

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
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AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES J. BRAY

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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Charles J. Bray on April 10, 2004 at Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and...

JESSICA WARD: Jessica Ward.

PIEHLER: And let me just begin. You were born in 1921—November 22, 1921 in Oklahoma. What was the town you were born in again?

CHARLES J. BRAY: Well, I actually was born on a farm about three and a half miles from Hitchita—H-I-T-C-H-I-T-A—Oklahoma.

PIEHLER: And could you—you mentioned before we started the interview, for people who want to know it and have a sense of where it is, it's not too far from Muskogee.

BRAY: It's about twenty miles south of Muskogee.

PIEHLER: And could you start off by talking a little bit about your parents, particularly your mother and father who were early settlers to what was then known as the Indian Territory.

BRAY: You're absolutely right. My father, along with about three of his brothers, left Georgia in the late 1800s because they were cotton farmers, and the land was wearing out, as they said, it was depleted. The nutrients were disappearing so they were looking for better land to raise cotton. So they migrated, at separate times, to McIntosh County, Oklahoma. My mother was born in Arkansas. She was about, oh, I guess about twelve years younger than my dad because she was about eighteen when they married and he was thirty, I believe. But anyhow, she migrated to McIntosh County with her father, her mother had died, and they married right around, oh, it must've been 1906. Now Oklahoma became a state in 1907, so it was still Indian Territory. And they bought a small log house with one bedroom as I recall them saying, and my—their first child died as an infant. The second child was born ... his name was Julius, Julius C. He was born in 1910. My next brother, in this same little house ... Marcus, was born in 1915, and then sometime after that they moved. They got enough money together because he was raising some cattle, and it was not too bad of times in the twenties. He even bought an old ford truck, and, I don't know, I think he paid about \$400 for it in those days—brand new. Um, so they had a little money and so they bought eighty acres of land in a different place, and a house was all ready on that. That's where the rest of us—I was the next in line. I was born in 1921. I had a sister born in '24, 1924, in the new house. And then my other sister—well I had a brother who died as an infant—and my youngest sister, Doris, was born in 1932. We were all born in this second house.

PIEHLER: I just should observe, your mother was born in 1888, in was it—I think I know how to pronounce it, but I'm sure there's a regional pronunciation. Graphic?

BRAY: Graphic.

PIEHLER: Did they actually call it Graphic? They didn't have a funny name?

BRAY: G-R-A-P-H-I-C—right.

PIEHLER: They actually pronounced it that way?

BRAY: Graphic, Arkansas. It may not exist anymore because my father's place—he was born in White Sulfur Springs, Georgia, and that doesn't exist anymore because I tried to find it. I talked to one of the neighbors there and she said, "Well, it used to be right down there." (Laughs) So ...

PIEHLER: Just an interesting observation about your parents' genetic pattern or clean living ... Your mother was born in 1888 and then passed away in 1980, and your father was born in 1876 on the centennial in White Sulfur, Georgia and passed away in 1972. So, they...

BRAY: Almost 96.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: My uncles all lived to be quite old, really, for the most part. Even I think one reached 100.

PIEHLER: Well, it's also just an observation about, particularly your father—this interview really spans—when you talk about recollections of your father, over a hundred years of American history ... Could you maybe talk a little bit about your parents, what you remember about them?

BRAY: Actually, my dad, he was—that's the way most dads were in those days. He didn't talk much, unless he was telling me to do something. You know? But the only time that he ever talked really was when he was drinking, and they drank a lot in those days. There was a lot of booze.

PIEHLER: So he could ...

BRAY: He could, yeah.

PIEHLER: He could drink?

BRAY: He knew when to cut it off because he knew that he couldn't do it when there was work to be done, and that sort of thing. But between the time that we were growing, say getting the cotton up to a certain point, it was very labor intensive. You've got to plow it. There was no such thing as weed killers in those days. You've got to plow it, and you've got to hoe it, and you've got to do all these things to it. But once you got it to the point where it was said to be "laid by," when the crops were "laid by," meaning there's no work to be done. So, he would go on a toot, I mean, he really would.

PIEHLER: He really would go ...

BRAY: He would go on a toot and it wouldn't last just one day. So during this time is when I can remember him talking and relating things more than otherwise. My mother was just the opposite. She was—she was like a, well as I say in my paper ...

PIEHLER: Well, you said ...

BRAY: The most wonderful person in the world.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you say in the pre-interview survey we asked you to take, “a homemaker, and caring mother,” quote, “a saint to her children,” which is pretty high praise.

BRAY: She reminds me so much of *Grapes of Wrath*—what's her name? Mrs. Joad? Is it? Joad wasn't it?

WARD: It's been too long since I've read it.

BRAY: Mrs. Joad, I believe. She was the thing that held ...

PIEHLER: Held the family ...

BRAY: Held the family together, and, but anyhow, to get back to my dad. He graduated from high school. His mother was very intent on him getting a good education. And he was the youngest son, and so she really did make sure that he got an education. He was ... truly she brought him up to be a gentleman. Always, even when I was growing up, if he walked down the street, he would always tip his hat to anybody, to any lady he met, even blacks. And blacks were, you know ...

PIEHLER: Even black women he would?

BRAY: Even black women. “Good afternoon, ma'am, good afternoon.” He was just a real southern gentleman, and what I call a good southern gentleman. And he was very honest. He had a reputation with all the business people that—“If you're Claude Bray's boy, I can trust you with this five-cent piece of candy to pay me tomorrow. I know that you'll pay me because you're Claude Bray's boy.” He was very much that way. His only vice, I would say, was the bottle. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, it sounds like ... when he drank, he really had that, you know, that day or two of [hard drinking].

BRAY: Right, well, yeah, he planned it, and then to go on one step further, when it comes time to harvest—we grew corn, and small grains, and cotton, and potatoes, and various things. When all the harvest was done, which was also very labor intensive, and the whole family was involved; I've picked more cotton myself. And then he would go on another toot. I call it a

“toot,” well, that’s ... and, you know, he had to be weaned off of it like it was opium [or] like it was heroin. My mother, I can remember her, you know, saying, “Claude, okay, I’m gonna get you”—it was moonshine you know? And then say—by the way when I was, well, I’m digressing here, but I was known as C. J. at that time. That’s another story, and I’ll get to that. But, she would say, “I’ll let C. J. go up to the bootlegger and get you one more half gallon, but that is it.” You know? He’d say, “Oh well, thank you so much.” (Laughter) I’d go up ...

PIEHLER: So your mother really knew how to handle these toots?

BRAY: Well, she did.

PIEHLER: It strikes me, he wasn’t violent in these toots.

BRAY: Oh, not violent. He was very, very—he was mainly just hanging out, you know.

PIEHLER: One of the things you said is, in a lot of ways he was a very, not stern, but he wasn’t very talkative. You know, if you were out in the field he wasn’t ...

BRAY: He wasn’t talking about, “Well, C. J., what do you think about, you know, that young lady down the street [or] that’s picking cotton next to ya?” None [of that]. And also, no tossing, you know, like these days you play with your kids. [There was] none of that, although he did with my sister.

PIEHLER: Your younger sister?

BRAY: He would read to her. He never read to me.

PIEHLER: But he would read to your younger sister?

BRAY: She talks about him; about sitting on his lap and him reading to her. So, it was there, but he was authoritarian. He really was. He did not believe—I never crossed the man. I never crossed him. I got a couple of whippin’s, with—some of the spur of the moment type thing, if I did something that upset him really bad.

PIEHLER: What did you do to upset him?

BRAY: Well, I write about ... that in here. One time I got a pretty good whipping because he sent me out to get the horses to go plow. We had to go, it was during plowing season, and we had quite a bit of woodland where the horses would go. They would stand real still, and they were hard to find sometimes. So they just wouldn’t just be there available when you wanted them. So he said, “C. J., go find the horses.” So I was down, and in the meantime, I had a little dog—my dog grew up with me from when I was this high (Gestures) until I left home—Jiggs. I would take Jiggs with me all the time, and Jiggs was chasing a squirrel. He chased him into a hollow log—we ate squirrel ... squirrel was good meat for us. So I was trying to get that squirrel and I was working with him, and I had a stick with a notch in it, and I was trying to twist him out, you know, which you can do if you’re good at it. And I finally got him to the point where I could just

get a hold of his tail, (Laughs) and about that time my dad shows up. He says, “Where are those horses?!” I had forgotten. (Laughs) He was waiting up there to go plow and then there were no horses. So he reached around and got around a limb off of a tree and just wore the heck out of me.

PIEHLER: So, he literally...

BRAY: He laid it on me.

PIEHLER: So the old-fashioned switch?

BRAY: I was about thirteen years old, I guess. But that was one I remember, and [it was] very, very rare, but he was goaded to it. He was provoked.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you didn't deliberately try to cross him ...

BRAY: Oh no, oh no. I never in my whole life, nor did I ever cross my mother because she was the gentlest person in the world with us. But if you ever sassed her—you just knew you didn't do it. I never, I never said, “Mama, stuff it,” or something like that. No, I mean, that would be unthinkable for any of us, even with my older brother. He never did it. We just didn't do it, neither to father nor to mother. We never, never, never talked back. They called it talkin' back, or sassin'. You just didn't do it.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, when—you said your father, the one time he did open up was when he had these “toots.” What stories would he tell you?

BRAY: Well he didn't talk about things in Georgia so much.

PIEHLER: Really?

BRAY: No, it was—well, usually it would be with someone else that he was maybe drinking with and they would do, you know, more private jokes, I guess, or things that I didn't understand. They'd both laugh and carry on. But I can't remember, until later after I grew up, and had a career of my own and I'd go home. I went home from—I lived basically in the Washington area. And every two years, I'd take the family, and we'd go back and visit. And then we talked a lot. We'd sit out in the front yard and talk about the world situation and things like that.

PIEHLER: So your relationship did change with your father when you were older?

BRAY: It did. I was really ... I guess you could say I was afraid of him when I was a young boy. I just—he was the authoritarian.

PIEHLER: But you had a very different relationship as an adult?

BRAY: Different relationship; and the thing that was really the height of this relationship, this change, was when he wound up in a nursing home. And he was probably ninety-three or so at that time, and they were both in the same nursing home, Mama and Daddy. She went to be with him because, well, she just wanted to be with him. So they both were there, and he said to me one time [when] I went to visit, he said, “C. J., would you spend the night with us?” And I did, and I was ...

PIEHLER: So you had a—it sounds like a very close relationship throughout your life.

BRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: In different ways, in an authoritarian [way], but then very much a partner.

BRAY: Yeah, oh yeah, and we all worked hard, and we knew what was expected of us, and, well, we didn't cross him.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, what—eventually you did learn some stuff about your father growing up and you mentioned that his mother, your grandmother, emphasized education. Completing high school in his day was a very rare achievement.

BRAY: That's right.

PIEHLER: You also mentioned on your pre-interview survey that—did he ever talk his father, your grandfather, and his military service?

BRAY: No, he didn't, but I found out a lot. He didn't, and I'm so sorry that I didn't quiz him. But, you know, he was the kind of fellow that you just didn't, I don't know, you didn't feel comfortable [talking to]. And it's unfortunate, but that was the nature of the time in the country back then. All of my contemporaries had the same relationship with their father. It's so different these days. And it's so different even in my generation with my children, even though Laurie is fifty years old. I played with them and all that, you know, took them places. The only time that we would ever do anything together would be maybe on the 4th of July. We always, always went—took a—we didn't have a car, so we took a wagon, a Springfield wagon. We all got in the wagon and put the ice cream freezer in there, and Mama would make something to eat. And we'd all go to the river, and we'd fish. We'd fish and have an all day outing on the river.

PIEHLER: And that was very much a 4th of July tradition?

BRAY: That was 4th of July. And at Christmas time we also had a big deal. So we only had two major holidays—4th of July and Christmas. And during the 4th of July—of course at that time, the crops were laid by, so my daddy, you know (Laughter). I can remember one thing that sticks in my mind. We went fishing, but he got this idea to sort of take a shortcut on this fishing bit because he loved fish. So he got some dynamite (Laughter) —and he knew how to do it. He made up some sticks of dynamite, and he went fishing with dynamite. (Laughs) We didn't get much, but, anyhow, he was drinking, but he knew what he was doing. He was loose. He'd

loosen up when he was drinking. Otherwise, he was like, you know the picture on the prairie of the man and the woman with the pitchfork. That was, you know, that was my dad.

PIEHLER: In some ways, you've alluded to it, but I want to ask more directly because you showed us a picture of the house you grew up in. In many ways, I think students reading this interview—as a historian this doesn't shock or surprise me, but even though it's the 20th century, first half of the 20th century, 1920s and '30s—you're living in a world that's not too different from the 19th century world of your father because you didn't have electricity.

BRAY: Oh, no.

PIEHLER: You didn't have a car.

BRAY: No.

PIEHLER: You used a wagon.

BRAY: Sure.

PIEHLER: And you didn't have a telephone.

BRAY: No.

PIEHLER: And it doesn't sound like there was a lot of cash you had on a weekly basis.

BRAY: (Laughs) No! We, well, we had a relatively small farm, and quite a bit of it was in timber, so we would—actually, he would lease some land in addition, or he'd do it on the quarter. He would raise the crop and give one fourth of it as a profit ... to the fellow that owned the land. So it was not a—it wasn't a sharecropping.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: It was leased land, and we gave one quarter. It was called "on the quarter," and we'd keep three quarters. But anyhow, we maybe would make no more than ten bales of cotton in a year. I can remember back in the '30s when times were tough, cotton was selling for four cents a pound, in the seed. That was before it was ginned. That meant that a bale of cotton was sixty bucks and if you multiply ten times sixty you'd get \$600. That was a year's work. We did have a peach orchard and an apple orchard and if you sold a few bits of, uh, a few bits of fruit for a little money, but that was like dollar a bushel or something like that. We raised watermelons and I sold watermelons on the highway. We made a little bit of money that way. Mama would sell some eggs to the stores once in a while, but, you know, we didn't—no. Money? No. We just didn't have it.

PIEHLER: It's probably an obvious question for you, but it sounds like you raised most of the food that you ate.

BRAY: I tell you what, in the fall we would go to town and we would buy provisions for the winter. We would buy, I think it was six sacks of flour ... forty-eight pounds a bag. We would buy a hundred pounds of sugar. We would buy, um, a forty-eight can of lard. We would buy about, oh, twenty pounds of coffee maybe ... and those were the basic things that we worked around. Mama in the meantime would've been canning everything in the world in fruit jars, you know, half gallons basically. Fruit, vegetables, and we all raised—we raised lots of beans and peas and potatoes. And we raised both kinds [of potatoes] sweet potatoes, which you hill in the ground so they won't freeze in the wintertime. So they would last well into the wintertime, and the other potatoes we'd put those in the barn and eat 'em as long as they lasted. And we probably killed two or three hogs and we would salt cure that. We would, uh, make dried peaches. We'd make our own dried peaches in the summertime with our—we'd put them on top of the house so they'd dry. And the flies, we had lots of flies because we had barns and stuff. So the flies didn't seem to go up on top of the house, and we'd dry the peaches on top of the house. So we had that, and we had sorghum molasses, that a guy—we raised the cane, and the man that made the sorghum did it on the halves. So he'd cook the sorghum and we'd get half of it, so we had sorghum. We killed a lot of rabbits and a lot of squirrels. Once in a while, we would kill a heifer or a young male calf. So we had a little bit of meat, but mostly we had a lot of vegetables. We ate vegetables basically; potatoes, beans, and canned goods, or Mama's cans.

PIEHLER: And you had your own cows?

BRAY: We had three or four cows that had to be milked twice a day, so you never had a vacation. We never had a vacation in our whole life when I was growing up.

PIEHLER: So the closest to a vacation growing up was going on the 4th of July to this ...

BRAY: That was ...

PIEHLER: To the river?

BRAY: That was a vacation—I don't think that my dad was ever—after he came to Oklahoma, he probably never got beyond Muskogee all the time I knew him until he was probably about seventy-five years old and living in a different place. He joined a bunch of cotton pickers and they went to Arizona. Like the, like the—and picked cotton with the Mexicans. And he was seventy-five years old, and he was ... you know, that's the reason he lived to be ninety-six. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: And so ...

BRAY: Anyhow, we're going a long way from your original question. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: No, no, no. So growing up, you had never, until you joined the service, left Oklahoma?

BRAY: No, I didn't.

PIEHLER: In fact you didn't even really leave Muskogee.

BRAY: Well, I'll tell you, we were in our senior year in high school. We had a one-day trip to Tulsa, and we took in—went to the newspaper plant and we went to see Bob Wills broadcast. You know Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys?

PIEHLER: I've heard of it. I've heard of it, yeah.

BRAY: We went to see Bob Wills. He had a thirty minute program everyday between twelve and one o'clock and we saw him broadcast. And you know it was an outing for the class; the class wasn't that big. We only had 15 kids in my class, I think—senior class. So, that was my longest trip.

PIEHLER: It's also interesting, because I even think people in Oklahoma would read this interview and go, "Well, you know, Muskogee and Tulsa, they're not that far. That's just an easy trip."

BRAY: Yeah. Well, yeah, we were on a school bus, though.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but that was the big trip. That was, for you growing up, that's the memorable...

BRAY: Yeah, mm hmm. We did, when we—I think the junior class made a trip to Muskogee, and we went—oh, and we went to McAlester, too, one time to the state penitentiary and went through the penitentiary and hung around. We happened to be there when the prisoners were having lunch and we were there mixing around with the guy with the prisoners. We had guards, of course, and we went down and they showed us Ol' Sparky, the electric chair, and there were three or four guys on death row, and they would say, "Hey, got any cigarettes? You got any cigarettes?" (Laughter) But it made a big impression on all of us! Stay out of McAlester—that's where the state pen is.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, because you said going to Muskogee ... you didn't go to Muskogee growing up?

BRAY: Oh, no. We went to Okmulgee—that was about 12 miles away.

PIEHLER: When you went to town that was the town you'd go to?

BRAY: Or to Henryetta that was about 10 miles away.

PIEHLER: So those were the two towns you would [visit]?

BRAY: Right.

PIEHLER: Where would you go to market?

BRAY: Okay, well, we just didn't go to market. We had a guy that came around with vegetables and with, oh, vanilla extract and various notions. They came to us.

PIEHLER: You didn't go to a general store then?

BRAY: Well, ... when we went to school we could buy things for Mom and ride home on the school bus, of course.

PIEHLER: But growing up ... you got your stuff from peddlers. You wouldn't necessarily go to the store and ...

BRAY: Not unless—my brother that was born in 1915 [and] was six or seven years older than I was. He got himself an old Model T and when he got out, I think he was—he was through high school or about through high school at that time, and he got a Model T. So during periods of time when we had vegetables for sale, or something for sale, he would take Mama, or—it was a two-seater, I think, so we had enough room for the three of us. I would go with Mama and Marcus, and he'd take us to Henryetta or Okmulgee. And she would peddle it to the little stores that sold things like green beans, for example, and cabbage, and things like that. So that would be—and then before we left town we would always go by Cress's, the five and dime store, and Sears had a store in both those places—no, they didn't in Henryetta, but in Okmulgee they had a store. So Mama did her shopping that way, and so, no, we didn't go to the store as it were.

PIEHLER: Yeah, it sounds like a very—until really high school, a pretty infrequent ...

BRAY: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: It's just very interesting in terms of space, because as I said, even someone in Oklahoma, they would just not ... grasp how far away that was for you.

BRAY: I don't think I ever—well, we didn't have room for openers—I don't think I could've ever had a person spend the night with us. We simply didn't have the room. I'll describe this house to you.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you should because you shown a picture.

BRAY: Okay, you walk in the front door, and that's the living room. There's a stove here. There's a dresser over in the corner. There is a linoleum rug, or covering. Straight ahead there is a kitchen, which had sort of a table we could all get around, and we had a wood burning stove that Mama cooked everything on. She could bake bread and everything with that wood stove, it worked well. And we had one bedroom off to the side. Actually, this picture shows it as being around behind, but it was actually on the side when we were there. We had one bedroom, and let's see, the most we ever had at one time was Doris was one, Katie, myself, Marcus, Mama, Daddy—we had six people. Daddy slept on the cot in the living room, and the five of the rest of us slept in that one bedroom. We had two double beds, and you could hardly make the bed the room was so small. It was a chore. And they were jammed together and so, Mom and the two girls slept in one bed, and Marcus and I slept in the other bed. And that was the house. We did

have a little screen porch on the back, that's right. It was not weatherproof. But that was, that was the house and, you know, it wasn't extraordinary for the times. Other people were in the same boat. So, you know, I didn't think much of it. We had a well in the backyard that we had to use a rope to ...

PIEHLER: A very traditional well as people would think of it with the bucket?

BRAY: No, it didn't have a bucket. It had a long—it was only an eighty-inch well. It was a drilled well—so big (Gestures). And it was a long thing, and you dropped the bucket to the bottom, and it would fill up. Then [when] you start to raise it, it would close see (Makes loud clapping sound) like a clapper. I mean, you know, a lock. And you'd pull it up, and then you'd put it in a bigger bucket and push it down and it would let the water out. So ... that's where we got our drinking water. Mama washed outside on that screen porch three hundred sixty days a year, sixty-five, I mean, she washed every Monday, and it was sometimes icy. You know, all through the winter she washed every Monday—those old overalls that we all wore. No ringer. It was a tough life. Tough life.

PIEHLER: It's an obvious point, but you also had an outhouse that ...

BRAY: Yes, we did, and Mama built it. My dad was not much for that.

PIEHLER: Really? When did your mama build it?

BRAY: She built it when I was pretty young. Before that we didn't have one.

PIEHLER: You just went out? I once asked someone about this and he said ... he kept going on about the TVA putting in these latrines. I finally said to him, "Did you—," you know he was so detailed about it—I finally realized I should ask him the obvious point, "Did you get one of these?" And then I asked him, "What did you use before that?" So before the outhouse, you just ...

BRAY: We didn't have one. You know, it was, uh, it was very, well, spartan (Laughter). And that was really inexcusable, too. I really often thought about why my dad didn't build us a latrine.

PIEHLER: Even at the time ...

BRAY: I didn't, yeah.

PIEHLER: You didn't fully understand even at that time?

BRAY: I didn't question it, but it was—it was pretty—well, anyhow. Mama did build us an outhouse.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, what were your closest neighbors? How far were your neighbors?

BRAY: Well, we lived on a State Highway 266.

PIEHLER: So that was paved?

BRAY: Well, eventually it was. It was gravel.

PIEHLER: Initially?

BRAY: Well, actually, I think, when I—by the time I got out of high school, it was still gravel, but it was a better grade of gravel.

PIEHLER: But even as a state highway it had not gotten paved.

BRAY: No, it did not have asphalt. But across the road we had a neighbor that was probably, I would say, three or four hundred yards. Then down the way we had maybe a quarter of a mile, and this way another quarter of a mile. So it was that way. People—a section of land is a mile square, six hundred and forty acres, you know. So, an eighty-acre farm was about average. So you divide eighty into six [hundred and] forty, that's a mile square.

PIEHLER: How often did you see your neighbors?

BRAY: Well, going to school was the joy of my life, uh, everyday that we had school. But school was handled differently at that time. We would go to school nine months a year. But ... three months of that was, well, we went to summer school. When we got out of school in May, see, we went through the wintertime ... Then we got out of school to do the farming [and] to get the cotton under control. Then ... we went back to school for six weeks until around the first of July. And we went to school until August the 15th; six weeks of school, of summer school. And then we got out of school to come back home and to pick cotton. So, then the first of October we went back to school. So we had summer school [for six weeks].

PIEHLER: Your schooling was very much geared to ...

BRAY: Geared to the farming, because the farmers depended on their children to help to harvest the crops.

PIEHLER: And it sounds like you loved [school], you mentioned that you loved it.

BRAY: School was really—I just loved school.

WARD: When did you start school?

BRAY: When I was six.

PIEHLER: So you did not have kindergarten?

BRAY: No, no. We went into what they called primer school. Primary, or primer, we called it primer. And usually you go to the first grade. You spend a certain amount of time in the primer and then you're in the first grade, and then you go a grade at a time. But sometimes—I know my sister skipped a grade because she was—my daddy had been reading to her, so she was a smart girl. She graduated when she was sixteen, and the rest of us graduated when we were seventeen. Mama was, again, I don't think my dad really—he didn't push us at all. I mean, he tolerated us going to school, but he didn't push us. My mama was ...

PIEHLER: She was the one determined that you would [go to school].

BRAY: Oh yeah, oh yeah. And the boys and the girls, too. I mean ...

PIEHLER: Both were pushed to go?

BRAY: We weren't pushed, but we wanted to.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, why did you ...

BRAY: It was so interesting, and it was meeting your friends, and we—I played basketball, and we played track, you know, we had a track team. And we tops, and we played marbles, and it was fun. [Every boy had at least one spinning top which was wound up manually with a cord. During recess, we would gather outside and draw a big circle in the ground and take turns spinning our tops in it. Someone had to get things started by providing “live mutton.” While the first top was spinning in the circle, the other guys would spin theirs and try to knock the first top out of the ring. If they did, they got to keep it. Meanwhile, this new top became the “live mutton,” and it became the target for the others, and so on.] Back home, you know, if you hung around, my dad would find something for you to do. (Laughter) There was always something that had to be done.

PIEHLER: So in a sense, you sort of enjoyed not doing physical labor.

BRAY: I knew I had to do it, but ...

PIEHLER: But in other words school was a real break from that routine?

BRAY: Exactly.

PIEHLER: Where was your primary school, or primer?

BRAY: That was three and a half miles away. We had a school bus.

PIEHLER: So you took the school bus?

BRAY: Oh yeah, we did have a school bus. And I can remember Jess Grogan [a farmer who also] drove the school bus for all of his life, I guess. And from the time I started to school until I graduated, Jess was the driver. And he lived up the road, and, so, I can remember that.

PIEHLER: Do you remember the name of the school, your elementary school?

BRAY: Oh, it was Hitchita; Hitchita Grade School. We went through first to the eighth ... we called it grade school.

WARD: How many kids were in grade school with you?

BRAY: Oh, in the whole school, gee—you know ... I never really [knew]. I would say probably a hundred and fifty maybe. I would say a hundred and fifty would be a good estimate. I know we only had—well, fifteen was the largest graduating class that Hitchita ever had I think, and that was the year I graduated. I think my brother, when he graduated, Marcus, there were only five in his graduating class. Because a lot of those kids dropped out for one reason or another, you know. They didn't ... either their folks weren't pushing them or something. So, I would say, though, a hundred and fifty would be a good number total [for] twelve grades.

PIEHLER: And it also sounds like there was pressure to work on the farm.

BRAY: Oh, yeah. Absolutely, yeah.

PIEHLER: The school you went to, what kind of building was it?

BRAY: We had a brick school, and we had a frame school. When I first started, the grade school was in a big old frame building, and it was in between the frame building and the brick building. One story, you know, slab on grade, one story. We did have electricity there, but we didn't have toilets.

PIEHLER: You didn't have indoor plumbing?

BRAY: No, we had outhouses for the whole school. The whole school had outhouses. We didn't have plumbing. But there was a playground between the two buildings, and we had an outdoor basketball court, and, then somewhere along the line, oh, I would say when I was in about the ... eighth grade, we got a gymnasium. And that was a big, big plus, and that's where we ...

PIEHLER: Well, you mentioned you loved playing basketball growing up.

BRAY: Yeah, really did. And well, 'course we got to go play, you know, you go play at local places or nearby small towns.

PIEHLER: So you played on the basketball team, and then much like today you would go to different ...

BRAY: Sure.

PIEHLER: Different schools?

BRAY: Yeah, we'd go on the bus and play them. Then once a year we'd have what we called an invitational tournament, and their schools would come because we had a gym and some of the other people [schools] didn't have gyms. So we would have a whole weekend starting on Friday, and you'd play, and if you won you'd play the next one and so forth. And finally we would have the finals on Saturday night, or whatever.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, was the new school, was it a WPA project?

BRAY: No. My brother, for example, graduated in 1927. And it was there [then].

PIEHLER: Okay, so the brick, it was a 1920s [building].

BRAY: I would say it was—I don't know exactly when the first class graduated from high school there, but it was before '27 certainly. And he graduated the year I started. He graduated in '27 and I started in—well, I started in '27. Cause I was born in '21, so I started in '27. But I do talk quite a bit about this sort of thing in this...

PIEHLER: In the article you've written?

BRAY: In this, I call it "Recollections."

PIEHLER: One thing I want to make sure I ask about is radio and movies. Did you have a battery radio?

BRAY: Yeah, good question. Let me see if I can—now, maybe I can just read it. (Looks through pages) I think you're going to find a lot of things in here.

PIEHLER: Yeah, as I said, I wish I would've sort of read it before the interview, but some of this ...

BRAY: Mm hmm, but anyhow, you'll see it in there. Anyhow, let's see if I can remember. Along about—well, I know when Jack Dempsey and ...

PIEHLER: Gene Tunney?

BRAY: ... were fighting their championship fights, we didn't own a radio. We went to a neighbor's house and listened to the fight. That was really stamped in my mind. Sometime after that, and that would've been ... probably '32 or somewhere in there, '33, Mama got an Airline radio, a battery powered radio from Montgomery-Ward, I think it was. I think that was their brand, Airline. And ... it required 3 batteries. There was a three-volt wet cell, and then there was, uh ...

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

BRAY: ... a couple of dry cell. I know there were three batteries that you needed. And I remember Marcus and I strung a long-wire antenna and got it going. That's when my life changed, it truly did. Because all of a sudden the world, the news, the music ... At night we could pick up New York City. We could pick up, oh, Nashville. We always listened to the Grand Ole Opry after that. Jack Benny was on, you know, on Sundays, and Bob Wills was on. At that point the government allowed a certain number of fifty thousand watt stations to be put in, to be on the airways, and KVOO Tulsa was one of those fifty thousand-watters. So we'd get Tulsa very nicely. We could get WSM Nashville [and] WINX Cincinnati, I think. We could even get—there was one hundred thousand-watter which was on just over the border in Mexico; out of the states. And we could get that. That was XEPN. I remember that.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, you said that radio really brought you the world ...

BRAY: Oh, we had no newspapers. Well, we got the Kansas City Star, which was weekly, came by mail. Daddy did subscribe to that. He wanted—there was a lot of farm news in there, and he wanted to read about things like that, and there was general news. And that was our paper.

PIEHLER: Once a week?

BRAY: Once a week, and we had no radio, and except when we went to a neighbor's house. Even the people across the road didn't have a radio. ... And I sat in front of that [and] at night I would listen to things and it was just the world was just ...

WARD: Did the rest of the family enjoy it as much or just you?

BRAY: Huh?

WARD: The rest of your family?

BRAY: Um, no, not so much.

WARD: It was just you?

BRAY: I did. In fact, I was listening to it that way the night of the, uh, what's his name? *The War of the Worlds*?

PIEHLER: You remember [that]? You actually ...

BRAY: Oh, I was listening to it. (Laughter) I was listening to ... a big band on and it was coming out of New York. And I was sitting there, it didn't come in all that well, but, oh, I could sit close enough to it so I could hear it. And all of a sudden I heard this "We interrupt this program to bring you a news flash." And so I turned the volume and got it scooted around so it could be loud enough for everybody to hear it, and Mama all of a sudden was listening, and it got worse and worse and worse. (Laughter) And Mama was out; she went out looking out toward New Jersey, you know, to see if she could see it (Laughter).

PIEHLER: Because my understanding of that is that there had been another popular program, and people had switched in. Like you had switched in to ...

BRAY: Yeah, oh yeah, they interrupted—the band was playing and they interrupted it. “We interrupt this program to bring a news flash to you,” and that’s when they started talking about lights being spotted in the sky, and when they landed, that somebody had spotted somebody, and they’re calling out the Army and, you know, and then things [got] worse, and worse, and worse.

PIEHLER: But you didn’t hear the broadcast from the very beginning, had you? *The War of the Worlds* that you remember?

BRAY: I, well, yes. That’s the way they did it.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

BRAY: *The War of the World*, as I understand it ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. I’ve heard it, and if you didn’t catch the very, very beginning when they say, “this is a play,”—they do actually...

BRAY: I didn’t hear that.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: No, I did not hear that. Maybe he said it, but ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. I remember hearing the broadcast and when the play starts it does sound like a very—and I understand if people switched in during the middle of it or even missed the very beginning ...

BRAY: Yeah, really I guess I wasn’t paying that much attention. I was just listening to the music. I didn’t hear that far because it was turned down. I didn’t want, you know, the rest of the people—maybe they were doing something else, and I had the volume turned down lower. But when I heard that, I turned the volume up. When I heard this, “We interrupt,” I turned the volume up and then everybody started listening to it. My dad and mother were there and my younger sister, but she was pretty small, well, she was three years younger than I was. But, anyhow, that was our introduction to radio, and it was the best thing that Mama could’ve possibly done to further our education.

PIEHLER: You would serve in the Navy and in a sense go all over the Pacific because of the war. Then you would later go all over the world because of the CIA and live in the Washington, D. C. area. But thinking back growing up, you mentioned that radio brought you the world, and particularly radio as it was structured then, would have these clear channel stations.

BRAY: Right.

PIEHLER: What was your image of the world because you had such a limited world that you actually physically could go to? So what did you think about places like New York, Cincinnati, [or] Nashville?

BRAY: All I wanted to do was to get out of what I was doing. I knew I wanted to get an education and I did not want to be a farmer. I did not. That was the furthest thing from my plans. I wanted to go to college, but there was just no way, that I could see, it was going to happen because we didn't have the money, and they didn't have grants. And, you know, they didn't have scholarships. It just was a different world. It's so easy these days to do it if you want to do it; if you want to set your mind to it. So I knew that I had to educate myself first [and] get educated so I could go on and do something beyond being a farmer. But I was very interested in history. My favorite subjects were—I had a terrific English teacher. We had four years of English, English grammar. I loved Miss Davis. She was a spinster, and she taught me four years of English grammar. And I loved—I did that because ... I liked her, and she was such a great teacher. But history was really, I guess, my favorite subject. And then we had geography and ... didn't have a lot of stuff that they have now, like shop, and, you know.

PIEHLER: What about sciences?

BRAY: Yeah, we had sciences.

PIEHLER: Did you have a lab?

BRAY: We did not have a lab.

PIEHLER: So it was all textbook? There was no lab?

BRAY: Well, we did have a science teacher that sort of experimented a little bit out in the yard, but we didn't have a lab.

PIEHLER: Well, you would later take German and Spanish in, you know, U. S. government schools in Berlitz. What kind of foreign language did you have in your high school?

BRAY: Before I came along, they had Latin. They taught Latin.

PIEHLER: They taught Latin?

BRAY: They taught Latin a lot in Hitchita. But by the time I got there, they had dropped that and we did not have any foreign language at all in high school. The last year, I guess, of my high school, when I was a senior in high school, they brought in the typewriter and taught us typing, and that really launched my career.

PIEHLER: Yeah, we will later get to that. That typing would be very important for the Navy.

BRAY: Very important.

PIEHLER: And that was an innovation in your school.

BRAY: That was, yeah ... we learned how to type. And the way they taught us was they covered the keys with rubber, and then, you know, you knew where it was, and then they would play music and we'd—*A, S, D, F, G, H, I, J,* and *Z* and, you know. So I learned how to type. And then something that I did not mention, yet, is that, well, I'll get up to that if you want me to. I don't know if we want—are we supposed ...

PIEHLER: Whatever you would like to do. I can always go back.

BRAY: Okay. I learned to type, so when I got out of high school I tried doing some manual labor. I worked for a guy that drilled water wells for a while. And the pay was nothing. You know, he gave you ten cents a foot for every foot we drilled, and we'd make about fifteen feet a day, so that was a dollar and a half a day, and it was heavy work. But, and then I hitchhiked—I was 17. I hitchhiked to Idalou, Texas, which was near Lubbock, down below Amarillo. I hitchhiked down there, and picked cotton for—after ours was done, finished and went down there and worked for six more weeks by myself, and when I was—my brother had been down there before with some other guys, and he'd picked cotton for this one family. So without even announcing to them I was coming—how was I going to let them know, you know? I could've written them, but I just decided to go down, to where Marcus had been. It was a family by the name of Hicks and they had cotton in Idalou, Texas. So I decided to go down and show up, and tell Mr. Hicks that I was ready to pick cotton for him. So I did. And I ... started early one Saturday morning and got down there late Sunday afternoon by hitchhiking. And showed up at their door, and they weren't expecting me, of course. They had a boy about my same age, and they had a girl a little bit older, I believe. And they said, "Well, we don't have all that much cotton left, but since you've come all this way, we'll work on mine, but I know this other fellow who's got some cotton that needs to be picked, and you can stay here and pick for him." So he said, "It seems a shame for us to put you out there in the bunkhouse. Why don't you sleep with Doober?" Doober was their boy. They put me in the same room with Doober, and they treated me like their son. Because I was a pretty scrawny, seventeen, a hundred and thirty-five pound, five foot eleven inches tall, nothing but skin and bones, but hard as nails. And I did things for them. They had work to do, you know. They had a cream separator, various other things they had. So anyhow they did have electricity. They had a windmill for electricity. But, anyhow, I stayed there for six weeks, I think, and worked some for him and then for a neighbor. And then I came back, came back home, and [with] really nothing to do. It was then October.

PIEHLER: ... You went to elementary school from 1927 to '35, and then high school's '36 through '39. You're the class of '39.

BRAY: That's right, that's right, we graduated in late May. And that's—in the meantime, I worked some manual labor I farm cropped, and then I went and worked a while in Texas. And then I came back, and then, lo and behold, my brother Julius who by that time had become a very successful salesman for International Harvester Company and he was living in Chattanooga, Tennessee. So he came home for Christmas to visit the folks, he and his wife, Mable, came home. And he said, "You know I might be able to get you a job in the office at the International Harvester Company at Chattanooga. So why don't you come on back with us, and I'll see if I

can't get you a job as a bookkeeper." Well, that would've been right down my alley because I loved math, I was good in math. And so I was 18 at that point. I was 18. So I went back with him, and as it turned out, to make a long story short, I was too young to make bond, so they couldn't hire me.

PIEHLER: You needed to be bonded?

BRAY: I needed to be bonded. So, I lost that job, and so I spent the next thirty days or so trying to find work in Chattanooga and I walked from door to door. I finally got a job at a grocery store you know, and that sort of thing. But it wasn't anything. So, I decided to go back home and go into the CCC. So I went into the Civilian Conservation Corps, which paid thirty dollars a month, room and board, and a nice balanced diet, and it was just really the best I could hope for at the moment. So, since I could type, they put me in the office working for the head of the soil conservation service, and I was pretty damn good as a typist, and also, I could compose a memo, you know. It was easy stuff. We were writing to farmers, right? You know, we had a lot of connections with the farmers. We were doing a lot of soil conservation work, which meant building ponds, and terracing, and crop rotation. This was a Roosevelt program to build up the land in Oklahoma.

PIEHLER: So you were in a CCC camp?

BRAY: I was in a CCC camp.

PIEHLER: Where was your camp?

BRAY: My camp was in Checotah [Camp #2808, SC-26]. It just so happened there was a camp there. So, it was only eighteen miles from where I grew up. So that was great. I got, well, I got promoted and within six months I was making forty-five dollars a month, and, you know, that was great.

PIEHLER: Given the money you had growing up this was real money.

BRAY: Oh, this was a dollar and a half a day ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: Seven days a week.

PIEHLER: Plus you were living in the camp.

BRAY: Plus, I was living—I was saving money like crazy because [of] what they encouraged you to do. They were giving the boys five dollars and sending the twenty-five back to the families. Well, Mama says, "I don't want your money, you know you earned it." So she said, "No, you keep it all," ... And at that point, Oklahoma had established an old-age pension for the older people, for the seniors. Not a federal ... [My Dad got about \$50 or \$60 a month and it was funded by a new Oklahoma sales tax of one tenth of one cent on all purchases. The state actually

produced new coins, basically made from aluminum and they were called “mills.” The pension did have certain restrictions on how much money you had in your bank account. As I recall, if you had more than \$200 in the bank, they could stop paying the pension. My Dad was no fool, so he kept his extra money in a fruit jar and buried it in an outhouse. He always called this his “burial money.”]

PIEHLER: Actually, I learned this from when I was interning for an Oklahoma congressman. I had all of these preconceptions about different states and I remembered this head of their social service agency wrote this congressman—it was a routine letter. That prompted a whole conversation about what existed in Oklahoma and, yes, he told me, that in Oklahoma, and this was in the 1980s, there was a separate old-age pension that supplemented Social Security.

BRAY: Went into effect in 1940, as I recall—’39 or ’40—1940. Because that’s the reason my dad, when they established the pension, he was, well, I guess, how old would he have been? He was born in ’76 ...

PIEHLER: Six.

BRAY: So, that’s twenty-four. Well, he was ... about sixty.

PIEHLER: Yeah, in his sixties.

BRAY: So he said, “Well to heck with this,” you know, all of his kids had gone. He didn’t have anyone to pick cotton for him or to help him pick cotton. So he sold the farm and moved to Checotah. And they got the old age pension, and he grew a big tomato patch and sold tomatoes, and made a little [money]. And he worked at the gin, that’s right. He worked at the gin, he worked at a nursery, and he got jobs in Checotah. And made more money than he could’ve made right there. So, that was a change for them too. So, anyhow, they didn’t need my money. They had that, you know. They were doing better than they were before on the farm. So, anyhow, the money that I made at the CCC camp was mine. So, I was saving money right and left. In fact, I was— (Laughs) I didn’t smoke, so I sold my cigarettes. They got allowance for cigarettes, so I sold my cigarettes to the other guys.

PIEHLER: I think one of the things that’s so striking about the CCC is it’s partly a welfare program—I mean, it’s partly a work program, but it’s also run by the military.

BRAY: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: So, you would get, like a soldier, you would get ...

BRAY: Oh, they trained us ready for the Army.

PIEHLER: But you would get the tobacco ration just like you were a soldier.

BRAY: Well, now, I don’t, I think they charged us something for that.

PIEHLER: But, like a soldier it was very nominal. So you would sell your cigarettes.

BRAY: I would sell my cigarettes because I didn't want 'em. You could only get one carton a month, I think it was. So, I'd buy 'em and sell them to my buddies.

PIEHLER: Well, it's also so striking because, looking back on it, the idea that these were youth, [and] that you were given cigarettes ... Well, let me—you mentioned the CCC camp ... it's under the Army. Could you talk a little bit about the Army people you encountered? You had sort of a unique CCC experience because you were in the office. You weren't actually out in the field.

BRAY: No, I never did. I went immediately into the office. I really did.

PIEHLER: And sometimes I get a sense—and you worked under the soil conservation officer?

BRAY: Right.

PIEHLER: Could you talk, though, about [how the CCC worked]? Because I got a sense you had some understanding of how this all worked.

BRAY: Well, actually, the CCC did various things. They planted trees, they built roads, they built campsites, soil conservation service and so forth. But in all instances you had a military side and a work side. The military side was run by, uh, like reserve officers. He was in charge of all personnel, anything that needed disciplinary attention that was necessary, provide the food, run the thing; [this] was under the military. He was the one that had us line up, and, you know, at reveille, or at retreat, we always lined up and marched, and so forth. He was in charge of that. And there were about two or three officers, only two or three officers. Then he had a sergeant, but he was a CCC guy. He was an appointed sergeant. He picked out the roughest guy he could find and said, "Okay, you're my sergeant. You're my first sergeant. You get forty-five bucks a month. You wear three stripes." So, but anyhow, the Army ran the camp. They were responsible for our welfare. They also were responsible for making sure we made our beds, our bunks, and so forth.

PIEHLER: So you made them Army...

BRAY: It was follow the Army. You had inspections every week that was run by the Army, and, in fact, those guys that got forty-five dollars a month were called leaders. And since I was a leader, I was in charge of a thirty-man barracks. I was in charge of these weekly inspections, and we would have to work our tails off to get that barracks in good shape because he would bring his sergeant around and make his inspections, you know. And he would flip a half dollar on it, and if it didn't bounce, he'd rip it off. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So he would—you had to make your beds, and ...

BRAY: Right. And your shoes had to be polished. I mean, it was strictly, you know, boot camp stuff.

PIEHLER: Footlockers and all your ...

BRAY: Everything had to be ...

PIEHLER: Much like an Army ...

BRAY: Four square.

PIEHLER: Much like an Army inspection?

BRAY: Exactly, exactly. And your barracks had to be—he had white gloves, you know? You had to get the dust off the iron cots, and your floors had to be sparkling clean, and he ran it like an army would run it, and well, like boot camp. And then on the other side were all these agronomists, in our case. They were soils experts, and this and that. We had about—and they were private citizens ... they were civilian.

PIEHLER: They were civilian, yeah.

BRAY: He wore a uniform. He, meaning the leader and his—I think he had an assistant leader. I think there were only a couple of them. And we had a CCC guy was our pharmacist mate, and we had a doctor; I'm trying to think whether we had a doctor or not. It seems as though we did, but maybe he came in. I don't think we had a doctor all the time. I believe he came around, as I recall, maybe a dentist, too. We didn't have a permanently assigned medical staff, but we had a pharmacist that was there. And we had an ambulance, if a guy got hurt on the job ... [they] would take this ambulance and go over and haul him in. But, anyhow, I was over on the other side. We had a lot of trucks, and we had motor machinists that were CCC guys that were trained as mechanics, and we had people that were trained as surveyors and would go out and survey, or engineering crew, and they would mark out various things that had to be done to the soil. And we had grunts that did the (Laughs) heavy lifting, you know. They were, usually, they were the thirty dollar men. And then you got to be a driver [and] maybe you would make thirty-six dollars, but anyhow, it was definitely a two-sided operation.

PIEHLER: So in some ways it's very military, but then you're still doing, essentially, civilian tasks working with civilians with expertise.

BRAY: Exactly, and we had some very fine, highly educated agronomists. My boss, for example, was a graduate of the University of Chicago, graduated in 1908, as I recall—fine man—[David K.] Markham was his name. And he liked me. He truly did. I was his boy. I worked for him for two years. [When I first reported for duty, his clerk was a very sharp, young boy by the name of Clarence Gibson. It just so happened that Clarence had just volunteered to join the Air Force, and Mr. Markham needed a replacement. I really lucked out.]

PIEHLER: So you were in a camp from '39 through 1941?

BRAY: I went until—I went into the camp in February of 1940.

PIEHLER: February of 1940.

BRAY: And I left in February of '42. I was his chief clerk for two years. And we got to be just like that. (Gestures) He just ...

PIEHLER: So you ...

BRAY: He took me places. In fact, he even took me to, um, Oklahoma A & M's, one of their football games.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

BRAY: Oh, what a grand experience.

PIEHLER: Oklahoma A & M, does that ...

BRAY: That was Oklahoma State.

PIEHLER: Oklahoma State.

BRAY: Oklahoma State now. It was Oklahoma A & M then. And they were playing—I forget who they were playing, but I'd never ... seen a college game.

PIEHLER: Well it sounds like you hadn't even been to a college campus before.

BRAY: Never been to a college campus. We had a little college by the name of Warner. Little Warner College, that just about the time that Pearl Harbor came along I had contacted, and I was going to go to Warner.

PIEHLER: With the money you'd saved up?

BRAY: With the money I'd saved. And so the war came along and washed that out, and I knew I was going to go into service. So it was just, "When would I go?" My brother was actually in the first draft, and that was in 1940, before Pearl Harbor.

PIEHLER: This is the brother in Chattanooga?

BRAY: No, this is the brother in New Guinea the one who died young.

WARD: Marcus?

BRAY: And I have a picture of him, too. (Retrieving pictures.) Well ...

PIEHLER: This is your brother Julius?

BRAY: Marcus.

PIEHLER: Marcus, the one who went to New Guinea, who was drafted?

BRAY: He was drafted in '40. He was in the first draft, and I remember Mama and I went with him down to the county seat to ...

PIEHLER: And he was drafted into the Army?

BRAY: He was drafted into the Army, and he wound up as a corpsman. He was a corpsman in New Guinea and spent a lot of time in New Guinea. [Marcus caught malaria there and never really got over it. He died at the age of 46.] But, anyhow, let's see, we were back at CCC camp. So, anyhow, I spent the two years there, and it was a great, great, great, great program; fantastic program. I ... I'm a ... well, I vote a certain way these days, Roosevelt is still my hero.

PIEHLER: You were a Roosevelt [supporter] then, and you still, it sounds ...

BRAY: Roosevelt—I like, well, I'll be frank with you. I've had some changes in my political thinking over the years, but don't ever say that Roosevelt didn't do well. (Laughs) He is my hero. He saved me. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: I want to ask you a lot more about the camp. One of the things is, so I don't forget to ask this, besides being a chief clerk, you were also a sergeant?

BRAY: Oh, yeah, I was responsible for that thirty-man barrack.

PIEHLER: What was that like, to be a sergeant of this group? What was that relationship like?

BRAY: Well, those guys weren't much trouble. Actually, they were all country boys and ... we had 'em come from Muskogee, which, they were city boys and we had 'em come from McAllister. We had them come from—but they were generally from around within fifty miles.

PIEHLER: Because CCC's original conception was to take urban youth.

BRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: But you did not have the urban youth from Chicago?

BRAY: Yeah, some of it we had.

PIEHLER: Some?

BRAY: But we had basically country boys, farm boys.

PIEHLER: Much like yourself.

BRAY: Much like myself. And ... I only remember one guy that I had trouble with and I really never came to any real disciplinary stuff, but I had ripped his bed up a few times.

PIEHLER: Even before the officer got ...

BRAY: Right. Yeah ... you know I had the guts and the grit, but not the brawn, maybe not the ... So there was a first sergeant. I know I had help if I needed it. So I felt comfortable being, you know, telling them that this is the way it was going to be. So the CCC camp, though, did a lot of things for me. First, it gave me a balanced diet.

PIEHLER: Well, I was just ready to ask about food.

BRAY: The best thing I—we ate pretty ... spare at home, let's face it. We ate a lot of rabbit and a lot of squirrel, and a lot of this, and you know. A lot of turnip greens in 1936. We lived on turnips and turnip greens, and we ran out of meat, and the meat only holds up so long in the wintertime, and then it goes for rancid because we salt cured it. It wasn't really...

PIEHLER: You had no refrigeration.

BRAY: No, we had no power, no power. Funny thing, my dad was, well he was this way, but the power line went past our house about when the TVA and all that started.

PIEHLER: You mean the rural electrification.

BRAY: The rural electrification ...

PIEHLER: So they did string a line along ...

BRAY: They strung a line within a hundred and fifty feet of our house, but my dad said it's going to cost too much money. He wouldn't hook up. Even though it was—they said, "Mr. Bray, you know, it's right here," and they paid us five dollars a pole; they put poles on our farm.

PIEHLER: And you got rent for that?

BRAY: [Not rent] ...we got paid [a one-time payment of] five dollars a pole. I remember that so well, and they had to have an anchor, you know, to hold the pole. A dollar for an anchor and five dollars for a pole, and that was cash money that they paid my dad, [about fifty dollars total]. And they would say, "Now you know we'll hook you up," but he said, "Well, how much is it going to cost?" "Well, I don't know. It's going to cost four dollars a month probably." Or I don't remember exactly, but it was too much for him, and I guess he visualized Mama wanting a washing machine or something like that and that was more. (Laughter) That was going to cost more money. And he didn't think about the power for a radio. Well, you know, he had blinders on that, let's face it.

PIEHLER: Now, when he moved to town, did he get electricity? You mentioned ...

BRAY: Yeah, that house had electricity.

PIEHLER: Did it have indoor plumbing when he ...?

BRAY: Yes, they had indoor plumbing.

PIEHLER: So when he moved into town this was a real staggering increase in standard of living.

BRAY: Oh, indeed, indeed. But, I'll tell you, Mama rewired that house. When they moved in, they had bulbs hanging from the ceiling and no switches on the wall. Somehow or other, and she didn't know the first thing about electricity; it's a wonder she didn't burn the house down, believe me.

PIEHLER: She personally rewired?

BRAY: She personally put those switches in somehow. I was gone by that time. I was—well, I guess I was in CCC camp, and I don't remember the sequence of things, but I do know that she rewired a lot of that house herself, which didn't surprise me at the time because she could do anything. She, well, she was quite a woman. Anyhow, uh, back to what I was saying about the camp. The food was, you know, one of the best things that ever happened to me. We had three square meals and we had a guy that was a very good pastry cook. It just so happened that he was one of the guys that was in the camp, and he cooked, and he was a very good cook. And he happened to be a very good pastry cook. He also taught the other guys how to cook, and we're cooking for two hundred people. There were two hundred people in this camp, two hundred guys. So they were cooking with great big pots, you know, with the big stirrers and all that, and making mashed potatoes out of—so we had guys that were on KP that that was their job was peeling potatoes and things like that, and helping in the kitchen. So, that was number one. Another thing, of course, was it increased my typing skills amazingly when I—that's all I did was work for Mr. Markham, and so I got quite good at that.

PIEHLER: So in some way you had an office job. I mean, you would wake up in the morning and after breakfast you would go to the office for the day.

BRAY: Right, exactly.

PIEHLER: And then come back to the barracks.

BRAY: And I'd go down to get the mail. I'd drive a truck down and get the mail, a pickup, you know, and ... I not only worked for the chief, the head guy, but the agronomists would have things for me to do. And we had about five of those, and they were all college graduates. They had their degrees in agronomy, and [were] great guys. I mean, in their fifties working for the government, like on—they were getting paid better than WPA, but it was essentially a WPA job. And they needed work. They were out of work, so this was giving them a livelihood. And we had our chief mechanic that handled our fleet of vehicles; that was his living. So, that whole complex was virtually like a WPA project, but it was professional, and so that was the way it ...

was run in Oklahoma. Now in other places you had stone masons, and you had this, and you had that, and you had architects. The whole program that Roosevelt created; WPA, PWA, I think there was one called PWA, WPA, WPWA, CCC, SCS, Soil Conservation Service, all of this was to give jobs because we were living with twenty percent or more unemployment on non-farm work. And if you worked on a farm it was a dollar a day type of work.

PIEHLER: Well, you've already described how, in some ways, you were doing okay during the '30s, but it was a very thin margin.

BRAY: (Laughs) Oh, it was thin, but, you know ... I don't remember that we thought we were ... Well, then along about 1938 or so, maybe '37, Roosevelt had a program of buying up things like oranges, grapefruit ...

PIEHLER: The Triple A?

BRAY: Triple A?

PIEHLER: Yeah, initially it was the Triple A.

BRAY: Okay, okay, Triple A. I had forgotten that, you're right. So he would buy this up and would give it out to people that needed it in the form of what they called "commodities." And you signed up for it, and it was really—in our case the commodities were delivered to the schoolhouse. And the people would come and get their commodities at the schoolhouse; maybe once a month.

PIEHLER: So you remember doing this as ...

BRAY: And my mama, my mother signed up for this. My dad didn't think much of the idea at all. He said, "We don't need it. We're okay. Don't worry about it." And I remember—and I mention this in here—we used to get a lot of grapefruit, and he couldn't care less about grapefruit, and I didn't like them, either, you know. We got 'em though, but mainly we got sides of bacon. We'd get sugar. We'd get coffee, well, not so much coffee 'cause we didn't grow coffee. It's whatever we grew in this country that they would give out. But sugar, we got sugar. And we got flour; not enough maybe to keep us going, but some.

PIEHLER: Well, and you didn't have that very good of diets, so these, for example, grapefruit. I mean not that you particularly liked it, but that was something, you know...

BRAY: (Laughs) I had never seen a grapefruit before.

PIEHLER: Until you got into the commodity ...

BRAY: And figs, or dates, or one or the other. Whatever they grew in California that the Triple A bought up; and I guess maybe Texas, south Texas.

PIEHLER: And this was in the sort of late '30s?

BRAY: This was the late '30s.

PIEHLER: One thing I want to ask specifically about CCC, but you mentioned those other programs. You mentioned that your particular camp mainly worked on soil conservation. It strikes me that it was aimed mainly at working with farmers in that region of Oklahoma.

BRAY: That's right.

PIEHLER: But what kind of projects did they work on? Do you remember what specific types of projects they did?

BRAY: Okay, they would help them build ponds. They would help them lay out terraces and they would work on terraces, but they would do it in conjunction with the farmers. The farmers would supply, maybe the mules or horses to do some of these things, but the CCC guys would do the work and the farmers would supply the means to do this work. We did not do all that much tree planting in our area. We did some, but there was, I'd say, I think the numbers ran into the billions almost all over the United States. But we ... we went in a lot for contouring the land, and that meant that the engineers had to go in and say, "This is the way these roads are going to be," instead of doing it the way they had done it before. They would terrace it and then run the roads crooked instead of straight, and they would do drainage work, drainage areas. Maybe drain areas so that it wouldn't overflow the crops [and] various things like that. And [they did] a certain amount of small bridge building. They'd get in to some of that, but mainly it was with the soil because we were fighting the dustbowl really, Oklahoma was, well, we weren't hit as badly where we were because we had more forestlands.

PIEHLER: Well that's, I think, the image. It's so funny, when I was working for this Oklahoma congressman, I had a certain mental image of Oklahoma, probably from *Grapes of Wrath* ... I was interning for Mike Synar. He said, "Oh, no, this is green country. This is lakes. This is..." I mean it's a very different [landscape] ...

BRAY: [In] eastern Oklahoma you had hills and forests. You see, western Oklahoma was the dustbowl and we did not have—it was in the sky.

PIEHLER: You could see it?

BRAY: Oh yeah. The sun was never really bright, even where we lived, but we did not have the dust storms that they had in the west and in Kansas and west Texas. West Texas was fierce, but we had more forests, more trees, and so did not have that much.

PIEHLER: Did you do any projects with parks?

BRAY: Our camp didn't build any parks.

PIEHLER: You didn't build any parks or work on any?

BRAY: But there were a lot of parks that were built.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

BRAY: Um, let's see. Let me see, there was a camp, there was another camp on down south of us that did get heavily into parks. In fact, their parks are still there and are used and, in fact, one of the parks was given to the Indians; it's still being run [by them]. It's called Arrow Head Park, and they have a huge facility. The CCC camp; they built all that.

PIEHLER: It's interesting, there's a park, um, I think it's called Hungry Mount—we went there ...

BRAY: Hungry—Hungry Motor?

PIEHLER: Yes, that was a CCC camp.

BRAY: That's in Virginia.

PIEHLER: No, there's another, there's another similar name. [Hungry Mother State Park, VA]

BRAY: Oh, okay.

PIEHLER: Hungry—I can't remember. We went there to hike once, and it was a CCC camp and project, and there's, in fact, a memorial to the CCC here.

BRAY: They did a lot of that.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: They built the Blue Ridge Parkway.

PIEHLER: Yeah, oh yeah.

BRAY: The Blue Ridge Parkway was a huge undertaking, and it goes right near us, where we live now. And it's a really a monument to the CCC camp.

PIEHLER: Your camp ... when you left in February of '42, the camp was not [closed], it was in '42 that they ended the CCC, but the camp continued when you [left]?

BRAY: Well, actually, I think they phased out the CCC camp around May or June of '42.

PIEHLER: So you're not part of the actually phase out of the camp?

BRAY: Well, I helped. Yeah, we were phasing out when I left. I remember we took a bunch of trucks to, I think to Oklahoma City as I recall, and I drove one of those trucks that last trip just

before I left. And they were phasing it out at that time. Phasing down, and, I think it stopped in May or June, and I left just before that.

PIEHLER: You mentioned you had a very close relationship with Mr. Marcus, and you mentioned, for example ...

BRAY: Markham.

PIEHLER: Markham, excuse me, and he took you to a football game at what became OSU, Oklahoma A & M. Did you ever go out with him to farmers or to any of ...

BRAY: No. He didn't go to farmers, but his agronomists did. He was the head. He was in charge. He was in charge of them. No, I didn't socialize with him, but he sort of took me as a, you know, as his son like. I mean, he was just kind to me, and he was all, I don't know, we would go on short trips.

PIEHLER: Where would be some of the short trips?

BRAY: Well, to some of the projects.

PIEHLER: Some of the projects?

BRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So he was sort of supervising them?

BRAY: Oh yeah, he was definitely in charge of them. Oh yeah, they reported to him, and they very well did. He was probably a man in his fifties, I'd say. If he graduated in 1908, I believe—well at least he was in Chicago University and ...

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Charles J. Bray on April 10, 2004 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

WARD: Jessica Ward.

PIEHLER: And you were saying he played on ...

BRAY: He played on, he played football because ...

PIEHLER: For Chicago?

BRAY: Chicago University used to have a football ...

PIEHLER: Used to, yes.

BRAY: Heck of a ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, in fact a very good team.

BRAY: A good team. I had the impression that he was a first-stringer for that football team before they dropped it. And I don't know what year they dropped it, but in 1908 they still had it. And he was just a fantastic guy.

PIEHLER: And it seems like he still loved football.

BRAY: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean there's no accident that he ended up at this game.

BRAY: That's right, that's right.

PIEHLER: You grew up in a very rural area. I get the sense that the only sort of professionals you really had a lot of contact with were your teachers. Otherwise, everyone was storekeepers or farmers. You had this experience of really working with professionals, not as a laborer, but as an office worker. What did you learn from that? Because it strikes me that it's left a real impression on you.

BRAY: Well, we did have some very, um, intelligent people in that camp, working. Those agronomists—I remember Mr. Ferguson, his name was Coy, C-O-Y Ferguson, and I remember he wrote a recommendation later on in my life when I ... [went] on to other things. He wrote a letter recommending me as a good guy ... a young man you can trust, good man. So I used to talk to those guys. And Jobe was another one, Mr. [Lee R.] Jobe. And there were about five of them, [also including] Mr. Manning. We would talk. We would talk about the world. And, so I learned a lot from my experience there; and certainly [from] Mr. Markham. My other contact was that I spent a lot of time with the local people in Checotah, and I joined a church, and I joined the young folk, the young men's, young—what's it called? Not Young Life, but the youth group in this Baptist church. And I led the congregation in singing. I would lead the singing at church on Sunday evening. I got to know the girls in Checotah, and I got very well acquainted with the telephone operator. She was the one that plugged it in and took the number and, you know, it was a manually operated

PIEHLER: Was it manually operated, and you talked to her?

BRAY: Manually, yeah. So it was a social thing. I got involved with the social life of Checotah, and there was business people, and students, and so forth—and farmers daughters. So it was my social ... I was very much involved in the social life of Checotah. So that's why—that's how this camp did so much for me coming off of this farm with such limited exposure to things, except for the school, the kids in school, and my teachers. I had some very wonderful teachers. I

liked all my teachers. I had no problem with any of them, and so, anyhow, the CCC camp, though, broadened my horizons tremendously.

PIEHLER: It also strikes me is that it both gave you the money and sort of the knowledge about college. I mean in a very concrete [way], because you were with a college-educated group.

BRAY: That's right, that's right.

PIEHLER: It's both the money and the things you needed to know about if you going to think of going to college. And you were starting to really plan to go to college, so in many ways ...

BRAY: Absolutely, absolutely.

PIEHLER: If the war hadn't come around, you had the plan to go to college.

BRAY: Absolutely. Yes sir, and, in fact, I was definitely going to Warner. I had already gotten my transcript from high school. When I graduated from high school, money was very tight, and I had trouble raising enough money to buy my class ring, I remember that. And, also, I earned a letter for basketball and also got an honor, a scholastic honor. I was in the honor society and they had a nice sweater for that. I could only afford one, I felt. So I chose the basketball sweater. I think it cost, well, I think it cost me about six dollars, and so I did not get the honor sweater. So when I put in my application at Warner, and I had money at that point, so I wrote back to the school, and I said, "Would it be possible for me to get my honor sweater?" And they did, they said they'd do it, and so I got my honor sweater. And I also had it made part of my scholastic ...

PIEHLER: Record.

BRAY: For Warner College.

PIEHLER: What were you planning to study?

BRAY: I didn't really have a [plan]. I just knew that I had to get an education so I could go out and meet, [and] fight the world and do something.

PIEHLER: So you didn't necessarily think you would actually become an agronomist or something?

BRAY: Oh, no.

PIEHLER: No, but you knew college was ...

BRAY: I had to have a degree. ... And, of course when the war came along, I knew that I was going in the service, so I didn't pursue at Warner any further. I had been there and talked to them, though, and my sister did go to Warner later.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, does Warner still exist?

BRAY: I have no idea. It was just a small college. It was just a two year college.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: And I don't know how ... I hadn't really figured out how I was going to get back and forth. It was too far to walk, although I did walk there to apply. I hitchhiked to Warner to talk to them because I didn't have a vehicle.

PIEHLER: I want to go back and ask a few more questions to fill in because your memory is just wonderful ... as I said, I've been to Oklahoma a lot and the Oklahoma you describe just doesn't exist anymore. There are still some real pockets of poverty, but it's just so different.

BRAY: Oh, see, the people sold their farms to dairy people, to cattle people. And now all the owners of these cattle ranches are sections of land ... some of them; or [they're] at least 360 acres [which is] a half a section.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Well, one thing I've asked you about is radio and movies. When did you get to go to a movie?

BRAY: The first movie I ever saw in my life, I think, was in Hitchita; and was a two-reeler. And they had to stop and, you know, change the reel, but that was probably about the time I graduated from high school.

PIEHLER: So you didn't, growing up in the twenties and thirties, you didn't go to the movies until ...

BRAY: No. Until—I take that back. When I got to be about sixteen, no, when I got to be about seventeen, I had a friend who moved to Henryetta; and ... they had a movie house in Henryetta. It just so happened that the iceman in Checotah always went to Henryetta to pick up his ice, and he always went on Saturday morning; and he was a peg-legged guy, I remember that, and he had a pickup. And so I got to know Peg Leg-whatever his name was, I forget his name. I'd get a ride from—he came right by my house on the way to Henryetta from Checotah. So I'd get a ride with him and go up to Henryetta and visit my friend. And we'd go to the movies, and we'd go to the local, what do you call it? Where ... you had a jukebox.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

BRAY: What do you call it?

PIEHLER: The ... malt shop or the sweet shop?

BRAY: No, not that.

PIEHLER: No, it wasn't that?

BRAY: It was called something else. Well, it'll come to us. But anyhow ... that was when, oh, let's see, oh, anyhow, my memory's gone on a couple of things there. But anyhow, I would go to Henryetta, and we'd see a movie. Well, it so happened that the iceman came back to Checotah the same day with his ice. So I had to get back to my house. This is before I went to Checotah. This was still on the farm. It just so happened that the barber in Hitchita always took his wife to Henryetta to see the movie on Saturday night. So I ...

PIEHLER: Hitched with the iceman and then hitched ...

BRAY: That's right. I would go up with the iceman and come back late Saturday night with the barber. And he had a Model A Ford with the turtle—with a ...

PIEHLER: I think they were rumble seats.

BRAY: Rumble seat. You know, they pulled down. And so I got a ride back with him; I did that several times.

PIEHLER: But that was only when you were sixteen?

BRAY: That was when I was probably seventeen.

PIEHLER: Seventeen. Otherwise then, you just didn't see movies?

BRAY: I didn't see movies. Maybe they had some movies at school, but they would be educational movies.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

BRAY: But, no, I didn't.

PIEHLER: When you did start going to movies, which was the late '30s, what movies did you see?

BRAY: Mostly all—practically all westerns.

PIEHLER: So you would see Tom Mix and ...

BRAY: Right.

PIEHLER: ... the Saturday matinee western?

BRAY: Exactly. When they always had the one-reeler, which was like Tarzan, and it was continued to next week sort of thing, and you'd always go back. They'd leave you hanging, and she would be lying on the railroad track, that sort of thing. (Laughter) But that was fun. I enjoyed the—his name was Kenneth Smith, and we were about the same age, and he was a lot of

fun, and we used to walk the street of Henryetta, you know, just like ... hang out. We were hanging out at the jukeboxes at the, uh, what did they call those things?

PIEHLER: Yeah, I can't think of the ...

BRAY: Well, anyhow.

PIEHLER: You mentioned joining the ...

BRAY: "Beer Barrel Polka!" that's when "Beer Barrel Polka" came out. That was the big thing, and they played it at that juke—at that place—that juke, box hangout. Everybody wanted to play it so that's all you'd hear was "Beer Barrel Polka, Beer Barrel Polka." (Laughs)

PIEHLER: How did you become friends?

BRAY: Well, he used to live nearby.

PIEHLER: And then he moved?

BRAY: Yeah ... we went to school together at Hitchita.

PIEHLER: And then he moved.

BRAY: Yeah, he moved to Henryetta and graduated up there, and I graduated from Hitchita. So his dad and his family moved to Henryetta. And so—but that's when I first really got to see movies.

PIEHLER: I'm curious also about medicine and doctors because you probably were born with midwives.

BRAY: Well, we were all born at home, of course.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: We had a doctor named Doctor Carlass who was eleven miles away in Morris, Oklahoma. In fact, Morris, Oklahoma is where Anita, what's her name? The black lady that got in trouble with the Supreme Court?

PIEHLER: Oh, I know. Anita, I can't remember her last name. [Anita Hill]

BRAY: Her dad had a farm there in Morris, Oklahoma. But anyhow, Dr. Carlass had an office in Morris. We seldom—I can name on one hand, probably, the times, oh maybe on two hands, that Dr. Carlass was in our house. We couldn't go to him because we had no transportation. If we got sick, or if Mama had a child, we would usually call Dr. Carlass, and we'd have to go to a neighbor's house to use the phone and call him and see if he could come. One time when I was probably about ten or eleven years old I got pneumonia, and that's the only time that I ever had a

doctor for myself, I think. They did get a doctor; Dr. Carlass came and saw me when I had pneumonia. Also when our baby boy who ... was almost nine months old when he died; he had intestinal flu or something. We had Dr. Carlass come that time, but he died. He wasn't able to save him. But other than that, you know, we just didn't have a doctor.

PIEHLER: Did your mother use the doctor for delivery?

BRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So she did not use a midwife ?

BRAY: Every time she had a child, in my memory, we had a doctor. And she knew when it was coming, and we had enough time to let him get there. We could, we had another doctor we could use, but we used Dr. Carlass usually, but Dr. Wallace was another one. I think he may have delivered one of my sisters. But Carlass was ...

PIEHLER: Was, in a sense, the family doctor?

BRAY: ... the family doctor. And he would drive. He made house calls. And we paid him in whatever we had to pay him with; sometimes it was, you know, chickens. We always paid him though. We usually could rake up enough money to pay him something. Maybe he'd charge five dollars for a visit, if that much. I know we always paid him. Somehow, we'd pay, but we had so few calls. And my mother and dad never had a doctor for them in my memory when I was growing up. It was only much later, my dad did have prostate problems when he was in his seventies, but I was gone, long gone by that time. My mother, I know, had a skin problem that was very hard to control, but we just didn't get sick. We got sick, but Mama—we did a lot of poulticing. If we got a real bad cold or something ... we got sick, but my mother was good; she was good at home remedies, and so she was our doctor, really. My dad, I don't think I can remember my dad ever gettin' sick enough to have a doctor. Maybe he just didn't say he was sick. [I know that one of my biggest problems involved "stone bruises." I went barefoot all summer, and frequently bruised my feet on rocks or other obstructions. The skin on my feet would become very tough and this would sometimes develop into very painful infections despite all of Mama's remedies, including fat meat and darning needles. What was needed, of course was a professional lancing by a doctor, which never happened.]

PIEHLER: What about dentists growing up?

BRAY: That was just a big problem. The first time I realized that I had problems, and I did have problems [because] I lost my teeth early, was when I went into the Navy. And I had really nice teeth, and the Navy doctor examined me. He says—by that time I had become Charlie. I gave myself the name Charlie. I was born and lived the name. I went through high school by the name of CJ, which ... [is] what's on my diploma, but when I went to Chattanooga to try to find a job, you know, I knew I had to have a name. I wasn't going to go through life saying, "What does CJ stand for?" So when I applied for my social security card, I said, "I've got to have a name." So I gave my name, Charles Johnny.

PIEHLER: In other words, when you were born you were literally called CJ? That wasn't initials that you were just called? That was just a nickname?

BRAY: There's a little bit more to it than that. My dad wanted to call me Claude Junior, but my mother never liked the name Claude, necessarily, especially for one of her kids. [My Dad was actually named Claudius Julius Bray at birth, although he grew up being called Claude J. Interestingly, one of his brothers was named Victor Hugo Bray.] She says, "I'm not gonna have that little baby named Claude. I don't like the name. I like it for you, but I don't like it for my [son]." So she actually refused to let me be named Claude Junior. Daddy wanted [to, but] I don't think he fought it very hard. So I never had a birth certificate. Well, I may have had one, but maybe it existed somewhere, but I never knew about it. So as I say, in Chattanooga, Tennessee I applied for a social security card, and that's when I became Charles J. And then when I had to get a birth certificate, I had the form ... we filled it all out [as] Charles J., Charles Johnny, Mama signed it. I took it down to one of the CCC agronomists, and he witnessed it, and we sent it to Oklahoma City, and they sent me a birth certificate and that's how I got a birth certificate.[The Family Bible lists me as "C.J." Bray.]

PIEHLER: With your name Charles ...

BRAY: Charles. Because I, at that point, I needed it because I was applying for a job with the federal government and that's how I got to Washington. I applied for a civil service job as a typist.

PIEHLER: This was when?

BRAY: This was in February of 1942. When I left the CCC camp I got a job with the Veterans Administration in Washington as a typist.

PIEHLER: This was ...

BRAY: After the war.

PIEHLER: After the war?

BRAY: This was 1941. I left the—did I say I went in? I went in ... I'm sorry it was '42.

PIEHLER: '42, February of '42?

BRAY: That's right. It was after the, after Pearl Harbor.

PIEHLER: After Pearl Harbor. So, you didn't go right into the Navy?

BRAY: No, that's right. I ... applied for, uh, I went to the county seat [in] Eufaula, Oklahoma and took a typing test for civil service exam for a typist and was accepted, and got my notification to report to Washington in February '42. So I got on the bus and I went to Washington and went to work for the Veterans Administration typing up insurance stuff, and the

war was then going on, you see. So I worked for the Veterans Administration until June of '42 and I went down and joined the Navy in June of '42.

PIEHLER: I want to ask you about your stint with the VA and then your move to Washington, but let me just finish a few questions just to fill in points. It's come out during the interview, your relationship, your family's relationship with the New Deal and the federal government in the '30s. You've mentioned the rural electrification and you got hard money for having a line ...

BRAY: Mm hmm. We probably had about five poles.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: You know, we got some hard money for [them]. [A one-time payment of 50-odd dollars.]

PIEHLER: Yeah. I mean, given the context of how little money you had this was ...

BRAY: Yeah, right. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: But not enough to sort of—your father decided not to get electricity. You mentioned getting commodities from the school, and then you of course joined the CCC camp. Were there any other relationships you or your brothers or your family had in terms of any of the New Deal programs? I know you mentioned the old age program that Oklahoma created.

BRAY: No, you see, Marcus graduated in '32.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

BRAY: And ... Julius graduated in '27. Marcus graduated in '32. So that was before Roosevelt really got started. So, what Marcus did was to go to California. He and another guy rode a freight train.

PIEHLER: In '32?

BRAY: Around '32 to Bakersfield or one of the farming areas in California to work in the fields out there. So he was one of the Okies that went to California, and so he didn't get involved with CCC and that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: And how long was he out in California as a migrant?

BRAY: Well, he stayed—oh, he went back several times. He'd work a while and come back. Then he'd go back, and then he got in with some guys that were doing the same thing, but they were from New York City. They were Italians. They were three boys, and he got very friendly with them, and they wanted to visit New York City to see their family. So they would drive across country, and Marcus would stop in Oklahoma, and they'd go on to New York City. They'd come back and ... pick him up, and they'd go back. So he did this several times and

worked in the fields and worked in the timber. He worked as a log roller in California, too, during the hard times. So Marcus was gone a lot while I was working in the CCC camp and that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: And your other brother Julius?

BRAY: My other brother was a tremendous, well, he was my idol. He was a—the girls were crazy about him. He was a handsome guy. Well, this is an old, this is an old picture. (Gets picture out.) He was a great ... that's—that was in '45 there, but back in the '30s ...

PIEHLER: He still looks quite handsome even ...

BRAY: And he had the gift. He had the gift. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: He could charm women?

BRAY: Oh, was that guy a charmer! (Laughter). Really, the girls (Laughs) went after him like Frank Sinatra. But anyhow, he was about 190 pounds, six feet, you know. He'd walk into a room, and it was just ... but, anyhow, he was my idol. Julius started out, um, raising money. He wanted to go to college and graduate—well, first of all he was the valedictorian of the class. He was on the basketball team; a first-string athlete, first-string basketball. [He was also one of a two-man, one girl debating team who represented Hitchita High. They won many trophies, including the Class B Oklahoma State Championship in 1927. That same year, the boys won the Class C championship in basketball.] He [eventually] saved up enough money. He bought a bunch of, back when he was still on the farm, he bought a bunch of little pigs and raised them into shoats in six months and made a little money that way. And he made a little money picking up other peoples' pecans, you know, and selling them. [Actually, it was quite a lot of money for the time. He, with the help of his little brother, Marcus, harvested wild pecans in the Deep Fork River bottom. This land was owned by a city dweller who was interested only in the land as an investment.] Any way he could make money, he made money. [I did not know this at the time, but when one of our four horses died of old age Julius skinned Old Frank and got a pretty good price for his hide. There were those who claimed that he helped Frank meet his maker, although I don't think he would go that far.] And [eventually] he got enough money to get into a business college in Tulsa.

He went for a while, a few months, but he said, "They're not teaching me anything. I can beat this on my own." So he started selling various things. The big thing with him was he got into the aluminum ware business and he got an old car that—and you could buy a car for twenty-five dollars in those days really, you know. So he got enough money to get started as a traveling salesman of various types, and he sold aluminum ware. He sold hosiery. He'd go to the schools and take orders from the teachers for hosiery for ... what would they be using? Not silk and not nylon—rayon. Rayon hosiery and he had other [items]. He had a line of goods, and he would—I don't know all of the things that he did sell, but he got into various things. Finally, somewhere in the late '30s, we'll say '36 or so, he wound up working for the International Harvester Company, and he became their top salesman. He truly did become their top—he won more prizes for more sales of International Harvester equipment, trucks, farm implements, and that sort of thing. He

was always winning prizes. I remember he won a shotgun one year, (Laughs) he was always winning things. So, anyhow, he was making good money and he married a girl from Georgia; and she was working ... in an office. So together they were doing quite well, and so the war came along, and he joined the Navy. Actually in February of '42, he joined the Navy. And he had cooking experience from his days of selling aluminum ware, so he became a cook in the Navy and just went straight up to chief commissary steward as the head. He got on this ship, and he was so good at his business, he became a chief, and really, I think in a year's time he made chief petty officer, probably even less than that. And that's him (Points to photograph) as a chief petty officer on the ship that he was on. And he made a lot of money playing poker on this ship (Laughter) because one of his shipmates told me, "This guy is unreal." He used to send hundreds of dollars back to his wife (Laughter) making money on ...

PIEHLER: (Laughs) I'm not surprised at that at all. (Laughter) I watched a lot of those old, some of them were really awful movies, World War II movies, but the common scene was the crap game where ...

BRAY: (Laughing) Right, especially since he was on a transport and they used to carry troops, you see. His biggest experience in World War II was carrying a troop load of nurses from (Laughing) San Francisco to the Southwest Pacific. He says, "They had more fun!" (Laughter) He said, "That was the highlight of my career." But, anyhow, that was J. C., and I forget where we were, but ... (Laughing)

PIEHLER: Well, one thing I should ask you, did he go back to International Harvester?

BRAY: He went back to International Harvester—well, wait a minute now. Um, no, he, uh, Mable, his wife, went to California because his ship came in to California periodically because it was a transport, so he'd move back and forth. So she got a job in California, and so when he came back—that's right, I don't believe he went back to International. He stayed in California, and she had saved an awful lot of money. He bought a liquor store, and the biggest expense with the liquor store was you had to buy the right to have a liquor store. We're talking about maybe twenty thousand dollars or so.

PIEHLER: Yeah, which was a huge sum.

BRAY: That's right, to buy the license. And you could—that was like the stock market. You could sell it. Oh, you know, you could buy and sell it.

PIEHLER: It's very similar in New Jersey. Liquor licenses now costs hundreds of thousands [of dollars].

BRAY: Okay.

PIEHLER: So I'm very familiar with that ...

BRAY: He bought this liquor store, and bought this license, and started really doing well.

PIEHLER: Well that was almost when it was ... that's almost like a license to print money.

BRAY: That's right. (Laughs) He really did do well, and, in fact, he did very well, he sold, and then he got into real estate. And J. C., Julius, we called him J. C.; he went by J. C. He didn't like the name Julius. He wished he wasn't—in fact, his name was actually Julius Caesar Bray. Well, he quickly dropped that name Caesar and made himself Julius Cecil Bray. So his discharge papers had Julius Cecil Bray. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: It almost strikes me that your father had had some Latin in high school.

BRAY: No.

PIEHLER: No?

BRAY: No, that, not my father. The Bray family in Georgia. We went back, and my great grandfather came from England and married into a very, very high class, uh, well, married into the Walton family. And one of the Waltons was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and also the governor of Georgia. My great-grandfather married into big-time, and then my grandfather did likewise. He married into big-time. That was before the Yankees came down and burned Atlanta. Anyhow, in other words, they were up here (Gesture with hands). My grandfather had something like forty slaves ... my grandfather that fought in the Confederate War was big-time plantation. And then, of course, the war destroyed all that pretty much. So, anyhow, in the Bray family, going back ... there was a lot of that; the Latin, and in fact, my grandfather's middle name is Chrysostom, which is Greek, a Greek philosopher. I believe he was a philosopher ... Yeah, they believed in perpetuating that history.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, it's a question usually I ask at the end of the interview, but I'm not surprised, given your interest in history very early, after retirement people become very interested in what happened. It sounds like you got interested in genealogy.

BRAY: Well, I have.

PIEHLER: Were you surprised, because you grew up pretty hardscrabble, and your father was not a talker; were you sort of surprised when you started doing this genealogy, the background you had?

BRAY: We often puzzled over—we never really knew my grandfather's middle name until, well, within the last twenty years. We were puzzled by ... what that name was all about. We couldn't even spell it until we started poking back, you know, and researching this. So yeah, I was most surprised.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Because, [the way] you have described it ... not [only] in Oklahoma, but nationally, this is a pretty hardscrabble life. And I wondered, you know, Julius and Marcus are not [common names].

BRAY: Marcus, well actually, Marcus was named Marcus Brown. Thank God he wasn't named Marcus Brutus (Laughter).

PIEHLER: Yeah , but still it's a name that ...

BRAY: But, anyhow, Marcus Brown; Brown came from my grandfather's second wife. His first wife—he had six children, I believe it was, with his first wife ... she died in childbirth, and he remarried. He married a lady with the last name of Brown. So her maiden name was Brown. So that Brown name was carried over to Marcus, Marcus Brown, and it's still being carried on to this day. I mean ... I'm the only Bray that—Julius and Mable never had any children. Marcus died young. His wife remarried, and the only Bray boy they had, [his] name was changed to Couch, to something else. So I'm the only Bray in that whole line from my dad, except Laurie's son is Charlie Bray, and that's one of the reasons she kept her name. [And my mother's maiden name was Dobson. Her father was a Hatley, of Virginia.]

PIEHLER: Is to keep the ...?

BRAY: Was to keep the name. So he's the only Bray, my sister's all—well, my sister married, a Rzonca, and they're all boys, Rzonca boys. My other sister married a Clarke, and she has two Clarke boys. I'm the only Bray, Charlie—Laurie's son is the only Bray ... of our line, of Claude and Ethel Bray. We have lots of Brays from his brothers. But I'm the only one of that line.

PIEHLER: One of the things, mentioning your brother, Julius, working for International Harvester. It strikes me as that trip to Chattanooga was really the big trip, up until that point, of a lifetime compared to ...

BRAY: It was. It really was.

PIEHLER: I mean you described Tulsa as being so exciting, but this was, I mean this was a real trip, by any standard. What was ... how did you get to Chattanooga?

BRAY: Oh well, he had a car.

PIEHLER: So you drove?

BRAY: Yeah. We drove a car.

PIEHLER: So you drove?

BRAY: No, he drove it. He tried to come back practically every Christmas. He would visit Mama. He came back home for Christmas, and he brought Mable that year, and so when Christmas was over I went back with them.

PIEHLER: What was that drive like? I mean, what's your impressions of the trip and Chattanooga?

BRAY: Well, I can tell you one. I can tell you a little bit about that. I was green as a gourd or green as an Arkansawyer, as we used to say. Arkansas was always, you know, number ten ... (Laughter). Not ... I'm getting some Vietnamese in here, "Deng How" is number one, "Do How" is number ten. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: My wife is, was an Okie so ... well, she didn't like Texas growing up; she learned not to like Texas, and Arkansas was what you sort of made fun of.

BRAY: Yeah, well ... (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Much like in Massachusetts ... they make fun of New Hampshire. So, so you said you were very green?

BRAY: That's right, green as a gourd, green as an Arkansawyer. And another favorite thing was my mother would say, "Slam ... What'd she say? "Close the door! Were you born in Arkansas?!" (Laughs) But, anyhow—where were we?

PIEHLER: You were saying about the trip, one thing you remembered distinctly.

BRAY: Okay, going back with J. C. and Mable. He realized that I needed to be educated. I mean, I needed to know which fork to use and so forth. We'd go into a restaurant and on the way ... now, this is just a small slice of the trip. We went into this restaurant and I remember that they had a pickled peach for dessert. They served the dessert in a bowl with a pickled peach and I was, you know, I didn't know how to attack this (Laughing), and so I was trying to eat that peach with the knife and fork, and he said, "Son"—he always called me son. He said, "Son, you can hold it with one hand if you want to." (Laughter) So this came up in later life. Mable had remembered that. That's, in other words, that'll give you some idea of ... (Laughing)

PIEHLER: Because eating in restaurants ... It sounds like he took you to some nice restaurants.

BRAY: Right

PIEHLER: Not just the ...

BRAY: They had tablecloths, you know. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, what did you think of Chattanooga?

BRAY: Well, I was, you know, enamored with it. I truly, truly was. And to show you how things were, they'd go off to work. They both worked, and, of course, when I didn't get the job as the bookkeeper, I was all day by myself until he said, "Hey son, maybe we ought to let you stay at the Y for a while?" So, after a couple of weeks staying in their apartment, I moved into a Y, so they could have a little privacy, obviously. So, I said, "Well, that sounds like a fine idea." They had a swimming pool down there. But, anyhow, during the day, I would call up the weather just to see, to use the phone; or I'd call up, get the time just to educate myself. I literally was a country boy, you know.

PIEHLER: They were living in an apartment, too, which is a very different style of living.

BRAY: Exactly, exactly. And I remember that was the year that Tennessee was playing, oh, let's see, they were playing USC, I believe, in the Rose Bowl. Yeah, I believe it was Tennessee. It was a Tennessee team anyway, oh wait a minute, yeah, it was a Tennessee team. And he several friends of his from the International Harvester Company came over and we watched the game together. We listened to the game together. It was on the radio, and they were betting pretty heavy. They were betting a hundred bucks. They were betting big money, and they had their money on Tennessee. I remember Tennessee lost by three points. And that was a pretty droopy bunch of guys.

PIEHLER: This also strikes me—I mean you're used to your brother visiting, but this must've been a very heady world.

BRAY: Oh, it was.

PIEHLER: I mean, the idea of betting a hundred dollars in an era where you grew up with six hundred, when you lived on six hundred [dollars] for the year.

BRAY: That's right.

PIEHLER: And an apartment ... you were used to no electricity, no phone ...

BRAY: 'Course I had this CCC experience.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: Well, see I'd come a long way since the old, the house on, you know, the farm.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: But I had not reached the big city yet and the nice restaurants and that sort of thing. But, I remember he sent me down—and these are just things that I remember. He sent me down. He said, “Why don't you go down and get us some ice cream.” So I went down, and I, you know, I did like Mama did and got the cheapest thing I could find and I brought it back, and he said, “Why'd you buy that for? Why didn't you get that good ice cream? We can't eat ...” You know? So, okay, I started—it was part of my education. I was being educated, and he was my philosopher. We talked a lot, and I loved him.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you were a very tight-knit family?

BRAY: Oh,very.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you conveyed that ...

BRAY: To this day. To this day, we—I don't see my sisters very often, but we are a very, very tight family.

PIEHLER: You know, it's been so great [hearing] about your experiences growing up in the '30s, and I guess there's one or two more areas. One area is you mentioned your father tipping his hat to black women, which was very ... Oklahoma was segregated.

BRAY: Very. They couldn't be on the street after dark.

PIEHLER: How close were your black neighbors? Or was it just in town?

BRAY: Well, we had a ... one only—actually there was only one black neighbor. And, uh, his name was Horace, ol' Horace, and he was half-blind, and my dad—he was really in bad shape; he needed help. My dad let him pitch a tent on a piece of our land, our property, and we would give him a little money once in a while. And we also helped him farm a small tract on our property. And he had a mule, and we actually supported him in ways. One of the funniest things I ever saw was one of Daddy's drinking buddies, it was in the wintertime, and, for some reason ... we happened to be on—we had a creek nearby and we were down at that creek, and I happened to be there with 'em. So Bonnie Sessions, his drinking buddy, and Horace, they had Horace there, and I happened to be there. And Horace always wore a stocking cap, an old stocking cap, just old, black cap, you know, and he was sort of their ... what's the word?

PIEHLER: Jester?

BRAY: Oh, no, I'm thinking—their foil. He was their foil. They, you know, they'd say, "What do you think ..."

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

PIEHLER: You said that, you know, they got...

BRAY: They got Horace drunk (Laughing).

PIEHLER: And ...

BRAY: And then they were having so much fun and this was—So they reached up, I remember, I think it was Bonnie Sessions, reached down and got Horace's stocking cap, filled it full of water and pulled it down over Horace's head. (Laughs) Cold, cold water and they just laughed and had the biggest time. But, that was ... just an isolated slice of [life].

PIEHLER: How long did Horace—how old were you when he first started living on, basically on your farm?

BRAY: Oh, when I was a little boy.

PIEHLER: Yeah. And then how long did he live 'til? Do you remember?

BRAY: Honestly, he was there when I left.

PIEHLER: So he was there when you left for war?

BRAY: No, he was there when I left for the CCC camp. Yeah, he was still there.

PIEHLER: Oh, wow.

BRAY: Yeah, and he was still farming that little place. And poor old Horace, he—I remember Mama gave him a dollar one time. He was going someplace; he was going ... maybe he was buying something from the peddler. But anyhow, she gave him the dollar and he spent it all on buying a dessert, a pie or something. He spent the whole dollar and ate the whole thing; just ate it all. I mean, just to satisfy his inner, I guess, his longing for something, some dessert. That was the relationship that we had with him. But to actually have black neighbors; we didn't have any black neighbors ... until they moved to Checotah. That's when Daddy would go uptown. They lived three or four blocks from the main street, and he'd walk up to town and meet a black lady.

PIEHLER: And he would tip his hat?

BRAY: He would always; he would always say, "Good morning, ma'am," and tip his hat to her. And there were several blacks that lived a few, oh two or three blocks from us, from their house in Checotah. As I say, we did not have any ...

PIEHLER: It was in Checotah that...

BRAY: It was in Checotah is when that happened, yeah. And he would've done the same thing had, I'm sure, had it been ... we just didn't see any black people.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: We didn't pick cotton with blacks because they ... they were someplace else. I don't know where they were.

PIEHLER: Your father's gesture really strikes me, given that he's from Georgia. It's a rather egalitarian gesture in an era—I remember my father describing an incident when he moved to Jacksonville from New Jersey, he was working in a store [that had] black customers, and he would say to them, "Yes sir." And he was even told by his boss, "You don't do that." I mean this was in an era when that wasn't done.

Bray: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: You mentioned earlier, Franklin Roosevelt. While some of your political views have changed, you admired Franklin Roosevelt then and you still do. You had a radio; did you listen to fireside chats?

BRAY: Oh, absolutely ... Yeah. And we—when the Japanese invaded China and the rape of Nanking [occurred in] that era, I was still in high school.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Were you aware of that at the time?

BRAY: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

PIEHLER: You were following those world developments?

BRAY: Yes, indeed. When the [USS] *Panay* was sunk? I, yeah, we argued, we debated that in school.

PIEHLER: Your school?

BRAY: Our own school. Oh, absolutely, and ... most of the kids there were Democrats, but we had one kid that had a Republican parent, (Laughter) and so we'd have our debates. But he didn't have a chance. I mean, we were all over him.

PIEHLER: Well this is something, I think, current Oklahomans [forget]. I even try to remind my wife because when I worked for Mike Sioner back in 1980, there was one Republican on the delegation, but it was all Democratic. And I think both senators were there. I remember the senior Democrat of the Oklahoma delegation ...

BRAY: Kerr, maybe?

PIEHLER: Kerr, I think, was no longer there, but I knew of Kerr. I just remember Tom Steed was like, sort of, an old ...

BRAY: Steed? I remember Steed

PIEHLER: Oh yeah, he was like an old—I met him once, I think. He just struck me as such an old-time Democrat, and I'd here Tom Steed stories from his chief of staff; he had a young chief of staff. But it's interesting you say in your school there was one Republican.

BRAY: Yeah, let me just say one thing, and I hope I don't—there's no mikes in this room, well, there is—I won't say what I was going to say.

PIEHLER: Yeah, um ...

BRAY: I might—I was going to say ... turn it off.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: Yeah, one thing you said off the record, and I understand why you didn't want to put it on the record because of the pejorative term, but your dad was in a sense, an old-time Southern Democrat.

BRAY: Oh, yeah. He never changed.

PIEHLER: Even in old age he remained a...

BRAY: Oh yeah, absolutely.

PIEHLER: I mean "yellow dog" was one term they used to use.

BRAY: That's right. He was also a very—had a very strong conviction of fairness. I will illustrate this by one thing that happened. He was—early on, there was no church around so we didn't go to church; maybe once in a while there was a traveling, you know brush arbor type of church ...

PIEHLER: Could you ...

(Tape Paused)

BRAY: Am I going to ...

PIEHLER: No, no, no, this is—so you were saying about fairness?

BRAY: Oh, okay. He, my mother and dad joined the ... let's see, was it Methodist—let's see, I'm trying to think. Turn it off just for a minute.

(Tape Paused)

BRAY: My dad and mother, sometime a long time ago, really before they died; they joined the Baptist church and they went to that church religiously. You know, every Sunday night, whatever; and when J. F. K. was running for President—and, of course, J. F. K. was Catholic.

PIEHLER: And that was a major issue.

BRAY: That was a major issue. And my dad's mother was a Catholic. She was a Catholic. She really was. So the minister made the mistake, in my dad's opinion, when he got before the congregation, and he said, "Well, you know that J. F. K. is Catholic." And, I don't know, sort of dropped that shoe that it's not a good idea to be votin' for a Catholic. My dad said, "Ethel, let's go." He got up, and he left that church, and he went up the street and joined the Methodist church and never went back to that Baptist ...

PIEHLER: Literally right in the middle of the service?

BRAY: Right in the middle of the service. He was a very, very principled individual and it was amazing.

PIEHLER: And it's interesting because your father—I mean, he stayed a loyal Democrat all the way through.

BRAY: Yeah. So, anyhow, that—I just remembered that. But he was a very principled person, very honest, and I do write in here one incident that he cheated on something, and it was so unusual for him to cheat.

PIEHLER: That it almost left an impression

BRAY: It left a very strong impression.

PIEHLER: Because he almost ...

BRAY: That's the only time that I ever knew of. I tell you what happened. We always carried our cotton to the gin in a wagon. We drove three and a half miles to the closest gin. You, you know when you go on the scales, you stay on the wagon, and you weigh. And you drive on, and you have your cotton vacuumed off by the gin. We didn't ... it just sucked it off, you know. And so, we got in the empty wagon and started out, and he said, "C. J., why don't you go on off uptown, and don't get—" in other words, that's all he said, but I didn't get weighed. I was sold for four cents a pound because the wagon was lighter, and that's, that just stuck with me. That's the only time I ever ... I don't know, I guess he ...

PIEHLER: He was ...

BRAY: He was so principled, and that was the only time in my life that I ever saw him ever saw him cheat on anything. But he sold me for four cents a pound. He didn't get very much.
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, no. I mean, it strikes me how desperate he was because that four cents a pound; you described how little the cotton sold for.

BRAY: I weighed only about 120 at that time.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: But anyhow, that's—he was very principled, and my mother was like ... My mother was less principled from some standpoints. I might just tell you a little story and I also mentioned it, I think, here, too [in the memoir]. She would do anything for her kids. In fact, there was something I needed, I think it was a jacket or a cap or something, and she just simply didn't have the money for whatever I needed. Or maybe it was ... I don't know, maybe it was the first suit of clothes I ever had. But, anyhow, she wrote a letter to either Montgomery-Ward or Sears and Roebuck, I forget, one or the other; and told them—she always ordered a lot of stuff from them. She told them that she had sent in an order and sent a check to pay for it and, "The article

number is so and so, and it never arrived and this has been more than enough time for me to have that. What happened?” And so, they sent her that article. That is how desperate she was. And another thing that they did on occasion, Julius and Mama, they liked to read Zane Grey books and they would send away for books, and you got a certain number of days to keep it. They would read it and bind it with paper so they didn’t get it dirty, and they would both read it, and they’d send it back and get their money back. Another thing we’d do is, constantly, we would send away for sample toothpaste. You know, you would see an article in the Kansas City Star “You can get a sample if you...” So we would, she would write several post cards with different addresses, which would always come back to us. (Laughter) We lived near Hoffman, Oklahoma—we hitched to Oklahoma. We had a P. O. Box, and, you know, “Claude Bray,” “Ethel Bray,” and we’d get toothpaste (Laughing) and ...

PIEHLER: The free samples.

BRAY: The free samples ... There were other things, but I do remember the toothpaste. That’s the kind of times we were in. My mama would do that, my dad, he ...

PIEHLER: Only once then.

BRAY: Only once (Laughs).

PIEHLER: One thing, and then I thought we might break for lunch, because before we get to your World War II experiences, is you mentioned debating the [USS] *Panay*.

BRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What was your impression, before Pearl Harbor, what was going to happen at the time? The fact that you knew about the [USS] *Panay* and remembered it, is very significant because I’ve often been struck by how many—and people, to be pretty honest, they didn’t know what was going on. They didn’t follow it, or they blocked it out. You were very conscious of this. At the time what did you think was happening?

BRAY: Well, first of all, I thought it was terrible what the Japanese were doing to the Chinese, throwing the babies up and catching them on bayonets and things like that. At least I think that did come out at one time. But what was going to happen, honestly it never really crossed my mind that we’d be fighting the Chinese.

PIEHLER: You mean the Japanese?

BRAY: I’m sorry, the Japanese ...

PIEHLER: You didn’t necessarily think this was going to be our war?

BRAY: I didn’t necessarily think it was going to be our war, and that’s why I was so surprised. And I remember the day it happened. When they attacked Pearl Harbor, I was in the CCC camp and I just couldn’t believe that they had done this. I didn’t realize that—I wasn’t aware of the

fine points of what we did to hinder their trade, and our embargoes, and all that. I really wasn't up on that so much. So I didn't realize that it was as serious as it was. But as far as fighting the Japanese, I never had any notion that we might wind up doing it.

PIEHLER: What about Germany, the war in Germany, and the war in Europe?

BRAY: I was very, very conscious of—this was going on when I was in Chattanooga whenever they were fighting the Finns. They were invading Finland and also the Russians. But, especially the Finns, and they were fighting the Finns on skis. I mean the Finns were beatin' the hell out of them, the ski troops. And they gave a real good account of themselves. Am I right?

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Yeah, oh yes. No, the Finns fought very bravely against the

BRAY: But finally they sort of ... they said, "Okay, well let's let, you know, we won't do this if you won't do that," and they sort of became pacified. And then I was very conscious of Stalingrad and all that era, too.

PIEHLER: What about the debates over neutrality and over aid to the Allies?

BRAY: Yeah, I was very much in favor of Roosevelt on that.

PIEHLER: So you were with Roosevelt?

BRAY: Oh, I was very much in favor of the destroyers; giving them thirty destroyers, oh yeah.

PIEHLER: So you were following that part, yeah.

BRAY: Very, very closely. Yeah, I ... I was so disgusted with Taft for voting against the draft. They just barely won that by ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, oh yeah.

BRAY: They voted for the draft, and it won by one vote and Taft, who was a candidate for President, voted against the draft. Yeah, I was very much on top of that.

PIEHLER: Well, I thought we would break for lunch. Before we move to the war, [Jessica], are there any questions you wanted to ask? We've covered a lot of ground, so I want to make sure we are finished before we move on, because we'll start with the war.

BRAY: I may have to ship over here, you know. (Laughs)

WARD: No, I couldn't think of anything.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you've been among the most comprehensive pre-war ... we've done about two and a half hours on pre-war, so it's been a real pleasure.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: Well, before we broke for lunch, you had told us earlier in the interview that you applied—you took the civil service exam and you got the job in Washington. You went to Washington, D. C., I think it was February of '42, to work in the Veterans Administration; and before asking you about the job, could you talk a little bit about Washington in 1942?

BRAY: Sure. Well, I took a bus and as we approached Washington, I kept watching for, you know, the skyline. And I was very disappointed that it wasn't more visible. I mean it was sort of flat, and I didn't realize that there is a rule in Washington that buildings can only be so tall because they shouldn't exceed the height of what, the ...

PIEHLER: The Capitol dome.

BRAY: The Capitol dome. There was, however, the Washington Monument. Washington, at that time, was really a small—it came across to me as a small town. It really did. They had streetcars on tracks. They had lots of bus service. They had so many statues with men on horses and I understood if two legs were off, they'd been killed, and if one leg was off, they'd been wounded, and if both legs were down on the ground they had survived. I don't know whether that's true or not, but that's...

PIEHLER: That was your impression?

BRAY: That was my impression. And the first thing I did was I ran in to, well, first of all, I didn't have a place to live. So I looked in the newspaper for places to rent, and I found an ad from Georgetown University's frat house. They had a room that they wanted to let. So I called them up and they said it was still available. So I went over to Georgetown to the frat house right off M Street there, and it turned out to be a group of probably twenty guys in this frat house. This particular room was, I think, on the third floor, this big old Victorian house; there was one other guy that was a renter. He worked for the weather department. So they said, "Here it is, and it's so much, and actually ... it's room and board. We have a cook." And I said, "Well, now, I'm going to be on shift work. I have to be leaving before four o'clock, and I'll get back after midnight." Because I'd all ready determined that was going to be my shift work. And so they said, "Fine," and arranged for the cook to make sure I got a meal before I left. So I rented that, and it was a delightful bunch of young men. All white, pumping iron, singing, having parties, and of course, I was on the third floor; the parties, they went on down below. So, I stayed there for a while, and really enjoyed it. They were a nice bunch of guys. Probably all wound up in the service before very long. And they took to me, some of them did, because I could always sing fairly well. I've always sung [and] been a singer, and well ... country songs or whatever. And at that time, there was a particular song—it wasn't "Sixteen Tons," but it was, anyhow, I forget the name of the song but it had just come out. I remember a couple of them in particular liked to hear it sung, and I did that ... And here I was, what, twenty or twenty-one, I guess. Yeah, I was twenty-one at that time. But anyhow, I stayed there a while, and I met someone else at work who was living in a boarding house over on Connecticut Avenue, or near Connecticut Avenue—well it was about the same distance, I guess, from work. I sort of got to know him and I didn't have any other friends. So I said, "Well, maybe I'll come over and join you." So I did. I left the frat house and went

over there and that was room and board, and coed. So that was a lot better, really for me. (Laughter) So, anyhow, I went to work at the Veterans Administration, and they put me to work filling out insurance forms, and little cards and this and that; just ribbon-clerk work, you know, which is what I had been hired for.

PIEHLER: So very routine work?

BRAY: Very routine work. Fourteen hundred and forty dollars a year, pretty good pay then, and called it CAF-2, used to, now they call them GS [Government Service] ratings, but it was CAFs. If if you're professional they call it a P rating. If you were clerical they call it a CAF. So I was a CAF-2 at fourteen-forty, and it started at CAF-1 which was twelve-sixty, and then so forth. So I worked there until early June on shift work, four to twelve, and said well, "It's time to get with it." So I joined the Navy and I filled out an application, or form, and they said, "Oh, you can type?" "Yeah I can type." So they said, "Well, we think we have a job for you. Why don't we do this. We're going to give you a third-class petty officer rating. It's called a yeoman, and it's worn on your (Pats shoulder)—that's a one stripe. And you get what we call a crow, or an eagle. You get a crow and one stripe, but you won't have to go to boot camp because we need you right away."

PIEHLER: This is interesting because I once interviewed someone who also didn't go through boot camp in the Army because they needed a labor battalion basically, and they shipped them right up to Canada. So you went to join the Navy and they said, "We've got a job for you and we're not going to send you to boot camp"?

BRAY: That's right. They said, "We've got a job for you," and I said, "Okay. I guess that's fine with me," and so I was assigned to the main Navy department on Constitution Avenue; those temporary buildings down there.

PIEHLER: Which are long gone ...

BRAY: Long gone now. Well, quite a while ago ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: Yeah, they took them down in stages. The ones right on the avenue were the main Navy and the War Department ...

PIEHLER: And these ... these were temporary World War I buildings that they never got rid of and they kept ...

BRAY: That's right, that's right. So, okay, I report for duty. Oh, first of all, he said, "You've got to find yourself a place to live, and we'll pay the rent and give you an allowance for food." It wasn't very much but it didn't take much in those days. This was '42, and you could get a meal for a dollar and a quarter quite adequately. So I found—well, I stayed in that boarding house.

PIEHLER: You stayed?

BRAY: I just stayed in that boarding house for a while, and then I moved elsewhere. But I went to work, and I was on shift work. It was three shifts; four to twelve, twelve to eight, eight to four. And ... it consisted of a fairly large area with a full commander in charge. Commander A. B. Bagley, a very nice distinguished gentleman, probably in his sixties, and he was running the war room. And in this war room, he had probably three or four officers, [who were] junior officers, and about eight yeomen, I think, and a Marine guard at the door. And we, in effect, checked—the purpose of this room was to prepare the briefing boards, charged full wall displays of what was going on worldwide. Like where the convoys were located in the ocean, where they were, how many had been sunk, and the battle—what was going on in Russia. How far the German lines were in Russia; what was going on in the Pacific, in other words, worldwide. And every morning at eight o'clock or so, or maybe a little later [at] nine o'clock, we were to expect the brass to come and be briefed by Commander Bagley. That consisted of, generally, Secretary Knox would come. There was Admiral King. There was the head of the Marine Corps, and I forget his name right now.

PIEHLER: Well, the commandant would come.

BRAY: The commandant of the Marine Corps would come, and maybe a staff or two. And there would be quite a troop of them ... and Commander Bagley would go through his dog and pony show for what we had been doing the previous twenty-four hours, changing the pins and all that. And we had a Teletype machine that ran sixty words a minute, you know, clanking away all the time.

PIEHLER: Which I think students ... [should know] that was state of the art.

BRAY: A hundred words came much later.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I think students would not fully appreciate ...

BRAY: You could ... just like a typewriter, sixty words a minute, you know that's not very fast.

PIEHLER: But still ...

BRAY: I can type faster than that. (Laughs) And it would just clunk and you know (Making a shaking sound) and then Russia (Shaking sound). You'd wait for that, and you'd tear it off, and you'd take it, and you'd plot it. And we did not have the benefit of the communications intelligence. That was done elsewhere. It was so closely held.

PIEHLER: So you strictly had the reports on the field, not ...

BRAY: That's right. Newspapers, radio, and agents—the well, we didn't have any agents...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: Well, OSS was just getting started. The Naval Intelligence was strictly attachés—military attachés. Not too swift.

PIEHLER: But you would get the reports from say ...

BRAY: We would get the reports ...

PIEHLER: From say, like from Sweden or from Switzerland and the places we did [have agents], but the Magic [The ULTRA code breaking program against the Japanese] and the other, you didn't even know ...

BRAY: Oh, we didn't even know they existed ...

PIEHLER: Even though you were in a very central [location] they were two separate worlds.

BRAY: Even these, some of these fellows, these ...

PIEHLER: Senior staff?

BRAY: No, no because it was so closely held. This was out on Nebraska Avenue, which is miles away. And they were breaking the Japanese code, and the British were breaking the German codes, or ciphers, and it wasn't get fed into this.

PIEHLER: Into this war room.

BRAY: Into this war room. It was done on the side somehow. I don't know. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Just jumping ahead ... given you had this experience in the war room ... how surprised were you in retrospect when you later learned of the sophistication of the code breaking?

BRAY: Oh, I was ... even after the war, I was working—went to work for ONI [Office of Naval Intelligence]—well I'm getting way ahead of myself now.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: But, even after the war I didn't know about it. Even though there was only one wall between me and it, and I was on this side and it was on that side (Gestures). I still didn't know until I got briefed later. And it was going on over here and I was over here (Gestures). It was so closely held. But anyhow, as I say, we had two yeomen I guess; two or three yeomen on a watch and then there would be an officer doing this. I did this for, well, I stayed at this particular job for about ten months, as I recall, and I—I tell you what, really, I felt guilty as hell. I just felt guilty ... it's the honest to God's truth. I did not feel, I just couldn't [or] did not want to do that anymore. I wanted to get out and do something.

PIEHLER: But you could have kept doing this job?

BRAY: I could have ... I could have kept it the whole war probably. I even got a promotion out of it.

PIEHLER: What did you get promoted to?

BRAY: I got a promotion to two stripes; to second class. I mean they ... I went to 'em and I said, "Look, this is just a soft job, and I just can't visualize myself going through the war telling my grandchildren I spent the war in Washington, and I just want to get out and go to sea. I want to get on a ship." So they said, "Well, if that's the way you feel, we'll get somebody else, you know." So at that point, he said, "Well what are you going to do about this?" (Pats shoulder). I said, "Well, I see what you mean. I can't go this way; just bust me back to first class seaman." I mean I told him that. And that means you get a white stripe around your shoulder and no crow, no eagle. They said, "Okay, if that's the way you want it," so I said, "All right," and they did. They demoted me to first class seaman and I just took a little time, you know. Then I wound up in Bainbridge, Maryland at boot camp.

PIEHLER: So you did have to do boot camp?

BRAY: Oh yeah, I did.

PIEHLER: After being in the Navy for almost a year.

BRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Now before you describe boot camp let me just ask a few more things about Washington. Where did you sign up to enlist?

BRAY: Washington.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but the ...

BRAY: Oh, at a recruiting station.

PIEHLER: Just a regular, run-of-the-mill ...

BRAY: I walked into a recruiting station.

PIEHLER: And you just happened to be there the day they said "We need someone for this?"

BRAY: Well, they needed, they needed them everywhere. And it just so happened that I wound up in that particular spot, and ... there was another guy at the same time. They took both of us.

PIEHLER: To be in this ...

BRAY: To be in that [intelligence office]. And here was no investigation. Plus I had been working for the Veterans Administration, and I had taken a test, and so they obviously had checked ...

PIEHLER: But they didn't send an agent out to, you know, the FBI didn't come out to your Oklahoma ...

BRAY: There may have been a few days after I enlisted that I was called. I'd have to look at my discharge, but we'll say two weeks.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but you don't remember getting reports from your parents, you know, "This FBI agent came to the house"?

BRAY: Oh, no, that was ...

PIEHLER: That was?

BRAY: The CIA, yeah, but not with the ...

PIEHLER: Not with this job, even though it was a very sensitive [position]?

BRAY: That's right, although it didn't have a code word.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but still you were—well, because in some ways some of the information is not public, even though it's not top secret.

BRAY: Oh! Of course, lot's of it. We're gettin' intelligence reports from other governments. And also we're getting locations of our fleets and what one could tell the enemy about. It would have been very easy for me to do that.

PIEHLER: Well, one of the things I'm struck by is you didn't go through boot camp, so in a sense you weren't—while you'd been in the CCC, and you had some socialization ...

BRAY: Yeah, but they didn't count that.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but I'm just struck because I interviewed someone else who didn't go through Army basic training. He said got to this [base]—they were building this base in Canada, and he was called in to speak to the officer. The senior officer wanted to see him. He said he asked the sergeant, "I don't know how to salute, you know, I haven't been through [basic training]." (Laughter) Even though you're in some ways doing an office job ... how did that acculturation go? You know, like saluting and just the mundane ...

BRAY: Well there just wasn't any. We didn't do that.

PIEHLER: You didn't salute?

BRAY: We didn't salute.

PIEHLER: Yeah. What about your uniform?

BRAY: Now, that—you raise a nice good point. Something that I got really embarrassed about; when they issue you a uniform ... dress blues, normally, you'll see three stripes on there. When you're an apprentice seaman, it only has only little stripe on the sleeve down here. And here I was running around with one stripe around here and yet I was petty officer (Laughter). And I went into a bar some place and somebody who had been in the Navy or something said, "What the hell is going on here?!" You know, and I said, "Oh, that's the way it came." And he said, "Hmm, they sure have changed" (Laughter). So then I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well you've only got one stripe down here on your cuff, and you've got a patch—a badge." And I said, "Oh yeah. Yeah, you're right. I gotta get that fixed hadn't I?" So I very quickly did get three stripes sewn on there. I mean that's the sort of thing that you run into by not being in boot camp, but anyhow ... so, I get to Bainbridge.

PIEHLER: Well, actually one or two other questions. We [already] talked briefly—you saw some big brass go through and I remember your comments about Admiral King. Could you relay what your impressions were?

BRAY: Well, Admiral King was a tall man. He was a quite a tall man. He was as stern as a wooden Indian. He his lips are thin. He's ... I never saw him smile. I never saw him ... he didn't talk; he's sort of monotone. If you weren't close to him you didn't hear him. I mean that's the way I remember him at least, and he was Chief of Naval Operations. He was the number one chief for operations and he had a lot on his mind I'm sure. But I just saw him from twenty feet away. He was in the briefing room, and I was back there doing my thing. So I would see them as they come in and again as they go out. So I really can't pass judgment on ...

PIEHLER: Yeah. What about Frank Knox? Because he was a politician of GOP, I mean he'd ...

BRAY: He remind, he sort of remind me of a butcher (Laughter).

PIEHLER: Really?

BRAY: If he'd put a white apron on, I'd say, "Hey, how's the butchering?" And he was sort of jolly, the jolly type. He was loose.

PIEHLER: You observed over lunch ... one of the things that left an impression on you was the Battle over the Atlantic. It strikes me that left a real impression.

BRAY: Yeah, it did indeed. Every convoy was numbered like if it was going from say some place—in Canada. I'm trying to think of some of the ports that we went out of—oh, say, we'll take New York. We'll say it's leaving out of New York. Normally it was further north. If the convoy is going from New York to Liverpool that would have probably a three-letter designation and a number, and that number would probably have the number of ships in it. I don't remember

that for a fact, but it's entirely possible; like a number "ZM143" might mean so and so with 43 ships. If it were going from up further north it would have another one, and going to Murmansk it would have a number; [they were] all numbered, and ... these ships would be every flag in the civilized world. It would be Greek ships. It would be Cyprus flags ... It would be French, just any kind of place. And they were commercial vessels; they weren't Navy ships. These are cargo ships, [that were] hired. They have civilian crews, they pay 'em well, they eat well, and they die awful, is what it was. When I first got there in June it was just horrible the amount of casualties that those ships took on the way over. Especially the ones to Murmansk, and it was not unusual at all for them to lose at least twenty percent of the ships in a voyage. We would try to cover them with aircraft out of Iceland, Greenland ... and then maybe—Ireland wouldn't let us. We couldn't ...

PIEHLER: Use their air bases.

BRAY: We couldn't use their air bases, so [we used] any place that we could get. And then out of the Azores, we could do that for south. And we had a limited number of destroyer-type vessels with depth charges, and we had gun crews on a lot of those merchant ships; those private merchant ships had our gun crews on them. That consisted of maybe a five-inch gun, probably on the bow, or somewhere, we'll say on the bow, and probably a half dozen sailors that had their ammunition and so forth. And it was all manual. There was no, you know, you crank it, instead of pushing buttons, and you load it like you're shoveling coal into a furnace. It was very, very spartan. So we lost a lot of ships and it just was horrible to think what those guys were going through. It really was. So ... otherwise, that was the worst part that I saw when I was there was the convoys.

PIEHLER: Was the convoys?

BRAY: The convoy traffic. And North Africa—I was there when North Africa ...

PIEHLER: The Operation Torch.

BRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What about the Battle of Midway?

BRAY: Battle of Midway ... had gone on before I got ...

PIEHLER: Just before you got there ...

BRAY: That was in April. Battle of Midway was in April. The Coral Sea was about the same time as I recall. That was really the turning point for our ...

PIEHLER: Well, Midway was barely reported, the Navy kept a tight lid on that. How much when you were in there did you see the difference between what was in the newspaper versus what ...

BRAY: The convoy, you didn't see ...

PIEHLER: You didn't have a sense of how the war in the Atlantic was going from the ...

BRAY: Not from the newspapers, no.

PIEHLER: So you had a very different view of the war?

BRAY: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: Than reading the *Star* or the *Post*?

BRAY: Absolutely. Yeah, and also we would get, we knew ... in our position we knew if there were battles in the Pacific. Midway had all ready happened. Now Solomons, we knew all about Solomons, I mean, that was later ... I don't remember exactly when the Solomon Islands ... But it was roughly mid-'42, I think.

PIEHLER: I'm struck because most service people I have interviewed of all the branches for various reasons, have a very limited worldview of the war once they're actually in their position. You sort of have the opposite. And sometimes they get promoted and get these wider views. You went into the Navy and you saw the whole big picture.

BRAY: It was just a super experience.

PIEHLER: When you got back on the ship, I guess ...

BRAY: Well, that was an experience, too.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but how did you sort of juxtapose—because in some ways you knew far more than even probably a lot of your officers.

BRAY: Well, you see, I was on the bridge.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so even there ...

BRAY: The captain was standing right there all ... And his cabin is right—I was the one that went back and woke him up when we had airplanes going to attack us. I saw the bottle of bourbon under his bed nobody else had. (Laughter) But, yeah, fortunately I was in strategic locations.

PIEHLER: Yeah, it's just such a different perspective. I ask people, "What do you know about the war?" And they said, "The war, you know, in front of me, and that was it."

BRAY: Yeah, well, certainly in the Navy ... the briefing room, I knew what they knew. I mean except for the [codeword].

PIEHLER: The secret ...

BRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: I'm curious about rumors. Partly because you were such in the know at the beginning of the war. Were there any rumors around Washington that you remember? Rumors you couldn't necessarily debunk because obviously they probably enjoined you to be secret about what you knew. Do you remember any sort of rumors going around Washington at the time?

BRAY: Rumors about what?

PIEHLER: About anything. I'm just curious, I've heard that rumors are, you know...

BRAY: Well, I know Westbrook Pecker didn't like F. D. R. (Laughter). Right? Things like that, but, no, I, you know ...

PIEHLER: You don't remember any of it?

BRAY: I didn't realize what Hoover was up to in those days. Of course the FBI—the FBI had people in South America, so we got reports from there. We did get certain FBI reports, but mainly that was more domestic stuff.

PIEHLER: But no rumors among civilians or Navy people who just, you know, rumors about when the war was going to end or what we were going [to do]. You don't remember those?

BRAY: I—no.

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

PIEHLER: Piehler and ...

WARD: Jessica Ward.

PIEHLER: And you were saying a thought just came to your mind about Walter Winchell.

BRAY: Yeah. I remember ... when the Japanese first attacked Pearl Harbor, he apparently didn't know the gravity of the situation because he says, "Oh, we'll have those guys finished in ninety days." Do you remember that?

PIEHLER: No, no.

BRAY: That I do remember. "We'll have those guys taken care of in ninety days," because he didn't think much of them, but he didn't apparently realize that all those battleships that they had either sunk or disabled.

PIEHLER: I'm curious because you were experiencing the Navy like many enlisted men by going back to boot camp, but what was your impression of the Navy from the top? You have a very unique insight.

BRAY: I'll tell you what, it was mixed really. The captain, and I'm getting way ahead of myself now, but our captain on our ship was the finest man, I believe, one of the finest I've ever met in my life. Later I met a flag officer that I thought was a jerk. Because some people that go to Annapolis [U.S. Naval Academy], and both of these people were Annapolis people. Some people seem to lord it over the enlisted men and ... I don't know whether that answers your question.

PIEHLER: Well, what about being in the Navy headquarters? What was that like?

BRAY: The Navy headquarters? I, you know, I only had experience with Commander Bagley and there was a guy from New Jersey—Freeddenheiser.

PIEHLER: Frelinghuysen.

BRAY: Frelinghuysen. He was a young assistant to Bagley.

PIEHLER: Oh interesting. I wonder if that ...

BRAY: From New Jersey.

PIEHLER: Is he the Frelinghuysen that became a congressman? Peter ...

BRAY: Peter.

PIEHLER: So you knew ...

BRAY: I worked with him.

PIEHLER: Oh interesting because I think his son or grandson is still a congressman. They're an old time New Jersey ...

BRAY: Peter Frelinghuysen.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

BRAY: And he was a nice guy. I liked him and you know, he was doing his thing and I was doing my thing.

PIEHLER: When you got out to the ship in the Pacific, did people know what you had done in Washington?

BRAY: No.

PIEHLER: No? It never came up?

BRAY: It never came up really. I don't recall that I ever—I can't recall, but I may have. But I didn't make a big deal out of it certainly.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Yeah.

BRAY: Okay, let me ...

PIEHLER: Back to what you were saying about boot camp ...

BRAY: I arrived at Bainbridge and they looked at my record. They saw that I had been a second class petty officer, so this chief—chief's run boot camps, let's face it. This chief who was married and had a family lived off base. He would say, "Ah, I see you've been here, see you've been ... Okay, I'll tell you what I'm going to do, Bray. I'm going to make you the appointed petty officer of this barracks." [They call it the "APO." Each Boot Company has an APO who is selected from the ranks of the boots being trained. He is in charge when no ships company personnel are present.] So I became the appointed—the only petty officer for that whole bunch of guys who came from—it was sort of a special company of guys that weren't very well educated from somewhere in Mississippi or some place. And there were some tough guys in there, too. Let me see, we had, I think there were two hundred, as I recall, in a company. I think it was two hundred in a company. So he said, "And this is what you got to do. Each day you will get a order of the day and it means you take them over for their shots here, and at this time you'll go over to this place, and you'll go drill them this, and you'll do that, and you'll have some help from some of the other ship's company around here, but basically your job is to run this thing when I'm not here." And it turned out he was hardly ever there! Because he'd show up in the morning and stay a while, "Looks like everything's okay," and then he would disappear. (Laughs) And I wouldn't see him again maybe until, you know, possibly the next day. And that included making sure that these guys kept their barracks clean, only smoking when the light is on. If the smoking light is off, you can't smoke. You can't use hair tonic. You can't use toiletry. You turn all that in, we put that in a basket, and lock it away, and you can't even use it. You can have toothbrush and toothpaste, and none of this, you know. And you get your hair was [extremely short] down to—slick, and it was nothing like the Marines, but it was boot camp. And so I, smartly, I picked the biggest son of a gun I could find; the meanest looking guy I could find that looked like he had a little sense, and I said you're going to be the master at arms (Laughter). And he said, "Okay, boss!" And ... and I said, "Let's see, who else should I get to help you?" So I got an older guy that looked ... and I'd talked to him, and so the three of us ran that company for eight weeks, yeah, for two months.

PIEHLER: While you were going through the training?

BRAY: Yeah, going through the training.

PIEHLER: And you'd had this experience a little bit at CCC.

BRAY: Yeah, I had.

PIEHLER: But still ...

BRAY: They didn't know that necessarily.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so that was ...

BRAY: Yeah, the petty officer

PIEHLER: You mentioned that this was not, as you put it, the unit didn't have all the brightest bulbs ...

BRAY: Well, that's what they told me. That they had selected this particular group—I guess the chief told me that. He said, "Now, you've got to be careful with these guys. They all come from ... the same general area," and he says, "They're not," as you say, the brightest bulbs, some of them.

PIEHLER: You said some of them were tough. How difficult was this?

BRAY: I, honestly, I only had one incident that was a little bit dicey, and that was that somebody had some money stole. So I was really trying to find [out what happened] to get to the bottom of it. So, I made up this deal. I talked to my master at arms, and ... (Laughs) I don't know whose idea it was, maybe it was his, but one of us thought of it. We get a bucket, and we put it in the latrine, and let each man go in one at a time. And we'd have a cover on it ... you could just pull it ... and go around, and everyone in the company would go in. And then, [we said] "Otherwise ... I'm gonna turn that smoking light out." (Laughter) Damned if the money didn't show up.

PIEHLER: It did show up—this worked?

BRAY: It worked.

PIEHLER: And you didn't have to deal with the whole issue of court martial?

BRAY: Didn't have to, well, you know, I don't think I even told the chief.

PIEHLER: So you handled this without ...

BRAY: As I recall, I did not tell the chief. It wasn't that serious, but generally speaking, there was a little bit of, you know, you had lights out, too. Lights were always out at a certain time. "Lights out!" and you know that means no talking, no horseplay ... and once in a while you'd have to say, "All right, you guys, knock it off!" But basically we got through it without too much trouble.

PIEHLER: Now you also were going through the actual training.

BRAY: (Laughs) Right! Of course I had had my CCC experience.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: I could keep step. I knew how to start on your left foot, you know. And do an about face and things like that.

PIEHLER: You also had experience hunting, so the rifle range wasn't ...

BRAY: No, we did not ...

PIEHLER: You didn't have any rifle range [training]?

BRAY: We didn't have any rifle range.

PIEHLER: Uh, what about firefighting?

BRAY: Firefighting, yes. Firefighting; and I had some super, good firefighting experience after I got assigned to that ship because there are ways to fight fires that would amaze you. With spray, with a huge amount of spray, you can actually almost walk into a fire if you've got this spray.

PIEHLER: It's also striking because people who went through boot camp often [say] firefighting is one of the parts of the training that's a very vivid memory for them.

BRAY: Yeah, yeah. I don't remember that we had any. It wasn't as sophisticated as I had later.

PIEHLER: Later at the Quartermaster ...

BRAY: Yeah. When we went through Pearl Harbor on our way out to the Pacific we went through that because we were using—they were all ready losing ships from kamikazes, and in the Philippines. And fires were the big problem, big problem.

PIEHLER: What else?

BRAY: Let me just finish with the ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, I wanted to ...

BRAY: Yeah, anything in particular?

PIEHLER: Well, I guess about the other aspects of training that you ...

BRAY: Well, swimming. You know you had to—you couldn't graduate unless you could swim a certain number of laps. You had to learn to swim. You had to be able to jump off of a thirty-foot high board. You had to learn how to use safety measures like, say, if you're at sea with no

lifejacket there are ways that you can take off your pants and tie knots in the legs and pull them down over your chest and float. Get the air in there and float that way, or take even your cap, your white sailor's cap, turn it upside down and inside out ... get it down over [to] get the air in it over your face, and lie there on your back, and there's enough air in that cap to keep you afloat. Things like that. But swimming, you really don't want to send a guy to sea if he can't swim. And a lot of marching, but we had ship's company guys to help the base guys. I wasn't the one doing that. I was just getting them there.

PIEHLER: Getting them there.

BRAY: And being with them, and being a part of them.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: Because I needed the training. I was getting the training, too. Of course you've got to take time out for getting into the chow on time and getting sick call if they're sick and anything that happens. Getting their laundry, making sure everybody keeps their clothes marked, and you used to mark it with Clorox, you know. If you got a pair of jeans, you just take something and write your name in Clorox ... on your blue jeans (Laughs). And that's a good way. So you throw all this stuff in the laundry, and when it comes out, you know, your name's on there. You pick out your own stuff. It [involved] lots and lots of little things.

PIEHLER: One question I should've asked earlier. Why the Navy, and how close were you to the draft?

BRAY: Oh, I registered.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but ...

BRAY: Oh, I wouldn't have any idea. I have no idea how close I was because they picked numbers you know. I had no idea.

PIEHLER: In joining, why the Navy? Why not the other branches?

BRAY: Um, I just thought that ... I'd like it better.

PIEHLER: Really, as opposed to ...

BRAY: As opposed to being down in the dirt and the gruntin' and all that.

PIEHLER: Had you thought of the Air Force?

BRAY: Not really. I really ... I grew up on a river and I liked to swim and be around water. That wasn't the reason, necessarily.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: But the Navy, let's face it, either you've got a bed, a dry bed to sleep in or you're in trouble, one or the other. So ... I'd take my chances (Laughter).

PIEHLER: So the dry bed really ...

BRAY: The dry bed appealed to me, even though it's three bunks in a ship, hanging, and they'd drop 'em down. So, it just appealed to me, and I liked the idea of a little bit of a swagger. (Laughter) I remember walking down the middle of the street in Baltimore [around] midnight, singing "Wild Eyes Rose," or something with a bunch of guys, (Laughs) just hanging out, you know.

PIEHLER: So you liked the group that you were ...

BRAY: Oh, I did. Oh yeah. Now we were very, very, very close. There's a—did I show you our bridge group?

WARD: Yeah.

BRAY: Yeah, those guys. (Points to photo)

PIEHLER: Yeah, so this is ...

BRAY: This is on the ship.

PIEHLER: This is on the ship?

BRAY: Yeah. This is our first class. That's old Mahoney. He's an Irishman from Boston, and that's me. This guy's from Texas, Reisinger. Howie, he's from North Carolina. Fratentaro was from Pennsylvania, and Gourley was from California.

PIEHLER: When did you join the ship? After boot camp, where did you go?

BRAY: Okay that's quite a ways, it takes time.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

BRAY: Then they said, "What do you want to be? What specialty do you want to be?" After you get out of boot camp, you have a choice; you either can have a preference as to what you do, depending on what they think of you. I mean your record. And ... oh, another thing we did in boot camp [for] a tremendous amount of time was calisthenics. When you first get in there they test you on how many pull-ups you can do, how many pushups you can do, and then they work on that. They work on that, then they work on that, and you do it every day ... every time; all kinds of strenuous stuff. And then they test you at the end and you'd be amazed how much you've improved. And [there was] boxing. One on one type boxing and things, you know, that sort of thing. So, but anyhow, they ... in my case, I could've had pretty much anything I wanted

to in the way of a service school. And I had read enough to know that a quartermaster was, I thought, the best rate in the Navy because the quartermaster's job is to tend the helm, tend the speed, tend everything on the bridge under the order of the officer of the deck or the captain. And the officer of the deck is—you're right there with him. You're in charge of the lookouts. In those days, you wore a right arm rate, and there were only six rates that could do that. They were the ones that could stand deck watches and gangway watches. Left arm rates were all specialists, like radiomen, electricians, you know, and no fighters. Just specialists, [not] fighters (Laughing) so anyhow. No, I'm being silly now, but ...

PIEHLER: You really thought if you're going to be enlisted ...

BRAY: I really thought if I'm going, I want to be ...

PIEHLER: Where the action is.

BRAY: I want to see things, and so that way—also, with the quartermaster, the officer of the deck keeps a very detailed log of everything that goes on during his watch. These are four-hour watches. The quartermaster also keeps a log of everything that goes on, including the weather, the sea conditions, the cloud conditions, the wind ... velocity, and you can tell that by what the waves are doing. You could judge it at least ... and so you recorded it every hour, you took it down, and also what the air pressure is. And also you have to keep the clocks wound, especially the chronometers. The official—we had three, or usually three, chronometers on a ship because in navigation you have to have correct time, otherwise you're gone; you're lost because you base everything on time. And each day you'd take a time tick. You get what they call a time tick from the Naval Observatory, and they'll count it down, and they'll do it at noon, twelve o'clock noon. They'll count it down, and you watch it and you see ... whether your chronometer is accurate or not. Your chronometer can be almost accurate, but it might be two hours from what they are. What I mean is, over a period of years a chronometer will lose—you never change a chronometer. You never reset a chronometer. You allow for error, a minus or plus. I'm probably not making myself clear, but you never do change or reset a chronometer. It's always, just let it go its way. It may have a built in error of a second a day or two seconds a day. So you factor that in. Then every day at twelve o'clock you go and tell the captain, [as the] quartermaster's job, "Captain, sir, its twelve o'clock, aye!" and you go on your way. That's just things [we did.] And we're supposed to keep all the clocks on the ship wound, but the guys down in the engine room don't want you down there (Laughs). I think the first couple of times I did, "What the hell's this guy doing down here?" So I quit winding their clocks (Laughs).

PIEHLER: But in the regs [regulations] you were supposed to.

BRAY: Right.

PIEHLER: You're supposed to [wind] all the clocks?

BRAY: Right, but the chronometers, yes, you really [had to]. And also it's an absolute must that you report to the captain. You'd get court-martialed if you didn't go tell him what time it was at twelve o'clock. Go wake him up and tell him, "Its twelve o'clock, sir." (Laughs) You'd work

with the navigator who was taking the star shot, and you'd work with the Bowditch, which is a ... [celestial navigation technique] that tells you what you need to know to figure out—starting with time and ... the angle of stars, and you get usually three cuts, and you find out very easily where you are at sea. Also you can get what they call a sun line where you can take a shot of the sun and through this Bowditch you can see where you are in the way of latitude. Longitude, you can't do it, but latitude is this way, longitude is this way (Gestures). So, anyhow ...

PIEHLER: It strikes me, this really intrigued you.

BRAY: Oh, yeah!

PIEHLER: The navigation and the ...

BRAY: It's the best rate in the Navy I think.

PIEHLER: ... how important the issue of time was. It's also interesting because the Navy today doesn't navigate this anymore.

BRAY: They've got LORAN [Long Range Navigation] and they got all this stuff.

PIEHLER: Well, no it's just ...

BRAY: It's got the satellites.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I talked to Rosemary Mariner who's a Naval captain, and she said they don't even teach celestial navigation anymore. Your navigation is still celestial in part.

BRAY: LORAN, Long Range Navigation, was coming in just as the war ended. They had, oh, a station, two or three stations around, but it wasn't any help to us much. We used star sights.

BRAY: Oh, we'd shoot Polaris, the North Star, and Venus, and Betelgeuse and—but anyhow ...

PIEHLER: Before the ship, you should talk about the school.

BRAY: Okay, this was in Samson, New York, and you could see how many guys there are. (Pointing to photo) I'm up here, and I did come in first in that group. I really did. I was working hard and I had one guy I had to beat, and he was a good one. He got assigned to a destroyer also, which got hit very badly, by the way. But, anyhow, these guys were mostly wash outs of the V-12 program, which ...

PIEHLER: Ah, okay. Yes.

BRAY: They were a bunch of good solid kids, too. They were, but they did wash out for one reason or another in V-12, or that was the aviation wasn't it? V-12?

PIEHLER: V-12, I believe, was the college.

BRAY: Oh, then one ...

PIEHLER: I think it was college.

BRAY: Well, what was the other one? V?

PIEHLER: I'm not sure, there were several V's and I may be wrong, but they were nonetheless, a pretty skilled group?

BRAY: I believe this was the aviation ...

PIEHLER: It could be ... I know one of the V's was college maybe. There might be another that's aviation.

BRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So they were a pretty bright group?

BRAY: They were. They were a bright group and a nice bunch of kids, nice bunch of guys. I enjoyed—it was sort of in the wintertime. I know it was cold as the devil, and Samson, that's right up there off the lakes you know, near Buffalo. We had four months of training; four months of training, and I learned a great deal about rules of the road, navigation, how to use a semaphore, lights, blinker, flags. I mean there's so much stuff.

PIEHLER: You mentioned, I don't know if we were on tape, how you knew the lights well enough that you once talked to your brother who was on another ship.

BRAY: Yeah, oh yeah. I could pass them at ten words a minute, and you have to pass semaphore at twenty words a minute. So you take a test at the end of this, and you have a ship's company guy testing you. You won't graduate if you don't pass it. So, yeah, I could do semaphore, I could do lights. Not the way these real professionals. Some of these guys could do thirty words a minute ...

PIEHLER: Well, that's like the signal corps, it would have a different level. Still you could do enough that you could do it on your own.

BRAY: Oh yeah. I could do the lights, yeah. Each ship has a, you know, a light mounted just for signaling because it has the shutter on it, you know? Open, close, open, close, dat-dee-da-da. So, anyhow, that was Samson, New York, and there were four guys in that group that came out as third class petty officers, and I was one of them. All four of us went to destroyers. So, you know... it's like the bureaucracy; it takes forever to get things done. So anyhow, we graduated, and so they sent us to Norfolk to wait for our ship. Well, I was assigned to the [USS] *Shannon*, which started out to be a regular destroyer, a DD, and they decided to convert twelve of them to minelayers, which only meant they had to remove the torpedo tubes and install mine tracks. They thought they might have a use for mines, but we never used them really. It was just somebody's

idea. It was just planning purposes. They wanted to have the a method of laying floating mines in front of Japanese warships if they were being chased or something like that. It wasn't anchored mines, but it was to be floating mines, which is a lot different. So that delayed our, uh, you know, commissioning date. We did not get commissioned until the 8th of September, 1944. We went to Norfolk and did odd things down there, just picked up trash or whatever they needed us to do, and just marking time really. Then we went to Boston and spent a couple of weeks there waiting for something or other—oh, I know, trying to get the guys , the people that built the ship, to do the final this and that or whatever needed adjustment. So finally on the 8th of September we were commissioned and we then went aboard and put out to sea. This, by the way, was commissioned by the wife of Colonel Shannon who was on Wake, I believe it was, Wake Island when the Japanese attacked, but he was not killed there he died later. And the ship was named after him.

PIEHLER: Named after him. And Mrs. Shannon?

BRAY: Mrs. Shannon was there. And it's a funny thing, later on after the war, I went to work for Naval Intelligence when I went back to Washington. She was working in ONI [Office of Naval Intelligence] herself. They had given her a job as sort of, you know, helping her out. She was in one of the clerical staff, Mrs. Shannon. But anyhow, we took a shake-down cruise to Bermuda and got all of the seasickness out of the way. I was sick for three days, I know. You finally get to the point where you get the dry heaves. But once you get over that, for ninety percent of the guys ... [though] once in a while, you'll find somebody that never gets over it, you never get sick again, and that's what happened to me. I never got sick again.

PIEHLER: You initially did get sick?

BRAY: Oh, I got sick, I really did. I was sick because we hit some rough weather on the way to Bermuda. The Atlantic is unpredictable you know. We had a doctor, for example, our ship's doctor that never got over it. We had to transfer him and get another doctor. We had another guy that every time it got rough in the Pacific, he'd heave, but he didn't want to leave the ship, so he stayed. He always had his bucket at his position (Gestures). Anyhow, I don't want to take a lot of time, but we did have a nice little cruise down to Bermuda after I got over my seasickness. We spent some time down there shooting at sleeves. You know, the airplane would pull the sleeves, and our guys would shoot at it, and things like that. We had some very experienced gunners that ... they were battle tested.

PIEHLER: So not all of your crew was new?

BRAY: No, oh no.

PIEHLER: What was the breakdown of the crew?

BRAY: Okay, twenty-two officers ... the rest were men.

PIEHLER: And of the officers, how many were Annapolis?

BRAY: I would say ... three at the most. The captain, the exec, and let me see, was there anybody else. It may have been only those two. There may have been a third one, but I know only two for sure.

PIEHLER: Two for ...

BRAY: But some of the others had experience.

PIEHLER: Some of them—this was not their first ship?

BRAY: Right, there were some, though, that had never been on a ship before.

PIEHLER: Were there any mustangs [Military slang for an officer who began his career as an enlisted man] among the officers?

BRAY: Uh, yes. There was one mustang and he was a great officer, and he had experience; name of Caldwell.

PIEHLER: What area was he in?

BRAY: He was a line officer.

PIEHLER: Line officer?

BRAY: Oh, yeah. He was line officer.

PIEHLER: What about the engineer?

BRAY: The engineer ... was in the reserves. Yeah, Himmerlee. I remember Himmerlee.

PIEHLER: What is the break down of regular Navy, among the officers, regular Navy and Naval Reserve?

BRAY: I don't have any idea. Most generally, you'd have any captain with a destroyer or a larger size would be Annapolis, but you had a lot of reserves on smaller craft. Like J. F. K. or what's his name? The one that's running now?

PIEHLER: John Kerry?

BRAY: Kerry, yeah, he ...

PIEHLER: Of the petty officers, how many were old Navy? And how many were ...

BRAY: Not too many old Navy. Not too many old Navy because in early parts of the war, a lot of them were lost. Honest to God, they were. I don't even think our boatswain mate, our chief boatswain mate was—I know our chief quartermaster wasn't main Navy. And—some of the

gunners, I think, were main Navy. Yeah, and we had some top notch gunners. I mean, they saved our bacon, I think. They were good.

PIEHLER: You had a very interesting war because initially you're in basically an office job, and you're living in civilian setting.

BRAY: Yeah and living, you know, in rooming houses and boarding houses, and eating at the Hot Shop [inexpensive cafeterias run by the Marriot corporation], you know.

PIEHLER: I remember the Hot Shops were still around in the early '80s.

BRAY: And ... they started out in Washington, you know, over around 3rd and M Street or someplace as a root beer float stand in the early '30s I think, and gradually went on and then became Marriott, you know.

PIEHLER: Yeah, it's interesting because the Hot Shop was a very distinctive Washington ...

BRAY: That's right, and then they opened up some in Virginia, northern Virginia, and all of a sudden it just bloomed; just bloomed and then they became Marriott ...

PIEHLER: What was it like to be on a ship—you mentioned getting seasick, but one of the things about destroyers is nothing about the Navy, particularly in World War II is luxurious, even ... the officer's quarters. I was really struck when once I was on a WWII destroyer when I first started doing oral history interviews, and I just couldn't believe how compact [it was]. I mean ... just seeing it, especially where the enlisted personnel slept. Could you talk a little bit about that?

BRAY: You see ... this ship is only forty-two feet wide. It's got a beam of like 41.10 or something like that ... It's about 370 odd feet long. That's you know, longer than a football field, that's a good size ship. It is very tight. You've got three tiers of bunks and when you go through, especially in war zones, when you go through a hatch you ... close the hatch because you want a watertight situation. Of course, ships, they can stay afloat a long time unless you get too much water in them. So you always close the hatch when you go through them. But you never ... and of course it's always moving and you get these (Wave motions with hands) all the time and when you get off, when you get to port, you're staggering around because it seems so funny to not be doing that. It never really goes away, although you certainly adjust to it. Then sometimes it gets so bad that even the bow is under the water and it comes up and it's pitching. It's very dangerous to go over too far when you're going. I can remember being on the wheel ... on the helm, and watching an inclinometer; the little thing that swings and it tells you the degrees, of ... where you are. If you go over [too far] that thing is hanging down and it's measuring what the angle is, and I can remember seeing fifty-six degrees and forty-five degrees is like that (Gestures), isn't it? Here's perpendicular, horizontal, that's forty-five degrees. I can remember being fifty-six degrees, and I tell you. Then when she comes back, she comes whippin' back and goes the other way! And you've gotta hang on to things to stay, you know, and you can't eat; you gotta eat standing up. We saw quite a bit of that.

PIEHLER: Were you in some of those horrible typhoons?

BRAY: They had two, one in June and one in October.

PIEHLER: So you were ...

BRAY: I went through both of them.

PIEHLER: And you went through those on the bridge?

BRAY: Both of them; I did. Although we, in one case, we were sort of protected by landmass; we got inside something. And the other one, we headed into the wind and kept it always right into the wind [because] you don't want to get broadside, and kept maybe ten knots on. And you were sittin' still because you ... maybe you had ten knots registered ... telling the engine room to give us ten knots, but you're just sitting there. The wind's holding you still like a satellite.

PIEHLER: Which was more frightening for you on a personal level—combat or these typhoons?

BRAY: Well, the typhoons, honest to God, I did not worry about too much.

PIEHLER: You did not?

BRAY: No because we seemed to be, well, we had a tremendously professional skipper. I just love him.

PIEHLER: Since you mentioned the skipper in passing, we should ...

BRAY: I don't have a picture of him. I don't have a picture of him.

PIEHLER: Your skipper who was Annapolis, what was his name again?

BRAY: Uh, let's see, we called him Uncle Ed. (Laughter) Oh come on, Charlie ... wait a minute—Foster.

PIEHLER: Edward L. Foster.

BRAY: Edward L. Foster. He was Annapolis man. He'd had two destroyers before ours.

PIEHLER: So this was his third command.

BRAY: Third command; and he could write a book on how to survive a war. He was so—he saved us. I refer to that in my speech here that I gave you.

PIEHLER: A copy of.

BRAY: Yeah. We, just very briefly, well I've gotten too far ahead of myself. Anyhow, suffice to say he was just a tremendously skilled skipper. I just know that I wouldn't be sitting here if we hadn't had him, because so many skippers weren't that good.

PIEHLER: What had happened to his first two commands?

BRAY: I think they just—maybe they were smaller and they kept ... he was so good, they put him ... this is the best destroyer they had. This is the most modern destroyer they had.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like he had risen up?

BRAY: Oh, definitely.

PIEHLER: One of the things you've observed—I wanted to ask you because you've alluded to this a little bit. But the Navy, I get the sense, was the most hierarchical of the services?

BRAY: It definitely is.

PIEHLER: But you've also alluded to the differences within that. You thought the captain was just a great guy. It sounds like he didn't believe in much, what was termed, chicken shit. He was not a ...

BRAY: That's right. I'll tell you what; this is what made him good. He treated the officers just like he treated the men. He was, you might even call him aloof, but he had the heart, you know, for every [man] he was just loved by his crew. Because he was not chicken shit. He was not ... he didn't let the officers get away with anything, badgering us. He kept those officers under control. And we had some that could've gotten out of control, and I can name names.

PIEHLER: It's interesting ... in some ways you're in one of the few ratings where you have a lot of contact with officers. A lot of enlisted personnel say, "Officers are these distant beings who mainly do chicken shit on us." Whereas you're with officers, but it strikes me that he very much believed ...

BRAY: Oh, he ... I wish I'd brought you a copy of his speech he made when he left. We got a new skipper in June after most of the bad stuff had passed, and I liked him, too. He was good. He was the exec [executive officer] and he was promoted to skipper. But—no, I'm sorry, I misspoke. We got a different guy. He was also Annapolis.

PIEHLER: Annapolis?

BRAY: But he was ...

PIEHLER: But similarly?

BRAY: Yeah, he was good, but he wasn't as proficient as Foster.

PIEHLER: Well, you also indicated that—I get the sense that he [Foster] held both enlisted and officers to the same standard.

BRAY: He really did, and they had so much respect. Everybody, both officers and men, had so much respect for him. The ... I just can't over emphasize what the relationship was of that whole ship; that whole crew. I never heard one smidgeon of criticism, ever, about that captain. And that is, that's unusual. And he died too young. We had several reunions later, or we've had about seven or eight reunions. The latest one being in San Diego in '91 I think. But we had the first one in '86, I think, and he'd all ready died at that point. But the second skipper was there, though.

PIEHLER: It sounds like he was well-remembered at these reunions.

BRAY: Oh, yeah, oh yeah ... of course ... at the reunions we give the second skipper a lot of credit, but in the back of my mind he didn't hold a candle to the first one.

PIEHLER: And taking nothing away, it sounds like, from the second one.

BRAY: No, no the second was fine. He was probably above average. He was an Annapolis man, in fact, he was one of their main football players. See, he doesn't make that impression on me, I can't remember his name, but he was a good guy.

PIEHLER: You also indicated earlier—and since we're on the question of officer, enlisted, and leadership ... the flag officer you had aboard did not leave this positive of an impression on you?

BRAY: He was commander.

PIEHLER: Commander.

BRAY: But he was a flag officer, and I walked in to him ... we were supposed to tell the flag officer it was twelve o'clock, too. So this was just barely after the war; this was probably in October [1945], just barely after the war, and he had replaced the other flag officer. So I walked into his office, and you know, knocked. [He said]"Aye!" I go in, "Its twelve o'clock sir." He looked me up and down, and I had a blue denim shirt on ... but I always kept the tail cut off. I never did want to tuck my tail in so it was sticking down about that far, and I'd sewed it and, you know, hemmed it and I wore it through the war that way. He said, "You get out of here sailor and get some clothes on!" I said, "Aye, sir!" (Laughter) See I ... then I had another one say, "Sam"—that was the nickname that I had at that time. "Sam, you know this is an officer's Navy, don't you?" (Laughter) But he was executive officer. He was okay. But I tell you, he wouldn't have been okay if he hadn't had that captain over him I bet you. He would've been tough. He would've been chicken shit. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you had some sense that you were lucky with this captain [Foster].

BRAY: Oh, in more ways than one. We were lucky because he kept the officer's in line and lucky because he knew what he was doing. Yeah, I ... I can't think of many people that I had

such respect for. I'll tell you that crew would've gone to—anything he wanted them to do, he would've done it. We would've all ... the esprit de corps on that ship was just unbelievable.

PIEHLER: I just thought I'd give Jessica a chance to ...

WARD: I was wondering while we're on the subject of life on the ship, you did answer most of the questions I had, but also I was wondering about African Americans. We read a book about African Americans in the Navy, in particular, and ... were there any on your ship?

BRAY: Sure, oh yeah. We had Mayberry. Let's see ... we had Washington, we had Jefferson ... that's three; Hitchcock, that's four. I think there was one more. But they were all stewards and they served the officers. They were the officers' stewards and they were the ones that brought the—if the officer of the deck on the bridge wanted a cup of coffee, he'd push a button, and a steward would come up. He'd say, "Bring a cup of coffee, and do whatever." So he'd do it. They'd serve him at the table. They were like the Filipinos, you know, the Philippines. The old Navy ... steward's mates, but what they did do, though, they had their GQ stations on guns. They were a part of the gun crews at General Quarters, oh yeah. That, uh, and they kept to themselves. It was ... segregated, no question about it. They had their own place to sleep, and there's no sense in—it's just the way it worked.

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

BRAY: As far as I know they served well on the guns; they were probably the ammunition handlers. They weren't the guys doing the sighting, we had professionals doing that.

PIEHLER: When you were on the deck it sounds like you did not do watches.

BRAY: Oh yeah, oh yeah; four on, eight off, absolutely. Seven days a week.

PIEHLER: So you would also do watches?

BRAY: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: How often would you steer the ship?

BRAY: Okay, I'll tell you exactly ...

PIEHLER: I guess I'd like to get a sense of your routine.

BRAY: Okay, all right. Here are six guys. We have a chief; he doesn't do nothing but pick his nose. (Laughter) But anyhow, we'd see him once in a while—good guy but ... There was first class, and I was second class ... seaman, seaman strikers; we called them strikers. And third class. Okay, two of us, Fratentaro and I were on one watch. Mahoney and Reisinger were in the other, and these two were on ...

PIEHLER: And that was the pattern?

BRAY: That was the pattern, yeah.

PIEHLER: You didn't switch off and on?

BRAY: That's right. There was four on, four off, but you rotated.

PIEHLER: You rotated?

BRAY: You weren't always on at the same time. You had a little ... you weren't on midnight shifts all the time. They had it fixed so it would work it out. I would be on the wheel; we'd take it—usually Fratentaro—you could take it any way you wanted to, but we'd be on an hour a piece. He'd be on an hour at the wheel and then I'd take it for an hour and vice versa. I always was ahead of him; he was a seaman striker when he came aboard and he made third class. I would keep the log, and I was in charge of the lookouts, and worked with the signalmen, and all that. And helped with the officer of the deck and spoke for the quartermaster of my watch. Mahoney, he spoke for them, and Gourley spoke for them. So that's the way we had three watches, four on eight off.

PIEHLER: In fact, it's sort of funny, I asked the question using the wrong terminology. You would not do actual lookout duty. You would supervise the lookout?

BRAY: No, no ... I'd look out, but ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, but you were not—that was not something you had to do.

BRAY: I'm in charge of the lookouts there and we were to make sure that they didn't go to sleep or whatever; to make 'em be alert.

PIEHLER: In some ways the two of you, when you were on watch, and the officer of the deck, you were really in control of the ship.

BRAY: We were. And the captain was asleep just right around the corner in his sea cabin.

PIEHLER: Ultimately the captain is always responsible, but one of the things that struck me when I've interviewed a few officers who've been officers of the deck ... all the officers invariably become officer of the deck at some point.

BRAY: Most of them.

PIEHLER: Most of them do. I mean it's—well, particularly on smaller ships.

BRAY: Well, they have junior officers that watch too. They have an understudy.

PIEHLER: Yeah

BRAY: And then they graduate maybe to officer of the deck.

PIEHLER: But it's something particularly on smaller ships they're more likely to do. It strikes me as a sort of heady, but also a frightening experience to be an officer of the deck. Because as this one officer said, I mean, he's in the middle of this horrible storm off the coast of Alaska, you know, the ship is getting—the pressure is denting the hull. And I just remember he said the captain did check on them at one point, but he was in charge. He said it was a really ...

BRAY: It is ... a tremendous responsibility and not all officers, line officers, can handle it.

PIEHLER: When you say not all could handle it?

BRAY: They'd go run to the captain, "Captain, what shall I do?" or, you know, maybe, "Go tell the captain that so and so." But others, the good ones, you know ...

PIEHLER: So you could tell the difference?

BRAY: Oh yeah, absolutely.

PIEHLER: So some of it was going to the captain right away?

BRAY: Right. That's right, and he doesn't—I mean the captain, he got very little sleep, that poor man because we were at GQ [General Quarters- battle preparation] so much at Okinawa. We were at GQ—well, routinely we'd go on GQ before daylight and wait till the sun came, whether we just got off watch [or not]; we'd still do that. So we had all this GQ stuff in addition to when—and GQ, everybody's on watch. When you're steering, we called it steaming routine, you've got one-third on duty, two-thirds off duty. But on GQ you've got one hundred percent on duty.

PIEHLER: You were all on deck?

BRAY: That's right; all over the ship.

PIEHLER: All over the ship?

BRAY: All over the ship.

PIEHLER: I guess ... particularly when you're steaming, when you're not on duty, what did you do? Well obviously you slept.

BRAY: We had lots of things to do. Well, you mean for recreation?

PIEHLER: Yeah. You were obviously sleeping for part of it.

BRAY: Well we had a lot of other things to do like, for example, we had to keep the chart corrected. We had some of the things I've mentioned ... some of them are menial. I played a lot

of chess with one of the radiomen. We did that, and people played cards, and people slept; of course you're going to sleep, out there you're going to grab your sleep whenever you can get it. When you're steaming, though, if you're steaming across the ocean with no really particular worries then you're going to be more active and not be in your sack that much. But when you're in a battle zone, you're going to hit that sack every chance you get because you don't know when you're going to be on GQ, so everybody's up. But—and I think, I don't know how much you'll get out of it ... on my speech. I didn't go into the personal stuff much on that speech. That was mostly the war [and] what was going on.

PIEHLER: When you came aboard the destroyer ... where did you expect to go? Did you expect to go to the Pacific, or did you think you could still be in the Atlantic?

BRAY: Uh, honestly I didn't know.

PIEHLER: You didn't know?

BRAY: But, I mean we very quickly found out we were going through the [Panama] Canal.

PIEHLER: That's when you definitely knew?

BRAY: Well we knew before then.

PIEHLER: You knew when they gave you orders to go through the Canal?

BRAY: Oh yeah. We knew before we even went on our shake-down, I'm sure. Yeah, we—and we had to go up to Yorktown, up the river ... the Chesapeake to pick up that load of mines, which we never used. We got rid of them in Pearl [Harbor], but anyhow, we knew that, well you don't need mines in the Atlantic, do you?

PIEHLER: So that was one of the signs?

BRAY: That was one of the good reasons. (Laughter) So then we got through the Canal and went to ... Long Beach, I guess it was, and then Pearl, and then right on out.

PIEHLER: Did you get any leave in Hawaii? I think you even mentioned you had some advanced firefighting [training] there.

BRAY: Yeah, we did, and we also had a little training in LORAN.

PIEHLER: LORAN?

BRAY: Long-range navigation, and firefighting, but we didn't spend much time there. Oh, we went out and did some sleeve firing, I think. Just a few days, you know. And we were able to go over to Waikiki a little bit, and ...

PIEHLER: What about Honolulu, did you make it to Honolulu?

BRAY: Yeah, oh yeah.

PIEHLER: I've read that Honolulu was just packed with service people.

BRAY: Oh, it was, it was. You (Laughs) well, it was sort of like Norfolk. Girls didn't want to have anything to do with you (Laughing). Rochester was much nicer. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Really? When you say Rochester ...

BRAY: That was a great liberty town.

PIEHLER: When you say Rochester was a lot nicer, any particular memories?

BRAY: Well, because when I was in Samson I went over to Rochester for a little weekend or something like that and everybody loved you.

PIEHLER: So you could get a date very easily?

BRAY: Oh well, I wouldn't know about that, but you know ... people were friendly [and would] buy you a drink.

PIEHLER: That type?

BRAY: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you ever get invited to someone's home?

BRAY: No.

PIEHLER: But in a bar, people would buy you a drink?

BRAY: Yeah. I did shore patrol when we were in Boston some, and that's an experience. You see a little bit of everything (Laughs).

PIEHLER: What was shore patrol? I mean I have a certain image of shore patrol, but what was ...

BRAY: Well, okay, each ship was required to send X number of guys out for shore patrol at night in Scully's Square and, you know, places like that. They'd pick about maybe three people a night from the [USS] *Shannon* and so I served that way. You just put your belt on, and ... [you've] got your Billy club, and you go around to the various bars and make sure that nothing was going on that shouldn't be going on. And then after a certain time, everybody was supposed to be gone, and the only thing left were the girls (Laughs). So shore patrols got friendly with the girls. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So was that all just, you know, drunken sailors and ...

BRAY: Well, I can't recall having any trouble.

PIEHLER: So you did not have a bad shore patrol?

BRAY: No.

PIEHLER: In fact, there were some fun parts to shore patrol? (Laughs)

BRAY: There were some fun parts, yeah.

PIEHLER: One thing I want to make—it's a standard question I often ask, what's your most vivid memory of combat? Or is there a particular vivid ...

BRAY: Oh boy, I've got a couple of those, yeah. I came within twenty feet of not sitting here I know that. I've written about this in that thing I gave you. We just almost bought the farm one night. Just very briefly, and it's in there, we were attacked about midnight by a, actually a Japanese zero it turned out, and it came in from the stern, and that was ...

PIEHLER: And it's a kamikaze?

BRAY: A kamikaze coming in, and that's the—you've got 370 feet of destroyer and he's coming in from the stern. He's got a lot of target. So we picked him up probably about 10,000, oh, more than 10,000 yards away probably, well, maybe not. We took him under fire at four miles, I guess, 8,000 feet. So we immediately kicked it up to flank speed, 35 knots, and we got him to the point where he was at the very last minute ... almost seconds; we got him squarely on the beam, the port beam. We were going this way and he had been coming this way, (Gestures) and we swung around, and we got him squarely on the, I mean as square as you could get him on the beam. And we have two smokestacks, and he came right between those smokestacks and cut an antenna wire between those and I was twenty feet below him, right here below him (Gestures) on the topside. He crashed twenty-five yards off and stuff flew back on; debris, gasoline, water exploded, everything. And nobody, unbelievably, nobody got hurt. I was standing there, and I had a little bit of steel between me and him. But I mean on the side. The guy that I played chess with, we were on the watch together; that was our GQ station. And it was over in a split second. Zip! He was gone, but then, you know. (Makes explosion sound) That was my most memorable experience.

PIEHLER: It also sounds like it was your closest call.

BRAY: That was our closest call, but there were other times. Especially one night, we were attacked for over two hours off and on by several—we were out on a picket station, just two destroyers, and uh, I think it was three or four small amphibious craft. I don't know how in the world we survived all the attacks that we underwent that night.

WARD: Was this during Okinawa?

BRAY: This is all at Okinawa. [At] Iwo Jima we did not have any kamikazes that ... I didn't see any kamikazes.

PIEHLER: Yeah, we sort of skipped over Iwo Jima, but since we're on ... Okinawa. I interviewed this junior officer, Ray Talbot who was on these picket duties at Okinawa, did your destroyer mainly do picket?

BRAY: That's what we were doing.

PIEHLER: That was very—most picket ships didn't make it, or there was a high ...

BRAY: Well, you see that's what we're—I just picked out two or three [pictures] to show you. That's what happened to one of the ships in our squadron. Um, we had twelve ships to a squadron and we had only one ship out of those twelve that didn't get damaged. We had eleven ships out of twelve, if we include ours, that was [damaged]. We were lucky. We were awfully, awfully lucky. Ours ... took a little damage, so it counts right? [Although of the eleven which were damaged, none were actually sunk. Three were damaged so severely that they were reduced to scrap. Also, numbers of killed and wounded crewmen were very heavy.]

PIEHLER: But still you had nothing like the damage that we see here?

BRAY: Oh, no, no. Nobody got ...

PIEHLER: I mean ...

BRAY: No, that's right.

PIEHLER: No one got killed on your ship from the ...

BRAY: Nobody got—we survived.

PIEHLER: That's a remarkable record.

BRAY: That's the captain.

PIEHLER: Some of it strikes me as luck, but the captain really knew [what he was doing].

BRAY: Oh, he could write the book, and he really did it. For example, as you'll see there in that speech, we were attacked, as I say, by several two-engine bombers ... over a period of two and a half hours. [Fortunately, we were patrolling with the USS *Smith* (DM-23), which also had a fine skipper. Our two ships worked very well together, switching targets as appropriate, and both came through without a scratch.] We ... fired almost 900 rounds of five-inch ammunition during that period of time. And those are five-inch, those are hand ... you know.

PIEHLER: You hand loaded it?

BRAY: I mean to shoot that many ammo, we would have to go back to get more ammunition, we depleted what we had. But we had them dive on us. We had them throw aerial torpedoes at us. We had them bomb us and we were all over the ocean, trying to keep up with things. We had them coming in from both sides, and just two ships, two destroyers [were] on a picket station, and yet we did not take any hits. The ship that we relieved was hit the night before we relieved it. We stayed there three nights and this was the last night that this happened, so we were out of ammo. So we had ...

PIEHLER: You literally had to leave?

BRAY: Had to leave. We were relieved by somebody else and that very night, that ship was knocked out of the war. It was hit, and they lost—they had, oh I don't know, seventy-some-odd casualties. And ...we were book ended by two of those. And I don't put it to luck necessarily ...

PIEHLER: No, you think the captain really had this skill ...

BRAY: I think that captain was just so knowledgeable, and he did write something for the other skippers. He says, "This is what I do." And his method was speed and maneuverability. We had twin screws and you can really get around, you can really ...

PIEHLER: That's one of the things I've read, that the destroyer was extremely maneuverable. What you lacked in sort of heft, you could really move a destroyer very quickly.

BRAY: Oh yeah, because you had twin screws.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: You had the forward engine room and a after engine room. You could really whip it around. So a lot of 'em, at night, some of the captains liked to go very slowly and report, you know, because they didn't leave any wake. When you're going thirty-five knots you're leaving a lot of wake, and it's easy to follow and easy to spot at night by a plane, especially if he knows approximately where you are because the stations are all ...

PIEHLER: Part of the point of the picket duty is, in fact, to serve as a picket, so you're even in a ...

BRAY: Oh, that's right.

PIEHLER: You're in a very vulnerable [position].

BRAY: I thought I had a little chart in here showing the picket stations (Looks through papers). Well, maybe I didn't. Well, I guess not. Anyhow, these picket stations were—we had sixteen of them and they were located ... anywhere from thirty to seventy-five miles away from the harbor, like the spokes on a wheel. Then we had destroyers on the inside as well; inside that, but the ones way out there were completely vulnerable at night, especially. In the daytime we did have the

combat air patrol fighter protection, but they couldn't necessarily handle them. There were too many of them. First on April the 6th we had 700 planes come in, in one day; 700 Japanese planes, 354 of 'em were kamikazes. This is documented by official Navy historians. We had, I think, twenty-nine ships hit that day. They—the pickets were lucky that time because that was in the early stages. They wanted to try to get the troop ships that came in all the way to the anchorage. Most of them got shot down before they got there. Not near—I mean those Navy pilots and Marine pilots had a field day, especially way out before they could get close. They shot down hundreds of them. But they started out with 700, so, uh, as time went by, though, they realized that they weren't going to make it to the anchorage because ... there was too much ... much defense. So they started picking on the picket ships, and that's when you had, like one of our sister ships, the [USS] *Aaron_Ward* was attacked by thirty-two planes and she was hit by six. [She was on patrol with the USS *Little* (DD-803), and the latter was hit at the same time by aircraft, one of which broke her keel. The *Little* sank in less than fifteen minutes. One of the small patrol boats was also sunk by a suicide plane.] And ... [the USS *Shannon* was called off another picket station and took the USS *Ward* in tow around midnight, with no lights showing, and towed her over fifty miles to safe haven.] That was unbelievable because we had bogeys, and that time we couldn't make any speed. We were only making five knots, I think. So we were slowly getting that ship back; trying to get it back, and there were bogeys in the area, but we held fire. We couldn't, if we'd opened up fire, it would've given our position away. So that was touchy; very, very dicey. And we had a lot of others which ... we knocked them down before they got to us. I think we had a total of twelve, I believe, we've been given credit for. And we had three that we're pretty sure we did, but couldn't absolutely say for sure.

PIEHLER: Going back, because when you were in Hawaii you said you'd heard ... that there was such a thing as kamikazes? No?

BRAY: Yeah , but it was at Iwo when we ...

PIEHLER: It was Iwo that you—that's when you ...

BRAY: Yeah, yeah and this was also happening in the Philippines.

PIEHLER: Yeah. When you first heard about this concept, did it fully register?

BRAY: Oh, not at all. No it didn't. See Nimitz put a news blackout on it. When they started this program in October of 1944 in the Philippines they hit four of our light aircraft carriers, not the big [ones], the light ones, and killed over a thousand guys, immediately Nimitz put a news blackout on everything and the correspondents were not allowed to—and the newspapers were prevented from saying anything about this. So everybody thought the war in the Pacific, you know ... they were “Rah, Rah, Rah” V-E Day, May the 8th, you know. Everybody was thinking, “Oh, great, we whipped those Heinies and the war will be over anytime now.” But this was by far the worst, costly battle in the U. S. Navy's history. We lost almost 5,000 killed and almost that same number wounded. I think there were almost 400 ships hit.

PIEHLER: Now ...

BRAY: Now that's powerful.

PIEHLER: It's interesting because I think in the popular consciousness—I did not have a full appreciation of two key battles I think. The Battle of the Bulge; I had a much different appreciation interviewing combat soldiers, and also Okinawa for the Navy's war.

BRAY: News blackout, that's right, the news blackout was it. Let me see. (Looking through papers) That was ... the whole—and the guys didn't write about it until it was all over. Let's see—well, I'll just read you this little bit. This was a guy—this is one of the books. This is a fairly current paperback, said it was published originally in '92, written by a guy by the name of Feifer, yeah, George Feifer. The title of the book is [*Tennozan:*] *The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*. He writes, "The American hardship on Okinawa never won rightful recognition. I hope my account of it will give a new generation a hint of the fighting man's terrible ordeal of the toil, terror, and misery. Their accomplishments in the face of appalling adversity remain hardly known by the general public to this day." He goes on to say that he thinks that, literally, it took sixty days longer to take Okinawa than they had planned. He ... indicated that, "the prolonged and unexpected ferocity of the battle could very well have triggered President Truman's use of the atomic bomb." And I do believe that had a lot to do with it because had we gone into Japan, as I've written here, you wouldn't believe what they had waiting for us. It was going to make Okinawa look like a picnic.

PIEHLER: I should go back because we sort of skipped to Okinawa, but your ship was part of the invasion of Iwo Jima?

BRAY: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: And could you describe your ship's role and how you sort of fit into that? Because that was your first combat.

BRAY: Okay, so we ... we're in Pearl, and we proceed to Eniwetok and make up with the group that was going to invade Iwo Jima, and that consisted of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Marine divisions. And we escorted them to Iwo Jima and watched them as they hit the beach on the 19th of February. And initially it looked as though they were gonna just go right on through it, because the Japanese didn't fire at them, hardly. There was some. I did see some mortar fire splashing down amongst the landing craft, but you didn't really know what was going on. They waited until those guys got ashore. They had trouble getting up over through this ash, this volcanic ash. It was up over a slope and they couldn't get their vehicles, their track vehicles, to climb that thing to get up over that. And so eventually they did. They scrambled and got up there and then all of a sudden all hell broke loose because that thing is only four miles long by two miles wide, I think it is; very small island. And Mount Suribachi's here and the rest of it. But every gun, and mortar, and everything was zeroed in on certain spots and they just made mincemeat out of those guys. We sat there and watched it.

PIEHLER: You didn't have any Marines on your ship?

BRAY: We had no marines on our ship.

PIEHLER: So you had no role in the landing itself?

BRAY: No, we were there on top of the island, though. We were right on top of it, and we—as close as we could get.

PIEHLER: Would you do fire missions?

BRAY: Direct fire. But we had to wait until ... the observers, both aerial and ground observers, could start. We looked and we found bunkers ourselves just by looking, and we'd take those out.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: You could take 'em out with a five-inch shell. But that wasn't—they were seven stories down. I mean it was honeycombed [like] you wouldn't believe. That place was bombarded for days and days by battleships and bombers, and they just went underground, and it didn't affect them. I'll bet you we didn't hurt hardly any. It was all—they had ways of just disappearing, and everything was underground. And all of a sudden, they'd ... you might see—the Marines were the ones that saw it. They had all of these spider holes around, and they'd pop up and then they'd disappear, and you couldn't ... and guns would roll out and roll back. And, you know, they'd be in tunnels. They'd roll out and shoot then go back. The Marines lost almost 5,000 people killed and over 25,000 casualties.

PIEHLER: Being aboard the ship, what sense did you have—you said you could observe the battle atop ...

BRAY: It was unbelievable. It was like a movie.

PIEHLER: That was your sense of it?

BRAY: And, well, we were getting shot at some, but not that way. The Navy lost almost 1,000 men and had almost 3,000 ... [wounded] I think, but that was small potatoes compared to what those Marines were going through. We were over there at the base of Suribachi, supporting that group and they called us off as they were going up, and they headed up that. That was the early days too.

PIEHLER: Then your ships role, in a sense, was finished?

BRAY: No, we went elsewhere.

PIEHLER: Elsewhere.

BRAY: Yeah, and we would—in daytime we'd fire and at nighttime we'd fire illumination shells. We'd fire a shell, a light, and it would parachute down slowly and light up the area to let the Marines know whether or not there was anybody coming. Of course the battle line was established for the night, and [we] tried to keep it illuminated over the enemy so they could see.

PIEHLER: Because things were so blacked out, this must have been a very eerie site these illumination shells.

BRAY: Well, you can't strike a match on a ship, you know.

PIEHLER: Exactly. Lights were all muffled.

BRAY: Real dim. I'd try to keep my log ... (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So when you're shooting these illumination rounds—it must've been ...

BRAY: Like 4th of July.

PIEHLER: So, what I'm thinking is, it was in fact ...

BRAY: That's right. We saw a lot of action with flamethrowers, Marines using flamethrowers, and you know they were close. It was just—well, it just kept you with a pit in your stomach all the time watching those guys go through that. But ... I tell you that not enough praise can be put on those guys; unbelievable.

PIEHLER: My sense is destroyers are too small for chaplains, did you have a chaplain?

BRAY: We had an acting, or a person, who had a certificate, you might say. One of the seaman.

PIEHLER: And what ...

BRAY: I think he was a carpenter's mate.

PIEHLER: And he was—did ...

BRAY: He'd hold service on Sundays, yeah.

PIEHLER: A Protestant [service]?

BRAY: Yeah. And people that wanted to would they'd have—of course ... I don't think we did that much during the hot time, but it was frequently—if appropriate we did that, yeah.

PIEHLER: You mentioned the doctor couldn't take it. Did you have a pharmacist's mate?

BRAY: We had a chief pharmacist's mate and two others. We had three pharmacist's mates.

PIEHLER: Three pharmacist's mates.

BRAY: Yeah, and they were, you know, they were out of a job pretty much except for bad colds and things like that. We were so lucky.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you fortunately did not have the serious casualties of other ships.

BRAY: Oh, no. You see that's why I'm saying I'm so lucky to be here, with the captain and the crew we had, truly.

PIEHLER: And how did you find Navy food aboard your ship? How was that?

BRAY: You know you get tired of it. It was a lot of dehydrated stuff; potatoes and you had powdered milk, and we didn't have any fruit. We did have ice cream, though. We could make ice cream out of powdered milk, which tasted pretty good. It ... it wasn't like MRIs, like the Army's used to, but it wasn't like base chow either.

PIEHLER: No, the base chow, it sounds like that was superior.

BRAY: That was pretty good. We had some good cooks, but we had a lot of, you know, one dish meals or a lot of stews or something like that, something easy. And if the weather was rough, we'd have sandwiches. Because your plates would fly ... (Laughs) so you had to stand and eat. But the Pacific is a lot calmer than the Atlantic. Yeah, the worst, some of the worst weather that we ran into was right off the coast of Cape Hatteras.

PIEHLER: The shakedown cruise?

BRAY: Right. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: What about saltwater showers? Was that—or did your condenser ...

BRAY: Um, well, let's see, I know we had fresh, I believe we had freshwater showers. Yeah, we did. We had salt running through the latrines, but we had a good ...

PIEHLER: Your condenser ...

BRAY: Condenser. Yeah, we did. And we only had a certain limited ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: We were limited in time, but we did have ... you'd want to lather up and then quickly get showered up. We were lucky that way. This was a modern destroyer, best that we had. It was a Sumner class, 2200 tons.

PIEHLER: One of the things you've shown us is in this book, and you're going to donate all this, you showed us that you went ashore. You looked for an excuse to go ashore on Okinawa.

BRAY: Yeah. Well, let's see. (Looking through papers) I don't know if I have a picture of Nagasaki, or Sasebo, in here but ...

PIEHLER: Was the land fighting still going on?

BRAY: Oh, no this was after the—they'd been signed. There's Nagasaki.

PIEHLER: No, but when you went aboard for Okinawa, you showed that the captured flag.

BRAY: Oh, yeah, that's an old story I might tell.

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah. You acquired a flag on ...

BRAY: The war was still going on, oh yeah.

PIEHLER: Because you picked this up July 11th, 1945 in, I think its Naha, Okinawa.

BRAY: That's right.

PIEHLER: And you told us the story before we started taping, but you looked for an excuse to get ashore.

BRAY: Right, I did because we hadn't been ashore in, as I said, it must've been over three months. Because you never—you fuel at sea, you fuel while you're going, you know. So we really were underway practically all the time. Once in a great while we'd go to a tender and get some groceries, but that was rare. Anyhow, I definitely wanted to get over there and just put my foot on that island since we'd been there. At that point, I was pretty sure that our ship was going to stay where it was. It was tied to the anchor. It was—we were slated to stay all day and leave the next day. So this was in the morning. So I told the first class, ol' Mahoney there, that I wanted to get a, well, I didn't tell him, I told somebody else. Anyhow, he didn't notice. I told him I was going to go over to the tender and get a chart, get a couple of charts we needed. So I got over there and I just kept going. I got a little boat, somebody was going to the beach, so I said, "Can I get a ride with you?" Okay, so I go over to the beach and I spent hours walking around over there ... where the battle had been. And GIs were around and the CBs [Navy construction battalions] were there working on the harbor. And so it was busy, very busy. So I wasn't in any particular danger, certainly, unless I stepped on a mine or something. But I just wanted to get something, a souvenir, so I approached these GI's and they were sitting there eating their lunch or something ... And couldn't find anything ... I said, "Boy, I sure would like to be able to take something home." He said, "Well, what have we got here for you?" So he pulled out this flag.

PIEHLER: This Japanese flag.

BRAY: It's a Japanese flag. It's about that so [wide] and there was ... a little pipe with a long bamboo stem on it, an opium pipe, apparently. Also a, sort of, a badge that they said came off a Marine, and it probably has his name on there. I bet you if I approached a Japanese embassy, they could probably track it down. Anyhow, he said, "Here's something you can have." I said, "Well, how much do I owe you?" He said, "Oh, give me a buck." (Laughs) So, I mean, there's plenty of stuff around. I looked out, after a while, I kept looking around and went down to watch

the CBs a while. I looked out and all of a sudden I realized I saw smoke come out of one of our stacks and they were firing up and they were—because if you're not going to go, you close your fires, and you cool them off. But they were obviously getting ready to go. And I was here and they were there, and I'd have been AWOL sure as the world if I hadn't got back. Well, I spent a very few hectic minutes trying to get somebody that was going back to that tender because I was pretty sure once I got to the tender I could get on to the ship. Well, it was really a good thirty minutes that I was hustling, "Gee you going over there?" "Nah, we're going over there," but finally I found somebody that was going to the tender and got back. And just as I got back they were ready to raise the brow. Yeah, what they call raise the brow because, you know, you've got a brow that slopes down that you can walk up. And this first class quartermaster that was there, Mahoney. He said, "Sam, where the hell have you been?! I've been looking for you!" I said, "I had to go to the tender, you know, I got to get charts." I had this chart with me. "Ah, get to your station!" (Laughs) When you're getting underway ... you post a special sea detail and everybody has a position on that, just like GQ. So I wasn't on my position. So, anyhow, that's how that happened.

PIEHLER: And that was the only time you set foot on Okinawa?

BRAY: That's the only time I set foot.

PIEHLER: And the ship never did?

BRAY: Oh, no. We were always, but, no, later on there was a detail sent over to get some provisions.

PIEHLER: But that was ...

BRAY: That was later. That was actually after the war as a matter of fact.

PIEHLER: And the same thing applied to Iwo Jima, no one ever set foot on the island?

BRAY: No.

PIEHLER: Now, I'm curious, there's a picture you showed us of when you got the news the war ended. Where was the ship located when you had heard the news?

BRAY: We were off Okinawa. We had been sweeping mines, here's the minefields (Points to map). Let's see—let me find ... Okay this is Okinawa right here. It's pretty small. See those two dots? That's Okinawa there, and these figures you see in here are in fathoms. Like way out here, this is a long ways from—this one's only... eighty-four fathoms deep, I guess. That means that that's less than 600 feet deep. All of this water is less than 600 feet deep. So wherever you see these patches is where they had mines sewn. This is like 125 miles long and probably forty or fifty miles wide and so forth. This was in the path of the expected invasions so we were spending our time—we worked on Juneau, I think, in July and into August. It just so happened that when the war ended we were back at Okinawa for some reason. I don't remember for sure, but we had been sweeping mines.

PIEHLER: Sweeping mines in preparation for the invasion?

BRAY: For the invasion. The invasion was set for November the 1st and the atomic bomb had not been tested yet. So the atomic bomb was tested, I think, around the 15th of July in New Mexico. So the Japanese were feverishly, as I'd say, were getting ready for us in so many ways, and so Truman had to make the decision "Do we continue with the invasion or do we drop this bomb?" And well you know the rest of the story.

PIEHLER: I'm curious about minesweeping, particularly since you were on the bridge. Could you describe that task, particularly from your perspective on the bridge?

BRAY: Okay, we have different types of minesweepers. You have wooden hull minesweepers with shallow draft, doesn't have maybe ten feet ... very shallow draft. Then you have metal ships that are much bigger like DEs [Destroyer Escorts], converted Des, or what they call YMSs [District Motor Minesweeper], but anyhow, they come in various styles. What you try to do is—first of all, you gotta have some idea of where the minefield is, and I don't know how we figured out where those minefields were. We must've gotten it through communications intelligence.

PIEHLER: But at the time you were completely puzzled?

BRAY: I didn't know, but yeah, somebody knew, somebody knew. So what you'd do is—let me, if I can have a piece of paper I'll (Gets paper). Okay, say this is a ship. We expect the minefield to be somewhere, like so, (Drawing sketch) and here's the ship. We'll say it's a wooden ship because it doesn't attract metal. I mean it's not metal, so it doesn't attract the ... magnetic mines is what I'm trying to say. The kind of mines we were sweeping were moored horn mines, and I think you have to break a horn to let acid leak into the explosive and that sets it off. What they do is; they're anchored to the bottom of the ocean, and generally ... you can only put an anchor so deep. You can go down [and] 600 feet is not too bad. The Japanese put a cable on it, run it down 600 feet, and it rests on the bottom. On top, here's the water, (Still sketching) the mine is underneath here, maybe twelve, fifteen feet deep, and this is the water. So the ship comes along and breaks one of these horns and sets off that mine. That mine is huge and ... it will kill a destroyer. It's unbelievable. Well we had one, the [USS] *Halloran*, that hit one in Okinawa and sunk and lost, oh, so many crew. Everybody down below were lost, only the people at topside survived. So what you do is, you have this wooden ship go first, as I say, you have to have some idea of where the field is.

PIEHLER: Actually, hold that ...

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Charles Bray on April 10th, 2004 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler ...

WARD: And Jessica Ward.

PIEHLER: And you were talking about trying to clear a minefield off the coast of Japan.

BRAY: Okay. Now, this is the—we'll say this wooden ship is going to go first because it doesn't attract the magnetic mines. And ... maybe it'll go up and not even cut anything. What it's doing is putting out cables that have veins on them that will spray it out like this. And it has ... sharp cutters on it. And if it hits a cable, see the mine is suspended; the floater is suspended, say, twelve feet under water. If it hits that cable; if it picks up the cable this is attached to, this will cut it, and this will pop to the top of the water. And that's where the explosive is, in here that'll pop to the top of the water. And then you explode it with machine gun fire at a safe distance. So what they do is—you'll have a whole row of ships, a whole row of mine sweeps. The first one going up and the other one coming behind it well inside. The next one might be over here, and he's got his thing sticking out here. So a whole series of mine sweeps are sweeping along overlapping each other. These cutters are overlapping. And they ... and you go up all the way through the field and then if you don't—the chances are he won't cut anything, but he might. This guy feels safe because this one's already been there. If you make a mistake and go up through here then you're in trouble. But you gotta know to allow plenty of space where you think the minefield is. So sometimes you might spend a whole day and not cut a mine, but the next day you run into 'em and you really start, they're popping up everywhere.

PIEHLER: And you're ship's job was to actually ...

BRAY: Well one of our main people doing the shooting was a smaller gun boat with a—closer to the water. Low to the water, but they had enough fire power to explode it, and the explosion is going up and they're wearing helmets and so forth. But we also did use 20mm's and BARs and .50 calibers. They can be exploded with weapons that way, but that's the way a mine sweep works, is [by] overlapping. And these cutters are unbelievably efficient [in the way] they cut that steel cable, because you've got a heavy cable, 600 feet of cable. And so they can feel it, I'm sure. As they hit something they know it. I never was on one of these, so I never witnessed that firsthand.

PIEHLER: When you were doing this mine sweeping duty after the invasion of Okinawa, and then you were back in Okinawa, what inkling did you have about what you thought—even if it was just a rumor about your role in an invasion of Japan?

BRAY: No, we just—we knew that we had to.

PIEHLER: You knew, but you didn't have any particular ...

BRAY: We didn't know that, even though in late June Truman had already signed off on the final invasion plan, and I describe this quite in detail; you'll read it there.

PIEHLER: But at the time you didn't know; you just had these ...

BRAY: We just knew that it was inevitable. Why did we come this far if we were going to stop with this?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: But the one thing that really had us puzzled us was [that] we weren't seeing any kamikazes to speak of.

PIEHLER: While you were doing this mine sweeping?

BRAY: After June.

PIEHLER: During the mine sweeping had you expected to be attacked by kamikazes?

BRAY: We did.

PIEHLER: So you were still very much in battle stations?

BRAY: Oh yeah. We did pick up bogeys from time to time, but the CAP, this was daylight, see, so ... since they did seem—we didn't have these mass raids. But we'd see an occasional raid. And the CAPs, the combat air patrol, the fighters, Marines, the Hellcats, and the Corsairs would take care of them. So the first few days it was a little bit, you know ...

PIEHLER: Nervous, yeah.

BRAY: But as it went on, you know, hell, this is not bad.

PIEHLER: Well particularly coming out of Okinawa, this must have seemed ...

BRAY: And then at night, we all just turned around that way and went on back ... away from [the area]. Because we were getting pretty close to Japan at this point. And so—but we did not know anything at all, even at the time the atomic bomb was dropped. That was just a complete surprise. Had no notion that anything, well obviously we didn't, and very few people did; let's face it.

PIEHLER: It strikes me that you didn't know what your role was going to be in Japan, because you started off the war in the Navy really knowing, in a sense, everything that was going on ...

BRAY: I don't know, I guess the captain ... I don't know whether he ...

PIEHLER: But if he knew, he did not share it with you?

BRAY: I bet you he didn't know about the atomic bomb.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Oh, I'm sure he didn't know. No, I'm sure he didn't.

BRAY: Oh, I'm sure he knew about Truman's plan.

PIEHLER: But you didn't know what your ship's role would be in any possible invasion?

BRAY: Well, we knew we were going to work with the sweeps, after we'd done that, and that's what we knew. Because we didn't have torpedo tubes, so we weren't traveling with the [USS] *Halsey* and that bunch. They were out looking for trouble and we were helping sweeps. We were working with the ground troops.

PIEHLER: So you had a sense that would be your role in the invasion?

BRAY: Oh absolutely.

PIEHLER: But you had no specific, or no training ... for an invasion?

BRAY: Well, Iwo Jima, we were a part of that invasion.

PIEHLER: But you weren't out doing—in the interim between Okinawa and V-J Day there was no training for an amphibious landing?

BRAY: Not especially, no.

PIEHLER: It was the mine sweeping?

BRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: When you heard about the atomic bomb, besides being very—there's a great picture of you and your (Laughter) ...

BRAY: Yeah, that was the first beer we had had in four months, I think.

PIEHLER: You got beer, which was, on a Navy ship, very unusual to drink openly.

BRAY: Yeah, that's right. That was the first beer we had in over three months, I guess.

PIEHLER: The last time you had had beer, where was it?

BRAY: Pearl, I guess.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so you never sort of—sometimes ships ... like on Enewetak you didn't have a little beer party?

BRAY: Oh wait a minute, you're right. Yeah, that's right. We did have a little beer party, that's right, and I think I have a picture someplace in one of these. (Looks through papers) Yeah, here we go.

PIEHLER: Okay. Yes, because you went out to an island, and had a little ...

BRAY: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: So you did have one, but otherwise, that was the last time. And then the captain ordered the beer broken out because of V-J Day?

BRAY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: At the time, not what we know now, but what was your first news reports about the atomic bomb? What did you think it was?

BRAY: Well, all we heard was that there was a special bomb that had been dropped on Hiroshima that was the equivalent of 10,000 pounds, or tons, or something; some unbelievable number. And that's about all we heard, initially. And we didn't celebrate quite yet. Then the more things came in, and came in, and then nothing much happened. And then the second one dropped on Nagasaki and things started to whirl. And it looked as though we had hit on something that was going to bring that thing to an end. So, we started to really feel our oats then. Then we got word that they were still negotiating with the Japanese, and that there would be—I guess it was not until the 14th of August, and Nagasaki was bombed on the 9th, that we got the word that a white DC-3, the equivalent of a DC-3 airplane, would be coming in our direction to Okinawa, to land [and] to talk, and not to take any action against it. Of course, we were standing down as it were. I think they'd already told us to stand down, but you know what? Two of our ships were hit on the 12th of August. The battleship [USS] *Pennsylvania* was hit by a kamikaze, as I recall, and another ship. So we lost people after Nagasaki was hit. So anyhow, low and behold, that white DC-3, or the equivalent of a DC-3 two engine transport came and I guess the Japanese envoy or whoever, talked to the commanding officer of the land forces. Landed, I guess, at Naha. So then we started celebrating. And then the announcement came, "cease and desist." No more actions. You can turn your lights on. We didn't turn our lights on the first night or two, but then we got the word, "Okay, turn your lights on. Have movies on deck," that's what it was.

PIEHLER: Ah.

BRAY: We used to have movies down in the galley. (Laughter) I mean mess hall.

PIEHLER: It's such tight quarters; I can't imagine the movie going experience in the galley.

BRAY: It was the mess hall, but you know, you were standing up (Laughter) and trying to turn around. And we'd seen them before, probably. We traded movies; all the ships around would get movies, and they'd trade 'em. And sometimes we'd get a new one, but well, and we'd probably seen it at home; it was something old.

PIEHLER: And the beer was broken out on V-J Day?

BRAY: Yep, and we went swimming, diving off the destroyer, off the deck.

PIEHLER: And between V-J Day and the formal surrender on September 2, what did you do?

BRAY: We were sweeping mines.

PIEHLER: You were sweeping mines.

BRAY: Oh, we swept mines way on beyond. We went to Korea. That's what one of these pictures you see here is. (Showing photos and map) It's us talking to people up around Korea. We went out to this one, this mine field, and met with a guy right along in here. Met with ... yeah, here we go, yeah this is his ... you can't see this too well. This is the second captain, the one that relieved Foster. And that's the Japanese envoy. He's the one that had the details on that minefield.

PIEHLER: And so this was ...

BRAY: This was in September, maybe October even.

PIEHLER: October.

BRAY: Anyway, a long time. Maybe September, because we had to clear that; all these had to be cleared.

PIEHLER: And I'm curious, because you had the cancellation. When did you enter the harbor?

BRAY: We went into Sasebo on that date. That was after the thing was signed, September the 14th.

PIEHLER: So did you clear the mines off of Korea before you entered the Japanese harbor?

BRAY: Probably after. I believe it was afterward because we had—there was so much, so many minefields otherwise, I don't know for sure. I kept a little diary and I could research it, but I don't know off hand.

PIEHLER: It sounds like during the initial few weeks after the surrender, your ship was still very much on duty.

BRAY: Oh no, we were clearing mines.

PIEHLER: And when you went into this Japanese port, what was your mission there?

BRAY: Um, to secure it.

PIEHLER: Just to secure it?

BRAY: Yeah, we were the first ones in. You know, that had been a closed harbor. Even way back, going way back to, oh, what's his name that went in?

PIEHLER: Perry?

BRAY: Perry! [U.S. Navy Commodore Matthew Perry] He didn't even go in. This is a closed—we were the first U.S. [or the] first any kind of warship to enter Sasebo Harbor. It was a long snaky thing and they had told them to put sheets on all their guns ... or mark their guns, so as we went down through there, slowly. God, you should have seen how many guns they had. They would have zeroed in on that harbor had we tried to go in there otherwise. It was a narrow harbor, a narrow inlet, and we got down there and we spent quite a while there. We were in and out, but we spent a good bit of time in Sasebo.

PIEHLER: What were some of the things your ship did and what were some of the things you did individually?

BRAY: Well, I think we were just showing and making a presence.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you were not ...

BRAY: The ship was making ...

PIEHLER: So you were not necessarily, once you got there, you weren't ...

BRAY: Oh, we had liberty. We went ashore. We'd usually travel with somebody else. I can remember going out with just one other guy, and I can remember taking a rubber raft with some guys and rowing out to some of the old derelicts that had been hit and destroyed or half sunk. And we went on one that was probably, it was probably ...

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: Well one of the things you said as we just paused for a break, you left Enewetak, it was Ulithi that you had the beer party where you left before Okinawa, not Enewetak.

BRAY: Enewetak we left ... to go to Iwo Jima.

PIEHLER: Iwo Jima, yeah.

BRAY: We were in Enewetak, but it was for the Iwo Jima thing.

PIEHLER: One question I want to make sure I ask, I guess it's a two part question. First of all, before the war and during the war, what was your image or attitude towards the Japanese? And then during the occupation duty, what was your image? Could you talk a little bit about that?

BRAY: It was, well before, the feeling I had was that if it was made in Japan, it was probably lousy, you know. That was my impression. And then, of course, when they started doing what they did in China, I really did not think kindly of them. But otherwise I had no particular feeling. I didn't have anything against 'em. I didn't really realize that they built the railroads across half the country—oh, no that was the Chinese. The Chinese did that, but I'm sorry, I digress. But

when we were fighting them, I tell ya, I just, you know wanted to get our hands on ‘em. But once the war was over and we went ashore and made liberty and found out what their reaction was, it was like a hundred and eighty degrees from what it was before. They were as nice as you can imagine. I didn’t see one single incident that was disturbing. Did I mention that I was looking for a chess set?

PIEHLER: No, no.

BRAY: I wanted to find a chess set. First I was looking for kimonos. I wanted to get some kimonos for some souvenirs for, you know, back home ‘cause they were easy to ship. And I also wanted a chess set for myself and I learned the words “I would like to buy a chess set.” So I went around and knocked on the door and they’d peer out and I would say in my Japanese, “Do you have it? I would like to buy a chess set.” And this went on ... (Shaking head) (Laughter) and I’d say, “Okay thank you.” And it was obvious I wasn’t gonna—they probably thought I wanted them to give me their one and only chess set for nothin’. But I never did find a chess set.

PIEHLER: You never did?

BRAY: I got several kimonos that way though (Laughter) ... they were probably some hand-me-downs, but I did get several kimonos.

PIEHLER: You also showed us pictures of Nagasaki. You got to Nagasaki basically within a month roughly of the ...

BRAY: Little over a month.

PIEHLER: Little over a month, well, September of ’45. What was your impression of Nagasaki?

BRAY: It did not look as damaged as I thought it would. I found out later that there was the point where it was dropped; it was dropped sort of behind a hill that sheltered a lot of the population. And there weren’t near as many killed there, about 35,000 maybe. Hiroshima was much more effective that way but you could see that something really horrendous had happened there. Smoke stacks with nothing, and things like that, um, but I never got ashore. Some of our guys did get ashore. I think there are pictures here of these officers, let me see, I think I see. (Looking through pictures) Yes, this is the shore. See—somewhere ... anyhow ... what have I done with them ...

PIEHLER: Is that Nagasaki you were looking for?

BRAY: Yeah, there were some pictures ...

PIEHLER: I think you passed them.

BRAY: It’s the one with the multiple pictures on it.

PIEHLER: Yeah, right here.

WARD: No, the one with people. This one?

BRAY: This one. There we go. This is on Nagasaki. (Indicating picture)

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

BRAY: These two are. They happened to go over there for some reason. I believe—wait a minute now. This is Nagasaki, (Indicating picture) I'm not sure that is. This is. Because we had a bunch of guys that got involved with the hurricane, or typhoon, in Okinawa and ... our ship left without 'em. And they were stuck in the typhoon and really had a rough time. They were over there getting provisions, so I'm pretty sure that's that gang. There were some—two or three enlisted men and two or three officers went over there that went over there for some reason. I guess curiosity more than anything else. But I never got ashore in Nagasaki.

PIEHLER: So ... is this accurate? You developed a fairly, even though they had been an enemy until fairly recently, a fairly favorable view of the Japanese?.

BRAY: I'll tell you one thing that was smart. MacArthur, you can call him anything you like, but he was smart by waiting and letting that sink in from August the 14th until September the 2nd. It was smart to wait and not have that signing until that time because everybody had sort of accepted it.

PIEHLER: So even though, in some ways, it was not a long time, it was just enough to come down from that warlike posture?

BRAY: Right, because those guys—and also the guys, the main [Japanese] Army and Navy high command, they'd all killed themselves by that time. They had, you know, they had nothing to lose. They were all saying, "Fight 'til the last man!" Because they knew they were gonna do that. The guy on Okinawa killed himself. His subordinate killed himself and virtually all of his staff, in a cave. They committed hari-kari [suicide]. Some of them used a grenade, but they used the old traditional disembowelment. that's an interesting story if you ever read that book by Feifer because they have a [ritual]. The way it works is they get dressed in, you know, in white and get their knife and all that, and they kick it in and just instantly their subordinate chops their head off with a big blade so they don't really suffer. Don't suffer that much, just "POW!" and it's over. His subordinate, that's his duty to do it and he has a blade that, uh, or a split up four by four.

PIEHLER: How long did you stay on the ship after—I mean how long were you aboard the ship and how long were you in Japan?

BRAY: Actually, we left Japan [sometime] in December ... and we were in and out of Sasebo until December. And we came back to Long Beach and I got off in Long Beach, and was discharged in Norman, Oklahoma.

PIEHLER: Oh, Norman, Oklahoma. So close to home.

BRAY: Yeah, back to Norman.

PIEHLER: I'm gonna do a follow up interview with you but, you used the GI Bill?

BRAY: I did, I did. I went to, uh, I went to ... I'll tell you what happened. I got back home, and took a few days, and I had so much time to report into my civil service job at the Veterans Administration.

PIEHLER: So you had, you had ...

BRAY: I had status! I had a job to go back to and I had the Veterans preference. So I wrote them and said, "I expect to come back and take over my job." You know [it was [fine] and I went back.

But in the meantime I had made a real good friend in ONI [Operations of Naval Intelligence] when I was working in the situation room; in fact he worked as a civilian. And he said, "Why don't you come to work at ONI? That's where I am." I said, "You think they'd need anybody?" He said, "Well, let me talk to 'em ." So he talked to Mrs. Curtis ... and he said, "Yeah, she's lookin' for somebody." I said, "Well okay then. I'll tell the Veterans Administration that I want to transfer to the Navy Department." And ... they said, "Well, okay, but you gotta report in first. You gotta report and then we'll do the paperwork." So I reported in one morning to the Veterans Administration, they had the paperwork, and I signed it all, and the next day I was working for the Navy. And I stayed there for two and a half years.

PIEHLER: The Office of Naval Intelligence.

BRAY: Right.

WARD: Is that when you went to school, night school?

BRAY: And I went to night school while I was ... [working for ONI].

PIEHLER: And what were you doing for the Office of Naval Intelligence?

BRAY: I was working—I was called an editing clerk. I was working for a commander, full commander; wonderful, another one of my favorites. [His name was Wyman Packard.] There are some fine officers. He was an Annapolis man too and he was on one of the carriers that were sunk.

PIEHLER: And you say you were an editor, what were you editing?

BRAY: Um ... his job, just the two of us. His job was liaison with the newly formed CIG [Central Intelligence Group], CIA. And so back and forth, he [Packard] would visit them and there was very close cooperation because CIG was about this big (Gestures with hands) and they wanted to be that big (Gestures with hands).

PIEHLER: So, in a sense, you're in the beginning of the CIA .

BRAY: With his recommendation. He ... as I say, his job was liaison with CIG, or CIA later, and so I got to know a lot of the CIG/CIA people. And of course, I worked, it was only the two of us and we worked together.

PIEHLER: So in many ways, you were present at the creation, as they say.

BRAY: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: I mean you weren't part of the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] group, but still as this group is forming.

BRAY: '47 was when CIG was born, I guess it was. Well, let's see, you had OSS that went to SSU [Strategic Service Unit], and then became CIG. And then in '48, or late '47 became CIA. I went in in August of '48 in CIA and so, uh, it just worked out very sweet, very sweetly.

PIEHLER: Thinking ... how much do you think the war, and the experiences you had in the Navy, and the GI Bill—do you sometimes think back, you know, if it hadn't been for the war, this is the path my life would've taken? You've had this remarkable, fascinating ... I can't wait to interview you more about being in Naval Intelligence and CIA. But how do you think your life would've been different if it hadn't been for the ...

BRAY: Oh, I probably would have wound up in Chattanooga, Tennessee or someplace.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

BRAY: And I wouldn't have married ... I wouldn't have nineteen grandkids.

(Doorbell rings)

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