

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE  
KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN W. NIPPER

FOR THE  
VETERAN'S ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WAR AND SOCIETY  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

INTERVIEW BY  
G. KURT PIEHLER  
AND  
JIM MORRIS

KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE  
APRIL 6, 2001

TRANSCRIPT BY  
JIM MORRIS

REVIEWED BY  
BRAD MASON  
AND  
CINNAMON BROWN

KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with John W. Nipper on April 6, 2001 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

JIM MORRIS: Jim Morris.

PIEHLER: And you were born on September ... 16, 1924 in Knox County.

JOHN W. NIPPER: Yes.

PIEHLER: Which part of Knox County were you born in?

NIPPER: South Knoxville.

PIEHLER: South Knoxville.

NIPPER: Yes.

PIEHLER: And you still live in ... South Knoxville.

NIPPER: Yes.

PIEHLER: And your parents were also ... they're—well your father's a native of ... Knox County.

NIPPER: Correct.

PIEHLER: But your mother is from Texas originally?

NIPPER: Originally, yes.

PIEHLER: How did your parents meet?

NIPPER: My grandfather was a Baptist minister, and he went from church to church, you know, in different states. And they moved from Texas I think—I don't know exactly where it was, but it was in East Tennessee. And ... my mother was one of ten children, I believe. And they moved in this area.

PIEHLER: And ... do you know how your parents met? Was it a church social, or was it ...

NIPPER: They went to the same church together.

PIEHLER: They did?

NIPPER: And I recall that he proposed to my mother in an airplane ride. That was something that I remember their saying. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And what kind of airplane ride was it? Was it a regular ...

NIPPER: It was just an open cockpit.

PIEHLER: Open cockpit.

NIPPER: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like it was a joyride.

NIPPER: Right, that's what it was, uh huh. I think he had planned that all along. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: And your father was a machinist.

NIPPER: Yes. At ALCOA, Aluminum Company of America.

PIEHLER: How long did he work there?

NIPPER: He worked there for nineteen years before his death.

PIEHLER: And your mother was a music teacher.

NIPPER: Yes, she ... studied piano when she was in Texas as a teenager, and went through Haun School of Music, I believe it was, and became a piano teacher.

PIEHLER: And while you were growing up did she teach the piano?

NIPPER: Yes.

PIEHLER: She taught in her house or ...

NIPPER: [She] taught in the home and then occasionally she would go to the schools and teach. And also occasionally to the home.

MORRIS: Did she teach you how to play the piano?

NIPPER: She attempted to teach me. But ... I didn't—I took for about two years, but I don't think that's the best way to learn is to teach from, to learn from your parents.

MORRIS: Why is that?

NIPPER: I don't think you take it as seriously. Now my mother taught my granddaughter, and she went the classical music route. And she did very good.

MORRIS: Did they raise you ... in ... the Baptist Church?

NIPPER: Yes. Yes.

MORRIS: And did they talk much about the Baptist faith and have devotionals or anything like that?

NIPPER: Yes, we—of course my grandfather being a minister, I stayed at his house just about as long as I did at my own home. But we were very close. And, of course, my grandfather would talk to me about, you know, spiritual things, and ... I became a Christian at eleven years of age in the church where I had attended all my life up to that point.

MORRIS: Being Republicans, did they ... have any influence on your decision to be a Republican?

NIPPER: No. No.

PIEHLER: I'm just curious. You told a great story about your grandfather, which we should really get on tape—both how you learned something about him doing ... a job. And then about his own background and how—could you tell that story about him?

NIPPER: Yes. My grandfather grew up in Dayton, Tennessee. And he wanted to become a minister. And Carson-Newman College was the closest ... college that the Baptists operated as a ministerial college. And he walked from Dayton, Tennessee to ... Carson-Newman College to attend school. And I was in business, and they had called me at Carson-Newman College to come up and look at some work they wanted to have done. And during the conversation, I talked to this man who was in charge of the records ... and he told me, I told him my grandfather graduated there in the late 1800s. And he said, "Let's see if we can find his record." And they had had a fire there that burned up a lot of the pictures. But he found his record, and he graduated from Carson-Newman College in 1898. And it gave a little resume of what he did. He worked his way through school there waiting on tables and doing odd jobs around there to help pay his tuition. And ... that's how I came to know when it was he attended. But there were thirteen in his graduating class.

PIEHLER: And it sounds like it was a really fun connection to have made.

NIPPER: Oh, yes. Yes. Um hmm, I enjoyed it very much.

MORRIS: Did ... do you remember growing up did your parents ever talk about ... Franklin Delano Roosevelt? Did they ever talk anything about him—how they felt about him?

NIPPER: My father and mother grew up during the Depression. And while we had ... adequate food and shelter and clothing, there were some struggles. And then when Franklin Roosevelt came along, and introduced the New Deal, or whatever it was that put the economy back on the right road—they spoke highly of him.

MORRIS: Even though he was a Democrat, and they were Republicans?

NIPPER: Right, right. I think that they really ... considered the individual rather than the politics. I don't think that was the main—party line was the main thing that they were so staunch about being a Republican or Democrat.

MORRIS: You ... had said earlier that's how you approach it now, right?

NIPPER: Yes.

MORRIS: ... did you learn that from them? That kind of approach to politics.

NIPPER: I think it just grew. I just listened and made my own, made my own decision.

PIEHLER: Growing up, did you have electricity?

NIPPER: When I was in grade school, we did not have electricity. We studied by an oil lamp. When I was in about the seventh grade, I believe that we had electricity connected to our house. And it was just a chord extending from the ceiling with a light bulb that's the extent of it. And ... we had no electric stove, we used [a] wood stove, and it was a primitive way, but we had chores to do, so we never got in too much trouble because of our activities.

PIEHLER: Now did you have indoor plumbing?

NIPPER: No.

PIEHLER: No.

NIPPER: No, we did not.

PIEHLER: Did you ...

NIPPER: ... not until I was ... ready to go in service, I guess, before that we had plumbing.

PIEHLER: When you were living in South Knox—were you actually living in the city itself at the time.

NIPPER: No, it was in the county.

PIEHLER: It was in the county.

NIPPER: Yes. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: Did your parents own their house?

NIPPER: Yes. They had borrowed \$1500 from my uncle or from my mother's uncle. And they had just finished paying off that money back to her uncle when the Depression really hit. And [of] course ... they owned the house outright as they were able to pay [him] back that money.

PIEHLER: So they were very fortunate in some ways in that sense.

NIPPER: Yes.

PIEHLER: What about your neighbors? What were they like?

NIPPER: We had good neighbors. One of our neighbors owned a little grocery store. And you bought the groceries and paid for it, for the groceries, at the end of the week. We had two cows, and we had a garden, and we could survive on that.

PIEHLER: How regular was your father's work growing up in the Depression, say, in '32, '33, '34? Do you remember?

NIPPER: He was off from work for a good long while, and he got a job working for a dairy, and it was just manual work. He had worked prior to that in a marble company, and the working conditions weren't too good. And they would work long hours and ... no benefits or anything like that. But then ... after he was laid off from work for some time—I don't recall how long it was, but he applied for a job at ALCOA, and he served an apprentice trade and went on through and became a machinist. And from that time on he was never out of work.

PIEHLER: So ALCOA was ... the steady job.

NIPPER: Right.

PIEHLER: As opposed to the marble factory ...

NIPPER: Right.

PIEHLER: ... and the dairy. What year did he start? Do you remember what year he started at ALCOA?

NIPPER: It was in ...

PIEHLER: Was it during ....

NIPPER: It was in the 40s.

PIEHLER: It was in the 40s, so it was during the war?

NIPPER: It was. He worked there during the war, yes. But he had gone to work there prior to ...

PIEHLER: Prior to the war.

NIPPER: Yes.

PIEHLER: But definitely in the late 30s or early 40s at the earliest.

NIPPER: Yes.

PIEHLER: Had your father served in the military?

NIPPER: No.

PIEHLER: No.

NIPPER: No, he was at that age in between, you know, when World War I ...

PIEHLER: World War I ...

NIPPER: Yeah.

MORRIS: What was life like with your brother and sister, and—are they still living, by the way?

NIPPER: Yes, both my brother and sister are still living. ... We were a close-knit family. We ... got along fine. We didn't—my brother and I were real close, and [of] course ... my sister was my mother's favorite, and she was ... the one that got preferential treatment. (Laughs) But in addition to being my father, my dad was my best buddy.

PIEHLER: You were very close to your dad?

NIPPER: Yes. We would hunt and fish and do things together.

PIEHLER: Oh, you mentioned hunting and fishing with your dad. What else would you do for fun growing up, particularly when you were younger?

NIPPER: We would play ... games at the school. We had—we went to Mt. Olive Elementary School. And there was a ball field there that we could play softball or baseball and football and different places in the community where people that let us use a field to play, and .... I was always interested in little rubber-powered airplanes, and ... my brother and I made several of those, and we used to read a lot of the books [on] Orville [and] Wilbur Wright, and ... aviation was sort of in the back of my mind.

MORRIS: What were those planes like? You said they were rubber-powered?

NIPPER: Yeah, they were made with little balsa sticks and that had a rubber band that you'd wind the propeller. And then you'd toss it out, and it would fly, and you know, just for a short while. And then ... it would land.

MORRIS: So your brother was interested in that too?

NIPPER: Yes.

PIEHLER: You would have been very, very young, well, but you don't have any recollection of Lindbergh's flight.

NIPPER: I remember quite well my mother and dad talking about it.

PIEHLER: That was a big item of conversation.

NIPPER: Yeah, it was ... the headlines in the news.

PIEHLER: Did you follow aviation at all growing up as a kid? I mean there were a lot of famous aviators out there when you were in ... the 30s. Did you ...

NIPPER: I read a lot of ... articles on aviation and the different ones that tried to learn how to fly without a plane, you know, mechanically. And I recall one time that we were going to ... try to learn to fly on our own. And we made this contraption, and I jumped off of a building and came very near (Laughs) ... meeting my maker.

PIEHLER: Or being very seriously injured. (Laughs)

NIPPER: Right, right. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: How often would you go out ... to the airport? Was that a destination you would choose?

NIPPER: We went to, on Sutherland Avenue where that ... high school is now—I think it's a public housing project ... that was an airport.

PIEHLER: People have told me that ...

NIPPER: ... and they brought that Ford tri-motored plane out there, and I recall going out there and seeing that plane fly. That was on a Sunday afternoon right down in the Bearden section there, and ... I recall there was a man doing some tricks on a motorcycle, and he would ride down that runway on a motorcycle standing up on the seat, and that stuck in my mind as a ...

PIEHLER: How old were you? Do you know?

NIPPER: I was still a teenager. I don't remember exactly how old I was at that time, but I had not gone to high school.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you wanted to be a pilot pretty badly, as a kid, growing up—that that was your dream job.



NIPPER: When I graduated from high school, they put a little note beside your picture. And an airplane pilot is what I said I'd like to be. I never dreamed that it would happen the way it did.

MORRIS: I know [you] went—the high school you went to has changed names a million times and locations. What was it like when you were going to ... school there?

NIPPER: I wasn't the happiest in grade school. We had a principal that was very strict. And ... he could say things to embarrass you in class. And ... sometimes he would even make the references if you were dumb that you'd never ...

PIEHLER: Never amount to anything.

NIPPER: Right. And ... they had a lot of whippings and punishment back then. It was, I mean I've seen him whip a student unmercifully for things that I didn't think he should've had that kind of punishment.

PIEHLER: It sounds like he was brutalizing students, not just ...

NIPPER: Right. Right.

PIEHLER: ... not just harsh discipline, but that things that you might get arrested for today.

NIPPER: Right.

PIEHLER: Is that a fair?

NIPPER: I was afraid of him.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: But—and I struggled in grade school. And I, I thought, I said, “Well, I'll never amount to a great deal because I'm dumb.” But when I got in high school, I made the honor roll almost every, almost every time that we got our grade cards. And I think it was the difference in the teachers. Now I had some good grade school teachers, but this one man was ... I shouldn't talk about him that way, but he was unreasonable. I recall this incident—if we got in trouble at school, and our parents found out about it, we'd be in trouble when we got home. And someone said that my brother said a bad word, and they told this principal about it. And he approached him on it, and he said, “No, I did not say a bad word.” He said, “We don't use that kind of language.” He [the principal] said, “Well, I was told from [a] reliable source that you said a bad word.” And this wasn't too long after the beginning ... of the school year. And he said, “As punishment for that, you cannot go down on the playground, and play with the other children, for the rest of the school year.” That was his punishment, and we're talking about six months or longer. Well he abided by what the principal told him. And ... one day we were talking at the dinner table, and this was a month I guess after that, and something came up in the conversation, and my brother said, “Well I can't do that, I can't go down to play with the others.” And my dad picked up on that. He said, “Why?” He said, “The principal told me that I said a bad word.” He

said, “Well did you say a bad word?” He said, “No, I did not.” He said, “Well, he told me that I could not go down and play with the other students for the rest of the entire school year.” He said, “Well, I trust what you’ve told me that you didn’t say a bad word, but if you did, that was too harsh a punishment.” He said, “I’ll be back in a little while.” And this was nine o’clock at night when we normally go to bed. Everybody went to bed when they blew the lamp out. And ... he went down there and called the principal out and told him what he was down there for. And he said, “I usually do not take sides with my son. I believe that the punishment that you’ve imposed on him is too great a punishment.” And he said, “In the morning, I want him down there on the playground.” And he said, “I didn’t come down here to whip you, but,” he said, “if that boy is not down there on the playground, in the morning, playing with the others,” he said, “you’re going to get the worst whippin’ you’ve ever encountered.” And that was all that was said. Well, my brother went down on that ball field the next morning. The principal walked down there and called him to one side, and he said, “I want you to come over here.” He said, “I thought I told you that you couldn’t play on this playground for the rest of the school year.” And my brother said, “But what did my daddy tell you last night?” He said, “I just want to let you know that it’s alright for you to come down and play.” (Laughter) And that was the end of it. That’s some [of] the little things that stick in your mind, you know, as a young ...

PIEHLER: Well it sounds like your dad really did stick up for you.

NIPPER: Yeah he did, uh huh.

PIEHLER: In high school ... what kind of things did you study? What was your craft study? Did you study vocational or college prep, or ...

NIPPER: As far as I know, we didn’t ...

PIEHLER: You didn’t have those tracks.

NIPPER: ... I don’t think we had that back then, or at least it wasn’t called to my attention.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: ... I did a little better than average in high school. I took ... industrial arts courses. I worked on ... the school paper, I earned a letter by working on the school paper. And we went to all the sport activities. I liked every one of my high school teachers. They were dedicated teachers, especially ... my English teacher. She was an unmarried lady, but she took that teaching to heart. She was fair and she knew how to teach and how to make you learn. And the ... principal of high school was my algebra teacher, and he was a good teacher. He used to have some funny remarks. I think he told this to me—he may have said it to the whole class, but he said, “Sometimes it’s better to keep your mouth shut and act dumb, than it is to open it and remove all doubt.” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You mentioned working for the school newspaper. Did you play any sports?

NIPPER: No, I was small for football, and ... I think we had a baseball team. I attended all the sport activities. The basketball and football was primarily, but we went to all the games. But we would play football in the neighborhood, you know, with different ones, but not actively in sports in high school.

PIEHLER: Were you involved in any clubs in high school?

NIPPER: No, I wasn't. I wasn't a Thespian. My brother was a thespian. I was in a couple of the school plays, but that's about the extent of it.

MORRIS: Do you remember the plays that you were in or what part you played?

NIPPER: I don't remember that. I know it was—and I was a stage manager one time, you know, things like that. I was sort of in the background. I didn't have any leading part or anything like that.

MORRIS: What prompted you to get involved in ... theatre? How did you even come about to audition to get a part or to ... be a stage manager?

NIPPER: Yeah, you auditioned. I just thought, "Well, all these other fellas, all these other friends of mine were," uh you know, "well there [are] quite a few people in the plays, and so, why don't I just see if I could be selected in one."

MORRIS: What got you interested in the newspaper? You said you'd done work with the newspaper.

NIPPER: I won the school typing pin (Laughs), for typing, and ... I could type more words per minute than anybody in my class. And our school paper had to be typed. And so, that's how I got involved. They wanted me to do the typing on the school paper. I didn't write any of the articles or any of the sports events, or anything like that. It was just mostly mechanical work after somebody else had given all the thought and the planning to it.

MORRIS: How often did the paper come out, the school paper?

NIPPER: It came out about, I guess maybe every two or three weeks, maybe once a month. I don't recall right off hand, but ... it just gave general information, told of sports events and different awards that people had gotten, or things like that.

MORRIS: You were talking about earlier that the grade school experience wasn't good, but that you gained, [it] sounded like you were talking about gaining some confidence in high school. Do you think it ... was a combination of the teachers, and—what do you think that ...

NIPPER: I think the teachers in high school ... knew how to make you want to learn. Now I had two or three—my first grade school teacher, I remember her name was Ms. Harris, and she was a jewel of a lady. She just made you feel like that you were in the best place that you could ever be right now. That you're going to do a good job, and we're going to help you. Then I got

up to ... the fifth grade or fourth grade, and back then we had flash cards that they'd hold up. And you were either supposed to multiply the number, or you were supposed to add it or divide it or subtract it, and write it down. She would hold 'em up and I'd write down on a piece of paper. Well, we had done that for two weeks, and the lady never took up the papers. So I said, "I'm wasting my time writing all this down." So, she'd flash those cards, and I'd act like I was writing. I didn't put a thing down. That day, I think she saw my page (Laughs), she took the papers up, mine was a blank. She bent my hand back, and she took a ruler, and she almost blistered the palm of my hand. (Laughs) But she was a good teacher too, but she, I never did do that anymore. (Laughter)

MORRIS: So it was effective, I guess, right?

NIPPER: Yeah, it was effective, yeah.

MORRIS: Well ... did you start thinking about college when you were in high school?

NIPPER: Yes. My dad being a machinist—we had a brother and sister, that's three of us, and he said, "You can stay home and work at odd jobs to pay your tuition." He says, "On my income, I can't afford to send three children to college." But he said, "I'll treat all three of you alike, if I can't send one, I won't send any." But he said, "It won't cost you a thing to stay home." And [he] said, "You help with the chores around here," and said, "You can find enough work, mowing yards and things like that, to pay your tuition." So, that's what we did, and my brother and I—and my brother after he got out of high school, he was sixteen months older than I, and ... he went to work at ALCOA, for a year, to save up money to go to college. So, we both entered college the same year. When I got out of high school—well it was before I got out of high school—the little store that was the country store near where we lived, they hired me to work in that little store. And then we mowed yards, and ... they only paid me \$2.00 a week, but it was spending money, you know, that I would not have had. And I cleaned houses. My neighbor would pay me to come in on Saturday and clean her house and do ironing and dusting and things like, not ironing, but ... sweeping and waxing the floors, and all that. And ... at this little grocery store, there was a man that worked for the TVA, and he took a liking to me. And he said, "Well you can mow my yard." And he said, "I've got a neighbor where you can mow his yard." And he said, "There's another man over there that he'll let you mow his yard." So he helped me get these yards, we didn't ... get very much for mowing. Twenty-five cents an hour is what we were making. And so I did that for about two weeks. And he was in the store one day, and I said, "Mr. Tankersley, I'm going to have to get me a job doing something. I want to go to college, and I don't have the money, and twenty-five cents an hour I can't pay the tuition." He said, "I'll give you a job, we need somebody at the TVA at Spring City." And he hired me at fifty cents an hour.

PIEHLER: What year was that ... you were hired?

NIPPER: That was in 1942. And ... he said, "It's a food-processing laboratory, in Spring City, and it's on two big barges on the lake." And he said, "There are two rooms and a bath, and you can live on that." And he said, "We've got a little truck there, and you can drive into Spring City to take your meals." And so, I went down there, I'd be down there Monday morning, and ... I

could hitchhike down there quicker than I could ride the bus down there. And then on Friday afternoon, I'd go out, and I'd hitchhike home. And this one fella stopped a couple of times and picked me up, and he said, "Do you go home every Friday evening?" I said, "Yes." He said "Well you just wait out here at five o'clock," and says, "I come through every Friday," said, "I'll haul you into Knoxville." So he did. So I made enough money that summer to pay my tuition to ... school, and it wasn't very much then. I don't know, it was, oh well, it seemed like a lot, but I wasn't making very much, so, but the comparison, I guess, was similar to what it is now.

PIEHLER: And so you entered which school ...

NIPPER: At UT ... in the fall.

PIEHLER: September of 1942.

NIPPER: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: I want to ask you ... quite a bit about UT in 1942, but a few more questions about growing up. And one question is how often did you make it to the movies, and where did you go?

NIPPER: We went to the Strand Theatre, and they had these western movies. You paid a dime, and the next year, I mean the next week, that same movie would continue. And I had a cousin that always liked to have somebody to go to the movies with me, and I didn't have the money to spend every week. He said, "I sell peanuts and popcorn at the football games," and said, "I've got the money to take you." So ... we'd hitchhike to town, and he'd pay my way into the movies. But now occasionally my mother and dad would take us to see Shirley Temple, and ... we looked forward to that. The Tennessee Theatre's where—there was the Tennessee, the Riviera Theatre, and there was a Strand, and ... a Roxy, and that was the red light theatre. You didn't go there. (Laughter) You didn't dare go there. It was on Union Avenue in Knoxville. So ... but we got to go occasionally. And we'd go to the school plays and things like that. We—everybody was in the same boat. Everybody was poor, and nobody knew any different, see? But there was some people that had an automobile. We didn't have an automobile. We had to walk. And everywhere that we went, we had to walk, or people, our neighbors would pick us up and take us to church.

PIEHLER: How would your father get to work, at ALCOA?

NIPPER: He rode with a man that worked over there, and he paid him so much a week to ride with him. And ... he paid him every week. My dad worked from two o'clock in the afternoon 'til ten at night. And the reason he did that is because the pay was a little higher when they worked that shift, either the night shift or that shift, he was able to ... earn a little bit more money. But ... that walking got pretty old, and ... I had a friend that had a bicycle. And he wanted to sell it, and he wanted ten dollars for it. And I didn't have ten dollars, but I mowed yards, and I could pay him a dollar a week. And I told him, I said, "I'd like the bicycle, but if you'll sell it to me for a dollar down and a dollar a week 'til I get it paid for, I'll take it." So, he did that. And so, man, I could just, I could load that ... lawnmower—it was one of those old reel

type push mowers. I could load that on my bicycle. And my old dog and I, we'd just go out in the community, and we'd just mow yards right and left, and you didn't have to .... Before, I'd have, see, not many people had a lawnmower. And we had a lawnmower, and we would use our lawnmower to mow other people's yard. And you'd use that old swinging cycle to cut the high grass down, 'cause they would pay you. The first time you mowed the yard, you didn't get paid, until the next time they wanted you to mow the yard. So they would pay you for the time that you'd already mowed, after they called you to mow it again. But our agreement would be every week. But they'd wait two weeks to sometimes three weeks, and they'd still pay us the same, so, but anyway. It was interesting, I think back on it, it was those were pretty good times.

PIEHLER: Growing up, before going to college, had you traveled very much?

NIPPER: I had been out of the state of Tennessee one time.

PIEHLER: And where did you go?

NIPPER: It was just across the Georgia line ... below Chattanooga. We had a, I had an aunt that lived in Chattanooga, and she had a son that was, of course, my first cousin. And we went down there one time, and they took us—I expected to see the, see the soil a little different on the other side of that line, but it wasn't. (Laughter) But I had not been out of the state of Tennessee except that one time, until I went in service.

PIEHLER: And how far west, even in this state, had you been? Had you been to Nashville growing up or ...

NIPPER: No. I've since been to Nashville and Memphis and ...

PIEHLER: But growing up?

NIPPER: No.

PIEHLER: No.

NIPPER: Chattanooga was as far as I'd ever gone. And we'd go around the loop at the mountains, the old road that went around. That was the highlight of a weekend, you know, when ...

PIEHLER: So you would go up to the park ...

NIPPER: Yes.

PIEHLER: Well even before ...

NIPPER: But we always rode with somebody else, see, we didn't have a car, and the neighbors would invite us to go with them.

MORRIS: Did you ever see Lookout Mountain, in Chattanooga?

NIPPER: Yes. We wanted to ride that cable car up the mountain, but it cost too much. We went with someone else there. We ... didn't have our own vehicle to go down there.

MORRIS: Was it always neighbors or friends ... sometimes friends?

NIPPER: Neighbors or friends.

MORRIS: It'd be the whole family of the neighbors, or ...

NIPPER: Well, sometimes it would be the whole family, and sometimes it'd be just—they would invite my brother and me to go with them. In fact, I had a neighbor that liked to fish, and he'd invite me to go fishing with him.

MORRIS: When you were—of course you talked about when you entered UT. Do you remember where you were when you heard that Pearl Harbor had been attacked?

NIPPER: Yeah, it was on a ... Sunday afternoon. I don't remember the exact date. But I was listening to the radio. And ... through the static—that radio we had had a lot of static, and it's difficult sometimes to hear what was being said. But President Roosevelt came on the air and said that we had been attacked by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor, and that we was declaring a state of war. I remember it quite well.

MORRIS: Did you know anything about the war going on in Europe before ... Pearl Harbor had been attacked? Did you keep up with that much?

NIPPER: You mean World War I?

MORRIS: Well, when in 1939 when the Germans invaded and all that?

NIPPER: I remember reading about when Hitler invaded Poland, and some of the struggles that those people were having. That that—but I had no recollection of anything ... in the Pacific. And I'd hear some stories about World War I, and I had a neighbor who fought in World War I. But nothing outstanding that I can recall.

MORRIS: What was your reaction when you heard that Pearl Harbor had been attacked? What did you—do you remember how you reacted to that?

NIPPER: I remember my mother and dad saying, "Well those boys are gonna have to go to war." I remember their saying that, but I listened to the radio ... regularly to see what was going on and about the devastation. Then you'd see pictures in the newspaper. But see there was no television or anything to show. It was all by radio.

MORRIS: Did you listen to the radio a lot?

NIPPER: Oh yes.

MORRIS: Do you remember about when you got a radio?

NIPPER: I remember, I was in about the, I guess about the seventh grade. We bought a Philco radio, and ... back then you bought it and brought it home and paid fifty cents a week on it, or whatever, you know, whatever the terms were.

MORRIS: Were there any particular programs that you liked?

NIPPER: I always listened to *Lum & Abner*, and ... there was another one, *Amos n' Andy*, and there were a lot of programs, quiz programs ... that you would listen where they'd give prizes. They'd ask questions, and the people would answer. And they'd say, "Give them five silver dollars," for answering the question correctly and so on. It was like some of these TV shows, but it was all by ... sound rather than sight.

MORRIS: Did the whole family kind of gather around together?

NIPPER: Yeah, oh yeah, when *Lum & Abner* and *Amos n' Andy*, everybody gathered around. And it was just—you didn't do anything during that, see it only lasted about fifteen minutes I think. And there was another one that we used to, another program we used to listen to called *Inner Sanctum*. And they opened a screaming door at the opening of it. We listened to that. And there were some others that I don't recall right off the ...

MORRIS: *The Shadow*? Did you ever listen to *The Shadow* or ...

NIPPER: I may have, but I don't recall it.

MORRIS: How 'bout the ... along the line [of] ... the movies ... you talked about Shirley Temple, and—do any of the movies, in particular, stand out that you saw, when you saw the different movies? Do you remember any that you just really, really were fond of ...

NIPPER: Well ... all those western movies with Tom Mix and ... all those others. They were all the very same thing, the good guy was after the mean guy. And ... I liked all of them. But I wouldn't go every week now. I'd go maybe once a month or sometimes it'd be two weeks in a row. It just depended on—but ... I liked *The Three Stooges* too. (Laughter) I think I saw them on television not too long ago, somewhere, re-runs.

PIEHLER: But you used to go see them in the theatre?

NIPPER: I bet they're hilarious, aren't they?

MORRIS: Did you have a favorite stooge, three stooge, a lot of people say they like Curly?

NIPPER: I just liked all of them. (Laughs)



PIEHLER: What about any war movies growing up? Do you remember any stick out?

NIPPER: Yeah. Now I watched, is it *Casablanca*, wasn't that a ...

PIEHLER: Yes.

NIPPER: Wasn't that a .... But, now, that was after the war, I believe, or it may have been ...

PIEHLER: It was during the war.

NIPPER: ... during the war. I remember seeing that. See, I would go to the movies. After I went in service ...

PIEHLER: Did you go to the movies in war?

NIPPER: I made \$75 dollars a month. (Laughter) And I could go once in a while.

PIEHLER: So going into the military was a big increase in pay?

NIPPER: A big increase, more money than I had ever thought about. Even as a .... I started out—I was a private. [Of] course I had to take all the exams and everything to get into the Air Force. And ... I thought. Well, I had to go to ... I passed the mental test. Then I had to go to have a physical test, and it was here in town. I was in school over at UT. And ... the doctor gave me all those exams, and I never had, I never had had a physical before. I'd been to the doctor, you know, for a little treatments and so on, but I'd never had a physical. And he gave me this physical, and he said, "Everything looks good. I don't believe I took your blood pressure." And he took my blood pressure. He says, "You'll never get in the Air Force with blood pressure like this." He said, "I don't know whether to send you to the hospital, to send you home or what." But he said, "Your blood pressure is way abnormal." He said, "Are you excited?" I said, "Yes, I am. I'm scared to death." And I explained to him that's the first physical I'd ever had. And he said, "I tell you what you do. You go home, and don't you eat a meal in the morning, or at noon, and come back up here that next afternoon." And says, "Don't let this thing bother you." [He] said, "You're excited. That'll escalate your blood pressure." So, he took my blood pressure, and it was normal, and so, they accepted me.

PIEHLER: Otherwise, you might not have gotten in the service at all.

NIPPER: Right.

MORRIS: What made you start ... what made you start thinking about the service in the first place?

NIPPER: Okay, I was in my, the last—let's see, they had quarters back then. These are semesters now, aren't they?

PIEHLER: Yeah, they're quarters.

NIPPER: Okay.

PIEHLER: You were in your third quarter. ...

NIPPER: I was in my third quarter, I believe.

PIEHLER: Or at least second quarter. You enlisted in February of 1943. So ...

NIPPER: Yeah. Okay. Anyway ... I was almost finished the second quarter, I guess it was. And ... I knew I was eighteen in September, and I knew I was going to be drafted. And I said, "The best thing for me to do is to join what branch of service I'd like to be in." So, I took the Air Force exam, and they said, "It will be at least six months before you'll be called up." [They] said, "You'll be able to finish that quarter and possibly, the entire year." And so three weeks after (laughter) I put my ... signature on that dotted line, I was in Miami, Florida, as a private making \$50.00 a month.

PIEHLER: Well going, before going into the military, I did say I wanted to ask you something about UT. What was UT like in ... September of 1942?

NIPPER: They gave—you had to take an entrance examination, and they put everybody—it was held down in the gymnasium. Now it's not the same gym now, I don't think. And we had to take ... military science. That was a requirement for all ... people, all men. And ... ROTC is what they called it. And ... we had to do ... marching and all this. It was a required subject. We had to take that examination before we could enter university, to see if you were qualified. And ... I must have been qualified. (Laughs) Some of those questions I'd never heard of before, but anyway ... I got in. And I was making pretty good grades, seemed like some of it was ... the same thing I'd had in high school in algebra and English and some of those things. The English professor that I had ...

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

PIEHLER: So ... you had Professor Hodges for your freshman English ...

NIPPER: Yeah. He was a good teacher. I don't think he taught many classes, but I think he just taught this one, but ... I liked him. And he just made you want to learn. And I had good teachers. I had one algebra teacher, and, [of] course, I was eighteen years old. And she was pretty as could be. (Laughter) And I thought, "Boy I sure am glad I selected this class." (Laughter) And she was pretty and had a beautiful figure, and sometimes they'd make little catty remarks. But, she was a good teacher. I mean ... it was a plus, the fact that she was pretty to look at, you know, made you want to learn. (Laughter) And ... I took, I was in engineering, and ... one of my courses was in surveying. I had mechanical drawing and surveying, and ... there was one other course in engineering that we had to take the freshman year. But anyway, we had to survey the whole hill. They had locations, and you had three people in your survey party. And I had my grammar school sweetheart as one of the members. Both of 'em—and the other one I went to high school with, and two girls and one boy. The two nicest, the ... only two

engineering students in university at that time, and I had both of them in my survey party. And I said, "If you all will do all the paperwork, I'll carry that transit around, and I'll plumb it and set it up, and we'll make an A in this course." And we did. Every one of us made an A. I made a hundred on the final exam that time, and the professor said that's the only time anybody [had] ever made a hundred on the surveying course. But I liked it, it was interesting. But I learned the most ... I think with a professor, and I don't recall ... Brown, Professor Brown. And he taught engineering problems, and we used a slide rule. And he had a collection of slide rules that was burned up, I mean he, just hundreds of slide rules. But I learned more about ... engineering problems under him. I mean he just, he just intrigued you to where you'd had to find an answer to whatever the problem was. And all of my teachers were that way, they were .... In chemistry, I wasn't too hip on chemistry. But you had a lecture, and it lasted an hour, I guess. And then you went to the laboratory and did all the experimental work in the laboratory. And it was late. And ... I don't know, do they go to school here on Saturday?

PIEHLER: No, not anymore.

NIPPER: We went to school Saturday 'til noon. Our last class would be 'til noon. And my last lab would be six o'clock. I mean the end of it would be six—it lasted two hours. But I enjoyed it, but ... chemistry wasn't my easiest learned subject.

MORRIS: What did you expect to do? Did you have some goals at the time? As far as ...

NIPPER: I thought I wanted to be an engineer. And ... after I came out of service, I worked for DuPont for thirteen years. I managed an office. It was a sales organization. And I wanted to—it was a lot of detail work, and it was a good company to work for. I learned a lot. I learned how to operate a business working for [them]. They could ... count the hairs on a buffalo and tell you how many were missing. (Laughter) It was that—they taught you how to operate a business and know where you were making a profit or where you were losing money. And I worked for thirteen years, and I told 'em, I said, "I'm tired of this detail work sending in reports every day of the,"—it had to go out regardless of what happened. It had to go to Wilmington, Delaware to the main office. And so [I said], "I want to be in sales." And they said, "Well, we'll give you a few customers to call on, but you still got to do this other job." Well, I couldn't do both and do justice to both. I had to come in on Saturday—we just worked five days a week. I had to come in on Saturday. I'd take work home. Then I'd come in on ... Sunday afternoon and work all afternoon. And I was in New Orleans, Louisiana, and I said, "There's got to be a better way." Well this was after the war, now. And so I left, I said, "I wanna be in sales." And I saw right then that they weren't gonna replace me—that they'd have difficulty getting somebody to fill my job. The man that hired me took my job, that's how desperate they were for people at that job. (Laughter) And that was thirteen years later, and ... so I resigned, they tried to get me to stay, but I said, "No, I've made up my mind, I'm gonna be in sales. I think I can sell." And I took a job as a salesman.

PIEHLER: Where did you go into sales?

NIPPER: I went with an old established company. Here they called it Chandler & Company of the building materials place. And ... they sold factory-built cabinets. And I thought that that

would be something nobody wanted to fool with that, but it was a big ticket item. And I made a higher commission on that. And then, they sold that company. So, I went with another company, and I thought, “You know, if I can make money for another company, and make good money on sales commissions, why not just open my own business?” So that’s what I did.

PIEHLER: When did you go into your own business?

NIPPER: 1972.

MORRIS: And that was Kitchen Planning?

NIPPER: Uh, huh.

MORRIS: And you were there for ... twenty years.

NIPPER: Mm hmm. My wife came to work for me one day a week to do some of the bookwork and stayed there nineteen years.

PIEHLER: How big did the company become? Was it just ...

NIPPER: I made real good in it. We were a family ...

PIEHLER: A family company.

NIPPER: Uh, huh. My wife and I was—my wife was the secretary and treasurer, and I was the president. And then I had ... two of my sons working for me. And we did real well, I was able to give ‘em a bonus every year and pay ‘em enough to where they could live to get the bonus. (Laughter) But I enjoyed it. I’d meet people every day of the—I’ve done sales on residences for a \$100,000. I mean, I went the high echelon, exclusive route. And it, I met the nicest people. I mean professional people, doctors and attorneys and people like that, and ... I got along fine with ‘em. I’d bend over backwards to see that they were happy with what we did. I didn’t do the mechanical work.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: We did the design, and we ordered ‘em factories, and they shipped ‘em. Most of ‘em were, most of our products were shipped from ... Pennsylvania. Quaker Maid and ... Coppes Nappanee in Nappanee, Indiana, and Wood-Mode ... those were some of our distributors. I mean some of our suppliers.

MORRIS: How did you meet ... I have never heard this story. How did you meet Bonnie? How did you all first meet?

NIPPER: This is gonna surprise you. My aunt married a man who was a principal of a high school, and they were having an eighth grade play. And we didn’t go to his school, but ... they were having an eighth grade play at their school. And I saw this little girl trip across the stage,

and this is at the eighth grade. I thought, “Boy, that’s the cutest little girl I believe I ever saw in my life.” (Laughter) And I was in the eighth grade myself, and ... I thought, “Boy, if she could just be my sweetheart.” And I thought about her for the longest time after that. And then [I] went to high school. Well, she entered the same high school that I did, and I didn’t have any way to ... take a girl out. Nobody had a car, (laughs) and it was one of those things that it’s hard to date somebody and not take ‘em to the movies, or out to eat. That’s generally what you did, go to the movies and ... eat, and that’s it. And I still liked her, and I was too timid and backward to ask her for a date. Well, my aunt’s husband said, “If you want to go out on a date, I’ll loan you my car.” And he did. The very last day of my senior year, I ask her for a date, and she accepted. (Laughter) So we dated from then on ...

PIEHLER: Even when you were in service ... you stayed in touch?

NIPPER: Well we stayed in touch, uh huh. After I came out of service, it was two years before we got married.

PIEHLER: But you at least laid eyes on her since eighth grade?

NIPPER: Yeah, oh yeah. And I’ve thought about that so many times, you know, and little did you know it would’ve come to pass.

PIEHLER: Actually, I just wanna ...

(Tape Pause)

PIEHLER: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor occurred? You mentioned hearing Roosevelt’s address, but what about the actual bombing? The actual attack itself, do you remember? It was a Sunday.

NIPPER: ... I remember the announcement on the radio.

PIEHLER: You do.

NIPPER: ... and I remember it was on a Sunday afternoon.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: We were sitting in the living room, I mean at home, and it came on the radio.

PIEHLER: Now you had graduated from high school in ... 1941.

NIPPER: No ... 1942. I was in [the] Class of ‘42.

PIEHLER: Okay ... and then you worked for that summer ...

NIPPER: That summer of ‘42.

PIEHLER: So you got ...

NIPPER: ... 'til September.

PIEHLER: So you got a good paying job. That was a real break, that TVA job.

NIPPER: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: How did the war change things in your high school?

NIPPER: There were a lot of changes. Number one, the seniors—when the war broke out, a lot of 'em didn't complete their senior year and joined the service.

PIEHLER: Right away.

NIPPER: Right away. Uh huh. I've got, I don't know how many of my friends joined the service. And ... we had one fella that he was a comic (laughs), but he said, "I decided to be a patriotic American and go join the navy." And he said, "I think that if I go out there, if they send me out there to San Diego, and I don't like it," he said, "I'll just come back home." He said, "They wouldn't let me come back home." (Laughter) The only reason I signed up is that I knew I was going to be drafted.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: And I wanted to get in the branch of the service that I felt like I would enjoy.

PIEHLER: And so the air force was that the pretty obvious ...

NIPPER: Yeah. Nothing else entered my mind. That was what I wanted to do.

MORRIS: Did it go back to, you talked about ... that developing interest in airplanes and everything ...

NIPPER: I don't know ...

MORRIS: ... did it go back to that?

NIPPER: ... I've always been interested ... in stories about flight, about Orville and Wilbur Wright and, you know, the different ones, the history of flight and so on. And ... I just thought, "Well that'd be a good branch of the service to be in." And we went through a lot of rigorous training, and ... we went to a lot of school. We had to do a lot of memory work. I mean it wasn't just going out there and learning to fly an airplane. There was a lot more to it than that.

MORRIS: What did your—you said your parents, when you heard about, when the announcement was made about Pearl Harbor, they said, "Well those boys are gonna go to ..."

NIPPER: She said: “Well I, I hope the boys don’t have to go, but I’ll bet they will.”

MORRIS: Did she mean you all, or did she ...

NIPPER: Yeah, my brother and me.

MORRIS: And you indicated on there two—I noticed that somebody else in the family was in the service, was that your brother?

NIPPER: Yeah, my brother.

MORRIS: How did he end up in the service and what branch?

NIPPER: He was in the navy. He was gonna try to join the naval air force, and his eyesight wouldn’t permit him to pass the test.

MORRIS: Did he also join because he thought he would get drafted? Or do you know why he ...

NIPPER: He joined before I did. I’m sure of that. He knew he was going to be called too because, see, he was sixteen months older than I was. And I went in ... shortly after he did.

MORRIS: When did you start thinking that, do you remember when you started thinking ... that you would be drafted? Apparently, was it when you heard in high school that ... Pearl Harbor had been attacked, or was it after that?

NIPPER: Well I knew I wouldn’t be drafted until I was eighteen because they wouldn’t take you. Navy may have taken them at seventeen, I don’t know, with parent permission, but ... the air force wouldn’t take you until you were eighteen, see? So, I thought about it my eighteenth birthday, that’s when I began to think that I’m going to have to go because they’ll draft me if I don’t.

MORRIS: But around Pearl Harbor, you didn’t look that far down the pike, I guess, and think, “Well when I turn 18,” that, “I’m going ....” Cause you didn’t know.

NIPPER: No. I, no it didn’t really. It didn’t really cross my mind. It uh ...

MORRIS: When you said you ... began your training the first place was Miami. What did you do ... in Miami?

NIPPER: We stayed in the hotels—they had the floors covered, the real nice floors covered with ... pine flooring. And it was right on the beach, I could throw a rock and hit the ocean. I never had been out of the state of Tennessee, except down there in Georgia (laughs) until that time. And it was rigorous training, they ran you through—[of] course I had been doing a lot of calisthenics over at UT, and ... we had to take physical education, exercises here. And I could

skin that rope—they had a big rope about that big around, (demonstrates) and I could hand walk that thing to the top of that gymnasium. I was the only one that I ever saw go all the way to the top of that thing. And it was a challenge to me. Why, if they want you to do it, you're supposed to be able to do it. And I could do that, I could skin that like a monkey. And I was in good physical condition, but we had a lot of people—see ... there weren't just prospective pilots in the group down there. It was to get you physically in good condition. And there were office people that had never done any calisthenics of any kind. And they put 'em out there, and a sergeant would stand over you, and you were going to do it. If you didn't do the push-up, if you didn't do what they, and .... I was sore, I could hardly walk. And these poor people, I think they'd just almost pass out. And they would make 'em go back later and do extra calisthenics until they got that soreness worked out. And we had to run, we had to run, like five miles. We had to go over all these obstacle courses and so on, but ... I enjoyed it. I didn't have any problem with it at all.

PIEHLER: I just wanna back up just a little bit. You mentioned ... having the physical here in Knoxville. That's where the physical was?

NIPPER: Yes.

PIEHLER: The induction physical.

NIPPER: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: Where did you report after Knoxville? Was it directly to Miami, or did you report to Memphis?

NIPPER: It was ...

PIEHLER: Or Nashville?

NIPPER: I went to Nashville, and I can't remember whether it was before ...

PIEHLER: Because ... people have told me that is where ... they segregated whether you were going to pilot's training, navigation ...

NIPPER: I believe ... I went to Nashville, and they did. We had a series of tests that we had to go through with, and I'm trying to think if it was before, I believe I went to...

PIEHLER: Miami first?

NIPPER: ... Nashville.

PIEHLER: First?

NIPPER: And then ... it was either before or after, but I believe it was after Miami.

PIEHLER: Miami.



NIPPER: And I think after Miami, they sent us to Maryville College, and then I think ... they sent us to Nashville, and then to Maxwell Field, Alabama. That was the sequence, I believe.

PIEHLER: How long were you in Miami?

NIPPER: I was there about two months.

PIEHLER: Two months.

NIPPER: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: And so you had a lot of drill ...

NIPPER: Yeah, a lot of drill. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: And inspections ...

NIPPER: Inspections, yeah.

PIEHLER: What about KP? Did you ...

NIPPER: Yeah, they'd put you on KP, and ... I thought I'd be smart and hurry and get all those pots and pans washed. (Laughs) About the time you hurry and got through, here came another great big load of 'em, you couldn't win. (Laughter) But when we were in Miami there were four of us that roomed in a room together. And they told us to scrub our barracks. [The sergeant] said, "I want them clean when I come in here with white gloves," and they'd rub it across the top of the doorsill to see if you'd dusted that. And then they'd call us, had us to stand inspection, and they'd come through there and check it all out, had us all to fall out in formation. Said, "Those are the dirtiest, raunchiest barracks" that they had ever seen. [The sergeant said], "And I mean I want you to get back in that room and clean those rooms." Well I went in and I got me a bucket, (laughs) here I started scrubbin'. And my roommate says, "What are you doin'?" I said, "Didn't you hear the sergeant say 'scrub those rooms'?" He said, "Oh they have to do that." [He] says, "Just don't worry about it." He said, "It'll be alright, this next time they come in ...." We didn't do a thing. (Laughs) I took his—he said, "I've been to military school." Said, "I know how they do." They came back in [and said], "Well that looks much better." (Laughter) We hadn't done anything.

PIEHLER: You were also ... well you were getting a lot of training in Miami. You were also in Miami, and you were right on the beach.

NIPPER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you have any fun in Miami?

NIPPER: We would go—I had a friend from our community that was sent down there, and our church had a paper that they sent to all the servicemen, and they’d tell where each one was. And I met this fella there, and it was just like going back home almost, you know, to be able to see somebody that you had grown up with. But ... yeah we’d look around Miami [is] about all, but you had to ride the bus, you know, and I don’t remember what all the activities were that we did down there, but ...

PIEHLER: Well did you go to any USO dances or to the USO canteen?

NIPPER: Not down there. We did—when I was stationed in Camp Springs, Maryland, that’s after I graduated flying school. They had a dance on the base there, and they wanted people to come down and dance with these different people, the women, you know. And ... it was enjoyable. I met one lady, she was going to George Washington University, and her father worked for the State Department. And when I was in ... Camp Springs, Maryland, you could just catch a bus and go into Washington, D.C. Now I went there about, oh, once or twice a week. And ... she invited me down to her house for dinner, meet her family and so on, and they were real pleasant to me, they were just real nice people. And then I went to Millville, New Jersey for gunnery training and dive-bombing training. And ... I came, I had to come back through Washington to Richmond, Virginia. And I called her, and they had me out there for dinner, but, you know, just .... They were real pleasant, real pleasant people and who tried to show you a good time. [Of] course, back then I didn’t realize that food and stuff was rationed, and it was a chore for them to prepare a meal, and they just prepared some of the nicest meals, you know. I don’t even remember the lady, the girl’s name now, but, I know she did go to ... George Washington University. I don’t remember what year she was in, she was close to graduating.

MORRIS: And you had met her at a USO function ...

NIPPER: Well it was there on the base. They had ...

MORRIS: Oh, okay.

NIPPER: ... had a club there on the base, and, of course I couldn’t dance, I’d just walk all over anybody. (Laughter) They’d say, “Well you’re a good dancer.” I knew good and well I wasn’t. (Laughter)

MORRIS: Well at Maryville College ... what did they have you doing at Maryville College?

NIPPER: We went to school there for about three or four months. We studied navigation and meteorology, and we had orientation flights in little Piper Cubs there off of the ... airfield. We never did solo. But ... my instructor was Litton Cochran who owned the McDonald’s chains here in Knoxville. And after I graduated from flying school, I got a leave about a month after I graduated, and I came home on leave and pulled in on the train down at the southern railroad, the L&N Railroad Station and got off of the train. And the first person I walked into was Litton Cochran. Some of his people had died that lived out of state, and they were shipping the body, and he looked up and saw me and called me by name. And I thought that was remarkable that he had that good of a memory.

MORRIS: The Piper Cubs, did you fly those over at ... I mean at the McGhee, was it called McGhee Tyson?

NIPPER: Yeah.

MORRIS: McGhee Tyson or Tyson?

NIPPER: Yeah, McGhee Tyson.

MORRIS: McGhee Tyson.

NIPPER: Uh huh, yeah. Yeah, we flew 'em, but the instructor was always with us. We didn't get to solo. They'd ... make you take off and land and tell you what to do and what you were doing wrong. And they would chew you out, I mean (laughs) they could call you some names that you didn't like to hear. I've been called some worse names when I was in advance flying school, but ...

PIEHLER: So the salty language of the Army ... was something, of the Army Air Force, was something of a surprise? Or, the salty language, the ...

NIPPER: Yeah. In basic training, that was the second airplane in the air force training group that we did, it was a BT-13. They called it a "Vultee Vibrator." And there—you had an instructor that you'd train with, and then you'd go out and solo and do the instructions that he'd given you. Every so often they would have ... another officer give you a check ride. He'd be a captain or a major or some higher rank than your regular instructor. Most of the instructors were second lieutenants. And mine was scheduled after a buddy of mine O.L. Oatman, the one that I still see occasionally. And what they would normally do, they'd ... they had these little microphones right in here (demonstrates) it was difficult to understand what people said. But he had his check ride. And normally they just pull the plane up, and leave the engine running, and the student gets out, and then I would get in. And they'd take on off. This time he pulled up, shut the engine off, and they both got out. And he stood him up there by that airplane, and he said, "That was the sorriest ride I have ever seen." He said, "I'm gonna try you one more time, and if you don't do any better than that you're outta here." And he said—called him a name or two. And, of course, he was just ready to, he just thought that was it that he'd be washed out. So he said, "Get in the plane. Let's see if you can do any better." So I climbed in and started the engine. He said, "Can you hear me?" (Laughs) I said, "Yes, sir." But I couldn't understand what he was saying, I could hear him. I thought he said, "Get in the plane and take off and climb 'til I tell you to level out." But what he told me was, "Get in the plane and climb to 5,000 feet and level out." Well at 13,000 feet I said, "Sir, when do you want me to level out?" (Laughter) That's when he called me an SOB. (Laughter) And he whacked that stick back-and-forth—and they can beat your knees, I mean they just make your knees on the side just feel like you'd been stomped on. He said, "Let me have this plane." And he put it in a spin and corkscrewed that thing down to 5,000 feet. And he said, "Now," and he went through, said, "Now do me a chandelle," which is a maneuver they had you to do. He didn't like that. He wanted me to turn it upside down and come around with the chandelle. And then he wanted Immelmann, didn't like

that. Everything I did he didn't like. He says, "I'm," oh he said, "You SOB, what have you got in your head beside the block of wood?" I believe those are [the] exact words he said. (Laughter) And I, I've already had my bag packed, I was ready to leave for ... glider school. (Laughs) So, he said, "Let me have this thing, I'm gone land it." And landing is a major part of your ... check ride. He pulled it in and got out. I got out. I thought, "Well where are they going to send me?" He said, "That was a damn good ride." I could not believe it. The only thing I've ever been able to figure out – that he was trying to get me rattled. And I didn't get rattled, apparently. But I—and he made that other fella ride the second time. But that's what he said, "That was a damn good ride."

PIEHLER: And you, you had packed your bags?

NIPPER: I was ready to go. I'd already was trying to figure out where they were gonna send me. (Laughter) But they always kept you in suspense, you never knew from ... one day to the next how long you were going to be there.

PIEHLER: You mentioned over lunch that ... you thought it was great when they sent you to ... Maryville for flight school.

NIPPER: Yeah!

PIEHLER: ... the first stage of flight school.

NIPPER: Right.

PIEHLER: And that you had hoped to sort of even live at home if you could.

NIPPER: Uh, well, I thought I ...

PIEHLER: ... and you got a rude sort of awakening about what would happen.

NIPPER: Uh, I thought I'd be able to come home on the weekends, I knew I wouldn't be able to come home during the week. They just didn't ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: ... permit that. And somebody got the measles, and that's quarantine for three weeks. And right after that, somebody else caught 'em, you know, and that's three more weeks. And I think somebody got the mumps, and I think I got to come home one time. And that was about it.

PIEHLER: You never got these ... the mumps or the measles?

NIPPER: No. ...

PIEHLER: ... but you were under the quarantine?

NIPPER: Yeah, uh, if one person got the mumps or measles, the whole ...

PIEHLER: The whole ...

NIPPER: ... unit was quarantined. So, they didn't want it to get out somewhere else. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Now where did you, you lived on campus in the dorms, in the dormitories?

NIPPER: Yeah. Uh huh. ...

PIEHLER: Were there any civilians on campus?

NIPPER: Uh yeah ... the regular school was there.

PIEHLER: You didn't take classes with them, did you?

NIPPER: No. No. Ours were separate classes. And we had military instructors.

MORRIS: And how long were you ...

NIPPER: No, wait a minute ... we had some civilian instructors.

PIEHLER: But you were just military in living ...

NIPPER: Yeah, uh huh. Yeah.

PIEHLER: You were with ... fellow cadets?

NIPPER: Right. See ... we were an aviation cadet then.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: Our pay went up to \$75 a month. We were in high clover.

PIEHLER: I'm just curious because your father was at ALCOA. I assume his hours went up, and pay went up. Would that be correct during the war? Do you ...

NIPPER: Yes. And he got a lot of overtime. He could work seven days a week.

PIEHLER: And what about your mother, did she work? Did she work outside of ... the piano teaching?

NIPPER: No.

PIEHLER: ... in war?

NIPPER: No.

PIELHER: She didn't ...

NIPPER: No. She was either a homemaker, or she'd teach lessons. And usually they would come to the house. I know all those John Thompson, (laughs) the books that the .... Well, in our church, just about everybody that can play a piano or an organ, she taught.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. She didn't play in the church, did she?

NIPPER: She was church pianist and organist for about thirty-five years.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. Did she get paid for that?

NIPPER: No, it was—she wouldn't take pay for it. She said that was her talent and her gift to the church. In fact, our church does not pay for the organist and pianist now. And the organist is, now, is ... one of my mother's pupils.

PIEHLER: Really? So the tradition .... Is it the same church ...

NIPPER: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: What church is it?

NIPPER: It's ... Mt. Olive on Old Maryville Highway.

PIEHLER: And so you've been going to the same church since you ...

NIPPER: After my wife and I married, we went to her church. She went to a little church called Meridian over on the old Sevierville Highway. It was a small church. And ... I learned by dating her we would go to church there, and then sometimes we'd go to our church. But when we decided to get married, I said, "Well, if you want to get married in our church, since there's more ... space, much larger church, uh, you're welcome to." She said, "If I do that," [she] said, "a lot of my friends will think I'm just trying to show off or be stuck up or something like that." I said, "Well whatever you wanna do." And we ... got married and that little church was full. They were hanging—back then they didn't have air conditioning. The windows were up, and they kept the back doors open. And people were standing outside looking in the back door at the wedding and hanging in the windows.

MORRIS: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: ... They were, I don't know how many people were there, but it, there wasn't a room for anybody ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: And ... I was glad that we did. Since then, that church has expanded and moved onto Chapman Highway, and it's a pretty good-sized church now. And then when we went there until our children started to high school. And they ... wanted to go to Doyle High School.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: Because all their friends at church went to Doyle High School. So we moved back to my home church. So we've been there ever since.

PIEHLER: And your wife's church, that was a Baptist church also?

NIPPER: Yes, uh huh.

MORRIS: When your ... when your father's pay increased during the war, and he got all the overtime ...

NIPPER: Mm hmm.

MORRIS: ... how did that affect the ... family life as far as, you know, you hadn't had a car and all those things—did it make any changes?

NIPPER: He went all through the war without ... without an automobile. The only car that ... we had was after—my brother and I bought a Model A little roadster. A 1930 Model A Roadster with a rumble seat in it. We paid a \$135 for it, and we went together and bought it. And we drove it to school. But my dad didn't buy a car until I came out of service. I bought one when I came out of service, and then he bought one.

MORRIS: Now was that the Roadster that you and your brother bought after the service, or was that—did you all buy that before the ...

NIPPER: Well, we left it at home, and he could drive it, you know, while ... we were gone. And my brother didn't want it any longer, and so I paid him for his part of it. And when I came out of service, I think I sold that thing for \$500. And I thought it was worn out, and the fella drove it to Miami, had new rings put in it, drove it to Canada and then back home. (Laughter) So it still had a lot of good miles in it.

PIEHLER: Well, plus, you made quite a profit at the time. I mean ...

NIPPER: Well, of course the dollar wasn't worth as much then, you know, as it was prior to the war.

PIEHLER: But so that's, usually cars lose value, not increase. (Laughter) So after ... Maryville you were sent to ...

NIPPER: I was sent to Maxwell Field, Alabama. And that was all groundwork too, there was no flying there.

PIEHLER: No flying.

NIPPER: No, no. And there's where ... they would wash people out. We did a lot of calisthenics and ... a lot of ground school. We had to learn the Morse code and all that, you know to, and radio and stuff like that. And they had a B-24 air base there, and we'd watch the B-24s—students would practice landings there. And one thing that they required [was] no cheating on any test. And ... I don't know whether this actually happened, whether they caught somebody cheating. But you would have to get up at midnight with class "A" uniform and assemble out, just like you were having a parade, and they'd call off somebody's name and says, "His name is never to be mentioned again" that he was washed out for cheating. And I never did know any of them, but that happened a number of times down there. And ... it was, it was rigid training there too, but then ... we were sent to Camden, Arkansas, to a little air base down there, and we flew PT-23s. It was a little low wing, twin-seated ... airplane with five radial cylinders, and it was open cockpit, and it was cold. We had to fly with a great old big Eskimo suit on. And my instructor's name was, his last name was Cobbyman. He rode a motorcycle. And he was a good instructor. And you were supposed to have eight hours flying time with an instructor before you solo. And one day he stopped the plane, and he got out, and he says, "It's yours." Well I just had seven hours in and he didn't know it. I knew it, but I didn't say anything. (Laughter) And so, he said, "It's yours, you're ready, take off." So I took off and brought it back in, landed. And then they would give us different instruction on how to do snap rolls ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: ... and spins and loops and Chandelles and all those. They started us out on that on the first plane. And he was showing this cadet, said, "Today we're gonna do snap rolls." And he said, "I'm going to do a snap roll," and they talked about it before they got in the plane and showed 'em what to do with the stick and the rudder and so on. And said, "Now I'm gonna do one, I want you to watch the controls and everything, then I want you to do one." So the instructor was in the front seat, he did the snap roll and whipped it around. He said, "Now you do one." Nothing happened. [Instructor said], "Go ahead and do the snap roll." Still nothing happened. The cadet had forgotten to fasten his harness, and he slung him out when he showed him the snap roll. When the instructor showed him the snap roll, there he was floatin' down in his parachute. (Laughter) In fact, that was the last time he was in an airplane too, I think. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: That's fairly memorable ...

NIPPER: Uh huh. So after that, we went to Malden, Missouri, which is another air base. And that was where the guy told me that I did a good ride. (Laughs) That I never thought I'd leave, in the Air Force from there. But we were there for a couple of months, and we soloed, and we did all the aerobatics and so on. And from there we went to Spence Field, Moultrie, Georgia—a little god-forsaken town way down there in southern Georgia. And we flew the AT-6s. And it had the ... retractable landing gear, it had the controllable pitch prop, it was a souped up airplane, it'd do all kinds of aerobatics, and ... you could do just about anything with it. And we that was a good-flying airplane I enjoyed it. It was real, a step up from what we had been



accustomed to. And I had an instructor that was pretty easy to get along with. He had a—you weren't supposed to get out there and rat race around the clouds.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: But he [would] take us out—there'd be four of us and we'd go around the clouds and go in there. And you weren't supposed to let 'em know about you at the base, if you said anything over the radio, they heard it back at the air base. (Laughter) And I got separated, I went in one of those clouds, and I couldn't get out of it. And the carburetor started icing up, but they got a switch there where you can ... de-ice the carburetor. The thing will stop popping and cracking and you think the engine is gonna quit. And he called out on the radio and says, "Where are ya, John?" I said, "I'm over here in the clouds." Boy I heard from him (laughs) when we got down. I mean he chewed me out royally. He said, "No, you don't talk like that over that radio." Said, "You know we weren't supposed to be out there." (Laughter) Then they—are you all getting tired of listening?

MORRIS: No.

PIEHLER: No, no, no, no.

NIPPER: Then ... about three weeks before we graduated, and got our wings and were commissioned an officer, they wanted to send four pilots back to Stuttgart—somewhere in Missouri I believe, to talk to the basic training cadets what a wonderful airplane that AT-6 was and how easy it was to fly and all—give 'em a pep talk so they'd just be dyin' to get down to advanced flying school. They had this one boy that went with us, and he could lay it on pretty thick, I mean. He said, "There's nothin' to it." He said, "[It's] the sweetest flyin' airplane." He said, "Now, you know, if I can do it, you all can do it," you know, went on. We stayed down there I think two days. We landed at Gunter's Field, Alabama, and then we went on and landed at ... where that airfield was, it's in Missouri somewhere. And so, we got ready to go back the next day, and we were supposed to land at Maxwell Field, Alabama at that B-24 base. Well here we come in for a landing. This ole boy that did all the talking got right behind a B-24 and got in that prop wash landed that thing, ground-looped it and dug the wing and tore the whole trim off the edge of it. (Laughter) And he should have known better because those planes generally ... it makes that AT-6 bounce around. He should have waited a little while. Anyway, we stayed there overnight, and they patched the wing up. And anyway, they radioed back to the air base what had happened, but he was able to fly it back. Well, the base commander was there to greet him when he landed. (Laughter) And he said, "I'm going to take you up tomorrow, and if you don't pass one hundred percent everything that you're supposed to do," said, "you're outta here." But, he passed him. And then we had to fly ...

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with John W. Nipper on April 6, 2001 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

MORRIS: Jim Morris

PIEHLER: And just before the tape was ready to end you were beginning to tell us another story, which...

NIPPER: Part of ... our training about two weeks before we graduated was to fly a night cross-country. And you flew a triangle, and it usually lasted about two and a half hours something like that. I think I flew from Moultrie, Georgia down to Jacksonville, Florida and maybe over to the Bahamas and then back up to Spence Field. And it was about two o'clock in the morning. And I called the tower for landing instructions, and ... they told me I was clear to land. And I got on the final approach, and I pulled the throttle back, and I heard this horn blowing. I said, "What in the world is that horn? What is that noise?" Well, when you throttle back, and your horn blows, that means your wheels are up. You're gone land without wheels being down. [I said], "I don't remember ever hearing that noise before." Of course it came on all the time during the day, you know, I didn't pay any attention to it. I bet I wasn't ten feet off of that runway, [I said], "Oh my goodness, my wheels are up!" Man, I hit that throttle, and I went around and started back down on the, on the base leg, and looked down, and this other fella was getting ready to land. I saw a streak of fire go across that runway, he had landed with his wheels up, and they washed him out. I came within (snaps fingers) a split second of doing the same thing, and I'd of been gone. If I had landed with my wheels up, that would have notified that fella not to do that, and (laughter) I'd have been the one that got washed out, and he'd have been the one that stayed ...

PIEHLER: ... stayed.

NIPPER: But anyway. And so we graduated from the AT-6's to a P-40. It was the old "Flying Tiger," P-40 with the shark's ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: And see, you don't ever have an instructor. That's the first time that you ever fly an airplane without an instructor that you've never been in before. And it's a new experience. And it's ... sort of a frightening experience. They tell you everything that's gonna happen, and you go to ground school and go through all the details, but you still were just not quite sure of yourself. And ... you sit further back in that airplane it looks like the nose is real long. And ... you'd have to take the P-40 off of the ground pretty fast after you start the engine ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: ... because the cooling system heats up and it'll overheat.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: And I took that thing off, and that nose just looked like it wiggles like that. (Demonstrates) But anyway it flew beautifully, no problem at all landed just real good. But they told us, said, "Don't do a spin." Well this one fella said, "Well I'll spin that thing." And he spun it in the ground he had to bail out. He stuck that thing in the ground about twenty feet. But, see,

he'd already graduated and gotten his wings and commissioned officer. He—they didn't wash him out.

PIEHLER: Didn't wash, he didn't ...

NIPPER: No.

MORRIS: Now was this still at ... Spence ...

NIPPER: Yeah.

MORRIS: Spence Field.

NIPPER: It, it was at a ... they had a little airfield twenty-five or thirty miles from there. And they, that's where they took it. I don't remember the name of the little town. But it was a, it was a concrete runway. And it was a nice runway, and that's where they had those P-40s based. And that was just to introduce you to the faster, heavier airplanes. And then, after that, we went to Eglin Field, Florida for gunnery training, but we took the gunnery training in an AT-6. It had a machine gun, just one machine gun, and it would shoot it would miss the propeller when the bullets went out you couldn't hit the propeller when you fired your gun.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: And they would have ... another AT-6 towing a long target, and four planes would go out, and you'd make passes and fire at it. And you'd have the ammunition in your plane might be red, and in the next one blue, so that when you hit the target, it ... color-coded that hole in the target. And then they'd bring it back to the base and drop that, and they'd count the, the number of hits each one of you had. And ... that taught you to lead the target, to be able to hit the target. And if you were firing at the back of the of the tow target, hittin' the back of it, you knew you weren't leading it quite enough to be able to hit it in the center.

Then ... after we finished that, they sent me to Camp Springs, Maryland. Right out of Washington, D. C., and they put us in the SBD Dauntless, it was a dive bomber. It's a, they weren't using it, but it was a, it was a military dive bomber. It had ... flaps that opened up like that (demonstrates) when you dive it to slow it down to where you could get a better ... aim on the target. That was the next one, and then, then the next was the P-47. We flew that out of Camp Springs, Maryland. And there again, that was the first time that you'd been in a plane that size without an instructor, and it was ... it was traumatic, at first, and they always wanted you to make a three-point landing. Well I brought that thing in about 150 miles an hour and landed on my wheels. I wasn't about to let that thing stall out 'cause when the engine's off on that thing, it drops like a rock. It's, it weighs seven tons (laughter), which is light for airplanes of today, but ...

PIEHLER: But at the time that was heavy.

NIPPER: That was, yeah, it was ...

PIEHLER: Well particularly from what people have described the Piper Cubs, you know, those were just ...

NIPPER: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: You know those were so light ...

NIPPER: Well after, we were doing aerobatics and we're following the leader. And we did, we did formation flying and night formation and night flying and night landings and so on. And ... we went through all that training, and we were out doing acrobatics over the Chesapeake Bay, and my roommate was flying in front of me, I was the fourth airplane. And our instructor was doing aerobatics, whatever he did, if he did a snap roll or an Immelmann or a loop or whatever, each plane behind did the same thing. Well, I was watching the plane in front of me—we were about 20,000 feet. I saw him rollover just like that (demonstrates) and start down. He went 20,000 down straight into that Chesapeake Bay and crashed. Well I saw that I wasn't going to do the same thing he did, so I pulled out. And I called the flight leader, and I said, "Marad just went in." "Oh no, no, he didn't go in." I said, "Yeah he did." I said, "I saw him. I know what I saw." [He said], "No, you're mistaken." So we went back to the base and landed. And there were three ships out there in the, in the bay. And he went down right in between those three ships. And so they, they told him. I told him, when I got back to the base I said, "Marad went in." He said, "Naw, he'll be here in a few...." I said, "He will not be here, I know what I saw." And about that time ... Annapolis Naval Academy called our base and said, "One of your planes just went in out there between three of our ships." And so then they believed what I told them.

MORRIS: Did he make it? Did he survive the—did he bail out before the ...

NIPPER: Oh no, no. [He] went straight in. I don't know what happened, don't have any idea what happened. Well, he was my roommate and I'd only been there with him for about two weeks. And ... they said, "John, you've got a job to do." I said, "What's that?" [They said], "You're the only one that really was close to him and knew anything about him. You'll have to escort his body home." I said, "No way." I said, "I don't wanna do that." [They said], "You gotta do it. That's an order for you to do. You knew his name, he roomed with you for a couple of weeks and you've got to do that." They said, "I tell you what we want you to do." Said, "Tomorrow, we'll send a staff car out here for you." See they'd let me fly an airplane, but they wouldn't let me drive a car, a jeep, or an automobile. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Because officers aren't allowed to drive, you were an officer at this point.

NIPPER: Right. And so they sent a WAC there with me. And I was to go to Annapolis, Maryland, at the Naval Academy, and meet this commander, and he said he wanted me to go up there and get that body and take it back to the funeral home in Washington. Well I didn't think anything about it. I got up there, I got to .... [I thought to myself], "How we going to take a body back to Annapolis," I mean, "back to Washington in a staff car?" So I ... still didn't think anything about it. So, I went there and met the commander and told him who I was. He said, "Yes," said, "I've been expecting you." Said, "Come back here." So we went back there, had a

refrigerator back there. And he even had a pair of looked like ice-tongs. And he had a little ... little waxed carton—sort of like an ice cream carton with a little handle on it.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: And he reached in there with those tongs and pulled out that boy's scalp, and stuffed it down in that little ice cream thing and folded it over. And he brought out an American flag and a piece of metal about that big around (demonstrates) or, you know, it was all jagged. That's all they'd found of him.

PIEHLER: They'd just found his head.

NIPPER: Mm hmm. Just the scalp.

PIEHLER: Jus the scalp.

NIPPER: I can see that scalp just as black and that red blood on it as, I can see it just as plain as if I [were] looking at it now. And so, I said, "Okay." So, I took it down to—well the WAC asked me, said, "I thought we were coming up here to get a body?" I said, "Well it's been handled; don't worry about it." [She said], "What have you got in that little box?" (Laughter) I said, "Oh, nothing." [She said], "I know you have." But I never did tell her what it was. But I took it to the funeral home and they put it in a casket—the metal and the flag and the scalp, and sealed the casket where it couldn't be opened. And then they gave me my orders to go with that body to Lawrence, Massachusetts and escort it and stay up there with the family at their house until the funeral was over. And that's about the hardest thing I ever did.

PIEHLER: In the whole war.

NIPPER: Yeah. They met me at—well first, his brother met me. He said, "John, have you eaten?" And I said, "No." He said, "Well I'm going to take you out. We're gonna eat lobster." He said, "Have you ever eaten lobster?" I said, "No, I don't know what lobster is." But, anyway, he ...

PIEHLER: What'd you think—I hate to digress, but what did you think of the lobster?

NIPPER: I liked it. Oh it was good, especially cracking those claws. (Laughter) See, I didn't even know how to eat a lobster. But he said, "It's gone be tough on you when you get to the house." Well ... we both walked in together. They came—both his mother and daddy and sister and everybody there, came up there to me; they grabbed me around now—I thought they was going to choke me to death. And they were all cryin' and carryin' on—I didn't know what to do or say. There wasn't a thing that I could say or do that I knew of.

PIEHLER: Plus you really didn't know 'em very well.

NIPPER: I didn't know a thing about 'em. And they started asking me a lot of questions. I told 'em everything, I didn't tell them about the casket inside. They said, "Why won't they let us

open the casket and see him?” I said, “Well you’ll have to check with the military on that.” I said, “I don’t have anything to do with that.” But, anyway, they had a room prepared for me to stay there at the house. I mean they treated with me with royalty. They said, “Our son’s gone,” said, “You’ll have to take his place.” And they had a little fourteen or fifteen-year-old daughter, and that little girl got struck on me, and I couldn’t stay away from her, (laughs) I tell you. I’d run from her (laughs) every chance I’d get, you know. (Laughter) But anyway ... they had the funeral. And they were Catholic and see I was a Baptist. I didn’t know a ... I didn’t know what they were gone do at that funeral. I didn’t know how to react. But they had me to go with them and sit with them through the service.

PIEHLER: And this was a Mass that was, it was in Latin.

NIPPER: Yeah, oh yeah. I didn’t know what was goin’ on, really.

PIEHLER: And Baptists were pretty strong then about what Catholics did or didn’t do ...

NIPPER: Yeah, oh yeah. So well I made ... one big mistake. And one night we were talking and I don’t know how the subject got on religion. That was the night before he was killed. And ... he was talkin’ to me—well I had a little testament that my granddaddy give me, and I’d read it every night. And he got curious and he wanted to read it, you know. And I was telling him about it, and I don’t think that went over too well, I don’t know. But I didn’t think it did after I said it—I didn’t realize it ‘cause see I was, I was completely innocent.

But after they said something about a radio, said, “You got a radio?” I said, “No.” You couldn’t buy a radio anywhere. There wasn’t a radio to be had. They said, “We’ll get you a radio.” I said, “No, not allowed to have a radio.” That’s the only way I could get out of it. They were going to find me a radio. And so when the funeral was over ... at the home all these priests and they, they had a pretty “happy hour.” (Laughter) I mean it was (laughs) ... and I didn’t drink. I didn’t drink a bit. And I they all got pretty inebriated. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Was this an Irish Catholic family? Do you ...

NIPPER: He was—they were Assyrians. They were from Syria.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

NIPPER: And uh, another thing, they’d ask me questions and I’d answer ‘em. Then they’d talk among themselves in that, in their language, see I didn’t know what was going on see? (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

NIPPER: I didn’t know whether that was good or bad. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What were your—just to go back for a minute, what were your impressions of the Mass, besides it being in Latin? I mean ...

NIPPER: Oh, it, it was nice. It was real nice. I didn't, I just didn't understand it ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

NIPPER: ... because I hadn't been subjected to it.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: And so after everything settled down I said, "I've got to go back to the air base in the morning." [They said], "How would you like to go up to New Hampshire for a few days?" I said, "Boy that'd be nice, but I can't. I've got to be back at the air base." Well, I didn't think anything else about it, I said, "No, I've got to leave in the morning." I get this telegram from the air base saying that my five day ... leave is granted. He had called his congressman out in Washington and had them call the air base and extend my [leave]. (Laughter) But I told 'em, I said, "It's not only that; I've got to go back." And they would have taken me to New Hampshire up there and shown me a week's time. But when I ... left and went overseas, they sent me cookies. They sent me anything—if they just had any indication that something I'd like to have, they'd send it to me. I got letters from them long after I left the service.

PIEHLER: So you stayed in touch with them for several years afterwards?

NIPPER: Uh huh. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: Did you ever visit them again?

NIPPER: No. No. It was, it was a long ways up there and course I [was] here in Tennessee ... But they, were nice people to me.

PIEHLER: And that was there, they had one other ...

NIPPER: They had another son.

PIEHLER: Another son.

NIPPER: He, he stayed in New York a lot. He had race horses. He [was] at the race track.

PIEHLER: This sounds like it was a pretty well off family too.

NIPPER: Oh yeah, they were. They were well off, uh huh ...

MORRIS: And politically connected, apparently.

PIEHLER: Yes, now to get you a leave like that.

NIPPER: Yeah. Well, after Washington then, they sent me—see we flew 47s, then they sent me to Millville, New Jersey for dive-bombing training and ... gunnery. [Of] course all along my

training—we shot skeet and link-trainers and airplanes with BB guns and so on, you know, to get training that way. But we went up there to Millville, New Jersey. And ... we practiced dive-bombing with, they were little two-pound bombs—they had six under there, and you could drop one at a time. And they told us—they had a ship down there, a wooden ship, you know, it looked like a ship and we were supposed to go in and dive bomb that ship and hit the target. They had a big thing out there. And I went through there and I dropped all six of mine, one at a time, I didn't think anything about it. I didn't know whether I'd hit the target or not. I couldn't tell. But my instructor was up here flyin' around watching us do all that. We got to the air base and he said that never has happened to him. I said, "What, you missed the target every time?" He said: "No," said, "You hit that thing every time." (Laughter) And he said, "I want you to tell these other fellas how you did that." Said, "They didn't even come close to that ship." (Laughter) So, I started telling [them] what I did. I said, "I just keep that ball and bank indicator in the middle and just aim at the target and turn it loose." (Laughter) They said, "Well you go up there and show 'em again." I couldn't hit, I couldn't get near that thing again. (Laughter) I mean it was one of those things. After that they shipped us to Richmond, Virginia and shipped us overseas.

MORRIS: And you left from—where exactly ... did you leave from New York to go overseas ...

NIPPER: New York, uh huh.

MORRIS: Where was that in New York? Do you remember, well you weren't ever at Camp Shanks, I guess.

NIPPER: It was Pier Number Seven or Eleven. (Laughter) I don't know; I don't remember which one it was. Some, we ... stayed on the ship. We ... went from—they sent us back to Richmond, then they drove us up to New York. And we got on a ship there, and ...

MORRIS: What kind of a ship ... was it?

NIPPER: It was a Liberty Ship. We left in a convoy and ... when we were out from sea a number of two or three days, the sea got rough and there was a ship over there that had a load of P-47's on it. And we all picked out which one was gonna be ours, you know. (Laughter) And that ship would raise up like that (demonstrates), and it'd shudder and down it would go, and that screw would come out of the water. And you'd think it was gone turn over. And it would tear the deck up on those P-47's and dumped 'em all overboard. (Laughter) Kept from tearing the ship up. (Laughter)

MORRIS: Oh, gosh.

PIEHLER: And you ... so yours picked out.

NIPPER: The one I picked out was in the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Oh it must have been a horrible storm for them to dump those planes.



NIPPER: Yeah.

MORRIS: How long did—now when did you, do you remember when you left ... New York. Around what time that was ... what month, or year?

NIPPER: It was in a December, I believe.

MORRIS: And that would have been of, '40 let's see ...

NIPPER: '44, I guess.

MORRIS: That's right. Did you, when you left New York—how long did the trip take? And it was to England, right?

NIPPER: Yeah, we went to Southampton, England and ...we docked there and went to a, I don't know what you called it. Anyway, they had barracks there, and we stayed there awhile. And then ... we probably stayed there a week. And then we got on a ship again and went to Le Havre, France that's where we unloaded. And then we drove to the air base. I'm trying to remember, I think it was Tantonville, France, I think. But anyway we—there were ... four of us that went through training together. We were buddies from the word "go." And we met this colonel who was the base commander there at that base. First thing he said, "Do you fellas want a drink?" And we all said, "No sir, we don't, we don't drink." He said, "You'll be sorry." (Laughter) Well we, anyway we got acquainted with him .... That night we had an air raid, they blew up every airplane on our field, I think, they, the Germans raided the field. And so they got some more airplanes in and so ... they put me on a—it was snowing, the ground was white. And we had these ole pierced plank runways—it's metal put together, you know, sort of like a belt. And you'd start—the runway went uphill just a little bit and ... it was easy to slide off of the runway and if you did, they had to get a big Cleat Track and come up and pull you back on there. But that's where I started flying missions. And this fella, they called him "Hose" Firestone, I don't know where he got that nickname, but anyway, his people were the Firestone tire and rubber people is what I understand. And ... they take you out on an orientation flight the first time, you see you hadn't flown in probably a month and it feels different 'til you get used to it. And so he said, "I want you to go out there," and said, "Ring it out." And we had ... we did have two bombs and a load of ammunition, the guns were on the plane. He said, "How would you go down there and like [to] go down there, and tear up that factory?" And I said, "Whatever you wanna do." So we dive bombed that factory, and I fired my machine guns as I was goin' down, ... and it's got tracers. Man it looked just like everyone of those tracers were coming this way (demonstrates) instead of going that way. (Laughter) Scared the living daylights out of me. I said, "They're going to hit me." It looked just exactly like that, and it ... when I got back down, I said, "That bomb did 'em some good, but I thought they was gone get me with those tracers." He said, "Why they didn't even fire at us, that was you firin' at them." (Laughter) So I learned, you know, after the excitement was over.

But the first seven missions, I don't think I slept a bit. (Laughs) When they started shootin' at me and that ... 88 ... of flak started coming up there at you and I thought, "I'm gone have to go

back out there the next day and face that,” you know. And I just figured that there’s just no way I’ll ever get back home. But ... I did.

MORRIS: What were the ... now that was in ... Tantonville?

NIPPER: Yeah.

MORRIS: ... Tantonville, France?

NIPPER: Uh huh.

MORRIS: What were the, what were the living accommodations like there? I mean ...

NIPPER: We were in tents, and it was cold.

PIEHLER: So just to back up—you never were in ... with the unit in ... England?

NIPPER: No.

PIEHLER: You joined them when they were already in France?

NIPPER: We were what they called a replacement pilot ...

PIEHLER: Okay.

NIPPER: ... see the 371<sup>st</sup> ... was formed in England.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: And they flew across the English Channel, you know, when they invaded Normandy.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: And they had beachheads and land established before we went in as replacement pilots. And ... there was a lot of the fighting that ... there was a lot more aerocombat. We did mostly dive bombing, and strafing, and ground support for the ... ground troops for the infantry, like we’d shoot up convoys and ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: ... knock out bridges and gun emplacements and ... tanks and things like that. I hated to see troop trains being strafed, but it was one of the things that you had to do ... like your, your killing a lot of people. I saw ... a fella drop a bomb on a barge going across the Rhine River. I know there were 1500 Germans on that ... he hit the bomb dead center—that thing, it just blew up, people—you’d see them flying up everywhere. And ... you don’t even like to think about that, but it is things that happened.

PIEHLER: When was ... you mentioned the first time—you were shooting flak.

NIPPER: Yeah, I was shootin' ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. And it scared you because of ... the tracers ...

NIPPER: See I could see the tracers goin' down.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and you thought they were ...

NIPPER: See ... every third or fourth gun in your belt was a tracer.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: And man (laughs) ... it was my mind telling me that they were firin' at me.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: And they weren't, I was firing at them.

PIEHLER: What was your closest call ... in combat?

NIPPER: We were flying, going out on a mission I don't remember what mission it was. And I had a 500 pound bomb under each wing, a 150 gallon belly tank because it was a long mission, and there were 278 rounds of ammunition in each gun, and they're eight guns, so it's a pretty big payload. And we had to fly through a overcast and it was a thick overcast, you had to go on instruments, and your wingman would fly right in real close. In other words, his wing would be, his right wing would be right in behind the leading edge of the ... trailing edge of your wing. And if you got out very far—we had twelve airplanes in the air ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: ... and if you got away, you might run into those planes. Well the air was turbulent, and you had to hold a steady course and rely on the instruments. There's one thing about flying on instruments and flying blind. You'll swear you're in a turn just going headed for the ground. And you've got to rely—you'll be going just as straight and level as can be. And sometimes ... when you, if you make a turn like that, you'll think you're flying straight and level, it's called vertigo. And ... you'll swear you're in a dive or upside down, so you gotta keep your eyes glued on those—that's what happened to [John F.] Kennedy [Jr.] up there. He didn't have an instrument rating, and he ... he experienced it for the first time, I'd say.

PIEHLER: I flew in a single engine plane, and ... the pilot sort of showed me [a] version of vertigo. We flew through a cloud, he said, "Okay." And he did a, he maneuvered the plane so he could say, "So what's up and down?"

NIPPER: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: You know, and he said that's why ...

NIPPER: If you can't see that horizon ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, yes.

NIPPER: ... why, you've got to depend on your artificial horizon ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: ... on the plane. And you have a ... gyro compass that won't bounce around in turbulent air. Your magnetic compass will spin sometimes, but you set your gyro compass to the magnetic compass before you leave, and then ... it'll stay where ... the heading is. And ... so the air was turbulent and we'd been in that overcast. All of a sudden I felt like I'd run into something. "Boom!" Just like that. I thought my engine had blown up or something. I looked back through my rearview mirror and my wingman had come over there with his propeller and cut off my left elevator on my airplane. The right elevator was still working, but ... I flew it, I dropped the bombs, and I was able to fly it and come back, but, you know ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: And ... another time, we were doing—this was after the war was over. We were doing aerobatics in Austria over the Alps and we were doing—I was leading a group, and I was going to do an Immelmann, which comes up like that (demonstrates) and rolls out. Well I got up straight like that (demonstrates), and I didn't think I could make it on over and that's a "no-no." Usually that plane will drop off and just go into a spin, but the planes had what they call water injection. You could hit that switch—it carried about thirty gallons of water. It'd boost that engine about twenty-five or thirty more horsepower. And I eased that thing down like that. (Demonstrates) That literally scared me to death and I'd been through combat and everything else. I couldn't do a thing after that. I told those fellas, I said, "Go ahead and fly, I'm not going to fly. I'm going back home." (Laughter) That's about the only ... time that .... My buddy up in Richmond, Virginia went out with me seven times and he got hit seven times flying my wing and I didn't get a bullet in my plane. And he said, "I just don't wanna fly with you anymore." [He] said, "You bring me bad luck." I said, "You shouldn't feel bad they were shooting at me, they just didn't lead me quite enough and got you." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: It's funny you mention that because were pilots a superstitious lot?

NIPPER: I don't know, I don't think I ever was.

PIEHLER: Well were others 'cause he ... I mean he said ... you were bad luck ...

NIPPER: (Laughs) Yeah, oh yeah, he ... I think it was just a matter of speech ...

PIEHLER: He was just kidding.

NIPPER: ... I don't think it was anything ...

PIEHLER: But you didn't know of pilots who had a certain ritual before they left, or who carried sort of a lucky rabbit's foot or any ...

NIPPER: All I ever did was pray before I took off and I believe it helped.

PIEHLER: I just ... some more, some general questions about your ... I guess one question would be, I meant to ask this earlier, but what was the favorite—you had not traveled much ...

NIPPER: No ...

PIEHLER: ... as a kid growing up ...

NIPPER: No.

PIEHLER: ... and the big trip up in Georgia you saw a lot of the country—admittedly through military bases ...

NIPPER: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: ... what was the favorite place you were stationed? In terms of that part of the, seeing a different part of the country?

NIPPER: I guess ... Camp Springs, Maryland 'cause I got to go into Washington and see all of the ... White House and the ... Washington Monument and see all the, those things. And the Smithsonian Institute, and so on like that.

PIEHLER: So you really enjoyed—in some ways you got to be a tourist in Washington.

NIPPER: Yeah, uh huh. See ... we could go—see we were off every night ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: ... and we didn't have to, we weren't restricted to the base. We could, we had a permanent pass and we could ...

PIEHLER: You'd just go in ...

NIPPER: Yeah, we'd just go take off, uh huh. And go in, and see a movie. Back in Washington then when you went to a movie they always had a ... live show in between. I saw Fritz Kreisler one time ... play the violin at a ...

PIEHLER: At a movie.

NIPPER: Uh huh, at a movie. He was on stage there. And there was some fella, I can't, he was real famous for whistling, and ... oh he could whistle, it was unreal how he could whistle. He'd just sound like a flute. But ... we were flying our twenty-sixth mission and my buddy that—his name was ... Fred Nerney. About two weeks before that he came to me one day, and he said, "John, could I ask you to do something for me?" I said, "Why yeah." He said, "Would you mind if I sent my brother your address—how to get in touch with you in case something happened to me?" I said, "Why, be fine with me." I said, "The only one catch I want to get all your clothes." (Laughter) Just joking with him, you know. And I said, "Well since you've said that, let me give you my brother's address so you could do the same thing for me." You know ... we were strafing a convoy and the last thing I heard him—he was right in front of me, and the last thing I heard him say, "I'm hit." And his plane went down and ... just almost like it landed and came to a skid in the field. This convoy was right in here (illustrates) beside a big row of trees, and so we were—some tanks and trucks and all that in there, and I'm sure small arms fire got him. And I flew, I strafed and flew on past him and looked down and his ... cockpit burst in flames. So we got back to the base, they wanted to send a ... fighter cover back out there, and take a little L-5 and land it and try to pick him up.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: I said, "There's no need." I said, "He was inside that cockpit, that canopy never opened, and it was burnin' inside." And so I went back and I ... reported it. You always had a briefing after you—you always had a briefing before you went on a mission to tell you what your target was, if they had a specific target for you to hit. Or—then when you came back, you gave the ... had a briefing and you'd tell and just took all that information down, and recorded it. But I got a letter from his brother. It was about two weeks after that. And ... I wrote him a letter and I told him exactly what had happened. And I never did hear from him, I don't know. I guess he got the letter, but I never did follow up on it.

MORRIS: So do you, do you think that it was the impact of the crash that caused ... the canopy to burst into flames ...

NIPPER: No, he ...

MORRIS: ... or do you think the small arms fire from the ...

NIPPER: No, he said, "I'm ..."—oh yeah, it could have been. He said, "I'm hit," before he ever went down.

MORRIS: When he went down.

NIPPER: Uh huh, yeah. And then another—there were four of us and two of 'em got killed. Another buddy ... John Motherway ...

PIEHLER: Where was he from?

NIPPER: He was from ... New York. It tells in that book [*The Story of the 371<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group in the E.T.O.*] where he's from. And I'm trying to think if it's White Plains or—O.L. Oatman was from White Plains, New York. But ... he's my buddy in Richmond ...

PIEHLER: So you had four buddies and two of 'em didn't make it.

NIPPER: Uh huh.

MORRIS: You said they went through training, they went through all of the training...

NIPPER: Yes.

MORRIS: Of course they didn't go through any of the ... Knoxville-based ...

NIPPER: No.

MORRIS: ... things like that ...

NIPPER: We met at Maxwell Field, Alabama. And then we went from there to flight training and we all went through together.

PIEHLER: And so one was from New York and one was from ...

MORRIS: Nerney was from ...

NIPPER: I believe both of 'em were from New York.

MORRIS: (reads from *The Story of the 371<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group in the E.T.O.*) ... Nerney was ... Lieutenant Frederick W. Nerney, 406<sup>th</sup> from Attleboro, Massachusetts ...

NIPPER: Massachusetts, that's right.

MORRIS: And then ...

NIPPER: Massachusetts.

MORRIS: Lieutenant John W. Motherway, 406<sup>th</sup> from Springfield, Massachusetts.

PIEHLER: So they were ...

NIPPER: Was he from Massachusetts?

MORRIS: And they both ...

NIPPER: Okay ... I was thinking they were from New York.

MORRIS: Remember you were from Tennessee ...

NIPPER: What'd it say about Donald Miller?

MORRIS: Ah ...

NIPPER: Has it got Donald Miller's (looks in *The Story of the 371<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group in the E.T.O*) ... there's Motherway—that's his picture. And Fred Nerney's on a little plane somewhere, it's not in the picture here because he ...

MORRIS: Oh that's right ...

NIPPER: ... he was on an airplane—on the wing of an airplane.

MORRIS: So what happened with ... Motherway.

NIPPER: Uh, he, I don't remember. He had, he got killed before Fred Nerney did. He had, I guess about, I don't [know], fifteen or twenty missions. You fly close formation, and if enemy airplanes, attack you, you would string out in a circle and go around like that (demonstrates). That way if a plane came in on this plane, this one's behind him see. And so you had a chance to—if he didn't get that one ... the other plane got you. Well, he straggled behind and all new pilots did that. He was way back here (motions), you know, and the flight was up here. Well, a Messerschmitt came in there—two Messerschmitts came in there and saw him, and it was just sitting duck, you know. They shot him down, but he went on by. Well, my flight leader saw what happened, he went over there and shot him down. And the wingman—he never hit the wingman, but the wingman just went right in with him, crashed right in the ground with ...

MORRIS: So the German wingman followed his ... flight leader right down into the ground?

NIPPER: Uh huh. Yeah.

MORRIS: What ...

NIPPER: There's two for one there.

MORRIS: What did the Messerschmitt—did you ever go up against the FW-190? Did you ever encounter any of those?

NIPPER: We had some Focke-Wulf's to land at our base one time and give up, but I never did—it was a good airplane.

PIEHLER: Was that towards the end of the war, when it gave up?

NIPPER: Yeah, yeah. They were surrendering, a lot of 'em were ... surrendering.

MORRIS: Would they radio ahead that they were comin' in?



NIPPER: They were trailing a white flag on their plane.

MORRIS: Oh.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. (Laughs)

MORRIS: What about the ... there was your life—you were talking about the missions and everything. What was the routine ... like ... for the missions—like, when you would get up and ... things like that, and life between the missions? Did you have any time between missions for recreation or anything?

NIPPER: Yeah, you would ... I'd usually go out there at the flight line. Just watch planes take off and read ... sometimes you'd be on standby for a mission, you know, and if the plane—the weather turned bad or something like that, why, you know, you'd be out there, but hoping the weather would break.

MORRIS: Would you get much sleep? Did you get to ... or would they get you up pretty early for a mission?

NIPPER: We would try to leave—when we'd fly our way over in Germany across the Rhine River, I, you always thought when you flew across that Rhine River if you were to get shot down, I always thought how I was going get back across that Rhine River if I made it back. I was going to get me a log or something (laughter) and go across that Rhine River (laughs) to get back to keep from staying over in Germany. We would ... have these briefings—is that what we were talkin' about?

MORRIS: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: I lost my train of thought.

MORRIS: I was thinking about what time they, if you had to get up at a certain time and ...

NIPPER: We would try to get up way before daylight and take off in the dark if it was a long mission, like way over in Germany. And the reason we did that, you could catch these locomotives, the steam engines, you could see that smoke where they had not gotten hidden from the attacks. And we could always knock out a few trains by getting up real early. I've taken off as early as two o'clock in the morning. And be out over the target maybe 300 miles or 200 miles over the target when daylight came. And you could, you could see those locomotives that smoke coming out of those locomotives, miles away.

PIEHLER: That ... certain time in the morning.

NIPPER: Yeah, uh huh.

PIEHLER: And ... when you would aim at a troop convoy, would you aim for the locomotive?

NIPPER: Yeah. You always ... after you knocked out the locomotive, those armor-piercing shells would go through that boiler on that locomotive and blow it up. And you could see it blow up. Tanks were hard to knock out.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: They, you could—if you went sideways, you could knock the tracks off. If you went behind or in front—now ... they taught us never to strafe down a road, always strafe across the road.

PIEHLER: Because ...

NIPPER: You're subjected to that enemy fire, more so when—in fact I came very near getting hit that way.

PIEHLER: Probably by not strafing the correct way ...

NIPPER: Right. There was a tank coming down the Autobahn this way (demonstrates), and I was comin' this way, and ...

PIEHLER: So he ...

NIPPER: ... he fired that big gun at me. I mean, I could see it go right across my wing like that, (demonstrates) but what I was wanting to do is ricochet the bullets on the hard pavement, and they go up under the tank ... under their fuel tanks. And set 'em afire.

PIEHLER: Were you a successful?

NIPPER: Yeah. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: But it was a close call for you ...

NIPPER: Yeah ...

PIEHLER: But there was a reason they told you ...

NIPPER: But it was a worse call for him. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But there was a reason they told you ...

NIPPER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: I guess it really demonstrated ...

NIPPER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... why don't strafe ...

NIPPER: Yeah, that's right.

PIEHLER: ... directly in because of the ...

NIPPER: That was a no-no, but it was ... just there, and I just did it.

PIEHLER: What was the mix of missions you would personally fly, say between, going after transportation facilities, air support for the ... ground troops, and then other types ... of mission? What was the ...

NIPPER: We flew some escort missions, a few.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: Not many.

PIEHLER: Okay.

NIPPER: And that, we would ... escort bombers and ...

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

PIEHLER: When it's transcribed it'll sound fine too. Although, just to warn you, you don't talk in complete sentences, no one fully talks in complete sentences, so ...

NIPPER: Right.

PIEHLER: But you were saying that you were to escort bombers was one of your missions ...

NIPPER: Uh huh. And we would be about 5,000 feet above the bombers.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: That way if enemy aircraft came in, why, we would have a shot at 'em. The ... bombers would be getting all the flak—all of the 88 millimeters comin' up.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: And ... boy they'd, they'd really throw it up at 'em too. I had a buddy that flew with me a lot. I call him a buddy really, I don't consider him a buddy. He had just gotten married, he'd been stationed in Panama. And just he'd gotten married, and they sent him overseas. And ... I was a second-lieutenant at that time, and he was a first lieutenant. But rank has no difference when it comes to flying—he flew, he was my wingman for a long time.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: And he was terrified all the time. And ... we had dropped our bombs. A message came over our radio that there were some enemy fighters in that area and we were gonna try to intercept them. Well, I had come up off of my target, and these planes I noticed they were just circling around like that (demonstrates). And I had to catch up, so the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. I take right across there, (demonstrates) but right down here's Munich. And all the flak came up I just don't see yet, and this boy hollered at me, he started yelling and crying, [he yelled] "You're gonna get me killed; get me outta here." He was screaming just like he'd gone crazy. Well, I—it scared me too, but we neither one got hit, but I ... don't see how. We couldn't have gotten, how they could've missed us. But, anyhow, I made a quick turn and got out of there, you know. But ... he said, "I'm gonna leave you if you don't get me outta here." Well, our flight commander heard that. When he got back down, he stood him up out there, and he said, "You're not leaving anybody. If you leave him, you're gonna leave for a court-martial, that's what's going to happen to you." He said, "If he tells you to fly through hell, you go right there with him." And but I didn't do it intentionally. It was one of those things.

But another time they wanted us to bomb a ... there was a bridge across the Rhine River. And our troops were on one side, and they had a lot of gun emplacements on the other side of the Rhine River. And they wanted us to dive bomb those gun emplacements, but don't knock the bridge out, don't hit that bridge. Because our troops were back there and they wanted to use the bridge to ... cross up on it instead of having to build a pontoon bridge across that Rhine River. Well, they said, "Now, there's not going to be any flak." Well the first plane went down, and they shot—I believe they shot the kitchen sink up. (Laughter) And I was the—ten airplanes had gone down, and I was the next one, and then ...

PIEHLER: When you say they'd gone down, they got hit?

NIPPER: No ... I mean they went down and bombed it.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

NIPPER: And ... no nobody got hit.

PIEHLER: But there was plenty of flak.

NIPPER: Yeah. And ... so the flight commander said, "Like hell there's not a lot of flak." (Laughter) And ... he was talking to the man on the ground, see. I mean we had a ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: ... a forward man there. And he said after about the fourth plane went down he said, "It's just too rough to go down." [He] said, "If you don't wanna go down, don't worry about it." That fella behind me was the only one that didn't go down.

PIEHLER: Everyone else went down.

NIPPER: Everybody. And he just stood up there and circled and, you know, it just left a bad taste. But he, I mean, he was in his rights to do that.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. In this case.

NIPPER: Yeah, uh huh.

PIEHLER: It's curious because you'd mentioned—I mean ... he technically outranked you. He was a first lieutenant you were a second lieutenant. One of the things—you were one of the few fighter pilots I've interviewed from small engine pilots, fighter pilots I've interviewed from, from the European Theatre. But I've interviewed a lot of bomber pilots and crew members, and everyone has said that the Air Force is pretty informal.

NIPPER: It is.

PIEHLER: Compared to the, particularly compared to the Army.

NIPPER: Yeah, uh huh.

PIEHLER: And particularly compared to the Navy.

NIPPER: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: So ...

NIPPER: My ... flight commander was a full colonel. And I flew—just the two of us flew missions a lot of times. He could draw more flak than any one person I ever flew with. (Laughter) He could find flak when there wasn't any flak. (Laughter) He said, "I want you to go with me." He said, "We've got a marshalling yard out here we want to dive bomb." And ... he went down, and I saw that stuff coming up at him, and he wants me to (laughs) go down there in that. And ... it's real unusual—once in awhile a person's microphone will stick, and you hear 'em (demonstrates) breathing real hard, you can, you can tell somebody's got there microphone on where everybody can hear it. But, anyway, we, I missed that marshalling yard, (laughs) I strafed it, but I missed it by a 100 feet, I think. But he hit it right in the center, I mean he knocked it out. But, he was a ... gentleman, and I could go in there and talk to him just like he was private first class so-and-so.

PIEHLER: So, in other words ...

NIPPER: We didn't have, no ...

PIEHLER: Well it sounds like it was very informal.

NIPPER: Oh, yeah, we could sit around—now when it came to major things like ... somebody telling you to do something, you know, why then ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, like a briefing could be very formal.

NIPPER: Yeah, uh huh.

PIEHLER: But in terms of ...

NIPPER: But, I mean we'd all sit around and play cards, and ... it'd be a colonel here and a major here and a captain here ... and a flight officer, which wasn't a commissioned officer. We'd all be there together, just buddy-buddy. (Laughter) And we'd call 'em by their first name, we didn't say Major so-and-so or Colonel so-and-so, we just called 'em by their name.

PIEHLER: How much saluting went on?

NIPPER: Looting?

PIEHLER: Saluting.

NIPPER: Oh, saluting. We would salute the first thing in the morning to the ... higher-ups.

PIEHLER: But that was it.

NIPPER: That was it.

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

NIPPER: Yeah. That's like saying "good morning." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: That was sort of the equivalent. (Laughter)

NIPPER: Yeah, uh huh.

PIEHLER: What about—I reading ... in your—in many ways the yearbook ... of your group, [*The Story of the 371<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group in the E.T.O.*] that it got pretty cold ... by December of '44. What would people wear? I mean this sounds—and how regulation were people ...

NIPPER: Of course ... we wore a flight suit.

PIEHLER: Yeah ... when you were flying it was ...

NIPPER: Yeah and ... we could regulate—we were comfortable in a cockpit with just a pair of coveralls on ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: ... a flight suit on ...

PIEHLER: But what about when you were on the ground actually?

NIPPER: We had a lot of clothes, and we had parkas and these things with hoods. I slept ... I believe it was in Tantonville—there was a big concrete building, the walls were about that thick ... (demonstrates) poured concrete, they had openings in ‘em, but no windows and doors. And ... five or six rooms in there, it had an upstairs in it. And we slept ... in that room. I would sleep on just a folded army cot, and I had a sleeping bag, and I had three blankets under that sleeping bag, and three over me, and my nose just stuck out of that thing, and I was zipped up in there, and that’s the way I slept. (Laughter)

MORRIS: Did you ever have ... any times where low fuel was a problem? Where you thought you might run out of fuel, or where you were in a situation like that?

NIPPER: Yeah, our planes had a warning light on ‘em that would come on when you had fifteen minutes of flying time left. And it would seem that the same pilots always ran out of fuel first. The same ones would—and it was because of the way you, tune your engine. ... It’s just like an automobile tryin’ to start out in high gear. You’ll run a lot of fuel through there, but you don’t go too far, and ... you change the pitch on your propeller to make a smaller bite and rev it up. That’s the most power, that’s [what] you use when you took off.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: But then when you got up to cruising altitude, you would get a bigger bite, and lean the mixture out—watch your cylinder hit temperature because if you lean the engine out too much, your cylinder head temperature ... would go up. And ... that’d damage the engine.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: But I’ve come in lots of missions with the warning light on. But we knew we were close to the field.

MORRIS: Were you ever separated? You told me a story one time about getting cut off at one point. I think you were the last one in, and you thought everybody else had ...

NIPPER: We were strafing an airfield, and there were twelve of us, I believe, and it was real late in the evening, just about dusk. And everybody made the pass—I was the last one to make the pass on it. And I made a pass. I thought the others went around. But they didn’t, they went on off, I made the second pass ... then looked up for the other planes, they weren’t there. (Laughter) I didn’t, I didn’t know where I was. I had no idea, I knew I was in Germany, and I thought, “Where’d they go?” (Laughs) And so ... they have a navigation system that—like there’ll be a radar station here (demonstrates) and a radar station here. And you can push your mike button, and call in the ... radar stations to take a fix on you. Say you were way out here, (demonstrates) okay, they’d take a fix on you like that (demonstrates) and a fix like that. And where that

crossed, they'd plot it on the map, and they could tell right where you were. And then they could tell you if you wanted to fly over here certain plots, they tell you what course to fly, and how far it was. And so, that was real handy, as long as your radio was on. My radio went out, and I didn't have a radio. So I couldn't get that fix. So I said, "Well, I know if I fly west, I'll get out of Germany before I either have to bail out or crash land." And I looked around, and right on the horizon I saw a ... faint silhouette of an airplane, and I thought it was a Thunderbolt, but I wasn't sure. I said, "Well, if he's a German, I'd be better off landing on their airfield than I would bailing out over there." So anyway, that's ... I poured on the coal and went up there to him. It happened to be a fella that—his squadron was based on the other side of our runway. (Laughter) And I pulled up beside him, and I motioned to my ear that my radio was out. I was glad to see him.

MORRIS: So you just followed him on in?

NIPPER: Yeah, followed him on in, we both landed at the same airfield.

(Tape is Paused Briefly)

MORRIS: You were talking about that one ... pilot that attacked, he would attack ... the farmers.

NIPPER: Well ...

MORRIS: Or the horses.

NIPPER: He'd shoot the farmer's horses, and I just—if two horses were pulling a gun of some kind, I wouldn't hesitate to shoot 'em. But if a farmer's out here plowing the field with two horses, there's no way you could get me to shoot a man's horses that way. It has to be involved in some kind of a military aid like pulling a big gun or something—a load of ammunition or something like that with horses.

MORRIS: When he shot ... was that primarily—you'd told me once before you had a ... because of the livelihood, the farmer earned his livelihood .... But this man who ... this other pilot that would shoot at ... the horses—do you know of any incidents where he actually also hit the farmer?

NIPPER: No ... I never did see him shoot the horses, but he told me he did.

MORRIS: Oh he told.

NIPPER: Hearsay, according to court. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But he also told you, I mean ...

NIPPER: Yeah, uh huh.



MORRIS: Was he boasting about it, sort of or just informing?

NIPPER: It probably just came up in conversation, I think.

MORRIS: What about ... we were talking also about the ... and I've already forgotten the name—your, the ... sort of mascot [they] had for the ... 371<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group.

NIPPER: Frisky.

MORRIS: Frisky.

NIPPER: Uh huh.

MORRIS: What's the story ... on Frisky?

NIPPER: Well they say "Frisky the Fox." He's foxy person, sly, (laughs) and the ... broom was for fighter sweeps that's the way they arrived at the name of it.

MORRIS: And I saw in the book that the Frisky was the, your communication ... based on the communications code—I didn't really understand what that meant.

NIPPER: The way I interpreted it, it was the ... 371<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group's insignia was the Frisky.

MORRIS: Did you ...

NIPPER: We wore some of 'em like that on the flight jacket, you know.

MORRIS: Did you have an artist ... that was in the—I a picture of ... one of the members in there doing some sketches.

NIPPER: I don't know who did those. Aw ... we had talented people of all kinds in there.

MORRIS: Did you have ... one of the stories too you talked about before about the ... you attacked ... the convoys, you did the ... bomber escort ... you flew ... support for ground troops. Did you—when you told me about ... attacking the troop transport ... it sounded like that was an isolated incident, like that didn't happen very often. When you ... when they had that one time that you had attacked a ...

NIPPER: It only happened one time for me.

MORRIS: Was that a designated target?

NIPPER: It was a troop train, a German troop train.

MORRIS: Was that a designated target for you all, or did you just happen to ...

NIPPER: Just happened to show up. Sometimes you'd just go out and look for a target, like you'd find a railroad marshalling yard or something, come up on one and see that would cut down ... the transportation. We did something one time that I've often—I went on a trip up here in North Carolina to that train trip up there somewhere, an ole locomotive engine—I've forgotten now where it is, it's not too far away. Anyway they go under a tunnel. And ... it's a pretty long tunnel, but, you know, you can stand at one end and maybe see the other end. We caught ... a German train headed in for this tunnel, and that tunnel went way on around the mountain. And that train pulled in there and hid, and we bombed both ends of that. I've often wondered, I don't know, what was in it, don't have any idea what was in there, but I don't know how they ever got out.

MORRIS: So ... did you ... when you bombed both ends of it ... did you see rock fall or anything ... seal it up?

NIPPER: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. But you don't even like to think about that. You don't know who was in .... But the worst thing I ever saw was that troop train. I mean there were people jumping out the windows of that train trying to get away, and [there's] just no way they could. With twelve airplanes goin' after 'em, it was just awful.

MORRIS: Now you ... we've talked about that a couple of times. Did you ever meet any infantrymen either over there or after the war that had served in the European Theatre?

NIPPER: No, but ... we would strafe a enemy convoy where American tanks were and called for ground support, and after we would go in and blast what we were supposed to, they'd open that hatch, climb up on that tank, and wave to us. It made you feel good.

MORRIS: So that was ... they would call in, you all would do the job, and they would at least acknowledge ...

NIPPER: Yeah, uh huh.

MORRIS: ... their appreciation.

NIPPER: We were getting 'em out of a, of a ...

MORRIS: Oh yeah.

NIPPER: ... bind.

MORRIS: Do you remember any other, any other ... incidents that stand out? As far as like close calls and things like that?

NIPPER: Well, I was one of the few pilots who never got a bullet in my airplane. The only incidents where I had damage was my wingman coming over. But the most vulnerable place to get hit was when you pull off of a target. And I don't know whether if what I learned—I'd try to

tell others about it. But you can fly your airplane to where it looks like it's going that direction, (demonstrates) but you're goin' this direction.

PIEHLER: So it looks like it's going right, but it's really going more ...

NIPPER: And they'll shoot on one side or the other of you. I've gotten out of—I've seen 'em waste a lot of ammunition on one side of my airplane that way. (Laughter)

MORRIS: You called that a skid maneuver didn't you?

NIPPER: Yeah ... it's, in a way it's dangerous to your plane if you—it could snap on you. But if ...

PIEHLER: So this isn't something they trained you to do?

NIPPER: No, you just ...

PIEHLER: You just picked it up.

NIPPER: (Laughs) Yeah. I ... yeah it's something I just picked up. I said, "Well, if they're firing at me, they think I'm going that way (demonstrates), if they're firing right there, and I'm goin' this way, I'm going to be further away from 'em." And I think it helped.

MORRIS: You talked about the plane snapping, would that just be because of the position, the way the plane's flyin' naturally?

NIPPER: You're cross-controlling. Your rudder says you're going, wanna go right, and your ailerons say you wanna go left.

MORRIS: What ... another thing I wanted to ask you about was the P-47. Did you all call it the "jug" back then?

NIPPER: Yeah, mm hmm.

MORRIS: Do you know where that came about? I'm sure it was ...

NIPPER: It's a big ole—looked like a big jug, I guess, I don't know, that's what they called it. I think the Germans called it Jabos. I believe that was .... And they had a big thing up there with a picture of an ole—looked like a freak with whiskers on it and all. (Laughter) That's what I was told. I don't know how true that is.

MORRIS: When did you go into Nuremberg? I mean ... the first time we talked we had, you had pictures from Nuremberg. When did you—that was ... after the war, wasn't it? Or ... were you there before the war ended?

NIPPER: We were in a little town called Furth, which is right out of Nuremberg. But Nuremberg had been devastated with bombs and so on when we landed. See what we would do ... the ground forces would come in and take an airfield, and then we would come in and land and use that airfield. And then when the ground troops moved on up and take another airfield, then we'd move to that. We stayed on the move most of the time. I very seldom ever stayed in one place longer than a month or two at the most.

MORRIS: Did you ever ... leave or was there nothing really to see in the area when you—if you could leave? I mean you said you read some, and you watched the planes take off.

NIPPER: At the end of the war, I was stationed in Linz, Austria. Beautiful place, beautiful runway, the Alps up there. You could get in the plane and go out and fly down those ridges—that was fun. We could take ... every third day—you and a buddy could get an airplane and fly to anyplace in the European-occupied zone and stay overnight and come back the next day. And that was ...

MORRIS: Wow.

PIEHLER: That was not a bad deal. (Laughter) Where did you, did you go anywhere? Did you ...

NIPPER: Yeah! I had a cousin that lived in Marseilles, France, and I was gone go down there to see him. And he was—I wrote him a letter, and he never did answer me, so we didn't go there. We went to Brussels, Belgium. We went to ... Paris. We went to—where was that other place? Oh, we went to Frankfurt. My buddy that lives up in Richmond had a cousin that lived in Frankfurt, and we were down in Linz, Austria at that time. And we'd told him, wrote him a letter and told him we were going come up and visit him. We had been based at that airfield at Frankfurt, and so we got up that next morning it was socked in you couldn't see the nose in front of your face. We knew that Rhine River [so] we'd go up there, so we got down low, and we flew up over that Rhine River all the way up there, and then the clouds opened up to where we could go on up and land. But we spent the night up there with him, and then they wanted us to do a, they wanted us to buzz the runway when we got ready to leave. And so we got up about 15, 000 feet and we went whoosh (demonstrates) down the runway. And he got up, and he did a roll and he didn't almost make it (laughs) I did a roll. But anyway, he took a picture of us and he sent that picture to us where we were taking off.

MORRIS: And why did they want you to buzz the ... runway like that?

NIPPER: Aw you just—excitement, see how low you could get and not hit the ground. (Laughs) In there [the 371<sup>st</sup> book] you'll see a captain—I can't think of his name right now, but ... he was a West Point graduate. And his daddy was a general, and he was my buddy. And we could get ... away with a lot of things that (laughter) other people couldn't 'cause they knew that his daddy was a general, and he could probably pull rank on 'em. And the weather had been real bad, and in order to ... get your flight pay, you had to fly at least four hours a month. And this was getting near the end of the month, and the weather's been so bad, we couldn't get our flight pay.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: And so he said—and this is a West Point captain. He said, “If this weather doesn’t break we’ll get our flight pay. We’ll build a box kite and fly it off the head-quarter’s lawn.” And he built that thing and flew it, and this ... colonel came out and said, “What are you boys doin’?” (Laughs) He says, “We’re getting’ our flight pay.” And I said, “Don’t tell ‘em that.” I said, “They’ll put us in the brig. They’ll think we’ve gone loony.” (Laughter)

MORRIS: Are [there] any other things you can remember ... that you all got away with together because ... of his connection there?

NIPPER: We flew together a whole lot, just out after the war ...

MORRIS: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: He wanted—we found out that you could buy film in Brussels, Belgium—that you could trade cigarettes for film. But we were in Austria, and ... they wanted somebody to go to Brussels, Belgium, and there was an old airplane—I don’t know what kind it was, a Waco, I believe, that was based there. And he said, “John, let’s go to Brussels and get ‘em some film.” So we flew that old airplane all the way to Brussels and we found somebody and asked ‘em if they could get some film for cigarettes and they said yeah they could do that. They got a great big package and I said, “If you’ll take it off, I’ll land it.” We never, either one had been in the plane before, so we came back that next day. And somebody else wanted to go in that plane somewhere, and they never had flown it either. And they were either landing or taking off and ran into the control tower, which is a great big mobile trailer, smashed into that thing, tore that trailer all to pieces, and tore that airplane up. But ... he didn’t get hurt.

MORRIS: He didn’t get hurt?

NIPPER: Nobody got hurt.

PIEHLER: I’m curious, could you talk a little bit ... about the ground crews? You know the ground crew that started ... your group.

NIPPER: I had ... a crew chief if he put a check on there that that airplane was in perfect order, that’s the way it was. I never had to go out and turn back because the airplane was not ...

PIEHLER: So you really depended on your crew chief?

NIPPER: He got a medal ... for that. I think that his airplane went out over a hundred times without anybody having to turn back in it. We didn’t always fly the same airplane, but most of the time we did. And I liked to fly the planes that he worked on because he was ...a good mechanic. They serviced ‘em every so often, and ... we had—when we fired our guns, the planes had cameras, and when you fired ... your guns, wing guns, the camera started operating. And it ran for three seconds after you released the trigger. So if somebody came in and said, “We shot down a ME-109,” (laughter) you gotta have proof. It’s not one of those things that you could ...

PIEHLER: Tell tall tales.

NIPPER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, you mentioned ... about staying warm, particularly ... in late 1944, what about food? How good was your food?

NIPPER: We had ... powdered eggs and a lot of things were dehydrated. But we had a good mess sergeant, and I mean, I didn't complain about it. Somebody—we shot a lot of skeet, and we were down in Austria, and this fella said, "Boy, I'd give anything for some fried chicken." Well, they limited hunting down there, but you'd go down through a field you could scare up fifty pheasants. And we took those skeet guns and went pheasant hunting and brought 'em back to that mess sergeant. He—man, you talk about eating. It was good. We told him it was fried chicken. (Laughter) And so we waited about a month, and they said, "It's about time for another chicken fry." (Laughter) And so we hunted again. And so, the next week, we got a ... note from headquarters, "No more hunting." So, the Germans weren't allowed to hunt.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: There were a lot of game—you'd go out, and you might find two deer, and a .... They had a shotgun with ... a large-bore ... rifle under the two barrels. And it was a—there was something else I was going to tell you and I forgot what it was. It's not that important, I don't guess.

PIEHLER: What about ... you mentioned praying quite a bit. What about the chaplains? Did you, how often did you see a chaplain when you were overseas?

NIPPER: We had one ... in our outfit. And I'd talk to him just like he was another pilot, you know. I mean if you had a problem. And we had ... a flight surgeon—that if you had, you know any kind of a flight problem. I mean a ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

NIPPER: ... impairment there. I know one time I had a pair of ... army shoes, and it caused a big cyst to come up on my ankle. And he wouldn't do anything about it. He said it'd go down eventually. I said, "Well what am I'm going to do about it now, it's hurting?" (Laughter) And so, he said, "Well come on down here," and he stuck a needle in there, and drew out that fluid, and it was alright after that. But ... they sent us on a ... rest trip one time to French Riviera. And ... that was a real nice place. It's all your—they fly you down there and then come back and pick you up, and you stay down there a week. And this friend of mine that went with me—they try to pair people together of the same temperament. Some of 'em wanna go down there and party, and some of 'em wanna go down there and just enjoy the scenery. But he could speak French, and we went to this place—you could go out there, and they'd let you use a bicycle to go bicycle riding along the beach and get a kayak and go out in the ocean there. ... He wanted to go up to a little town called Gross and it was a place where they make perfume. And we said,

“We’ll ride that bicycle—we’ll both get us a bicycle, and we’ll ride up there.” And it was about thirty miles up there and it was all uphill.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

NIPPER: And ... on the way back he broke the chain on his bicycle. And ... we had to tie our belts together, and I had to tow him some on the way back. But it was mostly downhill, and it really didn’t create that much of a problem. But ... they’d let you—they’d have, they’d have USO shows. I saw ... Bob Hope and his crew out in a field at Frankfurt. And they just built a stage out there in nowhere and they flew fighter cover over the ... show, you know, so that .... And in that big sports platz in Nuremberg ... they had ... Grace Moore singing there. And I sat over to the side—she was on the stage, and I was sitting over to the side here (demonstrates), and ...I snapped her picture. And we have a lady that, a young girl that goes to our church who won the Grace Moore Scholarship here at UT. And ... I took it—I said, “Do you know who this lady is?” She said, “No.” She didn’t know. I said, “Well you ought to know her,” I said, “that’s Grace Moore. She’s the one where you got that scholarship.” But anyway, she sang several numbers and then way back in the audience—that sports platz was full, and she said, “Are there any requests?” What she meant was are there any requests for me to sing a song that you .... One fella way in the back says, “Yeah.” [He] says, “Take it off,” says, “take it all off.” (Laughter) I thought they were gonna chase him out of that stadium. But that was a beautiful place, boy I tell you it was huge. There some pictures in there of it I think.

MORRIS: That was the one, now weren’t you, is that the one where they had ... the big, the swastika over the ...

NIPPER: Yeah.

MORRIS: ...the top?

NIPPER: Uh huh. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: That was still there when you were .... Was that still there when you were there?

NIPPER: Yeah, oh yeah, mm hmm.

PIEHLER: I’m curious when you were in ... Germany ... both before the war and then after the war—encountering Germans ...German civilians. How often before V-E Day would you encounter Germans, and what sort of, what way would you encounter Germans?

NIPPER: We didn’t encounter too many while we were on bases. Now after the war was over—right after the war ended ... we went into, I believe it was Nuremberg. I believe that’s where we were when the war ended. And we carried a .45 pistol. All the pilots had a .45 pistol. And we’d walk down the street, and these young German men would see us coming. They’d see us coming down that way—when they got to us they’d turn around, turn their back to us. I guess that was sort of a demonstration. We were supposed to go on—one of our last missions was to go up in the North Sea. They had heard that Hitler was on a ship and he was in the North Sea

and he was ... leaving Europe. And our mission was to go out there and find that ship and dive bomb it. But it was, it wasn't ...

PIEHLER: There was no ship.

NIPPER: No, there was no ship, and it was ...

PIEHLER: But this was ... the purpose ...

NIPPER: Yeah ... that was the purpose for it. And near the end of the war—well it was after the war, there was a—some general had come over there to visit the troops and make a big splash. And they wanted to give him a ... big send-off, and ... we were to rendezvous over Paris at a certain time. All the airplanes were to—and we were to escort him across the English Channel, and there were 1100 airplanes in that. Now that's how much the government spent on ... that fella. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You don't remember who it was.

NIPPER: I don't remember. But now I saw old "Blood and Guts," old Patton. We buzzed his convoy one time, and he stood up in his jeep and waved to us. (Laughter) They called him old "Blood and Guts," you know, he was a ...

MORRIS: On that mission ... where you all thought you were going to ... you know, come across the ship that, that had Hitler on it. What was everybody thinking about that? Did you know what, did everybody, was everybody excited, thinking, "Gosh, we may bring this thing to an end?" Or ...

NIPPER: Oh he was just like another ...

MORRIS: ... another mission?

NIPPER: The war was practically over, I think, and they didn't ...

MORRIS: So just like any other ...

NIPPER: Yeah.

MORRIS: ... any other mission ...

NIPPER: Uh huh.

MORRIS: ... just get it done.

NIPPER: Uh huh.



MORRIS: What happened in Nuremberg when—I know there were a lot of souvenirs around, I've seen some of the pictures with ... friends of yours wearing ... German tunics and caps. What were ...

NIPPER: That was in Metz, France.

MORRIS: Oh in Metz.

NIPPER: Somebody had ... gotten a German uniform and a hat, and—well in fact this guy's name was Firestone, he was my flight leader. He was a captain. And he was a likable somebody. We were just out there on the steps of this house where we were staying, where we were living. And he had that uniform on, just acting a fool—had a skirt and had that big swastika on the skirt there. And I had my ... .45 aimed at him, you know, like I was capturing a German. (Laughter) And it was a prank. They were going to take a picture of me. Well in fact they did take a picture. There's a Frenchman came by, and he thought it was real, and he was going to help me. (Laughs) We said, "No, no, no." I couldn't speak French, and he couldn't speak English. (Laughter) So we told him, "No, no."

MORRIS: So he was, you think he ... might have ...

NIPPER: Oh he was going to help me. He was going to capture that old German. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Oh. I've lost a ...

MORRIS: I can't, I was trying to think about the—I wanted to ask you about—do you remember where you were when you, when you heard that the, bomb had been dropped ... in Japan? The first one?

NIPPER: I believe I was in Furth, in Nuremberg, right near Nuremberg.

MORRIS: What was your ... reaction? Because I know, of course you know when the war ended in Europe the war was still going on with Japan ...

NIPPER: Yeah.

MORRIS: What did you ...

NIPPER: Well see, we were slated to go ... to the Pacific Theatre. And they had our outfit scheduled to go, see to ...

MORRIS: So when you were in ... near Nuremberg ... for you, as far as you were concerned, the war wasn't over yet, you, you're just waiting and biding your time until you had to go to Japan. Is that right?

NIPPER: Yeah, well we moved down. Our outfit moved down to Austria.

MORRIS: Mm hmm. Oh, that's right ...

NIPPER: And that was, that was a nice place. We had a ... building, there was a building down there on this—we, I called it Lake Addersea, a lake about fifteen miles long. And it was about ten or twelve miles from our base. And we could go down there, and ... there was a fella there that cooked the meals—a mess sergeant down there. And you'd go down there ... and eat your meals down there if you wanted to. You didn't go down there every day, but, you know, maybe once a week go down there. And ... the conductor of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra had a grand piano in that building, and he played while the people would eat their meals—he was displaced. And he'd do that for his meals, that's .... He was a real ... good pianist.

And I met a little boy right near that ... place. There was an orphanage. And ... I went over there—I took a little ole row boat and went over there at that orphanage, and there was a little boy about eleven years old. And ... he could speak real good English, and he took a liking to me. And we got to talking—every time I'd go down there, he'd want me to let him know that I was there, so he could come over and talk to me. And [he] said he'd like to have some comic books, so he'd learn the dialect of the Americans. And so I sent home and got him some of those, and he said he only had one cup of bullion soup and one slice of bread every day and that's all. So I'd take him some candy and stuff like that down there, and you know and .... His name was—I couldn't pronounce his name, but ... he said just call me Flo. He said, "You know what Flo means in German?" I said, "I don't have any idea." He said "[It] means body-crawling insect."

And ... my younger son, my youngest son married a girl up in ... Norfolk, Virginia. He's a industrial engineer, works in Sentara Hospital. Alicia, his wife, is ... an anesthetist. And her mother grew up in Vienna, and ... her mother came over here and could not speak English, couldn't speak any English. She met this man over there ... American soldier, and then he had to leave and go home. Well he thought so much of her—they hit it off real good and they decided that ... if they would send him back over there to Austria, near Vienna, that he would join up for four more years. And so he ... did. And so, they got married and came back to the states, and she said that .... She winds up ... speaking real good English—and just learned it from listening to different ones. She says she always counts her money in German, and she prays in German because she thinks the Lord can understand her a little better (laughs) in German than He can in English. (Laughter)

MORRIS: What did ... the little boy ... do you know how he ... learned English ... and did he ever explain why he called himself Flo?

NIPPER: All of the little kids had had English in school. Now there was another one that was about, oh he was about nineteen or twenty. And he, his ambition was to come to the United States, but—I took a liking to the little boy. He was ...

MORRIS: Did you ever find out how he had ... come to be an orphan? How his ... parents had ...

NIPPER: No ... he was in—his picture is in here [the 371<sup>st</sup> book] ...

MORRIS: Oh is it?

NIPPER: Yeah, it's ...

MORRIS: Did he ever explain to you why he referred to himself with that word? As a body crawling insect?

NIPPER: Well, he said ... that, I couldn't pronounce his name, and I couldn't pronounce it in German. [Looking through book] Let's see, I don't know ... his picture's in here somewhere. I don't know where it is. Alright, I'll tell you, I've got one of it, I don't think it's in here. I think I ...

MORRIS: Do you remember ... did you, was there ... any sense of relief or anything like that when the atomic bomb was dropped. That you knew then that you would not have to go to Japan? Or ... by that time ...

NIPPER: Well it ... all happened so fast that I didn't ...

MORRIS: Wasn't really aware of it?

NIPPER: No, I didn't really think too much about it.

MORRIS: Where did you go ... you went to school ... after the war on the GI Bill, right?

NIPPER: Mm hmm.

MORRIS: Where did you—is that when you went to, did you go back to UT or did you go to Maryville?

NIPPER: I came to UT.

MORRIS: UT.

NIPPER: I had some of my credits transferred there and some military credits transferred here.

MORRIS: What did you take when you came back? Did you just pick up where you'd left off?

NIPPER: I got into ... marketing and I should've finished, but I didn't. But my hindsight's better than my foresight. (Laughter)

MORRIS: Is that when you decided to ... ended up with the job ... where you—eventually ended up in sales ...

NIPPER: Yeah.

MORRIS: ... with Dupont. How did you come to get that job ... when you, when you left UT? Did you already have the job lined up before you left UT?

NIPPER: I came home over a weekend and called a man, and that was it.

MORRIS: He just hired you?

NIPPER: Yeah.

MORRIS: Right off the spot?

NIPPER: Uh huh. I always worked on a straight commission, and ... if I made money, they made money. If I didn't sell anything, I didn't make money, but they didn't lose any money because I paid all my expenses.

MORRIS: Well is there anything for this session you wanna add ... to the time we've spent? Which seems to me like only thirty minutes. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Yeah, it's been a ... it's really been a very enjoyable interview, and that's saying I don't feel one hundred percent ... so that's ...

MORRIS: But I think we would like ... if you want to do it again.

PIEHLER: Yeah ... we'd love to .... Yeah, and I wanna study your book more, and then study your transcript for this interview. I think this ...

MORRIS: I wanna study the ... I'd like to look at the book some more too. Are you sure you don't wanna borrow it, like maybe I get it at the end of the weekend?

NIPPER: No. I know who the fella is now.

PIEHLER: Let me just, before the tape runs out thank you very much for today's session. We really appreciate it.

MORRIS: We do.

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

Reviewed by Brad Mason, 2/04/05

Reviewed by Cinnamon Brown, 11/29/05

Reviewed by Kurt Piehler, 12/14/05