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AN INTERVIEW WITH SAM SMITH

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INTERVIEWED BY  
DR. G. KURT PIEHLER  
AND  
CYNTHIA TINKER

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TRANSCRIPT BY  
CYNTHIA TINKER  
MAGGIE YANCEY

REVIEWED BY  
MCCALL SIMON

G. KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Sam Smith on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004, at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler ...

CYNTHIA TINKER: ... and Cynthia Tinker.

PIEHLER: And I just want to thank you. You've come to East Tennessee—this is your fifth trip, and I feel like you should come to East Tennessee, if you would, every year. I want to just, to begin the interview, just if you could just start with your grandparents, because ... in talking to two of my classes, you have very vivid memories and stories about both your grandfathers and your grandmothers.

SMITH: Thank you. Well ... I only knew my grandmother. I never knew my grandfather that she was married to, but they tell me that she was born east of Gallup, New Mexico, and as a little girl she worked for a Spanish rancher that had a lot of sheep. She was doing the babysitting for them, for these Spanish people, and she learned how to speak Spanish, plus her own Navajo language. One day, the baby she was taking care of died, and while the people were at the funeral, she escaped. She ran away from that ranch and went back to her own home, which was at Glorieta Pass, New Mexico. And somehow she feared, and she didn't want to go back to the ranch, so she kept going westbound, until Gallup, New Mexico, and there she found my father ... who had been working on the railroad, but was also working for the miners—coal miners. And his job was to feed the mules. And the mules were the ones that operated the elevator, with a chain and a big wheel. He fed these mules, and harnessed them up, so that the mules would turn the big wheel, which lowers the miners down into the shaft below the ground. And at quittin' time he turns it backwards to hoist them back up with that wheel—that was an elevator. That was his job and that's where he met my grandmother, and of course they had some kids. In the meantime, my mother was born, and my uncle, and another my aunt was—my grandmother had three children for some man named Anderson, but they didn't stay together. My dad found my grandmother, and they must've fell in love, and after my Dad quit the mining job he was [in] a transporting service with eight horses and a big, probably a two-ton, wagon—big wheels. And that was his job, to load groceries in the Gallup area, and distribute them out to the trading posts northwest of Gallup some sixty, seventy miles, which took days to deliver the groceries. They needed supplies for the trading posts out there. I don't remember all those trading posts. Some of them don't exist anymore, but one of them still there is the Hubbell Trading Post. It's famous for a rug-weaving center nowadays, and that's how he took my grandmother out to west, to another community called Cornfields. And that's where my grandmother got tired of my dad, so she told him to leave the home. And they had a little bit of sheep and goats, and told him to marry my mother. That was my dad's stepdaughter, so, those two lived together and that's when my brothers and I was born, out of that one. But my mother kept the other boys, who are also my brothers, and they lived for many years up until World War II and past; that's how I was born. From what they told me when I was born, my grandpa was there. I had three, four grandpas and they're all in pretty good shape—they had a lot of livestock. They even owned Model-T [and] Model-A trucks—pickups. And one day, or one morning, I was born, and my grandpa was told that I was born a boy, so

he said, "I'll give him the name." And he gave me the name "Warrior's Leader," that was my given name in Indian, and there afterwards I grew up.

TINKER: Just to make sure I've got this straight, when your grandmother left the Spanish family, did she run away because she was afraid they would blame her for the baby's death? Was that why she ran?

SMITH: That was—that was it.

TINKER: Yeah, that was why. And then she married some man with the last name of Anderson? And had ...

SMITH: Yes. That one I never knew. I never got his full name. And just, I didn't care to hear about it, so I didn't ask questions. It just happened that way. She had three—one boy, two girls. One of them was my mother, the other was my aunt; they were Andersons.

TINKER: And then she remarried? And then told him to leave, and then he lived with your mother who was his stepdaughter?

SMITH: My mother was my father's step-daughter. Uh huh.

TINKER: Yes, okay.

SMITH: But there had never been any marriage.

TINKER: Okay. And they had you, and two brothers? You had how many siblings?

SMITH: In my family, I had two sisters and four brothers plus my grandmother's son and daughters. They were also my brothers and sister. They're kind of mixed up, huh?

TINKER: And they stayed close to your grandmother?

SMITH: My mother took care of her brothers. They lived in our place. My grandmother was someplace else with a new man. And she had some more kids over there.

TINKER: She did? Did you know them? Or were they ...

SMITH: They are my aunt—just one she had that was my aunt and, uh, a man was married to my other aunt, my mother's sister; she died. The man that was married to my aunt stayed and took my other aunt, my grandmother's daughter, from another man.

TINKER: Okay.

SMITH: So, it's just kind of ...

TINKER: Because they're close?

SMITH: Yeah.

TINKER: And people didn't travel as much then to find a spouse, right?

SMITH: That's the custom. If the son-in-law is a very good worker ... if the wife dies, that one, they pull out a younger woman and give her to him so he can stay.

TINKER: Mm hmm.

SMITH: Is that nuts? (Laughter)

TINKER: What do you remember as a boy? Did you play games? Did you work a lot?

SMITH: I was born baby boy, and that's when ... one of my grandpas gave me that name, "Warrior's Leader." Why warrior—they gave everybody, even the girls, they gave them a war name, to end in with "Warrior." Like, my mother's name, Glenth Des Bah, this is a warrior name right here. And this, their first name, I guess. So all the women are "Bah," and like Lila's [name] **???? bah**. Remember?

TINKER: When Roy gave me Bá Hoshoni Bah? The last part, Bah?

SMITH: Uh-huh. Yeah, you're a warrior! (Laughter) In our society ... you're always at war. Every day you're at war. You're at war with yourself, you're at war with ...

TINKER: The spirit?

SMITH: Even in the store, you're at war. And like, uh, if in home you don't have much to eat, you go to war to get the food you need. It kind of means, "look for," or—I don't know what other words.

TINKER: Like, confronting the daily struggle of life?

SMITH: Yeah. That's how come I was named "Warrior." But now, today or recently, I've been thinking about my name, why my grandpa gave me that name. I have led—leader. I have jobs where I have always been the boss—director, administrator. I always have been in charge. Even in the war, I was the teacher of the Code Talkers overseas in the 4th Marine Division. They brought them all up to the headquarters where I taught. So, it's kind of looked like I've lived up to my name without thinking about it.

TINKER: You think that's why he gave you that name?

SMITH: It hadn't been done yet, but looks like I just lived up to the name. Somehow, my record was good. (Laughter) Or accidentally! (Laughter)

TINKER: Did you go to school as a little boy?

SMITH: Yeah, I went to school.

TINKER: Do you remember what age?

SMITH: Um, it's what I said from the beginning—I don't know. The dates, the months, and years that I was not supposed to go to school, just be at home, herd sheep. And I was herding the stragglers, the ones that are handicapped. And my older brother, he'd go to day school, and he'd always come home with peanut butter in his pocket, and he used to give it to me—peanut brittle. So that took me to school. (Laughter)

TINKER: Because you wanted peanut butter? (Laughs)

SMITH: I wanted peanut butter! One day, I took out my flock of sheep and goats, and drove it a little way from the *hogan* and left it there, and I followed my brother. Every time he'd turn around, I'd get behind a bush and he didn't see me. He went to the school and I snuck around the back to the—it was the kitchen, and of course they were looking for school kids. They wanted more and more children to go to school, so I was there and first in Navajo they said, "You want to go to school?" I said, "Yeah!" And I got a haircut and went to school. And I didn't have a name, but they called me Samuel. The teacher gave me that name, Samuel, that's on there.

PIEHLER: Now, was that the Presbyterian school?

SMITH: No, that's a day school.

PIEHLER: It was a day school?

SMITH: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: Now, do you know who ran it? Was it ... the Bureau of Indian Affairs or was it another mission?

SMITH: I think it was an Indian Affairs day school, a government school, because they issued me clothes with farmer's pants...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. With the suspenders, ok.

TINKER: The overalls?

SMITH: Overalls, yeah.

PIEHLER: What had you been wearing before that? Before you got the overalls what was ...

SMITH: Uh, I don't remember. All those ... I had trading post pants and shirt that, uh, you don't have a set of clothes, only one that you wear.

PIEHLER: When you tell young people on the Navajo Nation about your growing up, what stories do you tell to them?

SMITH: I never tell this to anyone, anywhere. This is the only place.

PIEHLER: Really? You've never sort of said... Well I guess, how many people... you were very young when you were herding sheep.

SMITH: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: That seems to be something—do young people in the Navajo Nation still herd sheep the way you did growing up?

SMITH: Later, after that, what I did, you know, they automatically put their children in school. At that time it was different because my younger brother, they didn't let him go to school. And my older sister, she was going to the mission school. My mother pulled her out and told her to stay home and take care of the sheep. And my younger brother, they was going to make him a medicine man so he had long hair and a bundle back here, which looked good on him. (Laughter) But he cut it off later. That was life on the Navajo Reservation.

PIEHLER: How many sheep did your family have roughly? Do you remember?

SMITH: About eight hundred. And I was herding the stragglers—the handicap ones. The other two flocks were at difference places away from where I ... was livin' with my mother.

PIEHLER: So when the flock was out would your brothers, they would be...

SMITH: My older brothers and my older sister were over there with the other flock, taking care of 'em at different places. The land was free at that time—very free. And you could just go move to anywhere you want to and herd sheep there for a while and there's different kinds of vegetations that the livestock craved for, so you go around to those places, and then water too. Where there's plenty of water, that's where you graze sheep. So we would take turns. Other families have big—lot of sheep, too. So there was lot of cooperation and nobody saying, "You can't graze here," those days. But now, the Reservation, some places are fenced and you can't just anytime go there. Stay on the public road. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: But then you could just—there were no fences?

SMITH: There was no fences.

PIEHLER: And how did your family, in a sense—the sheep, you obviously ate lamb. I remember you talking about out in the Pacific when you had lamb. Would you shear the sheep every year? Or would you ...

SMITH: Oh yeah. Every year, spring when it warms up each year. And you sell the wool for groceries and stuff.

PIEHLER: So you would sell it to one of the trading posts?

SMITH: Um, yeah. You sort of make friend with one trading post. That's where you did it. There's other trading posts ... My mother dealt with two trading posts. We were just about in the middle of the Ganado ... The money that they had was pressed coupon-like coins and they had their names on it—trading post. You can't take that one to buy at the other trading post.

PIEHLER: So they didn't pay you in currency, they paid you in their own currency?

SMITH: No cash. No silver coins or paper money. That was it. That was how they keep the families to their own trading post. And it worked well.

PIEHLER: What did you grow? What kind of foods did you [raise] as you were growing up?

SMITH: Right around 1930 the ECW [Emergency Conservation Work]—it's a government project—came out to the Cornfields where I was born and down that valley the people lived along that river. And they were all assigned to a two-acre garden. The government put up the fence, two-acre each. The last one at the end was my father's. That's the one I fought for [in World War II]. Two acres. (Laughs quietly)

PIEHLER: Two acres.

SMITH: Yeah, because we get a lot, those years it rained properly. Every year, every summer it rained on time. Snow always the same height, not like this, nothin'. The years were good at repeatin' itself the same way all year round. So we grow corn there, pumpkin, melon, and watermelon. We grew those and it was very, very, very important to the family. So that's how come I—I guess one of the reasons that I wanted to fight for my land, and it come out to be my country later. So that's how it happened. Peanut butter took me to school. (Laughter)

TINKER: What kind of ceremonies—did you have regular ceremonies through the years?

SMITH: Yes, as you are growing up to be at a certain age, being a boy after about... you don't celebrate your birthday, but every once in a while after you grow so tall they have a ceremony for you so that you thank for your past life, all the good things that came to you. You thank the Great Spirit for that and then you ask for more, that it be better in

future years. That's how, sort of like you celebrate your birthday once every three, four, or five years.

TINKER: And how would you celebrate?

SMITH: You get a medicine man [to] come to your house, your *hogan*, and he bless you all night and to have, like I said to thank for the past, and some blessing for the future. A better one, a better life. But that was how you grew up. And then after you grow some they have *yeibichai* dances, they have squaw dance. The *yeibichai* dance you have to go through those four times in your whole life and they wear masks, and you get to see them without the mask. Your grandpa, that's what it says. *Yeibichai* means grandpa.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

SMITH: Uh-huh, and you get blessing from this person that is under that mask, and thereafter he's your grandpa the rest of your life. Even after he takes off his *kachina* things he's still your grandpa. So to respect him as grandpa, like your own grandpa. It comes with a lot of discipline at the same time. So... those are the purposes for having it. We don't celebrate our birthdates. That's how come I didn't know my birthday.  
(Laughter)

PIEHLER: We were just saying your discharge papers you said [they] said 1924, but in some ways that's an educated guess it sounds like. And you even had mentioned that you sort of had to change your date of birth so that you could get into the Marine Corps.

SMITH: Uh-Huh.

PIEHLER: How old were you when you were in Indian School in Albuquerque?

SMITH: At the time I tried to join I was sixteen and they wouldn't let me in and so I went back inside and lied about the year. I guess they wanted me to get in anyway for the war was...

PIEHLER: Because it was in 1943 that you joined.

SMITH: '42—Christmas vacation time. I had time to do that during the vacation from school. So I went down and that's what I did, but the recruiter let me finish the eleventh grade year ... May 3rd was [when] school was out, so I was in the Marine Corps May 6th. After May 3rd I went home and had grandpa bless me and then I took off for San Diego. Of course I had to come back to Albuquerque and Sante Fe, the capital of New Mexico where I was sworn in. And then we got on the train coach and it took us two days to get to San Diego. But it stopped in Albuquerque. There was more people that got on. There was draftees and then down in Grant there was some more. Everywhere we stopped they were addin' on coaches and our train was getting longer and longer. By the time we hit San Diego we had a long train ... how many hundred buses they took us off to San Diego boot camp.

TINKER: Um, I had one question before we too far. I wanted to ask—before you went to the school in Albuquerque could already speak English very well, from the government school?

SMITH: At the day school everything end with Smith to me and I went home and try to speak English. My older brother and sister made fun of me. So then there I went to Ganado mission where I... one summer I grew a lot of melons, so I took my pumpkins to pay for my tuition at the mission. Then the second year—the mission school was good cause there were white students there and you get to learn English a lot faster. The second year it cost me four goats [of] my own—dressed. I took that to the mission and the following year I didn't want to pay for it anymore. I met some of my cousins during the summer who said, "There's a free school in Fort Wingate—Indian school." And the following year that's where I hitchhiked.

TINKER: Do you remember how far it was from your home?

SMITH: Thirty, fifty—about sixty miles from Ganado.

TINKER: And you hitchhiked to Fort Wingate?

SMITH: I hitchhiked with my cousin's uncle. Um, my Dad's relative. This man had a truck, so I caught a ride with him to the Indian school. That's where I got beat up. (Laughs)

TINKER: Oh, is that where you got beat up? (Laughs)

PIEHLER: You mentioned that you, I mean it's a very good story that someone sort of beat you up and then didn't you join the boxing team...?

SMITH: Yeah, I joined the boxing team and I fixed his pants whenever school was out. (Laughter) And again, my cousin said there was a better school. Oh, I went through four, five, six grades at Fort Wingate the government school. I went through three grades [in] one year.

PIEHLER: In one year?

SMITH: One year. I was in the fourth grade about a week and then, uh, fifth grade about a month and then they put me in the sixth and that's where I finished. And, uh, my uncle's cousin told me you should've stayed at Ganado Mission, they don't teach much here. (Laughs) But I went to Albuquerque and then school.

TINKER: Was that the first time you had been to Albuquerque? When you went to the school?

SMITH: Mm hmm

TINKER: What did you think about it?

SMITH: It was the mutton and fry bread that took me over there. (Laughter) My cousin...there [were] three girls, my cousin's sisters. One is still living, the others died. They said, "Why don't you come with us to Albuquerque Indian School? We're going to take fry bread and some boiled mutton." Sure enough, when we got there they had sacks and sacks of lunch to eat on the train and it was allowed on the coach, the train. And we ate all the way to Albuquerque.

TINKER: Was that your first train ride, too?

SMITH: That was my first train ride, too.

TINKER: What did you think of when you saw the train the first time?

SMITH: I [had] seen them go by but I didn't think much about how it was to ride it. It was just that I am going somewhere. And the same way, it stopped here and there to pick up students. By the time we got to Albuquerque it was a long train and we had to walk about two miles from the train depot to the school. That was how I got to grow up.

PIEHLER: What was your favorite subject in school?

SMITH: Not really, uh, nothing. Before that I learned enough to get a job and hold a job so I wasn't really interested in any particular subject. I didn't know what I was going to be. I didn't choose it like they do now. When they're in high school they kind of plan already to ... not with me or any of my family was like that. Just so we went to school and learn enough to get a job and hold a job.

PIEHLER: Now before World War II, this is going back, when you were in school, say in ninth or tenth grade, what kind of job did you think you would like to do? Because you had a lot of really important jobs after the war, but before the war, going back to that time, what kind of job did you hope to get after you got out?

SMITH: Uh, what was going on at the time was for the children to learn and understand English and be able to get a job. I did not choose any kind of job.

PIEHLER: So you didn't really know what kind of job you could get?

SMITH: I never thought of any particular job. [Just] what gave me a lot of money. I would think that now, but at that time it didn't matter just so I know something. I went to school four hours a day and worked four hours the same day, eight hours that we put in. And I went through a lot of vocational training. I was electrician one year, the next year I was [in the] garden taking care of plants and stuff. And then one year I was taking care of sleeping with the chickens. The incubator—watching the incubator. That's where I stayed to earn my education. And there was a time I had to drive a dump truck. I could

barely reach the gas peddle. But the whole shoveling coal there, it was terrible. With those big scoops that go in. (Laughs) You dig down to the bottom and—I was hauling coal down to the power house. The power house is the one that keeps all the homes heated. Hot radiator. I took care of that. And I used to milk cows ... I learned how to take care of cows ... And then I worked in a shoe shop one year. Eleventh grade I worked in the shoe shop. And this man, our instructors always had a map on the wall and we were watching the war, the European war on that map. He used to draw, that's where they are and now they're over here. So that was educational, and we were fixin' shoes too. Ladies shoes, men's shoes, employees shoes...I learned how to do that. And the year before I was in the automotive shop where we took about engines, six-cylinder engines and learn all about how to be a mechanic. That one stuck with me. And that man gave me 'F' in automotive mechanics. (Laughter) So I went, after the war, I took mechanics because I was a mechanic! Because at a young age I had a car and I worked on my own car and became pretty good. One day I saw this instructor, I told him—he asked me, "What kind of job are you holdin'?" and I said, "I'm an auto mechanic." (Laughter) And I said, "When you retire, I'll be at your shop." (Laughter) That's how things happen to me all these years—but I'm glad of that.

PIEHLER: You mentioned having a paper route in Albuquerque. Do you remember how you got the paper route?

SMITH: A friend of mine—we delivered *Journal* in morning, very early in the morning when it's very cold. I was out there delivering the paper to the teachers and the government employees and they were scattered from the school to way over there. I had to buy a bicycle to do my job. And in the evening is not so bad. We delivered ... and when he gets paid he would give me half of his money and that's how I survived. Of course during the day I looked for a job, too. Saturday and Sunday I go out to other places and ask people if they want their grass cut, if they want their yard cleaned or window washed—I could never clean a window. (Laughs) So I stay with the yard cleanin' and stuff. Irrigation—clean irrigation ditch by the bushes and stuff to get it ready for the spring irrigatin'. That's how I made my money.

TINKER: Did you ever send any money back to your family, to your mother or father?

SMITH: I didn't make enough to send to them. (Laughter)

TINKER: Did you send them anything? I mean, did you just stay in Albuquerque and had no communication with them?

SMITH: No communication. Only when I get home in springtime and [in my] younger days I herd sheep and then one day my older brother went to ... work on the railroad. And, uh, not too long after that he came back. He said, "Let's go, brother. You can work." So I followed him and when we got over there he said, "This is my older brother, he's twenty-one, no, no he's twenty-two." (Laughter) But, uh, the foreman said, "What happened to you? Your brother's big." (Laughter) I said, "I've been sick, but I'm alright now." (Laughter)

TINKER: So that was how you came to work on the railroad?

SMITH: I made money there—not much, something like ninety-eight cents an hour, ten hours day. But it summed up at two weeks, that’s when we got paid.

TINKER: And that was when you straightened the rails out?

SMITH: Uh huh. Those rails, they were skimpy but those years the railroad was small, about that wide, and they very easily go wavy. (Gestures with his hands)

TINKER: From Phoenix to Stockton you said.

SMITH: From Phoenix to—not solid through. We did a bunch in Phoenix and then we moved to Stockton.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

SMITH: Over there, there was lotta oranges on both sides and after work I snuck over the fence and got some oranges and, uh, took it back to my boxcar and peel one. That orange was bitter. (Laughter)

TINKER: It wasn’t ripe? (Laughter)

SMITH: Those were planted purposely for thieves! And I was one. (Laughter) I didn’t do that no more after that. And then one day it was time for me to go back to school so I went to Stockton, um, bought three leather jackets, some pants, a *pachuco* suit, fancy shoes that was red, white, black color with flowers on it. They used to make shoes like that those years. I bought one of them, took that to school, and I was the sharpest guy on the campus.

TINKER: Now what kind of suit? You said a—?

SMITH: A *pachuco* suit. Uh, a *pachuco* suit are stripey—gray with loud white stripes. Not like referee ...

PIEHLER: So this was very fashionable?

SMITH: Uh huh, at that time—it was.

PIEHLER: At that time?

SMITH: Yeah. And the shoulders were big. Lotta pad. (Laughter) And I made lotta friends with my jacket. They all wanted to wear my jackets ...

PIEHLER: So really, you had picked the right ...

SMITH: I had three different kinds that zipped this way and zipped this way. (Gestures with the jacket he is wearing). And fancy buttons on it. So I went to school like that eleventh grade year. After that I had to leave.

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PIEHLER: ... even know the answer to some of these questions, but I think someone, even I think growing up in the Navajo ... among Navajo today, younger [people] probably wouldn't recognize some of the changes. You, for example, grew up without electricity. I mean it's sort of an obvious question, but when did you sort of—what was the first sort of building you went to that had electricity? Did your schools have electricity? The first school you had, did it have electricity?

SMITH: Uh, school had electricity ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, all your schools. Well, and obviously Albuquerque, yeah.

SMITH: Homes had no electricity. We had lanterns. Those, uh, [lanterns] they don't even shine. So we went to bed with the chicken and got up early to do that. No, no, no homework to do at home, just plain work during the daylight and go to bed early.

PIEHLER: So in some ways your summers are longer and your winters are shorter.

SMITH: Uh huh. Yeah.

PIEHLER: And what about telephones?

SMITH: Telephones? They had these telephones that you ...

PIEHLER: Cranked up?

SMITH: ... Long, short, long, long—like that. You really gotta know how to do it.

PIEHLER: So did your family have one?

SMITH: Huh uh. No.

PIEHLER: No. What was the nearest phone?

SMITH: The nearest phone was at the school and trading post, but we ... I don't think we had any reason to look for a phone.

PIEHLER: Well, because I noticed, if you don't mind me pointing out, yesterday I noticed you have the cell phone. How common would it be for young people to have a cell phone, say a sixteen or seventeen-year old, now among the Navajo?

SMITH: They have it ... it's everywhere. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah, I mean, I partly ask because I think even when young people on the Reservation read your interview on the Internet and they'll say "you mean he didn't have access to a—he didn't have a cell phone?" I think some will not—it's such a very different ...

SMITH: It's really—a lot of things different there. Bill Clinton gave all the Indians cell phones. And their pay is twenty-five dollars a year I think.

PIEHLER: To have a cell phone?

SMITH: Uh huh. That was because of the hardship that they had. A lot of these Indian elders are in need of help and they are way out in remote areas where ... there's no roads except truck roads. No more wagons. Nobody has a wagon ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. No one has a wagon.

SMITH: ... no more. They have truck—old trucks. Old cars.

PIEHLER: And when you were growing up, you mentioned that you had ... someone in your family had a Model A.

SMITH: Yeah.

TINKER: Your grandfather?

SMITH: My grandpas, two of them. They had lot of cars, lot of sheep, and they had a Model T, Model A pickup truck. And the truck is about that long and the cargo space is about that big, like a big wheelbarrow. Only their two wives fit in that thing. (Laughter) Their two wives get in the cargo space [and] it's full. ... if they carry anything they have to have it on their laps. And, uh, my grandpas both sit in the front and .... it was about that wide. Two of them, their heads would be hittin' each other. They have this "Billy Jack" hat you know, square like those Arizona Highway—the trooper hat ... that was what they wore.

PIEHLER: And they were at that time pretty unusual for having trucks. ...almost everyone else [had] a wagon with horses?

SMITH: Mm Hmm. And my grandpa always carried a gasket about that big... because he starts his truck with gasoline and then when it gets hot he switch it to kerosene. And down the road with kerosene he's going. And uh, I don't know how often—one time I saw him on the road, I stopped and looked at him, and he was cutting out a gasket ... He had the head off on both of them, took it off and put the gasket back on. The other one

had burned in the center, between the pistons. So he said, “this happens every ... too often” he said. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: When did you go to your first movie? Do you remember?

SMITH: Movie was very special. Nobody said movie ...

PIEHLER: What did they ... ?

SMITH: They said let’s go to picture show.

PIEHLER: Picture show.

SMITH: Yes.

PIEHLER: So what was your—where would you go? I mean, do you remember your first ... ?

SMITH: At Ganado mission they always had trouble with the [film]. They’d break in half ... (Laughter) But it was still a great pleasure to see a movie and, uh, the movie that your watchin’ is not smooth ... people are jumping around, you know, how it used to be just black and white a long time ago. And the movies are not sound, um, [not] talking movies mostly—face expressions [were used] to tell what you’re doing, what’s happening.

PIEHLER: ... It sounds like you remember some of the silent, what we would call silent films now.

SMITH: Gee, I don’t—Charlie Chaplin I think.

PIEHLER: You saw Charlie Chaplin?

SMITH: Yeah. Some of those—not Westerns, later I saw Westerns at Fort Wingate Indian School. They showed Western movies. That was a little better, smooth ... so I see a Western movie [with] Charles Stewart and some other ones ...

TINKER: Tom Mix? And Harts? Wasn’t there one with the last name of Harts?

SMITH: Tom Mix and—yeah. After school we’d all go down to the graveyard and—our teachers are all white—and all these white kids, they’re over there and I’m over there and I’m the main actor, the cowboy, that never got killed and these little white kids, they’re all Indians. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: (Laughter) And so you would play Cowboys and Indians, though you would be the cowboy?

SMITH: I'm the cowboy—the one that don't die. (Laughter) I had lots of fun with them. At the same time I was learning, I was getting educated. I was speakin' with them English. That's how I picked it up.

PIEHLER: So that's really how you were able to learn ... It sounds like by the time you got to Albuquerque you were pretty fluent in English. Is that a fair—from the mission school and talking [to the kids]?

SMITH: Yeah. At Fort Wingate it was those little white kids that taught me a lot. And at Albuquerque Indian School it was other tribes, not Navajo.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you had to talk English. Well, let me ask you a question so I don't assume. Did you know other languages besides Navajo? Other Indian languages?

SMITH: No.

PIEHLER: No

SMITH: I learned Spanish on the railroad. Good Spanish language but then I got away from that one. Also, when I first got married I learned Acoma language very good. I could win an argument with my wife, you know. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Which is ... that's a sign you ...

TINKER: Well Sam the other day, remember you told me, um, you said when you were younger that there were some Spanish words mixed in with your Navajo.

SMITH: Oh, yes. Yes.

TINKER: You said that's why we ... Did that come from your grandmother having lived with the Spanish rancher?

SMITH: Remember my grandmother lived with my dad and my dad worked on railroad too. So those two, uh—when my grandmother gets mad she would cuss and say all kinds of things in Spanish. Same way with my dad, when I broke his watch he ... (Laughs)

TINKER: You broke his watch?

SMITH: He would cuss me in Spanish and ... There was one very outstanding thing about my dad—a lot of people still ask me about him—that he was the greatest archer on the Navajo Reservation. He used to make bow and arrows. He used to make us small bow and arrows for me and my brothers and we used to play with it. ... He could make one that would go a long ways and they shot up the mountains and he would be way up the top, top of the rest. Those were the sporting things. Old men, they used to have a track made and outrun each other. And then they would have this bow and arrow thing going, too.

TINKER: Did he teach any of you all how to make the bow and arrow?

SMITH: We learned to make bow and arrow. I did and my—I made my own toys, bow and arrow, and played with it. I used to get to those cactus, those big ones. They make a good ...

TINKER: A good target, huh?

SMITH: Uh-huh. I knew how to put the feather on with a tendon of the sheep. Ligament? Tendon? They come that long and you ... just keep turnin', turnin' til at the end and then you don't need no glue or anything like that. It stays that way.

TINKER: It kept the feather on the end of the arrow.

SMITH: Yeah. That was how it was made. Same way with the tip. We used to pound nails to make the tip. That was how—we had some things like the knife, butter, and sugar, those things we said in Spanish. Not much Navajo. I learned the Navajo way of saying sugar later ... when I got to live with other families.

TINKER: For those modern-day items you all used the Spanish word for it because there really was no Navajo word for that.

SMITH: Uh huh. I guess there was no Navajo...

TINKER: Because there wouldn't be for butter. (Laughter)

SMITH: Yeah. So that was the growin' up of my life.

PIEHLER: One of the things you told me once at a Celebrate Freedom [was] that respecting your elders was very much emphasized when you grew up. And that's something you even sort of—you were a little distressed that the current generation of Navajo children—there's not the same respect that you felt you had for your elders growing up. Could you maybe talk about that ...?

SMITH: My family have a lot of respect for me, but other families I know—even a small child like that—they cuss their mother out and their father. [They] talk back to their parents and uh, the reason that is, is [because] in school it's a law that you can't spank your children. So they do as they please and if you—I know this one place I visit, uh, the mother spanked her little boy and the little boy said, "I'm gonna tell my teacher!" So that's where it started, they do tell their teacher and then these Social Service people come out and investigate the mother. That's how child abuse is pretty strong out there, uh, and it's not a good idea. There's one man who really fought for it, he's an educator and he said, "We should go back to spanking our children to"—not bruise them, but spank them, punish them.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like if you were bad you were punished growing up, not that I think you were bad that often (Laughter) but do you remember ... did you ever do anything bad that you still remember? That you learned your lesson growing up?

SMITH: ... I ruined my dad's watch. [His] gold watch—railroad watch. I got spanked for that.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Yeah. But that ...

SMITH: It didn't stay with me. I didn't have a grudge against my dad. I love my dad very much and I'm thankful to him. One day he says, "Son, ... if you make a mistake, if you make a mistake [and] nobody finds out about it, you don't get punished for it—punish yourself," he said to me and I've got to—I was thinking what did I do wrong, you know, then I remember, oh yeah. Me and my brothers we didn't sleep in the house, we slept outside. And when everybody went to sleep, parents went to sleep, we all took our rope and saddle and went down to the wash, got our horses. And we rode out about five miles—there was some wild horses over there—and we round them up, put 'em in corral. We ride full moon. We ride bareback—broncs. We do this every year during the summer til one time my older cousin's brother—he was a good rider ... [but he went] out the gate and there was some mole holes, that horse stepped into one and flipped him over, knocked him out and by daylight he was still out. So we all got scared and only his younger brother stayed with him, but we took off and went on home. But we found out later that he got up about 9:00 that morning.

PIEHLER: And he was okay?

SMITH: He was okay, but he wasn't okay the rest of his life. He got this seizure thing afterwards. Every now and then he would get the seizure and ...

TINKER: So you never told your parents that you were ...

SMITH: I—I punished myself.

TINKER: Did you? Did you all ever go out and ride the wild horses again?

SMITH: No more after that. And luckily, that year they wanted to round up all the horses and do away with it. The government ... they said they caused erosion.

TINKER: Oh, they started culling the herd.

SMITH: Yeah. So we had no more horses to steal and ride. That's how it happened. And then there was a reason I guess it happened.

TINKER: What one lesson do you remember the most from your grandfathers? Something that you used through your life.

SMITH: Hmm. Uh, one I never forget is the coyote pup. (Laughter) When I came back I had to tell them everything so I told them about what happened on Pearl Harbor. Two of my grandpas were there. One day we were sailing out to—I didn't know we were going to Saipan, but we stopped in Pearl Harbor and we had liberty, a one-day liberty pass, to get off the ship and throw ourself and come back in the evenin'. So me and my buddies, we took off and got a taxi cab and go down street—those years there was nothing but framed buildings. On Pearl Harbor there was no skyscrapers. And going down there was one big building, there was sailors, Marines, Army, all lined up around that building. And we asked the taxi driver, "What's goin' on over there?" He said, "That's the red light district." And so we stopped and I said, "Let's go get our coyote pups." (Laughter) So we got in line ...

PIEHLER: This is in Honolulu?

SMITH: Pearl Harbor.

PIEHLER: So, actually I have book which has, um, this line and I just ... (Looking for book)

SMITH: It was about 11:00 in the morning. We'd line up way at the end and we were in line all day. There was kids selling candy bars, we were all eatin', buyin' candy bars to stay in line. Buy evening it was ...

PIEHLER: So the line looked like this. (Pointing to photo)

SMITH: (Laughs) That might be the one. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So it was just lined up like that? This is a—I'm referring to ...

SMITH: Yeah, all mixed. Army, Navy, Marines, and yes, Navy too. (Laughter) And uh ...

PIEHLER: And so that ... this must've been in '44. Was it '43 or '44?

SMITH: '43.

PIEHLER: '43, um ...

SMITH: Fall ... somewhere in November. I got to the door, I was the first one of my buddies behind me. First one. I went inside and there was some more MPs, SPs, they looked at me and said, "You're too young, get out of here." (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So they threw you out?

SMITH: They chased me out. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: After waiting in line all day?

SMITH: All day. (Laughter) It didn't matter ... they thought I was too damn young. As soon as I turned my buddies followed me. (Laughter) They didn't want nothing' to do with it. They didn't want to try. So when I got home I told my grandpa what happened and he said, "You see grandson, they're not easy to catch." (Laughter!) "But then there's reason for it," he said. "If you don't succeed there's always a reason that you don't." And he would pray you know. I guess he has a verse where he stops for breath. At the beginning he prays slow until I learn, then he starts going a hundred miles an hour and I keep up with him—and, uh, when he stops ... he has his eyes closed and I found out too, to pray right is to close your eyes. When he stops I open my eyes, look at him and he would look at me and laugh. (Laughs) What's funny is I did that to him—he did that some, like twice, and at the end when it was over I asked—I said, "Grandpa what was funny?" He said, "Coyote pups." (Laughter) Yeah, then they gave me a ... the third degree before that. All that was brushed away with a crow feather and ashes, take it outside. So I was, I had a good mind for I don't now how long and then they came back on me and I go to a medicine man and have him take care of it, and that's how I lived. Every once in a while they would really come on to me and at home ...

PIEHLER: Would it come in a dream ... ?

SMITH: Yeah, a dream. I hit a lamp off a bed table by the side. I hit that lamp off. And at one time I was livin' on—I was sleepin' on the inside [of the bed] and I saw two coyotes coming. Over there, there was big log and they got behind that big log and then these two Japanese stood up, tall Japanese. And I went over—I was a kung fu man, I learned it on the side—kung fu. They call it martial arts now, or karate and things. At that time there was only kung fu and I learned it on the side, at the base, at night. So I wanted to get 'em right in here, and I did, and hit my wall in my bedroom, broke my toes on one side.

PIEHLER: Because of the force of ... ?

SMITH: The force, yeah. And there was just about that much, but I broke my toes doing that. (Gestures with hands) My wife was on the outside, I was towards the wall, so I did that. So it does come from ...

PIEHLER: When did that—was this in the 1960s? Cause you mentioned ...

SMITH: Uh, 1970—I think 70-something.

PIEHLER: So in the 1970s you were still having ...

SMITH: I still ...

PIEHLER: You had the dream.

SMITH: Yeah. Even today I still get it sometimes. Some nights—my wife would hit me to wake me up. I'm thankful she wakes me up. So that's how it is. I guess it's never gonna go away completely, but I had myself blessed [and] paid out of my own pocket to do that.

PIEHLER: But I get a sense that the fact that you could talk about what had happened to you and then had taken away from you, that was very valuable after you back from the war.

SMITH: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: Or let me ask in another way. Did some Navajo resist doing this? Did some of your friends or people you knew resist this sort of going through the cleansing that you did? With your ... your grandfathers.

SMITH: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: Did some not do the ceremony that you did?

SMITH: Um, I don't understand the question.

PIEHLER: Well, you had, you had said when you came home you got cleansed. You had the ceremony to cleanse you. Did everyone coming back have that same ceremony?

SMITH: Uh, if I lived on Navajo Reservation I would've had it done properly four times. Everything is four times.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Four times. You only had it once?

SMITH: I only had it once that ...

PIEHLER: That one time.

SMITH: ... day I came home. And then thereafter I married Acoma ...

PIEHLER: Acoma.

SMITH: ... a different tribe.

PIEHLER: Different tribe.

SMITH: So I went to her grandpa at one time when I really needed it. Well I didn't think I wanted to, but my wife, she said, "Let's go. Let's go see my grandfather, he's good at that." We went over there—sure enough, that helped me for I don't know, maybe three, four years. And then they come back and I go somewhere and do it. And my family, my own brothers and sisters and some very good cousin brothers, they tell me, "Let's have a

squaw dance for you. We will pay for it.” That cost about two, three thousand dollars. They said, “Don’t worry about it, we’ll take care of everything for you. We just want you cured.” So—but I tell ‘em, “No let’s wait a while. I’ll think about it.” And during the week I know where there’s medicine man. I go there and pay him to, uh, bless me and I’m home, my family don’t know about it. I keep doing it for years and years. I went to different tribes to help me—[I] lived like that.

PIEHLER: Did you ever—I’m just curious—did you ever go to a Veterans’ Administration program at all?

SMITH: I went there some time ago. I had been sick for about—gee, I went to a lot of hospitals and none of them would help me. Finally I went to the Veterans’ Administration hospital in Albuquerque and, uh, they got me into a room, five doctors. Two women and three men doctors, they got me into a room and they talk about me, and then they told me “incurable” or something like that. That they couldn’t help me, might as well go to the wreckin’ yard they told me. That made me mad. So I told them off—all of ‘em. I said, “One day I’ll get well and I’ll come back and tell you. By that time you will probably have learned more” I told them. So ...

PIEHLER: When was that?

SMITH: Um, that was in ’78 I think. 70-something.

PIEHLER: That ...

SMITH: That’s not to long ago.

PIEHLER: ... well, actually that’s twenty-three ...

SMITH: But understand, that’s just they way they are. And there’s a lot of us out there that are needing real good help, but they don’t have the place, they don’t have a bed, they don’t come back [to see the patient], some of them. And look like they only take care of the younger ones. The older ones are just fading away. So that’s how it is. I know this, uh, two weeks ago they closed some more veterans’ hospitals up north. Three I think—three that they closed, three of ‘em. Here they’re sending us to war. Persian Gulf, they got some kind of sickness over there—brain, nervous—and they can’t be helped. And same way it’s gonna come out of this one. I don’t know. So, that’s—we sort of take care of ourselves, with our own kind. And I got cured. All that was really bothering me is gone now. Only the dreams.

PIEHLER: The dreams.

SMITH: Yeah, only the dream ... all the others things that was making me sick is gone. I went to revival. Those tents—what do they call them?

TINKER: Yeah, the tent revivals.

SMITH: Yeah, I went to one and I asked this, uh, this woman to do something for me and instead of saying that she went to my legs right away. That's where my ...

TINKER: Pain?

SMITH: ... pains were. And never—it wouldn't heal up. I don't know what it was. I thought it was some kind of specific [thing], like Agent Orange, stuff like that. This lady went to my legs, she picked it up and prayed. Two weeks later I was healed, so I go to her church [and] give her lots of money. I mean my donation was quite a bit and I even go over there during the day, give her money or ask her what she need. So I helped with that, I paid for it. And I'm thankful that it happened like that and—I think the reason I went there was because my mother died. She used to pray for me a lot. All of a sudden she [would] come to my house, she'd say, "Son, you need a prayer. I'm gonna pray." And she would do that. That's how I got along—to this day. That's very good. But remember what my Dad said. If you do something wrong, and nobody find out, punish yourself. Maybe that helped, too.

TINKER: Mm hmm. Was the tent revival in Albuquerque or was it near your home?

SMITH: Uh, way down west—Arizona.

TINKER: So you made the trip special?

SMITH: Uh huh. –I don't know how I got into that one. I really don't know what took me there. I just happened to go there, then probably thinking ... might as well try this one.

TINKER: And it was a Christian revival?

SMITH: Uh huh.

TINKER: Did you go to anymore—did you ever go to Christian churches after that?

SMITH: Yeah. I went to some other ones and then when I went to too many they start criticizing each other so I quit going, but I still pray.

TINKER: Hm mm. I think I remember asking you once before if you ever went to Mr. Hawthorne's, R.O. Hawthorne's church—his Baptist church. [Hawthorne is also a Navajo Code Talker]

SMITH: He has the wrong approach about gettin' somebody into his church, so not really.

TINKER: So you don't go ... you don't go to his church?

SMITH: Yeah. I don't go to his church. He has a—he has a business going.

TINKER: Oh, okay. That's how he's making his living?

SMITH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: I want to—I want to just go back before ... to ask you about before the war. And one question I always ask veterans is what they remember, what they think of, what they thought of Franklin Roosevelt. What did you think of Franklin Roosevelt growing up?

SMITH: Uh, not much. I never thought of him much because he's way out there. The only thing that I remember about his is the Great White Father because he's the boss you know ...

PIEHLER: ... So that was a term that was still used.

SMITH: Uh huh. Great White Father. And like when I got home from enlisting I told my mother, I said, "I got drafted." She knew where that drafting was comin' from so she didn't object. She said, "Okay son if you have to go, go ahead. We'll get Grandpa here right away." So the grandpas helped me get started. And uh, what he did, I believe in it and, uh, it took me through in all ways. I had fears for a little while and they say, "Fix bayonet," I have fears—how am I gonna go, with bayonets in my body or something—I'm sure not going to get it. I'm gonna get as many as I can before I go. That was in my mind. And the night before ... hitting the beach we usually talk a lot. We try to laugh. It's not real laugh, but we laugh. When we really laugh is afterwards, getting back together again. But knowing that you're gonna go in tomorrow is ...

TINKER: ... I remember you said that one of your grandfathers was on the Long Walk [of the Navajo] when he was a boy. Was there still resentment towards the government in your family? Did your grandfather always resent the government after that?

SMITH: I think to this day they still do. That was a terrible story I used to hear when I was a little boy, really small. And the neighbor [and] other relatives would come to our place and stay overnight and they would always be crying and talk about that. How horrible it was—I had a movie of that one that I forgot to bring. It was ...

PIEHLER: One of the things, cause you told my first class about the story of the Long Walk [of the Navajo] and maybe this is a good time to recount it since you raised—this is a story you heard when you were a young boy. Could you tell the story that you heard as a young boy about the Long Walk?

SMITH: ... The movie didn't say, but it was there. The stuff that they say went along was there. They said that the soldiers, the government soldiers, had, uh, taken—they had all their beers and drinks and these big wagons. And they were raping the young girls, and they were just killing the older ones. Some were pregnant, they just let 'em die. They

didn't help them up. So 8,000 left Canyon de Chelly and only 5,000 showed up at Fort Sumner. And all the rest was gone. Where I live now, a little ways up, another tribe, Laguna, they have a September 19 celebration every year. That was supposed to be on another date, but they moved it to September 19 in memory of the Long Walk Navajos they said one night right across Laguna Village. At that time it was just a little village. Right across was where the soldiers stayed overnight and to this day they say on September 19, at night, there would be a lot of noise over there. It's probably a graveyard or something. But the Laguna people, they believe in feedin' poor souls, so they take food over there thinkin' that these people are there. And they pray and put food there every year. Still going strong they say. And Acomas do that too, but only for our own relatives that passed away. We have one place where they cook all variety of food one day and then they invite relatives to come eat, try to eat it all. And they take a little bit of each one of those variety of foods, put it in a bowl and take it up to feed the poor souls. That is why I never put back that—I still remember those other grandmas and grandpas that you used to come and visit and talk about the Long Walk. The outstanding, horrible thing done to the Navajo tribe at that time. That's how bad it was. But that didn't hit my mind when I was gonna go fight. Maybe because was a little bit too young when I heard these things. And my grandpa was seven years old when they got in. He went along as a little boy, seven year old. When he came back he was ten years old.

PIEHLER: From the Long Walk?

SMITH: Yeah, coming back. He came all the way back with his family and he died there on top of the barn. He had alpaca up there. He was pitching hay when he fell and died up there. His relatives kinda knew what he does, so they went up there to look and there he was. He was already gone—cold. He used to grow peaches.

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Sam Smith on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

TINKER: ... Cynthia Tinker.

PIEHLER: And you were saying about your grandfather who had the peaches?

SMITH: He had an orchard behind us—up on the hill. There was spring water way up there in the middle of the mountain, coming out of the rocks. That's where the water was sticking out and we feed our horses up there and sometimes we get a bucket of water and bring it home. And his orchard was down below. He would get his water up there and pour it into all his trees, each one. And he would come by at noon with his mule-team and the wagon, barrels of water in the wagon. And on kind of a warm day we would bring home the goats early and we'd milk them. We'd fill a gallon of milk, goat milk, and we'd be boiling and my mother would be on the side making tortilla—real nice one that cooks on the charcoal, they kind of bubble up—and here he comes right on time when the milk

is done and tortilla is ready. (Laughter) He don't shake hand with anybody, he just come to the tortilla, rip one up, stick it in the boiling milk and eat.

TINKER: So he just always seemed to show up at dinnertime? (Laughter) Was this grandfather you're referring to your father's father?

SMITH: This grandpa?

TINKER: Yeah.

SMITH: No, this one is my grandmother's brother.

TINKER: Oh, okay. Okay.

SMITH: Yeah. We didn't hate him, but we used to hate for him to be there at that time. (Laughter) So that always went on. He never missed. He come on time to do that. There was another thing. So really that Long Walk is never—it's still, they talk about it real bad now. As a matter of fact, they're making that into a—what do you call it? Uh, a place to ... really remember ...

TINKER: They're gonna build a memorial?

SMITH: Memorial.

TINKER: Are they?

SMITH: Uh huh. And I think they gonna do a lot more. They're asking for some funds and they're doing some fundraising themselves. And all that travel where they walked is going to be marked, like they do in other states. I traveled with my car and my family a lot and we always found some memorial right next to the highway to look at. There's a lot of stories to those memorials. That's how that's gonna be too. So I think that's nice. We will always be remembered.

PIEHLER: Did you tell the stories of the Long Walk to your own children when they were growing up?

SMITH: Uh, no. Only when they ask, of anything. I would tell them not too much, just a little bit you know, so they understand. Not to really make 'em think about it. That's the way—thinking that, like me ... I just listened in, and that's how I gathered all this. So, some other things, lot of things, I tell them a little bit. Not much. Not to sit with. They wanted to do my life story one time, we went one day, two or three pages, but my daughter never came back. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So they have asked you. But your children ... it sounds like when you were growing up, it sounds like you really had grandparents who really sat you on the knee and told stories. Is that a fair ...

SMITH: Uh, I wish I had paid more attention to it because I was too little and usually somewhere I'm asleep. Yeah, so I never go all of it, the story. But any part of that is all mean, terrible, what happened. Even in gathering the Navajos they found some of these way far from Canyon de Chelly at their own sheep camp, and they went and slaughtered all the sheep. And walked the family to Canyon de Chelly, which all of it is long distance walkin', several miles long distance. Some of them had learned to grow peaches. They had orchards and they went and chopped these down. They tried to starve them [in] 1862, I think. They tried to do that and then they give up and went away. But they still wouldn't give up what they were doing and they tried to have a peace treaty made there at Chuska Mountain—Washington Pass we call it. That's where they met with the three leaders and Kit Carson—colonel, I think he was a colonel, that they were going to write a treaty there and make some kind of agreement. But one of the soldiers threw a rock on the Indian horses to mess it up, not do that, not sign the treaties. I think that's all mean, or politician. Politician is mean.

PIEHLER: Well that ... what do you remember growing up about the tribe and tribal government? How aware were you?

SMITH: I remember them coming out, the ECW—Erosion Control or Conservation Works, I think—that they had come and brought some barbed wires and cut up posts, paid some Navajos about fifty cents an hour to divide this one area. Divide it into two acre each. Fenced it up and ...

PIEHLER: And was that through your tribal, the tribe that ...

SMITH: That was for the tribe that I knew of that lived in the valley by the wash and I was grateful for that because we got to plant corn and all what we going to have for winter, it was there. And the corn, they fix it to last the whole winter.

PIEHLER: I'm curious. Did you always have enough food growing up? Was there always enough—did you ever go to bed hungry? Do you remember?

SMITH: I don't remember. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: You never ... you remember ...

SMITH: Uh, not always have enough food. There was times we didn't have food so what my mother did was when they butcher a sheep they cooked the fat and saved the grease for lard. And that grease would be somewhere saved so it won't spoil. And those days when we don't have enough food, they cooked the grease, put the tortilla in it, and we had fry bread ...

PIEHLER: Fry bread, and that ...

SMITH: ... and fry bread with a lotta salt is just like eatin' muttuns because it's made out of fat saved through cookin'. They call the fat all cooked *chicharron*. It's something like the chip. Now they make a pork skin chip in store and you buy it—ninety-nine cents. And we had our own. That was survival food.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. That was when you ran short.

SMITH: Uh huh. We a lot of sheep out side. (Laughs) Could easily go out there and butcher one.

PIEHLER: You didn't but that was also—if you had really run out of food. What kind of foods did you buy? It sounds like you bought salt. Did you buy coffee growing up? What did you actually, you know, what types of food would you actually buy from a trading post?

SMITH: Mostly tomato cans and pork 'n beans, which has no pork inside. (Laughter) And things like that. And potatoes—potatoes was scarce, too. Sometimes they would sell little potatoes and they would boil them to eat. That was the right way to do it, is even though you have a lot of sheep don't butcher them yet. And I found out when we moved towards Holbrook [Arizona] we lived right next to cowboy with a lot of cows. And that guy, he only eats pork 'n beans. We go help him round up to help him brand or cut ears, tails. But, uh, we expect to eat steak when we get done ... (Laughter).

PIEHLER: And you got pork 'n beans.

SMITH: We got pork 'n beans. And I just think, "Gee, we've been doing this for quite a while with our own families and this guy's the same way." (Laughter) There was some other things you can preserve, food out of the garden. Corn—those come in handy during the winter, that you can have. Also, we went to eatin' porcupine for winter, but you have to go hunt to another mountain where they have porcupine. Also, there was wild turkey that you can shoot bow and arrow and bring that home and cook it, barbeque underground. Things like that. And during the other times there was prairie dogs to eat, there was rabbit, uh, little rabbit—Peter Rabbit—and then there was jackrabbit—big ones. (Laughter) Even if you get just one little rabbit, you cook so you can make lots to feed everybody.

TINKER: In a stew?

SMITH: With gravy and some leaves that grow on—there were some leaves that you could use, some vegetation on the ground that you could pick and cook with food to make it tasty and it was really—I miss all those.

PIEHLER: I'm curious. And I think this is aimed at everyone who reads the interview, but I even think some of the Navajo. How many ... of your grandchildren's generation, how many—you could survive out in the field. You could hunt, you could prepare your food. How many of your grandchildren's generation could do what you did growing up?

SMITH: None.

PIEHLER: This is ... in a sense what you're describing is lost. Because you could just ...

SMITH: This is all past and gone. Can't do that no more. The bubonic plague on the prairie dogs, rabbit, and all kinds of—they find some other things—Hantavirus in rats. Those are killers up there now, so you can't ...

TINKER: Nobody is willing to risk hunting because the animals have some disease or virus?

SMITH: Yeah. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: But what you've described takes a lot of skill ... and so this hasn't passed to the succeeding generations or ... well I think there are a lot of reasons but I think—so even the Navajo reading this, this would be something they would not themselves experience the way you did ... in terms of hunting.

SMITH: Yeah. They—I think they would just go somewhere and freeload. (Laughter) No, they wouldn't. I have three big grandkids with me that I feed. I want them to go to school and finish school so it don't matter how much it costs me, I'm taking care of them. And that's they way I do. I have sobered up some families on the Reservation that I knew were bad on alcohol, so I help 'em in some way. I spend money on them. And if in so long if they don't straighten up, don't do right, I tell 'em, "Remember what I said at the beginning. If you quit drinking I will help you. But if you haven't stopped drinking, so I can't help you anymore." I tell them I'll go help somebody else that is willing to give up drinking. So, I've been doing that. And my wife and I have raised some unwanted children that became our children. Not changed their names, they kept their names, but when we see them they're our kids. And ... some are grandmothers already, grandpas already. But, uh, we did that, my wife and I. And we're still doing it. So that's to—I tell them about the education is to learn more, to learn a better way of making a living. To have someday a peaceful world—maybe. Maybe.

TINKER: Or at least have a peaceful corner? (Laughter)

SMITH: Yeah. (Laughs) Yeah, but that's the idea. To get educated and have a better life, have a better country—I don't know how else to say it. That's on my mind. And I told 'em from the house to outside, it's all the same. To improve, learn. I didn't have much education. I'm just a twelfth grade graduate.

TINKER: Do you feel like the Marine Corps did that for you in a way?

SMITH: Oh yes, Marine Corps. I have a lot of respect for Marines and the Marine Corps. I tell them about that unit. My other son, he's Army. He came back and I said, "You have

to respect the Army, don't put them to shame." He's a good boy. He won't do that. That's the way to go. The Marine Corps did that for me, so to this day I'm still a Marine. I'm gettin' old, and not walk like a Marine no more, but to heck with it.

PIEHLER: I'm curious—you were very young when this happened. The swastika used to be a symbol that the Navajo used to use. Do you remember, there was a big debate in 1940 whether they should keep the symbol. Do you remember that at all? And apparently the tribe voted not to use it anymore.

SMITH: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: Do you remember any of that debate growing up?

SMITH: No I don't remember that at all.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, when you, it seems like a simple question, but when you were delivering the papers did you start reading the paper regularly? The papers you were delivering in Albuquerque? Did you also read the paper, start reading it?

SMITH: Uh huh. I read the paper. I read about the war. I read about myself. (Laughter) We were playing basketball, the score was tied, and my coach hit me like that, he says, "Smith! Get in there, as soon as you get the ball you shoot!" So I got in there and I got the ball. I was still way at half-court. (Laughter) But I got the ball, I say, "Here goes nothing" and I think the basket came over to catch the ball. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you also played basketball in school, and you boxed. Did you play any other sports?

SMITH: Football.

PIEHLER: Football.

SMITH: Mm hmm. I was quarterback, football. The years when you can kick the extra point as drop kick. Nobody hold on it. Drop kick, that's how we used to play. That's, uh, 1942.

TINKER: Which one did you like the best?

SMITH: I like all of 'em, but I wasn't so good in track though. Never ...

TINKER: But you were good in all the sports.

SMITH: I was good and I played baseball. I pitch—I was good. Nobody hit at the beginning. I always start. And basketball I was good. All of them, I was good. Except track, I never came first. (Laughter) I was third or second. But that was good enough. My coach always told me, "You don't have to be the first." I felt bad the first time then

he told me that. He said, “You don’t have to be first. You might just make it one day.” I don’t remember making it first one day, that’s how it all just became the past. I think maybe that’s what kept me in school, too.

PIEHLER: Is the sports? You liked ...

SMITH: Yeah. And, um, girlfriends. No girlfriends. If you have a girlfriend, your teammate or your buddies they call you sissy if you have a girl on your arm anywhere, you know. (Laughter) I didn’t have a girlfriend.

PIEHLER: When you were in high school?

SMITH: Uh huh. I just only treat some little girls, five or six of them, and one of them became my wife when I came back. I was still imagining her a little girl when I came home ...

PIEHLER: And she’d ...

SMITH: ... she was, you know, grew up. (Gestures with hands) (Laughter) So I didn’t think of marrying her until my mother put pressure on me.

PIEHLER: When you were reading the paper before Pearl Harbor, did you think at the time that we would be going to war? Did you have any sense of that?

SMITH: No, I never, uh, really read any other thing except what was going on in Germany and then my instructor in the shoe shop ...

PIEHLER: ... With the map of Europe.

SMITH: ... with the map. He kept us up with what was going on over there. And he was saying, “One day those guys going to be over here to take this country.”

PIEHLER: But the Japanese, you never ...

SMITH: Never.

PIEHLER: You never expected.

SMITH: Never expected till that Sunday morning on the 7th of December. We went to eat breakfast and all of a sudden it was there. They just had radio and we heard it. And two days later Roosevelt declared war on those guys. That ... really got to my mind, especially later when it became a newsreel, downtown. I’d go to movies, downtown Albuquerque, and usually they’d show the news first and then the main attraction, so it ... sunk in my head. And it stayed there till I been there. I still don’t care for them.

TINKER: And after you saw the newsreel, that was when you went to try and get in the military? Or did you try to get in before you saw the newsreel.

SMITH: No, much later than that. There was some other things that made me want to go. The way they were saying the Japanese were going to take this land and I thought of my dad's garden, two acre.

TINKER: So you thought about it for a while before you went down to the ...

SMITH: I thought about it for a while. And I think I kinda worked myself to it on the railroad when I worked ten hours a day. All they time I was gonna go, and my friends and some other friends were going, so I wanted to go to.

TINKER: And the first time you went to the recruiter's office you were fifteen?

SMITH: Yeah, I was fifteen when I went and they said, "No we're not ready yet, you come back two years." And I went back the next year and lied to him so I got in. I think they probably knew I was young.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

TINKER: They probably did. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Yeah, I ... Did you know of any Navajo who didn't, I mean, you were subject to the—you were underage or you ... could've waited until eighteen before you were drafted. But there was a draft, and the Navajo and others were getting drafted. Was there anyone that you knew resisted the draft or didn't want to fight?

SMITH: Uh, would I have resisted?

PIEHLER: No ... not yourself, but others. Did you know of anyone that really was angry at the government still, even during the war?

SMITH: I don't remember them by names, but I know they were deferred because they were going to school and they were given a chance to finish school first. And when I joined everybody found out, my teachers found out. My teacher kept me after school, talk to me to get deferred. I don't need to get deferred because I wasn't a draftee yet. They told me, "Why don't you finish school first?" I said, "No, I'll be back to finish it." Then I was lying to them, you know, and here I really did come back to finish that same place.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you mentioned to the class that you used the G. I. Bill to go back to high school.

SMITH: Uh huh. And the teachers were still there that tried to keep me there, except the principal and another civics teacher. (Laughter) I used to not like civics—study about government ... town government, counties, stuff like that. I still don't care for it, all

those, but I should have learned a little bit about it, I might have been a politician if I had learned all about it. So that's what happened.

PIEHLER: You mentioned even in this interview before about your trip to California, to San Diego. You'd also mentioned that the trip to Albuquerque had been a big trip growing up. Had you traveled anywhere else besides the Navajo lands and Albuquerque?

SMITH: At the time that was the only place I had traveled.

PIEHLER: So the San Diego trip was really the first time that you ...

SMITH: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: What were thoughts as you were going very far from home?

SMITH: Uh, I thought of that before, before I enlisted. I knew that I was going to go far and I knew that there was going to be death in combat. I thought of that and I made a commitment that I would—that I would try hard not to get killed. And, uh, I learned everything from the Marine Corps to keep me safe. Like they say in the Marine Corps, "I'm not gonna tell you twice, just once, so pay attention." So that was it then. I kinda think maybe some of them—well some were just rowdy, and don't care 'til ... things are put out by their superiors, so they didn't make it.

TINKER: When you were in Basic were you integrated in with the white unit? So they didn't separate you out in Basic?

SMITH: Uh huh. That's where I lost Golden Glove champ. At the boot camp, this guy, one day we went to get our shots. I got my shot, both sides, and they put gloves on us, from another platoon, my platoon, and I made good with this guy. I guess he was a Golden Glove champ of Ohio and they put us in the ring that night, after we both got shots. (Laughter) And he beat me. That's the last time I boxed.

PIEHLER: You were tired?

SMITH: Yes.

TINKER: Did he knock ya out?

SMITH: No.

TINKER: Just beat ya?

SMITH: Yeah, just—he didn't knock me out, but I won a box of pogeey bait. (Laughter) Do you know what pogeey bait is?

TINKER: No.

SMITH: Candy! Hershey candy. Big box. The candy is not allowed at boot camp, period. So I got a box of that and he got a chain, something like gold, that he won and I got candy. And when I got back to my barracks I fed all my buddies in that platoon—about sixty men. We divide that candy. We all had a piece of chocolate. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So they must've liked that.

SMITH: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: What do you remember of some of those people you served with in Basic? Um, do you remember, even if you don't remember the name, where they were sort of from or any stories about them?

SMITH: I, uh, no I really don't remember. I completely forgot those names because they went all different directions right away.

PIEHLER: Where were they from? Do you remember?

SMITH: They were from Texas, Colorado—different places. All these western states that go to San Diego for boot camp.

PIEHLER: What questions ... the fellow recruits—when you were in a barracks and you were sort of just talking, what questions would you ask of them and what questions did they ask of you? What you curious about? What were they curious about you?

SMITH: Um—I was not that kind of person yet at that time. I just mind my own business and study the training, training manual.

PIEHLER: So you really weren't very social with this group?

SMITH: Friendly talks, the short ones, but not to be with them. Or go out with them.

TINKER: You didn't have like one good buddy?

SMITH: Not really, it doesn't really work that way in the boot camp.

TINKER: Mm hmm. You don't have time to have a buddy in boot camp.

SMITH: Yeah. You don't have that kind of time. There was no going out. Only movies, but they're training movies on how to do this. And we go different places, learn different kinds of weapon. How to take them apart, put them back together and learn how they shoot [and] all that. That was the learnin', like that. So there was not—I didn't gain anybody there. Everybody was just sort of to themselves.

PIEHLER: In your group were you the only Indian? Was there any fellow Indians with you? Or maybe from another tribe ... ?

SMITH: There was another Navajo, uh, that—he was accepted in the Air Wing. He went ...

PIEHLER: He went to the Air Wing, which you had applied to.

SMITH: I was gonna go with him, but I got disqualified ....

PIEHLER: Because you didn't have a high school ...

SMITH: ... because of my, uh, class—not being a graduate of the twelfth grade. But I did pass the aptitude test. And I taught that guy how to disassemble rifle and put it back together. He had a hard time. I don't what he did in the Air Wing. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So the fellow Navajo, you had taught him how to put his rifle together. But you would've been also going to the Air Wing if you had had a high school diploma.

SMITH: If I had high school diploma I would have. I think, ah, I don't know, I might have failed. I might've just been on the ground all that time.

PIEHLER: You mentioned, I think it was to the first class, about shaving in the Marine Corps. Could you recount your story about your run-in with the drill sergeant and a razor?

SMITH: Yeah. Drill sergeant—every morning I get up early I'd be washing in the wash room and he come in later. And then I guess it bother him, one day he said, "How the hell you do that chief? You always here before I do." I said, "I was raised like this to get up early. Get up before the sun or you're a loser." (Laughter) He didn't like that I guess, so that day he says, "Smith! Front and center" and the whole platoon lined up and [he] made me about-face and then he gave me the razor and said, "Now, shave." And uh, he shaved that morning, but he never saw me shave. I just wash and I'm ready. So I shave right there and he came around and he said, "Right here, right here" 'til I shave it all off. (Pointing to face) And thereafter I shaved dry. Don't need no leather to shave. I shave after that. Those years they had this blade that you put it in backwards-like. I had that one with me all the time. I guess he laughed.

PIEHLER: How did you like the food in boot camp? And was any of the food different from what you were used to? Do you remember?

SMITH: Yeah. It was like government school food. (Laughter) So it was not unusual ...

PIEHLER: Well maybe I should back up. How unusual was the food in government school from what you—you know, you were used to growing up and making your own

food. What was the difference in the government school food? 'Cause it sound like Marine Corps, there was the pattern between government school and Marine Corps food.

SMITH: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: What was the big difference?

SMITH: I liked— (Coughs) Only thing is that in the government school they had Indian cooks that, you know, sometimes want to do you favor. They make fry bread and you get to enjoy that, just like back home. But in boot camp, no fry bread. But the other stuff was there, beans and pigskin boiled with beans. Everything, you know, [was] cooked in a big quantity.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

SMITH: And one thing I learned not to do was ... the first supper that we ... I ate everything on my tray and left a big butter, about that big. (Gestures) And I was going out to throw it away and there was a Marine standing by the slop can. He said, "Hold it!" He said, "Eat that butter." (Laughter) I looked back, he said, "Right there!" So I stood right there and I ate that big butter. (Laughter) Thereafter, I'd get the butter, but I always sit by somebody who likes butter and I share, I give them my butter. Some of them—or I'd ask, "Who wants some butter?" And they would say, "Me, me, me!" I just let them have. So that is one thing that I was taught.

PIEHLER: What was the most difficult thing about boot camp, do you remember? And what was sort of ... the easiest thing to do?

SMITH: (Pauses) Well, I just kind of kept up with everything. It was kind of—my dad my grandpa, they teach me a lot of things, that there's going to be another tribal war in different tribe. So they prepared me and they told me not to ever really sit down to eat, you gonna have to squat, have one knee up and the other side down. Be ready to jump like at a race starting line. That's how we used to sit and eat, and the girls were taught not to drink too much soup. We were taught, you know, to stay slim, not get fat. That's the way—be ready all the time. Be prepared for any kind of emergency and things like that, so at the school it was the same way. Sometimes they would line us up and we would march, learn to march, and kinda got the hang of it. So in the Marine Corps there was nothing really hard that I could—as long as I paid attention [and] understood the first time I—I had good ears that time, not like today. So I found out a lot of those other men, or boys, don't know how to do certain things, so I was alright. The only time I got scared was when I had to jump in the swimming pool with full pack. I thought that would take me down. I knew how to swim already. There was a lot of guys who didn't know how to swim so they got throw in by the drill sergeant and some of them almost drowned before they went after them. So that was ...

PIEHLER: That was your most ... in Basic, the most—and it wasn't the swimming part, but where had you learned to swim?

SMITH: Back home it used to rain. Rain a lot back home and we had some, uh, ponds that we used to swim in. Our parents told us, “Don’t jump into a pond without checking it out. Always check it out first because there’s some places that’s got sticks that might be going up.” So I used to do that, get in there ... They told us not to swim in a certain pond, “That’s for the livestock. Don’t mess it up.” So I didn’t swim in it, only certain ones that I used to. That’s where I learned how to swim and then continued to at Indian school [where] we get to swim—swim a lot.

PIEHLER: Did they have a pool at the Indian school?

SMITH: Uh, out.

PIEHLER: Outside they had a pond?

SMITH: Yeah. At the first time you get to go swimming, but then somehow that swimming pool drowned, got all dried up, cracked underneath cement somewhere. When we came back there was no swimming pool and we missed it. I noticed there was a lot of trash in that swimming pool. But we still go there at night—parched corn to eat.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. One of the things I ... Actually I’m gonna ...

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

PIEHLER: You recounted that your grandfather gave you a blessing before you left [for the Marine Corps] and could you maybe just—and I should’ve asked it in order—but you’ve talked about it to both of my classes and so could you recount—it sounds like it was, like it gave you a lot of courage when you were ...

SMITH: Sure did. It sure did. Growing up as a Navajo, Navajo boy, there’s a certain time you’d get the blessing instead of celebrating a birthday every year. There’s no such thing as celebrating birthday, that’s how come I didn’t know my birth date. But at a certain age when they think your ready for that age to do or learn new things they give you the blessing and they talk to you about it. And always remember there’s good spirits that are watching over us and every morning they have grind corn, white colored corn, but when we wake up we grab a little bit of it and go outside and pray for yourself. Thank the spirit for the good night’s rest and then pray for the morning, whatever you’re going to do make it easy if it can be done. And then at noon, if you’re at home, not anywhere else, you do the same thing again. And in the evening you go out and pray, pray all the time. Pray all the time. Be thankful and ask for a better future. So at that blessing I was glad, but I prayed to myself that I would be able to keep up with him in prayers. Because I can’t make a mistake, I can’t, uh—I have to say everything he said. So I prayed for that one before I got in. And when he started he start easy—easy so I can repeat after him. Those prayers are sort of ... the same thing over and over, slightly different from the first one. The second one is slightly different, and the third one, and the fourth one, that’s the end. And the idea is so you can learn and be able to say it without

the medicine man. That was the idea—to be able to be a prayin' man. So, I liked that. And sure enough, whatever they do, this is different from regular prayers. This was to bless a person going to war to meet sharp things, diverse things, all that, so that was all put away for me, and that gave me a lot of courage. And I never thought about it ... in the combat. That came from Marine Corps, that you only hear it one time. If you don't hear—I thought that what they used to say was real mean-like. (Laughter) And so, that done, I didn't depend on it, though. I really didn't depend on it, but I just thought of as it being with me. And the things that he taught me to do, when I hit the beach I did that. And all my comrades, too. I thought I was the only one, but I hear from other Code Talkers that they had done the same thing.

PIEHLER: That they had had the same thing, they ... You also said that your grandfather, at the ceremony, gave you sort of a armor. Could you describe that, what he had given you?

SMITH: That's in the prayer. That he had certain, certain holy birds, and animals, and creatures were put on me to protect me. So I was in the armor. It just kind of remind me of those old movies, what was that ... ? How they dressed with metal, here, there. It's kinda like when you pray you have metal socks put on, and so on, a feather here, there, to protect or have whatever object bounce off. I was dressed like that and probably now telling you I'm losing some.

PIEHLER: Well I should probably not ask you too much more then. (Laughter) Um, what—had any of your family like your father, your grandfather, had any been warriors in say the First World War? Do you remember any warriors—had any of the Navajo served in the First World War?

SMITH: Some grandpas went to war against Apaches. But ... they had a special name that we call them by and we had a lot of respect for those men. They were old when I got to know them, very old. And then like I said they were bringing us up, teaching us to be ready for any emergencies, thinkin' that they might come again. The Apaches, the Hopis. The reason why the Hopis are on top of the mountain is the Navajos chased them up there and they got in a fight with 'em. Same way with the Acomas I found out when I first got married over there. They used to—since me being a Navajo they used to talk to me about it. I didn't mind. I didn't know at the time that they had beaten up by some other Spaniards. [Don Juan de] Oñate [Salazar] is the guy's name, the leader of a troop that come through looking for gold. They were actually looking for gold. They put claim on some of those lands. That is what happened. So, that's the way it goes. And I just—some of those things kinda come true, what my grandpa prayed. He helped me a lot, but I didn't tell anybody I just kept it to myself and ...

PIEHLER: So even the fellow ...

SMITH: ... had my finger crossed. Uh huh. And when we left the island I prayed again, except after Iwo Jima. (Laughs) I got sick.

PIEHLER: ... Just to make sure we ask. Is there anything about boot camp that sticks out that we haven't talked about or I haven't asked you about? You remember shaving very vividly—what about the rifle range? How did you do on the rifle range?

SMITH: Um, I did good. I have a medal for it, so I'm alright with that. I shot rifle before I got in the Marine Corps. I got to be an expert, but the pistol I never had 'til I got in—matter of fact, 'til I got overseas. That's when I got a pistol. .45 caliber that I used to carry on the side for emergencies, the last resort. I use my rifle and grenades to depend on. So, I think that's the only two that really sticks out—the boxing and the shaving ...

PIEHLER: The shaving. And then ...

SMITH: And other things. There's lotta things I did like helping this other Navajo how to disassemble rifle. We got punished for that, the whole platoon got punished.

PIEHLER: Because of his ...

SMITH: Because of him not knowing how to put the—so I got assigned and the DI was after me too. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: To make sure he...

SMITH: That was because of getting up before him. So he got on my butt and told me to "get that man working." And I blindfold him and told him in Navajo how to do this, how to do that. And then take off the blindfold and do it with him again. I think in two nights I taught him and finally he got it together. I don't know what he did after that. After that he left and went into the air wing.

PIEHLER: I'm curious. Do you remember any KP duty you had to do?

SMITH: Um, not at the boot camp.

PIEHLER: Not at boot camp. You didn't ...

SMITH: We were overseas and I did boot camp ...

PIEHLER: You did KP?

SMITH: Oh, not boot camp. KP.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but not in boot camp.

SMITH: Not in boot camp. I never did that ... maybe I was lucky. I did other things, guard duty and stuff like that. That's a terrible job, guard duty. You don't do nothing, stay, just sit one place. And you get sleepy. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Um, did you write home to anyone when you were at boot camp or elsewhere? ... Did you ever get word back?

SMITH: I wrote to these little girls and they wrote to me. I wrote to some teachers because, uh, they wanted to know how I'm doing. And I'm not a good writer. I don't really care for writing. I always make it like Marines—short. So, and these girls keep writing 'til one day I got six letters one day and the whole platoon lined up and I run ... and got whipped with their belts. That's the policy procedure so you won't get so many letters. (Laughter)

TINKER: They made you run the gauntlet because you got so many letters?

SMITH: Yeah. (Laughter)

TINKER: And they didn't?

SMITH: No, there was some other guys that had to run too, and we got to whip them. (Laughter) Anybody that got six letters in one day, they run down that line. (Laughter) And I did one day and of course I didn't mind. They just [used] web uh ...

PIEHLER: The web belt.

SMITH: The web belt. So then pretty soon some of them start quitting. I guess they were growing older and getting boyfriends and the teachers don't write to me no more 'cause I don't write 'em right away. So that is what happened. And overseas we used to get a negative, that big. (Motions with hands)

PIEHLER: The V-Mail.

SMITH: That was a letter. And there was a lot of black mark censored reading. And I found out that my girlfriend was getting same way. They were getting negatives from San Francisco. That's where they turn them into negatives. So that's what happened. Don't say much. In between the division, Samuel Billison, my buddy was in the 5th Marine Division. He was at the bigger island, Oahu, and ... him and I write each other and it was like that too ... uh, a negative. And so we just quit writing.

TINKER: When you graduated from Basic, did you have a little bit of time off? Or where did you go after that?

SMITH: Oh yes, I went home. And I had another short blessing at home and I left—of course I [had] left my clothes, all of it, my shoes, socks, pants, shirt, like that. So that was kept at a different place and my mother took care of that all the time while I was away ... That community where we lived, a whole bunch of medicine men gather at one place. The way they did was to get your turquoise beads and ... chip off a piece of one of the big turquoise that's strung. So you take that one with the clothes to where the meeting is and all the medicine men get together and they sing and pray over there. And your clothes is

over there and they're blessing it all night so that you come home safe. That's the way it was done. Like now, we pray for all our relatives overseas and, uh, in Pakistan, what ...

PIEHLER: Iraq?

TINKER: Afghanistan?

SMITH: Afghanistan and Iraqi. Even some places we have relatives some place else that, it's, uh, I guess it's a policy that they have to serve overseas one year somewhere. Some go to Japan and some other places ...

TINKER: Korea

SMITH: ... that they ... Yeah. That they had to serve one year and then to actually go to Iraqi combat. That's what they're doing now.

TINKER: You had a few days at home, after Basic? You went through that and then where did you go when you left home again?

SMITH: I went home. I stayed there—how many days did I have? I think I had fifteen days then I went back to Gallup and I couldn't get on the bus, it was always overloaded. So I rent a room across at the motel, it was only two dollars in those days. Two dollars a night, so I got to stay and I'd go out and eat in café. The café was cheap those days. A bowl of beans and coffee was fifty cents. I was able to keep up with that one ... They wouldn't get me on, it was always overload. So at the last two days I bought a bag of apples and a loaf of bread and that kept me another two days 'til finally I got on the bus, there was room. But, uh, the bus driver remembered me coming to him all the time. There was lot of soldiers and Marines, can't make it, so I was late and they made me a statement, the bus driver. I took that back to the base so I wouldn't be punished. I came late two days, I think I missed, yeah. So that saved me. And then went back to training. I think before that or afterwards that I took aptitude test to be a pilot and they wouldn't let me. Then they took me to—I never knew there was a Code Talkers' school. I never knew that.

PIEHLER: There'd never been any rumor about ... ?

SMITH: There were never any nothin'.

PIEHLER: They kept it a real ... I mean ...

SMITH: It was a secret already ...

PIEHLER: That no one—you would've thought ...

SMITH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... that some Navajo might've said to you, you know, there's this—and not even know all the details ...

SMITH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So how did they sort of tell you? Do you remember who was the one who first told you about this unit?

SMITH: Well, the second choice was artillery. I wanted to get into the artillery, [but] by that time somehow they found out I was a Navajo. So they came over and said, "Are you a Navajo?" I said "Yes, sir." "Come with me" and that's when I went to that ...

PIEHLER: Was that an officer?

SMITH: Marine. A Marine sergeant.

PIEHLER: The sergeant just said ...

SMITH: Yeah.

TINKER: Were you still in San Diego at this time?

SMITH: I was, yeah, I was still in San Diego then they took me straight to Camp Pendleton—get all in one barracks with all kind of Indians. And as the training started they start taking some of them out. Those that were not Navajos were taken out to other branch and, uh, those that would not be able to make the code training were also taken out. The ones that barely speak English ...

PIEHLER: Eventually couldn't ...

SMITH: Yeah. So they were taken out and, but I stayed and I took the course. I took all the courses: the Morse code, the English and the Navajo. Pretty soon there was just a few of us left there and this Philip Johnston was our—the one taking care of you—was a tech sergeant. The man could speak just the Navajo language, the white man—old man. He didn't even go to boot camp. They just gave him a uniform and put him out in the barracks with us. (Laughter)

TINKER: So you saw him every day?

SMITH: Every day. Every morning. Yeah, he talked to us in Navajo. And sometimes he'd make fun of the other officers in Navajo. (Laughter) And those other officers don't know what he's saying. He had the leverage. That was, uh, I guess ...

TINKER: But your actual instructors, um, so it was white officers that taught you Morse Code and the ...

SMITH: That was at another place where we went.

TINKER: Okay. And then ... you had Navajo instructors to teach you the Navajo Code.

SMITH: Uh huh. Yeah.

TINKER: And Johnston was there sort of as, uh, supervisor.

SMITH: Johnston was just our, our mother.

TINKER: Okay. (Laughs)

SMITH: There to take care and look after us. Take care of our problems and things like that. We had two Navajos that were instructors, Rex Kontz, he died, and John Benally, he died too ... he one, I stole his girlfriend. (Laughs)

TINKER: Yeah, John Benally. (Laughter) Were they both from the original twenty-nine?

SMITH: Yes, they are the original twenty-nine. Though the original twenty-nine some of those were sent to Guadalcanal, the first part of the war with the Japanese. They were out there and they start making history right away as soon as they got in there because the, uh, the ciphering machine not working. There was a ciphering machine still that had to be approved by a communications serviceman in charge. They had to be tested first, whereas ours nobody had to test it for us. Give it to us and we're ... send it to the other end. And sometimes I get one, but most of the time where I was, with the general, I had to send it to three regiments and they would all have to answer "Wilco" that they got it. Never repeat those messages; say it one time and stay ready. And the few times there was others coming in from battalion, regiment, kind of forward echelon—front lines, they would be requesting somethin' that they need right away. Something that they can't get over the telephone 'cause we string telephones too, between the units. But there were times that the Japanese tap in these lines somewhere between us. These telephone lines are really long, maybe a mile long, that they have to string. And our telephone company does that all over ... And we have problem with those too and even the radios we have problem. The only problem that I really got from the Japanese is them jamming my frequency, but we had a way of switching the channel frequency to another and then you'd just synchronize [and] zero in on that receiver and you're transmitting and receiving on that frequency. So we learn how to do those things real fast. And I learned the Morse code, semaphore, linkers that we used aboard ship. We did that too. I had, since I was with the communications, the Signal company ... I was kind of all around person. They even at one time let me take a message to the front. I forget which unit it was, but I looked on the map for the G-2 tent and I knew where it is. I went over there and it wasn't there so I have to kind of look around. So that's, that's scary. I looked around and I found it and gave them the note that was given to me. Coming back I—a machine gun opened up on me. And I don't know at the time what was really going on, but he didn't shoot much. He almost caught up with me when he got shot.

TINKER: What island was this on?

SMITH: Maui. No, not Maui. Saipan.

TINKER: This was on Saipan?

SMITH: Saipan, yeah. Then I found out there's snipers. Marine snipers too. And, uh, I got to thinking about it. Well, that's not the first time they found them that day. When we went there was caves that we passed and there was bulldozers behind us, the M-50s. Uh, what are the—JASCO, Joint Assault Company, that come in with the equipment like that. They had these flamethrowers on a 'dozer [and] at the same time they closed the caves with dirt. Just 'doze it in there and after two or three days the Japanese days picked themselves back up, bring out their guns, and start fighting—just like in Iraq. That's what I think of as what's happening over there. But usually they don't go very long. They get 'em and everything's quiet again for a while. So that's what happened.

TINKER: You mentioned Maui. That's where you did your training?

SMITH: Yeah.

TINKER: How many weeks of school did you have for the code?

SMITH: Ah, I don't remember the—every time—after we clean up the Marshall Islands we came back to Maui. That's where the replacements were waiting there already. And we settle in and they brought all the Navajos up to where I was at the headquarters and next day we start school, uh, brushing up and we strung ... telephone, that place, the only time we use telephone among ourselves. We'd just go out in the field and get a telephone over there, over there, and over there, uh, kind of like they were regiments and I'm over here.

TINKER: Mm hmm, to practice.

SMITH: Practice, yeah. And that's how it worked. I don't remember how many weeks that was. But when we were ready to go to Saipan we didn't know we were going to Saipan. We didn't know where we were going until after we load up in Pearl Harbor and sail for about maybe a week, week and a half. And then one night they said, "We're going to have a briefing." So we all go out—the leaders all go to that briefing. I was part of it, going there. And that's where they give instructions about what beach we going—they make a map and show you where you're gonna hit and where you're gonna go. Where you're going to set up the center with the general and all that. All the plans given to you but not where. That's when you start worrying, when you start getting scared and you just think maybe this I'm going, maybe I'll make it through. So you pray. At night you don't sleep, next day you're out there on LST, the crew ship, the one that just falls down and you run out.

PIEHLER: LST?

SMITH: LST I think it was. I don't remember all those things nowadays ... And after that, Tinian. We rest there and regrouped at Saipan after we free the Micronesians. That tribe was there that had been taken prisoners of war and boy they were all very happy.

PIEHLER: Did you talk to any of the Micronesians that you ...

SMITH: I didn't get to talk to any one of them at the time because of the process of reorganizing and other things with them. They were putting them somewhere. I guess there homes were probably all demolished, so there was a lot of ...

TINKER: Chaos?

SMITH: Yeah. And we went across to Tinian. That one didn't take us long because those Japanese wanted to commit suicide. And we helped them out. And we had time to rest there. We found some goats running around. They caught one and butchered it. (Laughs) We had a feast there; it was fun. Then we went back to Maui from there. Again there were replacements waiting for us. Our killed in action and wounded in action were replaced and reorganized. And there was Navajo Code Talkers who all come up to the headquarters again. When we're gonna go out, they all go back to their respective organization, regiments, battalion, company—different places. Of course, down there they move around, too. Wherever they need them that's where they would go to operate and somebody always carried the radio and I guess there were bodyguards too. I had somebody carry my radio. My radio was really heavy, made out of metal.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. I've seen pictures of those.

SMITH: Uh huh. They were heavy and that's what happened. But I was kinda free all the time because of being right next to the guy that gives orders. I get to go away from headquarters. I think at that time they gave me some more men to work with, so at the headquarters we were increasing in numbers.

TINKER: Um, you were attached to headquarters, to the commanding officer, you said? Was this the division commander or company commander?

SMITH: I was right next door to the general all the time. Aboard ship, on land, and anywhere. And, uh, I thought I would be there permanently in a safe place. But it's not a safe place, sometimes we got bombarded—right at the general and they all jump in a foxhole, the general was yelling from underneath. (Laughter)

TINKER: Is that who you were always next to?

SMITH: Clifton Cates ...

PIEHLER: So that was the general ...

SMITH: ... Clifton B. Cates.

TINKER: There's a marker out on the street ...

PIEHLER: You'll have to show it.

TINKER: ... because he, I believe he went to the University of Tennessee.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So tomorrow we'll have to ask you some thoughts you have on General Cates. That's a good ...

SMITH: Uh huh. He was my general. I always tease my fans, my audience [that] he must've been a Republican. (Laughter)

TINKER: Cause he liked to fight? (Laughter)

SMITH: Because he likes to fight, see, in short period we went to four battles. But that helped me get out soon. Uh, I run up in points. You get points for each battle, a lot. And I was—when V-J Day came I was the first one. October 3 was the first—I had a calendar of that one and it shows how we were coming home. Mine was, I was on top of a sea bag and there was a fan going in front of me. I was flying. And the others were being shot out of cannon—artillery. And then there was others in a boat, rowing, how to get back to States like that. And the USS *McKinley* brought me back to San Diego. I didn't believe it, early in the morning at sunrise I said, "Where are we?" I was trying to recognize the place and they said, "We are in San Diego." It didn't really hit me 'til sometime later—that I had come home, or back to the States. Yeah. I was right next to the general and the strategic command post where they make all the plans. Where they have all the maps and they get the incoming information and they mark the maps and then they want to—whatever they want to do. (Motioning) "Do this, move this one this way, that way" and then they have reserves. Company has it's own reserves, when they get to be overcome they replace them ... the reserves are already over there. So I never knew war was like that. That's how they do it. And once in a while some officer, captain, lieutenant, come on out he say, "Hey! I want some volunteers." Nobody went to volunteer and he say, "Okay, you, you, you, you." (Laughter) I'm always at the end of the finger. (Laughter) But I didn't mind, it's war. I'll go. I went several times with them.

TINKER: Tomorrow we'll get some more details about your ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, we want the ...

TINKER: ... about the battles.

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