

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE  
KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

AN INTERVIEW WITH BUCK DONALDSON

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

INTERVIEW BY  
KURT PIEHLER  
AND  
TIFFANY DAVIS

OCTOBER 21, 2002  
KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

TRANSCRIPT BY  
TIFFANY DAVIS

REVIEWED BY  
STEPHANIE CRUMP  
McCALL SIMON

KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Buck Donaldson on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2002 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee, with Kurt Piehler and ...

TIFFANY DAVIS: ... Tiffany Davis.

PIEHLER: And I guess I'd like to begin—you were born on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1925 in ...

BUCK DONALDSON: ... New Verda.

PIEHLER: New Verda—just like it says—Louisiana. And your—could you tell me a little bit about your parents, to begin with?

DONALDSON: All right. My dad, in his early years, taught school until he made enough money to go to medical school. And he, um, went to med school at the University of Alabama, graduating in 1910. And I assume that he ... he was thirty-three by that time, actually, and he was asked to go to Louisiana and practice medicine. And so he settled in small towns in North Louisiana. My mother was from North Louisiana. She finished high school and was anticipating the possibility of going to Louisiana College, but I am told that my dad drove his horse and buggy past her house one day when she was standing at the gate and he went on down the road and made a curve and couldn't handle it. And I'm told that he came back down the road, stopped at my mother's house, went in and asked her parents' permission to court their daughter. (Laughter) And so they were married in Goldonna, Louisiana and ultimately there were five kids of us. I was born in New Verda, which was another—in a different parish, but was another very rural community. And, um, we lived there until I was three. Having parents who were—who loved music and this sort of thing, I became involved with that, and having been nine years younger than four others, I learned to sing all the fun songs that could be sung. And I—we lived in the big house right in the middle of town with a grocery store across the way, and I had the ... I could sneak off over to the grocery store, and the men would pick me up and set me on—and stand me on the counter and they would feed me candy as long as I would sing to them. (Laughter) At three years of age, we moved from there to where our home became permanently, in Castor, Louisiana—oh, forty miles south of Shreveport. And so I started grammar school and the like there. We moved from there to Central Louisiana in the Depression, because Dad lost all his money. All four of my brothers and sisters had to come home from college. And as I've always explained, you could eat chickens, but you couldn't wear feathers. (Laughter) So, my dad took a practice where he could get a small salary in Central Louisiana.

PIEHLER: When you say your father lost everything in the Depression, had he had investments or—because he was a doctor ...

DONALDSON: Right. Bank accounts, and ...

PIEHLER: So, he lost his bank accounts when the banks ...

DONALDSON: Yes. Closed.

PIEHLER: Bank runs.

DONALDSON: Right. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: And did he lose a house?

DONALDSON: Didn't lose a house at that particular time—he managed to hold on to that, but we had to leave it. Because ...

PIEHLER: He couldn't keep the mortgage.

DONALDSON: Well, he didn't ... I think we owned the thing, by that time. But a salaried position was so important. As I said, you can't wear feathers, and with five folks now back at home, that became a problem.

PIEHLER: So what job did he take?

DONALDSON: Well, he took a—we moved to a logging camp. It was called Louisiana Camp, south of Alexandria, Louisiana—southwest of Alexandria. And he took care of all of the families. There were, I suppose, the best I can remember, about—between thirty-five and fifty homes that the lumber company had built, and the men lived in these homes and the train station stopped there and started there. And in the morning, the men would get—would board the train and ride out to the lumber location and spend the day cutting logs. And then they would come home in the evening. And, of course, they had to get the logs out of the forest, and that sort of thing. So it was a strenuous business, and my dad had a lot to do with keeping these men in health for the job. We lived there ... four years, and in that time—we moved there when I was in the fourth grade, and so I attended a two-room school in the fourth ... and the fifth grades. But that was probably the biggest advantage of my educational career, in the long run, because I had a super teacher. We had fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh grades in the school, which meant fifteen minutes per hour for our own study. And that was also fifteen minutes at the chalkboard. And drill—constant drill, and this sort of thing, and also being able to hear what's going on next door in the next fifteen [minute] session with the fifth grade, and then sixth grade, and then seventh grade. Monstrous task for a teacher, but he was marvelous. And it was a fun time because we didn't ... these were all of the children who were in this fifty house situation. There weren't students who came in from the countryside. It was just for us.

PIEHLER: Was it run by the company, the school?

DONALDSON: Yes, under the direction of the parish, providing the teacher and everything. They [the logging company] provided the schoolhouse for us. And the extraordinary ... thing, we could sneak into the schoolhouse at night. We used to have rubber gun wars. (Laughter) And we had two big rooms here, and so we would divide up on each side of the room, and you had to sneak through and not get hit before you arrived at the other side of the house—of the room! And that was very exciting. Also had a lot of games to play—flying jenny, you may never have seen that, but you take a two by twelve board and get a stump that is level, and you

drive a long spike down into that stump and then you sneak some oil wrappings that were in the box for the train wheel was—to keep the wheels oiled. And then you use that for the grease on top of that thing, and what you do is to get two guys on the end of the Jenny over here and then two in the middle to push, and you try to go fast enough to sling ‘em off. (Laughter) It was possible. But school was terrific. We had a church there—was very exciting to be a part of, and with my musical interests and the like, I was always involved with all of that. So, when we finished the fifth grade, they decided the next year they would discontinue the two-room school, and we were going to be sent down to Leander, Louisiana, to another four-room school. My dad didn’t like that. And so he made special arrangements with the school department, the parish, for me to ride the school bus with the upperclassmen, and ride twenty-one miles to school over gravel roads—in Simpson, Louisiana. So I started the sixth grade in Simpson. And by this time, the Depression was beginning to get looser, and so I went to the sixth, seventh, eighth, and part of the ninth in Simpson. And my schooling in that two room school had been so exceptional that nobody could touch me in sixth, seventh, eighth or ninth. And I believe we had games—you know, math games and spelling bees and all that sort of thing. I remember in the sixth and seventh grade, one person beat me one time, working one problem. (Laughter) And most of the time, I won all the spelling bees. It came from drilling it at the blackboard.

PIEHLER: From ...

DONALDSON: ... from that two room school. It was marvelous. And even in the eighth grade, if I didn’t—if a teacher gave an exam in the eighth grade and I didn’t make the best grade in the class, she or he would give it over. Something was wrong with the quiz, if Buck didn’t ... (Laughter) Then in the ninth grade we went back home to Castor, to my hometown, in North Louisiana. Dad had gotten back on his feet. You’d be interested in knowing that when we moved to—we moved from Louisiana Camp to Simpson, when the logging situation went out. We moved into a house that was owned by a distant cousin. I recall that the house was probably a ten room house. And I also recall that my dad paid five dollars a month rent. (Laughter) And so in—but going back to Castor was quite an experience, because the first day in school—two people that I knew before, and I wasn’t all that fond with the principal. He was a little—I was perhaps a little in awe of him. And the first day that I was in school in Castor, he called me in and he looked at my report card, and he said, “Buck, I see here that you have a good record. You won’t be able to keep it up here.” All of the encouragement that I needed, really. Actually, what happened was that I took every course he offered. (Laughter) I only made an A in the last semester. But I had A’s everywhere else. And when I graduated from high school, we didn’t have a valedictorian. He didn’t dare, because I think he was a womanizer, and there were three girls, three girls and myself, who were the top four. So he didn’t name ... I recently learned from another classmate after all of these years that he did name the daughter of a school board member the valedictorian. But then, I didn’t need it. (Laughs) I was going to radio school, not to university. So I’m glad she got it, really. I’m glad he did that.

PIEHLER: So, you did finish high school ...

DONALDSON: Oh, yes.

PIEHLER: Before going into the Navy.

DONALDSON: Uh huh. Um, we only had eleven years in high school in Louisiana at that time, so I finished high school at sixteen. I played, let's see ... I started band in Simpson. I played clarinet and became the solo clarinetist. I also started piano there. And that was another of my problems. I wanted to be a concert pianist, but a country doctor in North Louisiana as the Depression was moving out—there was no way to get the kind of piano teaching that would have given me the techniques that I needed.

PIEHLER: So, you would have liked to have been a concert pianist?

DONALDSON: Yes. Uh huh. So I didn't get the chance to do that. Besides, it was war in high school with the guys. I was the only boy in town who played the piano. And I had every name—sissy name that I could be called.

PIEHLER: So, you were viewed as a sissy for playing the piano?

DONALDSON: Oh, by all means. And besides that, I also—I had to make a choice. Band—I played clarinet in the band—I was the only boy in the band. No, there was one other boy in the band. I think he played drum. And if ... basketball practice was the same time as band practice, so I went to band practice three days a week and basketball practice two days a week. But I always made the team, and I was always the first substitute when a sub had to go in. Thinking back on it, my PR would have been better—my public relations would have been better if I had dropped one or the other. (Laughs) But I didn't. But it wasn't easy to take. I can recall the day when ... dad would pick me up. We lived in town, and Dad would pick me up and take me home for lunch. And I very well remember the day when we got back to school after lunch and I said, "Dad, I'm getting out of this. I have had enough!" And his reply was, "You're getting out of nothing. You just started, boy!" (Laughter) Well, he had always been my supporter—whatever. That was great, so I hung on to all of it. And I've had my great times with it, and especially my victories. Because I shall now recount ... on my first furlough from the Navy, I was home ... and by that time, I had grown up a little. And I can recall being in front of the barbershop in Dad's car, and the barber—who was much of a drunkard in reality—was talking to another guy who was in school with me, and they were talking man talk, and I heard--and talking about fighting. And he said, "There's Buck out there. Take him on!" And he said, "Nuh, uh. He could whoop me." And then we went down to the—we had a get together at school, and I went over when everyone came and sat down at the piano, and all the girls came over. And I watched the boys standing there, and I heard one of them say, "Man, I wish I could do that!" (Laughter) So it was exciting.

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like during your Navy days that the piano playing actually—was that scene ever—you would go out and ...

DONALDSON: Quite amazingly, you see, in radio school I had different kind of start. I went straight from high school down to Port Arthur, Texas. And we had a fellow in there who would play the piano in the dorm. We had a dorm. It was a dormitory with boys on one side and girls on the other, really, and a cafeteria in the middle. We went to radio school and we took typing and all that sort of thing, and even did some broadcasting. We wrote our commercials in those

days, and we had to produce them ourselves—commercials on the radio. I'd had enough high school in activity in debates, interpretative reading, all of that sort of thing. In fact, I had the lead in the senior play from the ninth grade through my senior year. (Laughs) So, I'd had a lot of activity on that to bring me along, so—but there was a fellow that had a particular technique of playing the piano using chords. And I listened to him for a while, and then I started working out my own situation. And so I took the piece *Humoresque* and I would play the melody with the right hand and see how many different chords I could put to that melody with my left hand. And from that time, my piano—although I didn't have a teacher, I grew. And a lot of providential things happened in the Navy. My second ship in the navy was a troop transport. And I don't know how it came about, because this had been a merchant ship, a Cape ship. We had Liberty ships, we had Victory ships, we had Cape ships—this was transformed from a merchant ship, a cargo vessel, into a troop transport. And there was a piano!

PIEHLER: Which is ... they were pretty cramped ...

DONALDSON: Oh, yes!

PIEHLER: Thing is to have, a piano, it's pretty remarkable.

DONALDSON: Piano on the thing! So I went into town and bought *Clair de Lune* by Debussy, and I also picked up some records—Grofé's *Grand Canyon Suite* and two or three ... other things like that. And I had my own private times down in that hold with the piano, and learning it. But piano was great. In Port Arthur College—I was four months deep in Port Arthur College when I had an attack of appendicitis. I woke up with that pain and called my dad in North Louisiana. He came down and diagnosed appendicitis and didn't want me to be operated on in Port Arthur, so he took me back to Castor, Louisiana, and on to Shreveport for the operation. And I—that kept me in the hospital for a week and then I had a little recuperation, and during that time, the Navy announced that they were looking for candidates for radar school. And having had four months in radio school, I thought, "Hey, this ought to be a good foundation and another way to get into things." So that's when I decided that if Pop would go on with me, we'll join the Navy. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: I want to back up just a little and ask you ... you mentioned a few things about your father, and how your father and mother met. Could you talk a little bit about your mother?

DONALDSON: Well, my mom was a natural born musician. She never had a proper, formal piano lesson, but she played piano for church all my life. I sort of grew up on the front bench of the church, on a—she always had a velvet cover to the piano bench. And my dad always directed the singing for the church. So with Dad doing the singing and Mom—as soon as song service was over, as a kid, a young boy, Mom would have, of course, the front pew and she would take the velvet cover off the piano bench and put it on the seat and I'd go to sleep. (Laughter) And it was always interesting because there were five of us as kids, and Dad—being the only doctor in town—and if there was a little movement in the congregation during those years, we knew somebody from the outside was trying to get the doctor's attention. (Laughter) And so if my dad got up and left the church, then the rest of us knew we would walk home, for he would take the car and make a call and then come back. (Laughs) But Mom was always very

involved with the church and community. Although she didn't get to go to college, you wouldn't have known it because of her industry. And then, Dad's office was always at the house, which meant that patients came to our house. And my dad was probably the most unprejudiced man I've ever met. He never knew what color the person was that came into my house.

PIEHLER: So your father had both black and white patients?

DONALDSON: Yes. And he never made an exception, ever in his life, for which one was going to be seen next.

PIEHLER: So it was, in a sense, the order you came?

DONALDSON: Yes. First come, first served, and this sort of thing. And besides that, the community sort of looked to our house for a great many things. And so the black folks were at our house, and I am sure that my dad ate as many black meals in black homes, delivering babies, than anybody in the world. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: It's interesting, because I've interviewed a lot of doctors, not so much from the twenties and thirties, but from World War II era, who either became doctors just around World War II or in the immediate aftermath, and up until the 1950s, you alluded to something that now seems very much like ancient history, but visits, you know, the doctor visiting homes, was just assumed for most doctors ...

DONALDSON: Absolutely.

PIEHLER: ... and so, you have memories of your father going out at night?

DONALDSON: Oh, yes. In fact, in my college days, after the war, kids used to come home with me from college. And I shall never forget my best buddy, Arthur Hall from LSU [Louisiana State University], when I came up for a weekend. And, uh, we got in on Friday night and my dad was out all Friday night and Saturday morning—at my house, you ate breakfast with Dad, or you forgot it. (Laughter) So when Dad came in and Mom had fixed breakfast and all of us came in to the table, Arthur got a view of a country doctor who had spent his whole night out in some home looking over a patient. And he looked like he'd been out all night and this was the most thrilling thing of his memory. He mentioned that to me many times after that. I shall never forget the incident. Perhaps the person in town who had more money than anybody else lived across the road and about three houses down, because this was country, so it was not blocks, but three houses down the road. And this fellow had watered his milk. He had owned a dairy farm, and it had been watered down. And he was indicted and tried, and he tried to bribe the jury, and they sent him to Leavenworth Prison for a year. And he came back—he hadn't lost any money during that time, and he came back and I remember once in a situation he said to my dad, "Doctor, you cater to the lower class of people." And my dad looked at him rather straight and said, "Cater to the lower class? Tell me, where does a jailbird fit into the scheme?" (Laughter) Very strong, very straight. My Pop didn't—had no vices, he didn't smoke, he didn't drink, he loved people, and he loved his work. He said to me once, he said, "Buck, you know, I could've

gone to a city and made a lot of money, but I could not have made a lot of life.” (Laughs)  
Fantastic.

PIEHLER: It also sounds like he was paid in a lot of goods.

DONALDSON: He was.

PIEHLER: In the thirties, particularly, in eggs and ...

DONALDSON: Mm hmm. Even property. There was an eighty acre farm which came to him through that, which in years later was divided between the five kids of us. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: It was from his medical ...

DONALDSON: Yes, and that sort of thing. It’s tricky.

PIEHLER: I’m curious, in terms of—and this, to me, is sort of surprising—I ask this because I’ve often been surprised. Did you always have indoor plumbing in your houses?

DONALDSON: Oh, no. No.

PIEHLER: Even as the doctor’s ...

DONALDSON: ... in the doctor’s place. No, we always had the outhouse.

PIEHLER: The outhouse?

DONALDSON: Yes. We didn’t get electricity and plumbing until ... the war started. It was in the succeeding years.

PIEHLER: After 1939 or after 1941?

DONALDSON: After 1941.

PIEHLER: So, throughout the 1930s, you didn’t have indoor plumbing or electricity?

DONALDSON: No.

PIEHLER: What about radio? Did you have a radio then?

DONALDSON: Uh, not really. We had a lot of—I don’t suppose we had a radio until in the forties—in the mid-forties, anyhow.

PIEHLER: So, growing up, you have no recollections of listening to the radio?



DONALDSON: No. We played a lot of games at home. There was a lot of music at home. Whenever we were all in the car, we sung from the beginning of the trip to the end of the thing. But those sorts of things ... Dad—we always had biscuits, and we always had cornbread. My dad just wouldn't abide having a loaf of light bread in the house. (Laughter) This sort of thing.

PIEHLER: I'm curious—growing up, how much traveling did you do? For example, I know there's a big split in the little I know about Louisiana ... Did you ever make it to New Orleans growing up?

DONALDSON: Not growing up, no.

PIEHLER: Never growing up. You never ...

DONALDSON: But I did make it to Houston. My older sister, when she got married in Shreveport, Louisiana moved to Houston. And they were—I was always the baby, and my relationship with the rest of them was always extraordinary. So my older sister wanted me at her house in Houston for the summer. And the first time I went I was eleven, and my dad took me to Shreveport and put me on a bus by myself to go to Houston, Texas, which meant that I had to ride from Shreveport down to Lake Charles in the south, change buses, and then ride the next hundred and fifty miles to Houston from there, all on my own. And I went back—no, I didn't go back the same way. My dad came down for me. I stayed six weeks that summer.

PIEHLER: It sounds like that was your big adventure away from home. And Houston was a fairly big city.

DONALDSON: Mm hmm. Oh, yes. Houston was big.

PIEHLER: I mean, particularly compared—where you had come from. I mean, Shreveport, in many ways, was the big town when you were growing up.

DONALDSON: My dad was quite often in Shreveport. I can remember ... my dad had his eccentricities. He always wore kangaroo shoes—shoes made out of kangaroo skin, from Australia. And he would shop for that. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Was there a reason your dad wore shoes made of kangaroo skin?

DONALDSON: I just think he thought they were more durable and more comfortable. That's why. Strangely enough, in that country town, I don't ever recall—he was in town very often and there was a lot of dominoes and checkers played. And my dad particularly enjoyed dominoes. The men didn't sit around playing cards. They played dominoes or checkers and that sort of thing. I never recall seeing my dad in town, under any circumstances, without wearing a tie. Meaning, he didn't have to have a coat on, but he always ...

PIEHLER: He always had a tie on.

DONALDSON: That was a demand from himself. He always wore a tie. How much that had to do with his early—as I said he graduated from medical school in 1910, and he was thirty-three, and he had a lot—and he taught school before that, so he had some formalities that were important to him. And I saw it always to an advantage in the country living.

PIEHLER: It's just interesting, wearing a tie, I mean, 'cause I think a lot of my students today would have a hard time understanding, I think, no air conditioning and wearing a tie. You know, it's a very different ...

DONALDSON: Mm hmm. Yes, and northern Louisiana is hot as anything.

PIEHLER: Oh, it's ... I have relatives in Shreveport, so it's very hot. I, once, when I was growing up, spent the week there in Shreveport ... and it can get very, very ... And then once I went in October and it was still in the eighties.

DONALDSON: Yeah. But Dad loved his practice and loved the people in the town. And the black folks were in our house often. My mother always kept a scrapbook and if—we had a committee of black ladies who would come to the house and knew somebody died, and they would want to go through my mother's scrapbook to get poems for the funeral, and that sort of thing. And of course, my dad would lend money to the black folks who needed money, and would take care of them regardless of whether they ... I'm sure that when he died—and I just burned his books, I'm sure I burned five hundred thousand-plus of bills—that he never would have thought about asking for [money]. That was just his way. And I can't ever recall being afraid. I guess the only time I was afraid to confront him with a possibility was when I needed a clarinet to play in the band. And that was [during the] Depression. And I asked him if I could have a clarinet. He didn't laugh at me, but he said, "Why, of course." So he bought me a metal clarinet first because that was what everybody else was doing. After I became—three or four months later, when I was the solo clarinetist in the band, I walked in one day and he had a wooden clarinet for me. (Emotional) That was the kind of support.

PIEHLER: Yeah—because that was a big gesture. He may have been doing—he was not making a lot of money as a country doctor.

DONALDSON: Oh, no. No. But he—that was important to him, and of course, it made buddies.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you were very close to your father growing up.

DONALDSON: Very much. My mother, too, because in the ... actually, when I was in college and I would come home, by this time, my piano—my facility in the piano was good enough to handle things. And I've always—right now, people ask me, "How do you play the piano, by ear?" And I say "No." I usually say, "By suggestion. You suggest it and chances are, I'll play it." But I learned about three weeks ago that I play piano by feeling, for I feel every note I hit up to my elbow. (Laughter) I found out a new description—I play by feeling! But Pop would, when I was at home, we'd have lunch, and then the couch was across from the piano in the living room, and I would go in after lunch and play the piano, and as long as I played piano, Pop would

take his afternoon nap. When I finished playing the piano, Pop would go back to his office and see patients. But we were that kind of relationship.

PIEHLER: I'm curious about ... you didn't listen to radio—what about a movie theater?

DONALDSON: Dad loved that. And when we lived in Louisiana Camp, we were twenty-five miles from Leesville. And we would—Saturday nights, if Dad didn't have a patient that kept us at home, we went to the movie theater at Leesville, Louisiana. We could ...

PIEHLER: Which was a twenty-five mile ...

DONALDSON: Uh huh—a twenty-five mile trip. And in those days that was a long ride.

PIEHLER: That was a long way. (Laughs) So, your father really liked movies?

DONALDSON: He did. He enjoyed that very much, and Buck Jones was my favorite cowboy star in those days. So I've used Buck—of course, my real name is Buck, because his real name was Buck. I was Junior. But I very often when I see somebody ... “Your name?” “Jones.” (Laughter) But he liked that. We had always a set of encyclopedias and a set of the Harvard Classics at my house. And particularly in the years when I was in debating and speech competitions and that sort of thing, there was never any doubt—if I needed transportation to an event, he would be there. That kind of support was always there. When I left—he didn't want me to go to college, to radio school. He wanted me to go to LSU. I didn't believe that I had the privilege of putting him into debt to do it. So my sister, older sister, lived in Houston, and so when I left home to go to radio school, I went to Houston, spent a couple days with her. And when I got to Houston, I had a cable from my dad, saying, “If you will come home and go to LSU, I'll see that you have the money to do it.” (Laughs) But I knew he didn't have that much money, and I didn't think I ought to do that.

PIEHLER: You had mentioned that, you know, one of the signs you had as a small child that the Depression was really bad was when your older brothers—were your sisters in college?

DONALDSON: They were.

PIEHLER: They had to come home.

DONALDSON: All four of them.

PIEHLER: Now, you mentioned and you showed us a picture—what did—did both your brothers go back to college?

DONALDSON: Only one.

PIEHLER: Only one?

DONALDSON: Yes, the older brother, Ray. He went back to LSU and got his degree and got his commission.

PIEHLER: And your other brother, what happened? He didn't go back to college?

DONALDSON: Right. These two were quite an extraordinary pair. They were very much buddies. So much buddies that in country towns, I can remember times when they used to fight brothers. The older two brothers would fight until they were tired, and they would sit down and the younger two brothers would fight. (Laughter) And they were hunters and fisherman. And they always were hunters and fishermen. And they always took me with them, because I was young enough that I could sneak around to the other side of that tree where that squirrel was, and I could shake a bush, and that would scare that squirrel around on their side of the tree so that they could shoot the squirrel out. (Laughter) I never—they would take me fishing with them, but I knew that I was alone.

PIEHLER: They were the real partners and you ...

DONALDSON: They were the real actors and I was the support—support group. I have talked—one of my sermons as a preacher had been about John 21, where Peter and the disciples had been fishing and they hadn't caught anything all night. Jesus yelled at 'em and said, "Throw your net on the other side." I have said, "The last thing in the world I would have expected was to tell my brother where to throw his line when he fished, for the next thing I'd find it around my neck!" (Laughter) But so the younger, my younger brother, with all this they spent a great deal of time out by themselves. That is, they did their own cooking and all that sort of thing, and Raymond loved to cook. And so he came back after the war was over, he became—he made Captain before the war was over and had a terrible time in the Pacific. He was in the Signal Corps. But he loved to be a short order cook. He's the only person in the world I've ever seen throw scrambled eggs in the air. (Laughter) There wasn't anything about cooking he couldn't do. And so ... but his World War II experience was more demanding than we ever knew. And he died at forty-seven.

PIEHLER: When you say it was more demanding, what was his ...

DONALDSON: I knew—all I know is that at one time he was behind Japanese lines, separated from his company. And then I knew—that after part of that, he had gone to Australia for an R&R [Rest and Relaxation] and just that that was—right now we probably would treat him for PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder].

PIEHLER: You knew after the war that the war had really changed him?

DONALDSON: Yes. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: You didn't know what—now we would call it something like PTSD, but you knew the different ...

DONALDSON: It was an air. And we couldn't get him to church. He would not go to church after the war. Until ... before my wife and kids and I left for Africa as missionaries, we visited in Houston, and I preached at the church that he would have attended. (Emotional) And with me preaching, he went to church for the first time. And after that, never missed ...

PIEHLER: ... never missed church again.

DONALDSON: In fact, I came home from Africa on a furlough and was walking down the street in Baton Rouge, and surprisingly ran into the fellow who was the pastor of that church. Now, Raymond had died. So we greeted each other warmly and he said, he turned to me and said, "Buck, I have to tell you. Every preacher needs a church member like your brother Raymond." (Laughter) For what he did ...

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

DONALDSON: It was really something. That was his ...

PIEHLER: How much did he tell you—you and your other brother about the war? Or his father? You mentioned that you knew he was cut off behind enemy lines, but did he tell you ...

DONALDSON: Never discussed it.

PIEHLER: Never, never. And I assume you, you know, you and your brother had both been in the service ...

DONALDSON: Well, yes. Of course, all three of us ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. You had all been in the service. There wasn't ...

DONALDSON: ... At the same time. He never—and I don't know how much he assumed that I knew. Actually, my last trip to sea was from the Columbia River to the Philippines, and three days at sea, Japanese surrendered. But they didn't bring us back to America, they sent us on to the Philippines, and so we sat in Manila Harbor for thirty-three days. And I was a radioman, a signalman, a gunner's mate and a yeoman. Not a properly prepared yeoman, but I was the only navy person who could type, so I did the yeoman's duties, and because of that I usually—normally, as a radioman and a signalman, I spent eleven hours a day on duty. And, uh, I probably could have been the only third-class petty officer who went through World War Three with his own state room! (Laughter) And in Manila Bay, we had been there about a week or eight days, and I was asleep in my state room on the bridge, because I was radioman and signalman, that's where they hung out. And somebody shook me by the shoulder and when I opened my eyes—Raymond! He was looking me in the face. How did he find ... he never told me.

PIEHLER: But he found you, and ...

DONALDSON: He found me, and, in fact, he didn't wake me up ... he had already come aboard ship, met the gunnery officer, made arrangements with the gunnery officer for me to leave the ship and go with him to Clark Field near Manila, and to spend the week with him while we were waiting for orders about what we were going to ... so I was with him ...

PIEHLER: While he was in uniform, literally in uniform and overseas.

DONALDSON: Oh, yes. And he was an officer. So this third-class petty officer was hanging around with Army ...

PIEHLER: ... with Army officers. (Laughs)

DONALDSON: ... Captains—I don't believe we had a general around, but all the way up to it.

PIEHLER: And even in this circumstance, he didn't really share a whole lot in the way of what happened to him.

DONALDSON: I never had a conversation with him where he described something that went on.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

DONALDSON: But he showed me Manila in the week that I was with him, and there wasn't a building in Manila that wasn't damaged by artillery fire. It was fantastic. We are sitting on a ship that had brought lumber ...

PIEHLER: ... to Manila.

DONALDSON: ... and we took it back to America! (Laughing)

PIEHLER: Oh. The lumber never went ...

DONALDSON: No. They decided not to offload it. That was unreal. (Laughter) But it was war.

PIEHLER: Going back a little bit to Louisiana growing up—your parents were both Democrats, and there are two figures I want to ask you about their feelings about. The first, from Louisiana, would be Huey Long, and the second would be Franklin Roosevelt. You listed on your pre-interview survey both were Democrats, and it sounds like they were Southern Democrats. What did they think, first, I guess, about Huey Long?

DONALDSON: Well, they were never really Huey Long fans. They had to live with it, and they had learned to do that, because Huey was such a character. And ... of course, Dad was never part of the superstructure of the Democratic force. But there was no doubt where he stood—he was not a Republican in those days at all. But he would have made his choices. He

was free. But basically, his sympathies were with the Democrats, and, of course, with President—with Roosevelt.

PIEHLER: So, he was much more—he thought very highly of Roosevelt, but not ...

DONALDSON: Yes.

PIEHLER: He was more of the faction that—there were reasons not to like Huey Long.

DONALDSON: Yes, exactly. And the Long family ...

PIEHLER: I should give Tiffany a chance to—if she ... particularly about growing up.

DAVIS: Yeah, I was wondering ... Did you have any—you talked about all your extracurricular activities, music and everything. Did you ever have a job as a teenager, or you were just so busy in school ...

DONALDSON: The only thing that would have been possible as a teenager would have been a newspaper route.

DAVIS: Oh, okay.

DONALDSON: Because you see, every little country—every store in town was privately owned and they had no outside, other extra-family people didn't work. So there were really no opportunities for employment as a kid.

DAVIS: Especially during the Depression, I can guess.

DONALDSON: Yes. And even in my high school days, the same thing was true. There were ... It was too family-oriented and ... I can't think of ... The only thing would have been a newspaper route, perhaps. But that was usually done by somebody who, because of the nature of it, drove a car.

DAVIS: Right.

DONALDSON: He had—his route would have been Castor and Ashland and ... Lucky and these places, so that would have been ... I never thought about it. And we always kept busy with personal interests of—if ... there was music, things in high school. I don't recall a weekend my senior year of high school when I stayed home, when I didn't go somewhere, either to play basketball or to compete in a debating contest or to be in a speech contest or do something like that. And we did—we had lots of plays. Now, fortunately Castor High School was the only Class B high school in Louisiana at that time that had a full speech program. And that was due to that principal that I ...

PIEHLER: The principal who was not going to give you an A.

DONALDSON: ... who was not going to give me an A. (Laughter) Anyhow, even when I won a speech contest, he wouldn't. (Laughter)

DAVIS: Your brothers were quite a bit older than you. Did they ... were they already in the service when the war started, or did they join after the war started?

DONALDSON: Uh, they became servicemen, actually, after the war—as the war got underway. My older brother became—taught school for one year. And then the CCC was organized—Civilian Conservation Corps--was organized, by Franklin Roosevelt. And this gave young men a job out of the Depression. And it was on military bases and as a second lieutenant and then first lieutenant ... Ray became a first lieutenant, serving as commander of CCC camps and that was an advantage to me because I could go up and stay at the CC[C] camp with him.

PIEHLER: So, your brother Ray, who later died early, in part you think ...

DONALDSON: Raymond.

PIEHLER: ... Raymond. He got into the Army way before 1939 it sounds like.

DONALDSON: Ray came out of college, taught school for one year there, and then went into the CCC, so he was camp company commander until the war. And he went from, when the war started, as a first lieutenant he went on into active Army service. But he was always Army of the US; he was not the US Army, and that was to be his downfall later on, because he went through and became a colonel. As a lieutenant colonel, around 1960, he devised the North Atlantic defense plan for America. And he thought having done that; he would go on up the ladder.

PIEHLER: The general rank ...

DONALDSON: But when he finished that, we had about a 2,500 surplus of lieutenant colonels. And so he—they gave him the privilege of taking—of retiring or staying on as a master sergeant for the next three years and retiring, which meant that in the next three years, he would actually become a full colonel, and he would retire as a colonel. But this also meant that he had to become an enlisted man for three years. He did it, but it nearly killed him.

PIEHLER: I mean, 'cause he thought he was on track to potentially become general, and then to have to become a master sergeant ...

DONALDSON: Not only was that true, but, of course, then his family couldn't participate in officers' activities. It was immoral in the long run, for no longer was Marian [Raymond's wife] able to be a part of the Armed Officers' Club activities. She had to go to the noncoms' [Noncommissioned Officers'] place. And I believe Ray had an ulcer. And much of the problem was he was not properly used. In fact, he finished that twenty years out overseeing the tennis courts and the golf course at Fort Lee, Virginia. Ridiculous!

PIEHLER: Because he had been involved with war planning before that ...



DONALDSON: Absolutely. He had been the supply ... what they call it, I don't remember. I'm having a senior moment.

PIEHLER: A quartermaster?

DONALDSON: Quartermaster. He had been the quartermaster in the Korean War. He had been in Seoul—in Korea. And he had those kinds of responsibilities, always. And he had been the quartermaster of Fort Totten in ...

PIEHLER: New York.

DONALDSON: New York City—Long Island. And then to have to come out of that as a sergeant, it nearly got him. But he made it, and he lived to be eighty.

PIEHLER: What did he do after he retired from the service?

DONALDSON: Virtually nothing, besides what he wanted to do. He had bought a house in Alexandria, Louisiana. It had been an old, broken down—it was an old, broken down plantation home. I didn't know anything about it. It was later that I discovered that this was the house where LSU got its start. And its name is Tyrone and it is now a showplace. He spent his time doing what he could with that house and, uh, he was the regional president of Civitan and these sorts of things. He never, ever went back into a situation after that which I would have called a job.

PIEHLER: But it sounded like he stayed very busy.

DONALDSON: He did stay busy, and he did have a very active life, but it took a toll. I don't know that he was ever again the colonel that I knew earlier on.

PIEHLER: I guess I get a sense that both your brothers, who had been really quite—give the impression they were quite gregarious, and the military really wore greatly ... On one brother, basically, you really think it was, as you remember it, post-traumatic stress disorder.

DONALDSON: Yes.

PIEHLER: And your other brother experienced being, in a sense, surplus for the Army at such a late point in his career, you know—humiliated to have to take a sergeant's rank after being a lieutenant colonel.

DONALDSON: Yes, absolutely.

PIEHLER: That's quite a transition. It's not going from a captain or lieutenant to sergeant. Colonel rank, you can almost taste being a general.

DONALDSON: You're right. Now, being retired as a colonel helped.

PIEHLER: Yes, that helped.

DONALDSON: That helped because that put him back on the scheme, but there was always that three-year ...

PIEHLER: ... as sergeant—master sergeant.

DONALDSON: ... that he never ... I don't think he ever forgot that. And I don't know whether he could have.

PIEHLER: Yeah. You mentioned you debated in high school. Do you remember any of the topics you debated?

DONALDSON: Resolve that the power of the federal government should be increased.

PIEHLER: That was one of the debates?

DONALDSON: That was one of the debates, yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you take a side, or were you ... told what side you debated?

DONALDSON: Well, you could choose.

PIEHLER: You could choose?

DONALDSON: Uh huh. The negative or the positive. And we always had ... Because we were a Class B school, which meant that we had to debate Class A teams, and there were no Triple A's and Four A's and Five A's. You were either A, B, or C. So we had real strong competition, and we held our ground. We didn't ever get blown out. In fact, we were certain we won some matches that we didn't get! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I'm curious, when did you have a sense of the war in Europe or in Asia, growing up?

DONALDSON: Well, amazingly, December the 7th was my dad's birthday, and so when Japan invaded Hawaii—Pearl Harbor—on my dad's birthday, that was always prominent with me. I was still in high school. I was a high school junior at the time, but through speech activities and high school life, even in that small town, we were involved with world circumstances. And so I knew enough about it altogether that I looked ahead and, at my age, I just could say, "I know I'm not going to go to college," this sort of thing, and what is the alternative to—and we dealt with that, that sort of thing. And then my dad was always world conscious, and Mom, too, from a ... from that sense. Let me see. I have a picture of them that we took off the wall. What did I do with it? It ought to be a folder. (Rummaging through papers) Where did it go? It's just a single page. My wife copied it with the computer. Hold on. It has to be here. Oh! There it is. That was my dad and mom. There was a blotch in front of mother's face. But she was seventeen years younger than he. That, by the way, is my family—one granddaughter. But there was always world concern. Pop was always a deacon. My mom always taught the adult women's

Sunday School class. Pop didn't try to teach a Sunday School class, because he never knew how many of the times he'd be called out. And so he didn't do that sort of thing. But his own sense of responsibility, community-wise ...

PIEHLER: Would you or your parents have been classified as interventionists? For example, how did you or your parents feel about the Lend-Lease or the Destroyer Deal? Do you have any recollections of that?

DONALDSON: Well, by the time that came along I was away. Uh, I was already ... The Lend-Lease came after, and I'm not aware of having discussions with him in that particular vein.

PIEHLER: Now, you graduated high school in 1942 ...

DONALDSON: Right.

PIEHLER: ... and you enlisted in the Navy in December 1942 in Shreveport. And you mentioned Radio School. Were you involved with the Eddy Program?

DONALDSON: No. I had six weeks of Boot Camp, and out of that—from that, I was then sent on to Radio School in Los Angeles.

PIEHLER: Now, where did you do your Boot Camp?

DONALDSON: San Diego.

PIEHLER: San Diego.

DONALDSON: This was quite an extraordinary thing and I don't know that you're interested in it, but you might want to make a copy of it. I've written—I started writing something for my kids, and I've got quite a story.

PIEHLER: These are your experiences?

DONALDSON: Yeah. Well, I can tell you about it, and you can maybe copy that.

PIEHLER: Oh, I would like to copy that. I would like to copy that.

DONALDSON: I suppose it was because my dad took me to enlist, and we had quite a time with the enlistment officer. And I was seventeen and I had to report to Shreveport, and I had to take a plane—a train from Shreveport to San Diego. And there were twenty-five of us that had gathered together that day, and I probably was the youngest of the twenty-five, and as we assembled, the officer called me away from the rest of them and took me in another room and handed me the list and told me—informed me that I was in charge. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I've heard ... Yeah, you're not the first I've heard this story from, but—yes, go on.

DONALDSON: I was responsible for getting the guys from Shreveport to San Diego without an incident occurring anywhere along the way. (Laughter) And so we—I took over and we went in. That first night, as we started moving, I had to call muster. And I called about five names and suddenly I was interrupted. “Hey, Buck! I’ll bet you don’t smoke, do you?” And I said, “No.” And about five more names, “Hey, Buck! I’ll bet you don’t drink, do you?” “At my age? No.” “Hey, Buck! I’ll bet you don’t cuss!” There were five of them that came up, “I bet you ...” Well, let’s see, maybe four. I think the last one was, “I bet you even go to church.” And I said, “Every Sunday.” And I answered them all, not as a challenge, but as a confidence. And it worked. And ... we actually had one little incident that happened on the way. We had to dip down into Mexico. After the train the train had gone to El Paso and then into Mexico and came back up. And while we were there, we had to stop. We must have stopped for two hours. And there was a gourd vine that was growing all along the railroad track side and they had little green—little beautiful Mexican gourds that you see sometimes. And at first it became catch, and then it became war. And then there was a crash. One of those gourds went through a window. And it so happened that the Pullman car ahead of us blamed my guys, so I called muster and I said, “All right. Which one of you guys did it? Now, don’t stand there and act innocent. Let me know.” “It wasn’t us.” “You say so? Okay.” So the first thing you know, there was a Navy lieutenant aboard the train to get me to sign the papers that said my guys had broken that window. Well, I had two brothers that were officers; this one didn’t bother me. And I said, “By golly, if you want to take somebody to jail, you can take me. My guys say they didn’t do it. I won’t sign that paper for you or anybody.” We went on and got to the next—the next big station. Three officers came on. And I said—I told them the same thing, “You want to take somebody, take me. But you’re not going to blame my guys with something they tell me they didn’t do, and I’m going to accept that.” So, they forgot about it and when we got to San Diego and dismissed all this foolishness, I don’t know which way they went. I didn’t go with them, but they all ...

PIEHLER: They all made it safely to ...

DONALDSON: ... Yes. And they all came by and shook my hand. (Laughter) I went to boot Camp and then it was from Boot Camp that I went to Radio School in Los Angeles.

PIEHLER: Now, you ... The farthest you had been traveling from home had been Houston.

DONALDSON: Houston, mm hmm.

PIEHLER: This sounds like it must have been a very big adventure.

DONALDSON: It was. But having two such older brothers and two such older sisters, it was an education—especially since I was nine years younger than all of them. And I had to fight my way with them. My younger brother used to tease me to tears, and I nearly could have killed him twice. Once he just passed on the other side of that tree when that railroad spike hit the tree. (Laughter) And they would tease me until I would do something and my dad would give me a whipping, but they never got a whipping. (Laughter) I had to take it. It always unnerved me that, “Why doesn’t he get a whipping?” Well, he was too big to get a whipping.

PIEHLER: What do you remember about Boot Camp? What sticks in your mind? Because I've usually interviewed people who say their induction and then their first few weeks at Boot Camp or Basic Training leave some real impressions. What are your immediate memories of Boot Camp?

DONALDSON: Well, it was naturally a different world, but as—it was to me an adventure, really. Um, I liked the location. In those days, we did much of our training in—military training—we took long hikes and we would march through communities. And the houses were pastel pink and with the ocean there, to me that was terrific. I had enough—I was always a football addict, though we never had football in my high school. But I heard LSU/TCU in the Sugar Bowl. The first—second—I guess the first Sugar Bowl, really, on the radio and fell in love with football. Absolutely fell in love with it.

PIEHLER: Because you, growing up, you hadn't had a radio.

DONALDSON: My brother was home from college and the game was played ... 1934, I believe. And somehow—perhaps he brought a radio with him. And I listened and just became an addict on that time. So I played basketball in high school. We always played—we had tennis and ping-pong. But I had enough sports activity that the physical part of Boot Camp was not a genuine problem and then enough relationship with my officer brothers to know about guns and that sort of thing. So I rather took all that in stride, and I didn't worry about it or I just did what I was told to do—suppose to do. Always felt confident that I could handle what was coming along. Six—only six weeks ...

PIEHLER: Did you have any Firefighting Training as part of ...

DONALDSON: No, never Firefighting.

PIEHLER: Never Firefighting. I have a feeling that was a later—that was later incorporated into the training.

DONALDSON: Yeah. Calisthenics ...

PIEHLER: What about any memories of the old chiefs, some of the petty, you know ...

DONALDSON: Well, they—the regimentation there ... I guess I sort of expected that sort of thing. It wasn't in Boot Camp that—though we did have one or two rascals, but I never felt that there was anything I couldn't get around. It was—that part came in Radio School, for I went from San Diego to Los Angeles. Now, the naval armory in Los Angeles was turned into—whatever it had been before, it became the Radio/Signal School and it was a huge armory building and they had simply put up walls along—around the area. Our living quarters were behind walls back there. We were roughly 144 to 160 people per company. That was there. And I believe there were six companies of radiomen and two companies of signalmen that were there. And we had a couple—at least two chiefs in that that always—and they were involved with the calisthenics and this sort of thing, and we always had to endure them. And they would taunt us, especially when we had to do the obstacle course. My hands have never been stronger

enough than playing piano. Chinning myself was never my forte. Nor were pushups my forte, even though I've got a big chest.

PIEHLER: Well, you had played basketball, so it wasn't that you—you had actually had your physical activity.

DONALDSON: But we had this long obstacle course. We had to climb the walls, we had to go through the tunnels—one of these old chiefs was always standing there, "Who's going to be that last man?" Because he was going to have to do it again. Or, often, "Who's going to be the last five men?" Well, I never was the last man, nor one of the last five, but I've been sixth! (Laughter) And I've been second! But it was a ... But the adventure there ... What we did have also—we had—the Army—the Signal Corps didn't need the equipment that calls for sitting down and this sort of thing. We had long tables across the armory where the guys learn Morse code. But we had two areas that were basketball goals, uh, basketball courts. And we had marathon basketball games. We would start on Saturday morning at eight o'clock in the morning and play 'til Taps that night. Fortunately, my company had the best basketball team ... there were about nine of us that joined together that were only beaten one time in six and a half months. I say six and a half months, because four and a half months of Radio School and then they took the top thirty of us out of the class of 144 and kept us there for Signal School. We didn't know what it was about, because we'd never heard of Armed Guard and we weren't being told.

PIEHLER: So, you initially thought you were going to go into the Regular ...

DONALDSON: Fleet.

PIEHLER: ... Yeah, a Regular Navy ship.

DONALDSON: But I had an exceptional advantage in that with my previous Morse code training. When I got to Radio School, they had—you had—you first learn six words, then eight words, then ten, then twelve, and in this sort of thing, very often you hit plateaus. You may have a struggle getting here and then you'll hit a point where all of the sudden, it's there. And you jump. Well, I could already do twenty a minute and I didn't tell them that. I moved from one table to the next table, to the next table, to the next table. And to be a third class petty officer, you had to be able to copy twenty-five words a minute in plain language and eighteen words a minute in five letter code groups. I did that at the end of the first month, which meant that I had gone as far as they'd planned for me to go. And with that—but they had all these guys. They had to do something with me, so they put me in charge of the code program, which meant that I went into the code room, or the control room, and I set up the tapes for the code machines down the line. But I had my own machine and I could sit there and do what I wanted to do. So, in four and a half months, instead of coming out with twenty-five words a minute, I came out copying forty-five words a minute, which meant that I never, ever had anybody with me on a ship that could touch me.

PIEHLER: From what I've read, that's remarkably high—a high rate. That's ... [To Tiffany Davis] ... because I think one of the books you've read—I forgot what that Navy veteran could do, but forty-five is ...

DONALDSON: Yeah, I could stay a sentence or so behind. I never tried any more than that. We had old chiefs, who could turn around and talk to you for three or four minutes and then turn around and type everything in that had been said.

PIEHLER: You weren't that ...

DONALDSON: But I wasn't that old! (Laughter) I was only eighteen or nineteen during that time, but that was an absolute advantage, because when I was aboard ship, I only had a ... I had a merchant machine radio operator and a striker, we called—he was a seaman first class, who was a striker radioman on my around the world trip. But my next ship was a troop transport to Cape Canso and we had a complement of forty-four men—Navy men on that ship. And I had a first class and a second class, and then me, the third class there. So I volunteered to take the twelve to four radio watch night and day. Everybody hated the twelve to four, but I knew that if I had the twelve to four watch I could keep them out of my hair. They weren't going to bother me. Only I didn't succeed with the first class, because it killed his soul that he couldn't copy even thirty words a minute, much less forty-five. And he spent most of the time on that ship with me on my twelve to four watch in the afternoon trying to build up his code speed. But it also meant that I never had any arguments from them. That was the only ship that I didn't have my own state room, because there was too many of us there.

PIEHLER: Well, you mentioned the state room earlier. I mean, particularly you're on the troop transport, space is really at a premium, and so having your own state room ...

DONALDSON: But I didn't on the troop transport.

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

DONALDSON: No. Yeah, that ... We were all bunked in the ...

PIEHLER: You were? So, you didn't have your own.

DONALDSON: Yeah. We had always—we had—I had two advantages. One was with the twelve to four watch, but that also meant that I didn't get—have to get—stand up for—to get awake and go out on the decks for sunrise, because we always had to man the guns thirty minutes before sunrise and thirty minutes after sunrise. But they never called me to do that. Fortunately, we had enough gunners' mates on that ship that they could lose me in that scheme. Otherwise, I ... and otherwise either because I always had—I stood eight to twelve radio watch, three to five signal watch and then eight to twelve radio watch again at night, so I had already eleven hours a day, and they didn't bother me with the rest of it.

PIEHLER: I'm curious ... What did you think of California when you got passes or leaves?

DONALDSON: Well, I had an exceptional time. Not so much in San Diego, because I was more or less on my own there. But Los Angeles was something. I, uh, in the beginning days of Radio School—of course, there was Hollywood and all of the other exciting adventures around, and the guys were always wanting to go. And I had another advantage. I didn't drink. So I became the drinking buddy. If Buck went on liberty with them, Buck would get them back to the base! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So, you didn't drink at all during the services? But you saw a lot of drinking, it sounds like.

DONALDSON: Oh, I saw a lot of drinking. I had a lot of drinking buddies. They did the drinking, I did the buddying. And that always helped. But I always also looked around for things. We, by the way, had formed a band at the naval armory, and I played clarinet in the band that we had. And, good fortune, I went to see a movie one Saturday afternoon and struck up a conversation with a couple in front of me with their son. He was sixteen; I was eighteen at this time. But they invited me to go into the movie with them. It so happened that he had made the sets for the movie. The father had made the sets. And it was a Jewish couple and he—and Anne, his wife, was the head cashier for Santa Anita Racetrack. Steven was still in high school. But they adopted me—virtually adopted me—expected me at their house every liberty that I had, and if I didn't go to their house, they would likely drive out to the base and visit with me at the armory.

PIEHLER: So you, in a sense, had a foster family while you were in Los Angeles.

DONALDSON: Really, absolutely. And I still have, except that Bill and Anne are dead now, but I talked with Steven two weeks ago.

PIEHLER: So, you're still in touch after all—that friendship maintained ...

DONALDSON: Oh, yes. We're as much brothers. I think, a great deal has to do—I refer to the fact that my dad was the most unprejudiced soul. And Bill, Anne, and Steven were Jews—Steven, Bill, and Anne Peck. And I never knew that. I wouldn't have—if somebody had asked me halfway through this thing, "Were they Jews?" I wouldn't have told you they were Jews. They were Americans! (Laughter) But they—I think that was a part of it. They were people with me. And Bill once said to me that—of course the Jewish community in Los Angeles was very much under the eye of almost everybody, I learned later—and Bill said to me, "Buck, I think you're the only person I've ever known who allowed me the privilege of being a Jew if that was my choice." What a world. What a statement.

PIEHLER: Well, it's interesting you mentioned ...

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Buck Donaldson on October 21, 2002 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...



DAVIS: ... Tiffany Davis.

PIEHLER: And I was struck by that because, as I mentioned to you just as the tape was cutting off, there was a lot of anti-Semitism, but there was also a lot of—I mean, it's a pretty obvious point, there was a lot of racism, particularly where you grew up. And you give me a sense that you were really raised where this shouldn't matter, that people should be judged as individuals.

DONALDSON: That's right.

PIEHLER: So, it wasn't—to me, when you learned this family and, really, your best friend out there was a Jew, this shouldn't matter.

DONALDSON: That didn't matter. It was just marvelous with me, actually. I can remember the first time we went through the chow line at Boot Camp and somebody says, "Hey, Mack, what's your name?" And I said, "Donaldson." And the guy who was on KP duty, feeding the food—shoveling the food into the trays, not that you had a choice, they were going to poison you anyhow. (Laughter) He said, "Donaldson. That's Swedish, isn't it?" (Laughter) I just said, "Swedish? Are you *mad*? That's American!" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, I mean, I just laugh because in some ways, coming from sort of Northern Central Louisiana, I mean, it couldn't be anything but the antipathy of a Swedish area. (Laughter)

DONALDSON: Yeah. So, I thought that was a great excitement getting involved with other nationalities and the like and learning that there *were* Swedes and ...

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like you liked being near Hollywood, too, that that was a lot of ...

DONALDSON: Yeah, that was a lot of fun. I could—the Palladium was open, and they had the big name bands. And that meant that I could take this bunch of jugheads who were interested in spending the night at the Palladium and I could leave them and go up to the bandstand—and Charlie Spivack was the feature for much of the four months that I that I was there, and I've loved him ever since. He was the best trumpeter in the country. And I in—with my musical ear, I loved it and took advantage of all that sort of thing. When there came a time in my career when I got tired of buddying the drunks, I—before I met the Pecks in that city, I went out on my own. I learned that if I went to town and I picked out the biggest hotel and went into the restaurant, I could have a meal that wasn't going to be a hamburger or a hot dog, and I would usually be put at a table with someone else, which opened a door for me to get to know somebody else. And we'd have a good meal and have that conversation and move from there.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you also were not too fond of the food you were getting on base. Is that accurate?

DONALDSON: That's very, in these days, accurate. I had never had marmalade before. And navy beans for breakfast? And to get out of the Navy later on and discover that there are old

retirees who had to have beans for breakfast! (Laughter) I did learn to put up with it, but to this day I don't eat ketchup.

PIEHLER: Because of overdosing [on ketchup] in the Navy?

DONALDSON: Yeah. And this sort of thing. But that opened a lot of doors and we just ... It was a great adventure, and looking back on it, particularly even while I was there, we had—it was another one of those special things, too—from the standpoint of learning how to clean up things, for we had white glove inspections. And even now at seventy-seven, I do the housework at my house.

PIEHLER: Some of the Navy, the Navy ...

DONALDSON: Oh, always. (Laughs) My wife doesn't know how to do three-fourths of the things that I do. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, one of the—it's interesting, because you had brothers in the Army, and one of the things, I'd be curious your comments, is that the Navy was the more hierarchical, particularly on base or on larger ships, the more hierarchical of the service and a lot more emphasis was put on that white glove inspection. Is that your sense?

DONALDSON: I never thought about it that way, really, because that was my forte. My mom swept the house twice a day, whether it needed it or not.

PIEHLER: So, you were already in the mindset for ...

DONALDSON: Yeah, and I liked that business of having everything clean as could be. Even today, people walk into my house, and we live in a museum, and folks will walk in ... "Who does the dusting?" "I do the dusting!" (Laughter) But I always thought that was a—while it was demanding, it was great. The only thing that I disliked was standing guard.

PIEHLER: The guard, you ...

DONALDSON: I could've done something better than stand guard, but we had to stand guard. And you mentioned the racism. It was during my time at Radio School in Los Angeles when we had the Zoot Suit Wars ...

PIEHLER: So you remember that?

DONALDSON: ... in Los Angeles, and was in it. We were not allowed to go on liberty as singles. We were only allowed to go off the base, away from the armory, as two or three or four. And we were not allowed, during the time that I was sort of going to the hotels for lunch—for a meal or something like that, I had to wait at Sunset Boulevard and Chavez Ravine Road until another sailor came along before I could make it from that junction under the railroad track and on out to the armory. And we had guys that were attacked. And the ultimate result of the whole thing was that Los Angeles called an armistice day. Yuck. We had to march down to the city

hall in Los Angeles and stand there in parade stance for six hours while they got this Zoot Suit War out of their system.

PIEHLER: So you stood guard?

DONALDSON: Yes.

PIEHLER: Down at city hall?

DONALDSON: No, we didn't stand at—it was just that day that they brought in the zoot suiters and the representatives and that sort of thing and brought in the Navy and the other services' representatives and we called a halt.

PIEHLER: Halt?

DONALDSON: ... to that Zoot Suit War.

PIEHLER: You very much remember that end of that ...

DONALDSON: Oh, by all means. Yeah. Some of us—there were some guys who knew how to pass out. (Laughter) So they didn't have to stand there the six hours, but the rest of us didn't trust ourselves that much.

PIEHLER: Do you remember when you would go out on passes—do you remember seeing any zoot suiters?

DONALDSON: Yes.

PIEHLER: Because I've read it was a very distinctive garb.

DONALDSON: Oh, it was.

PIEHLER: Which, particularly in the context of the early forties ...

DONALDSON: Yes. It was the flashiest color and the flashiest style that you could find. It was zoot suit. It was just that. But it was perhaps almost the forerunner, as far as the activity is concerned, almost the forerunner of gang activities that have developed since then. Because there were these Mexican—and most of the zoot suiters that were causing this actually were aliens. They were not citizens. But we had to live with it, and we did, and made the best of it.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that you'd never heard of Armed Guard. When did you have a sense that—when did you know you were going to be part of the Navy Armed Guard?

DONALDSON: I think it was when I got to Treasure Island! Having finished Radio School and Signal School ...

PIEHLER: And expecting to be put on a ...

DONALDSON: Well, I sort of knew that we weren't going to be a—I wasn't going to a destroyer or a cruiser or a battleship or something like that. But what it was about, I had no vision of a Liberty ship or a Victory ship or a Cape ship or anything on that order. Nor did I have any vision of the fact that it would be small crew. And of course, depending on the gunnery officer, who was in charge, it wasn't—we weren't really military, insofar as that those things weren't required of us. We had guns and radio and signal duties to take care of, and we didn't have to muster at six o'clock in the morning and all that sort of thing. We did our job when we were supposed to do our job. Even in the Armed Guard, as enlisted men we had our own mess hall. We had our own waiters—merchant marines who served, and we even had a menu! (Laughter) Of course, the cooks were winos, but ... (Laughter) But the idea of something that wasn't fleet ... Now, we must have, looking back on it, we must have had some instruction in radio procedures, because the procedure – radio procedure that we had in the Armed Guard was totally different from the fleet. And I'm sure that we had enough instruction that I knew what was going on and that, but to get the overall picture of Armed Guard, no.

PIEHLER: That was, yeah ...

DONALDSON: And fortunately, the folks who—the top thirty of us—probably were the best of friends out of the a hundred and forty-four to begin with, in the long run. So we—it was quite a camaraderie that we had among ourselves as we went through Signal School and used the blinker and learned the flags and learned semaphore and all that sort of thing, and ...

PIEHLER: Let me give Tiffany a chance to sort of step in.

DAVIS: How much ... how often did you hear from home while you were first at Boot Camp and Radio School and then when you first got out actually in the Navy? How much contact did you have with them? Because your family was pretty spread out—your parents were in Louisiana and your brothers were in the Army. Did you have a good sense of how everybody else was doing while you were kind of ...

DONALDSON: Well, admittedly, it was kind of an event if I heard from—if I got a letter from a brother—perhaps a sister more often. Mom rather regularly, but there was a kind of understanding that, by and large, Dad communicated with the sisters and Mom communicated with the boys. So it didn't—Mom would bring me up to date on what Doctor was doing—this place or that or what was going on or what sickness was going on in the community and the like. She—Mom was a newsy writer. Unfortunately, she was left handed and in school she was made to write with her right hand, so she always had penmanship problems and that sort of thing that should never have been. But anyhow, she kept me very well informed and ... we didn't telephone.

DAVIS: Right.

DONALDSON: There was no telephone communication and that sort of thing. I think one of the toughest times that I had—I had the mumps in Radio School. I had the mumps over

Mother's Day, and I couldn't do anything. That was a bit disturbing to me, but there was nothing I could do about it; I couldn't open my mouth. But communications with them ... actually, through the war I just knew my brothers were there, somewhere. I mean, usually—my older brother stayed in Hawaii most of the time. He didn't—I don't believe in World War II he ever got beyond Hawaii, which of the islands there. But as you can see from this picture of the three of us here, was made in Los Angeles.

PIEHLER: Oh. So you were in together. And were they stationed there, or just passing through?

DONALDSON: Ray was stationed there and Raymond was passing through, and so ... they made it their business to see that the three of us got together and that the three of us had this picture made. But otherwise I don't ever remember hearing—having a letter from Raymond from a war zone, and I don't remember that from Ray, either. Most of my communications came from Mom.

DAVIS: Did you have ... or did you follow the events of the war? Did you have a good sense of what was going on?

DONALDSON: I did, because I was the radio operator. And as such I knew—the rest of the guys in the force wouldn't have, because I was always adventuresome with the radio, and I learned how to pull in Armed Forces Radio. In fact, I kept up with LSU football all the way through. And I knew what was the first ten songs on the Hit Parade. In fact, I had discovered that I was almost afraid to come home when “Mairzy Doats and Dozy Doats and Little Lamsey Divey” was number one on the Hit Parade. (Laughter) I was in the Indian Ocean when that happened, so I called up and said, “Guys, are we sure we want to go back?” (Laughter) But one of my choices was quite amazing in this order. Of course, we did get Red Cross packages, and they managed to get our Christmas packages to us. I mentioned my dad never smoked, but on my first trip to sea, before I got my stateroom, I was in the muck room. There were seven of us in this telephone booth, and there wasn't room but for five of us to stand up in, I think. And I was the only one that didn't smoke. And so for the first three weeks, I had a headache from cigarette smoke, and I concluded I've got to conquer this somehow and I thought, I said, “Well, maybe I'd better learn to smoke. Maybe that would do it.” So I started smoking in self-defense and I never was a real addict and that sort of thing, but I always did. It was just something I've got to—and I suppose the first time I went home on leave after my around-the-world trip, I had a cigarette. Of course, my other two brothers smoked, and so Dad expected that. But I think it—nothing ever hit me harder than when that next Christmas, I got from my dad a carton of cigarettes in my Christmas bag. And I said, “Uh uh. This has to be a message.” (Laughter) Not my dad. So that went out the window.

PIEHLER: So you didn't take—when he sent you cigarettes, you didn't take this as a gesture that he was supportive of this.

DONALDSON: Not at all—this was a wild notion. Not something for me to take. He could live with it, but that was about all there was there. I always had—because of the strong relationship between my dad and mother, my attitude toward life as a serviceman was never do

anything that would give my dad or mother the wrong—a bad reputation. That was the most important thing there. And therefore I didn't. My trust in them, my relationship with them, was so solid that I didn't need what these other guys needed. And I didn't get into it. And so our communication was always strong and very meaningful. Another extraordinary thing happened was that when I came back to Treasure Island from my around-the-world trip, the first Sunday I had liberty in San Francisco, I went to the First Baptist Church of San Francisco and there was on the platform with the pastor that day a chaplain. I didn't know him from Adam, but in the course of the church service, Dr. Julianelle, the pastor, introduced him. He had been the pastor of my church from birth to five years old. There was a time when I was five years old I had a crush on his daughter. (Laughter) So when the church service was over, I went up and found him. His name was Fortenberry. He was a Navy chaplain, and so I introduced myself to him and he nearly passed out on the platform, and he said, "Come on, let's go!" and so he took me by the arm and we went out to the car—church service was over—and he just held me by the arm and said to his wife inside, "I'll bet you in a thousand years couldn't tell me who this is." (Laughter) And she looked at me and thought for a minute, and then she turned around and said, "I can't tell you his first name, but his last name is Donaldson." (Laughter) So I was adopted again in San Francisco by Reverend and Mrs. L.V. Fortenberry. He was Chaplain Fortenberry in the Navy. He was in the fleet. We never sailed on an Armed Guard ship that had a chaplain. We never had that sort of—but so whenever I was in San Francisco, I was supposed to be at their house. And it was rationing days and I'll never—it never leaves my mind, Mrs. Fortenberry would fix a meal and she would spend all these points for all this food and she would say, "Buck, you've got to eat that. It cost ten points!" (Laughter) But they always had two or three other guys around for these meals.

PIEHLER: This almost sounds like this was a little part of home that was ...

DONALDSON: Oh, yeah. Veda had married a Marine who was in the Pacific.

PIEHLER: The girl you had a ...

DONALDSON: The girl I had a crush on. She was in the back of his car when we walked out the first day, and she was very pretty, and so I had a sister there, and we've been in contact ever since. She lives in Spring Hill, Louisiana, and we talk on the phone even now. But this whole experience, the ultimate amazement to me was the unmilitary world, in lots of ways. Because with my confidence in my job, I—the gunnery officer and me were buddies. Let me show you my first trip to sea. I did this for myself not long ago. (Opens the map which he begins to explain)

PIEHLER: This is wonderful. You've gone through on this map and pinpointed your different ships, and you've color-coded it.

DONALDSON: Yeah. You see, I started on my around-the-world trip—I started in San Francisco and went down to San Pedro here. And then we came south here below the Tahiti Islands. And you can pick it up over there in green.

PIEHLER: Tasmania. Hobart.

DONALDSON: And went down to—our first stop was at Hobart, but we’d—I’d had an extraordinary experience. As a radio operator, I was supposed to report all the submarine reports to the captain after, and I had learned to chart, and so, we were below the equator and I had picked up a submarine report that was just above the equator. And I charted it out and I took it in to the captain to report it to him, and he was having a session with the purser of the ship, the business guy—purser. And I showed him the message that I’d gotten and the location that I had charted out and the captain was a little guy, and he sort of laughed at me. “You bringing this in to me here when it’s not even on our path.” I was embarrassed. So I just registered it, and then on my way—by that time, I wasn’t ... I had just known him. So we came on to Hobart, Tasmania, and we left Hobart. We spent a day or so, day and a half, in Hobart and then came up to Karachi. But on our way to Karachi, India, I picked up another submarine report and charted it in the Red Sea. Now that was absurd, but that was the way it was set. And so I—when I saw where it was, remembering my previous experience, I left it on the log and didn’t show it to the captain. But when I went up at five o’clock to relieve the four to eight guy, which was the merchant marine radio, I believe, he was standing on his head. “The captain has seen that submarine report, and you didn’t report it!” And he is on his head, and he wants to be awakened for the nine o’clock broadcast for Allied merchant ships. And I said to, his name was Tom Smith from Cleveland, Ohio, I said, “Tom, the captain wants to be awakened for that? He knows how to copy Morse code? He’s going to stand in this radio shack and know what’s going on? No!” I said, “You can do what you want to, but I’m not going to think about it.” So I relieved him at eight o’clock and went on radio watch and about nine o’clock the captain walked into the radio shack, which was—there’s a corridor here, and then a corner where the chart room was here, and then his, the captain’s, quarters were here on the same bridge. And he came in and looked at me and said, “What is the story, Buck?” And I said, “Well, I can tell you the story.” It is a—he said, “Do you realize that if that had been sixty-three instead of thirty-three” or vice versa, I don’t remember right now, “it will be on our path tomorrow?” And I said, “That doesn’t worry me.” I said, “Captain, do you remember back in the Pacific when I charted a submarine report and took it to you and you made a fool out of me? You weren’t going to get a second chance. I’m a radio operator. If I can’t tell the difference between da-da-da-di-di and da-di-di-di-di, I should be either in the brig or at home. Don’t you worry about it, Captain. What I wrote on that radio log was what it was.” Do you know he made a friend out of me? It was fantastic. He loved it! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Now, he was also, you know, in a sense, he was a merchant marine captain.

DONALDSON: Yes.

PIEHLER: And you were Naval enlisted. Do you think you would’ve been so blunt and frank with a naval captain? You know, a regular Navy captain?

DONALDSON: If I hadn’t had my two brothers?

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean ...

DONALDSON: I wouldn’t. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah. So you think it was more the fact that you had two brothers who were officers.

DONALDSON: I think ...

PIEHLER: Or was it a combination of both? I mean, the fact that he was a civilian and in many ways, your relationship is a strange one.

DONALDSON: The way I came at him was not in a sense of disrespect or fear, but the—but we've both got a job to do. It was so fantastic, because we had—what we did on this trip, we went from Karachi to Bombay, Bombay to Columbo, Ceylon. Then we went from there to Calcutta and spent three weeks in Calcutta. We came back to Columbo and came down to Lorenzo Marks, Portuguese East Africa, and of all things, we were empty from Calcutta to here [gesturing on map]. We loaded coal aboard that ship here, came down and spent four days in Capetown, South Africa, then went across to Rio de Janeiro—and probably this port of Rio de Janeiro is the world's most fantastic site, particularly as you come in by sea. And as we were in—it was mid-afternoon and I was on watch in the radio shack and all of the sudden the captain was standing in the door. And as we headed into the harbor in Rio, the captain looked at me and said, "Buck, you will not miss this sight sitting in this blinking room. I don't care what they're going to say on the beach – you shut that down – this thing down, and come on up and stand with me on the bridge, and we're going to see Rio de Janeiro as we go into it!" (Laughter) And we were the best of buddies all the way from this ...

PIEHLER: ... incident ...

DONALDSON: ... this incident on India, or going up India and, of course, from this we went down to Santos, Brazil and picked up coffee and castor beans and such like. And then we left Santos, came back to Rio, and then went to Port of Spain, Trinidad, and then through the Caribbean, where we were escorted all the way.

PIEHLER: You were under escort, under a convoy.

DONALDSON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: After Port of Spain.

DONALDSON: Yeah. We hadn't had a convoy except going up the coast of India, up here.

PIEHLER: There you had a convoy.

DONALDSON: We had a convoy going up there.

PIEHLER: Was it American or British?



DONALDSON: Uh, it was American, and we had ... picked up five hundred pound bombs in Karachi and brought them down—and were taking them to Calcutta. In fact, that purser, we lost him in Bombay. He couldn't handle being on a ship loaded with five hundred pound bombs. And so he went batty. And he was a merchant marine, and so he—but, by the way, the relationship between Navy personnel and merchant marine personnel was always excellent.

PIEHLER: So you didn't have ... in your ships, you didn't feel a tension?

DONALDSON: Never.

PIEHLER: You didn't—because some have expressed, who've served on—who were Navy or even Army who happened to be on merchant ship—resentment of the fact that merchant marine pay was quite good during the war.

DONALDSON: It was.

PIEHLER: But you didn't—that, at the time, didn't bother you.

DONALDSON: What could you do about it? (Laughter) I remember Tom Smith, who was with me on my first trip, ultimately came home, became a radio announcer in Cleveland, Ohio, and was one of the best in the city for years. They got—I was making seventy-four dollars a month, regardless of circumstance. If we were in a war zone, Tom or Frederick Helmsworth, who was my next merchant marine radio operator, they made—in war zones, they made a hundred and twenty-five dollars a day.

PIEHLER: Which was then very good money. I mean, that was ...

DONALDSON: Yeah. But, heavens, we had jobs to do and the like, and I was always busy. I had—now this was my first trip. My next trip was on the *Cape Canso*, and we didn't have ... we had a merchant crew on the *Cape Canso*, but we did not have a merchant radio force there. We had the first class, second class, and me there. But I had the twelve to four watch, but I was always busy. I had—they sort of had me in charge of entertaining the troops. I had to run the—we had two movies to show. We had—you won't recognize these names, but *It Happened Every Other Night* and *Mutiny by Bounds*. We only had two, and we had a—we had a Army and a Marine crew that we had to show them to and I had ... I showed them so often, that instead of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, they came to me to be *Mutiny by Bounds*. And instead of Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert in *It Happened One Night*, *It Happened Every Other Night*! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So those were the two—well, they're wonderful movies, but, yeah, they—I don't know, if you're seeing them every other day ...

DONALDSON: Yeah. I knew the script by the time I came off. Because I was the one that was in charge of that and the toughest part of that was suffering with the troops. I couldn't stand celery for twenty years because they must have been served, those poor guys, must have been served celery soup every day for lunch. And the odor of it would come up to the radio shack. I now love celery, but it took me years to do it. And to have those guys very often hanging around

our mess hall wanting to see if we've got something that they could—that we could sneak out to them. Of course, we did, as often as possible. But it was something else.

PIEHLER: I'm just curious because your, in terms of the second ship, the SS *Cape* ...

DONALDSON: ... *Canso*.

PIEHLER: ... *Canso*. You picked up troops in Hawaii and where did you—it's interesting looking at a map of the British ports you made on your second trip. I mean, you hit many of the key—Marshall Islands, Eniwetok ...

DONALDSON: On that trip, that was the one that we made all the island groups down there, and we ultimately came over to the Admiralty Islands, just above Australia. And that was where we stationed, where we positioned ourselves to go to the Palau Islands and we were in on the Palau Island invasion. It's about here, this latitude. This—the low one is the Palau Islands and on the time of our arrival there, we were carrying troops, and we offloaded troops to go into that battle. And that was the first day that the American forces had used the firebomb at Peleliu was the island, and the place, the island was on fire. It was fantastic to see it there. We were warned not to walk on the deck, because there were bullets flying everywhere, and though there may not be snipers that would aim at you, just the rare bullet could get you, so don't do it. (Laughs) Stay in your room or at your work or something and keep yourself protected. But we never had—fortunately the Air Force was more in charge there, and we didn't have any real threat from submarines and this sort of thing, and we didn't have any bad experiences there. We were able to offload our ship and then leave, and when we left there, we went from the Palau Islands up to the Marianas and anchored at Saipan. And that was quite an experience at Saipan, because it was secure. The island was secure by the time we got there, and thank goodness it was secure, because lying in anchor there, we discovered that we had lost all power. We couldn't get the anchor off the bottom of the ocean, and also we couldn't make water. We were rationed—a half a gallon of water a day—fresh water. So most of the time, we washed our clothes in salt water or used a line and ran it through the belt loop and let them drag aft in the sea. But we also, on one of these adventures in the South Pacific, we picked up three hundred Japanese prisoners and had three hundred of them on board ship. And I believe that was when we—the time when we went back to Kauai in the Hawaiian Islands and offloaded the prisoners there. And the lieutenant, the second man in charge there, on that trip on Kauai, took us over to the Hawaiian Little Grand Canyon, and we had a liberty that day, and that's ...

PIEHLER: You have a picture of the Little Grand Canyon, Hawaiian Islands, 1944.

DONALDSON: Yes.

PIEHLER: So you were part of the invasion of Peleliu, your ship.

DONALDSON: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: And you picked up prisoners at the Marshall Islands or ...

DONALDSON: I may have my—we may have gotten prisoners down further south and taken them back and then come on out to the Admiralties. I think that's the way it was.

PIEHLER: And where did you pick up the troops? Was it the Hawaiian Islands or was it picked up—were they picked up somewhere in the Pacific?

DONALDSON: No, we picked up the troops in Hawaii.

PIEHLER: Hawaii.

DONALDSON: Yes. And then we went from—that's it. We went from Hawaii to the Admiralties and from there we went to Palau and then we went to Saipan. That's when we couldn't—we didn't have any power, so from Saipan we came back to America. We took the Great Northern Circle up.

PIEHLER: I guess one other question is New Caledonia and the Solomons. Do you remember why, and ...

DONALDSON: That was all troop activity. Because this was all on the *Cape Canso*, as I mentioned. That took place. There's one voyage on the *Cyrus Adler*, my last ship, that I'm not altogether clear. I'm more ...

PIEHLER: So the first two stick in your mind more.

DONALDSON: Yes.

PIEHLER: The third one—was the war still on, or was it ...

DONALDSON: Yes. The third one was ... the end of the war was approaching but Germany had not surrendered when we left America.

PIEHLER: So there was still the threat of the U-boat, German U-boats.

DONALDSON: Yes, uh huh. But by that time, the German U-boats were not active, even in the Atlantic. We'd had—by that time, we had gotten control of that. And there was very little to think about as far as Japanese subs were concerned. Occasionally, yes, but that trip was just about done with. My memories of that more are things about the ship itself. I could—I can recall—I remember Frederick Helmsworth was my—there were only two of us this time. I didn't have a striker with me. I didn't have—there wasn't a third radioman. It was just the two of us and we had to cover the day. And the schedule was two on, two off, two on, four off, two on ... you never slept more than four hours at one throw, as you had to relieve, and Fred had been—had finished his first year in med school at the University of Pennsylvania, and didn't—he was 4-F and they wouldn't take him in the Army and he couldn't stand it. So he joined the Merchant Marine. He left med school and joined the Merchant Marine. And so we were big buddies. By that time, I had decided that my career would be medicine. I was in Pearl Harbor, probably on the *Cape Canso*, when I had my own session on the deck one night with the Lord,

and left impressed that I ought to be ... that I was to study medicine. So the first time I had a chance to get to a bookstore, I didn't think much of my preparation, high school preparation, in math and chemistry, because my chemistry professor had been the high school basketball coach and I don't think he knew ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You don't think he was ...

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

DONALDSON: ...so I bought me three books. I bought *Algebra for the Practical Man*, *Trigonometry for the Practical Man*, and a chemistry book. And I dedicated myself, my free time, for the rest of the time of my Navy career to getting prepared to go to med school.

PIEHLER: When were you aware of the GI Bill?

DONALDSON: The war was over.

PIEHLER: That's when you first learned about the GI Bill?

DONALDSON: Yeah. You see, I had—I was in the regular Navy when I joined. We called it a diaper cruise, for I joined at seventeen and I joined to stay in the Navy until the day before my twenty-first birthday. So the war was over in 1945 and I had to stay in the Navy until my twenty-first birthday in August of '46.

PIEHLER: So you weren't under the point system?

DONALDSON: No.

PIEHLER: Oh, interesting. So you joined regular Navy.

DONALDSON: I was in the regular Navy.

PIEHLER: Within sort of the age twenty—so the point system, for you, was irrelevant.

DONALDSON: Oh, yeah. It had no meaning to my stay of time.

PIEHLER: So you had no expectation that, "Oh, it's V-J Day, any day now we're going to get to go home."

DONALDSON: No. I had to—I sat there and watched everybody leave. I was sort of glad to get rid of them, to tell the truth. (Laughter) Yeah. Were you going to say something?

DAVIS: Oh, no.

DONALDSON: But on that last ... on the *Cyrus Adler*, I had—one of the exceptional things was that in spite of the fact that on both of these merchant—these Liberty ships that I was on, I

had my own state room and never once did a—one of my colleagues get upset that I was better off than he was. That never once became a problem. They would do all sorts of things they weren't supposed to do back then. And they were always after ... "Okay, Buck, come on back." And I said, "You jugheads!" When we were in Manila Bay for thirty-three days, after midnight one night, they took the ventilator off of one of the holds and let somebody down there with a rope and stole cases of beer. (Laughter) I want you to know I had to look for those cases of beers for weeks, and never discovered it. And I usually—and of course, they were sensible. They would never drink—three was an absolute limit and usually two was—and they would come up and get to me—and they'd say, "Come on, Buck, we're going to play cards." And we played cribbage, and we played bridge and pinochle and that sort of thing. "You jugheads, you know if you get caught, I'll get caught!" And they'd say, "That's all right. Come on, we're together." So we always did it. They didn't get caught. They thought they were caught one night, but they really weren't. But ...

PIEHLER: It sounds like things were a lot ... the fact that you were an armed merchant—that things were a lot looser ... as sailors.

DONALDSON: Entirely. We didn't have a regimen. We were expected to do our jobs and do them perfectly. And ... but there was no need. If you were on a Liberty ship, you normally had a crew of about twenty-two, a gunnery officer, and the rest, you had a radioman, perhaps a striker, or maybe not, a signalman, and then the rest were gunner's mates with the officer. And I was always amazed at them. We always had—we were just buddies. In fact, on that around-the-world trip, that was when I started all this eleven hours a day. And gunnery officer had a hard time living with it, because I was the only one who was in the habit who had that kind of a responsibility. And I'd be on the bridge, standing single watch and look around me and there was the gunnery officer standing with a Chinese checkerboard, or a checker set. And he had come up to entertain me on my watch. (Laughter) And he actually, when we got back to the States, at that time, he actually requested me for his next ship. Unfortunately, I didn't get it. I was in Treasure Island and I happened to be waiting for my next ship, but they needed help at fleet post office. So they called about a dozen of us out and sent us over to the fleet post office, and for several weeks we handled Navy mail for the Pacific.

PIEHLER: And what was that experience? I mean, I think you're the first person I've interviewed who had anything to do with mail out of many interviews.

DONALDSON: It was extraordinary. The volume and the names ...

PIEHLER: And also, sort of, no one's in a fixed spot. I mean, in some ways, when you come right down to it ...

DONALDSON: It was a monstrous job, but it was not a drag. There was so much there to do, and it was so responsible and so necessary. The longest name that I had to deal with was Grzyenzielowski. Can you imagine? G-R-Z-Y-Z-E-N-Z-I-E-L-O-W-S-K-I. I mean, what the ...

PIEHLER: Which you remember to this day.

DONALDSON: ... to this day, absolutely. It was very meaningful. But that was a fantastic time because I don't know whether you interviewed anybody who has brought up the explosion that took place in Port Chicago in San Francisco in that war ...

PIEHLER: I've not—I mean, I know about it as a historian, but I've not interviewed anyone who was there at the time of the explosion.

DONALDSON: Well ... the providential wonder is that I was at the fleet post office when Earl Ashe was assigned to his next ship. And his radio operator went with him aboard ship and went up with that ship. That would have been me.

PIEHLER: You were destined for the ship that exploded at Port...

DONALDSON: Yes, uh huh. In fact, Earl and his wife Betty lived in Oakland, overlooking, a beautiful location, overlooking San Francisco Bay and all of it. And Betty had—Earl had left home to go to the ship and Betty was washing dishes, standing in the kitchen window, looking out in that direction when she saw the ship go up. Fortunately, Earl was three miles from it and made it.

PIEHLER: But the radio operator ...

DONALDSON: The radio didn't—operator didn't survive.

PIEHLER: Did that give you an eerie feeling?

DONALDSON: Later on. (Laughs) I didn't learn about this until the war was over.

PIEHLER: Oh, it was after the war was over. Okay.

DONALDSON: Uh huh. Yeah. Because that didn't ... But Earl and I were—Earl died two, three years ago now. And we were—when I came—when I would be in San Francisco and he happened to be in San Francisco, then I would always be invited to his house. And Earl and Betty and I were just such great friends.

[Tape Paused]

DAVIS: The only thing I was wondering, really, is ... we were talking about racism earlier. Were there ever any African-Americans or black people on any of your ships, as cooks or anything that you served on?

DONALDSON: We had African-American crewmen in ... the merchant crew.

DAVIS: Oh, okay.

DONALDSON: We never had the—I never—although I think there were, but there were few Navy personnel who were black. But generally speaking, there was no problem.

PIEHLER: So you had black—in the merchant marine, there were black crewmen.

DONALDSON: Yes. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: And what positions did they have? Do you remember?

DONALDSON: I'm sure they were deckhands.

PIEHLER: Uh huh.

DONALDSON: I don't recall—ever recall having one as a cook or as a steward.

PIEHLER: Really? In the merchant—so they were, in a sense, a regular part of the crew.

DONALDSON: Right.

PIEHLER: Whereas the Navy, they were generally stewards through most of the war.

DONALDSON: Yes, uh huh. They were part of the crew.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, you mentioned seeing Manila at one point in your interview. How often did you—and you mentioned going into Rio. The various places you stopped at, you literally did go around the world. I mean, you went to the Panama Canal, you went to the Suez Canal, you went to the Straits of Gibraltar, you went to Hawaii. You mentioned, earlier in your interview, going really up and down the coast of India.

DONALDSON: Yes.

PIEHLER: You crossed the tip of South Africa. You did not go through the tip of South America, but you ...

DONALDSON: No.

PIEHLER: What other ports do you remember going ashore? Any memories you have, because you mentioned some remarkable—this would cost a lot of money if you did this as a cruise or cruises!

DONALDSON: On the ship, going—that first ship, from America to Karachi, we had a Army master sergeant aboard who became—Mr. B.L. McDearmon, Sergeant McDearmon—who became a dear friend. And fortunately, when we arrived in Karachi, he did not have to leave the ship immediately. So there were—that gave he and I the privilege of going into town together. We went in and went to restaurants. At that time, and I suppose now, one of the things we did was take advantage of the fine stones. We would go to the jewelry stores, this sort of thing.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

DONALDSON: And take in what was to be seen. I had an extraordinary time in Karachi. One night, after he had to leave, I went in by myself and, of course, Karachi is very hot, and I was wearing my dress whites, if you call them that, just whites. I was wearing my whites, and we got from the dock into Karachi on gari—horse-driven buggies, sort of things. And the horses always looked like they were going to die at any minute to begin with, and we had to go through an area of Karachi which was inhabited by the untouchables. And I was by myself, and I left downtown to head back up to the ship and I had this gari and we got into the village that was untouchable and the horse fell down from exhaustion. But I didn't know an exhausted horse from a dead one. And there I was, by myself, in white clothes in this community. "Where do you go from here, Buck?" (Laughs) And it was—there were some tense moments until the gari driver got out and loosed the horse from its traces and suddenly he jumped up. What a relief! I relaxed and he put him back in his traces, hitched him up again and we took off. And sitting back there, the man could speak English and I didn't know it, other than our contacts at the length of the trip and he turned around to me and he said, he said to me, "Americans, I love. British, I hate!" (Laughter) So I felt safe. And, um, Hobart, Tasmania, was most memorable. I had a signalman, Clinton Gilette, from Nevada, from Reno, and Clinton and I went on liberty together at Hobart and it was my first real British contact. So we made the most of it for that day. We had a few hours there. And Karachi, then Bombay—mainly went into the big hotel in Bombay, and did a little seeing of the city, but mostly not so much there, but Karachi, we were there for three weeks. And we had all sorts of things. Once I had to work SP duty, shore patrol duty, in downtown Calcutta. And that was some experience for an eighteen year old – the places we had to go, and the things we had to see. But there was a good USO there. And you never forget the beggars on the streets in the place, and one of them standing there with a gourd in his hand and every thirty seconds he would say, "Ya La!" It took me a long time to realize that he was saying Allah, the Muslim God. "Allah!" And then we would have—there we had Chinese, mostly acrobats, who would come to the ship, around the dock of the ship, and put on the most unbelievable acrobatic shows for us—those of us who happened to be still on the ship that day. They would just entertain us, and we would give them a little money along the way. Lorenzo Marks was interesting because they had a German—it was neutral and they had a German embassy there. And there was always that tenseness there.

PIEHLER: Which port was that again?

DONALDSON: Lorenzo Marks, Portuguese East Africa, here. (Gesturing on the map) We had—it was very—now, what we did here, Earl Ashe arranged for us a trip into the jungle. We took a paddleboat up a river there—did some exploring, saw a few animals. But the most startling thing to me was how many India Indians there were that lived there. Because if you live in the millions of the people in India, and you can escape, you escape. And I was amazed. We did part of that trip on a train, and I was amazed to see an Indian couple dressed in their normal, very heavy, very done up Indian garb—the ladies in saris and otherwise. To see a couple get off of that train and walk down the road to a mud hut. That doesn't match. If you're like this, why aren't you more than that? But then you wouldn't have been more than that. Of course, I had seen, as I went up the Ganges River from the oceanfront into Calcutta, I had seen all of that, and



the houses that are—I just thought these were too well-dressed in Africa to be in that same vein, but they were. I didn't go ashore in Cape Town, because it was a bit of a struggle, but I had a wonderful time in Rio. They had a great USO in there, in Rio, and I enjoyed that. By and large, when we were in the Pacific the last year, we didn't ... we stayed aboard ship. It wasn't anything—except Hawaii, Kauai, we went ashore there, but ...

PIEHLER: Yes, I mean, some—I've interviewed others, sailors and soldiers, who've been to some of these places and they've—like Eniwetok, there was not very much there.

DONALDSON: No. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: There were a lot of American GIs that had ...

DONALDSON: I suppose if I had drunk, had been a drinker, I might have gone ashore and gotten into a big party or something on that order, but that wasn't of interest to me. I had more ...

PIEHLER: I noticed that your last—well, the *Cyrus Adler*, you hit the Mediterranean on that journey.

DONALDSON: No, no. That—I didn't hit the Mediterranean until after the war, really.

PIEHLER: Okay.

DONALDSON: This is sort of a ...

PIEHLER: Okay, so maybe I'm misinterpreting the colors.

DONALDSON: Right. Uh huh, the *Adler*, right. The *Adler* was altogether Pacific.

PIEHLER: Okay.

DONALDSON: And Fred Helmsworth and I by that time had—were enough ship worthy and free about being bored and all this sort of thing, we had—we were supposed to operate ... at sea with an automatic alarm. We never, ever ran into a time when anybody used it. And it had facilities that weren't—that other people didn't know about, except Fred and I figured it out. We got from the USO a ... gramophone, a phonograph, and since that automatic alarm was supposed to be—was hooked with all the ships, so that in case we happened to be out of the radio shack and an emergency came up on a ship someplace, they could set that thing up, and that would draw us to the radio shack so we could catch the message. But we knew that wasn't going to happen. So, having a gramophone, a phonograph, I went to the USO and also got a whole gang of records and we took the equipment apart on that automatic alarm and hooked up the gramophone so that we could play music throughout the ship. (Laughter) Only we had trouble. We set it up and knew we had it going right, but we started off with a Benny Goodman record, and all we could hear was “Da da da da da da da da da.” It was a trill. “What have we done wrong?” We stopped it. We stopped it and we stopped it and we went through our equipment.

It must've been at least an hour and a half before we let it go long enough—the record go long enough to know that this was Benny Goodman trilling a note! (Laughter) But from then on, we not only were able to play music to the whole ship, we could also run a news broadcast into the thing. And there was only me and Fred as radio operators on it, so the gunnery officer wasn't looking over my shoulder and neither was the captain looking over his. So we just made it as comfortable for everybody as we could.

PIEHLER: I'm curious what was your—did you ever, except for Peleliu, during the actual—when you were landing troops, did you ever encounter hostile fire? Or any close calls with submarines or, I guess, bad weather—typhoons?

DONALDSON: Oh, yes. The worst storm we were ever in was between Rio—was between Capetown and Rio. We didn't think we would survive.

PIEHLER: It was that ...

DONALDSON: Yeah. It was that bad. Oh, man, we were like this and like this and like this and this. (Gesturing)

PIEHLER: So, really riding the waves?

DONALDSON: Yes. But of course, most of our tornadoes, our hurricanes, actually make up here and come over here and hit America. (Gesturing on the map) So this ... and so we were going from here to here and I'll never forget it.

PIEHLER: So that was your closest call in war?

DONALDSON: No, that was it, other than Peleliu. The most excitement was going up to the—was in convoy, and I happened to be on signal watch in convoy, going from Columbo, Ceylon, up to Calcutta. For this great thing surfaced in the middle of the convoy. We looked for a conning tower and there wasn't one—fortunately, turned out to be two gray whales. Now, you could sit for hours on the ships and watch fish. There were times when we came upon dolphin by the mile in length—miles of them long. And always the little flying fish that were out there and very often the big whales. And, of course, we had the—each one of us had a gun position and at some intervals we had to—we would let loose a balloon and have ...

PIEHLER: ... gunnery ...

DONALDSON: ... practice on the twenty millimeters. We had two twenty millimeter [antiaircraft guns] aft, midships, and forward. We had a three inch fifty-eight cannon on the bow and a five-inch thirty-eight on the stern. And so we had all of that sort of thing that we could do. But there were—we didn't do any photography, at least I didn't. And almost nobody else did. We took the—we didn't know where we were going or what we were doing 'til we—I usually was the first crew member who would know, because the captain—as the radioman, the captain would inform me about what the score was. I had a Norwegian for a time on the *Cape Canso* who really never talked to anybody but me. He talked with his eyes. I never saw anything like

it. But even the first mate on the merchant crew, he would give them instructions, but I was always welcome on his bridge and we talked—and just fantastic memories of these sorts of things. As we, on this first around-the-world trip, as we came up through from Port of Spain, Trinidad, all the way up the coast—this was Tornado Alley along here—and for a day and a half, going through the islands here in the Caribbean, our destroyer escorts dropped depth chargers and you could always hear them. By the way, my daughter and son-in-law are over at Fort Bragg, living in Fayetteville, and he says, “We don’t get much sleep. We’re getting ready for Iraqi ...” And the bombing, the artillery shooting that goes on all night long has got to mean ...

PIEHLER: Uh huh.

DONALDSON: Now, my son-in-law was both a Green Beret and a Navy SEAL. And my daughter was a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy.

PIEHLER: So the Navy tradition continues—it continued in your family.

DONALDSON: Right. She was the ...

PIEHLER: That’s right. You mentioned that in your pre-interview survey.

DONALDSON: Yes.

PIEHLER: I’m curious, the last ship you served on, the *Suison*, ‘45 to ‘46, um ...

DONALDSON: The *Suison*. Yes. What they did, when the war was over, they disbanded the Armed Guard and sent us all up to Fleet City, which was above San Francisco. And, of course, as the guys who were in the Reserves were being discharged, the rest of us were waiting to be assigned. And so I was in Fleet City, I suppose, at least six weeks.

PIEHLER: Because you mentioned doing mail. Was this the point you did the mail?

DONALDSON: No. No. This was during wartime that I did the mail.

PIEHLER: Okay. Okay, the actual ...

DONALDSON: Uh huh. But Fleet City, we were just biding time. And that was the chief that was worst of all. Oh, he was the most—biggest scoundrel. No other way to describe him. Everybody hated him. And they had reason for hating, and we’d all have to muster in the morning and then we’d be sent off for certain duties in Fleet City that we had to perform, and when we were finished with those, we could play football, we could play basketball. We had eight man football teams going in that situation. But one day I got caught. We had to line up against—they had our companies march with two boards, one on the floor and then the one with the wording on it naming our company here on top of it, just like that, nailed to the top of it. And as we marched off one morning, after we had finished muster, somebody accidentally kicked that sign in front of me and I was on my way down with a step and I stepped on it and bent it down. So for four hours that afternoon, I marched in the rain in front of my barracks for

having stepped on that sign and bent it over. When I got back to the barracks after that thing, my company was about to mutiny. “We’ve watched you out there all afternoon with this stupid situation with this jughead. It’s irrational!” “Oh, it’s done now. Forget it. Just leave it alone.” (Laughter) So they sent us. Then I was assigned to the USS *Suisun*. It was a small seaplane tender.

PIEHLER: So a very small ship?

DONALDSON: Very small, and in the regular Navy. And I was given no preparation for fleet activity. I was assigned ... there was supposed to be six radio operators and three radio techs. There were two different—we never had a radio tech in the merchant marine. And three radio techs. And I was thrown immediately back into Navy. We had been in the—on the merchant ships we had broadcast to Allied merchant ships, which had its techniques for communication. But the fleet program was entirely different, and I hadn’t seen that since I had been in Radio School in Los Angeles.

PIEHLER: Which was at that point several years ago?

DONALDSON: ... Several years, yes. I didn’t remember anything about it at all. So I—but again, I was the best radioman in the house. And that helped with that. But amazingly, I think by the time we got to San Pedro from San Francisco, we had lost at least two radio operators out of that six. That was when—then we went down the coast and Christmas Day, 1945, went through the Suez, uh, the Panama Canal, which was a great experience. And we left from Panama. Then after the Panama Canal, we went on to Norfolk, Virginia, and spent most of the rest of the time in Norfolk. And as time went on, everybody but me left. And again, the radio shack was ... you walked out of the radio shack, took one step to the left, and walked into the captain’s quarters, which threw me into a buddy-buddy with the Captain, who happened—and our ship turned out to be the flagship for the admiral in charge of the Air Force of the Fifth Naval District. And so we got down to a place where I was the only radioman aboard and also where I had no techs with me, and no real responsibilities except they were always making change in radio procedure, and so what I could do was spend my time going through books and changing this figure and that figure and the other figure and that sort of thing. The war was over. And I was by myself and the captain was my friend. I got into real trouble, that could have been real trouble, and I got out of it easily. The captain came in to me one day and said, “Buck, do you drive?” Well, I had learned to drive on a leave. (Laughter) My dad, being a doctor, had a little more liberty for traveling and I had learned to drive. And so I said, “Well, I do drive.” So he threw his keys, and he says, “My car is parked down on the dock.” He said, “We’re going to have to change docks, so ...” and we weren’t operating radio equipment, he said, “Would you make out a message and go down and use my car and take it up to the radio station on the base,” Norfolk, Virginia, Naval Base, “and have them send it and bring it back?” Well, I managed until I got back to the ship and as I came to the ship, there were four guys coming off with two trashcans. So I had to brake and wait for them to get through with their—off the ship, with their job, and the motor died. And I turned on the key and nothing happened. And I looked at the gas gauge and there was nothing there. And I looked up, coming right in front of me was a full Navy captain who came up to me, pulled up in there, and stuck his head out of his window and said, “Get that thing out of the way!” And I sat there, numb, for a moment, and I stuck my head out

there. I said, "I'm sorry, sir. I can't do it. It's out of gas." He said, "Get somebody to shove you!" Well, there wasn't a soul on the deck, out on the dock, except two cops—two yard policemen standing over there. Well, I thought about that for a minute, and I stuck my head back out of the window and I said, "How about you, sir? Will you do it?" (Laughter) Well, I must have caught him off guard, because he pushed me out of the way, and he drove on off. Well, I ...

PIEHLER: He had a car ...

DONALDSON: ... well, he hadn't gone out of sight before those two yard policemen were over at the car. "Son, do you know who that was you were talking to?" And I said, "Sorry, sir. I haven't a notion in the world." He said, "That was just the Commander of the Norfolk, Virginia, Naval Yard!" (Laughter) Well, I went aboard ship and hid for three days. (Laughs) I didn't show—I thought surely this guy's going to get me. He didn't.

PIEHLER: You were safe.

DONALDSON: He just let it go. And the Captain and I just had a great time with it. Norfolk was—became my favorite port.

PIEHLER: Really? Of all the ports?

DONALDSON: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: And did you make any close—in both San Francisco and Los Angeles, you mention, really, the close—one, in Los Angeles, was a re-acquaintance with someone earlier, but in Los Angeles was a new family.

DONALDSON: Right.

PIEHLER: Norfolk, though. Had you made a similar type of family situation?

DONALDSON: It so happened that I didn't work at it for the first month. We came in at the first of the year, and whenever I had liberty, I went to the YMCA or I went to a movie. And an extraordinary thing happened. I had a month of leave coming, so I came home and on my way back to Norfolk after that furlough, I had a slow train through Tennessee. We must have stopped at every cow track in the state. And sitting there one day, going back to Norfolk—and I knew sailors and dogs weren't welcome. There were signs in town that said sailors and dogs weren't allowed. And something came to me. I think the Lord said to me, "Buck, go more than halfway." So I went back to Norfolk and the first Sunday I had leave, I found the Olney Road Baptist Church and I went to church and there were two sailors in church. One was myself and the other was Ed Harrell. Ed Harrell now lives in Jay, New York. (Laughs) And as history turns out, both of us—he went, after his Navy career, he went to William and Mary and then went to Columbia Bible College and has been a pastor in the North. And I went to med school. I finished LSU, went to med school, and my second year in med school, I left it to be a preacher.

I told my profs [professors] that I would finish the year, but I wouldn't take my final exams. I had to flunk it out. I had to close the door.

PIEHLER: Just to back up for a second, or just to—you had mentioned earlier that you, in many ways, being aboard ship, that you felt you had a calling to go into medicine. What had changed? And you had passed your first year of medical school, which I've heard is quite a bear. I mean, so you ...

DONALDSON: Yes.

PIEHLER: You know. What had changed? Why did you feel ...

DONALDSON: Uh, I had called myself into medical missions. I was going to be a doctor, in order to go overseas. I—when I was a senior in LSU, I only applied to LSU and Tulane. I didn't expect to get Tulane. I did—I anticipated I would get LSU. And on January the eighth, I went to the post office at LSU and got the letter from med school and I didn't open it. I didn't have to open it to know it said yes. I didn't get to open it before something hit my hand and said, "You can't have it. That's not my way." But I didn't give up. I went to med school. I—two times. I was walking down the campus at LSU and I was president of the Baptist Student Union at LSU and the president of the state BSU at the same time, and I was walking along the campus by the amphitheater and all of a sudden a car stopped and a door opened and some guy got in first thing and somebody, a friend of mine, had his arm around my shoulder and saying, "Buck, what's wrong with you?" I said, "What could be wrong with me? I've been accepted by medical school, I am the president of this, I am the president of this, and I've got everything in the world. But I'm not right." And that day—this was before I went to med school—that day I went on over to the Baptist Student Center and climbed up in the pulpit and cried for three hours. And I went on to med school, and as I got through the first—we registered in med school and I went home that night and the—I woke up at one-twenty in the morning and I was rooming with three guys, with two other med students, and I thought they were beating me in the back. "Now what's going on?" I was yelling every thirty seconds. I had a kidney stone.

PIEHLER: Oh.

DONALDSON: I spent my first three weeks at med school in the hospital with a kidney stone. (Laughs) And from then on, there was the struggle that took me to the place where I said the second time around, I am going to—so, what happened to me? I left med school and went to seminary and married a doctor. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, since you mentioned marrying a doctor, I can't resist asking now. How did you meet? You met—and she's a Knoxville native, so I ...

DONALDSON: Knoxville, UT ...

PIEHLER: ... UT graduate and UT medical school, Memphis.

DONALDSON: Memphis. Well, she had graduated from Memphis, interned in Birmingham, and practiced in Birmingham and then came back to do a residency in Memphis and then she had the feeling that she wanted to do Appalachian missions, and as such, she needed some Bible training. And by this time, I had left medical school and was in seminary. I was pastoring the downtown church, Baptist church, in New Orleans, by this time. And I was going to school full time and working full time. And she was on campus for about a year. She practiced pediatrics during that year, and she was with the leading pediatrician in the city. And we just didn't run across each other until November, when we changed quarters in school. There happened to be an obnoxious character on the campus that had signed up for the same course that she and I had signed up for, and she was sitting in class in that room and that guy was in the back somewhere and she was afraid that he was going to come up and sit by her, and I happened to walk through the door. (Laughter) And I got a sort of welcoming smile. And I went over and sat down by her and introduced myself and we talked and before the class was over, I had asked her if she would go to dinner with me in Mississippi the next night. And we've been having dinner together ever since. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Let me ....

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Buck Donaldson on October 21, 2002 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

DAVIS: Tiffany Davis.

PIEHLER: I'm curious about—you were very young when you entered the Navy and signed up to be twenty-one, and the war even ended before you turned twenty-one. What was it like to go back to ... what was it like to go to college?

DONALDSON: Well, I couldn't wait.

PIEHLER: You had mentioned preparing earlier in your interview. You had decided you needed to improve your math and chemistry.

DONALDSON: I did. I studied enough to get myself in trouble, because I made a good grade on the entrance exam in algebra. And so I was assigned to an advanced class and we started off with imaginary numbers, and I think the whole course was imaginary from then on. (Laughter) But English, fine, and chemistry, fine. I ... of course, I was a dyed in the wool football fan. I couldn't eat food on Saturday, I was so excited about what was going to happen Saturday night, and I made it my business just to know every football player on the team. And classroom wise, I was twenty-one and there were a lot of other servicemen. I think the miracle of it was that these jokers that I had known as sailors and soldiers went to college and became gentlemen overnight.

PIEHLER: That's an interesting observation. To you, it struck you how quickly that transition ...

DONALDSON: Overnight they became gentlemen. Horrible souls. (Laughter) That was fantastic to me, because ...

PIEHLER: It sounds like you had seen a lot of carousing by ...

DONALDSON: I had been their drinking buddy, as you know.

PIEHLER: The sober one.

DONALDSON: This sort of thing. I never, I never was—even on my last, even on the USS *Suisun*, a hundred and sixty-five men on the crew and as far as I knew, I was the only one that ever went to church and that sort of thing. And it was just, it was just downright amazing to me. I never hesitated to take any one of them to task. In today's world, my wife is always saying, "Don't you say that." "What do you mean? I've been at this thing for years, and I've never lost a fight." Somebody is going to let out with a curse word where a curse word isn't called for, I'm going to take him on, or her on, these days. (Laughs) But these guys, they really did. They were transformed. And of course, we were all in the dormitories together and I roomed with the SEC [Southeastern Conference] tennis champion for a while. Walter Martin was—I had two engineering students, and we just had a great time. I never, ever got one of those jugheads to church with me, either, until they got out of college and married people who went to church. But I thought it was nothing more than miraculous the way that the serviceman came home and his world became a new world.

PIEHLER: At LSU, you had fallen in love with LSU football, and now you were actually at LSU. So I assume you got to some games.

DONALDSON: It was fantastic. I started out in the band. I played—I was accepted as a clarinetist in the band, but I had to give it up because every time we made a touchdown I was supposed to play "Tiger Rag." All I could do was stick the clarinet in my mouth and blow! I wasn't that interested in playing "Tiger Rag." So I stayed through the first nine weeks.

PIEHLER: And then you ...

DONALDSON: I decided the band was better off without me. (Laughter) So I left the band, but the other things ... I was always involved with—there were so many things to do on campus.

PIEHLER: Well, you mentioned you were active in both the campus Baptist Association and then the state. What else were you involved—and you continued to play music. What else were you involved in?

DONALDSON: Well, we had a campus religious organization, and I was always involved with that. And then I always did things. We would have things like an all-campus ministry get-together. And I once wrote the whole show for that, and we put it on. I knew—I made it my business, when I first got to campus, I kept a pencil and a pad in my pocket and every time I met someone, I walked away from them, I wrote their name down. And so by the time I was a senior, I could call three thousand people by first name. I just made it my business to do that. I



was asked to run for president of the junior class, but I was doing too much. I always, also ... I helped start the University Baptist Church. And I also had a job leading singing for a mission off the campus. And so there were all of these things I knew. And as it turned out, wonderfully for me, I tutored the first-string backfield in English my senior year. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, you also—I mean, pre-med is not an easy curriculum.

DONALDSON: I don't know how I did it.

PIEHLER: Yeah. I ...

DONALDSON: I just—I worked at it when I had to work at it. I did—I think I made one A. Otherwise, I would wind up, generally speaking, with four B's and a C.

PIEHLER: Although, I think, for students reading this interview, not so much for your generation or even the generation that was next, getting an A—I mean, B's and C's were good grades in your era.

DONALDSON: Yes.

PIEHLER: Because now, I mean, just students might read this and go—because a lot of students probably feel like a B now is an average grade. But a B was a good ...

DONALDSON: Uh huh. Yes, we were pretty solid. We had—I think we knew our professors better than anybody can do today, really, because I had Dr. Vick, my chemistry professor and I have been great friends through the years. And one became a friend that wasn't originally, because he was my zoo [zoology] professor, and he took off on a—he came into class one day and took off on a tirade. He said, "I don't believe anybody can be a scientist and be a Christian." And I listened to him talk for about ten minutes and then he said, "Are there any questions?" And I spoke up from the back of the room and I said, "Dr. Stokes, my opinion of what you've just gone through ten minutes about is you don't know which side of the fence you're on." I had—the next period in that class, I had a test, and then—it was a test that I had not, was not superbly prepared for. And the next day, when he handed out those papers, he went around handing John and—Buck. I had a B! (Laughter) And you know, I had a buddy from then on. If we encountered each other on campus, we would stand and talk for five minutes or ten minutes about whatever was going on. It was just that way. But, uh ...

PIEHLER: You felt you had a call to the ministry and you had a remarkably diverse career. You both pastored churches, but you were a missionary on several different times. You also were a student—you were at Vanderbilt as a student ...

DONALDSON: ... director.

PIEHLER: Student director.

DONALDSON: Lincoln Memorial [University].

PIEHLER: And then you were a director of development and public relations for what organization?

DONALDSON: Harrison Chilhowee Baptist Academy in Seymour.

PIEHLER: And pastor again and a missionary again. I mean, you've had a remarkable career, really, in very different types of ministries, both here and abroad.

DONALDSON: Somehow we never, ever did anything—my wife and I—we never did anything that we thought was mundane. We—before I came home from Africa the first time, I had been—she had been the one female doctor on the mission, on the Tanganyika scene. We were at a tuberculosis hospital, and she had had charge of all the women and children patients there. So we did so many things. We taught patients in the hospital and I was in charge of all the evangelistic work. Also in that time, I directed the Goodwill Center for Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika. When we awarded our diplomas at the end of the year, I had the president of the nation come over and do that, Dr. Julius Nyerere.

PIEHLER: So you've met Julius Nyerere?

DONALDSON: Yes.

PIEHLER: One of the things, now that you mentioned Africa, one of the things that struck me—you were a missionary in Africa at the time that Africa was becoming independent.

DONALDSON: Yes. We were in Tanganyika the night Tanganyika became independent. I had three preachers who spent the night in my house because they were afraid to be at home. And I was so glad to have them in my house.

PIEHLER: Why were they afraid to be home?

DONALDSON: Well, the Congo had exploded. And that was just almost, hardly more than three or four months previously. And there was fear. The country had started off with the motto "*Uhuru*." That's freedom. But when Julius Nyerere became president, he was an Oxford graduate and he knew better. That wouldn't work, just freedom. So he added to it freedom and work, "*Uhuru na Kazi*." I speak Swahili. And so that sort of—and that set a tone. But at the same time, who could know what off-brand group would start something on independence night? So it was tense, and then became terrific. For overnight, when nothing happened on independence night, we grew into—we were a brotherhood. The town of Mbeya, six hundred miles from the Indian Ocean coast was never more friendly than the day after independence. It was just fantastic! You could—it was in the air. You could—you can feel the wonder of it. And we had this—our tuberculosis hospital was a specialty hospital because of a survey that was made before we built it. And there was so much tuberculosis in the area, that to have a general hospital was just possible, but there was a general hospital in the town. And to treat the tuberculosis patients was tremendous. So we had walked into a situation, not all missionaries see a lack, by any means. We had doctors on our—we had three doctors at the staff when we got

there. One of them thought that—two of them thought that we shouldn't be having this hospital. It's a white elephant. We ought to be out in the village saving lives. The other doctor had built a hospital and said that we needed a more structured sort of situation. They had run off two couples. They thought perhaps—I think they must have thought that with Barbara being the doctor and me being the preacher, who could be the chaplain, we could work into this scheme. We didn't try to be true, because we weren't on one side, we weren't on the other side. (Laughter) But we came out of it. We didn't solve it, but we lived through it. And about being at the Vanderbilt and other places, when we came to the end of our first furlough, we told them not to invite us back to Tanganyika. There was too much foolishness going on in the mission itself. And so I wrote to the state BSU Director of Tennessee and I said, "When I come home, I want to spend my furlough year as the BSU director at the University of Gatlinburg." And he wrote back and said, "Buck, don't be absurd and ridiculous. You know that position is never vacant." (Laughter) "But if you're in for it, I do need somebody at Vanderbilt. I've interviewed six candidates, but nobody pleases me. If you'll take that over when you come home, I'll have a year to procrastinate." So I took over Vanderbilt's and Drawns Business College and Peabody, but because I was working on two different situations—and I when we got on the state health director learned that my wife was in Nashville and he came and said, "We need someone at Smith, Wilson, and DeKalb counties. Will you take it?" She said, "Can't you see I'm expecting a baby?" He says, "All right, go ahead, but we need you in Smith, Wilson, and DeKalb counties." So while I did Vandy and Drawns and Peabody for a while, until we got another part-time fellow back, she did Smith, Wilson, and DeKalb, and had a ball—wonderful time.

PIEHLER: Your wife—in other words, it doesn't sound like your wife had really an interruption in her career. Did she? Who looked after the children when ...

DONALDSON: Well, overseas, you have to have help, in self-defense. It's not because you want it, and not because they're that much of an advantage, but they do figure. And so we had babysitters with the kids. And we could find that sort of help here at home, and we always—both of us were called. My wife knew when she was nine years old she wanted to be a doctor. And with my background and this whole situation, we'd never done anything but work hand in glove, and it's always opened the door.

PIEHLER: But in the States, how did childrearing go?

DONALDSON: Well, it was always very great. We had an excellent babysitter in Harrogate, Tennessee when we were—the second year I was at LMU. At Vanderbilt, we had a lady who came in and took care of the kids. I had a wonderful secretary at Vandy. She saved me from knowing that I was supposed to be on ten committees. (Laughter) And she didn't let me know that I was going to be on those ten committees until we had reached far enough in the year that all the director positions had been taken, so I could just be a part of the committee, rather than having to work it out. And besides that, we were doing so much speaking and so many activities around. Besides that, I had Dr. Dan Grant, who was the political science professor at Vandy, who was marvelous. He became the president of Ouchitah Baptist College in Arkansas. And Dan and Betty Jo knew every student on the campus, and if I had any problems, I called Dan or Betty Jo and said, "Which way do I go with this thing?" Actually, I was also ...had to be responsible for building the Baptist Student Center that now exists on the Vanderbilt campus.

They had just started the process, so I had to—that year I spent working with the architects, and I left them with a hole in the ground when I went on back to Africa. But the building that is now there was one that I—that the architects and myself designed.

PIEHLER: I'm curious about going to Nigeria. And one of the things ... I mean, it's sort of toward the end of your stay, but I can't resist making sure I ask this. I mean, Nigeria would have a very bad civil war and I forget the exact year of it, but the Biafran civil war. I just remember, as a young child, that's a very vivid memory of Biafra.

DONALDSON: This was 1964, and there were two coups in this thing, through 1969, and we were there during both of those coups. It was at that time—see, having been to med school, I had the unfortunate privilege of knowing medical language. And when we got to Nigeria from East Africa, we needed a hospital administrator. The only background I had for being a hospital administrator was a father who said, “Buck, if you are ever asked to be a hospital administrator, shoot the guy right then and whatever penalty you have to pay, just think it's a favor.” (Laughter) But first thing you know when we got back to Nigeria, I became hospital administrator.

PIEHLER: Against your dad's better advice?

DONALDSON: There was no other way. There was no other person to take it. And we had ... I had three jobs. I became hospital administrator for Southern Baptist's largest overseas hospital. We had a hundred and twenty beds. We had about a thirty bed maternity ward. We had a lab tech school, and we had a nursing school. And I had to make the provisions for all of their supplies and all that sort of thing as the hospital administrator. Also, we were short on evangelistic missionaries, so I had forty churches to look after. And also, we were starting a school for prospective pastors, and I was the only theologian that could teach it. So I had three tasks. While I did that, my wife did all of the hospital pediatrics and taught our oldest daughter and our middle daughter the first and third grades in school. But there are twenty-four hours in a day, and you use them the best way you can. And you—we had a great time doing it all. Nigeria is a wonderful place to work with people. It's far more personal than East Africa. A fourth of the population of Africa lives in Nigeria, you know, more than a hundred million people. But Africa is a place where you have a sense of humor. If you don't, you don't survive, because there's so much hurt that is to be endured. And the problem I had in Nigeria was not knowing Yoruba. I was on the mission council for Swahili speaking people in Tanganyika, but I never had a chance, was never offered a chance, and nobody knew how to speak Urhobo who was peeled [white]. You didn't know that you're really a peeled person. If you weren't, you'd be black. You're an *oyibo*. And every time and *oyibo* rides into a village, everybody sees you coming and that's the first thing—the cry goes up and they all say, “*Oyibo*.” The peeled one is here. But I had more fun with the Nigerians. As the hospital administrator, all my clerks were men. Most of my nurses were men. And the nurses were under, really, a great strain, because there were so many sick people in the whole country. And if you're an African nurse, they expect you to be the nurse on the hospital compound and be the doctor in the village. And there's not that much money, and I had to, as the hospital administrator, I had to go through every hospital chart to make sure that everything was proper, that no nurse had added to the doctor's order for medicine so that he could pick it up at the pharmacy and take some of it home

with him to treat his patient in the village. And fortunately, I never caught but one, but I did catch one, and everybody cried. It was just—shouldn't have happened. But fun! Once we had—this is the tropics and more rain than any other place in the world and I had a—couldn't have gravel. We had potholes. And for gravel we used the hard shell of a palm nut. Palm nuts had, you know, a meaty outside and then it has the hardest shell you can imagine. Then the palm nut is inside it, and you split that inside hard shell in order to get the nut and get the palm oil out of that. So I used palm nuts for gravel. And I needed some, and I didn't have any, so I went to Baba Atigari and I said, "Where can I get some palm nuts?" He says, "There's a factory down here that works with [palm nuts]." He says, "If you go down and ask them, they'll give you all you want." Well, I didn't know that I ought to take Baba's word for sure. So I asked Richard Omuwegbu, who was my maintenance man. I said, "Richard, Baba tells me that there's this factory down here and if I'll go down and ask them for them, they'll give me all of the palm nuts I want for our potholes." And Richard looked at me with a crooked eye and he said, "I know Baba would tell you that. But if a colored man goes down there and asks for them, they're going to charge you." It took me a moment to realize that that colored man was me! (Laughs) Everybody else was black. I was the colored one. And one day, my maintenance man on my office machines came in from Lagos to go through my office machines, and unfortunately we were always worse off after he left than we were before he came. And one day, a car drove in on the compound and went around. I didn't pay any attention to it. I was busy, and he parked over here, and all of a sudden one of my clerks was standing in my door and the clerk looked at me and said, "The damager done come." (Laughter) I didn't work the rest of the day; I laughed the rest of the day. "The damager done come." But the Nigerian scene—we lived through two coups. That meant everywhere we went, we went through a roadblock in order to get there. We might find a Nigerian soldier standing there, twirling his rifle or his machine gun on his finger. But as you see, we have three daughters, and we learned early that if they were awake and active when we got to a roadblock, there was always conversation that was undesirable. So we learned to tell them to go to sleep. So every time we came to a roadblock, they went to sleep. And the soldiers would look at one, and look at them and see that their eyes were closed and never question anything else. They would go on. Of course, the soldiers never knew what was in the car—Volkswagen Beetles. They never knew that there was a compartment under the hood of the Volkswagen Beetle. You could have taken a machine gun! (Laughter) They would never have realized. But we—our hospital changed hands once, as ... the Biafrans came in and took it. And then the Nigerians came and took it back.

PIEHLER: You were very much in the region of the civil war.

DONALDSON: Yes. Yeah, thirty miles from the front for two years. We lived like that.

PIEHLER: There was, I mean, the reason Biafra sticks in my mind is that I was very young, I mean, I was eight or nine, but I just remember it, you know, it sort of looked—I think, probably because of commercials, there was quite a bit of starvation.

DONALDSON: Oh, yes. That's true. And more than that, before and after ... Before, too, because there was all of this evacuation that took place as it was going on. But the Ibos actually were better educated, most of the educated people, Ibo, were better educated than were the westerners and the northerners, too. And so many of the Ibos had responsible positions in the

west and in the north. And then when this idea came, they had to evacuate, and they had to get home any way they could. And you just couldn't believe how many people can go on a lorry and the circumstances of the people who were in that lorry trying to get back home. And it was something. We couldn't go out. We couldn't leave our homes after seven o'clock in the evening. There were curfews. We had to get home before seven-thirty. And that was always a struggle. We always ... "Can we make it? Will we make it?" And part of that time, we had moved away from the—I had said to the mission, "If this job of hospital administration is worth being done, it's worth being done by a hospital administrator, not a preacher who got stuck with the job." So they believed me, and in about two years or so, they brought a relief in for me and we moved down to work with Europeans into Warri, about twenty-two miles away. And my wife would drive back and do the pediatrics. And she had to go through the roadblocks in order to do that. But it was during this time that one of the most extraordinary things happened. I had a pastor student named Steven Agahowa. And Steven was head, shoulders above everybody else around. He had had about a sixth grade education. He was my student. I taught him in pastor school. I knew what he could do, and yet his father was blind, his mother and dad simply existed. And you had to pay your way through high school, so Barbara and I paid his way through high school. We adopted him. We took him in. And the amazing thing was he graduated from high school, and that was all it took. Steven went on his own, got his bachelor's degree in Nsukka University in Nigeria. He now has his bachelor's, two master's degrees, and a doctorate, and lives in Chicago now. He came to America because he couldn't get the theological education he wanted. He is now in Chicago, and he called me Thursday night and said, "Dad, I've got to make a change. I'm in social work and I ought to be doing more than I am doing. I want to—my village needs help in Nigeria. I want to form a committee, a group, around me that can help me to make occasional jaunts to Nigeria and change their world. I've put ten thousand dollars in boring a well for the village, but there are other villages who need it." I ran into Haller Hill Saturday morning, told him the story, he said, "I want to call you. I'll call you this week." So I called Steven last night and he said, "Dad, we're having a board meeting. We're working all this out." (Laughs) Who knows what can happen?

PIEHLER: Just—because you had come back to the States. You'd come back, actually, to East Tennessee, and I have a feeling there is an element of your wife involved in that.

DONALDSON: Well, yes, and it's a two-way road. We were married in New Orleans and I still had half a semester to finish, or maybe a semester of school to finish, and I was pastoring the Downtown Baptist Church. ... Barbara was, by that time, house doctor for the women's hospital of New Orleans, Sarah Mayo Hospital. And my church was close to hers, and we could go to work together. We came home from work together one evening and there was a letter in our mailbox from the Bethel Baptist Church of Townsend, Tennessee, inviting us to come to the mountains of East Tennessee for a two weeks vacation as the guest of the church. They didn't necessarily say they were looking for a preacher. "Where in the world is Townsend? How in the world did anyone from Townsend hear about us?" Took me thirty years to learn. I learned that Barbara's pastor in her original Baptist church in Knoxville had learned that the Bethel Baptist Church was going to be without a preacher. They had built a new church and the pastor felt that he needed more education and was going to seminary. So Dr. Faulkner went out to Bethel Baptist Church, looked over the church, looked over the parsonage, decided Barbara and Buck can fit this thing. He called the pastor search committee together and told them about us and he

gave them the routine for doing this. So we came to Townsend to see what this was all about. We found it on the map and we stayed twenty-seven months, and went to Africa from there. Well, by this time, I had become re-indoctrinated to Tennessee Baptist Student Union and all of that. So when we came home, that was—on our first furlough, I did Vanderbilt...

PIEHLER: Vanderbilt.

DONALDSON: ...and she did Smith, Wilson, and DeKalb counties. When we came home on our second furlough, I did Lincoln Memorial University BSU and she did Claiborne and Union counties. And then there came a time in the seventies when the Nigerian war was finished, and they weren't allowing any new missionaries in, and we would've had to educate the kids at home. We couldn't do that and do mission work at the same time. So we resigned from mission work on the field, paid our way home and came back and we were in Florida. I had been called to be the pastor of the Rockledge Baptist Church and hadn't answered them when the phone rang on a Monday morning and it was Hubert Smothers at Chilhowee Academy saying, "Buck, where have you been?" I had met Hubert at Vanderbilt, while I was at Vanderbilt as BSU director, and in the meantime he had become president of the [Chilhowee] Academy. And he said, "Buck, where have you been? I've had a job waiting for you for two months. Will you come? When are you going to come? Yesterday?" I had never been a public relations director or a director of development in my life. Wow! But, who knows?

PIEHLER: Well, it was your position for eight years. You've listed '70 to '78.

DONALDSON: Then we went back to Africa. Then we came back from Africa in '81 and the [1982] World's Fair was on, was revving up. So the Academy decided that they wanted to ... get involved, so they wanted to let their dorms and their facilities for groups who would come in. So they came to me and said, "Would you handle this?" By this time, Barbara was working with Mary Duffey in public health in Knoxville and my kids were out of—they were all graduates of something. My older daughter graduated from UT [University of Tennessee]. My middle daughter graduated when I came home in '81, from Tennessee Tech. And my youngest daughter graduated from Chilhowee Academy that same spring. So I took over that, and Barbara was working here it had worked out that I also became a member of the World's Fair Speakers Bureau. Somebody said, "You've got to get involved with the World's Fair." And I said, "Don't be ridiculous. I just came home from Africa." And she said, "Well, you have to. Unless some people like you get involved, we may not pull it off." Well, I let her think for a minute, and I said, "Well, by George, I guess if it all depends on me, I ought to get with it." So I went down ... she says, "I got the person. I want you to see Carol Logan." And Carol was in charge of the Speakers Bureau for the World's Fair and I sat down and said hello to him and wound up a member of the Speakers Bureau. Well, that served so marvelously because, as a member of the Speakers Bureau, they called me in once a month or two times a month and updated me on everything that was going on the fair site, and then sent us out to clubs and high schools. My last speaking engagement was the Association of Army Engineers at Tullahoma. And by this time, we were close to opening, and as I went on my opening statement with that group of engineers—was that "Knoxville, Tennessee has created the greatest disaster since Noah built the ark. That ark wasn't going to float. There was no water. It wasn't going anywhere because there was no way for it to get from here to there. It was a disaster! Knoxville has created a World's Fair, and

everybody says—but they’re wrong. We’re going to do it!” You know, we shot for eleven million visitors. You know how many we got?

PIEHLER: I just know that it stands out as the last World’s Fair to make a profit. But I don’t know the numbers, but I know it’s a remarkable. It didn’t make a big profit, but it made a profit.

DONALDSON: We had eleven million, a hundred and twenty-nine thousand visitors. And at that time, I was running this thing at Chilhowee Academy, which meant that I knew what was going on and how it was going on and if some group called up and wanted something and I didn’t have an opening, I could say, “Hey, how about this week?” So for six months, I booked Chilhowee Academy dormitories. It was ten dollars a night. Bring your linens. We will feed you a meal and we can make a lunch for you, and if you request it, we can do supper. I played breakfast music every morning at breakfast for the crowd, and I wound up banking a little more than three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. And Don Mertz said, “Buck, you’re the only person who’s made a real buck!” (Laughter) But I had my daughters helping me. They could fill in. They’re terrifically busy gals.

PIEHLER: Well ... one daughter went into the Navy and also went into chaplaincy within the Navy.

DONALDSON: Yeah. She was the first female from the eastern—Navy chaplain from the eastern part of the United States. And she had a great time. Navy, at that time, was properly staffing, so that they could get the first three years out of a staff person and then not take them back. That way they didn’t have to pay insurance and all these gifts down the line. And actually, I think Jo was too successful for particularly—a particular male chaplain in that service and he didn’t let her come back for her second tour. The hospital, Balboa in San Diego, was up in arms and they awarded her the Navy Service Medal, which has never before been<sup>7</sup> awarded under the circumstances. She’s now on a medical team, chaplain of a medical team with Duke University working in the area of Fort Bragg, Fayetteville. And this medical team is handling HIV-positive and AIDS patients. As she started this, they had nine hundred patients around there, but recently, she has added to this, and is having a wonderful time working with the Lumbee Indian tribe that’s there. So this Duke University involvement had expanded.

PIEHLER: So she works for the medical center as a chaplain, or ...

DONALDSON: Oh, they have clinics in the area, and also she attends clinics to work with patients, but also she works as Duke University liaison with all of the groups, clubs, and such in the Fayetteville area. So she’s really busy.

PIEHLER: It sounds like a very busy career. And in many ways, she’s very directly followed your path. I mean, she even went to UT and to Wake Forest Baptist Theological Seminary.

DONALDSON: Right. And she’s just had a—her husband is a problem. He is a PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] and he’s just now admitted it. So now he is on medication and the world is changing. Thank the Lord for that. But he came—they met in San Diego—when she was in the Navy, and he was with SEAL Team 3. And they married, came back here and



married, and he came out of the Navy because he was a first-class petty officer and she was a lieutenant commander. And he came back and started vet school here, at UT, and I'm not supposed to tell you this, but his professor said, "John, you go to med school. Don't be a vet." So he left and they went to East Tennessee State and he became a nurse. And he's an emergency room nurse, and he's the emergency room nurse at Veteran's Hospital in Fayetteville, while she does this other thing. My middle daughter is the merchandizing specialist for Kiwanis International in Indianapolis. She was the Kiwanis Club's employee of the quarter this quarter. My youngest daughter is the business manager for Bandit Lights, Knoxville's second—Bandit Lights is the second largest stage lighting company in the world. She had an interesting time at UT. She enrolled in UT when she graduated from high school eventually, and got good grades. She didn't take algebra in high school. They were supposed to have given her a blank diploma at graduation, and she was supposed to go to summer school and ...

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

DONALDSON: ... five grades on her high school record, which were not A's. She applied to UT. They didn't count. They accepted her, and she started, but the World's Fair was on and she got money in her eyes, and she didn't withdraw. She quit. Later on, after the World's Fair was over, she decided, "I better go to school." So she enrolled at Tennessee Tech. They didn't look at her record. They looked at those A's and took her. She spent a quarter there and she didn't like that, so she came home and she got interested in music management. So she applied to the University of Tennessee, and she got a letter from the admissions office, saying, "We're sorry." They had looked at all those F's she got for quitting, and said, "We're sorry, but you are not academically acceptable. We cannot take you." They made a mistake. They misspelled "academically." (Laughter) Whereupon, she goes to the admissions department and walks in and says, "Who is it here who is unable to spell 'academically' [and] tells me I'm not acceptable at this institution?" And they took her. Now, she has never had algebra, and she only handles about fifty million a year. Because she is the only female in the administrative element of Bandit Lights who liked most everything at UT.

PIEHLER: I want to just take a quick pause.

[Tape Paused]

DONALDSON: We spent a year in England when we came home from Africa in '70 ...

PIEHLER: ... from Kenya?

DONALDSON: No, Nigeria.

PIEHLER: Nigeria?

DONALDSON: Right. And Barbara had an opportunity to do a master's degree in public health. She was public health director. In fact, in her history here, she has built the public health ... centers, in Maryville, Sevierville, and Madisonville ... those three, while she was public health director. And so we had—when the state said, "Yes, you may do that. You may get your

master's degree," we wrote to Loma Linda in California and Chapel Hill in North Carolina. And then we looked at each other one day and said, "Let's don't do that. Let's have an adventure. Let's go to England." So she proposed that she do her master's degree in public health in an English university, and they bought it. They said, "Send us a syllabus." So we had about six doctors in England that we knew, and we said, "Send us the best prospects." And we chose Leeds, England, which is half—equidistant between London and Edinburgh and London and Glasgow, because we had visited there before and we knew it. So we went there and for that year, took the kids, and they all went to British schools for that year. And we demolished this British notion that their education system is better than ours. For all three of our kids walked away with school honors. In fact, my middle daughter became a prefect of ...

PIEHLER: And you had a church while you were [there]?

DONALDSON: Yes. I enrolled in the City of Leeds School of Music on the basis that I could do what I wanted to do with piano.

PIEHLER: And this was your first time being professionally trained as a musician, or had you taken—in seminary and college, did you take music?

DONALDSON: No, I couldn't stand musicians. (Laughter) And I had had piano in high school, in the eighth and ninth grades, but that was all the formal stuff. In college, I couldn't stand musicians, but I always wrote songs. And at the Baptist Student Center, if we needed a program, and we couldn't find what to do, we'd write the thing and do it ourselves. But here, they agreed to let me do that, and they assigned me a professor and he started me out in Bach's *Three Part Inventions* and this sort of thing and had a good time with him; I just got too busy doing other things to keep up with it, and one of it was I became the pastor of a church while Barbara and the kids went to school. And we toured the country and had a marvelous time, because we—it was an experience that was staggering. We rented a house before we left, from a Mr. Horner in Leeds. And before we left to go there, we had a letter from him, asking us, "Would you please send me a list of the groceries that you would like to find in the icebox when you reach home?" And he said, "I will meet you at the airport when you arrive in Leeds." And we arrived in London late and missed the flight and had to call him and tell him, "We'll take a train and then we'll get a cab and come on home." And he said, "Forget it. I'll be at the train station to meet you." And he took us on a tour of Leeds that was something. We found we were only five miles, excuse me, five minutes, from the most active Baptist church in Northern England. And we went to church ... we got there on Saturday and we were in church on Sunday morning. Sunday afternoon, I went to a minister's meeting with the pastor. And he was in our house every day for the next eight days that we were in England, and we became such buddies. And we had such a great time. When we left England, we said, "Come and see us in America." And we went another step. We were able to leave enough money in the bank, in England, to pay for the pastor's plane ride here. And we heard from him, saying, "We're coming, all twenty-five of us, for three weeks. Is that all right?" (Laughter) And that was all right. I never saw more miracles performed in my life than in that time. We—I advertised. I just let it be known in Seymour that we were having twenty-five guests from England come if you'd like to have somebody in your house from England for three or four days. I didn't have enough to go around. And so we entertained them here for the first week, then Ridgecrest, our Baptist camp in North

Carolina. They were all Baptists from England, from our church in England, and I took them over there. They all balked when I got them there, because they don't normally go to church on vacations and holidays. They want a holiday. But I had arranged it so that I had an old friend from New Orleans come up to cater for them, to do the cooking, and I had a house for them to stay in. The only thing I asked for them was sixteen bucks for registering. And reluctantly, they did. But they left North Carolina in tears. They had had such a great time, they cried. And then I took them down to Marietta, Georgia, where the First Baptist Church—Roswell Street Church in Marietta took care of them for a weekend. Took them to Stone Mountain and showed them Atlanta, brought them back up here, made them stay in a motel on their way back to New York, because I picked them up in New York and brought them down. Made them stay in a motel so that they had one night in a motel in America. And Asbury Park Baptist Church in Asbury, New Jersey took care of them the last night that they were in the States. I made arrangements with TWA to be able to book them on their flight at nine o'clock the next morning, although they were not going to leave until seven-thirty that night.

PIEHLER: So they could sightsee.

DONALDSON: And I had made arrangements for them to have an eight hour tour of New York City. They've never gotten over it. (Laughter) And they've almost all been back. We've had them back here or they've been to see the people they visited when they were here on the American scene. Just a sort of a super situation. At Asbury Park, they asked—when we were there, they fed us a banquet the night that we were there, and they wanted the pastor to speak. And Ralph, when he got up, he said, "I don't have a speech. I really just have three things to say." He says, "And the first thing I want to say, I would not have believed your country. I have walked England. It is beautiful." And that is true. It is beautiful from stem to stern. "I walked it and I know it, but your country is so magnificent. It is fantastic." He said, "Second place, I wouldn't have believed your people. We're at home. They have made us, to be themselves. And I wouldn't have believed that." He says, "And the last thing I would say, is that I have—going back to England with a new vision of the mission of my church in the world." I cried. But that's what I was after—wonderful thing. The friends that we have—we were over, actually, my two youngest daughters, my granddaughter, and I, last October, went to England for six days. We spent the first night with friends from Tanganyika—two doctors, who were both husband and wife, are doctors. The second night we spent with an Anglican missionary, who had been with us in Kisumu, Kenya, and we saw London. My granddaughter had not been, and of course, naturally, she was only nine at the time. We got on the subway to come back, we were in downtown London, to come back, and we got in the front car and she was up there holding on the rails of the front car of the subway, acting like she was the engineer. We came to the place where we had to transfer. We got on the second one, and it was the lead car, and it so happened that the engineer was there in that car. So as we got in and sat down, and Lee Anne and Jan and myself and Margaret and Jana, the engineer looked around and listened to us for a bit and then she turned around and said, "Jana, I know your name. I want you right here." So she called up Jana to sit in the seat beside her, and when it came time for us to leave, she turned to Jana and said, "Okay, Jana, it's your turn, you drive the train." We came back to Atlanta and we were standing in the waiting room, waiting. We were all going in different directions. Jana was catching a plane to Fayetteville and Janet to Indianapolis and Lee Anne and I coming to

Knoxville. We were having so much fun together in that situation, suddenly a crowd gathered just to watch it.

DAVIS: Um, I just have ... let's see. Well, we talked about how you felt on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7th—it was your father's birthday?

DONALDSON: Yes.

DAVIS: How did you feel on this past September 11th? Did you feel any similarities towards that day? A lot of people in the press compared it to Pearl Harbor Day, the way that people reacted. Did you have any thoughts about that?

DONALDSON: I think so. It was, to me, it was as equally disastrous and alarming and unbelievable as Pearl Harbor was. We were—I was in Pearl Harbor before it was all replaced and repaired, so it was ... I guess it was my second trip that I went from San Francisco to Pearl Harbor first. But in the long run, I'm not altogether sure how much of a disaster—because man's reaction to man is disastrous. I've got these things. These are our Navy pointers [magazines]. You said you've seen them. And what they are our war stories. I just read the latest one—sailors on a merchant ship who spent forty-seven days on a raft in the South Atlantic. At Fort Mitchell, at our next-to-the-last annual reunion, we had a sailor in the Pacific, an Armed Guardsman, who had spent eighty-one days on a raft. And these stories about how the Japanese had sunk ships, collected the survivors, and put them on the deck and had them run down through bayonets and sticks, one of these things we use to hit, beat people. And if they made it to the end of the submarine still standing, then the big Jap at the end would bayonet them and throw them into the ocean. This story that I was just reading about these forty-seven, when the submarine sunk the ship, it sunk and afterward and then the sub surfaced and strafed the survivors. These few that made it on the raft were able to stay in the water on the other side of the raft and the sub decided not to try to come too close. But altogether, the inhumanity that was involved in—to prisoners, on both sides, was rather horrendous, and you were always aware of that when you're at sea. Fortunately, I was a Christian, and I dare say that I went to sleep every night at sea. Because most of the nights, we were alone—target practice, if that was possible. And I went to sleep with John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Neither let it be afraid. And you always, wherever you were, there was danger. They may not be shooting at you, but you were at war, whether you were being attacked or not.

PIEHLER: I'm curious—you've become very involved with ... the Navy Guard Veterans' Group. When did you become involved? When did you become interested? Because you ...

DONALDSON: As soon as I learned about it. My friend on the *Cyrus Adler* sent me word some four or five years ago, that we were having a reunion in Bloomington, Minnesota, so we made our reservations and flew up. I wasn't on the chaplain's list at that time. But, again, that was an amazing wonder, for I don't think I ever belonged to a church that has that closeness that we have as Navy veterans in the Armed Guard.

PIEHLER: So you feel close to even people from other ships? That the Navy Guard experience is something that unites you.

DONALDSON: We're just one. And you're never left out and you're never a stranger. You walk—I love barbershop music, and I followed them to Knoxville barbershop stuff, and you see—you go to a convention of barber shoppers and they stand around in the hotel and you—this group over here singing this, and you hear this group singing that, this group singing that, and you walk up and join any of them that you want to. Well, you go to a Navy Armed Guard reunion, and there'll be this group over here that's telling war stories, so you go up in and you're one of them and you tell your story. And nobody, not a single soul, is left out of anything. And I had such an extraordinary time. I was the chaplain of the one in—that we had at Fort Mitchell the year before last, and C.A. Lloyd, who takes care of this sort of thing and is the executive secretary of it, and he called me and said, "Buck, I need you for chaplain. And remember, will you make it short and sweet?" Well, I've had a lot of experience, so the first meeting we had was a banquet, and I had to invoke the banquet. So I stood at the microphone and I used about five well-chosen phrases, and when I said, "Amen," they applauded. The next morning, we had our business meeting where there were a few of the wives there, but it was a room full of men. And again, I made it short and sweet but to the point. And when I finished, I never heard an Amen chorus like came out of the crowd. Every man in the house said, "Amen!" And when that session was over, one fellow came up to me and said, "I want you to have this." And he dropped in my hand a cross and a chain. He had made the cross out of horseshoe nails and it was quite something. And he said, "I made this and I want you to have it. You sound like you know who you're talking to." But this is the most fantastic brotherhood that's imaginable, because everybody knows when he tells his story, he's got the total attention of everybody. They are interested in him, what happened to him, what didn't happen to him, and all that sort of thing. And you've got, wherever you are, you're all heir's.

PIEHLER: I'm curious ... you hadn't joined a veteran's organization. Had you joined the American Legion or the VFW or—how often, until recently, how often did you talk about the war? I mean, would references to your experiences in war, would they appear in your sermons?

DONALDSON: Oh, yes.

PIEHLER: So even very early, that ...

DONALDSON: Yes. The experiences were so real. And I haven't joined these other groups. They are too wild for me. I don't fit into that scheme. At the same time, I don't ignore them and I don't avoid them. I just don't—I'm not going to drink with them. (Laughter) By and large. But they're my buddies. My old drinking buddies.

DAVIS: I think I've asked everything I had.

PIEHLER: Oh. Is there anything you'd like to talk about that we haven't asked? I feel, in some ways, we have an African historian and she should really be the one who follows—does a follow-up the interview with you about your years in Africa.

DONALDSON: I see.

PIEHLER: But ... is there anything, particularly about the war, or anything in your career? I mean, we more quickly glided over your postwar career in the ministry.

DONALDSON: Well, I'm not so sure that we haven't covered most of the incidents through it. We had such strong relationships among us all. We never had—when we were at sea, we didn't have any—the only disagreements that I ever knew within a crew was when we had a boy who actually couldn't read and write. Now, how he got in, we never knew, but he spent most of his spare time working on his gun mount. And this was on the *Cape Canso*, and the gunner's mate would come out and say, "Hey, you know, I think that's a good idea." And the first thing you know, he's got everybody else doing the same thing. (Laughter) We ... you almost have to be friends, because there's no place to go. But we did things together aboard ship, particularly. I was going to—one incident that got out of my mind, on this storm crossing from Capetown ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, you mentioned that.

DONALDSON: I'll never forget one evening, I came off watch at just before twelve, and I had—I was down in the men's room and it was horrible outside. And there was one of the seamen in the men's room, getting ready to go out. And he so carefully put on his overcoat and his binoculars over that, and I will never forget the way that he put the strap off of the binoculars down right, pulled his collar over, and smoothed it down! To go out in that storm! He was happy to have the job, I guess. (Laughter) Well, that was tremendous. We had—we would normally hoard Coca-Cola. We would get to port and we'd try one. We had a Coca-Cola Christmas party on the east coast of India, going to Karachi about Christmastime. We could always share with each other our concerns about one thing or another. And it was war, but it was a brotherhood. And we were lucky that we didn't have to fight mud and all the other horrible things.

PIEHLER: I guess I just have a final question, and it probably relates to when you were growing up and then being a missionary and a pastor in the States. You grew up in a segregated society, although it sounds like your father really, in some ways, would look beyond that, particularly in his role as a doctor.

DONALDSON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: He thought it was important to treat everyone equally?

DONALDSON: Right.

PIEHLER: You were in black Africa when it's becoming independent and the civil rights movement is going on in the United States and really disrupting things. What were your thoughts? And also, sort of, being a missionary in Africa in the time when what's going on in the United States is getting a lot of attention, in terms of race relations.

DONALDSON: I think, in the first place, I was there because I knew that was my mission to be there. I guess I can explain it by an incident as well as any. I arrived at a clinic that we had in Kenya one day, to find that Joseph Apida, who was our medical assistant, who happened to be running that clinic, was out waiting for us to come. And when we drove in, Joseph nearly turned white, and I said, "Something is going wrong with this situation." And as I went in, he said, "There are ten polygamists over here, waiting to see," and I was new, "what you think about their lifestyle as polygamists." And, of course, this was not my first time to deal with this situation. And so, I said, "Joseph, relax. I didn't come here alone. You can't see Him, but He's here. And between the two of us, we will handle it." So I had an advantage. Unfortunately, many of our missionaries hadn't paid the price to learn the language. I knew the language. And so I walked into that group over there, and they were all sitting on the row. And I greeted them in Kiswahili and started talking with them in Kiswahili. And I said I'd let them broach the subject, so I didn't go into it. But after we had talked for a while and I couldn't get their question out of them, I said, "Hey, you know what? We've got a good group here. Let's have a Bible study." So I picked up the Bible and I chose a passage and started teaching it, and they participated, and then when I finished, and I took thirty minutes to do it, when I finished, I turned to them and I said, "Now, do you have any questions?" Nobody asked. I said, "Now, I've got a question. Isn't it true that all ten of you here have more than one wife, and you've come here today to see what this new missionary thinks about your lifestyle? And I've come here to tell you, I came here for one reason. I love you, or I wouldn't be here at all. I don't like your lifestyle. I don't think that it fits into a proper human pattern whether you're in Africa or Europe or anywhere else. But I want to tell you that the Lord didn't say, 'Whoever believes in me and has one wife, shall be saved.' And I've been in Africa long enough to know that if you get rid of a wife, I know what life she has to go into, and I don't like that either. So I'm not coming here to tell you that you are responsible for just getting rid of two wives or three wives and having one wife. You have started something that you've got to finish. And to my mind, you have the biggest opportunity in the world. You can transform Africa. Your job, as far as I'm concerned, is to be the best man you can and the best husband you can. Never miss being in that church a day when it's possible and teach your children not to make your mistake. For if the ten of you will do that, you can transform this continent. We don't need polygamists. I don't want to walk into a church and see you standing up as somebody's model. But I don't want to walk in the church and find your pew empty." And we finished and we all hugged and I went back over to see Joseph, and he was amazed. And I think, wherever I was, the first thing they knew was, "Do you love me? Are you here to accomplish a job and do something, or do you love *me*?" And that is primary. And then, "How much are you concerned about me? Have you come here to be, to get me in church, or are you come here to let me experience the world?" As one of my medical assistants wrote to me after we came home, and said, "You have—you were interested in the whole person." I... sure they were working in clinics, and nobody had bothered to treat them in the position they have. They were not making sensible salaries. I changed all that, paid them what—their wives were their nurses and they were being—not being paid properly. I paid them. And then I realized they had been living in Africa all these years, they have never been to a wild game reserve. Barbara and I made reservations for all of them [the medical assistants] and ourselves at the Maasai Mara Wild Game Reserve and took them there for three days and four nights, the first time they had ever been on a reserve. I have a mahogany zoo at my house, carved for me by a Tanganyikan man who, when I recognized his skill and asked him to start, I said, "Carve me a zoo." And we were speaking Kiswahili. And he said, "What do you mean?"

I said, “Well, let’s—I want several animals. Let’s start off with a *kiboko*, with a rhinoceros.” And he said, “What’s that?” Well, I had just come from a trip through Angora Gora Crater, where I had photographed a rhinoceros, and I said, “What’s that?” And then my American naiveté just fell out all around me. For I suddenly realized, you don’t go looking for a rhino unless you’ve got as much going for you as he has for him. (Laughter) Or else you’ll get the point. So I went in the house and got that picture of the rhino that I had shot in Crater and brought it out and handed it to him, and for about fifteen minutes, he looked at it, and then he said, “Okay, I’m ready.” And he handed me the picture and went away and carved the best rhino you’ve ever seen carved. It’s fantastic. It’s perfect. I was down in Jacksonville, Florida. I had some African stuff on display. And an African-American came up and in his slow tongue, he looked at me and said, “Them people over there. They ain’t got much sense, have they?” I said, “Well, much more than you would believe they have.” (Laughs) But this business of, “Who are you as a person, and how much do you love me?” In Nigeria, we had a terrible motorcycle accident. Two men, two brothers, on a motorcycle, and they were both terribly injured and one of them, Palmer’s wife, was down at the garden, working on the garden, when she heard the news. And she danced all the way from the garden to the hospital. And she shouldn’t have done that, but she did. And she was hysterical by the time she got to the hospital. And I met her as she came in, and I could see the glaze on her face, and I walked over and I took her arm in my hand. And she said, “Where’s Palmer?” And I said, “Come with me.” And I walked down to the ward where he was in his bed, where the doctors had already had a chance to do work on him, and she went in, I looked at her as she went in—we didn’t have to X-ray him. She did that. When she saw him she X-rayed him to see what was wrong. (Chuckles) And then I said, I just walked over to her and I said, “Rebecca, we will work this out together.” I went home and I didn’t see her until the next morning. When I had—when it was time for me to go to the hospital and I was walking in the back of the hospital and suddenly I found her behind me. And she walked up to me and she took my hand in hers, and she said, “Thank you. I won’t do that again.” For she had reverted to her pagan ways at the time that this tragedy had struck, and she discovered there was something better. And she walked up, “Thank you. I won’t do that again.” But this business of people are people and loving people, it’s just—and I never thought about, never had thought about, whether a man was red or yellow, black or white. And I got it from Dad and Mom, for that matter, too. It was wonderful.

PIEHLER: Well, thank you for giving up so much of your time.

DAVIS: Thank you very much.

DONALDSON: Well, I considered this a real privilege.

PIEHLER: And really, this map is fabulous for really getting a sense of where you’ve been. I mean, it’s really a remarkable set of journeys.

DONALDSON: By the way, this is a recent picture ...

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