh, we had Cokes, but they were in glass bottles and they were too hard.... Well, we used to take glass bottle with us on a lot of missions. We had a lot of night harasser missions. The Japanese would send one plane over and keep us awake all night, so we'd retaliate the next night. We'd send over one plane and keep them awake all night. Or a succession of them. Night harasser missions. So, we'd run out of bombs, so we would throw empty beer or Coca-Cola bottles. We had the notion that it whistled as it came down. (Laughter) We don't really know if it did or not, but we figured that would disturb them more. I may have killed more Japanese with beer bottles than I did with bombs for all I know. But, it was interesting to fly at night and to come within view of a city. The Japanese-held cities like Ambon, on the island of Ambonia, and you'd get just in sight, and suddenly it would go black. And you'd continue flying 'cause you're going to bomb them, harass or otherwise, and you'd get over the target and suddenly the lights would go on like that. (Snaps fingers) The searchlights. And they would just come and just grab you like, like a Venus flytrap would grab a fly, and ... you're suddenly in a cone of light and it's so bright in there that you have duck down in the cockpit. And you have to go on instruments because you can't look out. So now they're firing their anti-aircraft at you and you don't know where ... they're going off 'cause you can't look, and you start evasive maneuvers on instruments. And that is an experience. Because you can hardly tell which way is up anyway, and you're doing all kinds of crazy maneuvers. Deep diving, turn this way and that way. And after a while you'd realize, okay, you're out of the lights. So then you're safe once you're out of the lights because they did some transit-type sighting, [although] they had the sound ... tracking as well. But you could get away from the sound. So that was an interesting experience. But that was the—you asked what we were eating. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... No, no, no. That's such a great story ...

SEAY: But the food. Lots of stew. Lots of dried eggs for breakfast. I don't remember any ham or bacon, but, uh, we'd have dried eggs and powered milk and ... had cereal with powered milk. Had that rather frequently.... Well, once or twice, some oatmeal. Got ice cream, surprisingly, more than you'd think.

PIEHLER: Really?

SEAY: They could get it from Australia up with dry ice. So we had ice cream there, and loved it, too. And for lunches, awful lot of canned meat and canned potatoes. Uh, occasionally canned green beans. No green vegetables. That's what we would do when we went to Australia. We'd bring back fresh milk and fresh lettuce and tomatoes and vegetables. That was ... a rescue mission for us. And, of course, some beer and some liquor.

PIEHLER: And to make sure we have it on the record, ... where was your base?

SEAY: Okay. Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. The islands next to there called the Russell Islands was the next base. Then we moved up to an island called Sterling Island ... off the southern tip of Bougainville. Uh, some flights moved into Bougainville itself after we recaptured. There were black troops that took Bougainville. They made a good name for themselves there. [We] had a base [there], but it wasn't highly used. So, then we basically bypassed it. The Marines had landed on New Ireland and were preparing to invade Rabaul, but we kept them [the Japanese] down 'til they finally decided they didn't need to. So then we hopped over [and] we staged in Port Moresby.... Milne Bay, Port Moresby; bombed Finchaven, stationed there for a short while. Went up to another island called B-I-A-K, Biak, we called it. I don't know the correct pronunciation. We were there for a bit. In fact, that's where I was when I finally got my orders to go home. And from there the next big base was Hollandia. And that was a rather significant base. It was probably the key [U.S.] base in New Guinea. From Hollandia on, the Japanese were successfully, effectively bypassed. But I went on to another base called Sansapor, which is the far western tip of the *Vogelkopf*. The shape of New Guinea looked like a bird ... This is the bird's head. *Vogelkopf*.... [*Vogelkopf* means "bird's head" in German]. From there we went to Halmahera.... And their last base, 13th Air Force, as I knew it, was in Zamboanga in the Philippines on the big island, [Mindanao].... So they were based in Zamboanga, the old joke where the monkeys have no tails. That's where they were. And from there I got my orders to come back. So I went back to Biak Island to take a C-54 airplane back, but the Japanese had put together an old Betty Bomber over on the mainland. Just enough of it that they could come over and bomb out our three transport planes. So we couldn't go back by plane, but we found a troop ship. An old converted liberty ship came into harbor there, and we were able to get orders to get on it to come back. So, it took us a month to cross the water to get back, instead of flying back in two or three days, but we got safely back. But, um, that Betty Bomber, I think I probably saw it one other time. I was taking off from Finchaven and I saw a Japanese Betty Bomber off in the distance. I decided to go after it like a fighter plane. And with my firepower, fifteen guns, .50 caliber guns converging about a quarter of a mile in front of me, I'm sure I could've outflown it, outdistanced it and everything. But it got away in some clouds. And we didn't have radar on the planes and I wasn't able to find it again, but that was an exciting moment. I thought I was gonna be a fighter pilot for a minute. (Laughter) But ... it's probably the same plane that came back later and bombed out our stuff.

PIEHLER: It strikes me that you were aware, or at least, I'm curious, were you aware of this during the war itself? That you had some real advantages over the Japanese. In terms of their armaments, in terms of planes ...

SEAY: Oh, always. If something happened unfavorable for us or favorable for [them] it was just luck. We never had any doubt about that. That everything we had and did was

superior. Armor, firepower, ability, speed, although we didn't always have the speed. That was an illusion, but, uh, it worked out.... The P-38s were fast enough coming down, swooping down on 'em. We could get higher and dive down on 'em. We were not supposed to fly P-38s, but we used to exchange flights. (Laughter) I flew one solo, with no instruction. I took off and circled around and came back in and landed. And the CO found out. And then we would take the P-38 pilots up in the B-25s and let them fly them. They were both twin engines, so they were a lot similar and it handled a lot like a B-25. But the CO found out we were doing this and [said], "Anybody that does it again is immediately court martialed." So we quit doing it. But that's a beautiful airplane to fly. If I'd been in fighters, that's the one I would've wanted to be in.

TINKER: When you ... went on your missions were you always accompanied by the fighters? Or did you go out alone?

SEAY: Most every time, yeah. They weren't always P-38s, which were 13th Air Force. We had the ANZAC planes. The Corsairs mostly were attached to the Australian/New Zealand forces. And they ... would accompany us on a lot of the missions. As I mentioned, one time one zero got through the fighter cover and got at least one bullet into me and maybe more that I didn't see, or could've been more. But the ANZAC pilots, to us, were the best 'cause they would stay right with us right through the flak. They were there ... not right on our wings, but above. They would go through where the US fighter pilots were ordered to stay out of range of the enemy aircraft. They were out there looking for other fighters. But these guys would stay right with you. Then when the target run was over they would come back and buzz you, [and] come right at you. (Laughter) Just barely miss you. But we admired them so much. We'd cuss 'em of course, but we thought they were ...

PIEHLER: Did you have any contact with the ANZAC crews on the ground?

SEAY: They were flying from a different base.

PIEHLER: So, you ... just knew them in the air?

SEAY: That's all, uh-huh. That's all. I'm sure we—I can't remember.... On the ground, in Sydney, we steered clear of Australian and New Zealand soldiers because, uh, they were a little jealous. (Laughter) You know what the British used to say about the Americans, "They're over-fed, over-moneyed, and over here." (Laughter) That's the way they looked at us. I think one of my most scary moments [was when] I had taken a girl home ... in Sydney, and I had to go back and ride the subway. And ... walking the girl home from the subway there was group of Australian soldiers or sailors or both over here on the corner. And I had to go by them with her. Then I'm coming back, going back to the subway, and I stayed on my side of the street and they were eyeing me the whole way. And I thought, "Oh boy, they're going to take after me." (Laughter) So I

just kept walking and whistling, (Laughter) ... but it was scary. We were allies, except when it came to the women, of course. Then we were the enemy.

PIEHLER: ... You were on several different bases. How sophisticated were they in terms of creature comforts?

SEAY: We had the most expensive outhouse. We had an outhouse made completely out of mahogany. We could get the logs in to the sawmill and they would cut 'em into logs, so we had an outhouse made out of beautiful mahogany. And, uh, we had to leave it there, of course. Otherwise, it was tents and coconut groves. You had to avoid falling coconuts. We wore our helmets, literally.

PIEHLER: To avoid falling coconuts.

SEAY: To avoid falling coconuts. And sometimes the coconuts' roots were not too well anchored, and they would fall over. So, if you had your Quonset hut in there too close, occasionally one might fall and hit a Quonset hut. So you worried about that. It was kinda ... primitive that way.

PIEHLER: ... I had asked you about food, which was a lot of canned food. What about showers?

SEAY: Uh, it was wonderful when I got to Australia and had a shower. Usually we just washed out of—there were [water canisters] and you filled your flack helmet with water and just bathed ...

PIEHLER: ... They didn't set up hot showers? That was ...

SEAY: No, but it was great when you could go for a swim. When you were close enough to the shore to go for a swim, which was more frequently the case than you might think. We had a lot of swimming. And that was cleaning.

PIEHLER: And that sounds ... actually like a lot of fun.

SEAY: Oh yeah. That was recreation.

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned swimming ... and you mentioned cards and chess, but what else did you ...

SEAY: Read. And some of the guys played bridge. I didn't happen to get into bridge, but a lot of them did. Chess was the big, real big, activity. I still play chess a little bit. You just never quite forget it.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like you have a lot of time to kill.

SEAY: Yeah. There was a movie, ah, every other night, anyway. They'd set it up and you'd go sit on stumps or wooden benches and see a movie. A lot of movies. They got movies for us, in the evening. But, ah, to read at night ... there were some lanterns. We had lanterns with kerosene, but mostly flashlights. We could get batteries at the PX. So, they would set up a PX for us pretty soon after we had a base established, like at Finchaven or Hollandia or whatever. It was primitive, but ... let's see, we had folding cots, but everybody managed sooner or later to scrounge an air mattress. They weren't always coming in, but people would leave to go home, and [would] will you their air mattress. (Laughter) So it had a lot of prior usage.... And that made a cot pretty comfortable. Oh, the other thing, we got used to mildew. Mildew on all your clothes. All your clothing, bedding. And when I got home, I missed it. I was so used to the smell of mildew on my pillow that I got home and, "Something's missing around here." And it was the smell of mildew. I realized that's what it was.

PIEHLER: What about, um, church services? Did you have a chaplain on any of your bases?

SEAY: Yeah. I gotta tell you one quick little joke.... We had a chaplain and we had a flight surgeon. And the chaplain would give lectures, usually followed by the flight surgeon. So, one particular case I remember the flight surgeon was sittin' over there, you know, listening while the chaplain preached to us. So then the flight surgeon got up and said, "Well, men, the ... chaplain just told you why you shouldn't do it, now I'll tell you how to do it and get away with it." (Laughter) So, we had church services, but people didn't attend.

PIEHLER: Now, you mentioned card playing. Was there any gambling?

SEAY: Oh, lots of gambling. Oh, lots of gambling. And for real money.... We got paid in gulden, guilders. We got paid in Dutch [money] 'cause we were in the Dutch East Indies there.

PIEHLER: Oh, that's right. So you got paid in Dutch ... guilders.

SEAY: And we would use that. That was the currency for that area. And, um, they had two and a half florins. No, a florin, I think, was two and a half guilders. That's what it was. Sort of a large coin, bigger than a half dollar. And the big trick was, you take three of those and you drop the middle one and turn around and put it back. So, you spent a lot of time standing in line, you know that, in the service. For meals, for washing, for whatever. So you would stand there and you'd flip this coin (laughter) and some of them would get to be really an expert, like sleight of hand, almost. But, bridge occupied a lot of time. And I didn't get into bridge and I wish now I had because my wife's a big

bridge player. And I should, but I don't really know that game. But a lot of gambling. And I don't remember big stakes, though. I know some of the troops did. The officers, I don't think, got into it that much.

PIEHLER: But the troops, a few hundred dollars wouldn't be necessarily [uncommon]?

SEAY: Yeah, ... but I was never around one extensively.

PIEHLER: ... Did you ever have any contact with the population on these, these various bases?

SEAY: Of course, with the Australians when we were there. And in New Caledonia. The bunch I was with had just left New Caledonia and had come up to Guadalcanal. They had bombed Guadalcanal, but then they moved there. And they had contact with the ... aborigines, the Maoris ...

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

SEAY: ... But in Guadalcanal the native population was, uh, we would see little villages. But we didn't have contact with them.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. They didn't come to the base and do any work, or ...

SEAY: A little bit of that, but they wouldn't be working for us. They would be working for their own ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. So, you didn't have any personal [contact]?

SEAY: No, no sir, but I think they had that [later] in Japan and some other places. But we didn't have it there. The natives were frequently Muslim, and often half-dressed. But, uh, we would maybe ogle 'em as they walked down the road or something, but we wouldn't ... have much contact. That's interesting. When you read *South Pacific* there was considerable contact, but not in real life.

PIEHLER: ... Not in your ...

SEAY: Bloody Mary was not [real]—in fact, Bali Hai is a village on this Sterling Island, off the tip of Bougainville. There is a Bali Hai, but it's only a village and [James] Michener, of course, made it into an island because the name appealed to him. So, I've been to Bali Hai. It's real, but it's not an island.

PIEHLER: Now, you mentioned leaves to Australia, which, I get the sense, is one of the high points. How many ... of these leaves did you get?

SEAY: Well, three. One of them being an extra resupply mission, but two regular leaves. [Every] six or eight months. It wasn't really as regular as six months that we'd get rest and recreation. But, I got one extra trip where I went down with the supply plane to get stuff. And I would've had a fourth one, but then we had to turn around and come back 'cause the pilot went berserk. But, we would get there [and] it was a very exciting place. It was very conscious of the war, but all the [local] men were gone. They were over in Tobruk, and there just weren't any, any young men around.

PIEHLER: Even more so than the States?

SEAY: Oh, much, much more than the States. I mean, I've been in both places and there were—you had to worry about a girl in the States having a boyfriend somewhere. Well, down there you didn't have to worry about her having a boyfriend.

PIEHLER: 'Cause literally ...

SEAY: They were gone. They were all gone.

PIEHLER: Hence, the jealousy of the Australian service people because ...

SEAY: Yeah, when they would get back. The few of them that would get back. So, there were older people there. And we used to love to go into the bars there. They had an official closing time at six or whatever. The men were supposed to go home and have dinner with their wives and then they could come back later. But they would keep them open for us.... (Laughter) We'd have a back room where American soldiers could always go in after closing times. And we loved their beer. They had Tooth's 4X Ale, [which] was our favorite.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, 'cause growing up Methodist, there's a strain of real temperance in the Methodist circle. Were you a part of that?

SEAY: My mother grew up in it, with no card playing and no make-up. But it was already breaking down by the time she married, so by the time I went into the church it was all gone. I don't know where you'd find it now. You'd find it more in the Baptist churches than you would ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.... So, your father drank?

SEAY: Uh-huh.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean. So that ...

SEAY: I objected to drinking at an early age.... I'd learned at Sunday School that it was bad, but not because it was Methodist or Methodist prohibition. It was just considered bad. So, I used to fuss at him if they had company and had a drink.

PIEHLER: (Laughter) But then when ... did you have your first drink?

SEAY: Okay. Uh, I had my first cigarette when I was seventeen 'cause I knew I was going in the service and it seemed to be the thing to do, that you smoked in the service. So I ... deliberately took up smoking.

PIEHLER: Because it was expected in the service.

SEAY: Absolutely. I remember telling my dad that. "You know, ... in a few months I'll be in the service." It was almost like I had to. So, I forced myself. I didn't like it. I hated it. But I forced myself to become addicted. And as far as alcohol's concerned, um, I had had an occasional beer somewhere, but I'd never gotten intoxicated or anything. So, really I didn't do any drinking until I got in the service. And they had the 3.2 beer at the PXs, and served in great big cups. It didn't matter [that] it was 3.2, you got so much of it for a very low price. And so, you couldn't drink before flying or 24 hours before flying. So, ... drinking was something that you always had to keep under control. I never had a problem with keeping it under control.

PIEHLER: ... Without naming names, were there some people in you squadron that [had a problem]?

SEAY: Yeah. One in particular. He would go—he was a very religious person, I won't mention what religion he was, but, uh, he would get drunk and get very, very rambunctious. He was having problems with his religion, I think, at that point. And so, he was one. And among the pilots, no, you couldn't make it that far if you had a drinking problem. You just couldn't. And so you'd go to Sydney and you'd have a few drinks, but you had to find your way back. I, I think controlled drinking, more for the conviviality of it than anything else. You wanted to be able to and wanted to have the wherewithal, but I don't think alcoholism was a problem. At least not in the flying Air Force. That's a good question. I never thought about that. And it probably had an affect on me, that I still don't want to drink to excess. And I know others that'll have a drink or two, but it's controlled, and that's the end of it.

PIEHLER: ... Were you given a set number of missions that you were expected to fly?

SEAY: We were told fifty.

PIEHLER: You were told fifty missions.

SEAY: Yeah. And some of them, the guys that we replaced, had only flown fifty and they went home. And one guy out of the bunch had stayed on and had flown seventy, and he went down on his seventieth mission, and we were the 70th Squadron, so that got to be a ... sort of a superstition. But I flew mine and that's when I sank that schooner, was my seventieth one. Turned out to be my last one. And, uh, I knew one guy that had sixty-nine and he managed to be sick or something and not ever have to make his seventieth. We knew that ...

PIEHLER: So there was a real superstition that you didn't want the seventieth mission ...

SEAY: Mm hmm, because it had happened to somebody. But, fifty was the starting number and that was enough points to come home. It usually took about a year. So, it took us a year and a half and seventy missions before they had replacements for us.

PIEHLER: So, the deal was fifty missions, but you had to get a replacement?

SEAY: Absolutely. You still had to keep ...

PIEHLER: So, it was sort of ... (Laughter)

SEAY: Yeah. We got in in time to replace the guys ahead of us that had the fifty, but ... they didn't come in for us in time, so ...

PIEHLER: But, they didn't ratchet up the missions? Because in Europe they told initially, I forget the number now, but they told pilots a certain [number of] missions. But then when the losses diminished they raised the number.

SEAY: Yeah, twenty-five was what they started ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, I think they started out. But they never changed that officially. It was more [like] they said, "Well, we'd love to replace you, but we ..."

SEAY: Yeah, that was ridiculous.

PIEHLER: How did you feel about that? Were you ...

SEAY: When we found out that they didn't have replacements. (Sighs) It's there, you know. You grumble.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So, there was grumbling?

SEAY: ... But not serious. Yeah. You would think, "golly," but.... I remember a story

I read that said it all to me. It ... may have been fiction, but this guy was on a ship. A sailor. And they were at sea and his wife was about to have a baby or was about to die, I don't remember the exact story. But, anyway, he was trying to get leave to go to her and they wouldn't give him the leave, and finally she died. So, the next night he's in a poker game just as loud and noisy ... as he ever had been. Because it's done and there's nothing you could do about it. And I think there's a little bit of the attitude there, "Well, what in the heck can you do?" You just take it and go on. It's there to do. And I don't think anybody would ... feel much differently about it than I did. Anybody you talk to I think is going to say, "What choice have you got? Just make the best of it." But, you enjoy what you can out of it. And, you can see, I had some pretty good moments that I remember. The comradeship evaporates very quickly after that. I'm very conscious of that.

PIEHLER: There was a ... [sense that], once ... you got home that was, that was it.

SEAY: Yeah.... You do not live in the past. There was something you had to do, and you did it, and now forget it. You go on to something else. But now that we've all had our careers, successful or otherwise, we're retired. Now, we're drifting back to think about it because you can't relive your career to any particular extent. But, I think it's as we reach retirement that we begin to relive it. I think you'll find that. Something has to account for it. Because there's just that big gap. And I attribute it to the fiftieth anniversary [of the war], but I think its time has come.

PIEHLER: Well, it is very striking because ... while there were some veterans who did join veterans organizations and talked about it, a lot of people, particularly when I first started interviewing in '94-'95, there was real skepticism by the people ... at Rutgers who [said] "Why ... Why do this?" And some veterans, ... I said, "So, who have to you talked to about the war?" And one person, one of my first interviews said, "You're the first person I've really talked to about the war since, since the war." And I thought that was very striking.

SEAY: I've been to American Legion meetings. I joined the American Legion. I've been to VFW meetings, but I never joined them. And what I think about them [is] it's just another fraternal club. You're as close to them as you are [others]. I'm in the Rotary. I'm a very active Rotarian. I would be just as close to my Rotarians as they are to each other 'cause they don't share the same common experience by and large. And even if they did, you can't keep living it. It's no longer relevant.... Like in a case like this you can sort of let it all out and talk about it a little bit. But, otherwise, I don't think about it on a day-to-day basis. When I'm ... working ... in a career you think about that, day and night.... (Laughter) But the American Legion is losing membership very badly. VFW very, very badly. They're trying their darnedest to get more members in, but the newer veterans, you're not joining them are you? VFW nor American Legion?

TINKER: No.

SEAY: They're just [shrinking]. There is an active officers' association. I think I had a book, maybe I didn't bring it. It's that one. That's the reserve officers' book, ... but, that's for fellows that stayed in the service and retired after twenty or thirty years. It's a whole different breed than the ones of us in the war and then turned our back ...

PIEHLER: So you found yourself a different ...

SEAY: Absolutely. I went to some of their meetings. I don't have any more in common with them. They're talking about how they're going to improve their pension or improve their lobbying in Washington, and it's an active lobbying group.

PIEHLER: And in many ways a professional association. They're ...

SEAY: They're like a professional association.

PIEHLER: Yeah. I mean pensions ...

SEAY: I'd be as at home there as I would be at a dental professional association. (Laughter) Very interesting. So, it's a moment in history that, I'm glad I lived it. I'm glad I lived through it. I would hate to have missed it, if I could know that I would live through it, I would've gone. If it was a certainty of dying—I hadn't thought about that before. I don't know how I would have reacted.

PIEHLER: Well, one question I do want to follow up on, and it deals partly with dying. You mentioned this one superstition about the seventieth mission. What other superstitions ... and what about the sense of death? I mean, being in the military ... I get the sense you're conscious of death even if your squadron was not hard hit. But, still, death is not [far away]. It's part of ... daily calculations.

SEAY: It's always the guy next to you. It's never gonna be you.

PIEHLER: You didn't think it was ...

SEAY: Never gonna be you. The invincibility of youth. You really don't think it's going to hit you. You're going to be smarter, or mainly luckier. The guys in primary training, one guy was showing off in front of his girl, over his girlfriend's house in this little town. He was doing loops. Well, as you do loops you keep getting lower and lower. And if you're not very conscious of altitude; he did one last loop and crashed into the ground. Right in front of the girlfriend. So, that was kind of bad luck. But that would never happen to me. I mean ... he was a dummy. That wouldn't happen to me. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned the seventieth superstition, which sounds like ... people weren't flying basically looking to get out of it.

SEAY: (Pointing to the "Thirteenth") You'd think this would've been, but that was lucky for us.

PIEHLER: The thirteenth was lucky.

SEAY: Absolutely proud of it.

PIEHLER: ... No one ...

SEAY: It's reverse superstition. Maybe we twisted it.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So, being the thirteenth, that didn't ...

SEAY: Didn't bother any of us.

PIEHLER: What about lucky charms or ...

SEAY: Ah, yeah. Well, I wore this one all the time. (Pointing) That's the wings that I wore, literally, with my uniform. That would be Battle of Sydney.

PIEHLER: And the Battle of Sydney, you'd mentioned that before we got ...

SEAY: You didn't know that in history did you? (Laughter)

PIEHLER: No, no. I ...

SEAY: That was fought at two o'clock one morning at Kings Cross in Sydney, Australia. Several two o'clocks one morning. (Laughter) You make a fighter sweep through Kings Cross on your way home from a party or whatever. (Laughter) I told him before you came ... that I went back with my wife, and I went back to the pub that we had frequented when we were there in Sydney in the war. Three different occasions we stayed in the same rooming house, which our group had reserved, and we went down at different times. And so we all went to the same pub in Kings Cross. And it was still there when I went back, but they were just getting ready to tear it down. So, I feel like I was lucky I got there just when I did. But, uh, superstitions.... In some of these publications it will mention that the 42nd Bomb Group was named by one colonel as the "crusaders." He picked the name and he applied it to all the planes and nobody had a voice or a vote in it and nobody really liked it. So, we called it "the great double cross" 'cause it had the cross of the crusaders (Laughter) which had two cross bars on it ... Ah,

this is the colonel that led the other two planes into the side of the mountain. And so we didn't say much about it after that. After he was dead ... the emblem on it didn't continue. The ...

PIEHLER: So, once he got killed, that ...

SEAY: ... It just stopped marking any new planes and eventually all the planes were put out of service ... and just disappeared. So that, that was ... maybe the nearest thing to a superstition, a negative one.

TINKER: Well, what about ... pre-flight rituals? Like, ... when you went out to the plane did you do things in a certain order?

SEAY: There's one last thing that you always did. Pit stop. (Laughter) Wherever you were, wherever you had ...

TINKER: No matter what.

SEAY: Pit stop was an absolute necessity, whether you needed to or not. You needed to. And that's about the only ritual I can think of. One story that my friend in Kingsport thinks is a great story embarrasses me a little bit. But, there I was, eighteen years old and I'd gone through cadets and Air Force training, I was second lieutenant, and I would bite my fingernails. And it suddenly dawned on me, what must these guys that are on my crew, what must they think about me? I quit from one instant to the next.... How many years ago is that? Eighteen years to [now]. Almost seventy, almost sixty years ago that I instantly quit biting my nails. And I hadn't—you know, it's a habit that you have [and] you don't know you have it. And I didn't do it when I was flying, but at an idle moment, watching a movie, I'd bite my fingernails.

PIEHLER: And you felt as an officer ...

SEAY: In a way that was a superstition. I had to not do that. And it worked for me that way.

PIEHLER: So it was more than just, ... you know, officers are supposed to act this way? It was also a superstitious ...

SEAY: ... For my crew. Totally for the welfare ...

TINKER: You were afraid they would think you were nervous or afraid?

SEAY: That or that it would make them nervous. I wanted them to have confidence in me. And they couldn't have confidence under those circumstances.... Well, I guess I

was barely nineteen. I wasn't eighteen, but I was nineteen. And I don't remember when I started, but I know when I stopped. But, other than that, superstitions, pre-flight rituals. We were not terribly religious. We didn't go to the chapel service, except sometimes we were sort of ordered to go and we'd go. And it was as much the flight surgeon as it was the chaplain at these. But I can't remember others.

TINKER: What about a favorite plane?

SEAY: We, we wanted our own. Occasionally we were assigned a different one than we were accustomed to, and we always grumbled. We never liked to have to take a different one because we had confidence in the crew chief. And we would take gifts to the crew chief, but we didn't identify with them enough. If I had it to do over, that is the one thing that I definitely would've done different. I would've spent hours and hours on the line with the crew chiefs working on those planes. I would have worked on them with a wrench, I mean, I should've. I don't know why I didn't know that.

TINKER: When there were major maintenance problems were you aware of it at all? Or ... was that so far away from you?

SEAY: If you had a hole in it you expected them to fix it ...

TINKER: That was all you do.

SEAY: And the time my engine went out, the spark plugs obviously fouled up. And I went back to the crew chief on that one, I said, "What do you suppose caused that?" And he said, "Well, I put in new ones just before the flight. They must have been bad plugs." And so I accepted that, you know, and said, "Well, I'm glad that I made it back." And he said, "So am I."

TINKER: So, you never questioned their judgment?

SEAY: No. No. Never did. Neither their ability nor their intentions. We trusted them. But I should have spent more time with them to support them. One time I had a bomb hang up in the bomb rack. There's this cable that holds them in a ... shackle. And the shackle opens and so the cable falls out.... Well, the bomb fell out, but in its fall it caught on the head of a bolt, like that. So it was hanging up there in the bomb bay. And we always check afterwards to make sure everything released, and my engineer called up and said, "Lieutenant, we still got one in the bomb bay." So I called, I was the wingman, I called the flight leader and said, "I gotta peel off and see if I can't shake this bomb loose." So, I went off to one side and I shook and did everything in the world. It didn't release! So the flight leader ordered me, "Get back in line and we'll go ahead and land," so we did. And I figured, "Well, it may blow up when I land," so I landed a lot closer to him than I should have 'cause if I'm gonna go he's going with me! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But that, that must have been pretty scary, though, to ...

SEAY: ... I'm sure that was the best landing I ever made in my whole life because you just had to come in very, very smoothly and not bounce. So we got in to the revetment where we parked, and opened the bomb bays, and I said out the window to the crew chief what had happened. I said, "Look out for that bomb in there." He went in the bomb bay and took his two hands and lifted that bomb just that much and it came loose. I mean, it was so close to coming off there. It might have shaken off on landing. It might have shaken off on the way in. But, it didn't. Here I am. Who can account for it?

PIEHLER: Ah, yeah. That sounds like it must have been a little nerve wracking.

SEAY: That was. That whole thing was nerve wracking, but I was ... mad. I wasn't real smart, but I was mad at the flight leader for not releasing me to at least land away from prop wash and stuff. So, I didn't make it that dangerous, but I did land closer to him than I normally would have. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Is there anything we've forgotten to ask you about your actual service? Though I do want to ask you about your voyage home. Because that seems ...

SEAY: Ah, okay. We got on this troop ship coming back and Harry Truman, an announcement came on the radio that Truman had become president. Roosevelt had died. And everybody was saying, "Who is this Harry Truman? I can't even remember who the vice-president is," you know, "Wonder what he's going to do." [We] wondered if he was going to carry out the war.... We had our misgivings, but everybody was pretty sad. Roosevelt was the Commander-in-Chief and I didn't know anybody that didn't revere him.

PIEHLER: And ... you came from a true blue Democratic household so this was even more of a ...

SEAY: Yeah. I was still a Democrat then. True blue Democrat. So that was sad. But, the other thing I remember about it, we were way down in the hold, and I was just over the propeller and every time we come out of a wave and slap back down it would jar me loose. And, uh, that made me queasy. I didn't ever get sick, I just wasn't hungry. I ate bread and jam and butter and coffee for a month. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, ... I was going to say, 'cause even though you did not get airsick, I mean, seasick, you got queasy.

SEAY: Got queasy, and so I didn't want to eat. I never upchucked, but I just didn't want to eat. So, I went for a month on bread, jam, and butter. And I think it affected my

vision because later on I had a detached retina, and I think lack of vitamins for a period of time there probably affected me, I don't know. But I had a detached retina. It got fixed, so I was alright.

PIEHLER: And what did you do to pass the time on the ship?

SEAY: Read. Read pocketbooks, and there were always some floatin' around. And we played some chess. But, ... what an opportunity to do something constructive. But, even on the way home we were thinking ahead. Just getting home, getting home. We weren't preparing ourselves for a better life or a spectacular—we just wanted to get home. So, it was behind us and we didn't feel any obligation to do anything.

PIEHLER: You were ... coming home, ... the war in Europe was ending, but the war against Japan was not.

SEAY: The guys from Europe were being sent over there.

PIEHLER: Yeah. I mean, how did you feel about sort of coming home before the war was over? Not that you hadn't done your part, but still ...

SEAY: I felt like I was ready ...

PIEHLER: You were lucky. Did you feel lucky that you were [going home]?

SEAY: Oh yeah, yeah. I felt lucky and glad that it's over. And then I was relieved to think that I wouldn't have to turn around and go to Europe. That it wasn't that way, it was the other way. So I didn't have any concern about having to go back to the Pacific. My tour was over and I was glad it was over. It was behind me.

PIEHLER: And you turned down being a captain? The possibility of being ...

SEAY: Yeah. And never worried about it.

PIEHLER: And ... when did you land? You landed in San Francisco?

SEAY: Yeah, we went under the bridge. Had a great bet as to exactly what time we'd go under the bridge. That was an exciting moment. (Laughter) And then we got off the boat and made our way up to the Top of The Mark Restaurant, to the bar. And so, we wanted to have a drink in memory of our time in the Pacific, so we sat down at the bar. We weren't too nattily dressed either, at the time, and the bartender ... if anybody in the world was ever nonplused that was him. We said, "We want a gin and grapefruit juice, no ice, serve it in a canteen cup." Well, he came back with gin and grapefruit juice in a glass, said, "I don't have any canteen cups, but here's your gin." So, we drank a toast to

the memories and that ... that was a very psychological moment for us. That really sort of put a cap on it. There was a little bit of closure there.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Going to the Top of The Mark and ...

SEAY: Yeah. Yeah, and I remember from that point on then we were back into this new world. This new life. I got back and couldn't wait to get married ... [but] made a mistake there.... We knew within a month that ... in three years had grown so far apart that there was nothing. So that didn't last. But ...

PIEHLER: When were you actually separated from the service? Because you didn't even stay in the reserves. When did you actually get processed?

SEAY: In May.

PIEHLER: May of ... '45?

SEAY: I was married in May, so it must have been late May.

PIEHLER: Late May.

SEAY: Yeah. I think I had a month's paid leave or something that terminated, so I was on leave during May and that was V-E Day. It was on the day that I got married, as a matter of fact. There were all these celebrations outside our hotel room. We said, "Well, isn't that nice for them to celebrate our marriage this way." (Laughter) But, it was V-E Day. And so I was totally separated by—it'll tell you here. (Looking through documents)

PIEHLER: ... I should have ...

SEAY: Totally separated by—I have to find it somewhere. (Checking documents) I don't know. It would've been, I keep thinking it's April. Let me see.

TINKER: You put April on your [pre-interview] application.

SEAY: ... By June I had a civilian address. I got my airman's certificate by June, so May. So, it had to have been late May.

TINKER: I wanted to ask something before we got too far away from it. You mentioned you got married right after you came back to the States.

SEAY: Yeah.

TINKER: Had you received much mail while you were away?

SEAY: Yeah. We had corresponded the whole time.

TINKER: So you got mail regularly?

SEAY: Yeah, yeah. A little delayed. It went to an Army Post Office.... All this equipment that I'd shipped to the Aleutian Islands, the winter gear, finally arrived in the South Pacific in our footlocker. Well, and I also had put a fruitcake from my mother in there just before we shipped (laughter) and you can imagine the condition that was in. Just one lump of mold.... We just threw it away because it absolutely was of no use to us out there, and I didn't want to bring it back. I didn't have anything much else in the footlocker that I wanted.

TINKER: Did your parents write to you also?

SEAY: Uh, yeah. They wrote regularly. I didn't write enough, obviously, but I don't think there can be enough. They kept me informed of what was going on pretty much in politics, in the states. You could expect that.

PIEHLER: ... Does any of your World War II correspondence survive in either direction?

SEAY: Yeah, some of the letters are in my mother's stuff. What I corresponded with my first wife, that's long gone.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Yeah.

SEAY: 'Cause ... I told you we separated and divorced. But, um, yeah, if you're interested I could ...

PIEHLER: We'd love to have copies or the originals.

SEAY: I'll look for it. I know exactly where to look.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.... We'd love—that's exactly the kind of things we ...

SEAY: It kind of crossed my mind before I came, but I wasn't sure what you wanted.

PIEHLER: Oh no, no. Letters and diaries and photographs are really our, our stock and trade.

SEAY: I'll really do as much as I can ...

PIEHLER: You mentioned you knew about the GI Bill overseas. When did you first learn about it, and when did you think, “This is for me, I’m going to ... take advantage of it?”

SEAY: During the discharge procedures is when they made it clear. A law had been passed and some, some soldiers had already begun to benefit from it in early ‘45. It had passed prior to that. So, I guess I didn’t have any details on it until I was being mustered out and then, then I was told what I could expect. And so, I said, “Ah, that’s a great idea.”

PIEHLER: And you had mentioned before the war you had competed for a scholarship at Vanderbilt and you had gotten a one year scholarship.

SEAY: ... It was awarded to me, but I turned it down and it went to my friend who didn’t finish out his first year before he was drafted. So, again, I did the right thing.

PIEHLER: Now, with the GI Bill you had your choice of colleges. I mean, I guess the question is, why Auburn?

SEAY: They had aeronautical engineering and I was going to be an aeronautical engineer and a pilot, obviously. But, I could’ve gone to Georgia Tech, but their aeronautical engineering was full. The school was full, so, and Vanderbilt didn’t have it in my hometown, and so Auburn was the next place. But when I got there I found so many former pilots, there were at least 400 ... former pilots that I could ... associate, could identify right there that it seemed to me that it was going to be a crowded field. And so I switched over to mechanical engineering, which suited me alright, since I really didn’t continue flying, I couldn’t make any money teaching, too many guys there trying. So I paid for flying time for a while to keep my proficiency up, and then it just got to be too expensive. I didn’t have enough money even working as I did.

PIEHLER: What was it like to be back at college? Or be in college, you had never been to college.

SEAY: Never been to college. It was easy. I’d had some problems with trigonometry, for instance, in high school, and that was the lowest grade I made, was on trig. But, I took it again first year in college. They did a general make-up the first, it was quarter system, they did a general make up. And it was a breeze. I was enough older, more mature, that it was really no problem at all. So, I didn’t find it much of a problem. It was the quarter system, so I went year round. I did four years of college in two years and nine months and I came out with a B average. And I worked, but I had the GI Bill, and I was married, no children. But I figured I it was relatively easy for me. The discipline of the service carried over. And there were others, ex-soldiers like me, they didn’t join

fraternities either. They just [wanted to] get through and ...

PIEHLER: So, you didn't join any clubs, or ...

SEAY: Nothing.

PIEHLER: ... You had mentioned joining the Legion. Did you ... have a chapter of the American Veterans' Committee at Auburn? Do you remember that at all?

SEAY: No. There is such a thing?

PIEHLER: Yeah.... There is, but if you don't have a recollection ...

SEAY: I don't believe it was there ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah, I ...

SEAY: ... I graduated in September of '48. Graduated one day and went to work at Eastman the next. I mean, I had already gotten my job.

PIEHLER: So, why Eastman? I mean, how did that, ... how did you ...

SEAY: I had job offers from Pratt & Whitney. It was too far north. It was up in New Haven, Connecticut or somewhere way up north. Proctor & Gamble. That was Ivorydale, Cincinnati. That's too far north. They also had a plant in Kansas City where I might have gone, but that seemed pretty far away. And I picked Tennessee Eastman because it was close to home. I didn't want to leave Tennessee. So, nine months after I went to work at Tennessee Eastman I was sent to Rochester, New York. (Laughter) And from there I covered Canada. So I quickly learned to love cold weather. There was no choice. You do what's necessary.

PIEHLER: But, you still had some of that local [idea] that New Haven was very [distant]. I mean now, I ...

SEAY: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: ... I mean, it's far away, but not ... It's a distance, but not the same ...

SEAY: I had the impression of cold. And I ... I had enjoyed the South Pacific because it was always warm. I really had, and I didn't like the idea of cold weather. Oh, and it really was.

PIEHLER: You really ...

SEAY: And then I went to Canada and I really got my taste of cold weather.

PIEHLER: And I guess, um, Eastman Kodak and Kodak Chemical, I mean, ... both companies have been under a lot of change. Even very recently for Eastman Chemical. What's your sense of the company and your career? If you could talk maybe generally about ...

SEAY: They're very paternalistic. We, we had the best years, all of my career. I retired in 1986, after thirty-seven years, almost thirty-eight years. And they were golden years. Kodak owned us, we were a division of Kodak. They had a ... very special market, photography. There was nothing that could compare with them. So, it was only kind of after we left that they began to get into trouble from the Japanese stuff coming in, and more competition. So, the nature of the company changed, but they made enormous profits and they were very paternalistic. We got the best pensions, the best medical plans, the best pay of anybody. So I couldn't possibly have been luckier to have worked for [the] company. But, then after I left, Kodak got into trouble. They bought Sterling Drug and they paid too much for it, so they had too much debt, so they had to do something. And so they offered the Eastman Tennessee people to split off. Do a spin-off if Eastman Tennessee would take that Sterling debt with them, which they agreed to do. So, they set out in life as a company with an enormous debt. But they've been paying it off. They've been doing well with it. Their stock hasn't been favorably treated by the market because nobody believes that they can pull it off. They think you're just a little company that's been mothered by Kodak all these years, and you don't know how to deal in the real world. Well, they're showing that they can. They're surviving, they're back about where they were when they were spun off. ... And meanwhile, Kodak has had a taste of real competition, which they've never felt before, and they've had to go through some real changes to accommodate themselves to that. They'll succeed, because they're getting into the digital world. Eastman Chemical will succeed, because it's getting into the bricks and mortar on the one hand, and e-commerce on the other. It's the first chemical company that's really making this marriage and this change in the e-commerce world. Electronic commerce. So, they're gonna make it. It's going to be tough, but they're going to make it.

PIEHLER: Now, you worked, you mentioned your first job for the company, for Eastman Chemical, was ...

SEAY: Sales engineer. I was a salesman. I called on accounts in Rochester and a few in Canada. Then I moved to Canada and then all of my accounts were Canadian.... That was plastic sales only at first, then I was put in charge of all the product sales for Canada, for all the products.

PIEHLER: Your market was all of Canada?

SEAY: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: That's a big ... country and a big market.

SEAY: It is. And I traveled it all, [from] British Columbia to Maritime. But then, an opening came up in Switzerland, and I was sort of next in line, and so I was transferred there. So, there again, we were responsible for the sale of all the products that the company made, but in all of Europe, Middle East, Africa, and so forth. And so from there the next move was back to Tennessee to be in the international division. And I made it to the top of the line there, ... except I didn't make to vice president in charge of all this marketing. Another couple of years or been two years younger I might have. (Laughter) But, I have no regrets. I was treated extremely well.

PIEHLER: And it sounds like you, you had interesting jobs ...

SEAY: Traveling, dealing with great people. And we had some contract representatives, they like to call themselves agents. [We] had those in some countries. Others, we had our own people. But, we traveled and kept in close touch, so it was a people company. Now, they've had to downsize so much and tighten their belt so much that I detect some changes, but we're—*they* are, I'm not part of them anymore. I'm sure they're going to succeed, but in this new ... ambiance.

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like, not that you didn't work hard, but there was a lot of stability, it strikes me.

SEAY: There was. We were not running job scared. In fact, if you got fired by Eastman you had to be caught with your hand in the till or something equally bad. (Laughter) If you weren't doing your job, you got shifted. It's like the Peter Principle, you transfer them to their level of last competency, or something. They were very good about that. They would kick you upstairs or sideways until you could fit your job. And they just never let people go. Now they do.

PIEHLER: Yeah. In fact, they had, recently, a big [layoff].

SEAY: A big one. And about 800 people that are still disgruntled about it, 'cause you don't do that sort of thing at Eastman. Well, the market's such that they had to, so it's a big change. No, I had it good.

PIEHLER: I'm curious 'cause you had lived, you had grown up in ... Nashville, Middle Tennessee, and then you'd been in the service. But, then you lived abroad. I mean, Canada, and ... your second wife was Canadian. And then Geneva, but then you came back to Kingsport partly because of the company. What are your observations of

Kingsport based on ... having seen the world?

SEAY: Well, I had to come back in order to get advancement. I was as high as I could get in Europe, so there was nowhere to go. And so I had to come back. So I was assistant director and later I got to be a director. And from there I had one sideways move and then I retired. I could see that it was time to go. But, we'd had enough contact with Kingsport.... Remember the Beetle Bailey cartoons? Being a professor or a doctor, maybe he never reads these things. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Oh no, I remember Beetle Bailey.

SEAY: General Halftrack? He kept getting word from the Pentagon? Well, to us Kingsport was the Pentagon. And so we would get word from the Pentagon. That's where you went when you died and went to Heaven. You went to Kingsport. It was the goal for everybody. A lot of the people that were moved to New York or Chicago for their whole careers, they have stayed there. But, people who have been moved to Kingsport from wherever, they never leave.

PIEHLER: Really? So, you didn't feel, having been to these places, that ...

SEAY: I can still go anytime I want to. And we do go.

PIEHLER: Yeah. But, you ... were happy to come back to Kingsport?

SEAY: It's a resort. You can play golf all you want to, the weather's good. You got everything you want there. It's a great town. I'm probably keeping you ...

PIEHLER: Well, ... we've had you a lot. Let me, Cynthia, do you have any [questions]?

TINKER: ... Do you have a general opinion about, um, how you think you were treated as a veteran after you came back home? And, you know, do you have thoughts now like to compare that? ... How do you think the public views the military now versus when you first came home?

SEAY: Well, Vietnam had a big influence on how the public views the military. It's left its mark, I think, here and there. We had all the best. And I have absolutely nothing but regard for the Veterans' Administration in every contact I've had with them. And the VA Hospital in Johnson City had its ups and downs, but it did a good job. But, they're cutting back there. They're getting the least successful veterans in there, I'll put it that way. The least of the mental giants are in there. And if you have to go to the VA Hospital anymore, where before you could go with some self-respect, I think now I wouldn't feel a great deal of self-respect, if I had to go there now. I think they're dealing with, uh, the worst cases. But, I think they try, and maybe with limited money. I don't

know what impels a doctor to take a job there compared to taking a job in another hospital.... Maybe their comfort zone or something. But, I think the VA does alright. The graves they take care of, the graves are getting full, they're going to have to open some new ones. But, um, my father was buried, buried in the military hospital at Nashville. He's at Nashville-Gallatin. And my mother with him. Since he passed away, they could be in the same graveyard. I don't have any bad feelings. I think the people they've had in charge of it, there was a black man, his name was Brown, [and] I thought he did a good job. And this fellow who's a paraplegic ... in a wheelchair. I think he's very conscious of what they need, and I haven't talked with enough recent veterans to know how they ...

PIEHLER: Well, it strikes me in some ways you don't identify—if I were to say, “How do you identify yourself,” you probably wouldn't say “Veteran” as one of your first [responses]. Is that a fair ...

SEAY: Yeah, I would. Uh-huh.... I'm a veteran. But, I wouldn't specify World War Two, or One, I could say I forget which. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah, but in some ways I guess you probably would identify yourself more as a retiree of Eastman Chemical.

SEAY: Than veteran?

PIEHLER: Yeah. I mean, I'm just wondering.

SEAY: Well, you're pretty good at forcing [me to think about this]. I'll tell ya ... I think of myself as a veteran.

PIEHLER: Yeah. No, I mean, I'm not saying ... but ...

SEAY: But I probably think ...

PIEHLER: If, but if I said to you ... I mean this is a veterans' oral history ...

SEAY: I've retired from Eastman ...

PIEHLER: ... But, if I were on the street to ask you, how would you identify yourself?

SEAY: I'm retired from Eastman.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah. I'm just curious, because ...

SEAY: Somewhere along the line I might say, “Well, I went to college and I raised a

family.” I don’t really put ‘em in that order, but I wouldn’t mention it first, would I? I think you’re right.

PIEHLER: Well, one of the things that actually confused us is ‘cause you identify with the Vols, as a fan. You’re a big Vols fan and that stems from your son, who ...

SEAY: Who was a student here and so was his later wife. They were here together and married in 1985. We were coming down to see the games with them during the years he was in college, then after they left we just ... managed to get hold of some season tickets and we’ve simply continued since ‘85. So, we have orange blood. Kingsport is orange-blood country. It’s not Virginia Tech, although there’s a lot of people up there, [more] than it is at any other college. They’re all represented there, but the Vols—it’s a hotbed of Vols up there. So, you’re in the majority when you’re up for the Vols. I only have a problem when Auburn is playing here. (Laughter) I don’t go to the games down at Auburn, but when Auburn’s playing here ...

PIEHLER: There you have some divided loyalty.

SEAY: Yeah, I just sit there very quietly. (Laughter)

TINKER: You know, it seems like, to me, that the camaraderie you experienced so intensely during the war; when you came home ... do you feel like you have sought that out? Even though it wasn’t as intense, you know, [like] the American Legion?

SEAY: I ... didn’t find it there.

TINKER: But, do you feel that it’s some form of camaraderie?

SEAY: My camaraderie is with the plastic sales group at Eastman. We have a camaraderie there. It is an ongoing, year after year, association on the same ground. In the war it was just a one-time experience, ... but being in the plastic sales division is a lifetime thing. I’m the letter writer or the letter publisher for a little—we had a product called tenite. It was a plastic that we sold, so the T’s Tribune.... It’s been lost in the changes in the company, so there’s no longer a tenite division. We were all salesmen in the tenite division and there are eighty of us and we still meet once a month, maybe as many as twenty or forty of us will meet once a month. And I keep in touch with our little newsletter. And that has been my substitute comradeship.

PIEHLER: So, you ... This group, you’ve stayed very much in touch.

SEAY: It’s amazing how well they’ve stuck together. One other group that we do have an ongoing relationship with is called the XYZ Club. The Ex-Yodelers of Zurich. (Laughter) There were about ten of us that were over there with Eastman at the same

time. And we were pioneers in that. We had the golden years of overseas duty, and we came back relatively together. And the ten of us with wives, so it's a group of twenty, that meet two or three times a year in Kingsport, and we're on the phone all the time and we keep up. [If] one of the children gets married, well, we are all involved. We're giving a dinner party this Sunday morning for the daughter of one of the guys that was overseas with us. So, I've found a substitute for it. I haven't needed it from the service, and I think the continuity is what I treasure. And these people are there. If they were scattered all over. There are others that were there with us and I organized a gathering. We had forty people from around the world that had been in Europe with us at the same time. They came here from Australia and Holland and Switzerland and Canada and different parts of the states. So we had a little reunion, and it was a great event, but once in a lifetime. We're not going to bother with it again. But, our local XYZ group goes on, and the T's.

TINKER: Are there any other veterans in those groups?

SEAY: Yeah, there's some, but we never talk about it. The one guy that shot down the kamikaze. He and I are the only two that really talk about it very much, and we didn't used to. There's one other one that comes with us to the football games [and] he was in the Navy. He was on landing craft. Sometimes driving back and forth to games, he would tell me some of his experiences landing troops on the landing craft, I mean, he was on the mother ship that the craft went off from—but, that isn't the main thing. We talk about the Internet, 'cause he's an expert, and we talk about Eastman, talk about stocks. The world, the world has changed. So, it's a privilege to have an opportunity like this to open up and let it all hang out. I appreciate you asking ...

PIEHLER: Well, we really appreciate ...

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

PIEHLER: ... I'd asked you over lunch, and I said ... your children, growing up, they didn't ask you about the war?

SEAY: No. I had my army hat around. My flight jacket, I still have it with the squadron insignia on it with the bars, but I just hang it up there. One of the boys expressed an interest in it. When I go away he wants me to will that to him, but that's only lately. They grew up seeing that stuff, and it meant literally nothing to them.

PIEHLER: You mentioned it's only really since the Tom Brokaw book that they've ...

SEAY: Suddenly realized that I was part of that generation.

PIEHLER: And, in fact, that you did things. I mean, you were a pilot, and ...

SEAY: My older son did say, “Dad, I’ve just realized it ...” So, I did a tape of reminiscences like this for him. And I guess it was only one side, so I didn’t cover nearly as much ground as you did. By asking me questions, I’ve come up with things that I never would’ve dreamed of coming up with.

PIEHLER: We can definitely make a copy to give to your children ...

SEAY: Would you?

PIEHLER: Yeah. No, that’s fine. I’ll make sure that we [do that].

SEAY: Let me think of what I said. (Laughter) No, it’s okay ...

PIEHLER: ... It’s interesting how children [react]. We’ve had some reaction from children and grandchildren, and the common reaction is they never realized this. And they can identify with their parents or grandparents in a way they couldn’t because they, particularly grandchildren, view just this old figure ...

SEAY: Well, I found it interesting that you went back so much to my early life, the pre-war, the Depression years. And my son asked me for a tape on that recently, so I’ve done him one. But again, not nearly as much as you’ve brought out by asking questions. So, they would love to either ... [have] a copy or send the transcript or whatever.

PIEHLER: Oh, no, we’d be glad to. We’d love to make you a copy.

SEAY: And if something comes up, please call me on the phone if you need me to, which I find most unlikely, but if you need me to come back to fill in something, I’d be happy to do that.

PIEHLER: That would be great, that would be great. Well, let me, uh, ... is there anything else you would like to ask, say or ask?

SEAY: No, I think I ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: That’s fine. I just want to make sure you get ...

SEAY: No. Just if you get something in there about the 13th Air Force, about history missing.

PIEHLER: Well, let me just say that this concludes an interview with Charles L. Seay on March 24, 2000 with Kurt Piehler and ...

TINKER: Cynthia Tinker.

PIEHLER: At the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee. Thank you very much.

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

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