THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

# AN INTERVIEW WITH J.C. MASON

FOR THE
VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
CENTER FOR WAR AND SOCIETY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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MARYVILLE, TENNESSEE
APRIL 15, 2004

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PIEHLER: This begins an interview with J.C. Mason on April 15, 2004, in his home in Maryville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and ...

NIELSON: William Nielson.

PIEHLER: I'd like to begin by asking you to talk a little bit about your parents. Could you ... tell me a little bit about your parents?

MASON: That's my dad. He was, and my mom too was both born in Blount County, and I was born in the next county—Monroe. But, I was raised here. Back when my father and mother was first married, I used to move back and forth to that county because my dad had people in that county.

PIEHLER: Do you know how your parents met?

MASON: Well, my dad was in WWI and I think that … they met at church, to the best of my memory. I think that's where they met.

PIEHLER: Now was your dad—did your dad go over seas…

MASON: No, they had signed peace—he was getting ready to go when they signed peace, and he didn't have to go.

PIEHLER: And did he ever join the American Legion?

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: Was he active ... in a local post?

MASON: Yes, for a while I was.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. You were born in ... November 1930, in Madisonville.

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: But, you said you really grew up in Blount County. Where exactly did you grow up?

MASON: East of Maryville. What they call—right behind Grandview Cemetery. That was my home.

PIEHLER: And that was your home for how long? From…

MASON: That was my home until I went into the service, and come back, and got married.

PIEHLER: ... What kind of neighborhood was it? Could you tell me a little about it? Particularly for someone who is still fairly new to Tennessee, and East Tennessee ...

MASON: Back ... in those days, why there wasn't too many automobiles. About the only thing that boys had, and there was very few of them, had them, was bicycles. We walked about everywhere we went. We walked to church, walked to school. Of course I only lived about a mile from grammar school. Back in those days, we didn't have paved roads, it was rock roads. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Was, what was the sort of from your home, what was the nearest paved road?

MASON: It was about a mile.

PIEHLER: A mile?

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And well since you mentioned your dad was in road construction growing up…

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: Did he work for the state?

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: So he worked for the state highway …

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: Highway Department. And how steady was his work when you were growing up, particularly in the 1930's?

MASON: Well, before he worked for the state, he used to work with the Lambert brothers, crushing rock. He, he worked doing that. Then he went to work for the state, I think about 1947.

PIEHLER: So when you were growing up he had worked in the—crushing rock.

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: And how steady was his work? Did he …

MASON: Oh well, back in those days, they'd go to North Carolina, Virginia. They would just move in on the jobs, crush the rock for it, and then go somewhere else.

PIEHLER: So in other words, your father would be away from home quite a bit.

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: What was ... the longest stretch he was gone, do you remember?

MASON: Longest what?

PIEHLER: The longest stretch he was gone away from home.

MASON: Oh, he'd come in on the weekends.

PIEHLER: On the—so he was never so far that he couldn't come back for the weekend.

MASON: Right.

PIEHLER: Was he, in the 1930's, was he unemployed at all? Did he always have work?

MASON: He ... worked on WPA.

PIEHLER: What project did he do for WPA?

MASON: They ... built the road going into North Carolina.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. Was that part of the National Park, did he work on …

MASON: No, no.

PIEHLER: It was a different ... How long did he work for WPA?

MASON: Oh, I don't know because I was very small at that time, I don't recall. I don't recall how long.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but you definitely remember him working for WPA?

MASON: Oh yeah, I've heard him talk about it.

PIEHLER: What did he say about it?

MASON: Well, back then, they might just get work two or three days a week.

NIELSEN: So, it wasn't a constant thing?

MASON: And then there would be some other bunch work, you know. It was kind of rough back in the depression.

PIEHLER: How was it growing up? Did your family always have enough food?

MASON: Oh yes.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so food you didn't have …

MASON: We raised what we eat.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. So, how much—did your family own a piece of land?

MASON: Well, not too much. My Dad, he rented the ground and raised all our food.

PIEHLER: So when you raised food, you had vegetables?

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: Did you have any sort of pigs or other livestock, chickens or…

MASON: Well, my Dad always killed two hogs every year.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm.

MASON: We had our meat. My Mom, she canned stuff and that's what we had to eat through the winter months.

NIELSEN: Did your father hunt much?

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: Did your father hunt at all?

MASON: Yes, he squirrel hunted. He always went in the fall year to squirrel hunt.

PIEHLER: And, where was the nearest, sort of, where was the nearest store. How often would you go to the store to buy …

MASON: Oh the ... nearest store, was very close, I'd say less than half a mile.

PIEHLER: So you would walk to the store?

MASON: Oh yes.

PIEHLER: And, I've been, I just interviewed someone two days ago with a Korean war veteran from Knoxville area and he said, "We would really only buy the ... things like sugar and coffee, and salt." Is that the same for you?

MASON: Yes, pretty much.

PIEHLER: Growing up. So, basically everything you ate, you either grew or killed.

MASON: Right. Only thing we buy ... at the store would be kerosene, for the lamp, you know, and to build fires with, to start fires with.

PIEHLER: So you didn't have, growing up, you didn't have electricity until when?

MASON: Oh, it was I'd say '39—about 1939. I was about nine years old when we got electricity. We had a battery radio, but no electricity.

PIEHLER: And, did you get electricity through rural electrification or TVA? Do you remember?

MASON: It was TVA.

PIEHLER: TVA, and, how did that change ... your family's life?

MASON: Oh, we couldn't wait to see the lights turning on. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Did you, besides lights, did you get any other—you had a radio already, battery powered but…

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you get any—what other appliances did you get?

MASON: Oh we couldn't wait to course the batteries didn't last too long. But, we'd all gather around the radio and wait for the Grand Ole Opry to come on, on Saturday night.

PIEHLER: And…and then you didn't have to worry about the batteries,

MASON: After we got electricity…

NIELSEN: Most definitely.

PIEHLER: What about—I take it the iceman probably came around?

MASON: Yeah, yeah, we used to hang out the card. If you wanted twenty-five pounds, fifty pounds, you'd hang up a card—whatever amount of pound you wanted.

PIEHLER: And how long did you keep the traditional icebox? I mean, when did you get a refrigerator?

MASON: Oh, I don't know, it was probably way up in the '40s before we got a refrigerator.

PIEHLER: Until then it was the iceman?

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And, you had an outhouse?

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: How long did that, did you have the outhouse?

MASON: Oh, we had the outhouse—I think we still had an outhouse when I went in the Korean war.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. So, you didn't get indoor plumbing until—did your parents get it when, after you got back from Korea or …

MASON: Yes. I think it was somewhere in the late '50s.

PIEHLER: Late '50s. You mentioned growing up that you would walk to everything. Did your father own a car?

MASON: Yes, he owned a car, but he used it going back and forth to work.

PIEHLER: And so particularly when he was away on these jobs, he would take the car with him?

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: ... You have several—you have three brothers and a sister.

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: Where do you fit in the sort of birth order? Are you the youngest, the oldest, or the middle?

MASON: No, my sister is the oldest.

PIEHLER: The oldest.

MASON: And she lives in Ohio And my brother is four years older than me. He served in World War II, he was in the Navy in World War II. And I had a brother three years younger than me, he served in the Air Force during the Korean war.

PIEHLER: And what did, what did you and your brothers and others in the neighborhood do for fun growing up?

MASON: We made slingshots, we'd get out and shoot birds. (Laughter) We had to make our own toys back then.

PIEHLER: Did you play—did you have like a baseball or basketball or any sport?

MASON: Yes, I played basketball in grade school on an outside court. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: And your school—you could walk to your school?

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What was the name of your grammar school?

MASON: Union.

PIEHLER: Union, Union grammar school. And how big was it, how many students were in the …

MASON: ... One teacher taught two grades, and…

NIELSEN: How many classrooms were there?

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: How many classrooms were there?

MASON: Four.

PIEHLER: So basically you had four teachers going through grammar school. How often growing up, particularly in 1930's, did you get to the movies?

MASON: Oh, that, that was, that was a big thrill, too. My Dad and Mom would take me and my brother that was three years younger than me, they'd take us to town, Maryville here. And they had two theatres. One was Capital and the other was Park where you could take fifty cents and see both movies and have all the popcorn we wanted to eat. They'd take us every Saturday night to see Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Red Rider and all them.

NIELSEN: See, I ... absolutely adore going to the movies, I can't imagine paying only fifty cents to do all of that because nowadays fifty cents won't get you Raisinets at the movies.

MASON: Oh, that's true.

PIEHLER: So, you were a big fan of the western? You liked…

MASON: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you're smiling about them.

MASON: We looked forward to going to the movies on …

PIEHLER: And it was a Saturday night ritual.

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: How—was Saturday the day you'd also have your family would, in a sense go, shopping, in Maryville?

MASON: Well, back then, you could park on ... the main street. And they'd park the car and they just sat in the car while we went to the movie, maybe take a couple of hours, you know, but they enjoyed sitting in the car watching other people go by.

PIEHLER: This was a treat for you, for the kids, not for them. They wouldn't go to the movies.

MASON: No, no, they would just let us out, we would go in the movie, come out, go across the street to the other one. When it was over with, why, we'd come out, that would be somewhere around like nine o'clock at night. Because back then, they rolled the streets up after that. (Laughter)

NIELSEN: So, they just kind of enjoyed there time in the car watching the other people, just observing and seeing what was going on?

PIEHLER: What you mentioned church was in the neighborhood. You could walk to church.

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: How active was your family in …

MASON: Well, my mom was very active. Of course my dad, he didn't go, but my Mom—I remember, she didn't ask if we wanted to go to church, she would get us ready and take us to church. (Laughter)

NIELSEN: It wasn't a question.

MASON: And we'd walk.

PIEHLER: And you mentioned your dad, even when he was home, he wouldn't always go.

MASON: No, no.

PIEHLER: Were you involved in any youth group in the church? Do you remember, any special organizations for young people?

MASON: Well, they—this was a Baptist church we went to. We always would go early and what they had a class for what they called BYPU. We'd go to it before preaching service.

PIEHLER: Now, I think, your nephew, Brad Mason, if I remember correctly, he was a democrat. Your parents were both democrats. What did they think of FDR?

MASON: Well, back in those days, they thought he was a great president because he got us out of the Depression. He started the WPA, CCC camps. He got things a goin'.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. Your older brother, who went into World War II, served in the Navy? Did anyone else in your family serve in the CCC or WPA or other, besides your father?

MASON: No, uh uh.

PIEHLER: You remember, you mentioned going to Maryville, to the movies. Where else did your family take you growing up? Where else might you go to?

MASON: Well, we would go to the next county in Monroe, because we had to—I had a brother and sister buried down there, and we would go to decoration. We'd go down there maybe once a month to see my dad's people because he had people live there, and we'd go every year to decoration. And we'd go in an A Model Ford and its twenty-eight miles from here to Madisonville and it'd take all day to go down there and come back. (Laughter)

NIELSEN: Just out of curiosity, how fast, how fast did that vehicle go?

MASON: Well, the A Model back then thirty miles an hour was fast. (Laughter)

NIELSEN: It was the top speed for it.

MASON: Most of the time we drove about twenty. Thirty miles was about the top speed.

NIELSEN: Was about the top for it. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: It sounded like you grew a lot of your own food, you grew almost all your own, your food. It sounds like you had a lot of chores growing up.

MASON: Had what?

PIEHLER: Chores, you had a lot of…

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: What were some of the—what were sort of the earliest chores that you had?

MASON: Well, our dad would when we got big enough, he'd assign us to corn rows. Back in those days they chopped the corn out. If it came up too thick, well they'd thin it—what they call chopping out corn. And he'd take us to the field assign us to a row.

NIELSEN: You each get your individual row.

MASON: What they call chopping out corn. But they don't do that nowadays.

PIEHLER: What other chores do you remember, as you got older?

MASON: Oh, gathering corn in the fall. Always pull corn after it frosted. It would come off the stalk better. And that's what they used to feed the stock.

PIEHLER: And anything else that you remember having to do?

MASON: Oh yeah, we, I worked on the farm out there for a guy, for a dollar a day.

PIEHLER: How old were you, when you went?

MASON: About twelve years old.

PIEHLER: A dollar a day.

MASON: Yes, that's what I got. Six dollars a week and that was working from daylight to dark.

PIEHLER: What were—the farmer you were working for, what did he have you do?

MASON: What did he have us do?

PIEHLER: Yeah. What did…

MASON: Hauling manure, putting up hay, bailing hay, combining oat, wheat, barley.

PIEHLER: It, it sounded like ...you really had to work for your dollar.

MASON: Oh, we did.

NIELSEN: As, lets say, as someone whose …

MASON: But…

NIELSEN: Oh, I apologize, go ahead.

MASON: Back then six dollars a week was—I know it was hard work, but it was still good money.

PIEHLER: How much, do you know how much your Dad was taking home in the '30s?

MASON: Well, I'd say probably no more than fifteen dollars a week, if that much. But like I say, I was small, I don't remember.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Where your mother, she did not have to work outside the home. Did she ever have a paid job growing up?

MASON: Yes, she ... used to iron for people. And she ... went and helped people clean their houses.

NIELSEN: How often did she do that?

MASON: Oh, maybe once a week or something like that. It wasn't regular, you know.

PIEHLER: It, was that in the sort of surrounding community you were in?

MASON: Yeah, it was in walking distance.

PIEHLER: And what do you ... remember about—what was your favorite subject in school, in grammar school, do you remember?

MASON: Well, I, I didn't like school at all. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Really, not at all? (Laughter)

MASON: Especially arithmetic, I always dreaded that. Spelling, reading, stuff like that ... I done that ok, but arithmetic, I always dreaded it.

NIELSEN: Oh, definitely.

PIEHLER: You ... where did you go to high school...

MASON: Everett. But I didn't finish. I went to Everett High School.

PIEHLER: What led you to leave high school early…

MASON: 1945…

PIEHLER: 1945.

MASON: That's when I started.

PIEHLER: And you left, you only were there for a year or…

MASON: Well, I only went about six months.

PIEHLER: Six months?

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And then what happened, where did you, did you go?

MASON: Well, back, back then, working was more important than getting an education. So I quit and went to work, which, then I got a pretty fair decent job.

NIELSEN: Where were you working?

MASON: I used to drive a milk truck, I got on the dairy, the local dairy, and I got forty dollars a week plus commission, which that was pretty good money. Sometime I would—I got forty dollars regular, but ... my commission a lot of time, it would amount to fifty, maybe sixty dollars.

NIELSEN: Was that, was that ... was that good? I mean was that, was that a good wage to be receiving at the time?

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: Was that a good wage to be receiving at the time?

MASON: Yes, yes it was. Yeah, I bought me a car and paid for it just in a little while.

NIELSEN: What kind of car did you get?

MASON: 36' Chevrolet. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: And ... did you have that job until you went to the Korean War?

MASON: No, no. I was working for the state of Tennessee when I got called.

PIEHLER: You, a job in the road crew …

NIELSEN: Engineering.

MASON: I worked in the Engineering department. 1950 and in 1951 I got called to service.

PIEHLER: Backing up to World War II, do you remember Pearl Harbor, where you were?

MASON: Oh yes, we was at home on Sunday morning and you know, I was eleven years old. At that time, just being a kid, we was, scared. We didn't know if they was gonna hit the United States or not. And you couldn't get too much news where we lived, but I remember. And they used to have blackouts. You couldn't have no lights on after dark.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm.

MASON: And you know, being just a kid, why it kind of scared us.

PIEHLER: You were scared initially.

MASON: Yeah.

NIELSEN: How soon after, how soon after it happened did you guys get…

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: How soon after the bombing happened did you get word of it? I mean, how long did it take…

MASON: Oh, it was, I'd say probably Sunday evening, when we got the word.

PIEHLER: You mentioned being scared by the blackouts, um, and thinking the United States could be attacked. What other, what other changes did you notice by the war?

MASON: Well, they rationed everything—gas and sugar, and coffee, and stuff like that. Of course, like I said, we raised our own food. We had our own food, but I mean, stuff that we had to buy it was rationed, like sugar and coffee, but everything else we raised.

NIELSEN: Was there, was there ever any problem as far as the, I mean not being enough rations for everyone or anything like that in the store?

MASON: Do what?

NIELSEN: Was there ever a problem with there not being enough rations for everyone, like them being short on rations for people because they were being used for the war effort or anything like that?

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: What ... did your mother miss the most in terms of things that were being rationed, did she—what did she complain about?

MASON: It would be, it would be, sugar and coffee and stuff like that that you couldn't raise.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So, the sugar—the sugar your mother really noticed.

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Was she—did she like to bake?

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: What were some of her favorite things to make?

MASON: I guess a stack cake.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. What was the favorite thing your mother did make, was it, you mentioned she liked to make the stack cake, but is there other things she …

MASON: Well, I didn't care all that much for the stack cake, but …

PIEHLER: But your mother loved to make it. (Laughs)

MASON: She'd make coconut pie and ... I liked that coconut pie pretty well.

PIEHLER: Did you, did your neighborhood or school have any scrap drives?

MASON: Any what?

PIEHLER: Scrap drives. Did you collect any scrap for the war effort?

MASON: Oh, yeah, yes. Before the Japanese burned Pearl Harbor, I remember my dad and my brothers, we piled up a lot of scrap that Dad had. And this truck come by and picked it up, they had a scale on the truck. And they'd weigh it and they'd pay you right there according to the pound you had. Yes, I remember that very well.

PIEHLER: And ... during war did your father stay in the job—when did he switch over to the state highway department?

MASON: Well now ...during the war, he drove a bus to Oak Ridge, where they was making the atomic bomb.

PIEHLER: So he was a bus driver during the war?

MASON: Yes. He hauled workers.

PIEHLER: From where…

MASON: From here to Oak Ridge. This guy that had the buses he drove the bus for that company. hat was during the war, but then after that he went back to working on construction.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. What did you—growing up as a—you were younger during the time, but what rumors did you hear about Oak Ridge at the time?

MASON: About what?

PIEHLER: About Oak Ridge, what rumors did you hear about what they were doing at Oak Ridge?

MASON: Well, and that, too, when we got on up bigger after war went on ... they said they was building a secret weapon at Oak Ridge and that kind of scared us too because we thought maybe you know the enemy might come here and blow it up. We—as a kid it went through our mind, we talked about it.

PIEHLER: So, you, you, it wasn't until later that you realized you were, that the United States itself was safe, but as a kid you thought they could really attack here?

MASON: Right. But, at that time well, we didn't know.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So you had—was there rumors that there was some sort of secret weapon being built or…

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you heard that, you didn't know what it was.

MASON: No.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Cause I also heard rumors that people thought, I think even that it was a synthetic tire plant, but you actually heard rumors about …

MASON: Yeah, I remember my—me and my brother, younger than me, we went with my Dad on the bus, but we had to get off at the gate. They wouldn't let us ride the bus on in to Oak Ridge.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm.

NIELSEN: How tight, how tight was the security there?

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: Was there a lot of security?

MASON: Oh, yes.

PIEHLER: But you were saying about the bus driving in and letting off at the gate.

MASON: Dad would stop at the gate and the guard, although we was just kids, we would have to get off and stay at the guard gate until my Dad took the passengers on in what they call Y-12.

NIELEN: Mm Hmm.

MASON: And then he'd come back and he'd, he'd stop and pick us up.

PIEHLER: And what would you do while you were waiting, you would just wait there or…

MASON: He, he wouldn't be gone all that long.

PIEHLER: Ok.

MASON: Maybe fifteen, twenty minutes, something like that—thirty.

PIEHLER: And you would do this just for the sort of ride.

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

MASON: We thought that was something riding the bus from here to Oak Ridge. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Well, I'm curious, how, how often would you get up to say the Oak Ridge area or even to Knoxville growing up?

MASON: Who?

PIEHLER: To Knoxville, how often would you go—get to Knoxville?

MASON: Oh, we'd go to the Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round.

PIEHLER: Ok.

MASON: They used to have that, I don't know if you remember that.

PIEHLER: I don't remember it, but I've heard of someone was just talking about the Mid-Day Merry…

MASON: It was on, it was on Gay Street and, uh, really Maryville here, they didn't have no recreation, you know, and that was, that was a big outing to go over there and see that and on Saturday night they had what they call a Tennessee barn dance. And we would go to that cause there wasn't nothing in Maryville to do. And I think it cost about twelve cents to get in ... back then.

PIEHLER: So you would, you would, how old were you when you would do that…

MASON: Oh, about fourteen or fifteen years old.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. Your brother, how old was he when he joined the Navy?

MASON: He was seventeen. I remember him—my Dad was driving the bus to Oak Ridge at that time and ... he got my dad to sign for him, because he had to sign because he wasn't eighteen. He—my dad didn't want to sign for him, didn't want him to go. He said, well if I wait, they are going to put me in the Army. He said this way I can get what I want. He said I want to go in the Navy. So he served in the Pacific. He was in Okinawa during World War II.

PIEHLER: Was his ship ever hit by a *kamikaze*?

MASON: He was on a transport ship. No ... he said that what they was, when they had those suicide planes, they was trying to hit the aircraft carriers—mostly. That's what they was, that what they was diving into. He said they would come at them like they was going to crash into their ship, but they would peel off and hit an aircraft carrier. I remember Mom getting a letter—and see they censored the letters back then—and it was cut all to pieces. And only thing that she could make out, that he said that it was Easter, he said he didn't have no eggs, but he seen a lot of em busted. And that's the only thing she could make out, rest of it was …

PIEHLER: Was literally all cut out?

NIELSEN: They had cut it out so badly.

PIEHLER: When your brother came home, what did—he told you some things about the war, what did he tell you about being in the Navy and about …

MASON: Well, he—like I said he was on the troop ship, and he run one of these landing barges that took the marines and army into the beach, that's what he done. He talked ...about that.

PIEHLER: Did he like the Navy? Was he glad that he joined?

MASON: Huh?

PIEHLER: Was your brother glad he joined the Navy?

MASON: I didn't …

PIEHLER: Was your, was your brother glad he joined the Navy?

MASON: Yeah, of course he was ready to get out. Back then, if you volunteered, you had to stay three years. Of course if they drafted you, two years or else for the duration.

PIEHLER: Plus six months.

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So when did your brother, finally get, get home?

MASON: It was ...after the Japanese surrendered. There, uh, he might not of served the completely three years, they might of went ahead and discharged him since the war was over. But you did have to go in for three if you volunteered.

PIEHLER: Your sister, what was she doing during the war?

MASON: She was in Ohio. Her husband was in the U.S Army Air Force. He was stationed in Colorado and she was out there, they had their son, their oldest son, they had had him, he was just a small child and she lived out there while he served, but he didn't have to go overseas.

PHIELER: Your ... oldest sister, how much older was she?

MASON: She's eighty-two. She's about nine years older than I am.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. How did she meet her husband?

MASON: Well, at that time, I think it was around '39 when she went up there. My dad had a sister and a brother and he had some folks, some other folks who lived up there. And she went back with my dad's sister, they came in for a visit, and her husband worked

at the Firestone. And she went back with them, I think she was about nineteen at the time and she married up there and raised a family, but they had—they come down to visit us very often.

PIEHLER: And your ... other brother who ... served in the Korean war with you, at the same time you did, what …

MASON: He was in Germany when I was in Korea. He was in what they call Wiesbaden, Germany. He also joined after they drafted me. Why, me and him was pretty close to the same age and we run around together and, and after I left, he was kind of left with nobody and ... he volunteered.

PIEHLER: And your sister is Eleanor. Your brother who served in the Navy is William?

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And the brother that served also in the same time as you did in the Korean War is Franklin?

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And that leaves your youngest brother, I guess—Don?

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And he served later in the Air Force or…

MASON: No, no, he didn't, he was the only one who never did have to go and the reason he didn't go in the Vietnam War is that brother of mine that served in the Air Force, he got hurt and he was paralyzed and my Mom and Dad passed away and he was—lived with him and helped look after him. And he got deferred on that account. Which, like I said, we all served and he—we didn't think he should have to go no how.

PIEHLER: Your brother, Franklin, who got disabled—was it in the Air Force that he got disabled?

MASON: No, he got hurt after he got out.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. On the job?

MASON: Well, they, they was painting a drive-in theatre screen, and the scaffold broke and he fell forty-seven feet. It paralyzed him from his chest down.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. How, how long did he live after being paralyzed?

MASON: Twenty-six years. They said twenty years would be a long life for him. So he lived twenty-six.

PIEHLER: And your brother Don took care of him?

MASON: Yeah, well he did up until he got married. And then, my wife—and then he had a woman that stayed up with him and kept house for him. We'd go out and do things for him. He lived out next to where we was raised. We were just right there at their old place.

PIEHLER: How long did you live at—how long did you live with your parents?

MASON: Until I went to the Korean War.

PIEHLER: Korean War.

MASON: Twenty-One.

PIEHLER: When you, you mentioned getting a very good job in 1945 delivering milk.

MASON: No, this was 1947.

PIEHLER: '47. Was ... the milk job your first paid job? You mentioned working on the farm. How long did you work on that farm for a dollar a day?

MASON: Oh, maybe two or three summers. I was still in grade school.

PIEHLER: Grade school. And then what was your, sort of your next job, do you … ?

MASON: Well, I worked with my Dad at the rock quarry. I carried water. I made ten dollars a week. (Laughs) Carrying water to the employee.

PIEHLER: And then ... after the quarry, is that when you got the ... milk truck, or was there another …

MASON: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: How did you get the job delivering milk?

MASON: Well, this Frank Hedge, back—like I say back in those days, there was a lot of local dairies here around the county. ... I wasn't old enough to get my license. I lacked a few months, but my Dad, he knowed the guy that owned the dairy, so my Dad drove a truck and I went with my Dad and I done the delivering of the milk to the doors of the houses. And then when I turned sixteen, I got my driver's license. Then I took it over.

PIEHLER: And ... did you like that job?

MASON: Yeah, I did. Oh it was a seven day a week job. You had to get up early, but you, I was through by dinner time ... every day. I'd leave probably five o'clock in the morning, but I'd, I'd be through by noon.

PIEHLER: By noon. But you just, but it was also seven days a week?

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Did you, did you get any time off ever?

MASON: No. Only time I ... was off, [I] got sick or something. I couldn't…

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. What but that wasn't the last job you had before you went to Korea, the next job was—why did you leave the milk delivery?

MASON: Well, after, after that why that was when I went to work for the state. That was 1950.

PIEHLER: Was that a better paying job?

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: And how did you get the job with the state?

MASON: Well, my Dad, he was working for the state at that time and well, they was they was needing some employees, so I went and applied. Of course, I tried to get on the aluminum company, but back then they wouldn't hire you if you was in the draft age, and that Korean War was in ...full blast. So, I went to work for the state. When I came back, the plant had begin to go down. They was laying off and they wasn't hiring when I come back. So I went back to the state and I stayed forty-one years before I retired.

NIELSEN: What was what was so appealing about working at the aluminum plant?

MASON: What?

NIELSEN: Why did you really want to work at the plant?

MASON: Well, it was the best paying job around this part of the country.

NIELSEN: Was it, how close was it to where you lived?

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: How close was it to where you lived?

MASON: Oh, about four miles.

PIEHLER: So, that was the good job. Alcoa was the place.

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah I mean, it was the best paying company in, around this part of the country. But I remember, after I went back to the state, they'd lay off, a lot of the guys would have to draw unemployment and they didn't get called back maybe three or four months. Well, I wasn't making all that much money with the state, but I was getting a payday every ... where they wasn't.

NIELSEN: It was steady.

MASON: So, really, I guess I was better off in the long run working for the state then I was for the aluminum company at that time. Like I say ... it would shut down and they would lay off, guys would be off of work for quite sometime before they'd get called back. (Coughs) I didn't make a whole lot of money with the state, but I got paid all of the time.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. Do you remember where you were when Franklin Roosevelt died?

MASON: Oh yeah, yes. I think I was laying out on a pallet in the front yard of our house when the news come on that he'd died. Hot Springs, Georgia.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. What was your family's reaction, do you remember?

MASON: Well, there was, it was just like a lot of people when John F. Kennedy was killed. A lot of people was sad and they was ... Because ... he had done a lot of good for the poor people, Franklin Roosevelt.

NIELSEN: Do you, do you remember if your parents were at all worried about the war and how that was going to go after he died?

MASON: Yes uh, I'm sure they was. Because, like I say, a lot—as a kid growing up, our dad and mother, they would talk amongst themselves. Where we—us kids, we didn't know what they was talking about. I'm sure they was concerned about it.

PIEHLER: I'm gonna...

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

PIEHLER: ... In World War II, what did you think about who we were fighting against? Did you ever give it much thought? What did you think of the Germans and the Japanese?

MASON: Well, the Japanese was a whole lot crueler people than the Germans, and I guess we had a hate against them more so then we did Germans.

PIEHLER: So you remember that as a kid.

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: What about did you ever play war games when you…

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You did play.

MASON: We'd make wooden guns and we'd march, and I—my brother that went to the Navy, he was my hero. I thought it was ... something, him going into the Navy, because he came in on leave. I just thought it was—he was a great—he was my hero.

PIEHLER: So he looked, it sounds like he looked pretty sharp in his Naval uniform. He looked very…

MASON: Huh?

PIEHLER: He came home on leave in his uniform and all that…

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: How old were you when he, when he left and came home on leave?

MASON: He went in 1944. I was fourteen.

PIEHLER: Mm Hmm. In your neighborhood, did anyone did anyone lose someone?

MASON: Yes, I lost my mother's sister boy. He was killed in Germany in World War II, in what they call the Battle of the Bulge. He was in that, and he was he was killed there and I believe about 1946 they brought his body back. We attended his funeral.

PIEHLER: Where was he buried?

MASON: He was buried not too far from where I was raised.

PIEHLER: And, and what ... you mentioned seeing cowboy movies growing up. What about—do you remember any war movies that you saw during the war?

MASON: Oh yeah. I remember going to see that—I can't think of what they ... Van Johnson, he played in it.

PIEHLER: Oh ok, I can't think of the—was it the movie about the Dolittle raids? I know there was one that he …

MASON: Well, I've seen that on the History Channel.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

MASON: But, yeah, we any war movie that was on at the movie, we'd go see it.

PIEHLER: Did you think that you, you would go into the service at some point?

MASON: Oh when my brother went into the Navy I wanted, I wanted to go with him so bad. But I thought it would be fun to go see the country. But I didn't realize I would be going in 1951. I hadn't be away from home too much and, but when he went in I thought boy it would be something just to get to tag along with him or something.

NIELSEN: What did, what did, what did your brother think about you going over to Korea, the brother who went into the Navy?

MASON: What did he—what?

NIELSEN: What did he think about you going to Korea?

MASON: Well... he'd already been in the service, and 'course I'm sure that he was concerned about my welfare but after I come home why he told—I was with the 7th Division in Korea and he told me said, "I helped land that division in Okinawa." And it was the same division I was with in Korea. See, most of those divisions that were in Korea was in the Pacific in World War II. ... And after the Korean War broke out, why they sent ... most of them in there. But I remember him telling me that they he helped land the division I was with.

PIEHLER: You mention going to—your father was a bus driver in Oak Ridge and you heard rumors about a secret weapon. When did you hear the news about the atomic bomb?

MASON: Well, when they dropped it. When they dropped it, the first one.

PIEHLER: I am curious, how many in your neighborhood worked at Oak Ridge? Your father drove the bus. Who else do you know?

MASON: Well most of them was, lived around in town, Maryville, and my dad would pick them up in town, and he'd pick them up on the Knoxville Highway, Alcoa Highway—well he'd pick them up all the way to Knoxville…

NIELSEN: What did what did a lot of people in the neighborhood what did everyone think in general about the dropping of the atomic bomb, what were the opinions about…

MASON: Well, everybody [that] worked over there, they, they didn't know what, really—they didn't know they just ... guessed, said they was making some kind of weapon but they just that's all they knowed—figured, because it was all a secret. I remember this Lee Lambert that my Dad worked for, he crushed rock, my Dad worked for him. And he was crushing rock over there close to Oak Ridge and he was furnishing rock for housing projects and stuff over there. Well, he was—late in the evening, after they shut down the crusher, that's when they pull the shots—dynamite. Well, he was pulling pretty big shots. I mean, it was shaking the ground in Oak Ridge. So, they come to him and told him, said that he, "Mr. Lambert you going to have to quit shooting so hard." He said, "Why?" They said, "Well, we can't tell you why, you just going to have to quit." But he was trying to find out what they was making, so that why they wanted him to quit shooting dynamite so heavy. So, he was blasting rock out. But, they told him that he was going to have to quit shooting so heavy and he asked them why and they said, "Well, we can't tell you why."

PIEHLER: I'm curious, what did you think of before you went to the Korean War, what did you think of Communism or had you given it much thought?

MASON: What I thought…

PIEHLER: Yeah.

MASON: About what?

PIEHLER: About Communism, had you given it much thought?

MASON: Well, no I hadn't. At that time, you didn't hear too much about Russia, and I'm just like most boys that went over there. They hadn't heard of that place until it started, after World War II. See, they made that 38th Parallel and we occupied the, the Japanese occupied the whole thing during World War II and we occupied the south and like I say, we hadn't ever heard of the place.

PIEHLER: Do you remember when ... you first heard that we were in the Korean War?

MASON: Oh, I knew I was going to go sooner or later, 'cause I registered in 1948. Three years later they called me. I knew …

PIEHLER: You knew that …

MASON: I knew that whenever it started, I knew if it went on very long, I would eventually go. And I turned twenty-one. Eight days later they called.

PIEHLER: Had you thought of doing what your brother had done and enlisting, in say the Navy, like he had done?

MASON: No, by that time, I—knowed I mean if I had ... enlisted in the Navy, which ... When the Korean War broke out, there was so many of the guys jumped—joined the Air Force and the Navy because they knew, they finally knew, that what they wanted in Korea was the foot soldier. And that's why they got, they got in the Navy and the Air Force. My brother, he didn't want to wait around to be drafted. He joined the Air Force so he wouldn't have to—but, I said, "Well, I will take my chances, I'm not volunteering, I'm not joining nothing. They will just have to draft me." Which they did when I turned twenty-one. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You mentioned earlier, you hadn't really traveled very much…

MASON: No.

PIEHLER: Where—was the furthest you had traveled?

MASON: Ohio, where my sister lived.

PIEHLER: And that was up in Akron?

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: And how old were you the first time you went to Akron?

MASON: Well, I think uh, I was eighteen, nineteen years old, I guess, first time I went up there.

PIEHLER: And no where else, nowhere south had you …

MASON: No.

PIEHLER: Had you ever been to Chattanooga growing up?

MASON: No, no I hadn't.

PIEHLER: Or never to Atlanta?

MASON: No.

PIEHLER: Never to say, Memphis or Nashville?

MASON: Never was in Nashville. When I went in Army, guys—they asked me where I was from, I tell them Tennessee. The Grand Ole Opry back then was real popular. They said, "Oh I bet you go to the Grand Ole Opry." I said, "I've got my first time being at the Grand Ole Opry." I said, "I've been by there, in later years, but I got my first time ever being in Grand Ole Opry."

PIEHLER: This is when you were in the Army …

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: That's the first time you went to the Grand Ole Opry. You mentioned that you had a radio—you always had a radio growing up, right? Because you mentioned having a battery powered radio.

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: And you mentioned the Grand Ole Opry, what other programs did you …

MASON: Oh see it used to be WSM, and it would come on, oh I don't know, somewhere around seven or eight o'clock at night, go off about ten. But, before we got our radio, we used to go up to our neighbor's house. They had, they had a battery radio. We'd go up there and listen to the Grand Ole Opry. And Roy Acuff, Bill Monroe … and Minnie Pearl wasn't on at that time, she come on later. But, I remember those, those people. And I'm a blue—I'm a banjo picker, I'm a bluegrass …

PIEHLER: So, you play…

MASON: Yeah, my Dad made the first banjo I ever had.

PIEHLER: Really, so you grew up playing the banjo?

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: Oh wow. So is that one of the things you did a lot growing up?

MASON: Uh, I remember, 1939 ... he wasn't working. It was in the winter months and we had a snow on the ground and, I ... He there was an old wooden cigar box at home there and I picked it up and I said, "Dad, will you make me a banjo out of this?" And he just started it from there. I remember him taking his pocketknife and whittling the neck out of a two by four. Boy, I was proud of that as if it had been a thousand dollars banjo. After that, why he bought me one. He was an old banjo picker. And after that he bought me one down in Monroe County from some of his people. I think he gave five dollars for it. We had to put a new head on it. Oh, I was proud of that too. But, now I own a Gibson, I've got a five thousand dollar—that's how much it costs now. So, I grew up playing the banjo and I like the music.

PIEHLER: Did ever perform, did you ever perform, say, to groups?

MASON: Yes. Yeah, I used to play every Saturday night, out here what they call Granny's kitchen, on the old Knoxville highway. I played there about three or four years. Now, we've got—we sell music instruments down at the flea market. We go out there every Saturday and Sunday.

PIEHLER: I almost feel I should ask, if you be kind, maybe towards the end, at the end of the interview, play us something for the tape.

MASON: Well, alright.

PIEHLER: Did you, did you play the banjo at all when you were in the service at all or any musical instrument…

MASON: Well, I remember, this one guy, he was from West Virginia and the other ol' boy was from South Carolina. They thought cause I was from Tennessee, I could play anything. (Laughter) And they went on R & R in Tokyo about two weeks before I did, and they asked me—they said, "We'll get you a banjo when we go." They had what they call the Ginza Market—you can buy about anything in it—but anyway they said, "If we can't get a banjo, they said what else can you play." I said, "Well, get a mandolin." I can play a mandolin a little bit. But, anyway, they went on R & R and they—a week was all we got—and when they come back it was terrible cold, snowing and this ol' boy from West Virginia, he come in and said, "Mason if you can't play this thing," he says, "I'm going to break it over your neck." (Laughter) Well, it wasn't a mandolin, it was what they call a tater bug, but it looked like a gourd, but anyway, he said, "I could have traded it for a fifth of IW Harper Whiskey down at Seoul," he said, "Boswell wouldn't let me. Said he wanted, to bring it on back so you." I said, "I can't play that thing." I said, "That's Japanese made." (Laughter) But anyway, we had a lot of fun anyhow.

NIELSEN: Well ... you said you hadn't been—you hadn't traveled a whole lot and then when you got drafted, what was your, your Basic Training was in California right?

MASON: Yes.

NIELSEN: What was it like, I mean…

MASON: Oh, I hated it out there.

PIEHLER: How did you get out there…

MASON: Troop train.

PIEHLER: Now, where did you report for Induction?

MASON: Fort Jackson.

PIEHLER: Fort Jackson.

MASON: Yeah. Columbia, South Carolina.

PIEHLER: Is that where you took your oath of office?

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: And how did they get you to Fort Jackson, did you…

MASON: We was over there about two weeks processing.

PIEHLER: How did you get there, did you…

MASON: Oh, Trailway bus from Knoxville.

PIEHLER: From Knoxville.

MASON: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: And that's where you actually took your oath and…

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And that's where you had your physical?

MASON: No, we had the physical in Knoxville.

PIEHLER: In Knoxville.

MASON: Yeah, once we passed the physical over there, we was in. In fact, we was—they sent us over there for processing. Ship us out to where was going to take our Basic Training.

PIEHLER: Did you have any sort of farewell when you left?

MASON: Have what?

PIEHLER: Did you have any sort of farewell ceremony when you left Knoxville?

MASON: Oh no, no.

PIEHLER: And, you showed us a picture of you and your dad at an aunt's house before you went in. How did your family say goodbye?

MASON: Well, they was by me just like they was my brother in World War II. They hated to see me go. They didn't know if I'd be coming back on leave or ... 'Cause it was like World War II—a lot of the guys never did get to come back home. They was sent overseas and killed and never was home. And of course that was sort of the way it was. When my brother left for the Navy, when he joined the Navy in World War II, we didn't know if we'd see him again or not. But, we did. He, come in on leave before he went to

the Pacific, which I did, too, after I went in. I got to come home fourteen days before I went to Korea.

PIEHLER: You—how did you get to California?

MASON: From Fort Jackson?

PIEHLER: Yeah, from Fort Jackson.

MASON: Troop train. It took us a week to get out there.

PIEHLER: To Fort Ord?

MASON: Yeah. I mean, we, went by steam engine. We left Fort Jackson by steam engine. We didn't get diesel until we got to Chicago. We started getting diesel engine then. But, over there at Fort Jackson, of course it was just the set up, they'd wait til somebody picked you over there, robbed you, I mean, got your billfold with a knife. I think I had about fourteen dollars and they—it was the cadres that was doing it, but after you lose your money they'd tell you to sleep with your billfold in your shorts with you, after you done lost it. But anyways, they got mine over there and I didn't have no money, and, this old porter was on the troop train. He said we'd be coming into Knoxville next, to switch engines. I said well, would you do me a favor, he said yeah. I said call my dad and mother in Maryville and tell them where—I said what was the next town we'd be coming into, he said Chicago. I said have them wire me some money, you know, and he'd pick it up because they wouldn't let us off the train. And, but anyway, he said he would, but when we come in to Southern Railway over there, I looked up there and seen that JFG Coffee sign flashing, and I told some of the boys, I said, I only live fifteen miles from here, if I could get off this thing, I would go home. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So the, the troop train came …

MASON: But they like…

PIEHLER: Right past Knoxville.

MASON: Yeah, but they'd lock the doors, see. The only thing we could do was look out the window. We couldn't get out of the cars. We eat and slept all the way out there.

PIEHLER: And, was it a troop train, you didn't have any Pullmans did you?

MASON: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: You did have Pullmans, so you didn't have to just sit up the whole time.

MASON: No, uh uh, no we had Pullmans.

PIEHLER: You had Pullmans.

MASON: Yeah. They, they'd fix bed for us every night.

PIEHLER: And, where your parents able to wire you money?

MASON: Yeah, yeah, they—In Chicago this black porter, he got off and picked it up for me and give it to me. But, they'd stole my wallet and what little money I had. I didn't have a penny and so I had him to call—he did, I guess we was in Knoxville about fifteen, twenty minutes switching engines.

PIEHLER: What did you ...of your first trip across the country? Anything?

MASON: Oh, I thought that was something. Like I said, I hadn't been nowhere except up in Ohio and seen my sister. [When] we got out in the Western states, I hadn't ever seen nothing like that—cactus and desert, just as far as you could see. Oh, I thought it was something.

PIEHLER: What about Basic Training—what do you remember about Basic Training?

MASON: Oh, I took sixteen weeks of it, and like I said, we was right on the bay, it was ninety miles down to Frisco. Salinas and Monterey is two little old towns close to it. And it stayed foggy all time. I mean, in daytime, all day long, it was just foggy and damp. I mean it was cold. We had to wear, even up in April, May, still had to wear winter clothing. It was just damp and cold. I remember, after Basic Training, why I left there and got down in the southern part of California. It got so hot we had to change clothes. We had on winter clothing and we had to put summer clothing when it started getting hot. But, that's what I hated about that part of California.

PIEHLER: How—what was the most useful things that you learned in Basic Training, when you finally did get to Korea? What sort of stuck with you?

MASON: Well, my platoon sergeant, I thought he was—I mean, I could have shot him, and I thought he was the cruelest man. When you taking Basic Training that infantry, you sort of like a prisoner. Your word ain't nothing. And I thought that he was making us go through things was unnecessary. But, after I got to Korea, I could see that it wasn't.

PIEHLER: But, the times you said you were ready to shoot him because—was he career, had he been—was he a World War II veteran?

MASON: Yeah, he was war, he was making a career out of it.

PIEHLER: And he sounded like he was tough.

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

MASON: Yeah, I mean, I—thought he was the cruelest man ever.

PIEHLER: What was so cruel that he did, do you remember?

MASON: Oh, he'd make you do pushups and take you out on a hike after dark, after chow. He'd make us put on, our platoon, he'd make us put on full field pack and take us out in them boondocks out there in California—on the base there. He'd run us and I thought that was all unnecessary, but, after I got over there, I seen that it wasn't. He was teaching us what to do.

NIELSEN: So did you feel that your Basic Training got you ready for going to Korea?

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: Did you feel prepared after your Basic Training for war?

MASON: Well, you could, you can, you could go through that Basic Training and all that, but when you get in the real thing, it's a whole lot different. But, what they try to teach you, get you in shape. And ...

NIELSEN: What would you consider to be maybe the most important lesson that you learned in Basic Training, if you can pinpoint the one?

MASON: Keeping your weapon dry and clean. If you don't, they'd jam on you, you know.

PIEHLER: Your platoon—what do you remember about your platoon and training?

MASON: Basic Training?

PIEHLER: Basic Training.

MASON: Well they is a lot to remember, but I guess those, marches that he took out on for the night. Full field pack, that's ninety—that weighs ninety pounds. Plus your rifle weighs nine pounds. So, you were carrying over one-hundred pounds and you were double timing and that's, that's rough, that's hard. But ... it gets you in shape.

PIEHLER: In your, in your platoon, in Basic Training, were there any Tennesseans?

MASON: Any what?

PIEHLER: Tennesseans.

MASON: Yeah, yeah, this one sergeant, platoon sergeant, he was from Johnson City. Bristol rather—Bristol, Tennessee. Yeah, he, uh, he was a World War II veteran. He was ... making a career out of it.

PIEHLER: Where else were people from when you were in California?

MASON: Well, uh, all the guys that, when we left South Carolina, they was from the southeast here. Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, South Carolina, North Carolina—we was all Southern boys.

PIEHLER: And that was your platoon—was basically Southern boys, in the war.

MASON: But, when I got ... most of those guys that took Basic Training with me went to Alaska. See, after Basic Training, you got your orders, where you was going. And if you got that FEC, that's the Far East Command, that's what I got. But most of the guys I took Basic with, they went to—there was a boy, well he's been up here to see me, he lived in Nashville and he went in Alaska.

PIEHLER: Went to Alaska. And you didn't get to go to Alaska. When did you hear that you were going to be in Far East Command?

MASON: What?

PIEHLER: When did you hear that you were going to be in Far East Command, that you were going to Korea?

MASON: Oh, this after Basic Training, after I got my fourteen day leave, it said I was to report back to Camp Stoneman, California for the Far East Command. Which ... that was Japan and Korea and I knew I wasn't going to stay in Japan. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Now did, where did you have Advanced, or did you have any Advanced Infantry Training?

MASON: Had what?

PIEHLER: Advanced Infantry Training. Did you have any after Basic?

MASON: No.

PIEHLER: No, you had no Advanced course after …

MASON: No, uh uh.

PIEHLER: So, everything you had, they were to teach you, they taught you in Basic …

MASON: Right.

PIEHLER: Basic Training. What—I'm curious, how much KP did you have to do?

MASON: Oh, I hated that too. I pulled it pretty often, I mean everybody eventually gets it. I've been so wore out I couldn't get to the barracks hardly. Washing them pots and pans, I mean that's just—all day long. And they'd mess up one. You'd wash it and by the time you got it done, they had another one.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. What did you think of—you mentioned you weren't thrilled with the climate. There weren't—the heat, or the clouds, but what did you … (Phone Rings)

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: I'm curious, what did you think of Californians?

MASON: Oh, I didn't like it. I didn't like it at all.

PIEHLER: Did you ever, what cities did you get into, did you ever see San Francisco, or Las Angeles or Hollywood or…

MASON: Frisco was only … town I seen.

PIEHLER: What did you think? What did you do? Did you see any, any of the sights?

MASON: Yeah, we—during Basic Training, they'd give us a weekend pass, which it was only ninety miles—about like from here to Chattanooga. And three of us boys went up there. One was from Dover, Tennessee, one from Nashville, one from Jellico. We went up ... there for a weekend. We went out on the Golden Gate Bridge, walked out on it, of course we went right under it when going over seas. And I was seasick just about the time we got under it because in the Bay there, ... the water is choppy. The ship, tubs take you out so far, and it rocks. And I was seasick.

PIEHLER: Seasick from the minute you got on?

MASON: I was sick for seven days.

PIEHLER: And how long was the voyage?

MASON: Thirteen days.

PIEHLER: So, for the first seven days, how much food were you able to hold down?

MASON: Huh?

PIEHLER: How much food were you able to hold down those first seven?

MASON: Oh, couldn't eat. I mean, you could eat, but it would come right back up. (Laughter) It's motion sickness.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

MASON: But, they call it seasickness.

PIEHLER: Where so you went on a troop ship first to Japan, or did they land you in Korea directly?

MASON: No, we went to Yokahoma, Japan, and stayed over night and they assigned us to the division that we was going into in Korea. And they loaded us back on the boat and we went in Inchon.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And did you go in as a replacement or with a unit?

MASON: No, we went in as a replacement.

PIEHLER: As a replacement.

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So, when did you meet up with your unit?

MASON: Oh, they put us—when we landed, they put us in a old train—Korean train—and they took as far as it would go—I mean, the rail end. Then they loaded us on trucks and took us on in to the front line. I went in what they call Kumhwa Valley, what they, I don't know if you ever heard of it or not, what they call No Man's Land. That's where I went in at. You was overlooking No Man's Land. That was a position I went into.

PIEHLER: And ... what do you remember about meeting your unit for the first time?

MASON: Oh, they briefed us back at the division rear, and they told us, you know, that we'd have to be alert—stay awake. Said those gooks and Chinese would—see, we had wove a wire—barbed wire—out in front of our bunkers and when you get your C ration we just pitched the can down and they'd hang up in that barbed wire. And they told us that there, them Chinese and North Koreans would cut that barbed wire and slip in on you, and you wouldn't know it. And that's, they started to tell us, warned us to be alert. But anyway, when I went in, the first sergeant told my squad leader to put me on guard duty first, til I got used to it, and he was from Louisiana. He'd been there quite some time, but he didn't do it, they waited and put me on guard duty later on that night. Well, like I said, we eat them C ration and throwed em out and they'd hang in that barbed wire and the rats would get into them. I kept hearing something shake them cans. And I thought they was cutting the barbed wire. Well, they told us not to fire our rifle. [They] said throw a grenade, that way it wouldn't give your position away, 'cause the flash of the muzzle of the gun, the rifle, they could see where it was coming from. But anyway, I

throwed a grenade, I was so scared, I throwed it and I didn't even pull the pin. That's how scared I was. I thought it was a dud, I kept waiting for it to go off and it never did go off, so I throwed about two more and done the same thing. I didn't even pull the pin on it. See, you gotta pull that pin. It takes five seconds to go off when you release the handle, it goes off in five seconds. But, I realized what I was doing, finally got settled down, realized what I was doing, so I went throwing them just one right after another, and uh, the first sergeant he come through the trench and he didn't tell me who he was, I heard him coming. I turned around, I almost shot him, by mistake. But, he jumped in the bunker with me, he said, "What did you see." I said, "I ain't seen nothing, I heard it." So, he stood there with me for a while. To beat it all, my squad leader and the other guy, they didn't even wake up during all that commotion. But anyway, he said that's rats in them C ration cans. But I didn't know. But he, he really chewed my squad leader out because he was supposed to put me on guard duty early, until I kinda got settled down. But, your scared all the time.

PIEHLER: What—when were you the most scared in Korea?

MASON: Well, it was about two months I guess before I come home, they kept saying that our division was going to jump off and take another hill over from where we was at. And they didn't say what regiment was gonna do it. And that had me all scared, but I didn't know what—my regiment was going to be the one to assault it. And but anyway the 31st—I was with the 32nd—the 31st was the one that ... took it. Well, after they took it, we had to move up and hold it. They moved our regiment up to hold it. I guess that was my most—and we—my regiment was right over from where they took this hill, and they had done it in the morning before daylight and we could see, from our bunkers, we could see them when it got daylight, we could see them going up the hill. And I almost got my hand blowed off. I'd just come out of the bunker, and they tried to get us a hot chow to us at suppertime. They tried to bring us hot—and seemed like every time they'd bring that up there to us, that's when the Chinese and North Korean, they knowed that when we went down to the chow bunker to eat, we went by squads. And it seemed like they knowed every time we went down there, they'd start pouring in artillery on us, and mortars. And I had just come out of the bunker and they was a sixty round mortar hit this right up. .. above the—on top of my bunker. And it, that, that damaged my hearing—I can't hear good. I've wrote to my—I went to the VA and wrote to get my medical records and they, all the records was stored in Missouri and they said they had a fire out there in '73, World War II veterans records and the Korean War Veterans, and they was burnt up. So, the, I, they didn't do no, they didn't help no way of be fixed, on account of my records was burned up. They said they have to have my medical records before they could help me on my hearing.

PIEHLER: So, in other words, you mentioned this incident with the explosion, your hearing got damaged.

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: And the doctor looked at it at the time.

MASON: No, no the only thing he treated me for—sent me back to aid station and dug the shrapnel out of my right hand. But, I mean, couldn't hear for a day or two. My ears just rang, you know. It was that concussion. But they said—they told me at the VA they had to have my medical records before they could help me. I said the only thing I wanted was just some help about getting a hearing aid or something where I could hear.

PIEHLER: When did you try to get the VA to help you?

MASON: Oh, it's been four or five years ago.

PIEHLER: And they just said because we can't find your medical records.

MASON: That's right. But, that's what makes you mad. You go and serve your country, and I realize—and a lot of guys maybe, like everything else, they want something for nothing—but I told them, I said the only thing I'd like is to examine my ears. If I need a hearing aid, which I think maybe it would help me—I said that's the only thing I'm asking for. I said when they discharged me, I didn't ask for no pension or nothing. But I—over the years see it's gotten worse. I mean especially when I take—get a cold, head cold, I can't hardly hear nothing out of my right ear.

NIELSEN: So ... the doctor who took the shrapnel out of your right hand—did you say anything about the fact that your ears were ringing?

MASON: Well, at that time, my hearing had kind of come back a little bit. But ... at the aid station, [it was] just a medic one who dug the shrapnel out of my hand. It wasn't a doctor.

NIELSEN: Okay.

PIEHLER: What time of the year did you land in Korea?

MASON: '52.

PIEHLER: '52, what time was it spring, winter?

MASON: June.

PIEHLER: June, June in 19…

MASON: 1952.

PIEHLER: And how long did it take you to join your unit? You mentioned taking this train trip.

MASON: Well, see, they assigned us to the division in Yokahama, Japan. And when we got, when we got to Korea, they assigned us to the regiment—what regiment we was going in. We don't know what division we was going in.

PIEHLER: What regiment were you in, ultimately put in?

MASON: Huh?

PIEHLER: What regiment were you in?

MASON: 32nd.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And when you finally got up to your unit, what did you think of your squad leader and your sergeant?

MASON: Oh well, everybody got along. There wasn't no fights or nothing, nobody cursed one another, everybody was buddy buddy. You was just like family. You stuck together.

PIEHLER: And everyone in the squad got together—got along together?

MASON: Oh yeah, yes.

PIEHLER: Where were people from, in your squad?

MASON: Well, like I said, my squad leader he was from Louisiana, and had a boy from Mississippi. See, there was three of us to a bunker—that's all that could get into a bunker. I mean, we had bunkers all the way across Korea, which is 155 miles across. After Truman fired MacArthur, Ridgway, he took over. That's when he established the line 155 miles all the way across Korea. He set up the fence.

NIELSEN: Speaking of Truman firing MacArthur, how did, did you guys, how did you guys feel about MacArthur being fired?

MASON: Well, everybody was kind of mad at Truman for doing that. But, at that time, I guess maybe Truman, I mean MacArthur was trying to go over his head, I don't know. But way I look at it, if you got a foreman out there doing a job, if he's doing it, let him do it—regardless of what it takes to do it, let him do it. So that's kind of the way I look at it about MacArthur. He was in World War II in the Pacific, everybody thought he…

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

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with J.C. Mason on April 15, 2004 in Maryville, Tennessee. With Kurt Piehler and ...

NIELSEN: William Nielsen.

PIEHLER: And you were saying about MacArthur ...

MASON: Well, Truman, he was trying to avoid World War III, and he thought MacArthur might have gone too far and would cause the war. And he was a president and, really, I don't guess a general has got a right to go over—to try to go over the president.

PIEHLER: Had you voted for—well actually you would have been too young still, but in '48 were you for Dewey or for Truman?

MASON: Well, see, you couldn't vote until you were twenty-one.

PIEHLER: Twenty-one then. But if you could have voted did you—or who did your parents support, Dewey or Truman, do you know?

MASON: Oh they, they voted for Truman.

PIEHLER: They voted for Truman. What, it sounds like you spent a good part of your day, sort of in these bunkers or near these bunkers when you were on the line. What was ... a day like?

MASON: Well, during the daytime, I mean you had to stay in them bunkers because if you got out, we got a lot of guys killed by snipers. And at night, it was just a nerve wracking twenty-four hours a day. Of course they wouldn't—they wasn't too bad to ... try to make an attack in daytime because them jet fighters, you know. They flew around the clock. They kept them off of us a lot. They flew up the Manchurian border—Yalu River. They kept them kind of pinned down. But in the night, why, of course they couldn't see them at night, but it was kind of nerve wracking twenty-four hours a day.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that night you were—the first night out there, you were scared. You threw the grenades and not …

MASON: I was scared. I was scared—I didn't even pull the pin.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

MASON: I mean the, the first night on the line and you didn't know what was what and ... But I done the same thing months later. A new guy come in, he'd do the same thing, He'd heard the same thing I did. Well, what made it so bad [is] when I started throwing these grenades, this one boy down next bunk from me, he started throwing them. But, he knowed what it was—he was just doing it to scare me. (Laughter) So I done the same thing. Months later, new guy come in ...

PIEHLER: When did you, did you ever get used to it? What did you learn? Because you obviously didn't react the same way other nights when you were on guard duty. When did you, in a sense, get used to being on the line?

MASON: You never get used to it. Like I say, you just never did know when they was gonna—see they'd come with thousands. A lot of them didn't even have weapons. The first wave had weapons and the next wave they'd pick up the dead's weapons and keep coming. ... We found a lot of them that had opium on them. But they was, more or less, doped up. I mean ain't nobody gonna just come out in the open and get shot unless they they ain't in the right mind. That's just the way they was. And they'd try to harass you. They'd play—they'd play Hank Williams songs every night on loud speaker. You know, try to break you down—break the morale down. They'd try to get you to give up. "Come on over GI, we'll make you a good home." A lot of guys, they would, they'd go and give themselves up—thought they'd get better treatment. Then what they was going through. We had, during the end of the war, had fourteen that wouldn't come back at that time. They ... wanted to stay over there. But they eventually come home. But, they try to break your morale down. Yeah, like I say, I don't know where they get those records. I don't know. They'd play records of Roy Acuff. They play records of Hank Williams, Earnest Tubb. And it—a lot of guys think, "Whoa boy, that's making me homesick." I'm…

PIEHLER: It did make people homesick?

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: How often were you attacked?

MASON: Well, like I say, they, they would—there'd be wave after wave. They'd try to break through you. They'd try to find the weakest part in you in the line. And they always tried to get in that soft place and get in behind you. They was just, like I say, I think they was doped up.

PIEHLER: Your unit was attacked with a mass attack of …

MASON: Do what?

PIEHLER: You did have a mass Chinese attack?

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. We had ... flares. Every night, when they attacked us, they'd shoot up flares, [and] kept the valley lit up where you could see them.

NIELSEN: I'm curious ... how did you and the rest of your group, what did you guys think in terms of—what did you think about the North Koreans and the Chinese? We talked a little about the Chinese—the Japanese.

MASON: Well, the Chinese, if they took you prisoner, they was more better to you than the North Koreans. The North Koreans were sort of like the Japanese in World War II. They was cruel. But the Chinese, they was more—they was more civilized.

NIELSEN: I'm just curious and this, this is just kind of a general question, coming from me, a kid who is all of twenty-one. What was your first impression of Korea when you arrived there, just in general?

MASON: I thought it was the most unforsaken country I had ever seen in my life. Because people ... just lived in grass huts and pasteboard box shacks. Oh, it was terrible. It stunk. The people and kids were starving.

NIELSEN: How were you treated by the people, for the most part?

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: How did the people treat you?

MASON: They ... was good to GIs, the South Koreans.

NIELSEN: Right, right.

MASON: Because they knowed we was there fighting for them.

NIELSEN: I'm curious about something, I'm hopefully not jumping ahead, but would you mind telling me what you ended up being awarded the Purple Heart for because I was curious about that?

MASON: Do what?

NIELSEN: You were awarded the Purple Heart.

MASON: Yeah, it was on account of…

NIELSEN: On account of the shrapnel.

MASON: Yeah.

NIELEN: Okay.

PIEHLER: In the yearbook for—you have *A History of Bayonet*, the history of the 7th Infantry Division in Korea. There's a description of Triangle Hill, which I believe you've talked about.

MASON: Yeah, that's the one that I ...

PIEHLER: And here's a map of the sort of Triangle Hill complex. Where was the incident where you got the shrapnel and had the problem with your hearing?

MASON: I was over here, about right here. (Points to a map) Like I said, we could, we could see this 31st Regiment. We didn't know which regiment was going to take the hill.

PIEHLER: Okay. The Triangle Hill itself, because there are several other hills, there's Jane Russell and Pike's peak.

MASON: Well, I was, my regiment was over here in what they call Hill 1062. That's where we was at. But, we had—when the 31st took Triangle Hill, we had to move up and hold it. Of course, the first night we went up, why the Chinese, they tried to take it back. They counterattacked.

PIEHLER: What kind of—particularly in the battle for Triangle Hill, what kind of casualties did your unit take?

MASON: Oh, it, it was pretty bad. I don't know what the count was.

PIEHLER: Like of people you knew in your squad, did anyone get killed or …

MASON: Oh yeah, yes.

PIEHLER: Did you lose any friends, anyone you were particularly close to?

MASON: Huh?

PIEHLER: Did you lose anyone you were particularly close to?

MASON: Oh yeah, yes. Yeah, you—if they didn't get killed before they got close to you, they'd get just as close—well they'd try to overrun you. But, like I said, when I was growing up we'd go see John Wayne and the war movies. It's a whole lot different actually.

PIEHLER: What was so different? What ... did you think it would be like because of the movies?

MASON: Well, in the movies, you know, there's always a star. But, in actual combat, like I said, everybody—nobody is no hero.

PIEHLER: Really?

MASON: No. Everybody is just—they pull together. It's sort of like a football team. If you've ... got a good football team, everybody pulls together and you got a winner. So, that's the way it was in World War II and the Korean War.

PIEHLER: What was the bravest thing you saw someone do while you were in combat?

MASON: Well, actually I never did see nobody that done anything brave.

PIEHLER: By the flip side, did anyone do anything foolhardy.

MASON: Huh?

PIEHLER: Did anything, did anyone do something that was foolish?

MASON: Oh, well really it was—man being twenty-one years old, you don't think like you do if you're sixty. But I mean we ... took chances, we've got out and stood up on bunkers in daylight. (Laughter) We could have got shot. But, like I say, we didn't think too much about it. But, stuff like that is not all I done. I mean I tried ... to stay just as cool and calm as I could. Which, that's hard to do.

NIELSEN: I'm curious ... did you have any particular feelings, one way or the other, because something that I had read is kind of the opinion that several of the GI s had toward Korean and Chinese snipers. I mean, maybe that it wasn't fair play or anything like that. How did you feel about the snipers?

MASON: The snipers?

NIELSEN: Mm hmm.

MASON: Well, they've been snipers in every war and we had them. We had snipers. Like I say, the Army has had snipers, I guess, back to the Civil War.

PIEHLER: While you're—particularly when you're on the line, in these bunkers, what did you do to pass the time? You also said you could never really relax.

MASON: Well, that's true and I remember, there were two or three weeks there I guess, that I didn't write Mom—I didn't write home. She went to the Red Cross, she was worried why I hadn't wrote. They come to me and brought me a bunch of paper. It wasn't the kind of deal that I didn't have any paper to write on, but I remember them brining me a bunch of writing paper. They said, "Now, we want you to write home. We've got complaints from the Red Cross that they hadn't heard from you." And, of course, at the time I couldn't write, you know. But after that, well ... I got caught up and wrote. Of course, I can understand how my Mom felt not hearing from me.

NIELSEN: What was the—what was the longest stretch of time that you were on the front? How long, what was the longest amount of time that you were on the front at any given …

MASON: Oh, only time that we ... tore off is getting replacements, and they'd take us back on trucks, to what they call the showerhead, and we'd get a shower, once a week. Take a shower once a week.

PIEHLER: So regularly, you would get a regular shower.

MASON: Yeah. They'd take us back on trucks that would just be back there no more than an hour.

PIEHLER: What did you—when you finally did write to your mother, what did you write to her about?

MASON: Well, I explained to her and told her that I'm sorry I couldn't write. Of course she understood after I wrote her. But ... I could see myself having a son somewhere like that and not hearing from him.

PIEHLER: What, what else did you ... do to pass the time, did you play cards at all?

MASON: No, no. Everybody was all time on alert. We just didn't know when they were gonna hit us. You couldn't really—you couldn't relax, and I always dreaded ... Daylight, I kind of got through it pretty good because, like I said, the fighter jets kept them off of us during the daytime. And that, overnight was when they would ... try to hit you. And I always dreaded nightfall. Because, like I say, the jets wouldn't fly overnight, but just as soon daylight come they'd patrol out in the north parts.

PIEHLER: Were you able—did you sleep during the day time?

MASON: Huh?

PIEHLER: Did you sleep at all during the daytime?

MASON: Yes, sometime we'd ... sleep, take time out sleeping, maybe a couple of hours.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And how often, you mentioned, them sort of zeroing in, when you got warm food. How often would you get a warm meal?

MASON: Do what?

PIEHLER: A warm meal, how often would you get a warm meal?

MASON: Oh, like I said, at that one particular place that we was at, the cooks they had to cross this valley to get to the—they had a big chow bunker built, it was, oh it was probably twice as big as my house. Had sandbags on top of it about four or five feet. And these, the kitchen was in the rear and they'd bring up the chow. They'd fix it back there and, and put it in the—oh, I can't think of what they call them—Mermac (sp?) cans. Keep it hot—thermo. They'd put, they'd put them in the trailer and bring it up there on

the jeep. They'd have to cross this valley to get to the chow bunker and ... they'd—a lot of times they'd throw artillery and mortars in on them, and they never would get to us. But, they'd try to get us hot meals. That was at suppertime.

NIELSEN: Obviously ... having a hot meal is a really good thing that we kind of take for granted here where in that situation you don't get it as frequently. Where there any other small things that you missed, little things that we take for granted while we're home?

MASON: Oh yeah, I could imagine eating a hamburger back home, but—or you can imagine all them things, ice cream.

PIEHLER: Did you when you didn't get a hot meal, what did you eat?

MASON: C rations.

NIELSEN: C rations.

PIEHLER: How did you like C rations?

MASON: Well about the only thing I ever did eat of them was the, the only thing I liked, was them mini weenies—franks they called them.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

MASON: They, they was pretty good.

PIEHLER: I know it was somewhat common to have Korean civilians sort of do your, polish your shoes and do your laundry, did you have any Korean civilians on the line who were doing chores for you?

MASON: No, not in the infantry outfit. Now the motor pool and ordinance or stuff like that that was in the rear, they had, Koreans doing their doing their laundry. But, we, when we'd go back to the showerhead, they'd give us clean fatigues.

PIEHLER: You got clean fatigues every week.

MASON: Once a week. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Once a week with the shower.

MASON: Yeah, but my goodness you look like a mud man by the time you got back there in the middle of the week, to get you a shower because it would rain … Muddy. You could take a shower like today, by that night you felt like—I mean seem like you never did have one.

PIEHLER: One of things I've been struck in interviewing veterans is the extremes of climate in Korea.

MASON: Huh?

PIEHLER: The climate of Korea.

MASON: Oh.

PIEHLER: Because it could get really hot, but it also got—my sense is, it got very cold.

MASON: Oh yeah, in the summer time it was miserable hot and in the winter time it was terrible. Twenty and thirty below zero.

PIEHLER: What was the coldest you remember being in Korea?

MASON: Well, I guess uh, probably ... in January of '52, I guess.

PIEHLER: '52 or '53?

MASON: '52. They ... started issuing us thermo boots at that time, I believe. And they called them Mickey Mouse boots because they was big. But they was insulated and they'd keep your feet warm at zero weather. And but before that they didn't have them. They started issuing them about '50, about 1952. And they was bad to gall your feet because they was thermo, your feet would sweat.

NIELSEN: What kind of things did you do to—what kind of things did you do to keep warm in that extreme?

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: What kind of things did you do to keep yourself warm in that extreme?

MASON: Well, we had sleeping bags, but they'd get wet, and when they get wet you couldn't get in them. It'd be wet. You wouldn't try to sleep in a wet sleeping bag. Of course, you—like I said, you was about ... miserable about all the time.

PIEHLER: What you mentioned getting off the lines for showers once a week and clean clothes, but when did you finally get some R & R, because there was a picture of you in Japan?

MASON: See you had to be there six months before you could get R & R. They call it rest and recuperation. But, after you was there for six months ... you was eligible for R & R.

NIELSEN: How long was that for? Was that for a week?

MASON: Just a week.

NIELSEN: Just a week.

MASON: Yeah, they flew us ... there and Tokyo. Well, what you could do before your R & R come up, you could put down where you want to go in Japan. You know, you could have went to Osaka, Nagasaki. A lot of the guys went to see where they dropped the atomic bomb, and I said well, I don't want to go see something that didn't exist. But, there was a lot of guys that went there just to see what it looked like. So, I, I went to Tokyo, and they flew us Seoul to Tokyo—a week. I think it cost me forty dollars in Japanese money. Of course I had American script. But after I got there, you could cash it in for Japanese yens. And I think it cost me forty dollars for a hotel and my meals for a week. Of course that was a lot of money back then. I think that's what it was, forty dollars.

NIELSEN: I'm curious. How did the how did the Japanese treat the American soldiers who were coming over there for R & R?

MASON: They was ... good to us, yeah. Of course, they realized they didn't have no other choice. They was defeated. Really, they had to rely on the United States to survive. So, of course I'm sure down deep, there was a lot of them probably didn't care for us. But, they didn't show it.

PIEHLER: What did you do on leave, that week you had in Japan?

MASON: Huh?

PIEHLER: What did you do while you were in Japan?

MASON: Well, like I said, they had this big Ginza market and you could buy about anything under the sun on it. And I took that in, took some of the nightclubs in that they had in Tokyo. Of course at that time they had Tokyo—see they had bombed it pretty bad in World War II—they hadn't got it all built back. They was a lot of still tore up pretty bad. But, what, what they had rebuilt and hadn't been damaged in World War II, why—go to places like that. And you could see Mount Fuji from Tokyo.

PIEHLER: Did you did you go to any nightclubs?

MASON: Yeah ... what few they had.

NIELSEN: The, the young lady that you were in the picture with when you went to Tokyo …

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: The young lady that you were in the picture with?

MASON: Yes?

NIELSEN: Who was that?

MASON: Yeah, she was my escort for the week. And ... that forty dollars included her for a week. You get a taxi and if you was going a certain place, that taxi driver, he'd try to run the meter up on you. Well, she'd tell him, you know, in Japanese, where to go. And I'd ask her what ... was he doing, she said he's trying to make the fare more. He'd done like he'd missed the place. He… and she'd talk to him in Japanese, of course I couldn't understand ... what she was telling him, but anyway, he'd turn around and go back she'd make him move the meter back on the taxi. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: How did you ... feel about the '52 election? Were you for Ike, for Eisenhower, or for ... Stephenson?

MASON: Well, not really, I wasn't for him, but of course I was a Democrat and but I mean, he promised to bring the boys home in Korea, and of course I was for him for that. I was wanting to get out of that place. But, really I wasn't old enough to really know all that much about politics.

PIEHLER: Did you vote in that '52 election while you were in Korea?

MASON: No.

PIEHLER: No. But, you did like Ike's promise of bringing …

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You thought that was …

MASON: Yeah, well by him being a general in World War II, I thought well he might not be alright, but he turned out—he wasn't. Things pretty bad under him.

PIEHLER: Did you—do you have any memory of your unit serving with any other United Nations troops that were fighting in Korea?

MASON: Yeah, we, we had the Ethiopians attached to us. So, they had Turks, Australians. They had all these other nations in there, too.

PIEHLER: Did you have any contact personally with the Ethiopians?

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: What kind of …

MASON: But, but you couldn't understand them.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. How close were they to where you were …

MASON: Oh that, they, they been right next to us.

PIEHLER: Right next to your…

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Bunkers right?

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And how did your unit communicate with their unit, do you know?

MASON: How you—communicate?

PIEHLER: Yeah, yeah.

MASON: Well, just your hands and sign language, because, like I say, you couldn't understand them.

PIEHLER: What about the, what about the Turks, did you ever serve on the line with them?

MASON: Well, the Turks wouldn't—we had the Ethiopians.

PIEHLER: Ethiopians.

MASON: But, the Turks, I don't know what division they was attached to.

PIEHLER: They were not with you. I also noticed in the yearbook, Columbians, from Columbia, do you remember any?

MASON: They, see the Ethiopian was attached …

PIEHLER: They were close…

MASON: Columbians was the 31st, they had ... one attached to each of the regiments.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. What about South Korean troops? Did you ever serve with any Republic of Korea [troops]?

MASON: Yeah, we had ... a few in with us, but they was—at that time, we was just trying to train them to show them what to do. I mean they ... weren't equipped to fight. But, that, it's different now. They've got them now where that they could they can take care of themselves. But, back then, why, they didn't know—they didn't have nothing to defend their self with.

NIELSEN: Did all of these all these different groups of troops we were talking about—the UN troops and the South Korean troops—did everybody get along okay?

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah.

NIELSEN: Even though, I mean, just because they were from different countries or different areas of the world, they got along okay?

MASON: Yeah, like I say, everybody got along.

PIEHLER: What ... did—what was your sense of—did you think that victory was possible in Korea, when you were there, by the time you got to Korea?

MASON: Well ... we done that. What they—the UN, the United States and UN—they was just wanting to push the Communists back across the 38th Parallel, and that was what they was what they wanted, and we done it. And a lot of people say, well, today, we didn't win in Korea, but we did. I mean, we kept them from taking South Korea over. They didn't do that in Vietnam. They wound up losing. But it kind of hurts me when I hear somebody say, "Well we lost in Korea just like Vietnam." I say, "No, we didn't, we kept the Communists from taking the south over."

NIELSEN: So, would you say ... for the most part, were you pleased with outcome of the war?

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: Were you pleased with the outcome of the war?

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah I was, I mean I ... couldn't see losing anymore—we lost 54,000. And I couldn't see—well that's, that's why they kind of had to ... MacArthur, he wanted, he wanted to go on into China, and that could have caused a World War III and a lot more casualties.

PIEHLER: When did you leave Korea? When did your tour end?

MASON: In '53.

PIEHLER: What time in '53?

MASON: Uh, February.

PIEHLER: February.

MASON: I mean March—March of '53.

PIEHLER: So, you left before the war—the armistice.

MASON: Yes, yeah, I was back here in the States four months when the ceasefire ...

PIEHLER: Were you still in the Army when the ceasefire took place?

MASON: Yeah, yeah, I was down at Camp Polk, Louisiana.

PIEHLER: What were you doing at Camp Polk?

MASON: I was I was helping train the troops.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Did you unit ever take any prisoners?

MASON: Oh yeah, yes.

PIEHLER: How many were North Korean, and how many were Chinese? Do you have any sense?

MASON: Well they—these that the—of course I wasn't in on it, but these they took one morning, these guys on our post, they just come up and surrendered. They didn't have no weapon. Like I say, I think the majority of them was doped up. They didn't have no weapons. The only thing they had on them was two shotgun shells. And they ... brought them through the trenches there where we was at, and they was more or less hungry and wanted to just give up. But, yeah, we—there was a lot of them like that, that ... walked up and surrendered.

PIEHLER: What about, did anyone from your unit or regiment that you know, did anyone become, get captured as a prisoner?

MASON: No, not that I know of. We never did get one from my, from my outfit, we never did get one captured.

PIEHLER: Did you ever go to services while you were in Korea—chapel?

MASON: No.

PIEHLER: Did you ever see a chaplain?

MASON: No, I doubt it, I didn't.

PIEHLER: What about a USO show, did you ever see the …

MASON: Well, Mickey Rooney—after I got over there, he had a show, but I didn't go. I didn't go back to see him.

PIEHLER: You didn't, yeah.

MASON: And when Eisenhower was running for president, he came over. My squad leader went down, went back to the rear, to see him.

PIEHLER: Saw Ike, personally?

MASON: Yeah, yeah, he come to Korea.

PIEHLER: So, so your squad leader actually got to meet him.

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What did he say about the meeting, about seeing Ike in person?

MASON: My squad leader said—of course Ike wasn't even in the Army at that time. He was running for president.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

MASON: He said when he walked up to shake ... hands with him, he saluted him. (Laughter) I said, "Well, you didn't have to do that he wasn't no general now, he was just running for president.

PIEHLER: Did you, by the way, did you get a hot turkey dinner on Thanksgiving when you were in Korea, that Thanksgiving of '52?

MASON: Well, I don't like turkey myself. No, I never did get one.

PIEHLER: You didn't get one.

MASON: Uh uh. [Negative]

PIEHLER: How good was the ... medics? What do you remember about your, the medics and medical care, because you got fixed up for shrapnel.

MASON: Yeah, but that, what they done, there was a medic who dug it out of my hand, the shrapnel, but they wasn't no doctor done it. ... But the medic ... they done a good job and they evacuated. So they started using that bubble top helicopter to evacuate the wounded. And that, that was a lifesaver, because they could get a guy—they'd get him

back to the aid station quick with a helicopter, where if you had to carry him or transport him by jeep or truck, he may die before you could get him back there.

PIEHLER: In terms of Korea, is there any, what other experiences, particularly in terms of combat, stick out in your mind that we haven't asked you about? Is there anything ...

MASON: Yeah, that Triangle Hill, that showed in the book, the map, and I guess that was my worst nightmare.

PIEHLER: That was?

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: And ... that strikes me as that was your closest call.

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Is there anything that we haven't asked you about Triangle Hill or in terms of combat?

MASON: No, like I said, we had to go up after the 31st took it, and why that they lost so many guys, it was getting close to ceasefire, and why they took that old hill and lost lives, I'll never know. But I think they just wanted to show the communists that we had the strength enough that we could do it. And I talked to a Korean up here in the mall. He had—him and his wife had a store up here and I asked him if he was in the ROK army, the South Korean army, he said yeah. I told him—I said I was on Triangle Hill, which he knew what I was talking about. He said, "You ought to go back over there and see it." I said, "No, I don't want to see it." He said they've got ... trees and grass growing on it now, but back then when we took it, it wasn't nothing but an old slate hill. But, like I said, I think that was the last hill—major hill—they took before ceasefire. But I think they just wanted show the Communists that we had the manpower, that we could do it, because they lost ... well they lost a lot of people during the Korean War, the Chinese and North Koreans.

PIEHLER: How did you get home from Korea?

MASON: By boat.

PIEHLER: And how was your seasickness coming home?

MASON: Same way. (Laughter) I thought well, when I left Sasebo, Japan, that's where I come back through, I thought well, maybe I'll make it back this time without getting sick, but we hadn't gotten outside of the land when I started getting sick again. It wasn't as bad as it was when I went over.

NIELSEN: Did it take you roughly the same amount of time to get back? Was it …

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: How long did it take you to get back?

MASON: Thirteen days.

NIELSEN: The same.

MASON: Yeah, I was on that water thirteen days.

NIELSEN: What did you—where did you end up going as soon as you got back and what did you do there?

MASON: When I got back?

NIELSEN: Mm hmm.

MASON: Well, when we got back to Camp Stoneman they ... had us a steak dinner. We got back in that one morning. That night we had a big steak and then processed us to the closest camp to our home. Which Fort Knox was my closest and they flew me from Lackland, I mean Oakland, California, to Fort Knox, Louisville, Kentucky. That's where I got my thirty-day leave. They give you thirty-day leave. And I had to report back up there and they sent me to Camp Polk, Louisiana. That's where I got discharged.

NIELSEN: What did what did you do on your thirty-day leave?

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: What did you do on your thirty-day leave?

MASON: Oh, I just went around and seen everybody, people I hadn't seen. That was about it.

PIEHLER: What did you tell people about what happened to you in Korea, and what do people ask you?

MASON: Well, really, the only people that talked to and we talk about, is ex-Korean veterans. My cousin, he was a medic in the 2nd Infantry Division, and me and him talked a lot. Like I say, we—the guys that's been over there—usually we talk. I mean, somebody else, they don't ask nothing about it.

PIEHLER: Did you ever ... have a—did you ever have a welcome home parade?

MASON: No.

PIEHLER: You never …

MASON: No, but I think we was treated fine by the civilians. We wasn't treated like the Vietnam veterans. I never did—never was treated out of the way by civilians, but I do know the Vietnam veteran was treated bad.

PIEHLER: Now you went to Camp, to Fort Polk to do training, to be cadre, correct? When you came back, you did training?

MASON: Yeah, yeah, they…

PIEHLER: What was your rank when you were doing that?

MASON: Corporal.

PIEHLER: Corporal. There, yeah, there are your stripes. So when ...

MASON: I hung that uniform out, my wife she put it in a cedar chest and I've kept it.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. So, when you got back, that—when were you married?

MASON: '54.

PIEHLER: '54.

MASON: Yeah—me and my wife. I met my wife when I, when I got through Basic Training. And she was graduating high school when I come home in '53. And we got married in '54.

PIEHLER: And you met her in Basic Training. Before or after Basic Training?

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: So when you went home on leave.

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Where, where did you meet her?

MASON: I met her, she was—had got off the school bus. She had to walk quite some distance, back then, to catch a bus. So, me and my brother was coming on the road that she walked on and I stopped and talked to her. We went to the drive-in movie that night and we started dating from then on. But, waited until I got discharged before we got married.

PIEHLER: It's funny, you're the third person I've interviewed this past week whose talked about drive-in movies …

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

PIEHLER: You were saying that the main ... drive-in movie was …

MASON: Lakemont—that's about halfway in between here and Knoxville. It was the main one back in the '50s. That's where most people went.

PIEHLER: And you had your first date with your—eventual wife at a drive-in.

MASON: Yeah. Yeah we went to the drive-in that night after I met her. When I had to go back and go down to Camp Polk, she wrote me all the time. After I got discharged, why, we waited until I got out of the service, and we got married in '54—29th of January, '54.

NIELSEN: Where were you married?

MASON: At her home. The preacher married us in her home.

PIEHLER: When did you get promoted to corporal, was it in Korea?

MASON: No, no. I didn't get promoted until I got to Camp Polk. I was just a PFC [private first class] in Korea.

PIEHLER: And what was it like to sort of train, you know—you had not had fond memories of your sergeant at Basic Training. What was it like to be on the other side as cadre?

MASON: What now?

PIEHLER: What was it like to be on the other side of training troops, now you'd be in the position …

MASON: Oh, well, there's some drill sergeants I think kind of show their authority more so than others, but the way I look at it when I was doing the same thing down at Camp Polk, I tried to treat them just like I wanted to be treated. Like I say, some of the guys they'd cuss you when I'd took Basic Training but they can't do that now, but back then they'd cuss you and call you ridge runners and hillbillies and all that stuff. But ... stuff like that is uncalled for I don't think ... And I never did do that, but …

PIEHLER: So you were called by your ... sergeant a hillbilly…

MASON: Huh…

PIEHLER: You were called a hillbilly when you were in…

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah. They was kidding me and say well you from the mountains and one your legs is shorter than the other you from the mountains.

PIEHLER: How many ... black troops did you serve with?

MASON: Oh at that, see at that time they just started putting the blacks in, mixing them with the whites I think I served with a couple in my outfit. All the time I was in Korea a couple.

NIELSEN: How did ... every respond to the integration of the troops, to actually working side by side with the African-American troops?

MASON: Well, at that time well in Basic Training we had, we had a lot of black ones. And like I said they was from the South and all the white boys—we went to Fort Jackson from Fort Ord—they was all from the South, but they didn't get along too good back then. Although the blacks, they was from Mississippi and Alabama, and all around the Southeast, but they was a lot of fights—a lot of fights.

PIEHLER: In Basic Training…

MASON: Yeah

PIEHLER: What about when you got to …

MASON: They didn't fight during—'cause they'd court-martial them. But they'd do it after duty there.

PIEHLER: What about once in Korea, how ... did blacks and whites get along?

MASON: Well like I say, we only had two in ... my outfit what time I was there, and ... But they never was no trouble. Like I say, everyone was trying to stay alive.

PIEHLER: So in—there was not a problem once you were in Korea in your unit between whites and blacks fighting and …

MASON: Do what?

PIEHLER: Blacks and whites weren't fighting once you were in Korea in your unit itself. There weren't fights between the two blacks in your unit and the whites and visa versa.

MASON: Like I say a couple is all I can remember serving with and they wasn't in my squad. They was in the company, but they wasn't in my squad. But when you in a place like that you don't think of stuff like that. Of course I was raised up in the South. I was

raised up to respect them but not to mix with them. That's the way we was all raised. We was raised not to mistreat them, but not to mix with them and that's—I'm still like that today. You don't have to go out and mix with them but you don't have to mistreat them. I mean, they're human beings. I realize that

PIEHLER: Growing up that—were there any black families that lived near by?

MASON: I think there was one I think he lived three or four miles over from us but you very seldom see them.

PIEHLER: That's the only black family you remember growing up

MASON: Yeah

PIEHLER: Had you thought of staying in the army?

MASON: Huh?

PIEHLER: Had you thought of staying in—reenlisting in the army? No, No. (Laughter) Did they try and talk you into it?

MASON: No. They tried to get me to re-up when my times was up, and I told them no, I'd done my duty. I'm ready to go home.

PIEHLER: When did you finally get discharged? Was the Korean War still going on when you were actually discharged?

MASON: No it was over with…

PIEHLER: It was over…

MASON: Yeah

PIEHLER: What time—when did you finally get home from the army permanently?

MASON: Uh, '53

PIEHLER: Well what month roughly?

MASON: January—I mean November…

PIEHLER: November, November '53

MASON: Yeah

PIEHLER: You were completely done. Now did you join the National Guard or…

MASON: Yeah I, see you—they drafted you for two years, then you had six years of standby reserve, and they said if you join an active unit it would knock three years off. So I join the Air, I mean the National Guard over here and I got three years knocked off.

PIEHLER: And so you stayed in the National Guard for three years?

MASON: Yeah

PIEHLER: And you didn't reenlist then for the Guard?

MASON: No, I was just getting my reserve time over and get it over with.

PIEHLER: What did, did, what did you guard unit do

MASON: It was an anti-aircraft, which I didn't know nothing about because I was in an infantry outfit. It was an anti-aircraft …

PIEHLER: And what did you learn? I mean what—how often did you meet? Did you meet once a month or once a week?

MASON: No, back then you went once a week on Wednesday night for two hours and, but then they started doing it on the weekends—one weekend out of the month. But back then it was two hours every Wednesday Night.

PIEHLER: And what kind of what—in the event your unit was actually fully mobilized what was your job?

MASON: My job in …

PIEHLER: In the entire anti-aircraft unit.

MASON: I was the gun section

PIEHLER: So you were part of the gun section.

MASON: Yeah, I was in the—it was a 90mm antiaircraft, and I was in it.

PIEHLER: Did you do ... summer camp also?

MASON: Yeah, we went to Fort Stewart, Georgia, for two weeks.

PIEHLER: Two weeks. Did you—you used the GI Bill to buy ... a house.

MASON: Yeah

PIEHLER: Is it this house that you …

MASON: Yeah

PIEHLER: Or is it—this house you bought with the GI Bill. (Indicates the house they are in currently)

MASON: Yeah

PIEHLER: Had you thought of getting ... any schooling on the GI Bill?

NIELSEN: What year did, what year did you buy your house?

MASON: Huh?

NIELSEN: What year did you buy your house?

MASON: '58

NIELSEN: '58

PIEHLER: You using the GI Bill. Did you ever join any veterans' organization when you ...

MASON: Yeah, I belonged to the American Legion for a while and the VFW.

PIEHLER: Are you still active in those organizations?

MASON: No

PIEHLER: Were you ever active in the local posts?

MASON: Yeah, I was for a while.

PIEHLER: Were you an officer?

MASON: No.

PIEHLER: What—when were you active and when did you become less active?

MASON: Well, I ... after I took part in it, I just got kind of burned out on it, you know—the way it operated, and I just, both of them, just got out.

PIEHLER: Why were you burnt out on them? What was it?

MASON: Well, in my opinion I think they use the veterans' organization like that so people can make money, because in both places they serve drinks, and they make money. I don't think they should use the veterans' organization to do that. I think it should just be veterans' affairs and that's all. That's kind of the reason I got out of it. I mean, anybody that donated money to the veterans could go to it and buy drinks. Really that's the only reason it is set up.

PIEHLER: Well 'cause I just read recently that I think it's Alcoa/Maryville finally you could buy alcohol .

MASON: Yeah

PIEHLER: So the Legion Post and the VFW place had one of the few legal bars in town is that for alcohol is that one of the few places you could get a drink, is that the roll they served?

MASON: Well, you could get that before they voted that in.

PIEHLER: Yeah. What—did you say to your children or your wife about Korea how much did you tell them about what happened in Korea?

MASON: Well, I just told, them the stuff like I told you all, when they asked me. I didn't volunteer. They would ask me every once and a while [about] my experience in Korea.

PIEHLER: So they won't be—when they read this interview, they won't be surprised at—your children won't be surprised at what happened.

MASON: Oh, no.

PIEHLER: ... When we looked at pictures, you said there was one person you did stay in touch with a while, who lived in North Carolina. How much contact did you have with the people you served with after you came home?

MASON: Well, I used to—really, I had more contact with this boy in Panama City, Florida. I used to—at Christmas time, he'd write me and I'd write him. He'd send me a Christmas card, but last time I sent ... him a Christmas card, I think, that's been several years ago. I haven't heard from him. So, I don't know if he passed away or was maybe killed in a car wreck or something. I don't know. I never did know whatever. I never did hear from him no more. He was real close to me in Korea. We served right side by side.

PIEHLER: What did he do after the war, your friend from Panama City?

MASON: I don't know, I don't know what he done. I never did ask him.

PIEHLER: Yeah. And you've never really, you've written him, but you never saw him since Korea.

MASON: Huh?

PIEHLER: Your friend from Panama City, you never saw him since Korea, in person.

MASON: No, uh uh.

PIEHLER: You, did you go—you went back to your old job after you came back from [Korea]?

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: And that, you had no problem getting …

MASON: Oh no, no. Only thing they done is reinstate me.

PIEHLER: And what, what did you do in that job after you got home?

MASON: Well, what we done, I worked with a construction engineer. And, like Alcoa Highway—of course that was done later on up, but before we widened it, we set stakes for the contractors to grade by. We'd stake out bridges and culverts—stuff like that. That's what we done. That's what they call construction engineers. We got a—well they still got it—field office over here in Alcoa. But the main office is in Knoxville.

PIEHLER: So, you would work—it's one of the things you said you would stake out the highway, actually. What other things would you do with the engineers?

MASON: That's all.

PIEHLER: That's all?

MASON: Just roadway

PIEHLER: Road.

NIELSEN: Was it ... difficult for you at all coming back from being in the Army and just going back into civilian life? Was it difficult?

MASON: No, no, not really.

PIEHLER: You never had a hard time sleeping at night?

MASON: Oh yeah. I mean, I've had nightmares, but I still have them.

PIEHLER: You still have nightmares over it. What happens in your nightmares? What would be in a nightmare?

MASON: Well, it, it was stuff, you dream about stuff that happened over there.

PIEHLER: What about ... you had mentioned nightmares, did you ever have insomnia where you couldn't sleep?

MASON: Oh yes. Yeah, I wake up now at one, two o'clock in the morning, and I can't go back to sleep. I just get up, drink coffee, and when Hardee's opens, I go eat breakfast at Hardee's. Of course my wife, she's still in bed. (Laughter) When I wake up, I got to get up.

PIEHLER: You were a big fan of movies growing up. I remember your smile when you recounted some of the cowboy movies.

MASON: Oh yeah, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Red Rider—all them old shoot 'em ups.

PIEHLER: In terms of movies about either the Korean War or war in general, what, what movie do you think, or movies do you think reflects what you went through, is there a movie or movies?

MASON: *Retreat Hell*. I don't know if you ever …

PIEHLER: I've seen that, yeah.

MASON: Have you?

PIEHLER: You think that, that captures ...

MASON: Yeah, yeah, I liked that pretty well.

PIEHLER: Anything else that strikes you as …

MASON: Well, there was another one that—I forget what they called it. I went to seen it. It—of those two movies that I seen about the Korean War, it was more ... close to the real thing, you know. That's the reason I liked them so well.

PIEHLER: So *Retreat Hell* was one.

MASON: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Is there any movie you really don't like about war, having been in war now?

MASON: Well, after ... serving in combat, you see these movies now, like John Wayne's ... It wasn't like it was before I went in service.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. So, you didn't like John Wayne movies as much after you served?

MASON: No, no, I didn't. (Laughter) But I did before I went.

PIEHLER: Before, yeah. I guess you must have seen then, *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, before.

MASON: Oh yeah, yeah. It was a good movie, but like I say, after you been in combat, you can see so much fake in that. Of course, I mean, I can understand that, but before I went in, I thought that seeing something like that, it was great.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. You mentioned earlier you feel good about your Korean War experience, that you feel you accomplished something. Is that correct? Is that, you felt in fact that in many ways, you won the Korean War.

MASON: Yes, yeah. Oh yeah. But, like I said, a lot of people think we didn't. But we did. If we had pulled out like Vietnam, there would have been Communism in the south.

PIEHLER: What did, what did you think about the Vietnam War at the time?

MASON: I thought it was a bad situation from the get go.

PIEHLER: Really, back in '64, '65? Your children, none of them have served in the military?

MASON: No, no.

PIEHLER: Do you think if you hadn't been—I got the sense that if you hadn't been drafted, you probably would have just waited your turn to be drafted.

MASON: Oh, yeah. I never would have volunteered.

PIEHLER: (Looking at Nielsen) Any, any…

NIELSEN: Any additional—I honestly can't think of anything that we haven't already asked.

PIEHLER: One—thing I notice, while I used the bathroom, you went out and smoked a cigarette with my co-interviewer. When did you start smoking?

MASON: Oh, I smoked, I guess, about all my life. Back when we was kids, back growing up, kids could go to the store and buy ... the tobacco. You know, they can't do that now. You've got to be eighteen years old. But my dad, he ... smoked Prince Albert. And he would give it to us. I remember my aunt saying one time, asking my dad, "You

mean to tell me, you going to let them boys smoke?" He said, "Yeah, I'd rather give it to them, then them go behind my back and do it." He said until they get big enough to buy their own, he said, I'll give it to them if they going to do it. And he did. And, I smoked rabbit tobacco—I don't know if you know what that is or not. Grape vines—back when I was a kid, we'd cut grape vines and you could smoke them. This rabbit tobacco that used to grow out in the field and it looked like tobacco. But, it didn't taste like tobacco, but we smoked it because that's the only thing we had to smoke. (Laughs) They call it rabbit tobacco. I don't know why they called it that, but we used to go out, in the fall of the year and it would be dry and you could take it and rub it in your and grind it up. And we'd roll it up in the, in the brand Pope paper.

NIELSEN: I'm curious—I did have kind of one last question. If you could, if there is an experience you could pinpoint, while you were in the Army, what would you consider to be your best experience while you were in the Army?

MASON: Well, I guess, when I come back from Korea and was stationed down at Camp Polk, I guess that was my best part of the Army life.

NIELSEN: What did you like about it? What did you like about it?

MASON: Well, I liked, I liked the camp and I liked the territory in Louisiana. It was—of course its flat country down there, but the people was more sort of like the people here. That's what I liked about it.

PIEHLER: What in terms, it strikes that the cigarette ration was pretty important in Korea. Was that…

MASON: No, we had cigarettes.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you had no problem getting cigarettes.

MASON: No, they come in the C ration.

PIEHLER: They came …

MASON: They was strong—they'd been packed for so long. A lot of what we ... had in Korea was what was left over from World War II. And C ration, K ration, all that stuff was—well, the equipment we used was from World War II. They'd been rebuilt.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Did you feel you had the right amount of supplies and equipment, did you ever have complaints about supplies and equipment that you had?

MASON: Do what?

PIEHLER: Did you ever have any complaints about the supplies you had or equipment?

MASON: No, what we had, only thing that was bad, we didn't have the clothing that we should have in the winter months.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

MASON: But they—like I say, the latter part of the war, the last part of it, they began to get better clothing. When I got over there, we just had what you call combat boots. And they was just leather boots and in the winter time ... your feet—they'd freeze, frost bite. But they ... started—they come out with that thermo boot, and it was awkward, it was big, bulky, but it kept your feet warm.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. Is, is there anything we forgot to ask you about that you'd like to, sort of a very open ended ... Is there anything we forgot to ask about Korea or about growing up or about coming home from Korea?

MASON: No, no, you pretty well covered it.

PIEHLER: Would you like to go back to Korea? Have you ever been curious to go back?

MASON: Well, not really. Myself, I just wouldn't care nothing about going nowhere in foreign countries anymore, the way it is. I mean, this terrorist attack we've had. And most of these countries, they don't care nothing about the United States. If you go to those countries nowadays, why, you don't know if your going to be taken hostage or killed. The way it is, I just wouldn't care ... about going nowhere.

PIEHLER: Did, you saw a lot of the world in—during the Koran War. I mean you went to Japan and to Korea. Have you ever been—did you go abroad ever again after Korea? Did you travel anywhere else?

MASON: No, uh uh. No, I come home, got married after I got out, settled down, and I've had a pretty good ... life.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. And you mentioned you worked, I think it was for forty, forty-one years. What year did you retire?

MASON: '91.

PIEHLER: '91.

MASON: '91.

PIEHLER: And ... as a final—one of my final questions, is what have you been doing in retirement?

MASON: What do I do?

PIEHLER: What do you do in retirement, what do you do to keep busy?

MASON: Well, I work my yard and like I say, I make a small garden now. I used to make a big one, but after I retired, I just started making a small one. I go to the mall and talk to the guys. There's a lot of Korean War veterans that goes up to the mall. I go up there and talk to them, so I've enjoyed retirement. I missed it. When I first retired, about a year there, I kind of regretted I retired, but after that first year, why, I liked it real well.

PIEHLER: So, you initially missed work and the …

MASON: Huh?

PIEHLER: What, what did you miss, why did you initially regret retiring? Why did you initially regret that you retired?

MASON: Well, I missed the guys I worked with. Of course I go back over there and see them every once in a while.

PIEHLER: So, you've started to talk to a lot of Korean War vets and …

MASON: Yes.

PIEHLER: What do you guys talk about when you get together?

MASON: Well, we talk about different things. The outfit we was with, and what division we was with, and what part of the Korea was at. I mean you can talk to guys like that better than you can somebody who hadn't ever been in the service, or been over there. My cousin, like I say, I talk to him a lot. He was over there the same time I was, but he was in the 2nd Division. He was a medic.

PIEHLER: Well, we want to thank you very much for, for inviting us to your home.

MASON: You're welcome.

NIELSEN: Yes, definitely.

MASON: But I'm going to play you one on the banjo.

PIEHLER: Oh yes, that would be great.

NIELSEN: Definitely.

(Banjo Plays)

(Applause)

MASON: I wanted ... to do that for you.

PIEHLER: I really appreciate it. It's a first for an interview—the first person to perform musically.

MASON: Well, like I say, I've fooled with the banjo ever since 1939.

PIEHLER: Oh wow.

MASON: But you mentioned that and I wanted to do it.

PIEHLER: Oh no, I appreciate it.

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