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AN INTERVIEW WITH STANLEY DUHAN

FOR THE  
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INTERVIEW BY  
G. KURT PIEHLER  
AND  
CATHERINE I. DAVIS

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TRANSCRIPT BY  
CATHERINE I. DAVIS

REVIEWED BY  
BRAUM DENTON  
MARK BOULTON

G. KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Stanley Duhan on March 14, 2002 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

CATHERINE I. DAVIS: Catherine Davis.

PIEHLER: And, let me just ask you formally for your full name, and ... when and where were you born?

STANLEY DUHAN: My name is Stanley Duhan. I was born in New Rochelle, New York.

PIEHLER: And what year were you born? What was your birth date?

DUHAN: March 12, 1926.

PIEHLER: Oh wow, so it was just recently your birthday?

DUHAN: Two days ago.

PIEHLER: Two days ago. Well I'd like to begin—could you tell us a little bit about your parents?

DUHAN: Yes. My mother was born in 1900 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And my father was born in Latvia—I guess it was part of Russia at that time—and as a teenager he came to this country. He was the youngest of three brothers and a sister, but he was the biggest, and so he ... was the leader, even though he was the youngest of the family.

PIEHLER: So he was the first to come over?

DUHAN: They all came together except my father—he was the last. His older brother was being inducted into the Russian Army, and, of course, he didn't want to go. So my father volunteered to take his place. The brothers left with their sister and mother .... And my father snuck out of the Russian Army and followed them. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So your father briefly took his place?

DUHAN: Briefly.

PIEHLER: The whole family, come over?

DUHAN: They all came over here, and they settled in the New York area.

PIEHLER: Do you know what year they came over ... to the United States?

DUHAN: Oh, it was the early 1900s, but I don't ... have it with me. My son is great into genealogy, and he has researched the family. He has a stack of records on it, but I don't know. He even has the name of the ship they came over on.

PIEHLER: And did they come to the New York area?

DUHAN: The New York area, yes.

PIEHLER: And your father ... owned an automotive repair business, you said?

DUHAN: Right.

PIEHLER: When did that get started, do you know?

DUHAN: In the early 1920s. Somewheres in there.

PIEHLER: So it existed when you were born.

DUHAN: Yes.

PIEHLER: That's all you knew, about your father's history?

DUHAN: That's right.

PIEHLER: And was it based in New Rochelle?

DUHAN: No, it was based in a town just outside of New Rochelle called Tuckahoe.

PIEHLER: Oh, I've heard of Tuckahoe. And ... how big was ... your father's business?

DUHAN: Well, it was growing, and growing very nicely, and then 1929 came around and everything crashed. And, like everybody else, he lost most of it.

PIEHLER: But he ... didn't lose all of it?

DUHAN: He lost the building, but he had enough to get another building a couple years down the line, and started building back up again. He wound up with two ... facilities. He got rid of one after a while, and then the second one when he retired from business.

PIEHLER: It sounds like ... in the long run, he was a successful businessman, small businessman.

DUHAN: Yes.

PIEHLER: How many people did he employ, say, when you were going off to war?

DUHAN: I believe it was two, besides himself.

PIEHLER: Besides himself.

DUHAN: Two older mechanics.

PIEHLER: And when he sold the business, how big was his business?

DUHAN: ... It was pretty stable.

PIEHLER: It was small?

DUHAN: A small facility, yes.

PIEHLER: What kind of cars did he repair? Did they change over time? Was it anything that came off the road?

DUHAN: Anything that came off the road. There wasn't the variety of cars that you have today.

PIEHLER: ... How did your parents meet?

DUHAN: That I really don't know. They met in New York City somewhere.

PIEHLER: But you don't know?

DUHAN: I don't really know how they met.

PIEHLER: And ... you mentioned your ... mother was a bookkeeper?

DUHAN: Bookkeeper.

PIEHLER: Did she work outside of the home when you were growing up?

DUHAN: She kept the books for my father, but not—didn't have another job.

PIEHLER: She didn't have another job while you were growing up?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: How observant was your family growing up?

DUHAN: You mean religiously?

PIEHLER: Religiously.

DUHAN: Well, Tuckahoe was a very small town, and the Jewish population there was very small.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) It sounds like it was much smaller even than Knoxville.

DUHAN: Very much so. When they wanted a Minyan, they had nine Jewish men. All the other local Jewish men worked in New York City.

PIEHLER: That's not quite enough. (Laughs)

DUHAN: They made the fellow that owned the lumberyard, who happened to be an Irishman, they made him an honorary Jew, and he filled in.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) He was the tenth ...

DUHAN: He was the tenth man.

PIEHLER: And he would actually come to Minyan?

DUHAN: Yes.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. So Minyans were a tough thing to organize.

DUHAN: That's right, and at the beginning there was no synagogue, JCC, or anything. If you wanted that, you went fifteen miles down to Mount Vernon, New York. And for the High Holy Days, the services were held at the Masonic Temple.

DAVIS: So did your family travel there a lot together for the more important religious holidays?

DUHAN: ... No, they had them right in town. There were more families than nine, but the men were mainly in the clothing business in New York, and things. They weren't in town for anything on weekdays. And then, finally the congregation grew. They first rented a store, and then they rented another store in the same building. And then eventually they built a facility in the Crestwood area of Eastchester, Yonkers. And it's still active.

PIEHLER: But Tuckahoe never built a synagogue?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: No, even today they don't ...

DUHAN: Even today. But anyway, the towns are very close ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

DUHAN: You didn't have to travel very far to go from one to the other.

PIEHLER: Did your family keep kosher growing up?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: And were you Bar Mitzvahed?

DUHAN: Yes, in town.

PIEHLER: In town?

DUHAN: In town at the Masonic Temple. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: In Tuckahoe?

DUHAN: In Tuckahoe, yes. At that time you never were on the Bima until then, and after that, there were no activities for teenage Jewish children.

PIEHLER: So it was Bar Mitzvah? That was the end of the Jewish education?

DUHAN: That was it.

PIEHLER: When growing up in the '30s, what did your family think of Zionism? Did it ever come up?

DUHAN: I don't think it really came up.

PIEHLER: No memories of Zionist activities?

DUHAN: No memories of anything. I mean, only what you read in the newspapers, but that was about it, and there was really not very many people to discuss things with.

PIEHLER: ... You listed as your father's political affiliation "none." Was he an independent ...

DUHAN: Yeah, he was an independent. We all were, my mother, my father, myself. We were not members of the Democratic or Republican parties, or whatever else there was at the time.

PIEHLER: What did your family think of Franklin Roosevelt?

DUHAN: They thought he was quite good. I mean—but you didn't hear very much about what was going on then like you do now. Now everything is open.

PIEHLER: So your family didn't talk about politics a lot at the dinner table?

DUHAN: Not very much, no.

PIEHLER: What was your neighborhood like that you grew up in? And where did you live in Tuckahoe, roughly?

DUHAN: Well, we lived in Tuckahoe proper. And then we moved up to an area called Eastchester, which was four [or] five miles away. And we lived in a detached home, two-story home, or an apartment. There were several of them in there. My parents always rented.

PIEHLER: They never owned a [home]?

DUHAN: They never owned.

PIEHLER: So they never lost a home in the Depression, but they also never owned one?

DUHAN: That's right.

PIEHLER: And I assume your father had a car?

DUHAN: Oh yes. My father had a car, and my mother had a car.

PIEHLER: Oh really?

DUHAN: Yes, she drove. But again, at that time if you drove thirty-five miles an hour, you were driving fast, too. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Did your family ... have a telephone?

DUHAN: Yes.

PIEHLER: And a radio?

DUHAN: And a radio.

PIEHLER: It sounds like your family—how well off was your family compared to, say, some of your neighbors in the Great Depression, say, in the early '30s?

DUHAN: I think they were—there were no friends or relatives that were really hurting and had to go on relief or anything like that. I remember when Roosevelt declared a bank holiday, and all of the banks shut down at once. It was a scramble to find out where to get some money for a couple of days.

PIEHLER: So that you remember, it sounds like you remember very vividly?

DUHAN: Oh yeah. I think my father raided my piggy bank at that time to get a couple of coins until the bank opened back up. (Laughter) But other than that life was normal.

PIEHLER: Otherwise you don't have a distinctive memory?

DUHAN: No, I mean, things were tight. But again things didn't cost like they do now.

PIEHLER: And it sounds like, in many ways, you were very shielded [and] your family was doing well, much better than other families?

DUHAN: That's right, equal or better.

PIEHLER: In terms of having a car, two cars, and a radio and a telephone.

DUHAN: Yes.

PIEHLER: You grew up in sort of a predominantly non-Jewish community?

DUHAN: Very much so.

PIEHLER: ... How were your relationships with the other kids growing up? Did you ever have any anti-Semitic slurs or anything?

DUHAN: Well, very little.... There were a few incidents.

PIEHLER: But nothing major?

DUHAN: Nothing serious. Nothing that I ... could take real offense of. Just like kids.

PIEHLER: It was more like schoolyard hazing.

DUHAN: Uh, yeah, "you this," and then you forgot about it.

PIEHLER: Well I'm very intrigued, because it sounds like your father—was a small businessman, and it sounds like the small businessmen who were Jewish had very good relationships with a lot of their Gentile counterparts.

DUHAN: Yes, he did.

DAVIS: Just a couple things—you said your father owned an auto repair business, and then later on you became an engineer. Did you ever ... play ... with the cars and help work on them?

DUHAN: I worked on cars, doing simple repairs.

DAVIS: Did you ever work with your father in the shop?

DUHAN: I went down there on weekends to be with my father there. Besides being a repair shop, they also sold gas and, you know, that, and service the car, you know, change the oil and so on. I was there. I used to work at the pumps while the men were working at the—on the cars themselves.

PIEHLER: So you pumped your fair share of gas?



DUHAN: Right, and checked air in the tires, and other minor things. (Laughter)

DAVIS: ... Was your family pretty close growing up? Were you really close to your brothers and sisters?

DUHAN: I don't have any brothers or sisters.

DAVIS: That's right. But to your parents and relatives?

DUHAN: We were close to cousins.

PIEHLER: So you did have cousins?

DAVIS: Did they all stay in the same general area?

DUHAN: Well, they were in the Upper Bronx or over in Yonkers which is very nearby.

PIEHLER: That's not that far.

DUHAN: No, ten, fifteen miles, you know.

PIEHLER: So you had a ... big family?

DUHAN: Well it wasn't that big. I think my grandparents and my uncle, my mother's brother, lived in Long Island in Rockaway. And I think that was the farthest away from the family of relatives, 'cause we went to see my grandmother quite often. My grandfather died when I was about five. But we were ... close to everybody while we were growing up.

PIEHLER: So you didn't feel isolated as an only child?

DUHAN: No.

DAVIS: Also, when you were talking about the Depression ... did you ever think about ... your family and the families around y'all weren't well off, but they were at least able to get by ... What did you think of all the other measures being taken to help alleviate the Depression?

DUHAN: Actually, where I was, and the people that I was familiar with, we—the Depression really didn't feel that bad. I mean, people weren't jumping out of windows and—you couldn't get big presents for yourself. In other words, if you could buy a little ten-cent toy, you were satisfied.

PIEHLER: That was a big deal.

DUHAN: It was a big deal, but you didn't think much of it then. As you were growing up you had a bicycle. You know. You had a football. You had a baseball and things like that, so ...

PIEHLER: It sounds like ... you also—did you go to a lot of movies growing up? Did you go to the theater a lot, the movie theater a lot?

DUHAN: We went ... not a lot, but we went quite often. In the town itself [there] was one theater with one screen, and that was on Saturday. And at that time, they had the short serials, where you went every Saturday.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. So did you have any particular hero? 'Cause my late father-in-law used to love Tom Mix.

DUHAN: Oh, he was great. I mean, but our hero was the star of the current movie.

PIEHLER: But there were none others that stood out?

DUHAN: You're having to get me to think now. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, 'cause it left such an impression on my late father-in-law that ... he moved to Oklahoma for work and retired there. And one day he took a pilgrimage to the Tom Mix museum because he, as a kid, used to love Tom, Tom Mix. What else? It sounds like you played a lot of sports.

DUHAN: Really, you know, we played in the street a lot. But I wasn't on any organized team.

PIEHLER: Team?

DUHAN: ... any teams. I went out, when I was in high school, to get on the tennis team, but by that time, rubber was rationed, they couldn't get tennis balls so that ended that .... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: How much traveling did your family do? 'Cause you mentioned going to the Rockaway.

DUHAN: Well, that was the biggest trip, to the Rockaway.

PIEHLER: So you'd travel by car?

DUHAN: That was an all day trip, and you stayed over. You came back the next day.

PIEHLER: So that was the big trip growing up?

DUHAN: That was the big trip, except to go to camp in Canada when I was 11½.

PIEHLER: You never went—you never, say, went on a family vacation to anywhere else?

DUHAN: No, you traveled to parks and things, but within a couple of hours away.

PIEHLER: So before you went to war, you hadn't left, say, the greater New York area, say, Rockaway, Long Island, except to go to camp?

DUHAN: That is correct.

PIEHLER: You'd never had, say, been to—had you been to Philadelphia, or ...

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: Or Boston?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: Albany?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: And do you think that was something, because your father was a small businessman?

DUHAN: No, I just—I don't think anybody in our circle of friends took long trips.

PIEHLER: It sounds like he didn't really want to travel. Have you been back to the area?

DUHAN: Well, that—only to visit my parent when they were alive. When I graduated high school, I of course, I left town then. But four or five years ago I got a notice that my high school class was having a fifty-year anniversary. And they sent me a list of who was still living, and where they were living. And it was surprising that very few people left the area. In other words, they didn't live right in that town, but within a certain—a radius of fifty miles. About 85 percent or more of the people are still right there.

PIEHLER: That is very interesting.

DUHAN: Mm hmm. I was surprised that people just didn't get out and go somewhere.

PIEHLER: Because you've traveled quite a bit since then?

DUHAN: Yes, I've been all over this country, worked all over this country either with industry or the military.

PIEHLER: ... Where was your elementary school? Do you remember? Was it in Tuckahoe?

DUHAN: The elementary school was in—the first couple of years was in the Yonkers area. I even remember the name. It was PS-15. (Laughter) And then we moved to the other side, into the Eastchester side, and I finished grade school there, and it was the Waverly School. And then from there I went over to the junior high ... in the area.

PIEHLER: And do any teachers stick out, growing up, particularly in terms of ... helping you shape the idea that you might become an engineer?

DUHAN: Yeah, there was one, our neighbor—when I was going to high school, across the street lived the science teacher ... and we became friendly. And also, at that time, most of the teachers stayed after school, and they had clubs and activities going on. So at three o'clock you didn't run home. You went to an after school activity of your choice.

PIEHLER: You went to clubs?

DUHAN: I went to a club that he ran. Various science-oriented things, and I if I had a question about homework, I could go across the street and say, "What about this?" which was very nice.

DAVIS: Were you pretty active in all sorts of different stuff growing up? Did you participate in a lot of school activities?

DUHAN: Well, just the after school activities and sports.

DAVIS: Just the science thing, and ...

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you ...

DUHAN: Yes. And, of course, you had friends and you visited with them.

PIEHLER: So you played a lot of sports in the street?

DUHAN: Yeah, we played a lot at that time. Lionel Trains was the big thing.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. So you would have a train set?

DUHAN: Oh, yeah. In fact, the house we were living in when we were near the high school had a great big attic ... and several of us took all the train sets—theirs and mine—and we set 'em all up in our attic ...

PIEHLER: And built a huge model? (Laughs)

DUHAN: Yeah. You didn't have all the bridges and tunnels and things that they have today, but we had a bunch of trains running up there. So we played with that. We played in the street. 'Cause you could—there wasn't that many cars around, that you had to worry too much about ... traffic.

PIEHLER: How often ... did you and your family make it into New York, say, Manhattan?

DUHAN: Not too often. We went in occasionally, but not very often. You did most of your shopping in New York. In other words, if you needed a suit, or something like that.

PIEHLER: But largely it was sort of in the Tuckahoe area.

DUHAN: That's right. You had friends there. My parents had their bridge ... group and their pinochle group, and they got together every week, and they went away, you know, on weekends. No, that's wrong. They went away in the evenings. Didn't stay overnight, but they went to shows and things like that.

DAVIS: Pretty much everything you needed was right there?

DUHAN: Right there. Your needs were very simple then, as compared to now. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What—growing up, how much did you sort of know about what was going on in the world? Did your ... parents read a daily paper?

DUHAN: Oh yeah. We got the local paper and a daily paper.

PIEHLER: The local paper.

DUHAN: Yeah, well, I should say the New York paper, one of them.

PIEHLER: You don't remember which one?

DUHAN: No, I don't. 'Cause the local paper was a weekly paper, and it did not carry national and international news.

PIEHLER: Strictly ...

DUHAN: Strictly local. And you heard things, but you really didn't hear too much of what was going [on]. I mean, you knew about the war. There were pictures in there about the bombing of London, and things like that. You read all these things, but you really didn't get to—you know, it was terrible, the awful things being done by the Germans.

DAVIS: Did you ever think that it would really hit home for you? Because you are reading about all this stuff ...

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: So in 1940, '41, it sounds like you were a typical high school student.

DUHAN: Yes, but when the U.S. entered the war I became an air raid warden. I went to college when I was seventeen, and at eighteen, quickly I got a draft notice. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What year did you—you entered college in 19 ...

DUHAN: '43.

PIEHLER: '43. And you were seventeen?

DUHAN: Yeah. And then, during the freshman year I had—it was in March when I turned eighteen, and I had to go 'til May or June, whatever it was, to finish my freshman year. The draft board allowed me those couple of months to finish that one year. I remember very clearly the Pearl Harbor day, 'cause I was at the movies with my mother then. We were seeing *Gone With the Wind*. And they stopped the film in the middle and announced that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor. That remains with me very clearly.

PIEHLER: Did they resume the movie?

DUHAN: Then they resumed the movie. 'Cause everybody says, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And did you know where it—I mean were you one of those ...

DUHAN: I hadn't the slightest idea where it was.

DAVIS: Was it kind of shocking to think that that could happen?

DUHAN: Oh yeah. You know. You didn't expect it to happen and—so that was that.

PIEHLER: You mentioned your parents had the pinochle, bridge group. Was your father or mother active in any other organizations? Any clubs, or ...

DUHAN: Well they were—there was a Jewish group in town. I'm trying to remember the name of it, but [it] eludes me. My father was an active mason and a volunteer fireman.

PIEHLER: They were ... active in the Jewish group?

DUHAN: They were active in that. In fact, they were one of the charter members of it, and grew into the synagogue that was later built there.

DAVIS: By the time the synagogue was built, about how many people were there that were ... going regularly?

DUHAN: Oh, they came from more than just Tuckahoe. I guess there might have been seventy-five families. I don't know.

DAVIS: That's a pretty good size.

DUHAN: ... at that time, it was a fairly elaborate building.

PIEHLER: And it was—was it conservative?

DUHAN: Conservative.

PIEHLER: Conservative.

DUHAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Were you a Boy Scout?

DUHAN: For a short while, yeah.

PIEHLER: What rank did you [achieve]?

DUHAN: Uh, one up level.

PIEHLER: First class?

DUHAN: Yeah, I think I was. Again, there was no Boy Scout troop in town, so you had to move to the next town up, which was Scarsdale. And it meant somebody had to drive you up there. So, it became a little difficult. I didn't stay with it that long.

DAVIS: Did you get to go on camping trips and stuff with Boy Scouts?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: ... Several things before we sort of go onto the war, being in high school in the early war years, when the United States was into it. Did your mother have anyone help out in the house?

DUHAN: Yes.

PIEHLER: She did have a cleaning ... person?

DUHAN: Yes. She had a girl that actually slept there. You know. She was a full-time ...

PIEHLER: Full-time.

DUHAN: She came from New Jersey. It was Passaic, New Jersey, which to me was miles away (Laughter) even though it was only across the river, really.

PIEHLER: 'Cause now we would view—I'm somewhat familiar with that area and it's just not that far from Passaic.

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: But when you were growing up, that could have been ...

DUHAN: Yeah, I mean, transportation wasn't what it is today—of course, there was very, very little air travel. Buses were local buses. You didn't travel by taxi very much then. You just more or less made your own way, doing with what you had without thinking about everything.

PIEHLER: And did your ... family, did your parents or you speak any Yiddish growing up?

DUHAN: My mother and father did. I didn't understand it.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like when they wanted to talk about something, and they didn't want you to hear, that's when the Yiddish came up?

DUHAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: But you never grew up speaking Yiddish?

DUHAN: No, but neither my mother nor my father had an accent at all. You wouldn't imagine that my father was born overseas, and, of course, my mother grew up in this—my grandparents spoke very good English.

PIEHLER: Did you—when World War II broke out in 1939, did your family still have any family connections in Eastern Europe that you remember?

DUHAN: I think my grandmother had some people over there, but we lost contact with them very early. I don't know what happened. My son could probably come up with more, because he has, through his genealogy, made contact with people over in Europe, and essentially he says, "Would you go to the town hall and look up the records on so-and-so, and I'll send you a couple of dollars for your effort." (Laughs) He's been getting information that way, and they've been making copies and sending it to him.

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like you have a family tree through your son's effort.

DUHAN: He did a tremendous effort.

PIEHLER: But growing up, you didn't feel—there wasn't someone your family ... particular your immediate family, had been in contact with.

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: Well you have a great story about Pearl Harbor, where you heard Pearl Harbor—how did it affect your high school?

DUHAN: Well, of course at that time, immediately, air raids was the first thought. I became an air raid warden ... when I was in high school. They issued me a tin hat and an armband. That was fine. I could go out at night. But if they had an air raid drill during class, the principal wouldn't let me out to go to where I was supposed to be. (Laughter)



PIEHLER: So at night or late afternoon you could ... participate, but he wasn't gonna let you skip class?

DUHAN: Right. The classes stopped, of course, and you did whatever you did then. Go to an assembly area. No, they didn't let me out for that.

PIEHLER: Did your school have any sort of bond or scrap drives?

DUHAN: The school didn't, but the town did. There were various places in town that they had bins, and you put your aluminum and copper and soup cans in there, and, of course, as rationing became more and more, things tightened up considerably.

PIEHLER: Your father was a small businessman, and he repairs cars, and ... they stop making new cars, and tires become very scarce.

DUHAN: Right.

PIEHLER: How did that affect your father's business, and how did he make it through the war?

DUHAN: Oh, they managed to survive. They didn't drive that much, in other words. Where I now drive maybe eighteen, twenty thousand miles a year, they probably wouldn't do that in five years at that time. Tires lasted a long time, and gasoline was rationed.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that during the war your father had older people work for him. Did he lose anyone during the war?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: No.

DUHAN: They were all beyond the military age.

PIEHLER: The draft age.

DUHAN: The draft age.

PIEHLER: Were his coworkers fellow Jews?

DUHAN: No, they were not.

DAVIS: Did you get to be pretty good friends with them just going to see your father?

DUHAN: Oh yeah. I had friends that were both Jewish and non-Jewish. We didn't discriminate in any which way.

PIEHLER: In your high school, did you know of any sort of seniors, particularly in 1941, '42 who sort of left school to enlist, or ...

DUHAN: A couple did, but not too many.

PIEHLER: Not too many.

DUHAN: Not too many.

PIEHLER: What kind of expectation was there in your family about you going to college?

DUHAN: They wanted me to go in the worst way.

PIEHLER: That was just a given?

DUHAN: That was given. Where I went and what I went for, that was my choice. And I had certain restrictions. For instance, in high school languages were not my forte ... I think I'd still be in high school if I had to ... (Laughter) But anyway, I found a college that ... I wanted that had an engineering department. At that time I thought I wanted to get a degree in aeronautical engineering, which I didn't. But when I went to Virginia Tech, they did not require a language to get in.

PIEHLER: So, that's why you went there?

DAVIS: That was a big factor ...

DUHAN: Well that was one of the reasons. Also a good friend of mine went there the year before.

PIEHLER: ... From your town?

DUHAN: Yeah and he told me how great the school was. Of course, by the time I got there a year later he had already gone into the army ... and of course the school attendance dropped way down. There wasn't very many civilian students there. They were mainly underage, like I was 17.

PIEHLER: They were 4-F?

DUHAN: Few 4-F. And there were a number of military ASTP, naval ROTC. They were rotated in and out.

PIEHLER: So, most people either were in uniform in school or they were 4-Fs or they were very young?

DUHAN: Right. The ones that were seventeen had to go into the cadet corps 'cause at that time that was mandatory there. So I was in the cadet corps for a year.

PIEHLER: The army or another service.

DUHAN: There wasn't any differentiation at that time.

PIEHLER: Oh, it was just a general ...

DUHAN: It was ROTC. It was mandatory to belong. Now they are divided into Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine, so on. But ... it's voluntary now.

PIEHLER: But then you had to belong?

DUHAN: You had to. It was very different.

PIEHLER: When you went off to college, did you think there was a chance you would finish your college degree or ...

DUHAN: I didn't think so.

PIEHLER: You thought that this was just a year?

DUHAN: Yeah, I really wasn't that interested in college because I knew everybody else, everybody I was friendly with, they were getting their notices to go. So, I figured I was gonna get one very soon. During my freshman year, I was kind of a mediocre student. I did enough to get by, but I wasn't that great.

DAVIS: Was it real different to leave your family for the first time and to go so much further away since you ... stayed in the New York area for such a long time?

DUHAN: Well, actually, now that I come to think of it, they sent me to camp during the summer two years.

PIEHLER: You did go to camps?

DUHAN: Two years.

PIEHLER: Away?

DUHAN: Two years, away and to day campus. One year, well one year, and well before that I went. A day, like ....

DAVIS: Weeklong camps?

PIEHLER: Day camps.

DUHAN: Day camps. But I went to one up in the Laurentian Mountains in Canada and one in Pennsylvania.

PIEHLER: Oh, so that was a long way from home.

DUHAN: That was a long way.

PIEHLER: And was it a Jewish camp?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: No.

DUHAN: I never went to a Jewish camp. In fact, I didn't even know of any at that point in time.

PIEHLER: But one was in Canada and the other—did you go to another?

DUHAN: Yeah, it was somewhere ... in the hills of Pennsylvania.

PIEHLER: Oh okay. Well it sounds like those were your two big ... growing up ... it sounds like those were the two big adventures?

DUHAN: Right. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Well, did your initial impressions meet the good things you had heard about Virginia Tech? What's your memories of, sort of, visiting the campus for the first—you know, coming to school there?

DUHAN: Well, it was tremendous. Virginia Tech at that time was entirely different from what I had seen like NYU or the colleges in the area up there. 'Cause it was almost a self-contained town. It had its own airport. It had its own heating system, their own laundries, and dining rooms. To get there from—there was no I-81 at that point, Route 11 was the only road to go south. When you got to Christiansburg, there was a two-lane farm road going over to Blacksburg and the town itself was minute. It had one policeman that wore a cast-off cadet's uniform. It was just different ... 'cause you didn't have much time to think or anything. They immersed you right away into this thing. You were taught when you pass somebody you had to say, "Good morning," or however, whatever the situation was. Being polite and courteous was kind of the thing that you had to learn—they had a very strong honor system. The cadet corps—I mean the whole school at that time was small. Full-time civilian students were few. Very, very few female students at that time.

PIEHLER: There were some?

DUHAN: There were some, but I think you could count them on a couple of hands. They had their own building, but I don't think—I don't really remember seeing any there. I knew they

were there, but—and then when I came back to go there, of course that grew and there was a lot more. Things were a lot more open.

DAVIS: You said there was a farm ... road to Blacksburg. Did you and your friends ever take weekend trips to other parts of Virginia?

DUHAN: We didn't have any way to travel really most students did not have a car.

PIEHLER: So you came down by train?

DUHAN: Uh, when I went there originally, my parents drove me down and then they went back. At that time there was a little train that went between Blacksburg and Christiansburg. If you wanted you could go over there, but that was about it.

PIEHLER: And hitchhike?

DUHAN: ... Which we didn't do very much either. [We] more or less just stayed right in the area. There seemed to be enough to do on campus to keep you busy. The staff were very strong on education, and they still are. You could go to your professor and say, "I got a problem," and he'd sit down and talk to you. There was no saying, "I'm too busy, come back tomorrow." Even today, the president of the university teaches a course.

PIEHLER: Oh, that's a very good thing.

DUHAN: Education is first there, even though research is very strong ...

PIEHLER: Oh yeah, it is known as a very good research school.

DUHAN: Yeah, but they are still very strong on the education of the students.

PIEHLER: How do you like living in the South?

DUHAN: I've always liked it. I mean—when I came south at seventeen, I liked Virginia. I liked the area. And then when I was in the Navy, a good portion of it was spent in the South. So I've always liked the South. I do not like New York with the millions of people and everybody running around and the—all the heavy traffic. Knoxville traffic is enough for me. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You mentioned that you were originally interested in aeronautical engineering. Did you sort of growing up have a fascination with airplanes and ...

DUHAN: I think I did. I built model airplanes and my friends did and we flew 'em around.

PIEHLER: Did you follow some of the great aviators of the time?

DUHAN: Oh yeah. Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart and so on.

PIEHLER: That did it.

DUHAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: When was the first time you flew in a plane?

DUHAN: Hmm.

PIEHLER: Was it during the war?

DUHAN: It was after the war.

PIEHLER: After the war.

DUHAN: After the war.

PIEHLER: Now, at Virginia Tech did you think you would go into aeronautical engineering or did that quickly change?

DUHAN: That changed there.

PIEHLER: Oh ... even in the first year?

DUHAN: Yeah, I don't know why, but it did.

DAVIS: Did you take any classes?

DUHAN: And I wound up in mechanical engineering. And I stayed with that through there. In fact, I doubled up and took both mechanical engineering and industrial engineering, and when I graduated, I got two degrees at the same time, so ...

PIEHLER: In terms of Virginia Tech, were there strong class traditions? I know in a lot of colleges at the time you were very much identified with your class and other classes often hazed you. Did you have any of that?

DUHAN: The hazing was strictly—like at West Point with the Plebes. They had it down there.

PIEHLER: They did have a sort of class?

DUHAN: Yeah. I mean, there wasn't any physical hazing, but there was a lot of verbal hazing.

PIEHLER: I know at Rutgers during the '30s and '40s, for example ... underclassman could be asked to provide a match to—a light to an upperclassman, or even carry their books if ...

DUHAN: No, you didn't do that. The hazing was mainly standing at a brace at attention and being shouted at and saying, "What are you doing?" Or asking you a question and screaming at

you when you didn't know the answer, but .... You had to walk in a specific way you couldn't just cut across the fields.

PIEHLER: You had to walk at angles ...

DUHAN: Right. And the same way when you were in having meals. You just couldn't dive into your food. You had to wait 'til the upperclassman at the table gave you permission to eat.

DAVIS: Was the cadet group that you were in—were those pretty much the majority of your friends? Did y'all get to be pretty close?

DUHAN: They were friends at that point. Unfortunately over the years I have lost track of them. We all went different ways. Like me, you got married, had families, you moved around, and you just lost contact.

PIEHLER: Did you always wear your uniform—as a cadet?

DUHAN: As a cadet, you always wore a uniform.

PIEHLER: You always were in uniform?

DUHAN: Right.

PIEHLER: Even though you were still a civilian?

DUHAN: Right, you wore a ... it was similar to a West Point [uniform], only it was dark blue and you wore that all the time. And in the summer, in the warmer days, you had a cotton type of uniform that you wore.

PIEHLER: So in many ways you were getting used to military discipline?

DUHAN: Right.

PIEHLER: And, sort of, marching, and so forth.

DUHAN: Yeah, and that didn't bother me at all.

DAVIS: Did the majority of the people that you were with in the cadets get drafted about the same time after that first year at school?

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DUHAN: ... I really don't know, 'cause I left ... at the end of the year, came home, spent a couple of weeks and then entered the Navy. I really don't know what happened to the others in there. When I came back some of them did, some of them did not.

DAVIS: Once you joined the Navy, was it a big change from being in college.

DUHAN: Oh yeah. 'Cause I had never been with people like I was drafted with. The people in the unit that I was assigned to came from the Lower East Side of New York and the docks of Hoboken and in Jersey City. There was one fellow in the group that was [a] college graduate. There was about six of us that even went to college and about twenty that had gone through high school and the rest didn't and it was a group of 120 people.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like they were a very, overall, a very tough group.

DUHAN: They were very tough. They didn't take well to Navy discipline.

PIEHLER: Sounds like there were also lots of crap games?

DUHAN: There was a lot of things. (Laughter) In fact there was—the one fellow that graduated college, he was commissioned directly at—while we was at boot camp as an ensign and he left us. I don't know how that happened but he must have applied beforehand.

PIEHLER: Beforehand. So he was even taken out of the group?

DUHAN: He was taken out.

PIEHLER: So you say they didn't take well to Navy discipline—any stories ... [or] incidents stick out?

DUHAN: Yeah, some of them, like we'd be marching as a company down the street and a Navy WAVE would walk by and all of a sudden somebody would fall out and start chasing. You know, things like that. (Laughter) It was up in the Finger Lake area of New York at the Sampson Training Center. It was time to harvest grapes up there 'cause that's a big wine country. And we picked grapes and we were going back to our unit. And as we were going down the road ... there were many companies and many areas, and there was a guard station at each. We were wearing white uniforms at that time. The fellows on the trucks were throwing purple grapes at the white uniforms. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So these—sounds like a very tough group?

DUHAN: They were. And you really had to watch your things in there.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you were—well, let me ... back up. Do you remember what time of year you reported? You were drafted?

DUHAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Drafted into the Navy?

DUHAN: Drafted into the Navy.



PIEHLER: So you didn't have a choice of that?

DUHAN: Well yeah, they asked you at the induction ceremony ... do you want to go to the Army or Navy?

PIEHLER: And you got the choice and you said [Navy]?

DUHAN: I said Navy. 'Cause I didn't feel like living in the mud and I know what an infantryman was, so I said Navy and I got it.

PIEHLER: You said that you knew what an infantryman was.

DUHAN: Well, I knew that from being a cadet down in Virginia.

PIEHLER: That part you learned.

DUHAN: Yeah, I understood that 'cause you had basic training—you know military subjects down there when you were a freshman it was a requirement.

PIEHLER: What about any movies? Did you say watch a movie like *All Quiet on the Western Front*?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: It was more from the cadet training?

DUHAN: Yes. You saw military movies. There wasn't the periphery of movies that you now have.

PIEHLER: What time of year did you report to—for induction? You mentioned earlier [that] you were allowed to finish the semester.

DUHAN: It was August of '44.

PIEHLER: So you were up at the Finger Lakes Region, I take it in the fall.

DUHAN: In the fall.

PIEHLER: Well, besides being with a very rough group, what else do you remember about basic training?

DUHAN: I remember that the chief that was in charge of the unit had been retired and then recalled. A very heavy Irishman. And we were required, at one point, to do a march of five miles or something like that. And he marched us out of the campgrounds and up a road until we came to a place where it kind of sloped off and he says, "Everybody into the woods and lay

down.” And we stayed there for a time. (Laughter) “Ok, let’s go back.” He wasn’t about to march.

PIEHLER: He wasn’t about to do a five-mile?

DUHAN: No. (Laughter)

DUHAN: There were people in the unit that didn’t want to be in the service and were very unhappy.

PIEHLER: ‘Cause you always hear now ... I guess you must be hearing some of the rhetoric about the “Greatest Generation” and how everyone was so willing to serve. You have a memory that some weren’t quite as willing to serve.

DUHAN: Yeah, there was some in there. A couple of these tough ones actually cried at night because they were there. But I think you’re here, you might as well make the best of it, have fun as much as you can, ‘cause there is no way you’re gonna change it. And that kind of worked well.

PIEHLER: ... A lot of people in going through basic for some reason remember fire fighting very vividly. Do you remember ... that sort of initial training in fire fighting? And maybe the people that tried to do fire fighting in the Great Lakes in winter.

DUHAN: No, I don’t remember.

PIEHLER: You don’t remember that?

DUHAN: I don’t remember fire fighting. Two instances stand out. One is abandon ship drill, where you were fully dressed. You had to climb up a tower and you had to jump off into the pool. I don’t remember if we had a life jacket, I don’t think we did. And you weren’t forced to jump, but you couldn’t come down unless you jumped.

PIEHLER: Unless you ...

DUHAN: Unless you jumped.

PIEHLER: For people scared of heights, that must have been quite a traumatic event.

DUHAN: Yes. But I remember this way of holding your nose and you jumped in and you got out and, of course, your clothes were sopping and your shoes were squishy. And, I also remember the first day that I got into the Navy, we got into Sampson early in the morning, you know, quite early. We were marched to the mess hall for breakfast and I remember it was sour milk and hot dogs that were kind of gray and green. You took it, you threw it away and they said, “That’s breakfast, eat what you want.” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Did the food get better after that first meal?

DUHAN: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: But the hot dogs and sour milk, that's a lasting memory?

DUHAN: Yeah. That I remember. The food wasn't bad. I mean, I'd never before had baked beans for breakfast before, but I learned to eat that.

PIEHLER: Any other memories of Sampson, 'cause these are such great stories. And did you stay in touch with any of this group after you left?

DUHAN: No. No, they were sent to many different places.

PIEHLER: How many Jews were in the group that you remember in Sampson?

DUHAN: I think ... I probably was the only one.

PIEHLER: Only one that you knew.

DUHAN: Oh, no, wait a minute. This one that was commissioned, he was Jewish.

PIEHLER: The college graduate?

DUHAN: He was Jewish.

PIEHLER: But otherwise these were more Irish and Italians?

DUHAN: That's right. A lot of Italians.

DAVIS: Did any religious issues ever come up amongst the group?

DUHAN: Not then. Nobody ever said anything about going to church on Sunday or anything else.

PIEHLER: So you didn't—at Sampson no one went to mass or to chapel or ...

DUHAN: No, I don't remember. I remember that when somebody really got nasty or fouled up, everybody was responsible. You had to pack up your belongings. At that time, everybody was issued a hammock, a mattress, a sea bag, and so on. And you packed your sea bag. You put your mattress in the hammock and you tied those around the sea bag and a couple of times we had to do that in the middle of the night and carry 'em and march around outside, but that wasn't too often. We did that once and everybody pretty well remembered, and we did not get into this situation again.

PIEHLER: Any other memories of the chief besides ... being an older chief and coming out of retirement, not wanting to do the five-mile march and stuff, any other memories of the chief?

DUHAN: No, he was fair.

PIEHLER: Yeah, and trying to handle a very rough group it sounds like?

DUHAN: Yeah. I don't have too many memories of him.

PIEHLER: I'd also like to back up to the point about the grapes. How long did you pick? Was this like a week?

DUHAN: It was several days 'cause there were thousands of people out there that were going through basic training at that time and then the place became an Air Force facility after.

PIEHLER: Isn't it near Rome, New York? Sampson?

DUHAN: ... It's one of the Finger Lakes. It's been a while since I've been up there.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

DUHAN: So they rotated among the groups.

PIEHLER: To help out in the harvest?

DUHAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you get paid any extra?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: No, you just got your ...

DUHAN: Some of them may have got paid. We didn't.

DAVIS: ... Did you know of any men who just couldn't make it through? You said some of them cried at night.

DUHAN: If they could walk, they made it through.

DAVIS: Okay.

PIEHLER: So no one got washed out?

DUHAN: No. After your basic training you got a week's leave before you were reassigned and a couple of men were so bad they took away their recruit leave and shipped them right out to the Pacific.

PIEHLER: Oh, they didn't even get their week?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: Oh.

DUHAN: They were real bad.

PIEHLER: It sounds like they thought they wouldn't come back?

DUHAN: I don't know what happened to them.

PIEHLER: But they didn't even get their week?

DUHAN: No. They went out like stevedores or something like that to unload ships that were going in on invasion fleets or something like that.

PIEHLER: Were there any black sailors being trained at Sampson?

DUHAN: I don't remember any.

DAVIS: What did you do on your week leave? Did you go home and visit your family?

DUHAN: I visited with my parents.

DAVIS: Did you have a lot of stories to tell them?

DUHAN: Not too much. My mother was a worrier, so I didn't want to tell her too much.

PIEHLER: Did your mother, during the war, work outside of the home at all?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: She just continued to help your father?

DUHAN: Help with my father, yes.

PIEHLER: What about any volunteer activities? Did your mother or father say, did your mother say, join the Red Cross or any ...

DUHAN: She did something, but I don't remember.

DAVIS: I know they wanted you to go to college. Did they want you to join the military?

DUHAN: They weren't happy with that, no.

PIEHLER: It sounds like your parents wouldn't have signed you in early?

DUHAN: No, they would not have.

PIEHLER: They would have let you go after being drafted?

DUHAN: Well, there was nothing they could do about it, so I went. But they didn't want me to and my mother worried about it constantly. Everything worked out all right.

DAVIS: During basic did you—what did you all do for fun? Did you play cards? Did you and the other men—or were you just so exhausted that you just ...

DUHAN: I don't know. We used to go to the canteen. We weren't allowed—at that point as a recruit you couldn't drink beer. We would go and get a coke or whatever they served. You wrote letters, you—there wasn't too much card playing.

PIEHLER: Really, you don't remember going to a movie?

DUHAN: I think there was a movie every once in a while, but not too much. I mean ... they kept you so busy by the time evening came around you just wanted to go to sleep.

PIEHLER: After Sampson and your leave home, where did you get sent to next?

DUHAN: Chicago, to ...

PIEHLER: The Great Lakes?

DUHAN: No. To inside the city of Chicago there was a high school called the Hugh Manley High School. It was taken over by the Navy as an ... electronics technician type of school. And I was there for three months or something like that. The gym became the dormitory. That's where I learned about three high bunks. (Laughter) That's where I first became aware of something called television and radar. Because Chicago, as you know, is a very cold, windy, snowy city. We used to have to walk guard duty around the school. There was a chain-linked fence all around it. The chief in charge of the watch would sit in the building in front of a, essentially, a TV station. And he used TV to monitor the guards walking around.

PIEHLER: Because he had TV cameras?

DUHAN: He had TV receiver.

PIEHLER: So he definitely knew you were marching?

DUHAN: Right. You couldn't sit down or lean against the fence or anything like that 'cause he was watching. Radar was a very classified word at that time.

PIEHLER: So you couldn't tell your parents what you were doing, in terms of what you were being taught?

DUHAN: No. Well, I didn't really work on radar, we were learning very basic electrical subjects.

PIEHLER: When did you learn about radar? Was it during your training there?

DUHAN: Well I learned what radar was there, but I didn't do anything with it. And then when I finished up there I was shipped down to what was then Oklahoma A&M down in Stillwater, Oklahoma to continue training and ... That was again a complete change of pace ... because it was a beautiful school. There were no, well I shouldn't say no, very, very few male students there. The Navy had men in electronics training. They had a very large WAVE contingent there, learning to be yeomen [naval petty officers who performs clerical duties]. I forget what it was, secretarial or something like that. And there was a tremendous female population at this school.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you had some fun?

DUHAN: Oh yeah. Too much fun actually. (Laughter) And I was there two or three months ... I had so much fun they let me go.

PIEHLER: Oh, you had—you washed out of the training?

DUHAN: I washed out of it because I was more interested in having fun than I was in training. And I remember the first day we went to math and the professor says, "Now before we get into this, we're gonna review math. First, let's take trigonometry. Anybody have any questions with trigonometry? Good. How 'bout algebra? Oh, you know that too. Fine." And he went all the way on up until calculus and he says, "Well, I guess you're well grounded in math. Now we can go on." (Laughter) That was about a half-hours worth of review and the course was very, very accelerated. There were a lot of former, well, there were some former college professors in there that got drafted.

PIEHLER: And they were taking the course?

DUHAN: And they were sent there to take the course. In fact, one of them was better qualified than the teacher and he taught part of it.

DAVIS: Was this to learn about how to be—electronic technicians?

DUHAN: Yeah. It was electronics and engineering.

PIEHLER: Was this the electronic or engineering?

DUHAN: It was mainly electronic.

PIEHLER: Electronic engineering?

DUHAN: Yeah. That's when radio tubes were the big thing. Nobody knew about transistors.

PIEHLER: I still remember TV and radio tubes, whereas for Catherine that's a historical memory. I vividly remember.

DUHAN: And slide rules.

PIEHLER: Yeah, my chemistry class in high school—the class before me had been trained in slide rules. We didn't get that training. I'm sort of disappointed now, with calculators.

DAVIS: While you were in Chicago, was that where you also learned about being [a] radio tech and radio operator?

DUHAN: No, that came later.

DAVIS: Oh, okay.

PIEHLER: At OSU, were you trained by the professors at OSU or were they contract teachers?

DUHAN: They were both.

PIEHLER: Yeah, they were OSU professors ... or A&M teachers.

DUHAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: My wife, Susan, went to Stillwater for college, and it is a beautiful campus.

DUHAN: A beautiful campus.

PIEHLER: And particularly the library is—in the way it is all set up.

DUHAN: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: And it sounds like—you were in Chicago in the winter?

DUHAN: Yes.

PIEHLER: Which is not warm. Chicago winters are nasty.

DUHAN: Very nasty. My wife wants to go to Chicago. I says, "Forget it. I have bad memories of that place." And then from Oklahoma A&M, I went to Great Lakes for reassignment. I was up there during the summer months.

PIEHLER: That was a lot better?



DUHAN: A lot better. I was there a couple months, tops. Not too long. And then I went to Gulfport, Mississippi to go to a radio operator's school. That was again a very different—everybody lived in Quonset huts. Mississippi in the summer in a Quonset hut is not where you wanna be. That metal roof just retains the heat. The roads were built up there, and the Quonset huts were built lower, about two feet. When it rained, it kind of filled up like a pool.

PIEHLER: So, the water would just sit there because the roads were higher? So the rainwater just drained right through the Quonset hut?

DUHAN: Yeah. It just went in there. And they had boardwalks, you know, to go from one area [to another]. But they floated when the heavy rains came. I was telling Catherine, I had a lot of pictures of this. Last year, I was down in Gulfport and I gave them to the museum down there.

PIEHLER: Oh good ... I always like to have stuff have a good home.

DUHAN: They sent me a letter saying thank you for them.

DAVIS: How long were you at Gulfport?

DUHAN: I was there—I'm trying to think. Well, Truman became president when I was down there. I remember that.

PIEHLER: So you were definitely there in April of 1945?

DUHAN: Yes. From there ... let's see, what happened after that? From there I went—because the war in Europe had shut down then, ended, I was sent up to Millington, Tennessee to the naval station there to become part of the ship's company for the officer separation center. The reason they did that is because I was a radio operator and I knew how to type.

PIEHLER: So it was just the typing? That's why you got sent to Tennessee ...

DUHAN: That's right.

PIEHLER: And so that, in a sense it was your duty station.

DUHAN: That's where I was for a while and then, I don't know why anymore, they were setting up a maintenance organization there 'cause the separation center was kind of a tenant group on the airbase, and they didn't want to service the unit that we were with. So they were asking for volunteers so I volunteered to become part of the maintenance group. And we were winding up doing carpentry and electrical, things like that, which I much prefer to do than sitting at a desk typing .... We had a lot of fun with that. But being in that we had charge of all the equipment that was around, and we didn't like going to the mess hall there, so we wound up scrounging a stove and a refrigerator. We set up our kitchen in the maintenance shop and we just went to the mess hall, occasionally. We found out that when the troop trains that came in, the warehouse would only accept full cartons of food from them. If you opened a carton they didn't want it. It

was hard for them to inventory a third of a case of eggs or—so we found out this and we volunteered to empty the cars and commandeered all the open cases so we ate very well.  
(Laughter)

DAVIS: Sounds like you were somewhat of a troublemaker yourself?

DUHAN: Hmm. So, when they decided to close that unit and they sent me to Bambridge, Maryland, which was another separation center and I was back ... discharging sailors this time. I was up there until there was nobody left to discharge but the people working in the separation center so we discharged ourselves.

PIEHLER: Quite literally?

DUHAN: Yes. We wrote our own discharge. Joe over here would say to me, “Okay, where you been?” I’d tell him. He says, “Did you get any medals?” I’d say, “Yeah, I got a couple of ribbons for this thing.” He’d write this down. I could have put anything I wanted on that thing. And then we came home.

PIEHLER: When were you ... discharged?

DAVIS: ‘46.

DUHAN: ‘46.

PIEHLER: ‘Cause you didn’t have very many points?

DUHAN: I had enough to get out if I wasn’t working in a separation center.

PIEHLER: Really? It was being in the separation center.

DUHAN: That retained me there for an extra few months.

DAVIS: What were the biggest differences? You were at so many different training stations ... what were the biggest differences?

DUHAN: The differences were the caliber of people. The facilities where you were, you know, the sleeping conditions, and also the officers that were over you. Some of the commanders, like at Gulfport and Bambridge, for some reason, they insisted that at five’o clock you must put on your white uniform, even though there was two feet of water when you stepped out of the Quonset hut down there to go ... and, of course, the barracks building was all heated by coal fire. You had to wear a white uniform to shovel coal. You know, this is the way the Navy trained them and that’s the way it was. In other places they were very understanding and they treated you like a human being. It was mainly the ones that came up through the ranks. They didn’t win their promotions by brains. They won their promotions by time.

PIEHLER: So you could, it sounds like, you could tell the old Navy's hands from the newer Naval Reserve, or people fresh out of the Academy type of thing.

DUHAN: Well, when I was at Bambridge, the man that was in charge of the area where I was assigned was a lieutenant commander and while I was there he was ... given the choice of either retiring or going back to his rank as a chief ... which he decided to stay with the Navy because he only had a couple more years to go before retirement. But the thing that the Navy did to him, which I felt was very wrong, was to leave him at the same duty station. So you can imagine everybody that he picked on as a commander could now retaliate.

PIEHLER: ... now make his life miserable.

DUHAN: Yeah. And I thought that was terrible.

DAVIS: How did you feel about the people who were your commanding officers? I know that you said that at Sampson that he was fair. Did you ever feel like any of them abused their power or ...

DUHAN: No, I don't really think they did. They were very insistent ... sometimes they were unreasonable. When I was on the Great Lakes they would say that on Saturday morning or Sunday, Saturday morning I guess, you were gonna have an admiral's inspection and everybody was cleaning, cleaning, cleaning. White glove inspection all over the place. Then the barracks was sealed. You couldn't go in no place.

PIEHLER: And did the Admiral's team actually show up?

DUHAN: Oh yeah. And they went to places like under tables with the white gloves looking for dust under there. Same way with—I remember an Easter Sunday I was up there at the Great Lakes and I was lying in the bunk and the chief came by and says, "What are you doing? Go to church." I says, "I don't go to church on Sundays. I'm Jewish." He says, "You either go to church on Sunday or you go to work. Which do you wanna do?" So I went to church. (Laughter) But some of them were just so unreasonable. Down in Gulfport we had a petty officer in charge of our little group who was a drunkard. He would line you up to go to march to lunch or dinner and cursing in the foulest way you could think of: "Get in rank you blah blah blah blah." I swore at that time I was not gonna stay with the Navy any longer than I had to. On weekends he got so drunk he didn't even know where his barracks was. We had people come in and we'd say, "Oh, take his room. He won't know the difference." He'd come back, see somebody laying there [and] say, "Oh, I must be in the wrong room," and he'd leave. (Laughter) There were reminiscences of the things like that and they were funny when you come to think of them.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like it was like a new world for you?

DUHAN: Oh, it was very much so.

PIEHLER: 'Cause it sounds like something like that in your hometown, or something like that.

DUHAN: Oh, nothing like your hometown.

PIEHLER: What did you think of the country—except for these two camps you'd gone to, you hadn't traveled very much outside the New York area?

DUHAN: No.

PIEHLER: What did you think of these different parts of the country? You mentioned the Great Lakes being very cold.

DUHAN: It was interesting. I enjoyed it. You know, I made my own fun. I made up my mind at the very beginning. I can't change things so I'm gonna enjoy it the best I can. It's stood me in good stead.

DAVIS: Good attitude to have.

DUHAN: And I got through it. There was no sense crying over it. There was nothing I could do about it.

PIEHLER: I know you need to go, you just let us know when you need to go.

DUHAN: Okay, I'll do it.

PIEHLER: I have a tendency to go. I know we're running quite late. Well you'd mentioned that you had no desire to stay in the Navy. Any disappointment that you didn't make it overseas?

DUHAN: Yeah. I was kind of disappointed. I mean, I'd been going to school after school and I'd have like to do something other than that.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you got in the end a very mundane duty.

DUHAN: Yeah. But this is what they wanted me to do so this is what I did. I couldn't fight it.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like your mother worried far less than if you'd been ... on a ship.

DUHAN: I would imagine so.

DAVIS: How do you think that training prepared you for going back to school?

DUHAN: Actually, 'cause I got out in August and—I don't remember—school started normally September or something like that and I went back. I applied and, of course, I got accepted. And I found it much easier going to school. I realized that I had to do something and, you know, I'm not gonna breeze through this. I didn't have to study as hard to get better grades. We're all, well 95% of everybody back there was a returned veteran and we just got along very well. We had

some fine times in there. At some point in time you mentioned cards. We had some wild card games going in the barracks there. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Now where did you go—did you go back to Virginia Tech?

DUHAN: I went back to Virginia Tech. That's when I found out that I could double up. I was taking about twenty-one credits a quarter and I found out that if I went one six-week summer session I could get two degrees at the same time. Which I did.

PIEHLER: And did you use your GI Bill?

DUHAN: Oh, yes. That was a big help. And the GI Bill then was wonderful 'cause you got all your tuition, food, living, laundry, books, and I don't remember ... it was \$50 or \$100 a month. You could live high on a hog with all this. It was very little money out of my pocket to go.

PIEHLER: Did you keep a car the second time you went to Virginia?

DUHAN: Yeah. I had a car. I don't remember if I got it during my sophomore or junior year. Again, there wasn't—there was no problem of parking a car down there.

PIEHLER: There was still very few cars then.

DUHAN: Yes. My father was very fortunate that he knew somebody that was getting rid of a car that was in fairly good shape and he got it for me. I used that .... I was the only one in my group that had the car so we went a lot of places together.

DAVIS: Going back to school, did it seem like—I know you went to school for a year beforehand, but it seems like it was so much different coming back. Was it almost like that first year was just kind of back or kind of a distant memory?

DUHAN: Well, yeah, because again we were living almost in barracks style accommodations down there. And everybody just came back. They would take no nonsense. They wanted their education and get out. They told the teachers, "Cut the crap and let's get down and get the education. Let's not have any of this other stuff." At that time you went to school five and a half days a week. And in the afternoons it was usually the labs. And I remember we were a very heavy drinking crowd at that time. In our briefcase we always had some ginger ale and a little liquor or something. And we'd put it into the cooling water for the experiments. (Laughter) I know the teacher, the professor, he was a returned Navy commander. He'd come up and say, "What do we got drinking today boys?" (Laughter) So it was fun.

DAVIS: That is too funny. So while you were in school you were taking 21 hours at a time and went to summer school. Did you ever ... date around a lot while you were in school?

DUHAN: Oh, we were dating. Yeah. At that time, you'd date some of the co-eds that were there.

DAVIS: I know you said there were a lot more women the second time.

DUHAN: Yeah. And then of course ... when the big dances came up—there were no fraternities down at the school at that time. You'd invite somebody from home or wherever, and they'd come in for the dance. I know one of the WAVES I was friendly with in the Navy, was stationed in Norfolk and I invited her up for a dance. You know, all kinds of things.

PIEHLER: Well, I guess, one of the things, I think, students of this generation don't realize is dating was a very common thing to do. It doesn't necessarily have to lead to romance.

DUHAN: No, it was not too much romance. I mean it was just friendship more or less.

DAVIS: Just going out and having fun.

DUHAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... You mentioned that people wanted to get out in a hurry. So, did hazing practices decline?

DUHAN: Well, when I came back it wasn't required to go into the cadet corps. The only thing they did was the barracks down here were for cadets and the barracks over here were ex-GI. And the school says, "Don't mingle too much with this younger group in here."

PIEHLER: They said, "Don't mingle too much with the civilians?"

DUHAN: Well, they implied it. Drinking was very heavy up here. There was no drinking down there, and they didn't want to corrupt these seventeen, eighteen year olds. They tried to stop the drinking, but they hit tremendous resistance and finally the school gave up. (Laughter) There's a whole bunch of stories I could tell you about that.

PIEHLER: But eventually they looked the other way? Well, it sounds like, if you're bringing it into lab, that sounds like the administration looked the other way.

DUHAN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: I guess during World War II, when did you have a sense of the Holocaust?

DUHAN: You didn't really. I didn't really hear about the Holocaust until after the war was over.

PIEHLER: Really? It wasn't until after your discharge that you had some sense of what happened?

DUHAN: That's right.

DAVIS: Were you just aghast at the whole thing? It's just appalling to me. I can't comprehend.

DUHAN: Oh yeah, it's just incomprehensible.

PIEHLER: Well let me before, 'cause I know you are looking at your watch—is there any thoughts you have particularly about—'cause we'd like to do a follow-up.

DUHAN: Oh, that's okay.

PIEHLER: 'Cause we haven't gotten to the Air Force Reserve and your career.

DAVIS: Yeah, that was my next thing.

PIEHLER: Any reflections on your growing up or on the Navy or going back to school on the GI Bill ... any final thoughts?

DUHAN: No, I just thought, going back on the GI Bill relieved a tremendous burden for my parents. Even though at that time when I went originally I was an out-of-state student and the tuition was \$315 a quarter as compared to what you have today.

PIEHLER: But that's still a hefty sum of money then?

DUHAN: Yes, it was. And, I mean, you could buy six gallons of gas for a dollar then.

PIEHLER: So, that did take the pressure off your parents?

DUHAN: Yeah.

DAVIS: Was your mother much more relieved now that you were back in school and not in the military?

DUHAN: Oh yeah. In fact, I think she's the one that got rid of most of my Navy uniforms ... 'cause I couldn't find anything.

PIEHLER: How often did you write home?

DUHAN: I don't know, a couple of times. I'd just as soon use the telephone.

PIEHLER: Oh, so you would call a lot when you could?

DUHAN: Well, I probably called once a week, something like that. Not every day. There was always, you know, plenty to keep you going and the friend that I had that went the year before me to VPI, he came back so we were friendly down there. And ... we just had our own group of friends and we were, you know, a lot of us were taking the same courses. We'd study together, we'd have lab together, we'd go party together.

DAVIS: Y'all pretty much had the same backgrounds too, didn't you?

DUHAN: In fact that's how I wound up going into the reserves—we decided that three of us more or less had the same military background that we would all apply for the Navy Seabees. 'Cause we'd heard so much about that and construction. That is much more informal group than the normal Navy. And we all applied to the Seabees. The other two got letters saying, "Fine, we'll direct commission you as ensigns in the Seabees." And I got a letter saying, "We'll commission you as an engineering officer down on the engines in the ship," and I said "No, thank you." (Laughter) Then I applied to the Army and they were going to accept me. That's the time that the Army and the Air Force split.

PIEHLER: Well thanks for coming in today. As I said I'd like to do a follow-up for the rest of your career but we really appreciate you coming in today.

DUHAN: I'd be glad to.

DAVIS: Very entertaining.

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

Reviewed by Braum Denton, 5/15/04

Reviewed by Mark Boulton, 6/13/04

Reviewed by Kurt Piehler, 7/20/04