

WWII 151 A

Interviewee: Ed Kissam

Interviewer: Ann P. Smith

Date: April 21, 2010

S: My name is Ann Smith and I am here with Edward Kissam, and today's date is April 21st, 2010. We are in one of the meeting rooms of the Millhopper Alachua county Library. This interview is being done both for the Sam Proctor Oral history program and the Matheson Historical Museum. Let's start off with where you were born.

K: I was born in South Carolina--actually at a saw mill in the swamp. The saw mill was on the banks of the Edisto River and this was off into the woods about a mile from the town of Embree. My father worked for the lumber company there. He was the person who was self-taught to be a civil engineer. He had a sextant and a compass and he went out to tracts of timber and ran the lines where they were supposed to be and then he estimated how much timber they could get off this tract. And then they had also made him the Justice of the Peace and he could sign the papers of the company. He never went through high school. He was born up in North Carolinas but I was born, there, in a house there by the sawmill, obviously a house, cause we lived in it. Once there was a--my mother told me once they had a flood there and they had to go upstairs, so there was a two story house there. There were probably other houses too, I doubt we were the only ones, but it wasn't a big community. Apparently we left there when I was one year old. The family then went to Orangeburg, South Carolina. I was taken back there when I was five years old, there was nothing there--no mill, no houses, a pile of saw dust, and that was all.

S: Well, what year were you born?

K: 1925.

S: Ok.

K: July 12th

S: Well so, you grew up . . .

K: The first things I remember were in Orangeburg, South Carolina, which is a relatively large town so far as South Carolina is concerned--not as big as Columbia, but then it was tremendously large but it had nice schools and I went to first grade there.

- S: And what do you remember about it?
- K: Well, we lived on a street called Henly Street and we lived in a nice house, a middle class house. The school was a walking distance, straight down about a quarter of a mile or something. My sister, I had an older sister four years older, and she was also born at that sawmill place. The nearest place to where we were born was Embree, a little tiny community called Embree.
- S: Did you ever hear stories about if you were attended when your mother was birthing you? Do you know if it was . . .
- K: I understand the doctor came to the house; as a matter fact, I'm pretty sure the doctor was there.
- S: Do you think your sister too maybe had a [doctor]?
- K: I'm not, well, probably.
- S: Probably?
- K: Probably. My sister—apparently, they had her bed in one of the living rooms, and my sister was peeping in when I was born. When my father discovered her he paddled her a little bit.
- S: (laughing) Oh that's something!
- K: Yeah.
- S: Well now, you went to first grade there?
- K: At Orangeburg.
- S: At Orangeburg; do you remember anything about school?
- K: Oh yes. For one thing, they taught us to write immediately. They taught us to write in script.
- S: I'll be darned.
- K: We started in September. They had a book that we kept, this was my story book. We had our first letters and we had our letters to Santa Claus and so on like that.
- S: Oh perfect!
- K: And one of my children still has this book, and it's all the way through school and the teacher was Mrs. Riley. So, school was very easy for me. I was an all "A"-type student at that age. The school was a two-story brick building--a nice school

building. It was walking distance and the family was my older sister, four years older.

S: And what was her name?

K: Mary.

S: Mary?

K: Mary Elizabeth

S: Alright.

K: And also, in the family my father had been married previously, and they had three children and then his wife died. He was at a saw mill down in South Georgia at that time. My mother and her sister that helped care for her, this woman who was ill.

S: I see.

K: She died. That's how my father got to know my mother, and I don't have any information they never really told me anything about how they really got together, but they obviously did. So, I had three half-siblings. When we were at Orangeburg, the oldest of the three, and she was off at college. They were that much older.

S: Sure.

K: She was at Coker College in South Carolina--a very nice college for women. The only person that my family ever sent to college was this daughter, and she was called Marvalee, everyone called her Maeie and I called her Maeie. Also when I was born, she wanted me to be named Jimmy but they named me Edward Bernard. But she, all my life, called me, Jimmy.

S: That's what she wanted! (Laughing) Aren't those family stories just something?

K: Yes. She finished college and went to Charleston, got a job teaching and met a fellow named Burney Hughes and they were married and lived there all their lives. The other two was Luther, my father's name was Luther Clarence Kissam. The second child from the first marriage was Luther Clarence Kissam, Junior. Who was always called 'Buck' by everyone.

S: Buck?

K: Buck. He was an exceptional person and when he was a teenager, when we were at Orangeburg, and while he was still in high school, he got a job keeping

books for the lumber company. And when he was 16 years old, he got married. He married an 18 year old girl. They had a family over the years. And he got a job at the post office—stayed with it all of his life. He ended up as a post master in Columbia.

S: Isn't that something?

K: They had a family and he became a post master in Columbia, S.C. I don't know whether he ever finished high school—he might have. The third one in our family was Roberts. was an athlete. He was a boxer; he played football; he played all sports.

S: How many years older was he, than you?

K: The youngest was 10 years older than I. (laughter)

S: (laughter)

K: So whenever I was six years, he was sixteen.

S: They were almost like aunts and uncles.

K: In a little way. Roddy was a good athlete and he got a scholarship to Clemson College. It was a military college, then. It just so happened that the mill in Orangeburg burned on the summer after I was just seven, I guess. And the Depression was on and there were no jobs. The older daughter was teaching and she was okay. Buck was with the post office, and he was secure. Brother Roddy got the scholarship to play football, boxing and track. And so he went to Clemson College. We never got to see him do any of his sports. The Depression was so bad, my father could not get a job. These companies that he worked for provided him with an automobile, usually a Buick, a big Buick, for some reason. But when we were in Orangeburg he bought mother a car—a Pontiac. So when the mill burned, he lost the Buick. The whole corporation was gone. No jobs were available. So, my mother's sister, who had actually helped to take care of this first wife of my father's, lived at Hilliard, Florida on a farm with her husband. They invited us to come down and stay with them until my father could get a job. So, we moved down with all of our furniture and all to Hilliard and the furniture was stored in a shed at the farm. My father went off in the car that he had bought for my mother. He was gone for over a year. We never got any money from him. He didn't make enough money to just get along. He finally came back on a bus. The car was gone. He was a very independent type; he didn't want to get anything from the government. But he ended up working with the WPA for one dollar a day. During this year or year and one-half, we lived with the Davis'

on this subsistence farm. We worked on the farm with them—they had cows. They had pigs. They had fruit trees—oranges.

S: How old were you then?

K: Well, I was probably seven by the time we went down there.

S: And do you remember it as a happy time?

K: It was for me. It was happy for me; I liked it there. My sister didn't like it, particularly. But it was a very country little place—the little town of Hilliard was. But they had a nice school. It was a two-story brick building, strangely enough. The school seemed fine and we went on a school bus. When my father came back, we moved to a little tiny house, unpainted, shack of a house about a mile out from Hilliard. We moved out from Davis' house. My father had this job for a dollar a day but we lived next door--about 100 yards from the Gordons. He was the rural mail carrier. He owned the house, rented it for nothing, practically, I guess. And also, [he] loaned us a cow. He had two cows and gave us the better of the two.

S: Wasn't that something? Those are the stories I have heard, everybody helped everybody.

K: (crying) Forgive me for being so emotional about it.

S: You've got the right person as far as that's concerned and I'm more emotional every year. I just, a pretty song or a gorgeous bird would just trip me off. Well so,

K: So we lived in this little house, next to the Gordons. We went to school on the little school bus that was more of a made up school bus. It was a truck.

S: But it was transportation.

K: It was fine. And I enjoyed living there. It was in the woods, right behind the house was forest. And they even had panthers, Florida panthers.

S: Oh my goodness!

K: I had heard them but I haven't ever seen one.

S: Uh huh.

K: There's a little creek where you could actually swim.

S: Sounds like heaven for a little eight year old boy!

K: Not bad, it was.

S: Yeah.

K: I went to school there and I sold Cloverine Salve [since 1860, a treatment for chapped lips and chaffed skin] to all the people that lived all around the country side. I'd sell them Cloverine Salve for twenty-five cents and surprisingly enough, a lot of people bought it.

S: Uh huh.

K: I think they were donating to us. I got a watch for selling Cloverine Salve.

S: Did you?!

K: Um hum. And then after a couple of years, when my father got a job . . .

S: Uh hum. As what?

K: Same thing that he had always done. It was a lumber company in Columbia, South Carolina.

S: Ah.

K: I guess I was ten, then, maybe. He had to go and get up before we did. As a matter of fact, my mother was pregnant because my younger brother was born before we moved the family.

S: I see.

K: I gave my father the watch.

S: Yes.

K: Then we went to Columbia, or Cayce, just outside of Columbia--a little town. My father worked for a lumber company there, but we only lived there about a year.

S: Do you remember anything when you were in South Carolina? Did you have any contact with African Americans, or certainly didn't have any in the schools?

K: Only the workers. My father frequently took workers--he had this big Buick. It seems he would always give them a ride. But anyway, he would sometimes take workers out to the woods.

S: What kind of man was your father?

K: He was stern; he told me bedtime stories, usually bible stories.

S: I see.

K: In our family there was no smoking, no cursing, no alcohol. It was strictly up and up. It didn't seem to me that it was exceedingly religious.

S: Did you go to church?

K: Yes. Baptist, in Orangeburg ,S.C.

S: Just on Sundays or other times, too?

K: I don't remember anything other than Sunday's. We went to church wherever we were, in Cayce, near Columbia. As a matter of fact, when we were down at Hilliard, we went to a little Baptist Church and that little Baptist church had a piano but nobody could play it. My sister was 11 then and she played by ear and she played it for them.

S: She just sat down and it turned out to be her job.

K: When they sang she played.

S: Isn't that wonderful! Well, that was meant to be.

K: Also, when I was eight, the preacher always invited people to come join the church. I had not discussed this with anybody but I went and joined the church. They had a special ceremony for me and I was baptized in the St. Mary's River.

S: Now, tell me about your Mother.

K: My mother was born on, and grew up on a farm on the Suwannee River in South Georgia.

S: What kind of a person was she?

K: She was a very sweet person. I was probably her favorite. She did all kind of special things for me—food-wise and everything. She sewed clothes for us. She sewed very elegant clothes which were laughed at when we came down to Hilliard. She was a very sweet person and the older children called her, "Mama". And she treated them just like she treated us. They all loved her and her life ended as a tragedy but it is a long story.

S: What happened?

K: We were running up on WWII, now.

S: Well, shall we save that [for later]?

K: I think so.

S: Shall we go on chronologically; you are doing a good job. So, you are about ten years old.

K: Then my father got a better job at Waynesboro, GA. And Waynesboro was a lovely little town—still is. It was just wonderful. We lived in a house across from a park. It was just a simple house but it is still there across from the park. Everybody was friendly and I loved it. My sister, also. As a matter of fact my sister got married to a man from there--one of the old families. We were there for three or four years. I was in the 8th grade there and I was the only eighth grader on the high school football team. I weighed 120 lbs. I was a guard. I just got beat up all the time. But I was fast--that's why they wanted me. But I was the only eighth grader on the team. There are a lot of wonderful things about Waynesboro and one was that my sister--four years older than I was--met a man who was from one of the oldest families around and they had a plantation. They later married and that complicated things, too, later on.

S: What else did you like in high school besides football?

K: At Waynesboro, they taught Latin, for one thing. I didn't like Latin but everything else, I liked.

S: And you were still getting good grades?

K: Yes, I always got good grades. And my brother, who was at Clemson, bought me a bicycle for one of the Christmas'.

S: How nice.

K: So that was wonderful. I also sold parched peanuts on Saturdays. I would go all over town

S: So, you were still doing the entrepreneur thing, weren't you?

K: And my Mother would be sure they were parched just right. I also carried a newspaper when I got the bike. I delivered the paper—*The Savannah Morning News*. And I recall one time I had been to a place where they took the paper and it was time to collect. I went and said to the man there that I would like to collect for the paper and he said, "Well, go ahead." And I said, "Well, I have done my part; now, you have to do your part."

S: What did he say?

K: He said, "Well, you have done your part."

S: Was it a morning paper?

K: *Savannah Morning News*, I believe.

S: So, you had to get up early.

K: Yes, they dropped it off at a place before dawn.

S: And you had to fold it and . . .

K: Umhum and deliver it. And I didn't have very many customers but anyway, it was an income.

S: That is a good start. A lot of people talk about that.

K: So that was a positive part about Waynesboro. I met some wonderful friends there.

S: And then, how long were you in Waynesboro?

K: Probably, let's see—I was in eighth grade and I was fourteen when we left. My father got a job—which he considered a better job, even—at a saw mill in a little town called Elizabethtown, N.C. My father was very well acquainted and friendly with a fella named D.S. Gardener. D.S. Gardener owned the mill in Orangeburg that burned. I think he owned the mill in Columbia. So, he offered my father a job. We went up there to this tiny little town, 1500 people. But we moved into a house that was just a gorgeous house; it was a Greek style, stucco up on a hill out of town about a half mile—just a lovely place. I had a whole big bedroom, bigger than this room, all to myself and it opened on to a patio that had a wall around it that arched.

S: Oh, my goodness!

K: It was a wonderful house. And, so we lived there about a year.

S: And you went to school there?

K: Yes, in Elizabethtown.

S: But, you didn't graduate from that high school?

K: Yes.

S: You did?

K: I did.

S: And what year was that?

K: 1942

S: Oh.

K: That was when World War II began.

S: I was going to say that was a very bad year.

K: And so this house came up for sale for \$1500. My father did not have \$1500 and he would not borrow money. He would not borrow money.

S: Yeah.

K: D.S. Gardner had tried to get him to go in with him, to borrow ten thousand dollars and go in with him but he would not do that. So, we poked around-----
-----.

S: Yeah.

K: And, so the mill that D.S: Gardner had, in about a year, burned—burned up--gone.

S: Oh.

K: I don't know whether he set those things afire or not, but it seemed, you know.

S: Well, actually you know from an awful lot of the interviews I've done, that was not uncommon. I mean, all of that stuff was very, very volatile.

K: Um huh.

S: And so. . .

K: They used steam and they made it with their slabs.

S: Yes, and it's all wood.

K: Yeah it was.....

S All fuel.

K: And when they would burn, everything seemed to burn.

S: It just went up.

- K: The equipment and saws and everything. So, anyway that burned up, but fortunately there was another, even bigger mill in Elizabethtown.
- S: Oh.
- K: And my father got a job with them right away.
- S: Right away.
- K: Um. Doing the same thing.
- S: Well, wonderful.
- K: Uh huh. So we stayed there. We had to move out of this wonderful house, which was for sale.
- S: Umhum.
- K: And we moved to a brick, a little brick house, which was also the second nicest house we ever lived in.
- S: Well, you moved lots before you ever graduated high school.
- K: Oh, yes.
- S: Do you think that taught you anything? I mean going from different towns?
- K: Probably.
- S: What lessons do you think?
- K: I don't know.
- S: I always think of the flexibility and adaptability that I think I learned from that kind of experience--that people who born, grew up, and stayed in the very same house, the same neighbors, the same community, didn't seem to have.
- K: Uh hum.
- S: That's just my hypothesis.
- K: Well, I hadn't really thought about that, particularly but it probably did have a significant. . .
- S: I mean you learn new friends; you learn new games to play or the same game with a different name.

K: Yes, but when we got to Elizabethtown, this little town, my sister, Mary had finished high school. She was just floundering around. And she went down to the bank and they loaned her a hundred dollars. And she took the money and went to Charleston and started secretarial school.

S: All right.

K: And she got a job before she finished that school. She never did finish the course, but she got the job.

S: Got the job.

K: And then the Evans boy from Waynesboro showed up; they started going together. Then he was up in Norfolk for some reason and got sick. She went up and nursed him back to health. And then they got married in Charleston.

S: Did she pay back the loan?

K: Of course.

S: Of course, like her daddy would have taught her. Yep, I already knew the answer to that. (laughing)

K: Then the Evans sister and her husband moved back to Waynesboro where she lived the rest South Carolina. My brother was a coach and a teacher. So the principal called him and my brother came up and the town, he was a charming person, never met anyone that didn't like him. He played first string at Clemson on the football team and he was a boxing champion at South Carolina.

S: He's the new hero, wasn't he?

K: He did the broad jump.

S: Well that was nice—that you recommend your brother.

K: He came up and everybody liked him there. All the business men chipped in to increase his salary from what the school allowed. And then they built him and his wife a little house. There was only one little block of stores and his little house was on the end.

S: Well, you know the kind of life that your father and mother lived and how your father didn't like to borrow money or those kinds of things—that comes back to you. All of these wonderful things that happened, people remember good people. I had a business colleague who was the CEO of the Hospital Corporation of America and he said, "Good people beget good people". He would like

responsible people that worked in his organization to recommend people that they thought were good and that was good enough for him.

- K: Well, my little ten year younger brother was born in that little farm house in Hilliard after my father had gotten a job up in Columbia so he is a native Floridian. But anyway he was in the family then, too. We were up in North Carolina. He was a little boy—and in Waynesboro.
- S: What did you think that you were gonna do the day after graduation from high school?
- K: Well, for one thing in high school, football was a big thing. My brother was a coach just established—got everybody to--the town got football equipment for us. And we had a football team. He tested everyone out, individually. I was the second fastest person. The fastest was a big fellow who was a tackle. But I was agile and I became the quarterback. I did all of the passing and the punting and a lot of the running. I was his best player on the team. It wasn't a big team but anyway. My brother got us a game with Orangeburg, this bigger town where we had originally lived. We lost 14-12. I played quarterback, punted, and I played linebacker on defense. I played a good game that time and someone from Clemson was there and saw me.
- S: Really.
- K: So, my brother contacted them in my senior year. And they said, "Bring him on down." So I went and talked to the coach at Clemson and I was offered a scholarship. But then, the war started. We had the attack on Pearl Harbor. This was January, just before I graduated. We only had eleven grades there. I graduated one month before I was seventeen; I was still sixteen. For one thing, my father still did not make a lot of money. My father handled all the money. Mother was not allowed to fiddle with the money. It was one of those autocratic type of things. She was not abused at all. This was 1942, then. It was December of 1941 that was Pearl Harbor. I remember when that happened. I heard it on the radio.
- S: Were you at home?
- K: Yes.
- S: What was the reaction of everybody in the room?
- K: The boys were afraid that they would not make it into the war before it was over. That was the way they felt. The girls didn't make any comment that I remember.

S: Not even from your Mother?

K: Nobody was afraid. Not from Mother, either. I was 17. This Elizabethtown was fifty miles from Wilmington up the Cape Fear River. They had established a big shipyard there building Liberty ships.

S: Yes.

K: And I went down there and got a job there as a ship-fitter's helper and worked about six months roughly there.

S: What was your job?

K: The ship fitter's helper and the ship fitters, these Liberty ships were built in various stages and they had a big yard where these huge plates of steel were bent and shaped and then they were taken over to the way, where the ship was, put the keel down. The ship fitters had to get all the pieces lined up right and then, tack weld them. So, I was taught, all this--was taught on the job.

S: Sure.

K: And I was just helping, did what the ship fitter wanted. And where they found all these people that knew how to build ships, I don't know, because there were about seven or eight ways, going on all the time. So it was welding welding and then getting this place together until the ship was up. And they launched about a ship a week.

S: Did they really?

K: Yep.

S: I've talked to some others that have worked and done that.

K: They were beautiful ships to me. I thought they were just beautiful. And I think the Merchants Marines must have had some advertising about going into the Merchant Marines. And I decided that. I would like to do that. I was seventeen and wasn't eligible for the draft in the military. So I volunteered for the Merchant Marines school up in Hoffman Island, New York .They sent me up there by train and I spent three months up there.

S: What did your parents think? Did they think that was a good idea?

K: Yes.

S: So they were supportive.

- K: And uh, so that was the beginning of my war experience at a ship yard and then, the Merchant Marines.
- S: And where was the training, did you say?
- K: It was in Hoffman Island, New York, which was in New York harbor. Hoffman Island is probably, now, the base of one of the big bridges going over there, I expect. There was about two or three thousand people. I had one boxing match there and I won.
- S: There was a lot of that informal, and certainly in the service they talk about [boxing] you know. Okay, and so, after your three month training . . .?
- K: Well, they marched us down Wall Street and we got our seaman's papers. And we had to join the Seaman's Union.
- S: I see.
- K: And then this training, besides being trained on the island, we also were trained on ships. There was a big, three-masted schooner, sailing vessel, called The Vema and we had to keep this spic and span and climbed the mast and all that. But we never did take it out. However, my little group that went there was considered one of the best and they gave us a dance at the top of the New Yorker Hotel. I'd never danced.
- S: Oh. Well, now would your father have approved? Is dancing okay?
- K: Probably not
- S: That was certainly border-lined, anyway.
- K: And, so there were young girls; there were girls, anyway. One of them came to ask me to dance. Oh, and in the Merchant Marines school, we had uniforms like sailors. They were dark but they had red on them instead of white and we had sailor caps. So, we looked like sailors.
- S: Pretty sharp.
- K: Anyway, that was the dress uniforms instead of dungarees and denim shirts. A girl asked me to dance. I told her that I didn't know how to dance. So she said, "Well, I will teach you." So, we got out there and she taught me for a minute and then she said "Let's sit this one out." (laughter).
- S: Dancing was not one of your natural talents.

- K: No, it wasn't. I guess if I had been taught. I learned to dance, later. Then, she said, "I don't smoke and I don't drink, but that doesn't mean that I don't do other things."
- S: My goodness! Well, I guess that made you pause for thought.
- K: Yes, I had to pass that one over.
- S: I think that was wise.
- K: I had a girlfriend in Elizabethtown. She probably liked me but she didn't love me. I really think that I loved her. She was the daughter of the farm agent for the county. They lived way out of town. I had a little bit of time with her, dates with her, while in high school—but not much. Also, as soon as we graduated, she went off to college like a lot of the others. And as you know I was a Merchant Marine. I had two ships. The first ship I was on was a coal ship. It was being loaded with coal in Norfolk. They sent us down by train and dumped us off at Seaman's Union. They assigned us to the ships. So, I got this ship that was--Oh Gosh, I can't think of the name of it. I will think of it later. It was just a little black ship—small, but full of coal. They were dumping the last coal cars in. I got a little bit seasick looking at it rising. So, I went up and put my sea bag and got on the ship. And they were trying to get it cleaned up after the last coal was dumped in. And I started to help. And they said, "Go down and get your work clothes on." But as a matter of fact, by the time I got back with my work clothes, they had it all hosed off and ready to go to sea. The ship was a terrible looking little ship. But the wheel house was beautiful. It was glass. It was a beautiful wheel.
- S: How large was the crew?
- K: Not very large. I don't know how many, probably eight or something like that. It had a couple of guns on it--cannons that the Navy sailors were responsible for.
- S: What was your job?
- K: My job—we had watch. There were no lights at night—they were all out. They had to watch the bow and had to watch the top and watch the stern. And if you saw something like a light or anything, you would call out, "White light two points off the port bow." And the officer would say, "I see it!" Really, just voice. The captain, on my first watch on the bow, came down and put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Son, if you have got to puke, go over to Leeward.
- S: The ship was to take the coal where?

K: To Boston. So we were going up the coast within sight of the coast in the day time and I was on the wheel – this is one thing that happened—I was on the wheel watch. The compass, not in numbers but the old west-by-north, we had a heading to keep on. A third mate, who was an Englishman, was with me in the wheel house. My first time on the wheel and it was at night. The ship kept drifting toward the shore. I would turn the wheel and bring it back and it would drift more. Finally, I headed a full right rudder and it drifting away again. I called the third mate who was there and I said, “Listen,” and told him what was going on. And he took it and said, “Sure enough. So, he ran down and got the captain. The captain came up and took the thing and whirled it one way and whirled it another and whirled it another way and then he got it straightened out. He said, “The rudder is run by steam and it leaks off a little bit—you have to sort of let it balance itself. You don’t just hold it.” So then it worked fine. But we were going through the Cape Cod Canal and he took over **voice** and I was on the wheel. He took over voice control and he said, “Hard right rudder.” And I got to worrying about this and whirled the wheel left.. He blew his stack. “When I am on control, you just do exactly what I say.” So, I did and we didn’t run into the side. So, we went to Boston and all of the crew, the officers, everybody except cook and I –I volunteered to get double time money for staying on watch on the ship. They didn’t tell me that it had about a twenty foot tidal range. So, I was just watching the ship and hawsers are lined up, this big around. They got tighter and tighter. The cook said, “Those lines are getting pretty tight.” I said, “Yeah, golly.” He said, “How about I loosen them up?” So, he did. But they didn’t say anything to me about this. So, the cook saved a disaster. It probably would have broken the lines. We would have been adrift. So, that was another little thing.

S: That is how you learn, I guess.

K: I went ashore for about thirty minutes on Scully Square in Boston. All the sailors and the girls and the little shops and all, and then I came back. Then, we started back; we got the coal all out. We started back and we were just out of Boston a little bit and the ship started leaning, keeling to one side. And the first mate said, “We have got a stopped-up pump down in the hole. I want a volunteer to go down with me and unstop the pump. So, we went down in this black waist/chest-deep water and got the pump unstopped. And came back up—I don’t even think the first mate said ‘thank you’ or anything like that. It was just part of the job. But, anyway, it straightened out after we got it pumped out. So, that went on back and there were no other incidents on that trip. It was a nine-day trip back to the Seaman’s Union.

S: Did they give you another assignment?

K: Yes, and they asked how much sea time did I have in and I said “nine days.” The other seamen said, “Old Salt”. So they assigned me to a Liberty ship: The Thomas Nelson Page. The captain called me and asked me to stay on board the Middlesex—that was what it was called—the S. S. Middlesex. I told the captain that I wanted to go deep sea. And he said “I understand.” They realized I was trying. When I got back from the second trip on the Thomas Nelson Page, I read a little scribble in the Elizabethtown newspaper that the S.S.Middlesex had sunk off of one of the capes in a storm. They didn’t say anything about whether people were lost or what. So, The Thomas Neilson Paige joined about sixty other ships at Hampton Roads, Virginia. Then, we took off to the southeast and went through the seaweed of Sargasso. Anyway, there were flying fish—I was just thrilled. That was two or three days getting down to, just off the east of the Bahamas. And all the seaweed and flying fish. It was a much larger ship—about 10,000 tons and it had a load of flour. And also, it had some big cylinders welded on the deck that said, “Poison Gas.” As soon as we got out into the ocean, we started having night attacks by submarines, every night. The approximately sixty ships were convoyed by destroyer escort. They had built a fast destroyer with depth charges. The depth charges just went [explosion sound]. We lost two ships going across the Atlantic. It took about a month. We were going very slowly, about five knots. And then we hit the coast of Morocco. We were coming up the coast of Morocco very slowly and got near the Straits of Gibraltar and whoever had charge of the whole convoy, gave the orders for everybody to go flank speed—as fast as they could go. So, every ship cranked up. We got through the Straits of Gibraltar, just as dusk. Then it got dark and we were all out—spread out in the Mediterranean. And back behind us, flares starting dropping. Yes, they knew spies were in Spain and Morocco and would see how fast we were going. They were in charge and it worked perfectly; nobody got hit by anything.

S: You knew the danger was out there.

K: Yes, we did. They were going to bomb us. And so the convoy cruised along the North African coast and we stopped in Bizerte which was in Tunisia. And then [we] went to Naples, Italy. We lost a ship; it was torpedoed just as we went by Sicily.

S: If you were all in convoy, you could see all of that, couldn’t you?

K: The sixty ships were spread out pretty far. So, we went on in to the Bay of Naples which was just gorgeous. And the volcanoes were all there. There was one called the Stromboli (?) on an island just off Sicily. On Sicily, itself, Mount Etna, and then Vesuvius, of course in Naples. So we went into Naples and all the wharfs were blocked by sunken German and Italian ships. So we tied up to a

German liner that was on the bottom. They just put planks across and then we crossed. They came to our captain and told him that our cargo was not a priority and they needed another ship in there. So we went back out and anchored in the middle of Naples harbor. And that night and every night, German planes came over and bombed. And that ship that took our place was hit and full of munitions and explosives and there was a big fire ball.

S: The stories I hear, though, are time and time again, of the reason you are sitting here is that you got missed that time and somebody else got it. Invariably, those are the stories. They take a chance and say, 'I am going there' and something happens here.

K: Liberty ships had a five-inch cannon aft and a three-inch cannon forward. These were manned by Navy. They had four, twenty millimeter anti-aircraft guns. And they were manned by the Merchant Marine crew; I was on a twenty-millimeter. They were _____ made in Sweden. They were dangerous. They had twenty millimeters about this long [gestures] and they had the explosives in the nose. They told us that even a raindrop had been known to explode those things so don't drop them. So we would have whole belts of these things and we just had to be very careful with those. And every time something happened we had to go up and get into the tank with the anti-aircraft guns for just in case we were attacked.

S: And was that often?

K: We were never directly attacked.

S: But you had to go up there from time to time and you had to be ready.

K: Yes, even when they were bombing in Naples, and they bombed every night. They didn't bomb in the daytime at all--just at night. And the Army anti-aircraft was so much that it was like the fourth of July. It was just one tracer out of every third would light up the sky. We had these big searchlights that would show the planes. But we didn't ever get hit.

S: Were you frightened?

K: No. Not a bit--just watching a movie. I never saw but one person who was frightened. When they finally got us unloaded—and by the way, we were allowed to go ashore.

S: Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

K: Yes, we were allowed to go ashore which we did. I've forgotten exactly what kind of boats we had--how we went ashore.

S: A launch or something like that?

K: Yes, I believe it was one from our ship. And so I got to see Pompeii. And all the money was cigarettes. The Italian was no good; U.S. money was no good. Cigarettes. And we were allowed to buy one carton of cigarettes each week from our ship's store.

S: And you didn't use many of those.

K: I didn't use any of them. I never smoked them. As a matter of fact I really don't remember seeing anybody smoke one.

S: Really?

K: I wondered who did smoke them because if we got a haircut, it was a pack of cigarettes. If we took a taxi out to Pompeii, it was a pack of cigarettes. And who smoked them? I don't know. [laughter]

S: Like you said, it was the currency. I would have thought being "sailors" they would have been smokers but apparently not.

K: The soldier's daily food would have cigarettes in it-- six or eight. So they expected everybody to be smoking and I guess, they sort of encouraged it in a way. Everybody smoked but not me.

S: So did you ever unload?

K: They finally sent some barges out with some black stevedores, black soldiers, to unload the flour. The flour was in bags. Then they took off the poison gas from the decks.

S: The canisters.

K: Then we left Naples and went around to Algeria, North Africa.

S: Exotic, never heard about that in South Carolina, did you?

K: No. Oran was a very interesting place.

S: How do you spell Oran?

K: O-r-a-n. It was a big port. We went in and there was a large French warship lying in at one of the wharfs--a battleship, actually. The town of Oran had streets that were for pedestrians--had steps in them, even. There were a few for cars. But most of them were for pedestrians. I, and some of the other sailors from the Thomas Nelson Page weren't told exactly what we were going to be doing there but we were allowed to go ashore. And a little French boy who spoke French and English--he was about seven or eight years old--volunteered to be our guide. He guided us around town and showed us everything. We went to a bar and a French Foreign Legionnaire joined us. And he had the most faded uniform--it was a typical Legionnaire uniform but it was so faded, it was almost like that [pointing to the table surface]. He had just been in the dessert a long time. So, he just hung around with us and the little French-speaking boy--talked to him and talked to us in English. It was really interesting. We went to a movie that was nothing. The bar--we went to the bar but the little boy had to wait outside. I didn't drink so they got me some kind of soda. Then we found out they were making a troop ship out of our ship--putting bunks in it. And sure enough, it took several weeks, actually, to get all these things put in. Then a contingent of American soldiers from North Africa got on our ship and we took them to Naples. And the only person I saw this whole trip, afraid, was one of these soldiers. Yes, we were in a convoy. We waited until a convoy came along. We joined a convoy. And right beside us a ship was torpedoed--a munitions ship went up in a big fire ball. The crew, of course, had to get on their tubs for the anti-aircraft and so on. I was going up putting on my helmet and my life jacket and this one soldier was like this, his eyes were just so wide and he was terrified. I said, "Take it easy. It will be all right." He said, "You get up there where you belong." All the other soldiers--it was like watching a movie. Not one person showed any fear--not any time while I was on this trip. So, we took the Americans back to Naples--got them off. The front line was about 20 miles from Naples. You could hear the guns exploding. Vesuvius was erupting and running down. It was really exotic. There was a lot of waiting around and finally we were sent back to Oran and we got a shipload of French Arab soldiers. They had long rifles with bayonets and they had a loaf of bread stuck on each bayonet. They also had barrels of cognac that was put down in the hold. One of them accidently broke. The crew had buckets going down. Our quarters was a room with two double bunks. So there were four of us. One was a youngster from North Carolina about my age. Another was a twenty-five year old fella from Ohio, and the other was a black man from Philadelphia. He was the only black man on the ship. They all drank, except for me. They took this cognac and lit it and let it flame up then they'd dip in and get it. It was pretty exotic but I didn't drink. I was a Bible-carrying Baptist.

S: Did you catch any razz for that?

K: The Ohio man one time said, "Do you really believe that Jesus didn't have a father?"

I said, "Oh, yes, Joseph was his father." He just shook his head. (laughter) And I read the Bible so there was something in the Bible every day.

S: How did the four of you get along?

K: We all got along fine. The bosun came to me on the first day and asked me if I wanted to move knowing I was from the south and the black man. I told him that didn't want to do that. It turned out that the only one that I remember that name of, on that ship, is A.B. Hawkins, the black man. He was about forty-five years old. And on Christmas time, he said that was the first Christmas that he'd spent out of jail in twenty years.

S: Is that right?

K: And he was a cook. And a lot of the others were prejudiced against him. Not the southerners as much as some others.

S: I would I imagine. What was your rank?

K: I was called an "ordinary seaman." So, after you had some time at sea and so on, you got to be an "able-bodied seaman". And after that, you were either a boatswain—and he would be in charge of all the sailors.

S: I have seen the terms but I didn't know how they were ranked.

K: So I was an ordinary seaman. The other two—other than the cook--were ordinary seaman. Most of us on this ship had not really been to sea before. But they had some very experienced people on there. The boatswain was a European, Norwegian or something like that. Spoke with a heavy English accent but he was excellent and knew exactly what to do and taught us. And what we did still was to stay on watch. We had these big masts with the lookout thing on top, also, areas where the guns were, where we would have lookouts. I think we had two hours on the watch, two hours on the wheel, two hours on watch, two hours on the wheel, and four hours off or something like that. It was busy but comfortable.

S: And this would have been in all of the ports or even at sea?

K: Oh, at sea. The lookouts were only at sea. There was somebody to stay with the ship. They wouldn't let the ship be abandoned but generally we were allowed to

go ashore. As a matter of fact, I went by myself and walked maybe a mile or two down to the Mediterranean coast because the inlet into Oran was pretty long. So, I walked down to the coast and along the--it was pretty exotic.

S: I can imagine the pictures in your mind.

K: Nobody had a camera; there was not a camera aboard. It was not allowed, I don't think. We didn't have any mail.

S: I was going to ask if you kept in touch with home.

K: No, there was no mail. The military had a mail service but we didn't have that. We didn't have any kind of contact. So, we were sent to Naples with the French Algerian soldiers and they were finally unloaded. Then we were sent back to Oran. We picked up a load of German prisoners. The German prisoners were all so happy to be out of Africa. They were glad to be aboard the Thomas Nelson Page. They wanted to help on deck; they wanted to be out on deck all the time. But their officers, who were kept up with our officers in the upper part of the ship, they were just haughty. One time the captain made them come out and see these—probably this convoy were maybe one hundred ships, all as far as you could see, everywhere. And they just turned to face away from it, and wouldn't look at it. But I remember looking and seeing that occur.

S: Did you get a sense of why they wanted to get out of Africa?

K: Well, they were prisoners and they had a rough time probably—even before they were prisoners.

S: So they were glad to leave that.

K: Yes, I think so. They were all very friendly.

S: Well, I was going to ask you about that.

K: The officers were very haughty. But the soldiers were very friendly and wanted to help, help do the jobs. We let them do some things that we could show them.

S: And then you took them where?

K: To Naples. And why—they must have had a prison camp there somewhere. I never found out why the prisoners went there.

S: I know there were some ships that brought them to prisons in the U.S.

K: Yes, as a matter of fact, German prisoners worked at these mills that my father worked. They worked out in the woods and all over the U.S. I understand [they worked] in the west and everywhere. And I think they all enjoyed doing it.

S: And that probably was not dissimilar to what they would have done as young men in their country.

K: It was interesting but I guess they were all loyal to their homeland and Hitler but were probably beginning to sense that . . . As a matter of fact, Rommel, who was the commander of the Germans—and you know that he was part of the plot to kill Hitler and that he was assassinated for that-- He and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Hitler was a real horror story.

Anyway, and all of this took about eight or nine months. Another month coming home. And the Thomas Nelson Page was empty coming home, riding high and had no incidents.

S: So when did you come home?

K: In May of [19]44.

S: So, you were in the Merchant Marines quite a while.

K: Yes, a little over a year; it was 1943 and 1944. It may have been some of 1942 when I was first in to school or something. We were paid off, paid \$1,500.00 for that trip. We were paid off. The ship was run by the Grace Lines. So the Grace Lines paid us off. I guess they all of the crew together—the seaman's union. They had the officers and so on.

S: So they left you at what port?

K: We came in to New York and tied up somewhere in New Jersey. They paid us off and we got on a train and I went to North Carolina

S: So, when you got home, were you . . . ?

K: The family didn't know I was coming home. They were glad to see me. None of the friends were there at all. I was also eighteen; I was eligible for the draft. And I went to the draft board there in town. I decided that I would join the military and that I wanted to go in the Marine Corps. And that's what I did. So, they sent me right up to Raleigh on a bus. They did the physical there in Raleigh and the same afternoon, I was in Parris Island.

S: What happened to two weeks to say "Good Bye" to the family?

K: Well, it took about a week before I was gone. Oh, when I first got home we got a telegram from the purser of the ship that said he had overpaid everybody by fifty dollars but that the Grace Line had not paid us. The union had an agreement that every sailor would get \$300 if there was an attack—an air raid or any kind of attack—in the first day in port. And so we were in three different times that happened because there was an air raid every night. So, the first day, we were supposed to get \$300 from them. He said he would see about sending that money down and could he take the fifty dollars out of it. So, actually, I just went to a lawyer (I didn't know any lawyer) but I went to one there in Elizabeth town and told him that I would agree to that if he could arrange it. So, he did and they sent extra money down. Almost as much as we made.

S: So, what did you think of Parris Island?

K: I loved it.

S: Did you?

K: Yes, I did.

S: It was athletic and physical?

K: A lot of discipline, a lot of activity. You didn't walk anywhere; you ran. I loved it.

S: That's wonderful. You made the best right choice.

K: And then they tested us when we finished our thirteen weeks, actually, we trained on Parris Island. On the rifle range I shot "expert". That was a big thing in the Marine Corps. Then they tested us—gave us all kinds of exams after we finished our training. I had requested to go into artillery but they sent me to Cherry Point, Aviation Station because of my abilities, I guess. So, when they interviewed me at Cherry Point, they interviewed me (a corporal interviewed me). He said, "I see that you have asked for the artillery. The Marine Corps is putting these 75 mm cannons in these PBJ's (which were the B-25, medium bombers)." He said "If you go to navigation school, you can be a navigator cannonier." I said, "Suits me."

S: You were the dream of the recruiter's, weren't you?

K: Yes. Well, I went to navigation school and it was very . . . it didn't look like much—just little huts. And then one of these big domes but it was very sophisticated. We were taught celestial navigation, and we had this dome where you could—oh, and we had to do a link trainer, too, to fly the links, so that we could also fly the link trainer in the navigation dome. You could set the stars in

the dome for any time in the past or in the future, even, or the present. And we had all of the materials that we needed to work out the stars fixes. We would have two; one would have to fly it to keep it on a certain track, and one would do the shots and work out the “fixes” here and there. So, it took several months. [In] The very first airplane that I navigated, they designated me to be the first navigator, (we had several navigators). We had gone to the weather shack and gotten the wind speed and direction, where the wind was coming from etc., but I looked up and the clouds were going different so I put that down on my pad. I checked where it was coming from and estimated the time. We took off heading for Sun City in the Midwest and I realized (we had a drift meter—you could read) and the drift corresponded to what I had seen out there. So I just put down that the wind and we went right into the town perfectly. The other student navigators were asking me things such as “Where did you get your wind from?” So I said, looking and watching the drift. So, that was the first little “incident”.

S: Yes, but those were important observations.

K: Yeah. By the time we finished the navigation they found out that the cannons really didn’t work very well. They tore up the planes or something. So, they sent me and the other groups of navigators to bombardier school in California. So, there were several more months doing the . . .

S: Where in California?

K: El Centro, which is right on the Mexican border about eight miles from Mexicali. There are two, Calexico and Mexicali—two towns that are right next to each other. And El Centro base was about eight or ten miles from there. So, we went there several times. The wind blew all the time. The trainers that we had were little twin engine, Beechcraft, tail down planes, but it had an Nordan sight on it--very sophisticated sight. The bombardier had to—this was a gyroscopically stabilized sight--get the gyroscope up ten thousand revolutions per minute, and then we could take off. We would get going toward the target, which was down in the Sultan Sea. The guy that was the bombardier could take over. We would set the sights and the Nordan sight would fly the plane, every little move--you could see this view and every time keeping the sight within the Norton sight would fly the plane. It would tilt every little movement. And it would release it when you were in the right trajectory. It was so sophisticated an instrument. It really was something. So I learned to be a bombardier and also, after I finished I was an instructor there for a little while.

S: How long did you do that?

K: Not long, maybe a week or two. And as a matter of fact the one thing can be a tragedy was for the gyroscope to tilt--it would get going around and destroy the plane, actually, so we were always worried about that. [On] the first flight that I had as an instructor, the new navigator student, set it for the target, and he looked around at me wide-eyed and the gyroscope was tilted over about 45 degrees. I told the pilot to take over the plane and I went and eased it back up. Fortunately, it did ease back. So, it started to do it again. And then, it didn't happen again. Anyway, there was always a little something to keep your attention!

S: Well then, how long you were in bombardier school?

K: I don't remember exactly how long. It was several months.

S: When you were finished with that and you were finished as instructor, where did you go next?

K: I went down to Mexico, and I traveled to L.A.

S: Were you out of the Marines then?

K: Oh, no!

S: You mean you were on leave?

K: This was just time off. Probably day or weekend leave or something like that.

S: Oh, okay.

K: So, I got to see some of that.

S: What was your next assignment?

K: I went back to Cherry Point, N.C. for operational training. We were in a group of these PBJ's (the B-25 bombers) and we flew out and there were targets set up on the offshore islands. We would use these little thirteen pound bombs that would leave a little puff of smoke [when they exploded]. We were training with that, our operational training. We were waiting to be sent over seas to the Pacific. And then the bombs went off in Japan.

S: What do you remember learning about that?

K: Well, we learned that the war ended; and it ended right away, within days.

S: How did you know? How did you hear the news?

K: I've forgotten exactly how. I guess we had radios, and they grounded all of us. We were grounded right away. Out of navigation school and out of bombardier school there was no ranking. I was a PFC, navigational bombardier, whatever rank they went in, they came out as. In the Army, I would have been promoted to a second lieutenant, but we were all PFC's or there was a sergeant or two. There was an officer or two I found out later, but anyways. In the Marine Corps, people under the rank of corporal have to spend a month in mess duty. They pulled me off of the flight line and others, too—bombardiers, and put us in the mess hall so I made coffee for 10, 000 men for a month!

S: (Laughing.) Well you've got to put that somewhere on your vita, don't you?

K: (Laughing) Of course! And I don't even like coffee, still don't.

S: Well, that would do it!

K: On the ships, we had to make coffee when we were off, and on one of the ships there was a big pot and we would pour a pound of coffee into it and fill it up with water, put it on the stove and that was it. They'd just pour it off with the strainer. Anyways, I'd grind up these fifty pound sacks of coffee beans that smelled so good! I'd put 25 pounds into each one of the big coffee makers and that was all there was to that.

S: That's a lot of coffee.

K: That's a lot of coffee and it should have been fine, but a lot of people complained about it. (Laughing.) So, anyway, while I was on mess duty, they sent down orders that all of us navigators would be at least tech sergeants. So overnight, I became a tech sergeant along with the other navigators. The fellow in charge of the mess hall—the whole thing, it was a big mess hall for 10,000 men--was a staff sergeant, one rank below tech sergeant. He didn't like us flyboys, anyways. (He called us Airedales!)

S: Well, this probably couldn't have helped!

K: So, we decided we would stay on this duty until the end of the month which was about a week. Oh, and when you got the rank, rather than having a ceremony or anything, we were handed a slip of paper and we went down to the PX to buy your stripes and sew them on! The same thing with the gold wings we were issued from the navigation school. We had to go buy our own gold wings.

S: If you want to wear them you've got to buy them, right?

- K: So, long story, short, I made tech sergeant while I was on the mess duty. The sergeant that was in charge of the mess hall didn't show up that whole week!
- S: (Laughing.) Really?
- K: So, we just ran it.
- S: So, after your mess duty, then what was your next assignment?
- K: Back to being a navigator bombardier on the planes, getting together to be sent over. (All of this had happened before the war ended.)
- S: And so when the war was over, then what happened?
- K: They grounded us and we just had duty in one of those big warehouses where the just had stuff stacked up to the ceiling. And as a matter of fact, I dreamt that one of those big stacks fell on me and it crushed me and I died. I dreamed that. I still remember it. And why? There was no real reason; it didn't seem to be very dangerous work or anything. Then they took a group of us and sent us to China.
- S: Did they tell you what it was for?
- K: Nope. As a matter of fact they sent some navigators and they also sent some other troops. I was put in charge of—because I was a tech sergeant—and I guess all of the other techs had about fifteen men I was in charge of to get to the west coast.
- S: I see.
- K: So, we went on trains to San Diego. We got on a big troop ship there and went across on the ship. And they had these R4-D's which were the DC-3 civilian life and I forget what the Army called them, but anyway, we called them R4-D's. They had several of them on the deck of the ship. We went all the way over without stopping. We made port at Tsing Tao, China. That is where one of the Marine Air bases was. And so, we were to navigate these cargo planes out of there. Immediately when World War II was over, the communists in China took over all of China except for some of the coastal cities. The nationalists still controlled what they call Pei Ping then (now Beijing), and the railroad to Tin Sin as well as Tsing Tao, and Shang Hai. So, we (the Marines) were the sort of helping them and getting intelligence and stuff. We, navigators, navigated planes up and down the China coast and over to Japan and Okinawa. We were there about six months.
- S: Really? And some of this was cargo and some of this was personnel?

K: Yes, yes. There were some pretty interesting incidents. As a matter of fact, the Marines had some enlisted pilots, master sergeant pilots. On one of my trips to Shang Hai, with two master sergeants as pilot and co-pilot and I was a tech sergeant navigator, and had a buck sergeant mechanic who stayed with the plane all of the time. Otherwise, we were not assigned to planes; it was just whatever plane was available, except the mechanic stayed with it and took care of it mechanically. But we didn't know who the pilot was going to be. They didn't know anything. It was all very impersonal—the crews. So, we flew in to the big airport in Shang Hai. And only the enlisted men got off of that plane and I recall that some of the comments made by the Army, who were lieutenants and captains, and they could hardly believe that this Marine plane had just been flown by enlisted men. But that's the way it was. On one of my trips to Japan—I spent about a month in Japan—

S: Whereabouts?

K: . . . on the Southern island of Kew Shu, which is just about 15 miles from Nagasaki. Hiroshima was farther west and north. Omura was the name of this place and it was a former air base but all the runways had been bombed by our people so we had to use the fields to land in--the big clover fields. The very first time there, I got out and there was a four leaf clover! And the Japanese barracks were so simple but they were so beautiful. The Japanese had flowers and plants. They had beautified where they lived. And they had hot baths.

S: Wow, how wonderful.

K: They just had a way of beauty with them. And the young people, the children, who went to the school, and the school was very close, they were all very friendly. And even the ex-soldiers were friendly.

S: I had heard that.

K: They were, but the old people wouldn't even look at us. They would ignore us when we would walk down the street. One time one of the ex-soldiers – we were in a Quonset hut and I was a navigator. There were two to three other lesser ranks there. They opened some kind of a cabinet that was full of swords, the big Samuiri swords, and they let us each have one! So I picked out one and I took it back to the hut and I was showing it to the others and to this Japanese soldier. He spoke English. He said, "I'll show you how to do the mantle of arms with it. I gave him the sword and he pulled it out of the sheath and started doing something. I realized that he could cut off all of our heads if he wanted to. So I walked over and picked up—we were armed with carbines. He just laughed and laughed and laughed! Then I realized that I had just turned over a weapon! He

just thought it was so funny! Also on the base there were these arches, these religious arches, and there was money under them. I was looking at one of them and I was also picking up and looking at some of the money, the Japanese money, and an adult come by and said, "You Christ, God Bless." and ..oh, another incident in China was—I guess it was in Sing Tau. I was just walking down streets by myself. And I saw a flag hanging out over just a little store front type thing. It was a red flag with a black swastika on it. I thought 'what in the world is that doing here'? So I went down there and went in and it was a religious place. There were two men who were Chinese and they spoke a few words of English; I spoke a few words of Chinese. They had all around a little shrine to Christianity with a little cross, Buddha and all the other's --about seven or eight different religions and they obviously they accepted all of the religions. At the dome of this little place there was a sort of a dome ceiling that made it a dome. There was a smiling painted Chinese face. They pointed up and said "God". So I looked at it and thanked them and they didn't try to proselatize me or anything but as a matter of fact I became an agnostic.

S: Did you?

K: Yes. Still am.

S: Tell me how that happened?

K: Well, I got to thinking--they accept all of these religions, many of which are contradictory to each other. I learned later that it's the Taoist and I got to thinking--here I was a " Bible-carrying Baptist," sort of half educated with it but ... I had read the Bible all the way through. And that it isn't very likely that it was anything more than Greek Mythology.

S: I see.

K: I got to thinking about all of these different religions. I'm still interested in religion but I'm an observer and not a believer.

S: It is one thing to read about it it's another thing to...

K: I've read the Bible twice and the Koran twice; I have read it through. I've read about Buddhism and Shintoism and also read the Bagavagedah.

S: Yes.

K: So, that's been later.

S: So you believe...?

K: What do I believe?

S: Yes, what do you believe?

K: I believe that we are not intelligent enough to know the truth and I think that all of the dogma of all of the religions, including Christianity is manmade.

S: . . .is man made?

K: Mhm

S: In your deepest heart, what do you think happens to us when we die?

K: I think we go to the earth; I'm going up in a 'puff'. (both laughing)

S: I bet it's going be a really beautiful 'puff.'

K: Yes, religion is fine and I belong to a church, actually. That is a really long story but I do belong to a Methodist Church just because my wife grew up, as a little girl in Columbia, South Carolina. She was brought up by her grandmother right across from a Methodist Church. The grandmother always took her to church and Sunday School.

S: And it was important to them.

K: Yes. I met her at University of Florida when I was there post war.

S: Well, let's not skip any so, when you were in China, how long was that assignment?

K: About six months.

S: And then were you discharged from there?

K: Got back from there—came back on a ship, across country on trains to Camp Jeune, North Carolina, and I was discharged from there. And I went home. And that is when the disaster was waiting for me. My mother was schizophrenic, paranoid; my father had a stroke; my ten year old brother was trying to hold things together. And my best friend who had been in the Army Air Corps as a tail gunner in a bomber had bought a plane (he had gotten out before I got back from China) he was flying the first week which he wrecked and was killed. And he and I communicated; we wrote each other. He had already done all of the paperwork for me to start college with him. It was the twenty-sixth of August that I came home. The first week of September we were to start.

S: What year?

K: That was [19]46.

S: 1946.

K: He had already arranged for me to go to this Presbyterian Junior College about twenty-five miles from Elizabethtown. We buried him and I decided to go on up there. So I went there and came home every weekend.

S: Did you anticipate what you were going to find? Did you learn from letters . . . ?

K: No, I had no idea.

S: It just unraveled.

K: It was obvious immediately. My mother had a loaded rifle in the living room. My brother said she had tried to run over the local doctor. She felt he was doing things. She was really paranoid. So, I spent every weekend at home and I had to take her to a mental hospital. I had accumulated money and they had put it in a bank in the family's name, actually. So, actually, I used up about \$1000 which was a lot at that time at this mental hospital. They gave her shock treatments she became zombified and couldn't remember anything. She was not paranoid, anyway. We went on for a few months and she became paranoid again. I consulted with the town doctor and we decided that she should go to the state hospital. So, we arranged that and I took her up. I had to carry her in, in my arms. She would not go in which was the worst part of my life.

S: I would think so.

K: She went into the big hospital there in Raleigh. And in only a few months—they did the same thing—they were ready for her to go home. They contacted me and I got her. Then, she wanted to come back down here to Florida where her sister lived. I brought them all down to Florida and bought them a house.

S: Where about in Florida?

K: It was in Oceanway, just a little north of Jacksonville. It belonged to the owner of an old sawmill that was right beside the house. Actually, when it came right down to it, I got a job loading slabs and then I went over to UF and signed up there, too.

S: The University of Florida here in Gainesville. So, how was your father doing?

K: He was better; he actually was driving some but he shouldn't have been. He drove, maybe, for a few more months and then he had a wreck. And that was the last of his driving. And my mother, also, got bad again. So, I took her up to a

doctor who arranged for, and examined her. Also, they had to have a citizen's committee to question her. So, they did that and agreed that she needed to be hospitalized. So, I took her up to Chattahoochee where she spent the rest of her life.

S: And was that a long life?

K: She lived to be eighty-eight years old. She was in the hospital forty years. It was [19]46 when I came home from the Marine Corps. I would go and visit her and bring her home once in a while but she could not tolerate being out.

S: That is hard when that have gotten use to the structure of what they know.

K: Her disabilities and my father's disabilities . . .

S: Did your little brother do all right then?

K: My little brother was very malleable. He helped and he lived—when I finished at UF in [19]49—with my sister who lived in Waynesboro, Georgia, then, and in a stable situation. He lived with her. But they had a problem, I think, something financially, and she said I would have to look after him. I had already finished at UF and I was a welfare worker with the state welfare department in Starke. And my brother came down and we stayed there about a year. Also, at UF, I met my wife. From the time I left high school until the time I went to do that stuff at the ship yard, which was ten hours a day—seven days a week, and going back and forth, from the time I left high school until I was a senior at UF, I didn't have a date.

S: Busy life.

K: Yeah. It was busy.

S: How were you when you met your wife?

K: I was twenty or twenty-one—twenty-one, probably. And she was a graduate student at UF. I was working in the serving line at the university cafeteria. She came through, usually with some of the professors, and she always ordered an avocado salad. So, sometimes, they were out. So I started saving the salads for her. So, that is how she noticed me.

S: One does what one has to do, doesn't one? What graduate program was she in?

K: English. She majored in Chemistry at the University of South Carolina—was graduated sum cum laude. I am very emotional about her. She died but anyway . . .

S: What year did she die?

K: [19]74.

S: How many children do you have?

K: We had five children. My brother, Ben, came and lived with me a year in Starke and he went to high school. We lived only a block from the school. A National Guard Armory was on the corner, right across from the school. I was making \$200 a month and my brother Ben—who I think was fourteen or something then—said, “Ed, why don’t you join the National Guard and you could get some extra money. You only have to go there once a month.” I thought about that and I thought that was reasonable. So, I did that and they made me a second lieutenant. Then the Korean War broke out. Every weekend was spent at Camp Blanding. I was the A & P platoon leader and then the communications officer for the regiment. So, it was every week but they never did call this division up, strangely enough. But I made more money in the National Guard than I did in my job. The reason I got the job in Starke was that I wanted to be close so that I could see Barbara. She was still finishing her thesis and all. The professor told me that she was the best they had ever had.

S: When you were in the National Guard, how long was that?

K: It was a couple of years or something. And Barbara and I were married.

S: What year were you married?

K: [19]50, I guess. I was graduated in [19]49.

S: Graduated from UF. Now, we skipped getting into UF. When did you begin?

K: As soon as I brought the family down to Florida. I bought this little house at Oceanway. I enrolled in UF.

S: And finished in four years.

K: I finished in [19]49, the degree. Actually, it only took me three years to get through.

S: And then, after graduation, you went over to Starke?

K: Actually, I went to Jacksonville looking for a job and they told me I needed to go and finish school. I said, "I finished; I have my degree." They said, "Oh." So, they tested me for the state department for things. I made high marks on all that so they gave me a job. I requested Starke. So, I was a case worker for the welfare department.

S: Let's just say they didn't need a bombardier.

K: Laughing.

S: Did you like the case work?

K: Not particularly. I was getting to every black family in Bradford County.

S: I'll bet.

K: All on welfare. And a lot of the white ones. This was in [19]49 and [19]50.

S: And a depressed area.

K: Yes, and a lot of them were old age assistance but that was FDIC. So, Barbara and I were married and she came and lived at Starke with me and my brother, Ben, went to live with my sister again at Waynesboro. So, I was sort of bemoaning there was no future in the job I was in and so Barbara said, "Well, what would you like to do?" Well, I said, "I would really be interested in medicine but I haven't prepared for it. I don't have any of the . . ." She said, "Well, go back to UF and get all of the necessary courses."

S: Was she working at the time?

K: She said, "I will get a job at the library." And she did. And also, I was in the National Guard so, Camp Blanding every weekend, making more than I did in my job at Starke. So, that sort of saw us through. It took two semesters for me to get the prerequisites. It was as hard as medical school.

S: I think that is true.

K: Physics, organic chemistry, stuff I hadn't taken.

S: That was a totally different path from anything you had taken.

K: I had no idea there would be any problem getting into medical school.

S: And was there?

K: Yes. I applied to four schools and got just a form letter from each of them except one. And that one was Bowman Gray at Winston Salem—Wake Forrest College. They asked me to come up and I was interviewed by a surgeon. He said, “I see all of your paper work. What else are you interested in?” I had gotten interested in birds—bird watching. So, we talked about birds for thirty minutes and he said, “You are in.”

S: Interviews are something else, sometimes.

K: I am sorry I am so emotional about all this; I haven't thought it all.

S: Well, would you like to take a break? Or if we want to make another appointment and do another session . . . whatever is your choice. Are you doing all right?

K: What time is it? Maybe we should make another appointment.

End of Session A