

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
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AN INTERVIEW WITH SAMUEL SMITH

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INTERVIEWED BY
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G. KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Sam Smith on February 13th [2004] with Kurt Piehler and ...

CYNTHIA TINKER: ... Cynthia Tinker.

PIEHLER: ... at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee. And let me turn it over to Cynthia Tinker because I know she wanted to ask some follow-up questions from our interview of yesterday, February 12th.

TINKER: Okay, just to clarify from yesterday. When you're talking about your grandfather, um, you're referring to your mentor who did the ceremony with you as a boy, right? You don't mean your literal mother's father or father's father.

SMITH: Mm hmm.

TINKER: So when you say grandfather you're referring to one of your uncles?

SMITH: My grandmother's brothers. Those are my grandpas.

TINKER: They're all your grandpas. Okay.

SMITH: Uh huh. Then I have a grandpa on my father's side I never knew.

TINKER: Okay. I just wanted to make sure because in the way we have grandfathers it's literal, you know, our mother's father or our father's father. But it was your mother's brothers.

SMITH: Grandmother's brothers. My mother's fathers are my grandpas, too, but they're, they're distant like my father's father. So they are my grandpas, too.

TINKER: Okay. And then ... when we left off we were trying to figure out exactly what headquarters you were attached to and you said it was, um, General ...

SMITH: Clifton B. Cates.

TINKER: Clifton B. Cates.

SMITH: Next door to his tent.

TINKER: So did you get the opportunity to know him a little bit personally?

SMITH: Not really. Not even when I became his bodyguard. He's a general—I salute him. (Laughter) And to try to help take care of him with other the people assigned to him as a bodyguard.

TINKER: Okay, so that was just one of your assignments?

SMITH: Mm hmm.

TINKER: And you just did that for a short time?

SMITH: During ... all the time in the Pacific battles that I was with him. I don't where he came from. Suddenly he's our general, but he didn't stay at the camp. He had his own quarters—a mansion somewhere. And after we were gettin' discharged I don't know where he went. So—but during the war he was the boss. He had his own tent.

TINKER: And in Kurt's class you talked about the, uh—when you went to do a forward patrol with your buddy and you had a little trouble with a creature. Was that on Saipan?

SMITH: Yeah, that was on Saipan. There were times, I don't know how it happened, I had the other boy stay with the radio set, the Navajo radio set, and I was on assignment to go forward echelon several times, different occasions for different purposes that I did that.

PIEHLER: Could you sort of recount what happened cause you ... told quite a story about your run-in with the scorpion? Could you describe how that happened?

SMITH: Oh, at that time they finally get on the frontline somewhere, so they pick a few men from I don't know where. They were coming by, a whole bunch. When they came to the ... division headquarters they were still in need of some more. So the lieutenant came out and he said, "I want some volunteers." And in the Marine Corps nobody ever volunteers because they don't tell you first what the purpose is. They want volunteers first and then they tell you what we're gonna do, what for. So I didn't raise my hand. I just stood there and then, um, he went and pointed out to some men and I was one of them at the end of his finger. (Laughs) So that's how come I went with them. And of course I grab all my weapons and left and we march right on up to the place where we were to—after getting close we had to be absolute quiet to get to the end of the line, and we dug in right away and we had to signal each other with tapping on the rifle butt—Morse code. And the Japanese were nearby somewhere and they were whistling. They were trying to make us open fire so they can get us, but we didn't, we just kept absolute quiet and me and another boy, he was just sixteen years old—I don't remember his name now. I forgot first name some years ago and then later, lately I forgot his last name. I don't remember it. There was a whole bunch, I don't know which one he was, but we dug in a foxhole and went down just about that deep and he was guarding my back and I was guarding his back. (Gestures with hands) That's the way we were situated for the night, waiting for the Japanese to come up and then we would let 'em have it. And during that time of waiting, I didn't hear it, [but] all of a sudden I got bit in here. (Points to neck)

PIEHLER: In the back of your neck.

SMITH: Sort of on the side back here. And then I, I try to be brave and take the heat, the pain, but it was so terribly painful and I notice I was swelling up. From the top of my head down to my neck was just straight ...

PIEHLER: It was a big sort of boil it sounds like.

SMITH: Yeah. So I had to get out of the foxhole and start walking, pacing back and forth. That was making some noise, uh, the pebble rocks, so the sergeant, he said, "Take him back to sick bay." So my buddy got up and he led me to a jeep parked with parking lights on. That I remember pretty good. And I got in the jeep passenger side and we took off. He went back. We took off and we were hitting the branches going through. He never turned on his headlights, just parking lights, but I imagine he know where to go so he—while we were going I passed out. I didn't know I passed out. But anyway, I woke up the next day about noontime. I was in a big tent that was the sick bay—the hospital tent. There was a lot of wounded around me and I was one of them. And he [the doctor] had some pills in his hand and he came over, he said, "Smith, you're lucky that scorpion just bit you. If it had stung you, you wouldn't be waking up," he told me. "You can go back to your outfit," he said, and I told him my outfit, who I was attached to, the 4th Reconnaissance Company that was coming by, that I was volunteered to go with. That's what I told him and he said, "You're lucky again. Those guys got wiped out last night."

PIEHLER: So everyone you were with on the line didn't make it.

SMITH: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: Including the person ...

SMITH: No, uh, pretty well wiped out, they say that. Not everybody.

PIEHLER: Not everyone ...

SMITH: He must've known this by receiving them into the tent. That's how ...

PIEHLER: That's how ... some did make it back wounded.

SMITH: Yeah. That's how he got the message and he came to me. So I sort of became a straggler for a while. But I made my way back to headquarters by hitchhiking to the division headquarters. But I didn't tell anybody about it. I just kept to myself, went back to my old duty as a Code Talker. We were sending messages all that time, receiving messages, and, uh, that was what happened that I was saved by a scorpion. Usually, ants, the first thing they do is sting ya, but this one didn't, so I, I think of my grandpa's spiritual way of putting me in [the armor] that helped me. And even some people that heard about when I give a talk they come up to me and they say, "The Lord saved you that way." So it's true. It's true that things like that happen, too. We didn't just make up things to pray with ... that was given to us by the Lord some years, hundreds of years ago for us to live by, to guide us. That was what happened. So, that saved my life. I told that

to my grandpa, but he didn't say anything about it. (Laughs) He keep thinkin' about the coyote pups. (Laughter) It was a very, very strange way of pulling through.

PIEHLER: How good were the doctors and the orderlies when you were in sick bay?

SMITH: I only saw him one time.

PIEHLER: You only saw him once.

SMITH: I didn't know when I was brought in. I didn't know any of that part 'til the next day about noontime. It was almost noon because when I got out of that tent there was a mess line over there and I got in that line to get served.

PIEHLER: How long were you in sick bay?

SMITH: One night.

PIEHLER: Just one night and then you were, you went back to your divisional headquarters?

SMITH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: How many Code Talkers were there on Saipan? Do you remember?

SMITH: About thirty-two.

PIEHLER: So they're fairly spread out among the different units.

SMITH: Yes.

TINKER: Was there one per company or two?

SMITH: I don't know how they worked it down. I just know they were down at the regiments and the battalion under the regiments and then under each battalion they had companies, so it just kind of was wider and wider.

PIEHLER: Were you the only in division? In the divisional headquarters or was there another Code Talker?

SMITH: At the beginning I was the only one, but then after Marshall [Islands] operations they gave me ... two more, so there's three of us. And by the time we went to Iwo Jima there was more yet, so we can switch and we got a bigger radio set of for Iwo Jima. The kind that you sit on like a horse and you crank the generator.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay, I ...

SMITH: Yeah. We all took turns doing that while one is ...

PIEHLER: One is doing the ...

SMITH: Yeah. It has some meters that shows when the battery is going down, that's when we'd start cranking, recharge, and the needle would go up. And you use that power and the others were battery, but those were really heavy ...

PIEHLER: The batteries.

SMITH: ... but I never did carry one. I felt how heavy it is. Somebody always carried it for me because that's the one they want to kill. The one that's carrying a radio is the one they want to kill, so my division saved me that way.

PIEHLER: Were you ever next to a radioman who got killed or wounded? Was the radioman ever ... when you were with a radioman?

SMITH: Got killed?

PIEHLER: Yeah, or wounded.

SMITH: I never did, but the forward echelon down the regiment, my other Code Talker buddies they talk about things like that at the base camp where we recuperate and maneuver with replacements. They talk about that, so I knew of that ...

PIEHLER: You knew that carrying the radio was very dangerous.

SMITH: Yeah. Very.

PIEHLER: Um, what was your—the scorpion sounds like that was a pretty close call. Did you have ... was there a closer call where you were in even greater danger?

SMITH: I think I tell 'em that yesterday about taking a message up to forward echelon ...

TINKER: Right, and they ...

SMITH: ... and coming back I drew a machine gun fire.

PIEHLER: So that was the ... closest, the most, you were in the greatest personal danger was the machine gun.

SMITH: I had some other close calls, uh, where they found out where the command post was and they shelled us. That's where I got some shrapnel on my arms.

PIEHLER: Was from shelling?

SMITH: Shelling, yeah, and they hit a whole bunch of fifty-five gallon barrels that ignited and burnt.

PIEHLER: What island was that?

SMITH: On Saipan.

PIEHLER: Saipan.

SMITH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So this is—I think you told about the general ... he also jumped in to the foxhole.

SMITH: As soon as we hit the beach we dug in and everybody helped. Made a big hole for the general. Real big foxhole. (Laughter) Bad idea. (Laughter) When the shelling started he was down there already and everybody jump on him. (Laughter) I heard him cussin'. (Laughter) I can't repeat ...

PIEHLER: You can't repeat ... (Laughter)

SMITH: ... his cussin'. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So he had ... he could be foul-mouthed ...

SMITH: ... Nobody apologized. They stayed down there until it stopped and then everybody climbed out of there. (Laughter) So that's war.

TINKER: So you feel like—do you think because of those close calls you had on Saipan ... feel like that was the most dangerous island?

PIEHLER: For you personally?

TINKER: Was that the most intense fighting?

SMITH: Oh, no. Marshall Island was pretty bad too where I was and, uh, I had just gone up a little bit and I looked back and there was a fifty caliber machine gun being set up behind me and this guy, I guess they just put him on, and the lieutenant was over him showing him how to operate the machine gun and the lieutenant got hit right in here, straight. (Gestures to head)

TINKER: In the forehead.

SMITH: We went down and then we had to advance, go forward. That's the G-2's job to go up to a certain line that was prepared before the war—before the battle. We had to

advance, there was some wounded GIs around and you can't stop to help them or else you get court-martialed. So we had to keep going 'til we got up to the line where we were supposed to, and set up the command post again over there. That was tough fighting too on Marshall Islands. We got two little islands, but lot of Japanese on that with a lot of ammunition [and] weapons, so it was not an easy thing. Any one of those islands wasn't easy, no, and Tinian I think was a little easier than the other three; Iwo Jima and Saipan, Marshalls, uh, because over there I guess the Japanese found that out we took back the Saipan Island, so instead of fighting it out to "save face," they say they don't want to surrender. They don't want to be known to be a giver-upper. So they stage Banzai attacks like old Indian wars. They'd line up and they'd yell and try to make it to us, but they only go half-way.

PIEHLER: Were you on the line when there was a Banzai attack?

SMITH: Yeah, I watch ... I was on the radio ... My radio job comes first. If they got pretty close then I would've ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, but you close enough to see them charging.

SMITH: I seen them and I heard it.

TINKER: And that was on Tinian.

SMITH: Tinian, yeah. They did that about four times and then it was all over. They gave up and thereafter we killed, some of the boys got together, killed a goat, and cooked it. On Tinian we had enough time to do that. We all ate and got back on the ship. I think it was the next day that that happened.

TINKER: So in between Saipan and Tinian did you go back to Maui or ... you went straight from Saipan to Tinian?

SMITH: Straight, uh, of course we regroup on Saipan. I imagine they had brought those replacements on another ship to Saipan where it's really necessary. They made those replacements. So we were there for about a week and then went across to Tinian. That was how the G-2, the strategy people worked it. And I was right close to that G-2 tent because the message comes out of there and I send it. If I get a message, it goes right there to—there was a sergeant that carries the message for me. So that's how the war works.

PIEHLER: I'm curious, because the average person, the average Marine who's on the line, doesn't really know what's going on, but because you're part of sending the messages and receiving the messages you had a very sort of unique perspective, even compared to a lot of the officers, of a sense of what was really going on. Did you ever sort of—what was that sense of knowledge like, to sort of, um, sort of know what's going on in a way that most Marines don't who are in the middle of the battle? Do you have any thoughts on that?

SMITH: I never thought of it in any way. I just ...

PIEHLER: You just ...

SMITH: ... keep, keep going.

PIEHLER: ... keep going.

SMITH: Yeah. And I barely knew what's going on at the other divisions or other, like the Army was on the other side. Some of what's going on over there was coming through my radio and going to the G-2 so that way they can plan a little better. And on Saipan, too, I was up at forward echelon and those GIs, all those guys, they get K-ration and the K-ration they had jawbreakers. And I had two big pockets on my dungaree jacket. Those two pockets were full of jawbreakers candy and I used it so I won't have this kind lip [like] now. (Gestures)

TINKER: The dry lip.

SMITH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: The dry lip. How come they didn't want their jawbreakers?

SMITH: And the jawbreakers ... were hardly colored. No color, faded. (Laughter) But I had 'em. Those other GIs, my comrades, they don't care for candy so they gave it to me. They say, "Hey chief!" and fill my pockets. And then this one day we—they blew up our water tank, I think, water trailer and we ran out of water and one day we all got dry lips, except me.

PIEHLER: Because of the jawbreakers.

SMITH: I was taking the candy to keep my lip moist, wet. And one of them, he came over and—I don't remember his name, he was a very close friend of mine too—he came over and he said, "Hey chief, how come you're not, your lips are not white?" And I reach in here and I gave it to him and he took it and went away and in a little while he came back, he say, "I want some more." (Laughter) And then everybody start comin' over, pretty soon I empty both my pockets. (Laughter) So I saved the troop.

TINKER: Saved 'em from the dry lip.

SMITH: From that jawbreaker. From there on they saved their jawbreakers. (Laughter) Reserve.

PIEHLER: You've just mentioned that you were often called—and you've mentioned this to my class—is that you were often called chief. How ... did that start from boot camp on, were you referred to as chief. How did you like being called chief? I mean, it

sounds like you got used to it, but did—how did you feel about always being called chief?

SMITH: Um, I take it as a nickname, chief ...

PIEHLER: You weren't insulted by it?

SMITH: ... nothing like war bonnet, nothing like that. Just chief, and that kind of separates me from the others. We had some Mexicans in that division and they called 'em ponchos. They were the same way as I was, being called chief. But except one time aboard ship I was coming up and I didn't know a chief petty officer was behind me, and my sergeant—he's a sergeant-major—he say, "Hey chief!" and the guy answered behind me. (Laughter) He said, "No, not you! This chief over here." (Laughter) They got in an argument ...

PIEHLER: The chief petty officer was not pleased with the use of that?

SMITH: ... and he said, "I'm the chief!" (Laughter) Yeah.

TINKER: So he was insulted that you were called chief. (Laughs)

SMITH: So the sergeant-major, he told him, he say, "You're just chief aboard the ship. This guy's chief all the time." (Laughter)

TINKER: Well, after, um, Tinian did you take a break before Iwo?

SMITH: Before Iwo we went back to Maui and again gather all the Navajo Code Talkers at division headquarters where I was. We have a big tent. It's our classroom, that's where we do all the Code Talker brush-up. Also, on these islands, when we go hit the island we send messages to each other and we find problem with some of the things that we're gonna use over and over. So we thought of a idea to have made for each one of them so that the communication be quicker, faster, shorter—and that's what were doing, too, at these, uh, at these rest periods.

TINKER: So when you'd go back to Maui you're improving ...

SMITH: Improving.

TINKER: ... and fixing problems that you've found in battle.

SMITH: Right. Also, there was some weapons coming aboard at the time that we had to make names for those things, too.

PIEHLER: New names for the new weapons.

SMITH: Uh huh.

TINKER: Like what? Can you remember one?

SMITH: Like, uh, those grenades and some others I don't remember exactly. But I still remember M-1. (Laughter) Yeah, that's what we did and we were adding that on to our list of code that we had. That book ... that I loaned to you?

TINKER: Mm hmm.

SMITH: It wasn't that many. It wasn't that many when we started. And when—at the end of Iwo Jima that's how many it ...

PIEHLER: It grew. The code.

SMITH: It grew. And the other divisions I found out were doing the same thing. What we were doing, at one time they flew me and my assistant teacher to Pearl Harbor and we found out that, uh, the other teachers from other divisions, from other islands were flown there too. So we put all our communication papers together and made this one.

PIEHLER: So the code was uniform then at that point?

SMITH: And then it was uniform, right. Of course we discuss some of them that were made by other divisions that we thought we'd just do away with and just make one, for the certain thing that was made during the battles. So that's how that one is built, made up. The twenty-nine Navajo Marines had just about three pages of code and we build it up to five, six pages doing that. And that was from the experience of what took place on each island that we fought on. So that's—yeah, we rest after Tinian. And then, uh, we never know—I never know where we're gonna go. We all guess where we're going to go. Somebody always say, "We're going over there," and we start believing him and spread the word and some other guy come around, "We're going over there," to another island, so it was all guessin' 'til the night before attack. We have a briefing aboard ship and I'm usually one of them in there with other officers, captain, lieutenants, sergeant majors, and me a PFC, be in there in briefing to look at the map and they talk about planning. How we're going to do this. Day One, we're gonna go this far, Day Two that far, and so on. But it didn't work on Iwo Jima. We were to take that island in seven days—one week. They had been bombarding that place for one whole month off the battleships. And bombed. They were bombing that for one whole month, just [one] right after another. And here we was gonna take it, really, I thought we were going to take it in seven days. And, uh, we spend like two days on the beach trying to get in. (Laughs) Yeah. That cinder was so hard to climb. Uphill you had to kind of climb sideways to get to the top. It was really bad and there was a lot of bodies on the beach that were being picked up and taken back. The ones that can move get picked up, the other ones get picked up later. So that's how it was on Iwo Jima. And we, after about two weeks—well they raised that flag on day six I think it was. It was a small flag. I don't know whose flag it was, and then the next day it was gone. There was no flag. And a little later on, there was a flag up there on the mountain again. That's the one they had a problem with.

Nobody wanted to go up there to put up that flag, so a few volunteered to do that, uh, and one of 'em was a Pima Indian. The last one barely touching the pole is the Pima Indian Ira Hayes. That took some guts to go up there and do that the second time. The first time nobody thought they would do that. They put it up without problems. I understand that big flag, the next one, was from a boat, one of those little boats. I don't remember the boat, but it was a Navy flag.

TINKER: Could you see them putting it up from where you were?

SMITH: No. But all I know is it was up there and then another time, I don't remember when, I looked up there it was gone. And then later yet I saw another one ... I notice it was bigger. Bigger flag. So I didn't see them. I didn't ...

PIEHLER: You just saw the flag and then it was ... wasn't there.

SMITH: I was busy over here cranking the generator. (Laughter) That generator went dry on us and we didn't want to crank it no more. (Laughs) Make lotta noise. You could detect—give yourself, give your place away. And they would use mortar or something, hand grenade, to put us out. So we asked for a new one and finally they got us another one, or they serviced it and took it back. Yeah, that's the way it goes.

TINKER: Well you talked about how heavy that radio was and how hard it was to get up the black sand. How did you all get the radio up there?

SMITH: I don't know. Like I said, I never carried that radio ...

TINKER: So it probably took a few ...

SMITH: Yeah.

TINKER: ... men to carry it up.

SMITH: They might've used rope to pull it up there, I don't know.

TINKER: So you didn't actually see 'em pulling it up though?

SMITH: Huh uh. You barely notice anything going in there and sometimes you feel sad looking around, but the thing to do is look for the enemy and try to save yourself. So not really much time to check out anything.

TINKER: From the time you landed how many days was it before you got the radio set up and started sending messages again?

SMITH: The next day or a day and a half I think. That's when we finally got up to where we were supposed to be the first day. And that's where we set up communications. Of course everybody is on the radio set right away and my job was to get up to the top and

look for my radio, but that took me a long time to get up there. And when I did get up there it was there, ready to get on. So that's how it happened.

PIEHLER: How often, your main job was to relay message, but how often would you have to fire your weapon in any of the island campaigns?

SMITH: Uh, not too often. If I had to have a mic one hand and fire ... [on another] side I would have.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SMITH: I would have, but I never had that happen. When I went out to front echelon—when I was off the set ...

PIEHLER: So you the time you were sent on that you were volunteered?

SMITH: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: That was one time you fired your weapon. Was there any other times when you were not delivering messages, but ...

SMITH: We had snipers—Marine snipers all around guarding the general. At one time I was like that, I was put on duty. Plus back to the radio as soon as I got off the other duty, I'm back on the radio so I don't have time to sleep. And you don't care to sleep. You can go like four, five days without sleeping and not feel sleepy.

PIEHLER: So that's often what you were doing on these island—see on Iwo Jima, how long before you got any sleep?

SMITH: I don't remember, but it was quite a while.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah. Sometimes somebody would come over [and say] "I'll listen to ... your radio and you go ahead, go to sleep." I can lay down, but I only once go to sleep. So that's the way it was until way, way days later. Then you can sleep when things kinda go down. And then of course, by that time some of the Japanese behind you had dug themselves out of the hole, start a fight. But they're put away right away, as soon as they open fire they [the Marines] have snipers all over the place to get rid of them. So fightin' is no rest. And don't ... eat. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So when you were on—in the island campaigns you just had k-rations or c-rations? Which ...

SMITH: K-ration up to Iwo Jima. I still had K-ration I took to the shore. A few days later they had set up a mess hall and they were serving C-ration—big cans of chicken hot.

Hot meal. Yeah, that was a treat. Otherwise, on the other islands we put up with K-rations all the way through. And that's American cheese and ham. I hated ham. I never want to eat ham, even after the war, for a long time. And rice. Rice, bag of rice all over the islands. All those places. I sure didn't like the rice and ham. (Laughter) Ham because of all the meat that you see. Dead bodies. That put the ham out of my mouth.

TINKER: Sam, I was reading in this booklet that you let me borrow that a couple of the guys, um, said that they were mistaken for Japanese. Did anyone ever mistake you for a Japanese?

SMITH: No ...

TINKER: Did you hear stories about that?

SMITH: That happened in my division with one. That he was up forward. He was kind of a—he went and put on those separate toes tennis shoes—Japanese shoes. He put one of those on, he was walkin' around. But he was kind of goofy. And our own Marines caught him and he tried to explain that he's a Marine, and that he's a Code Talker, but they wouldn't take any chance on him. They almost shot him. So finally he got back his mind and he told them who his commanding officer was and what outfit he was with. So those Marines took him over there to that CP and that commanding officer, he look at him and he said, "No, I don't know him." (Laughter) And they were going to take him away when he said, "Wait, wait, wait, that's my boy!" His name is Robert Malone. That's what they told 'em and so they released him. And boy he got it, that guy. Told him, "I should shoot you in the foot for wearing the ..."

TINKER: For wearing the shoes, the sandals.

SMITH: Yeah. See that can happen. They can take the clothes off dead Marines and put it on. Those are all the things that are in one's mind. So that's how come he did—And then there was another one [Bill Toledo]. He was short and his eyes were kind of like this (Gestures) and they thought he was a Jap. But that happened on Guadalcanal, and so they assigned him a man, another radioman [Richard Bonham]. So they got to workin' together with the set and the machine—the deciphering machine. He got to work on those things and they wouldn't trust him with a ...

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PIEHLER: They wouldn't trust him ...

SMITH: They wouldn't trust him to send messages, so he was just alone with his buddy after he almost got captured. He had a bodyguard then. So then he ...

TINKER: So he had a bodyguard?

SMITH: Yeah. That was his bodyguard. The other radioman was assigned to him. He didn't ...

TINKER: Because they were afraid the other troops would think he was Japanese?

PIEHLER: So it wasn't really protecting him from the Japanese ...

TINKER: It was protecting him from the ...

PIEHLER: From the Americans.

SMITH: Mm hmm. Yeah.

TINKER: Well there was another story in here where ... one was captured by the Japanese.

PIEHLER: Yeah. And he'd been on Bataan.

TINKER: Mm hmm. He was on Bataan.

SMITH: Oh no, no, no. He's not Marine. That Joe Kieyomia?

TINKER: Oh, he wasn't?

PIEHLER: Yeah, he was Army I think.

SMITH: He was Army.

PIEHLER: He was in the Army before Pearl Harbor.

TINKER: Oh, okay.

SMITH: So, those two were working together. They were both radiomen in the communication department and he didn't know that his white friend was his bodyguard 'til way after the war. As a matter of fact, 1980-something, we went for a reunion down at Camp Pendleton and down there all the other Marines were there and we were down there. And they didn't know each other, but then my buddy the Navajo, he said, "It sounds like my old friend's talkin' over there." So he went over there and he still didn't recognize him so he asked him, "Is your name so-and-so? [Richard Bonham]" And the other guy said, "Yeah." Then he said, "Are you Bill Toledo?" And he said, "Yeah." They sure hugged each other then. It was a blessing to reunite. Thereafter they always went to their reunions, to their own division reunion—3rd Marine Division. That was the other one. The goofy one is, uh—they put him with me. I had to watch him, but I always had him on the generator. (Laughter)

TINKER: You had him crankin' to keep him out of trouble? (Laughter)

PIEHLER: When you say he was goofy—there seems to be more to that than just wearing the tennis shoes, which wasn't a very smart idea.

SMITH: Yeah ...

PIEHLER: But what else made him so goofy?

SMITH: He was always doing something not right, you know, not being a part of the trooper.

PIEHLER: Had he volunteered? Or did he want to be there? It sounds like he—

SMITH: I don't know how he got in. I never questioned anybody [on] how they got in, but he was with 4th Marine Division and evidently he passed the examination, the test. So they put him in the 4th Marine Division with my troops. That's how he was there, but he just always does something odd.

PIEHLER: What else did he do odd that sticks out?

SMITH: Um, that's the only that I ...

PIEHLER: You remember. But there was a pattern.

SMITH: There was some other things that he was doing not right.

PIEHLER: Do you want to take a drink?

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: You mentioned both a lot of casualties—some of these people you knew. How did—what did that ... Besides just seeing lots of casualties, people you really knew. What was it like to sort of have to keep going on? And really, you had no choice as you described it.

SMITH: Uh huh. At the time, it's just way too bad you know. I could be next. I don't know how I would get it. That's what is usually in the mind. But I see them bury them on Iwo Jima. I had time to walk up a little bit, I wanted to go see the airfield, but I walked into this big trench that we had. That long away and all the bodies were in there on top of each other. (Gestures) And about four days later I went back up there again and it was all covered, nice and smooth. The bodies were in the center and the headstones were way over there, far away. And I read in the paper after the war that some of the families had to bring the bodies back. I just wondered how they would get 'em out of there, buried like that, and in body bags. Those rubber bags, waterproof. So that is something I noticed too. But, uh, ... I didn't feel it. I knew some of 'em that got killed, but I didn't know 'til way

long afterwards. I start to thinking, “Why am I here and my buddies back there?” That’s very sad situation.

PIEHLER: Did you think, um ... at times that you would be next? Did you think that it was just a matter of time in battle? That you would be ...

SMITH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What battle was that when you started to? Because you’d been through a number of campaigns. When did you begin to think—

SMITH: In every battle I thought that way.

PIEHLER: So from the very first, from Saipan on ...

SMITH: “How am I gonna get it?” I wondered if I would suffer or go like that. You think that all the time, but a few days after on land you kind of start forgettin’. Pretty soon you forget and you’re on your way home or back to the base camp. And don’t think of it in the maneuvers until the night before, after the briefing, you start thinking, “We’re going to go in at that time at that wave number three, four.” And that’s when you start thinking, “I wonder how I will get it.” I think it was on Saipan that they had a *kamikaze* plane that missed—I was on the flagship, the command ship. I’ve always been with the general. I was on that one and that *kamikaze* plane missed us! Barely tipped our boat and went and hit a little boat over us. So that was a big miss and ... they are really huge, the *kamikaze* plane. And it only has one pilot to steer that to where they want it. So that’s like, uh, that’s how it was with me. I don’t know about the others. I never asked anyone how it was. But, uh, before Iwo Jima this friend of mine, who died not too long ago—that, uh, we talk all night. He told me his whole life story and I did the same to him. We talk and we laugh, but it was not a laugh. It was just a made up laugh, but ... all the time we were probably both thinking, “Am I going to get it this time?” and you know, “How will I get it?” Those were the thoughts in my mind at the time. I was scared. Not scared enough to run, but scared enough to get in there and beat ‘em up. That’s how scared I was. I wanted to really get a whole bunch before I go, you know. That was in my mind.

PIEHLER: The friend you talked about, before going into Iwo Jima, who was he? You said he recently passed away.

SMITH: William Kien [was] his name. He’s from Crownpoint [New Mexico].

PIEHLER: Crownpoint?

SMITH: Yeah. He was in my division. He was ... assigned to some other regiment.

PIEHLER: And was he a Navajo?

SMITH: He was a Navajo ...

PIEHLER: And what ... about his life—anything you remember from what he told you that night?

SMITH: Oh yeah. He said, “Gee ... I’m here as a Marine.” He said, “One time I almost kicked the bucket,” he said. After finishing high school he got very sick, got very thin. He only weighed like ninety pounds, and the hospital had kind of given up on him. And so he, somehow somebody came and told him to use another tribe’s medicine man. So they took him over there, just carried him like a baby, they took him over to that medicine man and that medicine man ... right after he examined him he told him, “I’m going to make you well. You stay here with me four days.” I wonder why it’s always four days in Indian. (Laughter) So he did stay there four days and on the fourth day he was eating. And then his family came back and he walked to the car and got in. He walked. They had just carried him in—that’s what he was telling me about. And then of course he had girlfriends here [and there], herding sheep he found another woman, all that stuff. All the things that he was telling me, trying to make us laugh, but we weren’t laughing. We were making sound, but not really laughing. That’s how it was that night. And I told him my story, from my sheep herding days, workin’ on the railroad, and going to school. I told him some of my high school athletics, playing football, basketball, baseball. So we sort of make a confession to each other all night ‘til daylight then we had to get ready to pull out. And, uh, but I saw him after Iwo Jima back at the rest area, Maui, and this time we laugh for real.

PIEHLER: A real laugh.

SMITH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And he was a Code Talker?

SMITH: He [William Kien] was a Code Talker. He died about four or five months ago ... and they told me when he was going to be buried. I went over there with my wife and when we got there they told us, “Tomorrow.” So I never attend his funeral ... my traditional way you only make a trip to one funeral. You don’t go back and forth. That’s the belief that I have, so next day he had his funeral. Said there was a lot of people there. I had planned to go there and give a talk about him of all the years that I had known him, I was going to—what to you call it? Eulogy?

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

SMITH: That’s what I wanted to do, but I didn’t do it ‘cause they had told me the wrong date.

PIEHLER: Do you want to say ... is there anything about your friend that you want to say? I mean this might be a good place to sort of put it on the record, as they say.

SMITH: Are you through with your questions?

PIEHLER: Oh, no. No, uh, we had plenty more, but we could take a break.

SMITH: I would like to make a comment at the end.

PIEHLER: Okay. Yeah ... we would really welcome that.

TINKER: Well, we could move on and you could talk about, um, after Iwo and when you returned. And your return home to the states.

SMITH: I thought I was coming home straight after getting off the USS *McKinley*, the aircraft carrier. They called our names out and put us in formation and march us to the bus. And that bus took us to the railroad and we got on the train and we went to Mare Island, San Francisco. It's northeast of Berkeley, I think. Mare Island, a Marine base there. A small one. That's where we were put for sixty days. I was there and got fat, didn't do nothing. No exercise, no morning training, just stand around, go play basketball and baseball, and eat. And of course they lecture us the day before I got discharged. The Marine Corps put me down to zero, 'bout that tall. (Gestures) That's what they did to me and let me out the gate. He said, "You're nothin', you're no more anything. Don't think you're a Marine [and] go out the gate and walk around like that." So why am I going to do that? (Laughter) What for? So [at] the first store out the gate I bought me gabardine clothes, shirt, um, Air Force jacket—the leather with that fur on here. Can't find those no more. (Laughter) That's what I did. And I traveled south down to Los Angeles and then got on another bus coming ... coming home. On the way—when we left Los Angeles some guy went nuts. He had a gun—an automatic pistol. So they stop at Victorville and got him off bus and they gave us a break to go outside, stretch, and walk around a little bit. It was about—I don't know why that guy went crazy.

TINKER: Do you think he was a veteran from the war?

SMITH: No, he wasn't dressed like a veteran. I don't know who he was. He was Anglo or something. He was not an Indian. So I got out and I went down the street a little ways and found me a 1941 Packard—a big long car with spare tires on ... both sides. (Laughter) So I bought that thing and I came home with that one. And around the Gallup area my old buddy saw me in the car and he said, "John Dillinger!" (Laughter) That was a nice car. You don't slam door, you just shut the door and it'll close solid.

PIEHLER: You mentioned to the class, you told the story about your run-in with the California Highway Patrol. Could you recount that?

SMITH: Oh yeah, I got stuck. Just before I got to Barstow the highway patrol stopped me and asked me for my driver's license. I didn't have none ... [but] a six by six and jeep permit—military. He said, "This is no good buddy. Follow me." I went up to the station with him and I got over and he went in there and he told those guys, he said, "Give this man a driver's license."

PIEHLER: And they just ...

SMITH: They gave me driver's license in there. Those years they didn't have pictures, so I got my driver's license to come home with ... I had it for I don't know how many years. I was saving it and I lost it somewhere.

PIEHLER: But ... they didn't charge you for the license?

SMITH: They didn't charge me. I guess he paid for it. But I didn't pay anything. I just went on home like that. Yeah.

PIEHLER: What was it like to—you mentioned earlier that you went back to high school on the GI Bill.

SMITH: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: You were a real veteran. I mean, you had seen more than one island assault and you had seen a lot. What was it like to go back to high school, particularly with younger students who had never really, in some cases, never left New Mexico? Never left the Reservation or Albuquerque.

SMITH: Uh huh. Um—when I was coming home I went to my girlfriend's house and the next day I told her I'd take her to Albuquerque [to] buy her some clothes. So I did and I—I had one kind of favorite street. I always go on that one, so down Central [Avenue] I got off and went on that street and everybody coming this way was wavin' to me and I was wavin' back and pretty soon my girlfriend said, "You're going the wrong way!" (Laughter) People comin' up were trying to get me off the street. I was waving back like [it was] "Welcome home!" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Had the street changed ... So while you'd been away ...

SMITH: While I was away they put signs up, one way street. (Laughter) Yeah. And then, uh, I went back to school where I had left. And some of the teachers were still there. They really had, uh, me going. And I didn't want anybody to know that I'm a veteran. I didn't want people to know I'm a veteran, but some of them knew. Of course the one's that were my classmates that had graduated had gone home, but this was like you say, young ones. But ...

TINKER: You just didn't want ... the other kids in school to know?

SMITH: I didn't want anybody to know I'm a veteran.

TINKER: Why?

SMITH: Even back home I told my family, I said, "Don't tell anybody I'm a veteran," I said, "that I just have this squaw dance and maybe we'll have another one." Here I

married another tribe, so my squaw dance stopped there. Just one. I was supposed to have four. So I went back to school and of course I still know how to play and the coaches they wanted me to play football, basketball, but I was overage then. I think they just go up to eighteen, so I couldn't play. I was good, still good playing football and all that, pitching baseball, but I couldn't play for the school then. So I just graduated with a real thick diploma. It has all kinds of some other certificates that went with it that I had earned that one year.

PIEHLER: What certificates did you earn?

SMITH: Some achievement, doing things different. I don't—they're still stacked at my home somewhere. But I don't remember exactly what they were. Outstanding here, outstanding there. It was just ... Also, I got to be a tamer ... boys, naughty boys picking on little guys. The little guys come to me to fix their opponents. (Laughter) One day one of 'em dared me, he had a cigarette in his mouth and I went out there, kicked it out of his mouth without touching him. (Laughter) I just hit the cigarette, didn't touch him at all, and he was really surprised. He walked away. That's how my school was. I enjoyed—I was one of the planners for activities put up by the seniors that year, so I got to give a speech at the end and hand the key to the junior class president. That's how my school was. I enjoyed it.

PIEHLER: Had you given any thought of going to college or going to a technical school with the rest of your GI Bill?

SMITH: Um, I was invited from Muskogee, Oklahoma ...

PIEHLER: Oh yes, yeah.

SMITH: ... uh, Dr. Samuel Billison, our [Navajo Code Talkers] Association president, he wrote to he me, he said, "This is a good school here. You should come over ..." I wrote back and I told him I'm already busy with family things. We were having babies [and] kids, so I got to stick with that one. I figured maybe some day I might have a chance and I never did.

TINKER: So you'd already gotten married while you were ...

SMITH: 1946, March.

TINKER: ... going to high school? In your senior year of high school?

SMITH: Mm hmm.

TINKER: And Rena was one of the little girls that had been writing you?

SMITH: One of the five little girls I used to buy pop for.

TINKER: And she was the only one that kept writing?

SMITH: She was that, that big then when I left. (Gestures) When I came back she was ... (Gestures and laughs)

PIEHLER: She was only a few feet tall and then she ... (Laughter) You've mentioned earlier you hardly recognized her, she'd grown so much.

SMITH: Uh huh, yeah, but her face was still the same and I thought we was just gonna be friends, but then my mother pressured me to marry some uneducated girl. And that girl later got married, but she never had no kids. Just think, I would've had no kids. But somehow I took this one and my mother chose her, so that's fifty-seven years ago.

PIEHLER: Though you told the story to my class, your bride-to-be was a pretty smart woman. Could you explain what she did when she came to visit your mother?

TINKER: Remember [when] you brought her home the first time?

PIEHLER: Yeah, when you brought her home the first time. She had, I think, a strategy. Could you explain?

SMITH: Yeah, mm hmm. She went to the stove right away and cooked and we had a good supper and it was different from what my parents used to eat. It was different, it was better. And then the next morning, same way, she cooked breakfast again and after we were ready to go I told my mother, I said, "We're gonna go back now. Go back home, take her home." And then she said, "Son, you keep this one," she said. So I kept her. But she's a very kind woman. I let her be the boss sometimes, but I always do things my way after things cool down. (Laughter)

TINKER: So your mother didn't have any objection to the fact that she was, that Rena was Acoma?

SMITH: No, she had no objections like that.

TINKER: And Rena's family? It didn't phase them that you were Navajo?

SMITH: Except one aunt. One of her aunt's thought I was not so good. She told Rena, "You're just going for the uniform" and Rena said, "No, I'm not going for the uniform. I knew Sam before he went overseas." That's what she told her. And I wish that lady hadn't died 'til the code was de-classified. She died before that. And boy, I worked my tail off working for her aunts, her uncles, her grandpa. And hardly anybody had a car at that place, [but] I had a car. I'm always taking them to the grocery store somewhere and some of them start to buy vehicles and I was there teaching them how to drive. I was slaved—it wasn't slavin', I was young. It was not a slave thing. I was working hard to do things for her relatives.

TINKER: Trying to get their approval?

SMITH: No, I was just doing it.

TINKER: Just trying to do the right thing?

SMITH: Yeah, just doing it for them. I liked ... her relatives so I just went ahead and did that. But nowadays I tell her she's all paid for. (Laughter) That was not in my mind those years. I just enjoyed working.

TINKER: Um, what kind of—Did you have a traditional wedding ceremony in the Navajo way or Acoma?

SMITH: I had to go to Catholic class one whole week, learn how to be a good Catholic.

TINKER: Were they Catholic?

SMITH: She was a Catholic, so then at the end when the priest thought I had enough to go ahead and get married, I didn't have a ring. And I didn't know when was going to get married, but all of a sudden we couldn't get married and another Navajo, ex-Army, was married there. I found out he was the same clan as I was, so I called him uncle ... [and] we brought him over to be witness. So it was the four of us and the priest, that's all. And I borrowed my uncle's ring to put it on Rena. As soon as we walked out the door, take it off, give it back. (Laughter)

TINKER: I guess later you bought a real ring.

SMITH: Later, yeah.

TINKER: But I remember, uh I think when you were for Celebrate Freedom, you told me that ... when you get married the man goes to live with the woman's family. So you left your family?

SMITH: That, I didn't know when I got married. And then after I got married the mother-in-law, who got to be my best friend ... always gets on my side, help me, and teach me a lot of the Acoma tradition to be there. They didn't have a home. They were living in their aunt's house, so I went to work right away and I changed my car to a pickup truck and I was hauling rocks, and I built a house. And all those other homes were just houses and I found out the water line is coming right by our house where I built the house, it was right there. So I bought some pipes and brought that water inside by the stove. We were the first one to have running water inside, but no shower. And then refrigerators and things were hard to find those days, so I built one on the north window. I built a box with a screen on it, with shelves. And when I'd buy groceries, she'd ... raise the window and put all the meat on that shelf.

TINKER: So it was an outside refrigerator?

SMITH: Outside refrigerator. That's what I did. I just thought of it that way. Well a lot of things weren't there yet. In Grants [New Mexico] they only had one general store where I was lucky to get credit. I went over there to buy a bed and things that we need and pay for it. So that's how I got married. That's how we lived for a long time.

PIEHLER: You mentioned you started working. What was your first job when you got out, after the school, and you were married?

SMITH: My first job was railroad.

PIEHLER: You went back to the railroad? 'Cause you had worked there before.

SMITH: I worked there before ... before junior year and then after I got married I went back to—there was no job anywhere. Railroad was the only thing there was and I went to work down, uh, in Sacramento I think it was. I worked there for a while then came home. And then I had a friend that told me there was a job near Salt Lake City [in] Tooele, Utah. It's a government compound where they had a lot of Army supplies, so I went with him. Well, I took his family's belongings in my truck and he took his family up there. I worked up there 'til I made enough money and came back, got my family, took them up there. And I continued working 'til my father got sick down in Arizona, near Winslow. So I had to move back and went to Belmont, [near] Flagstaff, another Army installation where they were disassembling ammunition. I transferred down there to be closer to home. So that's how I moved around to work. And then I came home again to McCartys, [New Mexico]. And I got a job through that aunt, the one that didn't like me. She liked me, but she was just critical. I worked for her a lot. She made me work a lot and she got to liking me, I think. So she got me a job in a store—home supply. This store had a big wagon, bigger than yours. (Laughs)

TINKER: Bigger than my wagon. (Laughter) And you drove their wagon around?

SMITH: It was an International truck with cover all the way to the back. A heavy duty International truck that was full of groceries inside [on] both sides. Cigarettes, steak, and some clothes that are ordered. Those years the railroad people were living by the railroad all the way to Los Lunas, all the way down into California. They call 'em section gang. About every ...

TINKER: So the workers lived all along the ...

SMITH: ... about every thirty, forty miles depending on the maintenance of the railroad. They had steep tracks those years, they were kind of narrow. That we used to pick it up, and so I was a store clerk. They used to load me up in Gallup and I would come towards Albuquerque, south down to Los Lunas to trade with all kinds of people. First it'd be Navajos, 'til we get to McCartys then its Acomas, 'til we get to Laguna and then the Laguna men all the way to, uh, I forget, the Los Lunas turnoff. From there, there was Mexicans, Spanish men working all the way down to Los Lunas and I would stay there

overnight and come back and hit some of the ones I missed, the sections. That was my job.

PIEHLER: So it sound like you were able to get paid employment after the war pretty steadily. Is that a fair—or did you have gaps where you couldn't get work?

SMITH: Yeah, there were gaps where I couldn't get anything and the unemployment compensation was not all there then, so you just don't have no money. That came later, I think the time I was working as a store clerk, that came after I—another employment office came after me to work for them, so I work for New Mexico state employment office recruiting and counseling workers how they can get a job and keep a job ...

PIEHLER: And that was in the ...

SMITH: ... and that was my job in Gallup.

PIEHLER: When was that? What time period was that?

SMITH: About 1940—50, I think, '49, somewhere there. And it was my job. After that one went out of business I came back to Grants and I worked at a service station for a while ...

PIEHLER: That's when ... you were repairing cars?

SMITH: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: 'Cause you'd mentioned ...

SMITH: Before that I repaired cars.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but you were sort of telling the funny story about your not doing well in auto mechanics in school, but making a living at it. (Laughs)

SMITH: That time, yeah, I think it was my teacher, James Patton. I ran into him in Albuquerque somewhere, reunion or something, and he asked, "What do you do for a living?" he said. "Auto mechanic," I told him. (Laughter) He had given me F's. (Laughter) I said, "When you retire I'm going to take your place." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What about some of your fellow veterans? How were they fairing in terms of work coming back? Did you sort of know how at the time—were they able to find work?

SMITH: All over this country, the one I know had gone to Oregon to do the—the one that I said died not to long ago ...

PIEHLER: Yes.

SMITH: ... he [William Kien] went down to Riverside, California to find a job over there. And then the others I don't remember now where they were. They all had a hard time. One of them, he was a real neat guy. He went to Las Vegas and married a white woman. Now he's got a bunch of Cadillacs at his house in Las Vegas and he's a computer expert now. He took himself to school. The other ... one of them also married an Acoma, my wife's cousin, another girl. Jimmie Benally was his name. He went to that and he worked on railroad too that took him down to Barstow, and he didn't travel with the track no more, so he got a job at the stock ... where they keep cows.

PIEHLER: Stockyard.

SMITH: Yeah. He takes care of animals over there that are left to be transported. So that was his job and he retired down there and his home is down at Barstow. His wife died down there and he still has his children down there. They're probably all married now, but he's still there. And another one became a butcher in Kings Canyon Trading Post. He retired recently. And then another one married a white girl, a nurse, and she worked on the Navajo Reservation in Kayenta area. So that's the way it went and, uh, one also married a white woman, but she died on him and he home back to ... he's retired. And another one, uh, he came home, he married a Laguna lady. Half Navajo, half Laguna woman that he's married to. They're still--they don't have any children, but they adopt some kids, so they're living in Gallup. He was a teacher, educator. He's the one, his picture is right here. (Points) This one.

TINKER: Oh, Albert Smith.

SMITH: Yeah, adult education teacher.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

SMITH: Yeah, that one ...

TINKER: So the whole time you're ...

SMITH: And the other one, Keith Little, he's the treasurer of the Association. He start his own business, logging, north of Fort Defiance, Arizona. Then they put him out of business. The government shut down ...

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

SMITH: ... I was a director of reconditioning center taking care of about a hundred and some men and the women. And one day they sent me a young man with a degree. They didn't want anybody to be heading a department without a degree, like me. I was running it pretty well. Yeah, so they brought this young guy to my office and I took him out all week to certain places where the projects were going and Friday I let him go home, and Monday he didn't come back. (Laughter) One day I saw him in Window Rock and I said, "What happened? You just didn't ..." He said, "Oh that's too much for me," he

said, “I could never run that office like you did,” he told me. So, he’s right. To be in charge of things like that is not easy.

TINKER: So, Sam you said that you didn’t want any ... you didn’t want anybody to know you’re a veteran, but when you went for these different job wouldn’t they ask you? Did they usually ask you?

SMITH: I didn’t depend on being a veteran to get my job. My job, usually, people [would] come to my office and want me to do a job. If I know how to do it and the answer is yes.

TINKER: Did you ever get the feeling though that sometimes they knew you were? They could tell by the way you carried yourself and they didn’t have to ask you?

SMITH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What about getting the jobs at those different Army bases? Did being a veteran help you get those jobs?

SMITH: Uh, I think so. That ... earlier ...

PIEHLER: Yeah the earlier jobs.

SMITH: ... in earlier times. I think that did at Tooele in Salt Lake and Belmont in Flagstaff. And I was in charge of the job there. Of course I had a bigger boss above ... a foreman, then I’m in charge of running the place. So that’s how it was until they closed down shop—the usual government cutback and all that. But I always knew something, how to do something, because I went to Albuquerque Indian School. I took all these vocational trades, electrician. I wired my own house when I built it and those years they were not too strict about it. They just came and hooked it up and everything switched off and on, “Okay.” (Laughter) And it was wife’s idea where to put the receptacles. (Laughs) Yeah.

PIEHLER: What year did you get electricity? Do you remember?

SMITH: What year? 1942 I did that, or ’43.

TINKER: Oh, so it was when you built your first house and you went ahead and wired it up.

SMITH: Oh, I wired my first house in 1950 I think it was.

TINKER: Oh okay.

PIEHLER: So 1950 you got—you had electricity in your house?

SMITH: Yeah. And I had certificates to a lot of things to, you know, to pass without red tape. But I don't have 'em anymore. None of them. I just gave it away or put them away and they're somewhere.

PIEHLER: You had sort of stressed, you know, the value of education. You said it was very important. You stressed it about children and your grandchildren. But it strikes me as that your education at Albuquerque, at the Indian School was extremely valuable. That it was ... I'm sort of just confirming that you got—you really could do a lot when you got back.

SMITH: Mm hmm. Yes, I'm very thankful [for] that school that I had. Work four hours and go to school four hours. Of course I didn't like all the subjects that was taught to me, like ... American history I liked. There was not very many subjects that you could take those years. There was just a few and Civics I really didn't [like]. I used to go to sleep on it. (Laughter) But, uh, it kind of come to me after I left school, so no problem there.

TINKER: So what job did you do for the longest period of time?

SMITH: Being a director. Being a boss. The one I really liked was heavy equipment. How to operate bulldozer, and I used to work all by myself. I just pack lunch and load my bulldozer on an eighteen-wheeler and take off to the Reservation, wherever there's a dam that need to be repaired. I always had a foreman that follows me to make sure I do it right, you know. Usually they never correct anything that I did, I just went along and worked and then I had an accident. I volunteered. (Laughter) My boss, the superintendent, told me, ... "Hey Smitty," he said, "little league have a baseball field over there and it's all gravel, it's hard, and when they fall they really skin their knees and stuff like that. We need some soft dirt put over there. Can you find a place to get some dirt?" I said, "Oh yeah." And I went down there about 4:30, quittin' time, payday was 5:00. So I went down there. I grab one guy, he don't anything about heavy equipment but I took him just for safety, and we went down there. And I got on the front-end loader and start loading dirt into the trailer. And one more load to go in there and all those bolts behind me broke at the same time and I was still in the seat. I went between those levers and almost cut my whole foot off. I broke my leg, this side, burned my arm on both sides because I grabbed the exhaust pipe and I was laying on top of the engine and this guy, he came over. I told him to disconnect something, so he was fooling with the shifting lever underneath [and] it went in reverse and I start going backwards, I look back, there was a big ditch behind me, and I just sort of prayed real fast—short one. And, uh, it just got right to the edge and stopped. The hose fuel line had broken off and what was in the line was all taken in to the carburetor when it ...

PIEHLER: It stopped.

SMITH: ... stopped itself. Then there he had to wiggle me out of the seat. And I weighed 182 pounds at that time, kind of solid, not like now—too fat. So he picked me up and my both legs were damaged and he picked me up like a baby, took me to the tractor-trailer, eighteen-wheeler. I got in somehow with my toes, this side. Got in and

threw my shirt on the floor to let the blood run on that one. He got in on the other side. He never drove that truck before or any big truck before so he said, “How do you do this?” And I give him instructions sittin’ here and he did everything like I said and he start that truck and we start going. And I tell him when to shift and he did all the right things and we got to the—there was somebody stopped on the road at the same time when he took up, so he told that guy what happened and that guy went to phone and called superintendent. And up the hill, [on the] main drag, the station wagon came and they put me in there. And that took me about two miles, the ambulance came, met us, and they put me in the ambulance. I had a pack of cigarettes and I was smoking. I must’ve smoked ten in three miles to the hospital. It looked like all day driving, but it was a short time. And all my co-workers came to the hospital and donate blood. All of them. And they stood, watch me get operated ‘til midnight. That’s how I survived that time.

PIEHLER: How old were you when this happened?

SMITH: Now you ask me that? (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Was this in the 1950s or ...

SMITH: 1959. How old was I?

PIEHLER: Yeah ... if we can get a ...

TINKER: So you were ...

SMITH: May 22, 1959.

PIEHLER: Oh, so you remember the date well.

SMITH: I never forget that date. It’s something [that] sticks to me, you know. It’s hard to forget. So that’s what happened. And then, uh, oh I’ve been a chief ranger, too. I had just started to be a ranger. I wanted a easy job, not do much work ...

TINKER: After your accident?

SMITH: After my accident.

TINKER: Yeah.

SMITH: They put me in the office after that and then one day some big company came and said to give a test driving trucks, uh, eighteen-wheelers. And by that time I had a cast on this—not a cast, but those brace ...

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

SMITH: And this one was alright, so my boss the superintendent said, “You, too, Smitty,” he said, so I got in to take the test and won the first prize—with all the young drivers. So they told me to be in charge and take care of all the heavy equipment so I did that for a while. And then ...

TINKER: Was this the heavy equipment for a company?

SMITH: For Navajo tribe.

TINKER: So it was the tribal government.

SMITH: Yeah, it was government. Yeah, they paid me very small insurance that time.

TINKER: ... So after you were in charge of all the trucks and heavy equipment, when did you become the chief ranger?

SMITH: One day a lieutenant from the chief ranger department came over and he said, “Sam why ...” He called me uncle. Everybody called me uncle because my name’s Sam. He said, “Uncle Sam.” I’m uncle to everybody that I have worked with. So he said, “Come on over and be chief, be a ranger. We need one ranger to take care of this area.” Oh, boy! I said, “Okay, I’ll come over.” In the meantime the truck driving had divided. They divide the whole department in half. One went to the electrical department by itself. They call it Navajo Tribe Utility Authority. It went over that way [and] I was elected to go that way and my boss-to-be is not a good boss, so I said, “I don’t think I’ll go that way.” But on account of my experience in welding they wanted me to go that way. “How shall we do this? Should you have a separate office?” We were talking about it. That’s when this guy came, said, “Do you want to be a ranger?” and I said, “Yeah!” So I went and I packed my frying pan, all that stuff, go out to the mountains, [and] stay up there, check fishing license, hunting license, watch out for poaching and all that. And then that went until we got in a war with the Hopi tribe and I was sent out there to mind the boundary lines where we was herding sheep. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: What was the Hopi war? What was the dispute about?

SMITH: I don’t know what caused it because we’d been very friendly with the Hopis. I don’t know, the politicians, the guys on the office, both sides, are the ones ... The Hopi family and the Navajo family outside, they both have sheep and they take turns herding sheep. The Hopi would send his sheep to the Navajo—herd sheep for about two or three months, and then come back on this side and let the Hopis herd sheep for a while. They were very close. As a matter of fact, there was half Navajos on this side, half Hopis on the other side that married. They were like that and here’s some people in the office that didn’t like that. They wanted—the Peabody Coal Company came aboard and they were mining coal up there and the Hopis thought they should have some of the royalties off of that one so that started it. And there I was minding the sheep and horses. (Laughs) And they hired, the Hopis hired a ranger out of Winslow. A big, white guy. That guy was mean. I almost got in a fight with him one time, told him to take it easy. He didn’t care,

he didn't want to listen to me, just took off. I told him that there's Hopis and Navajos on both sides ... He knew that too, but he just wanted to do his job and he was rounding up Navajo horses, puttin' them in the stockyard and making them pay so many hundred dollars to get 'em back out. That went on for a while 'til, uh, Peterson Zah(?) came aboard and the other Hopi guy [Ivan Sydney]. They're both my friends, too. So that's why I was over there. And one day I got a call on my radio to come in to the office [at] Window Rock. And when I got over there they, they said, "Sam do you want to be the chief ranger?" So they needed another chief. So I went over there and I said, "Let me think about it." I just wanted to go home. (Laughs) So I needed the night to think about it. The next day I talked to some of my friends, co-workers over there with the Fish and Wildlife Department and the rangers. Some of those [were] very good friends of mine [and] they said, "C'mon Sam, take over that chief job. We know you can do it," they were telling me. And I know I can do it. So finally I say, "Okay." And so I got my uniform. I wear captain's bars. (Laughs)

TINKER: Was this in the '60s then?

SMITH: Somewhere there. '67, I think.

TINKER: Yeah.

SMITH: Because that's where they found me when they wanted Code Talkers to Chicago. They found me at that place. I had made a movie for education and being a ranger. I was in a helicopter flying and, uh ... that's where they saw me and ...

PIEHLER: They saw you in the movie?

SMITH: Uh huh. I made a movie for education [about] being a ranger. I went to work and I developed the rangers into a better-looking department. I went to a lot of work doing that and they were all very happy about it when I finished. And then ...

PIEHLER: Just to back up a minute. How much training had you gotten to become a ranger? Did they give you any training or was ...

SMITH: Uh, no.

PIEHLER: They just told you, "This is what you need to do" and then you just went out and ...

SMITH: Uh huh. Being a ranger, being up in the mountains taught me a lot. How to be a ranger. And then there was law to enforce. I couldn't work on that one 'til I got to be chief ranger. I went to work on that one. So the next time the state ranger came up to sell permits on the Reservation I chased him out. (Laughter) Yeah, I did that. He was good friend of mine before that. (Laughter) He lives down at, uh, down southwest of Holbrook [Arizona]. He's a sergeant and I'm a captain. That's what I told him. He complained to my boss's boss, the highest one, and he let him go. He took him out and let

him go. I said, “Well it’s none of my business now. I did my job.” That’s where I was when somebody came to me and said, “Hey Sam, we heard you’re a Navajo Code Talker in World War II. Chicago, 4th Marine Division wants you.” “Okay.” (Laughs) I went. There was about forty of us went that time. They didn’t only invite the 4th Marine Division. The 4th Marine Division sponsored that reunion, but they also invited other Code Talkers from other divisions, so that was nice. We all went up there, get our first recognition medallion. Great big ones.

TINKER: Was that when you got the Ira Hayes?

SMITH: Ira Hayes on horseback?

TINKER: Yeah. Or was that later?

SMITH: Yeah. That’s the one ... Yeah. And I had that one, for a while it didn’t mean nothing to me, just left it somewhere in the drawer. Same way with my Congressional Medal, it’s in the drawer. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You had mentioned earlier that, um, that you had, when you came home you had a ceremony where, in a sense, you told your story and then it was sort of washed away from you. Was the Code Talker reunion sort of the first time you talked about the war to anyone?

SMITH: At the time, only to my grandpas. They asked me questions and so I told them everything—everything. Not leave anything out. And that one they shooed it out to the— to the spirit wind and took it. And I was well then after that for a while.

PIEHLER: When did you talk about the war, what happened to you?

SMITH: Never.

PIEHLER: Never.

SMITH: Never talk about war to anybody, anywhere. I met some other Code Talkers, but we didn’t talk about it.

PIEHLER: So in ’69 what did you talk about when you all were in Chicago?

SMITH: Uh, we didn’t talk about—only the big honchos. The DIA area director was there, he gave a talk. And Philip Johnston sang Marine Corps Hymn in Navajo ...

PIEHLER: (Laughs) He sang it at the convention?

SMITH: ... and we all sang. And we all enjoyed the whole week we were there.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like you didn't talk much about what had happened to you in the war. Is that a fair—You didn't start exchanging war stories?

SMITH: Huh uh. No, until 1972 ... Some of the twenty-nine people and us 4th Marine Division, we wanted to have a group, an association. So the twenty-nine, again, helped us to set that up. We wrote—I was part of the by-laws that was made, the first one. I helped make that one, and the others 'til we changed it several times and finally we set on one. So ... we changed it again about ten years ago on account of the years going, the way that things are changing. So we change it to meet that, [to] update the by-laws. But we didn't talk about it. All of sudden they were joking about things that they did in the service. That's how it started ...

PIEHLER: You would tell the funny stories.

SMITH: ... talking, laughing ... all the jokes, all the things that we did in L.A., at Camp Pendleton, places, overseas, Maui, and Pearl Harbor. (Laughter) And then finally somebody start asking like here, now. And that's when we started to think back more, harder. And that's how it's coming out, that's how it ...

TINKER: So your children didn't know you were Code Talker the whole time they were growin' up?

SMITH: After I came back from Chicago. My children were still young yet, but the older ones, they said, "Dad, I didn't know you did that!"

TINKER: Mm hmm. You just told them a little bit?

SMITH: No, I said, "Yeah I did that." I didn't tell 'em much. I still don't tell them much, but they know what happened, what they did, and they sort of end with me to keep it blessed. Not talkin' about it.

TINKER: Right. As they were growing up did you, in the home, did you speak Navajo and English to teach them both?

SMITH: Um—I spoke English at Fort Wingate where I used to play with the teacher's children. They were all white. We used to play cowboys and Indians. They were the Indians, I was the cowboy.

TINKER: But I mean your children. When they were small, did you teach them English first or Navajo?

SMITH: No choice. We spoke English to them because I don't speak Acoma and my wife don't speak Navajo, so English was the only one we spoke to them. And in later years some of 'em wanted to learn Navajo language and they did on their own, somewhere else. And ... once in a while they come up and ask me, "What does this mean?" If they say it right I tell them. Like I told, yesterday was it or the day before, if

they don't say it right it don't mean what they think. Like one nurse was assigned to me in Indianapolis last year to massage my finger after autographing eight thousand dollars worth of books. That's a lot of books. (Laughter) And she was trying to thank me. So some of the men over there, or women, are Navajos. They were there and I guess they were teaching her how to say "Thank you." So she came up to me and she said, "I'm married," in Navajo. (Laughter) I almost said, "So what." (Laughter) But I knew what she was getting' at, so I said, "No, say it this way," I told her.

TINKER: Can you say the word to show the difference?

SMITH: Mm hmm. *Ahéhee'* means "thank you." *Ahéhee'*. " " she said to me. That means "I'm married." (Laughter) Like, "Hands off, I'm married." (Laughter)

PIEHLER: When did you first start talking to—you're very good at talking to classes and other groups about your experiences. When did you start doing that?

SMITH: When I was asked to do that.

PIEHLER: When was the first time?

SMITH: Um, oh way back. '70, '74, '75, somewhere.

PIEHLER: What was ... Do you remember the ...

SMITH: It was not ... not as many as I did last year and the year before. This last five years I've been talking a lot. But now it's going back down. Not much.

PIEHLER: You first came out in the year 2000 to Pigeon Forge and Celebrate Freedom. How many other places had you spoken that year? Do you remember?

SMITH: Rochester, New York. Seneca, New York. Minnesota. [At] Fort Meade, Maryland I spoke to CIA from all over the world that gathered there. I spoke to them and I thought I put 'em to sleep. (Laughter) They were just quiet, absolutely quiet. I spoke to them, they really enjoyed it, and after I finished I sat down and one white guy went up to the stage, he spoke Japanese. And then another white guy went up there, spoke some other language. And these guys were from all over the world, that's where they came from to be there to hear me talk about the Navajo Code Talkers. It was something really fascinating to them ... no wonder it was used in a war to great amount. That's what they were saying. They were praising the language, after it was declassified.

TINKER: Before we get to far I want to go back just for a little bit so you can tell the story about, um, when the FBI came to you when you were chief ranger and asked you to help 'em.

SMITH: Um, FBI came there. Of course I know that the ... the American Indian [Movement] uprising was in the area on the Reservation and they were stealing sheep

from sheep herders. And then they were going to the little stores with a gun, takin' what they want for their food. They weren't earning, working, buying groceries. They were stealing them and then they'd go down to state line, Arizona/New Mexico. The sheriff from Apache County came up to put a stop to their actions, but he got killed there. They shot him with a shotgun. A guy name Jose Romero was the one that did it. And they said that guy was in my area, but ... I live in Fort Defiance. So this FBI thought they better do something, so they came to me from Gallup. Came to me and said, "Mr. Smith," they call me. (Laughs) "Can you come work for the FBI? We hear you have war experience. You're a veteran, Marine Corps. You have the experience and we'd like for you to come work for us. We'll double your salary," they said. That did it. (Laughter) So I said, "Okay," and the next day I report to the office and they took me to Gallup and they gave me a car, an unmarked car. This car had a lot of radio sets inside. They were hooked to the state police, the county police, and some other adjacent law enforcement people. And then they took me to that abandoned Fort Wingate depot, Army depot. We went way—there was three of us that were chosen. We all the way to the back in one of those igloos that had machine guns inside, so we took those out and put it in our trunk, and shotgun, high powered rifle. We load my car with weapons like that and then I went to work. We ... always had briefing in the mornings before going out to work, and that's how it got started, and we went huntin' for that guy.

TINKER: So you were specifically just lookin' for the guy that shot the sheriff?

SMITH: And the rest that ... anytime of the night I would get a call [that] there's a holdup somewhere, store. I would go over there and then try to—if I get there in time I had the chance to arrest them. And some of those were my relatives.

TINKER: Really?

SMITH: Yeah.

TINKER: Cousins and ...

SMITH: Uh, burning the U.S. flag. That I didn't like at all so I told them. I said, "You guys should know better than to ..."

TINKER: Did you arrest them?

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, I put them away.

TINKER: And did you all catch the guy?

SMITH: One night they called and we went to the airport and got on the plane, went down to Phoenix. And down at Phoenix there was cars waiting for us, so we just all jump in those cars and follow each other to one big building. Almost outskirts of—northeast outskirts of Phoenix city. There's one big white house, that's what they said. That's where

he was. He was noted there or spotted there, and we all kind of circle, circle our wagons. (Laughs) And this guy, he just come out like that.

PIEHLER: He put up his hands ...

SMITH: I thought he would shoot, you know, so I would shoot too. But he didn't, he just come out. They arrest him and took him to Winslow holding cell ... federal prison holding cell. That's how I got to be in there and ...

TINKER: So how long did you work for 'em?

SMITH: A year.

TINKER: A year?

SMITH: Exactly a year. At that time I was given a chance to stay in and train Navajo police. I didn't have much training experience so I said I'm gonna retire. So I got my retirement lump sum and went home. Then I wanted to just do some easy work, not much responsibility so, one day this guy [that] died ... two weeks ago, he came to my house and he said, "Sam, why don't you work for us?" "Okay" I said, "I'll work for you, but don't make me be in charge." (Laughter) So he said, "Yeah, yeah we'll do that. We'll give you an easy job. Nobody going to bother you." So ... I went to the place where they work and I had my tool box, and I was singing and working ...

TINKER: Working on cars?

SMITH: Working on cars, kicking the tires. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So it sound like you really do enjoy building and fixing things. Even ...

SMITH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you work more just because you wanted to keep busy after you retired?

SMITH: Um, I—Well, the first thing I like to do anywhere is to improve it.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

SMITH: I like to do that. Make it run better, smoother. So I did [that] to all the departments that I have worked for. And at this time, two days later, this guy that died two weeks ago, he said, "Let's go eat downtown," and we ate downtown and then he paid for the dinner and then he said, "Let's go to main office [in] Window Rock." And we went over there and he should me the paper, and I was getting promoted. (Laughter) Take charge of the shop. (Laughter) Oh, boy.

TINKER: Did you?

SMITH: I did ... yeah. I did a lot of things for that [shop]. Built some skids to use, patterns out of boards so we can make things quickly, assembly line-like.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

SMITH: I had those done and we went to work. And then up at the top they were getting fired, and I was going up there, and pretty soon I was at the top. They all did something wrong, so I took their place and I was the right fit. That's how I usually get the job, doing things like that.

PIEHLER: I have, actually, I have a few questions going way back to your service that I want to make sure I—I realized I need to ask. One question is, you talked a lot about replacements. What was it like? How did you feel about replacements and how did they fit into the unit, um, that you observed? Between these sort of old timers and then these replacements coming in, because by Iwo Jima you had seen lots of replacements come in. What was that like?

SMITH: I got used to it. Some of them were sad. If I had known a person for quite a while and he's not around no more that's sad, but the replacement is usually another guy that would be just as nice anyway, so. That helps a lot to get almost the same kind of replacement to work with.

PIEHLER: You didn't resent replacements or you didn't feel like they were so inexperienced they couldn't—

SMITH: Um, I didn't resent any replacements.

PIEHLER: Yeah ... My sense in interviewing veterans is there's a lot you learn because of battle. What did you try to tell new replacements as they came in about what it was going to be like?

SMITH: It was not in my job that needed to talk to the replacements. I didn't have any in my ...

PIEHLER: In your immediate [unit]?

SMITH: Yeah. So that was somebody else's. But I noticed them as being a replacement and so on like that. To me they were alright. [It's] somebody else's job to teach them their new job. I ... the Code Talkers was fortunate, we didn't lose ... just one.

PIEHLER: Just one.

SMITH: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: You had mentioned that at one point, I think it was in boot camp, they said you need religion and could you describe how you picked for your dog tags what religion you would be, at least in the Marine Corps?

SMITH: They told me I had to be a Catholic, or Protestant, Presbyterian, and I never been blessed by any one of those. Um, what do you call that when you become a Catholic?

PIEHLER: Baptism?

SMITH: Yeah. I was never baptized any one of those. I was traditionally a Navajo, my own religion use corn meal to pray and corn pollen to pray. I wore an eagle plume here, feather. And black arrowheads out of stone, that was my weapon. And I didn't go to church, never did. Guys went to church ...

PIEHLER: So you never went in the service?

SMITH: Yeah.

PIEHLER: But you mentioned you put Presbyterian on your dog tags because you had gone to the mission school.

SMITH: Because I was forced to. The guy said, "You gotta belong to something. We're not going to get a medicine man to take off to the Pacific to bury you." (Laughter) So ... it didn't scare me though, what he said, it just funny. So I said, "Okay, I'm Presbyterian."

TINKER: Well the same thing sort of happened with your middle name.

SMITH: Yeah.

TINKER: They told you that you had to have a middle name.

SMITH: They said, "There's a lot of Samuel Smith, what's your middle name?" They told me, "You gotta have a middle name." So my nickname was Jesse ... because I'm always helping somebody they called me Jesse at school. That's how I said, "My nickname is Jesse." "Okay we'll let that [be] your middle name." (Laughter)

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

PIEHLER: You mentioned you'd wore your eagle [feather] around your next the whole war, that you never were told by a sergeant to take it off.

SMITH: No ...

TINKER: The arrowhead?

PIEHLER: The arrowhead.

SMITH: The arrowhead and I—we have inspection, not the real hard inspection like we used to have stateside, but overseas they let go of some of those things like that. With me I just wonder why, is it because they think I'm going to die or [are they] just lettin' it ride. That's what I thought so, it never bothered anybody. Of course I didn't have it sticking out like that, it was always kind of under like that and not too loud. (Gestures) That's what happened.

PIEHLER: You saw a good part of the world, both Hawaii, California, and these islands. Was there any place you attempted to sort of say, maybe I want to move there or go back to? Did anything really sort of—

SMITH: No it never occurred to me. All I thought of is going home and being at home, but here I am in McCartys. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you never were tempted to sort of leave. You wanted to come home.

SMITH: I wanted to come home, be at home, where the air is right. It's not humid. It's always fresh. I wouldn't trade that for anywhere. And McCartys is the same way, my present home. It's good air there. So that one—it is quite a ways from my home, but I get to travel down to, when my mother was still living I used to go buy wood, buy hay, haul it down to her place because she lives in the desert. But she died about twelve years ago, I think. Since then, it's only my sister and my little brother are in town. But only my sister comes to visit me and I visit her once in a while, maybe once a year. That's how we are, grown apart. Of course, my kids, my children they get to know ... my relatives down there and my older brothers all died, so I accept their children. They're now my responsibility, too. Uh, not too long ago one of their daughter died and I went out there to the funeral. They were very, very glad that I did that to take their real father's place, be there you know. So that's another thing that I do to be alright.

PIEHLER: You had mentioned in my class, um, your sons and your grandchildren, and in fact a daughter, have served in the military. When they went off to serve what did you tell them? And what didn't you tell them? 'Cause you ... what did you tell them to do or what ...

SMITH: I—I just did farewell to them and I didn't give them any kind of advice about being in the service. I know they will get all their instruction from the proper authority over there so that was ...

PIEHLER: So you didn't tell them any of your stories or about what had happened to you or things to watch out for?

SMITH: No, I didn't. I never did. Never had to, any of them.

PIEHLER: When they came back what did they tell you about what had happened to them? Did they ever tell you stories?

SMITH: Oh, they just tell me the funny things and we laugh. (Laughs) Not anything serious you know ... for discussion. But that was the way they were, the way they are now.

PIEHLER: In terms of ... interviewing you or telling your story, who else have you told your story—because you've really told us a lot and you've been very generous. Who else have you told your story too?

SMITH: Because you ask a lot of questions. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But have you been interviewed before? ... This is your first interview?

SMITH: Uh, I have been interviewed before as a group, a whole group of Navajo Code Talkers, and we only have a chance to say one time, then the next guy and so on, so on. This one here is a real—the only one that ... I've been places a lot. The audience that I speak to usually have one question ... so I really put out a question to the audience and they would [get involved] like they did in the classroom.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SMITH: But this here is down to the bones. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I guess ... cause your ... at some point your children or grandchildren will read this interview and do you think they'll be surprised at some of the things they read about what happened to you?

SMITH: Now they all know. They ...

PIEHLER: A lot of this you have told them.

SMITH: Uh, they got it from somewhere and they know what I did and they tell each other. And it kind of straightened them out too.

PIEHLER: Well one thing I just remember when I first started doing these interviews back in 1995, I remember the ... a daughter-in-law wrote back about how the grandchildren read the interview of this veteran who had had a stroke and couldn't talk to them anymore. But they had a whole new perspective because they were reading about him as an eighteen and nineteen year-old. And I was just thinking, do your grandsons and granddaughters know that you, for example, used to go out, sneak out at night and ride the horses? Is that a story they'll have heard before?

SMITH: (Pause) Gee, I don't ... (Laughter)

TINKER: You don't remember if told 'em or not?

SMITH: No, I never have told 'em ...

PIEHLER: Well, it's a wonderful story 'cause you just can't do that anymore. I mean, even if you wanted to, you just ...

SMITH: In our way, it's usually in the paper, that I discuss with them [how] somebody did something wrong you know ... and thinking that they would learn not to do anything like that. Almost anything in the newspaper that comes out, because they can read that. And I would make some remarks about it so not to take that route, so that is my way. That's the way I was raised from when I was a small boy. They always talked about somebody, the neighbors or somewhere.

PIEHLER: So it's the third person that you ...

SMITH: Yeah. They used that to—I didn't realize it that they were doing that to teach me something. But later, I found out, I think about it, and found out that that was the way of teaching instead of lecturing. Of course, my older brothers, when they made mistake they were lectured and I was sittin' in, just a little guy. So when I grew up to be their size I didn't do the same. I didn't go that route ... That taught me to [behave]. So when I was about ten years old or nine, I told my mother, I said, "Mom, I'll never will be a problem to you any. As long as I'm growing up I will never be a problem to you." And then I told her when I was going to Indian school, I said, "Mom, don't buy me clothes no more. The government's gonna issue me clothes, so you don't have to worry about buying clothes for me," I said. So I did. And that's ... maybe some reason why I went to the Indian school.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Because it sounds like it was one less for your mother to feed, also.

SMITH: And just like when my mother was going to buy me a woman, I said, "No, Mom." I didn't say I'd get one free, but I knew I could get this one. Said, "Keep your concho belt, your shawl, horses, cows, don't do that." I didn't want anybody to do that for me. So I went and got my girlfriend and she accepted. She wanted to anyway.

PIEHLER: I'm curious on, um, you mentioned going to picture shows, as you called them, which was very common to call them before World War II. After you came home did you go to any war movies?

SMITH: No.

PIEHLER: You never saw anything like *Sands of Iwo Jima* or ...

SMITH: They were but I never ...

PIEHLER: You never ...

SMITH: The only war picture I saw was *Windtalkers*. That was for me to judge.

PIEHLER: But you never saw any of the other films?

SMITH: ... movies, war movies.

PIEHLER: You would see other movies though?

SMITH: They would start and I would quick do something else, not look at it. Because it brings back a lot of things. Like this, uh, these Iraqi ... when soldiers get hurt I feel it. I don't know who they are, but when they're hurt I'm hurt too. That's the war. Yeah.

PIEHLER: So *Windtalkers* is the first war movie you had seen?

SMITH: *Windtalkers*, the only one I saw. I wanted to judge how it is and sure enough people ask about it and I can answer them.

PIEHLER: What do you say to them about *Windtalkers*?

SMITH: Before?

PIEHLER: What do you say when they ask you about how accurate the *Windtalkers* is ... How do you address that question?

SMITH: I tell 'em it's my fault it was made. (Laughter) It is. Some years ago the Greenberg production came to us, said they wanted to make a movie about Navajo Code Talkers and all those old guys, they died. They don't live anymore. But anyway, we all read the script and there was a lot of things that we didn't like in there, so we crossed them out and gave it back to the producer. Ernest Greenberg, I think his name was. And they took it back and came back the following month at the meeting. They told us nobody wants to buy it, nobody wants to sponsor that one, its too dull. (Laughter) That's what they told us. We were out of luck then. This was about thirty years ago. So this time, four years ago, when these Japanese came to our meeting we were given scripts and these guys were gonna do the same thing. They said, "This is not right, this is not right, gonna take it out, better take it out." I said, "No." I got up and I said, "No, we shouldn't do that. These guys want to make money out of the movie for themselves and for us. And last time we did that, and nobody want to sponsor it." So I said, "Leave this one the way it is and let's see how it comes out." And I was assigned to assist them, but I told this to **President Ustibe**, I say, "He can go." Because I didn't want to go to LA and be down there saying how the movie should be done. But this guy was. He was down there.

PIEHLER: Any sense of how he ... Did he like the job? (Laughter) The person you sent in your place?

SMITH: He was for it. When he came back I asked him if he had made any correction anyway, he said, “Uh uh [Negative].” (Laughter)

TINKER: So did ... Did the Code Talkers Association receive some payments from the movie?

SMITH: We got \$100,000 to begin up front. We're using that one for scholarship to our children. And we're getting, if it goes overseas we're still going to be getting' some more.

TINKER: The Association is getting a percentage?

SMITH: Uh huh. And then we switch bank to Charles Schwab .

TINKER: Did ya? (Laughter)

SMITH: They're managing our money now. It is quite a bit of money so its best that it goes up—not in the Gallup Bank anymore. (Laughter) So, that's how it happened.

PIEHLER: When ... you give the different lectures, what questions are please to hear from ... audiences? What questions sort of annoy you? That you really—and mind you, I should almost apologize for many of our students, that they know little, not just about Navajo culture or World War II, but you'd be surprised what they don't know about. But given that, I mean, what questions are you sort of pleased to hear, to be asked about, but what really do sort of annoy you at times?

SMITH: It's mostly what I did during World War II. Those are the questions—nothing about the culture, but I usually bring that in by myself. Yeah.

TINKER: So you wish they would you more about the culture?

SMITH: No, I don't. I just feel satisfied that I did a good job explaining, so.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you're also pretty pleased by your questions you get from—you've not gotten the questions that you've just ...

SMITH: I like questions.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

SMITH: Yes. And it's good for the audience, the whole audience, not only the person. There are a lot of people they'd like to ask question, but they don't know how to present it, so if somebody does they're in there getting their answer. And I just hope I did good in answering them. That's the only thing I have in my mind. I hope I did right, you know, to do that. That's the only thing that I think of, that I've done right.

PIEHLER: Um, I guess, I guess one thing you'd mentioned that your brothers, you also didn't talk very much about the war after you got back between your brothers.

SMITH: No ... Usually we talk about what we did at the training or Los Angeles and places like that, at the camp. But nothing about combat—we never talk about that.

PIEHLER: Because you said about your brother who was in the Air Corps, who was shot down over the Philippines, you mentioned in class that you didn't know he had been tortured until years later. I mean, just before ...

TINKER: Right before he died? Right?

SMITH: Uh huh. Right before he died he told me. He said, "You're the guys that almost had me killed," he said. I said, "How?" I knew he was prisoner of war at the time. "What happened?" And then he told that they did put wire around his head and keep twisting on this side 'til he blackout. And he said he did his best. He was well-educated. He did his best to ... He copied every word we said, but couldn't put it together to make sense.

TINKER: They thought just because he was Navajo that he could tell them what the code was?

SMITH: Uh huh.

TINKER: And they tortured him?

SMITH: Yeah. They didn't believe him. They keep torturing him. I don't know how many times they did, he didn't say that much because we just spoke a little bit. And then I said, "I think that's why you're safe." (Laughs) "If you didn't know nothin' they would've killed you," I said.

PIEHLER: Well it sounds like—your story also really confirms why it was important even to put Navajo in code. That it was, you know, it was not just the Navajo language that threw the Japanese, but then it was even in code. So even if they had a Navajo speaker ... Did you carry the actual, did you have the code in your head or did you have a sort of codebook?

SMITH: In my head.

PIEHLER: So all the code was in your head?

SMITH: Uh huh. The only time I had the book was at the recuperation, the base camp. That's the only place we had the books to practice on, what do you call, brush-up. Of course, we put in some new words in there too. That was the only place, otherwise, you're going to—you couldn't even carry a camera. But I had some pictures made. The one Lila used?

TINKER: Mm hmm.

SMITH: I don't know how ... this guy was an usher in the theater in New York, how he took those pictures, but he gave me one of 'em. That's the one they used at the—I had more than that. My kids took 'em all out.

TINKER: So your kids have the original photos?

SMITH: Yeah. So my kids have it somewhere and I don't ask for it.

PIEHLER: Well let me, um, you've been so generous with your time and your stories. What have we forgotten to ask you or what would you like to tell us about? About anything about your life or particularly your wartime experiences.

SMITH: Um, I think that's it. That's about it. Except some jokes, but those shouldn't be in there. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, one thing I guess, one very light thing, because I do want you to say a little bit about your friend, is Los Angeles. I think there's some stories you haven't told about Los Angeles because you mentioned that was one of the things you talked with you brothers about going into Los Angeles. What was that like to go on? Particularly the first time you were on leave.

SMITH: I went on leave the first time and I didn't know that was my sergeant's girlfriend I picked up. (Laughter) She was Cherokee from Oklahoma. A pretty little doll.

PIEHLER: And you didn't realize it was the sergeant's ...

SMITH: I didn't know that was my sergeant's girlfriend. But, uh, I don't know if it got back to him, but ... (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What did you think of Los Angeles? I mean, you'd been to Albuquerque, but I get the sense that ...

SMITH: I didn't do much in Los Angeles. I went up there to get a haircut and get a tattoo. I got one on my arm. I went up there to get one because the other Code Talkers had tattoo on their shoulders and I thought I'd get one for ID. So I had my name, Jesse, put on there. And the emblem and the anchor, globe, and eagle put on my arm. That's all I went up there for, otherwise I never went. I usually just go down to Oceanside where I can eat out and have something other than the government chow.

PIEHLER: You had said that you'd had ... the good friend that you had, on the invasion of Iwo Jima, you had exchanged your life stories the night before the invasion. Is there anything else you wanted to, and you told us a little about his life story, anything more you wanted to say about him?

SMITH: Hmm, no ... except, uh, we spent the whole night. We didn't go to sleep. He told me his story, his life story, first and then when he finished I told him what I did growing up. Going to school and then how I joined the Marine Corps. How I tricked the recruiter is what I told him. And then a little bit down [at] the Camp Pendleton, of course he knew most of that because we were together down there. So that's about all that ... I went with him to Fort Lewis last year. Fort Lewis [College in Durango], Colorado. He told that story.

PIEHLER: About?

SMITH: About the same story that he told me, he told it to the audience. And it is something that he—if it hadn't been for that Indian doctor he would've never made the Marine Corps. They had given up on him, that he was gonna die, but then somebody mentioned where he would get well and they took him over there and that Indian told him that he would make him well, four days. He did, that was magnificent. So he told it again one more time and I heard it. That was the last time. Then almost a year later he's gone.

PIEHLER: And you had ... It sounds like you had been friends with him. You stayed in touch ... after you got home you stayed in touch with him.

SMITH: Only, only at the meetings. Not off away from—Of course we met, we usually meet down at Gallup grocery store, one big place where people meet. I go to that store and wait around and get to see a lot of my relatives from Arizona come shop there. So that was where we used to talk, usually talk about Association business. And that's what happened.

PIEHLER: It sounds like the Association was pretty important for getting all the Code Talkers together. That you really, in a sense, you went your separate ways after the war. Is that a fair way of saying it? That you ... didn't really stay that much in touch.

SMITH: Uh huh. We really went our separate ways. There's still some that are not coming to the meetings at all. And then all of a sudden one of 'em died that we don't even know, but we have funds to help them with the funeral expense.

PIEHLER: There were lots of other Navajo who served in other parts of the military. What's the relationship between the Code Talkers, who are the most famous of the Navajo veterans from World War II, and the other veterans?

SMITH: Not so good. Um, they're kind of jealous on count of Code Talker being praised a lot and being in the paper a lot, in the news a lot ... I used to go out parade in their, uh, their fair, with a different agency. We have five agencies on the Reservation. And I don't even go to the Window Rock Fair anymore. I don't mind it at all, but sometimes when I have the chance I do that. I go just to see my relatives [and tell them], "Come see me." That was the only thing. Then my family being out there too, to see my other, sort of a meeting for that is what the purpose ... Yeah. I heard them say from the sideline, like, "I've been there too!" from those veterans. It's nice. I'm proud of all of them having been

in the service, having done their part, too. It's for the same reason, but they don't want to say the Navajo Code Talkers. There's some Code Talkers that dislike that, but me, I don't want to show it. I don't want to be like that. I just go along with it. I appreciate them to because my other relatives been in ... My oldest brother was killed by Japanese, [he was] Army—27th Army Division in the Pacific. My other older brother was in the Air Force and then another older brother was in the Army, but he never left the states. He dropped something on his ankle and became crippled, so he never went overseas. And my other brother was in the Marine Corps ... I think after he finished boot camp they found out, at the advanced place, they found out he had thyroid problem and his eyes was coming out, out ...

PIEHLER: Out of the sockets.

SMITH: ... out of the sockets, so they discharged him. And then he went to hospital and had it fixed somewhere, but he never went back. And then me, the youngest one, I almost got medical charged. The time I came back from Los Angeles, they ran out of buses, Marine Corps buses, so there was a cattle truck and everybody was climbing in there. That cattle truck was from the Marine base and I jumped in and I stood in the middle, right about the middle, with my arm out. Down we went, down the road and there was a split, this guy looked like he was going this way and he turned that way. And my side, all the guys came this way, me down there. I had just bought those cap, the one with the ... I was really proud of my cap. (Laughs)

TINKER: So when the truck took that sharp turn all the guys fell on top of you?

SMITH: We fell to the side and the middle part was where it broke, where I was.

TINKER: Oh, so you went up against the metal.

SMITH: So, I had stone grit in my arm, sliding down the road. And I was passed out for a little while, I guess, because the ambulance got there and I was trying to go look for my new cap. (Laughs) That guy said, "Oh never mind, never mind, let's go. You're hurt." But I walked to the bus. There was a bus this time, empty. And a lot of us went in there, got in there and I still know that I was there 'til we got to the hospital sick bay. I walked inside myself and I sit while they were doing the more severe ones. When it was about my turn, I guess I passed out. And I hit my head this side.

PIEHLER: 'Cause you had mentioned to the class about your hearing.

SMITH: That's why my hearing is no good this side, except my hearing is only digital ... not a regular hearing aid. They said that my brain was damaged up here.

PIEHLER: So in other words you went into all those island campaigns only hearing out of one ear?

SMITH: I still hear pretty good when I went in, it didn't bother me ...

PIEHLER: Oh, it didn't bother you until later.

SMITH: About ten years ago ...

PIEHLER: Oh, okay. But it stems from that accident.

SMITH: Uh huh. Well, everything is getting' on me now that I'm older you know. The accident I had, the broken bones I had years ago, they're now paining and hurting. That's what comes with the age the doctor told me. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Well, I wanted to say this concludes an interview with Sam—Samuel Jesse Smith on February 13, 2004 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler ...

TINKER: And Cynthia Tinker.

PIEHLER: And really, thank you very much. I almost feel like we should have you out every year just so we could talk to you some more.

SMITH: Mm hmm. Thank you brother Dr. Piehler and granddaughter Cynthia Tinker. It's great to be interviewed like this. I'm glad to have volunteered to do this. As an emergency come to our country we all get together, become brothers and sisters, bringing our spiritual weapons to preserve freedom to this great country. And God bless America. Thank you.

TINKER: Thank you, Sam.

PIEHLER: Thank you.