

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH WALTER G. DENISE

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Walter G. Denise on March 25, 1997 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

Jennifer Lenkiewicz: ... and Jennifer Lenkiewicz.

KP: And I guess I would first like to ask you about your parents, starting with your father. Your father served in the calvary of World War I.

Walter Denise: Yes.

KP: Was he drafted?

WD: ... He was in the Guard, National Guard. And at that time he was in Chicago. He was grooming horses and, you know, when you're in the calvary you spend a lot of time with the horses. And then he came to ... go-- they were taking the unit overseas. And apparently, at that time, he was of not sufficient weight to qualify. They thought he'd be too light for the service. So he was released. I've never questioned him too much about it.

KP: When your father worked for W.R. Grace, did he work for W.R. Grace out in Chicago, Illinois?

WD: In the Mid-West area, yes. He was going from farm to farm with demonstrations of how the various fertilizers, including guano from South America, would improve their crop production. And he would even have tests in the corn fields and some other fields out there to show how the certain fertilizer effect would be. And he was able to sell quite a bit of fertilizer that way.

KP: Did your father grow up on a farm?

WD: Yes. He was raised on a farm in Freehold. Our family farm was started in 1712 in Monmouth County. And when dad came along, he had kind of sought his own living and his own experience in life. He graduated from Rutgers in 1910. [He] became involved with W.R. Grace throughout the Mid-West. And when his father passed on, well, then it [be]came incumbent upon him to come back and return to the farm operation, which he did. And I remember living on the old farm in Colts Neck Township. And also we lived up on Highway 33, right outside of Freehold; there's an old farmhouse there. And waiting for the trees to mature, 'cause we put out thousands of whips. And they had to be in perfect set rows. And Dad's idea was the rows had to be set such that if you shot a rifle, you could hit every stick in a row. And he was very fussy about that. [laughter] So we had to wait six to eight years before we get much of a production started. ... And in the meantime, we grew vegetables between the trees, ... some of which I don't like--tomatoes--and we had watermelons and cantaloupes. And I can't eat any of that today.

KP: Was that from eating too many or you never liked them?

WD: I just never acquired a taste for them. Some of it, you know, it was always there. And you got sick of it. So I can't eat it today.

...

KP: Your parents, how did they meet? Do you know?

WD: It was when he and mother were in Chicago. She was a contralto and I think she was doing some singing in different places and had an occasion and met. And it was about that time when dad was going to be released from the service, and he got the job in the Chicago area with W.R. Grace. And they decided to marry. And following along that line, mother and her mother, ... were Christian Scientists for years before that, and they thought they could convince my ... Dad to be [a] Christian Scientist. And he poo-pooed the idea, he says, "This is ridiculous." And she invited him to a lecture, and said that, "You ought to come and hear this fellah Paul Stark Seeley." ... He said, "Well, out of ... respect to you, I'll do it." But he says, "I don't know why I'm wasting my time." So he went, and he was healed of smoking, ... cold turkey, smoking. ... And then he attained a respect for it, became very, very ardent, in our teachings.

KP: What religious affiliation had your father been before?

WD: Dutch Reformed. [laughter]

KP: Oh so, there was a long Dutch Reformed ...

WD: Lineage, yes. Right. Our family moved from Holland in 1638, and down to Monmouth County in 1712. So that Dutch heritage has been in the family. As a matter of fact, there are two stained glass ... windows in the Reformed Church in Freehold, dedicated by the Denise family. And we don't say much when we go there; we just enjoy looking at them, and know that they were representative of our family. And I don't think that the people object to it. That they're-- they think someday they feel that maybe we'll come back. [laughter]

JL: Now your mother, she graduated from graduate school? In music?

WD: She took some training including in New York, the Walter Damrosh Studios in New York, too. And she was a soloist in our church, and she had done some musicals for the ... Women's Club and Sicilian Club in Freehold. So she was, you know, very talented in music, a lovely voice. We had a grand piano in our house. We have it now. But they ... had a long happy life. On the farm, Dad was kind of the boss and Mother took care of the ... some of the social requirements of ... some of the help that we would have. If they didn't have enough clothes, or food, or something, she took care of that. Made sure that things were taken care of.

KP: How many people would work on the farm?

WD: We would have as many as 150 migrants every summer. Which was one of the reasons I decided to change my occupation back in the ... early 60's.

KP: Because of ...

WD: It was just getting too overwhelming. I wanted more of an intellectual challenge, and instead of having to cope with that strain of life so much. We were good to them, but you were constantly bailing them out of jail, or getting them sobered up so they could work, or lending them money all the time. It just, I just felt it wasn't inspiring, intellectually challenging.

KP: Your father went to Rutgers, class of 1910. What did he tell you about Rutgers? Did he ever talk about Rutgers?

WD: Well, he talked about fraternity life a little bit. ... But he never talked much about ... the activities. He would always come to the reunions every year. And they were getting lesser numbers as the years progressed. And he says, "I don't know why I keep going back. These fellahs are so old anymore." [laughter]

KP: Did he ever take you to any reunions?

WD: ... Yeah, we came up together a couple times, on some of the reunions. And it was interesting to meet some of his crony friends, and they were very interesting people. I mean, he had some people who were, one of them was the Secretary of the Army of the United States. And one was affiliated with various other activities, very socially prominent in the community. So, it was interesting to meet these people.

KP: Do you think you were destined at an early age for Rutgers? Is that the family assumption?

WD: I never had an intention of going to college. I mean ... it just-- when I graduated from high school I was sixteen, five foot two, 105 pounds. So I was a shrimp. I didn't have a car ... I couldn't get my license until November of that year. So I spent a few months on a five-masted barkentine, the **USS Marsala**, learning to adopt to the rigors of naval discipline. And find that I got homesick in October, and I left. And then, shortly after I left, she went down for winter quarters in Florida, got caught in a hurricane, and was shipwrecked on the Virginia coast in 1939. So, you could see things occurring in my life, and said, "Now why did I get home sick? Or if I had been on board, would we have been [lost]?" Well, not lost; I think they were saved, but the ship was lost. Just completely shipwrecked.

KP: Had you always been interested in the sea growing up?

WD: I had a fascination for it. I read Moby Dick and some of the other sea stories, and [I] enjoyed it. It was fascinating. And I look back at it, I don't know why. It was just a childish fascination, I'm sure.

KP: Which you were able to act out enough, in a sense, take part in it, even if you realized after a while that you didn't want to [do] it.

WD: Well, I didn't know ... how I would adapt to it, but I just felt that there was-- ... I'm a home kid. A farm boy, who wanted to stay on the farm, really.

KP: So you really saw yourself as really not going to college and just staying back to work on the farm?

WD: I took some courses. I thought I was more in an engineering inclination rather than farming. And so I ... [would] take care of mechanical needs on the property. And I would map out the trees in the orchard. I had big maps that would show how many trees were in this row. And they were all plotted out, by varieties and numbers and everything else. And we would plant our horticultural program around these maps. And say, "Well, we want this area to be getting this kind of treatment. ... And when you get to these, these are where these various species ... are located. Go out there and find them." And we'd make new plantings. I would do them on maps as well, like on contour maps. We even did contour farming because my Dad worked very closely with the Ag Station, and he was on the board of directors of ... what is now Cook College.

KP: Cook College. Or then, it was New Jersey College of Agriculture.

WD: Correct. And he worked very closely with them, and when Blake was around-- it's a name that nobody knows of today, but he produced a lot of varieties of peaches that we adapted on our property and developed and ... marketed. And it worked out very well.

KP: It sounds like your father was fairly prosperous in the 1930s despite the Depression. Or was it more touch and go?

WD: Well, despite the fact that we had land, we weren't overly prosperous because it would be several years before you get enough to start working. ... He had a choice of buying two farms when he came back to help oversee the farm-- the family farm and expand and go into what he wanted to go into was fruit trees. And the first farm was the one in which the Denise family had settled in Monmouth County in 1712. The old ... house and everything. And I remember the house as a child, how people had altered ... and ripped out some of the beautiful old hickory or chestnut paneling and sold it out of the house to, you know, so they can have some money. If the house settled, ... the doors didn't open, why they'd saw off the bottom, and some door was chopped off about four or five inches. And you know, it kind of hurt you like that. But he had a choice to buy that farm or the old Brakley farm down the road further. The first farm was worth-- they were asking 7000 dollars, or 6000 dollars for it. No, no, no, sorry. No, ... the agent knew that it was a Denise homestead, and he was a Denise. He was interested in buying this farm. It was now 8000 dollars. He got a chance to go down and buy a little larger farm for 7000 dollars and ... develop that instead. And actually, the soil was better on the other, on the second farm we had. [laughter]

KP: I have to confess I have never been to Freehold, but it was, when you were growing up, it was very much an agricultural ...

WD: Oh yes, yes.

KP: ... community. I mean it was the county seat, but it was very much the ...

WD: That's true. And the more prosperous farmers lived in the ... town and had their farms on the outskirts. And that's pretty much what they do in Europe today. The farms are always outside the villages. But more prosperous farmers lived in nice streets like (Brickerhoff?) Avenue, Broad Street, Main Street, and just quite a transition as far as traffic is concerned today. Terrible transition. ... I remember when I was about seven to ten, we had no electricity. We had no running water, and we had a hand pump out in the front yard. And the outhouse was up by the barn, which was like 200 feet up the hill from the house. And I mean that's not very luxurious living today.

KP: But you still liked the farm?

WD: Oh yes.

KP: Even though ...

WD: The ground.

KP: Yes.

WD: And the space and the culture and so forth.

KP: What led your parents to get electricity? There must be ...

WD: ... REA Program came out and they put poles in. We were almost a mile in off the highway.

KP: So it was the REA that gave you ...

WD: REA. Rural Electrification Administration provided the electric wiring to our house. And they put [it] in for free. Even if they had to use just one bulb up there so that we could get electricity, which was really a bonus for us.

KP: Given the fact that your parents were Republicans, what did they think of this REA Program that was giving them electricity? They must have had some mixed feelings?

WD: Well, I don't-- there was nothing ever discussed about that to my knowledge. But ... WPA Program, we weren't very fond of Roosevelt. But ... WPA Program, we had them put a drainage system in for us, surface water drainage, where they cleared an area, and in some cases, provided cement or concrete embankments and so forth, to get the water to move in this direction, down that course, not in a stream, but just in this ... area way. So they worked hard on that.

KP: So your parents were not so fond of Roosevelt it sounds, but they were very fond of some of the things that the New Deal did.

WD: Well, it was kind of a participation program. I think that they felt that it was for the benefit of everyone. I don't think that the New Deal situation was very, went over very big with our family. I guess it was most Republicans at that time. There's a lot of philosophy that goes with that ... and politics, and I don't think it's proper to get involved with that.

JL: Now, you went to high school in Freehold?

WD: Yeah.

JL: Did you do any clubs or sports?

WD: I was on ... the wrestling team. And too small to be on the varsity squad. And I was on the team; I was 95 pounds or less. And when I graduated high school, at 105, I was in the Ag Club. I don't know what else it was, the Chess Club maybe. But I wasn't very socially active in the school thing because we were on the farm and I had to get a bus. And I remember sometimes, when I missed a bus, I had to walk to the high school two miles or two and a half miles. And I had to make sure; I had to walk a mile almost to get to the bus, to start with. And then walk another two miles to get into the ... high school.

KP: So you did not want to miss the bus, it sounds.

WD: Didn't miss it too often, no.

JL: So did you work on the farm over the summer?

WD: Oh yes. I worked during weekends and after school hours too. There was always something to do.

KP: What were the earliest farm chores that you remember growing up? And did you progress up the farm chore ladder?

WD: Mucking ... the stalls. We had cows and we boarded horses for some other people around the community. They would ... use these horses for heavy draft work. And these were Belgian Percherons, I believe. Quite large. They had hairy feet, above the legs at the lower legs were very hairy over their hooves. And big feet, I mean. ... One of my jobs was to take the horses down ... from the barn down to the pump. In front of the house there was an old trough, ... they would get the water. And I literary had to run to keep out from under their feet. I was really afraid I was going to get squashed by them. [laughter] But then I'd have to feed them some hay and ... the man was very sensitive to some things, and he'd think ... he thought the horses were allergic to something. So I had to spray the hay with some kind of a solution so they wouldn't get dust-- and muck the stalls, as I said before. We had cows. I had to milk the cows. We had turkeys, geese, and pigs and chickens. I mean the whole fowl lot.

KP: It sounds like most of the food you ate came from the farm?

WD: Oh yeah.

KP: You were pretty self-sufficient.

WD: It was my job to go out and eliminate the chicken's neck and head, and take care of de-feathering it and so forth. That's why, I guess, I probably don't like chicken today. [laughter]

JL: That's what my mother says also.

WD: Yeah. Yeah.

JL: She lived on a farm.

WD: Yeah.

JL: You were raised with a strong religious backing. How did it influence your thoughts and the way you went through high school? Or did it not at that point?

WD: It didn't at that time.

JL: Just when you got to the military?

WD: Yeah. As the saying goes, "The man's extremity is God's opportunity." And until then I was under the aegis of the family. And I didn't feel any responsibility in that way. I tried to be a good society member, and that was generally it. I fooled around too much!

KP: You mentioned you had this experience on the boat, and then you decided to come home and work on the farm. What was your family's reaction and your own reaction to events in Europe in the late 1930s and early 1940s?

WD: I think we were appalled by it. It was around '37 when we saw the Hindenburg, Von Hindenburg, the dirigible, the night that it went down in Lakehurst. We saw it just flying over, and just a little while later, I think, we heard it on the radio that there was a catastrophe on the air show. And turns out that the commander of the ship was a fellow by the name of Pruss, who was a relative of my grandmother's, believe it or not. And so we felt badly about what had happened. As far as the other things, the atrocities that started to take place in 1939 in [the] occupation of Poland and Czechoslovakia, but Czechoslovakia first, was abhorrent.

KP: How much were you aware of them at the time? How closely did you follow the news of events?

WD: ... We were aware of it, strongly aware of it. But we weren't concerned too much at that time because we didn't know how far it was going to go. We just thought, well, immediately, we're somewhat down. And then that's ...

KP: Did you think ... oh I'm sorry.

WD: ... I was going to say that we became more and more concerned as time progressed.

KP: When did you think or did you think the United States would get involved in this war?

WD: I thought that we should've been involved, in a way, because we knew that England was going to be overrun.

KP: So it was really only after the fall of France that you became interested?

WD: Yes. Then we realized this ... has gone too far. A lot of innocent people were being killed, you know, with their aggressiveness and so forth. And you know, ... you look back at the whole thing, at that stage of when they had just taken over France, took Paris. And if they had gone to England, at that time, instead of trying to tackle Russia, they could've taken the whole world. I mean they were that much of a threat. I think in many respects good wins out, wills out. And you can't-- evil can't succeed forever. Sometimes you're not patient enough with it.

KP: You had mentioned your family was of Dutch descent.

WD: Yes.

KP: How did the invasion of ...

WD: Holland?

KP: ... Holland affect them?

WD: Well, I don't know that they had any stronger inclination there than anywhere else, but we visited Holland. I know dad had gone back to Holland a couple of times. And he went to the archives in Den Hague to look up the family and the history of the family. And so we would go down to the ... lower country and see where our family originated from. And it was very interesting to see that. And after ... the war my wife and I, on our 25th wedding anniversary, went back to Europe to tour the country. We went to Holland, especially. We went to the ... windmill country area and toured the country socially. And we went to a church in Rotterdam. I think it was Amsterdam. I guess ... it was Rotterdam. And there we were able to meet some people there. And the things that they endured during the war! They came [and] took their bell, the church bell. And anything of value they took out. And they--in their means of repatriation--they give them ... not the value of the bell, but the value of the metal ... in a molten material. In, you know, just raw material, not as a bell. And so they really didn't do much in the way of repatriation in that way. But they had an usual experience that ... I think is important to

relate-- that during the war they never were deprived of having the services together. And some of the books that we use for reading daily were able to be, not necessarily smuggled in, but they were there, and they were able to be distributed there because a German soldier who was in charge of this occupation of this ... community-- his mother was a Christian Scientist. And ... he would say, "If this package comes in, it is not to be opened." And so they were able to continue four, five years during the war without interruption at people's homes or whatever it was because they weren't allowed to congregate in any church anymore. I guess you know about that too. So they ... were able to continue throughout the whole duration of the war. They have some bitter feelings about the Germans, there's no question about it. Maybe not as strong as other people might have had, but ... the German people are not readily acceptable in most parts of Europe yet, on the Continent. When we rented a car over there, we rented it in Holland. I'd venture to say, [we] would not have had the good experiences we'd had if we'd rented it in Germany.

KP: Really, you're ...

WD: Oh I was convinced of that. That ... 25 years after the war. They were not accepted yet. ... They just had hated the Germans for what they did. And I don't blame 'em. I'd have hated them too. And I think the atrocities they imposed on several of our Jewish friends were entirely intolerable. But in any event, when we got to crossing borders in the car [it was] look at the passport, look at the car, go! And people with German cars, they'd read their passports. Go in there, study them and everything else. And they were, just making them uncomfortable, I guess. But we never had any trouble like that. Thank God for America. [laughter] You can see I'm indoctrinated.

KP: Where were you when you learned Pearl Harbor was attacked? Were you in ...

WD: Well, I was on the beach with some friends, and we heard that. And ... [long pause]

KP: Do you want to take a break?

WD: No, it's alright. ... I had a lot of friends. ... I thought what a dastardly thing that was, that we had the information to prevent it, and had we thought that we could trust. And that's why I feel there's only one thing you can trust, and that's God. And in this case here, it hit home. I think because we were going to be involved, ... needlessly. And I just dreaded what was going to happen. And I just knew, also, we couldn't tolerate it, we had to do something about it. And I just couldn't stay at home after that. And that's about the time I decided I would go into the marines. And they wouldn't have me. Well, they lost out. So ... hence my desire to get into the service and do something rather than stay at home and watch it happen, or hear about this happen at home. I, in good conscience, I just couldn't have stayed home.

KP: In reading your written account though, you really had a lot of ambivalence about having to kill. While you felt that obligation to serve, you also felt it was important to hold that it was really wrong to kill people.

WD: Yes. And people criticize me for not staying in the medics or doing something that I could feel that I was-- and I just didn't feel right about that. I was a Christian Scientist. We don't believe in taking medicine, or doctors. .. Hey, doctors are great people, some of my best friends are doctors. And I have nothing to say against them, but I just feel the philosophy of what they work with is a little different than what we've been raised to do-- believe. And I just ... didn't want to be in the medical field in any way, and I think [it was] because of this fact that I was an enemy alien. I think they felt, "Well we'll corner him off over there." Well, I didn't want to be cornered off. I just felt that I wanted to be a participant and not in an ... indirect way, but in a direct way. I felt that I had a responsibility to do. And I, that's the reason I got out of the medics, very honestly. And then after I got out of ASTP they put me back in the medics again. I said, "Whoa, wait a minute!" After all this engineering training, I thought you'd send me to the engineers not to the medics, you know. So I guess this thing kind of haunted me, and I didn't like to be haunted like that.

KP: Because it sounds like you also had real tension with serving as a medic, in terms of Christian Science principles?

WD: Well, serving as a medic I could've done it. But you're treating with medication, and that was a kind of violation of my early education. I just feel that I couldn't-- I can't mix the two. I found that the "first aid" training I had in the military, and the Boy Scouts came to good, ... especially on that one night. There were several occasions where-- not that I was indifferent, but I didn't take in the dire picture and pin it on him and say, "He's got an awful chance of ever trying to get through." I said, "No." And I'm thinking to myself, "He can be taken care of, and taken care of well." And he can't succumb, period. And so maybe in a way it's a kind of a contradiction. But I felt that I still served in [a] medical capacity, but not as a medic. ...

JL: I actually wanted to ask you about Boy Scout training. You mentioned that a couple of times. Did you really learn a lot from it that you used in the field?

WD: Oh yes, oh yes. And we did camping, and hiking, and learned how to do-- tie knots. And you know, you go for your merit badges. And you have a certain amount of discipline there. But I ... stay[ed] in ... until I got to be a Second Class Scout. Never even, I was never First Class. I never made it. I didn't stay with it long. But the thing was [that] on the farm I had to go, be transported about two miles where they meet in school, and someone had to bring me home. So mother or dad would take me out ... and then the scout leader would bring me back. And it meant some ... travel time for the scoutmaster to get me back home and so forth, so. But I guess I lost interest in it because it was quite an ordeal for them, everybody, to be involved with it. But they ... enjoyed it. We still see the kids today. When I came back from overseas, I helped with the Scouts and took them on camping trips, and I see these Boy Scouts every once ... [in] a while and say, "Boy remember that trip?!" [laughter] And we went up to ... the Water Gap, Delaware Water Gap and did some hiking up through the mountains up there. And I took them ... camping in the middle of winter. In the middle of January, when it's freezing. And we hiked fifteen miles to the camp. And then the next day we were gonna ... hike back. Well the water froze in our canteens that night. ... You know, sleeping in our cot, our ...

KP: Pup tents, yes.

WD: Well no, it was a bag, sleeping bag. ... But the kids remembered that, you know, their little tough experiences and made them realize what they can do and what they can't do. So the Boy Scout treatment, training, was they would say we want you to get to such and such a point. You'd be out marching through the woods, and blaze your way if you have to, or to find your way. And be able to find your way back. So there was a lot of that; Scout training was excellent, too. And then, mapping the farm, and a few things like that, all kind of tied in.

KP: You mentioned you had problems getting into the marines. Did you expect to have any problems getting into the army as an enemy alien even though you had become a citizen?

WD: Well I ... the alien business didn't have any concern. I had to have a waiver, though, for glasses, and they said I had a heart problem. And that I encountered in the Boy Scouts and when I wrestled and so forth. When I got to college here back in '46, I wanted to go back to sports. And I wanted to go out for the 150-pound football team, or ... the JV crew. And they wouldn't let me do either. I said, "Why?" "You have a heart problem." I said, "You got to be kidding." So I said, "Well, what can I do? I want to be doing something in ... sports." He [said], "Well, what would you like to do?" I said, "Well, maybe I can wrestle." "Sure go right ahead. Hey wait a minute." [laughter] Why, I don't understand this reasoning, if I can't play football, why can ... I play-- why can I wrestle? Well, anyway, I did wrestle here, the couple years I was here. Anyway, I got over that heart problem I had through prayer again. And I haven't had any problems since.

KP: I should just comment you look in great health.

JL: Yeah ...

KP: If you had this heart problem ...

WD: I'm playing tennis, ... twice a week. And I don't like golf, but I was playing racquetball until a couple years ago. But, I found it conflicted with my tennis. It's entirely wrist action, racquetball, and tennis is a full follow through. So and beside that, the fellah I was playing racquetball ball with hurt his shoulder or his elbow and couldn't play anymore. Well, maybe I ought to quit too.

JL: You mentioned in your memoirs that you used humor a lot. And I know I am bringing it up again, you mentioned Stars and Stripes magazine.

WD: It was a newspaper, yeah.

JL: Yes, the newspaper. And you mentioned something about a GI cartoon? Could you elaborate?

WD: Well, ... GI Joe, I don't know if you ever saw him, or saw some articles, Bill Mauldin. And it was just, it was a lot about army life all the time. And some of the cartoons were very, very much at home. And I ... can't cite them at all, really, but, you know, you'd see one and everyone would've read it and seen it. And then ... things get a little tense, and we'd say, "Hey, how about Joe today?" [laughter] "Ah yeah!" They'd laugh. I mean you ... bring it in as a kind of enlightenment of the situation because sometimes you're sitting there, and you're just concerned about what's going to happen.

KP: It sounds like you thought Bill Mauldin had really captured a lot of your experiences?

WD: Oh yes. Oh yes. Very much so. And these two old gruff characters, I mean now, they were pretty earthy. But I mean for the average mud hole GI he hit it right on the head every time.

KP: You had mentioned that your father had gone back to Holland before the war. Did you also go with him? Or had you traveled much before the war?

WD: No, no, no.

KP: How much?

WD: ... The only traveling we did that-- we went to the Chicago World's Fair in 1933. And the New York World's Fair in '39. And I guess, Florida once. But we didn't do an awful lot. We didn't have, you know, too much to work with as far as money.

KP: What did you think of the World's Fair? It must have been terribly exciting?

WD: Very exciting. It was fabulous, fabulous. And I remember going on the roller coaster. And the first climb was way up, and your first down is coming down over Lake Michigan. And all of a sudden you'd turn; ... you'd swear you were gonna go in the lake. Well, I got a little sick on that. [laughter]

KP: In joining the army, you saw a good part of the United States, partly because of ASTP, but also because of your training.

WD: Yes.

KP: You didn't want to be an officer, at least you didn't think OCS was the ...

WD: Well, ... at that time, I didn't feel, personally, I'd been in the army long enough to have enough experience as an enlisted man, to go out and lead [men]. I think there are a lot of officers who have not had enough training with enlisted men, as an enlisted man to have that experience and know what they think, and how they feel about things. And they come out there, and they're very dictatorial and demanding and insulting and so forth. And really never understood what the GI was going through because there are some personal problems that they're carrying, they lost a mother or a father.

KP: In relating this, it sounds like you experienced this as a GI, in terms of some of the 90 day wonders? You seem to be saying that it would not have hurt these officers for them to have spent a year as enlisted men?

WD: That's true, and especially Lieutenant Harrop when we got into combat. He was the guy who was a GI guy every minute. But under the first attack he was gone. I [said], "What happened?" "Well no, we don't know." Well, he ... took off because he was afraid. Got scared and left. Well, if he'd been down in the pits with the men, I don't think he could've done that, knowing that they needed him. And when he came back, he had captain's bars, and I guess that's in there too. And he came to me, and he said that, "Denise, I don't understand these men, why they don't talk to me." I said, "... Captain," I says, "I'm gonna recommend that you leave now." "Well, I mean, what have I done? I ... couldn't help what I did, you know." [I said], "Well, as ... far as they're concerned, you're a deserter. And they don't have any respect for you." "They can't blame me about that," [he said]. I said, "That's true. Why don't you keep on going back." He became a general's aide. Hey, you don't flaunt your captain's bars in ... combat. I mean that's the kind [of] guy he was. He had his bars up here. In combat ... you never knew who was an officer because they covered it up. They didn't want the enemy taking pot shots at the officers. And that's what they were doing.

KP: But he wore his bars?

WD: He wore his bars right out there for broad wide open, at the front there. Just look at me, look ... what happened to me.

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

WD: That ... I don't understand. But that, I think that position of general's aide demanded a captain's ... rank. He wasn't even first lieutenant, he was a captain. From second lieutenant to captain.

KP: Do you know how he got this promotion? Did he know someone?

WD: I have no idea. I think they needed everyone they could get. And I suppose the general says, "Well if he's my aide I can keep an eye on him, or something like that." I don't know.

KP: Yeah.

WD: I just have to rationalize it. And I'm not good at rationalization sometimes.

KP: You got into the ASTP Program, which it sounds like you enjoyed a great deal.

WD: It was a training, but then there was a reservation in my mind. I'm really not in this for education; I'm here to work in the field somewhere. But I thought, "Well, at least maybe this way I could get out of the medics." And so ... the experiences were good.

KP: I mean, you attended two universities as part of the ASTP, Denver and ...

WD: Yeah, well, the Denver experience was at a Jesuit school. And there were well-trained teachers. I mean, they were qualified, ... especially in the mathematics and history departments. ... A couple of departments there were very good teachers. I didn't enjoy having to be on that kind of a campus. I would've rather have been on a regular college campus where religion was not played. ... Everybody has their own ideas about that, and I don't mean to denounce anybody, but it's just that the teaching was not anything that I wanted to be involved with. And there was ... an attempt [on] several times to try to have us come to ... the Grotto, and so forth.

KP: They would have liked it if everyone attended Mass. I think it sounds like?

WD: Well, I don't know what they'd like or not. And ... I just didn't want to ...

KP: Yes.

WD: ... I was there for a reason. And the teachers, as I said, were very good. And they knew their topics. And that's what I was there for, so. And I think they probably thought, "Huh!" What's this guy know about God?" And, ... that's all right. ... What I have is for me, and, if it works for me, I would hope it would work for everybody, but only as they see it happen for someone else.

KP: What did you think of Denver?

WD: I thought Denver, at that time, was lovely. I felt very encouraged about being in that area, but on campus you don't get out much at all. ... We did get a day or two off here and there. And you'd go to someplace. I was in Boulder and I was in Colorado Springs. And I got to see some of ... Colorado, like Pike's Peak, and it was a nice area, I enjoyed that one. I went to Leadville. And at that time, I thought Colorado was very nice. And I still think it's nice today, but parts of the mountains in Colorado are very expensive.

KP: Well ...

WD: 300 dollars a night to-- hey come on! To go skiing! [laughter]

KP: Because the Denver you saw was really just above the frontier town almost ...

WD: Oh no, no, no.

KP: But it was very small. I mean, I think the current Denver ...

WD: Well, they had trolley cars and ...

KP: Yeah.

WD: I mean, it was quite a city in the 1940s.

KP: Yes, someone once told me that she had remembered Denver of 50 years ago where you would still have some tumbleweed go through the town. But that might have been ...

WD: Well, ... you ... had to go out in the ... country to see that. ...

KP: Yes. Now Denver, you found, was a pretty sophisticated ...

WD: It was a city, a sophisticated city, yes. I remember the trolley cars coming down to the center of town.

KP: Which it sounds like you took those down to the ...

WD: On occasion, ... nostalgically, yeah. No, it was, I went back to El Paso, ... one of my first bases. We were there about a year or so ago. Oh, it's awful! Awful! I mean I thought it was a quaint little town, small houses, small lots, beautiful lawns, irrigated. Went back to the hospital where I was stationed there; I couldn't recognize anything. And now, it just ... seemed run down, nothing picked up; it looks dirty! And as we were driving out of El Paso, looking to the south, we saw a huge bank of smog, industrial smog. I thought to myself, ... how could I have ever gotten nostalgic about El Paso, you know? But I did. ... One of the things I used to do was in these various areas. I'd try to get out and do some mountain climbing, which I did in El Paso and around Denver and Colorado Springs. And I just got out and climbed mountains, and sometimes, most of the time, I'm by myself because "Hey I don't want to go there I want to go up [to] town and see the girls or something. Forget it." [laughter] I wanted to be out with nature and commune with God.

KP: The army can be very unaccommodating to people of different religious faiths.

WD: That's true.

KP: And it sounds like there was quite a tension there that you felt in terms of your desire to serve your country. But, also, the army could be very unaccommodating.

WD: Well, the army was unaccommodating if you had anything that you wanted to do in your own religious beliefs. Everyone was either Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, period. And you had either P, C, or J, on your license-- on your dog tag, not license plate. Dog tag. And they didn't have any recognition for exemption from medical treatments of any kind. You had to go the route, period.

KP: In your case, not only did you have to go through the medical treatment, but they put you in the medics which, really, sort of added to that tension.

WD: Yeah, well.

KP: I mean, of all the things they could've done with you.

WD: Well, I think that is where they were putting conscientious objectors. And I wasn't a conscientious objector. I didn't feel that I was-- they wanted people as a pacifist, maybe, to be there. Maybe I am a pacifist at heart, but I was-- certainly was not a conscientious objector. I was an objector to any kind of war, of any kind. But I'm not going out to do anything to avoid going to it. I wouldn't run away from this country for anything. And that's why I can't stomach Clinton. I'm sorry, but that's, anybody who's been in the military doesn't have much regard for what he did. That's politics, and I'm not going to [go into it].

KP: You also went to Iowa, I mean the State University.

WD: Wonderful campus.

KP: Yes.

WD: ... It was a kind of an Ag part of the campus there. We had all kinds of good food. There was a nurse's training school there. It was always nice to have, to see some of the girls once in a while.

KP: It sounds like, in reading your accounts, you had some mixed feelings about ASTP so abruptly ending.

WD: ... I was sorry to see it close because I didn't come to a termination of my studies. ... But I took it as: well, it has to close down because the demand for officers and enlisted men is much stronger now, and I can't afford to have some guys being trained and losing men in the European or Pacific Theaters. No, I realized that that had to come about.

KP: Because some people I have interviewed have been less understanding. They have been pretty bitter about it. That they were made this promise that they would be allowed to finish their education, and, all of a sudden, one day, they say, "Well it's over." We're not even ...

WD: ... C'est la vie or c'est la guerre. We often said, "C'est la guerre." Such is war. Right?

KP: And you had to go back to the medics. [laughter] Which was also, I mean, you mentioned ...

WD: Well, I think they looked at my medical contact or experiences and they decided, well, since I'm in this outfit, maybe I should go to the medics. Litter bearer at first and then an ambulance driver. And I said, "It's too bad I don't feel, in a way, that I want to feel in doing what I really feel I should be doing. And I couldn't carry a gun. Not that I would use it, necessarily, even as a medic, but you know, you feel ... these people are defenseless. And they're getting shot

because they got a cross on their helmet, and that's just a target for the enemy. They're gonna knock him out.

KP: You sense that even before going overseas?

WD: Oh yes.

KP: That being defenseless was not a smart thing to do, even if you were ...

WD: Well, for me, I didn't want to be in that position. Again I was dealing with casualties and so forth all the time. And having to medicate. We know that people can survive ... a terrible ordeal without medication. This fellow that had both legs blown off never even passed out. According to material law, medical law, he should've been dead with what he had to sustain for hours out there. And I can't help but feel that prayer helped that young man that night.

JL: I actually wanted to go back just a little bit, you got your naturalization papers.

WD: At Fort Bliss, Texas.

JL: What exactly went through you?

WD: Exhilaration. Exhilaration. Now I am truly American. I got rid of the stigma of being an enemy alien. You have no idea. People who are raised in this country have no idea what they have here. ... What this country is for everybody. And I think we're coddling too many people. Work this country's built on what we call a work ethic. And we're gradually losing that, and it's wrong. Wrong. Too many social programs. I think social programs are necessary. We had people on our-- when I was a young boy that were destitute, lost a job, had nothing. People in the community helped. And now they say, "Well let Uncle Sam take care of it." Well, I don't think that's right. I think when there's a problem in the family, the family ... takes the brunt and does it right there. And here you got people who have children and don't even contribute to the home, and so forth. I don't, I can't abide that. It's just wrong, that a man could go around and have children by different women and not even ... be responsible for anything for that family. It's not right.

JL: I also wanted to ask you: when you were, I guess, in training, I think in El Paso, you had a situation with a couple of men. Was there a lot of hostility among the men?

WD: I think there was some subdued hostility. When you are cadre--cadre meaning the permanent party--when you are cadre, you resent new people coming in. And ... more training and so forth. But I think they also resented, ... maybe the intellectual capacity of ... some of the trainees. I think they were probably second, third-grade-level-educated people and ... were just envious of anything. And they were going to do anything they can to make their life miserable and so on. Cadre men, some of the training, all the non-coms today who are training, tend to get a little officious and overbearing in their, and you hear it in the paper all the time now, their abusiveness and so forth. It's uncalled for, but I think a lot of it has to do with their educational

background, social background. ... That shouldn't be, but it is. It's a fact. We tried to, not have to, have to cope with it. But in the military you're thrown in together, and this was a situation ... you'd never expected. And when people drink, they tend to lose their control and their rationality. And I think that's all it was. It was an underlying of feeling about that, and it was being acted out. And this one guy was resisting, and I thought, "God ... why can't you keep your mouth shut. You're making it worse." I mean he was almost ready to haul off and hit the guy, you know. I said, "Go ahead, you got yourself in this trouble, go get out of it." You know, and that was wrong too. But I almost got it too. But I realize I had to, wait a minute, "Hey God, get me out of this." And the whole thing just vanished. And I even mention it in there, and I use it when I have been teaching Sunday school. Don't expect an apology. I mean, of course, you got to get it. ... This guy's got to apologize for what he did; he did something wrong. And I say to myself, "If you think what happened that night was so real and so drastic, and you try to raise yourself above it, you can't dwell on that. To expect an apology was kind of making it more real. And you're developing more resentment and everything else with it. Forget it, it's past, you're done." It's a different philosophy, I guess, than a lot of people have, but ...

JL: To go back to when you were a medic and you wanted to get out of it and go into the infantry, you were threatened with a court martial a number of times.

WD: [laughter] Those threats, I'm sure, were just airborne verbalizations of nothing.

JL: Okay, so did you think ...

WD: I thought ...

JL: Did you have courage to get through it? Or how did you go around the court martial threats? Would you just pretend that they were nothing?

WD: Well, it just, it kind of disappeared. ... I was concerned about it for a long time because I tend to be a little bit more conscientious. And if I'd done something wrong, sure I should be punished. But I didn't feel I did anything wrong, on two cases.

JL: That's why I asked because there was like two different ...

WD: Yeah, the third case was really wrong on my part. However, I think I was exonerated. I never knew that I was because I felt, ... I brought out the movie. I forgot the name of the movie now. But in any event, I felt that ... in this case here, I don't think they knew. I don't think they had a cold cut case that they could convict me. And that fella held it against me for a long time after that. But the fact was that he had no business being down there. And the fact that we lost some men ... on that raid that night made it more evident that if it went to a court martial trial they would've lost the case. Or they would've thrown the case out. "A Few Good Men" was the name of the movie. That was a marine story. But the other court martials, I think, were just threats.

KP: I think you used the term, "A lot of hot air."

WD: Yes.

KP: You learned, eventually you learned the army, some of it's bluster.

WD: Yes. Well, they throw out, I think that you learn that they throw that out as a means of-- to curb you from ... your present thought of activity. ... We were very much aware of the Articles of War, and what we had to do, and what we weren't suppose to do. Those army regulations could be made to stick, but I don't know that they could be made to stick if I went to a court martial trial about wearing out a pair of boots.

KP: Yes, right.

WD: I said, "Come on." I mean, I couldn't get 'em exchanged at my induction station. I'd been there for 30 days, and ... I wear out a pair of shoes. And now I can't get 'em exchanged; I only get one pair. [sighs] And then the other one was going over a sergeant's head to get out of the medics. And that one I had the full support of a battalion commander. Yeah, ... we get abused in the service.

JL: You were then put in Company K, is that correct?

WD: Yes.

JL: When you got out of the medics?

WD: Yes.

JL: What were your assignments and your rank?

WD: I was a private and shortly thereafter I became PFC. I mean, that's after two years of the service. I lost my rank to go to the ASTP, and I had big PFC rank, you know, one bar ... one rocker. And it was four dollars a month, though. That was a lot of money. [laughter] ... K Company only because they had the best mess sergeant. My job was first assigned to a platoon, to a squad, as a scout for the squad. I don't know why they thought I should be made a scout, other than maybe I had some farm training, you know, having been raised on a farm and maybe because ... I had a higher army score than they did, than some of the others did. Maybe I would have more intelligence-- I don't know. I'm just surmising. But in any event, from that I became a scout for the platoon. And got ... special training because I didn't have much in field training. But I ... was developing now and getting a lot of special training, with special, with all kinds of weaponry and field maneuvers and training and so forth. And all that added to my skills when I got overseas.

JL: And you went overseas with Company K?

WD: Yep. Yeah. And stayed with 'em 'till I went to school and got my commission, came back, and then I was assigned to Company I. I became a platoon leader then, and that was [at] the end of the war. So, some of things that we saw coming back were grotesque. The army, the prison camps, were awful things to see. There was an attempt to try to keep sanitation in order under control there, and there was no fence in this area. They were just dominated by four machine guns in the corners. They went across here; they're gonna get shot going through. Well, these fellahs were prisoners. There ... [were] thousands of them there. And they could've surged through that line and gone, but I think they felt, "Hey, why should I go and get involved any further?" They were Polish, Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, all kinds of foreign ... people who were brought in and given a rifle and said, "You're fighting for the Germans now!" And I don't think they really wanted-- some of them didn't want to fight. We were fortunate that way. We did run into a lot of SS troops. They're special trained troops. They're tank, you know, the tank brigades. They were gung ho troops. But a lot of times, when we caught, captured kids, twelve, fifteen-year-old kids, because ... the Germans were getting very desperate, [would] take anybody they could. ... He had to know that this was a futile cause, for his self-aggrandizement. And why he didn't realize it sooner, I don't know. But he sure involved many, many people. [What] was it total? I heard six million; I've heard twenty million people killed in World War II.

JL: I just want to go back a little bit. When you went overseas what was the experience like on the ship? You were on for eleven days?

WD: Yeah.

JL: What was that like?

WD: Well, we were thirteen deep. And that would be about, ... not quite, twice the height for this ceiling. And we had these racks, about one and half spaces ... here between racks, they're pipe racks. And rope and cloth bottoms, and they were folded up every morning. And you just sat around ... in the hold because, you know, we were in a convoy. And we had no way of getting out on deck to get air. And ... it gets stenchy down there, just gross. But every once in a while, they let us up, I guess, maybe, ten minutes a day, move around on the deck and go back down again. If ... it was safe because we were always under likelihood of attack by submarines. And we'd hear these depth charge[s] being lobbed off of some of these TDs or what they were out there and explode under, to ward off any submarine attack. We never saw any submarines, but we were down below all the time. [laughter] I like to be upstairs. So after we were out a day or two, I asked to be put on deck duty. And that meant working around, doing things on the deck. And that way there I got an extra meal. Instead of two meals a day, I got three meals. ... And then being out on the deck, and being able to get some of the fresh air.

KP: And you had experience aboard a ship.

WD: Yes.

KP: An oil ship admittedly, but still you ...

WD: Yeah, yeah. But that ship was different than this.

KP: Yes, yes.

WD: ... You were in with thousands of people on the ship aboard there. And the bunks were, as I said, were so close you couldn't lie on your side. You had to lie flat on your back. If you lie on your side, you're already poking your elbows in the guy above you. That's how tight it was.

KP: How much gambling? Was there any gambling going over?

WD: Not going over.

KP: Really?

WD: No.

KP: Then that would have to ...

WD: I was not aware of any. I doubt if there would've been any.

KP: So that would be on the trip home?

WD: On the trip home. Oh man! That was rampant. [laughter] It was really rampant. That was on the Queen Elizabeth but that was, as I said, rampant on board. ... In the order of the day was to suppress it. You know, control it a little bit. There's no way you can control it. ... You know how long the Queen Elizabeth is; it's over a thousand feet long. You'd go all the way down and all the way back. Well, you don't have to go but ten feet, and they're back to gambling back here. [laughter] I mean, come on. I think they just wanted to keep us busy. We were seven of us in a single stateroom, which is not, well, not quite as big as this room, with lower ceilings. That was a stateroom.

KP: Seven people, yes.

WD: ... A single stateroom for seven. And there were either double and triple decker bunks. So we had seven officers in this one stateroom, which was designed for a couple or single person, coming back. So ... R-H-I-P, do you know what that means?

JL: No.

WD: Rank has its privileges. And the privileged was to stay in the stateroom, with ... six other guys. But anyway, ... it was a blessing coming back, it was wonderful. Four days, the Statue of Liberty. What a view!

KP: You talked a good bit about your training because you, in a sense, had double training. You had training as part of the medics, you had this sort of basic training without weapons ...

WD: Yes.

KP: And then you went through very extensive infantry training.

WD: Yes.

KP: And you have talked a good deal about combat in your written memoirs. Overall, how effective was your training, do you think?

WD: Oh I think it was very effective. Fortunately, we didn't have to utilize some of it; that bayonet training we didn't have to use.

KP: And gas training.

WD: Gas mask[s]-- we got to a point where we just threw them away. And we used a flexible hose to put around our dog tags to keep them from making noise. And you look at any GI, if he had the tags hanging out they were always wrapped with this piece of rubber. And which was good, it was quiet. Why didn't they issue just ... these protectors because you'd hear these dog tags jangling anytime you move.

KP: How interesting. You are the first person to mention this. I am sure it was probably common knowledge, but you are the first person that mentioned that. How common was that known on the line to do that with your dog tags?

WD: Everybody was doing it.

KP: When did you learn to do this?

WD: After a month or two, when we were on line, I guess.

KP: So all of a sudden you realized this is what we could use the gas mask for.

WD: When you go out on patrols, you're saying, "What can I do to make things quiet?" And then, oh yeah, so and so did this, and I mean it was just common knowledge. Everybody did it. And they used to cite the Articles of War about leaving our gas masks, you know, here and there. Hey, we had no use for them, and they're a nuisance. If you're going out on patrol, you certainly don't want to have this big bag, which is like a purse, a big purse, carrying along with you all the time. You got enough to-- we had to do special things. We never-- if we had a bayonet, we would have it in our boot. That would be the only location. You couldn't have it in the scabbard because even a bayonet in the scabbard is gonna make noise if you hit something. You couldn't take your canteen cup, or mess kit with you because they'd rattle. You didn't wear a helmet because if you hit brush it's gonna make noise. You just did everything you could to make it absolutely silent. And then you'd be walking through the brush and then, all of a sudden, "crack" goes a twig or something like that. Oh!

KP: People who have been on the line have told me that it's a very disoriented feeling. You often have a very limited view. You only see, literally, what is in front of you and possibly what is in back of you. And you are always very narrow in outlook.

WD: And you always want to know what the big picture was. At least, I did.

KP: Yes.

WD: ... Why are we here? What's going on, on the other side of us? What's going on outside of that area? No, we want to know what the big picture [is] we never got much of that.

KP: But also being on patrol, you really don't know where anything is because you are, in a sense, stumbling around looking for things.

WD: Well ... you have [an] inkling. ... We studied maps. I know contours, you know, with my eyes shut. And the maps also showed woods, and you knew where telephone poles would be going. So you were able to identify with certain features along the skyline because you didn't-- you'd have a compass but you didn't dare wear the compass with the face up; you wore it face down. So it was always unexposed, and you'd go with the compass like this, anything that had any kind of light. This is where the Germans were ingenious in many ways. They had ... the potato masher hand grenade, which ... looked like a potato masher and until you turned and you pulled. And what happened, that wire pulled some chemical, and that ... fused the hand grenade. And it made no noise at all. Our hand grenade, you'd pull the pin and you hold the hand grenade in your hand. And, when you're ready to use it you let the handle fly, and you count, "One thousand, one one thousand two, one thousand three," and then, "phooey!" And hoped it had a four-second or a five-second fuse. And most of the time it was okay, [laughter] because if you ... threw it too soon, they could throw it back at you. And that's what we were ... concerned about. Potato mashers you had no idea, what-- and I don't think they even knew how long that fuse was going to ... run in that potato masher.

KP: You talked at length in your memoir about your weaponry, but also the German weaponry. And, I guess, one of the things I have read is that American GIs were told that they were to have the best of everything. And you realized, at least in your memoirs, and, at the time, I think that a great deal of the German stuff was far better, at least some individual items.

WD: Well, there were certain things. The 88 cannon they had on their tanks, as well as their field artillery, were superior to ours. They had a flash arrester on theirs for one thing. But not only that, but it had a lower trajectory than our shells. Higher velocity, lower trajectory. ... Meaning this, ... they were deadly accurate. The machine guns were firing, ... our machine guns were firing at the rate of 600 rounds a minute, theirs were at 1300 rounds a minute. Brrr! And every half a minute, if they were under continuous fire, every half a minute or every minute, they would have to replace their barrels, their machine guns ... barrels would be red hot. So red that you could see 'em at nighttime. ... [They] had to change the barrels, and put a new barrel in. We didn't have that. We didn't need it. Our air-cooled machine guns were, as I said, about 600

rounds a minute. Hey, how much ... ammunition [do] you want to throw out there? So our machinery was good, but their machine gun was higher velocity and stuff.

KP: Were you let down that America always did not have the best equipment as you'd been promised?

WD: There were times when we didn't have enough ammo; sometimes not any practically. And if the enemy knew that, ... we'd have been in serious trouble. If we were on the move, it was difficult as part of logistics that kept equipment supplies up to the front lines. So you couldn't extend out too far. In a way, the Battle of the Bulge was a little problem that way, in that they were extended out there. And we were also on an extension down in our area, and we had to withdraw, at that time, Battle of "North Wind." But ... there's always that trouble of getting out too far. Patton experienced this; the French armored experienced it. They'd get out so far, and then they ran out of gasoline. And to get the gasoline up to 'em in their forward march is difficult, especially if you're under artillery fire. So there were times that we ... didn't have-- we asked for some cover on our attacks. "I'm sorry, we don't have any ammo." Well they were saving it to repel an attack rather than use it as a cover for our attack. And our tanks didn't want to go out there in front of the enemy tanks because they knew that the Germans had deadly accuracy with their 88 millimeter cannons. And once in a while we'd get a TD outfit, tank destroyer outfit, up with us. And "Come on, Charlie, you gotta lead the way." "No way!" They'd say. ... And they were concerned they were going to lose their equipment. And if you ever see a tank on fire, it is a gruesome sight.

KP: You've seen ...

WD: Oh, we saw several of them on fire. The batteries in 'em, the lead melts in those and the lead melts in the shells, and it pours out the bottom of the tank. That's how hot it gets in there. And while they're burning you hear the "tkk tkk tkk tkk tkk" and the "boom boom," ... all the time while this tank is burning up. And the guys that are in there, you don't know whether they're in there or not because if they try to get out through the upper hatch they're gonna get popped off by the enemy. If they try to come out the lower hatch they may be right down on the ground. They can't get under-- they can't get out from under the tank. But the only way-- they either die in there or they get out as quickly as ... they can, and take a chance of getting hit. And so it's ... not a pleasant thing to think about. I didn't want to be in a tank; didn't want to even be near a tank because those things drew fire. [laughter] In a way, I felt that the job I had as a scout was one of the things that helped me a lot because I could do my own reconnaissance with a lower number of people, less apt to get hit, and bring back information and use it for counter intelligence work that needed to be taken care of.

KP: In addition to the equipment, there are certain things I was very intrigued about in your memoirs. One of them was your attitude toward replacement. You are not the first one to talk about it, but you talked about it in your memoirs at the time.

WD: Well, they're so inexperienced they don't know what to do. And they do a lot of things that we had been trained to not do, ... such as standing together, or exposing, you know, they would

fire a gun or something at a time, when you should be maintaining silence. And they weren't shooting, they were trying to-- they thought they saw something. You don't do that, I mean. And in the foxhole, they're so tense. I went through many replacements. And I'd try to get some sleep at night, and you're so keyed up that you can even feel that they see something. That sounds incredible, but ... you do feel it. You wake right up sometimes, and just, ... "What's up?" He said, "I think there's somebody out here." Okay, so then I'd get up and, you know, watch with him. But ... you had to get some rest out there. Sometimes I'd be standing in town, just standing up against a building and fall asleep just standing up. That's how tiring it is sometimes. Other times there's nothing going on at all and then you hope you'd get a chance to write, but you don't much. Mother always wrote everyday, though.

KP: The mail could be irregular, but it sounds like you got a lot of letters when they did catch up to you.

WD: Six weeks without a letter, and then 72 letters all at once. [laughter] 42 from my mother alone. I had a girlfriend. And then I got a Dear John letter when I got back to the States, so I'm glad it happened then instead of over there.

KP: But your girlfriend at the time had been pretty regular in writing?

WD: She wrote frequently, but not regularly-- not every day.

KP: Was she from the Freehold area?

WD: Red Bank area, yeah. I met her through a social function. And as I look back I, whoo! What did I see in her? [laughter]

KP: You mentioned replacements sort of shooting when they do not see anything. I was also struck by the number of incidences of friendly fire you experienced.

WD: People ...

KP: Some having tragic consequences.

WD: Yes. Some people don't realize that what they talk about friendly fire today has happened for a long time. And friendly fire occurs from misjudgments, or miscalculations, or totally ... uncontrollable. You could be going around a corner and all of a sudden you see somebody there-- or like when our officer was shot coming back looking for an outpost. Couldn't find it, he turned around, came back, and he [was] coming from the enemy area. Pow! One of my guys shot him. And that's friendly fire. The officer was back on line, though, within in a week or so because it was an armor-piercing shell, fortunately-- armor piercing as compared to a lead shell, a lead tip. Armor piercing would go right through, straight through. And we used to use 'em to shoot tanks, hit the tanks sometimes, but you had to hit the certain place. But if you had thin-plated steel on a ... armored vehicle, you could probably knock it out with an armored shell-- armor-piercing shell. So this guy was hit with an armor piercing shell, and if you look at our

clips, we'd see a black tip on one of them-- that was armor piercing. And we tried to not use it, but then, we had flare ... tips, and we had soft-lead tips and so forth. If he ... had been hit with a soft-lead tip, it would [have] mangled him inside there. The horrors of war. But fortunately, with an armor-piercing shell, it went through clean. Friendly fire. Now, so that does happen and you can't-- you'd like to avoid it, but it happens. And you hope there are not serious consequences as a result of it. And it also shows you ... the thought of the devastation when you fire one of those pieces in rear echelon. You're thinking of the desolation that's occurring out there, you think about it. Well, we got them. The next thing you know they all come out of the fox holes, and they make an attack. You think you got 'em, look at there. You ... weren't so devastating as you thought. So maybe in a way, in some ways, it's good it isn't so devastating, but in other ways, hey we needed some protection. And we'd look for it, and we don't get it because it didn't do what they thought. We got air bursts. Air bursts are those where the artillery shells are timed to explode in the air. They could be timed to explode at ten feet over the ground or twenty feet above the ground. Or some will detonate when they hit a branch in a tree. Those are called "tree bursts." And they may be 50 feet up in the air. And they're awful deadly that way because these pieces of shrapnel just go everywhere. They just shower down with such force. And then, of course, the white phosphorous shells. They're awful. Don't ever-- I never got a piece of it on me because it'll burn right through your flesh in no time. The horrors of war!

JL: What was it like to take prisoners?

WD: To do what?

JL: Take prisoners? You had mentioned your unit took prisoners. What did you do with them? Did you send them to camps in the United States?

WD: ... We would take 'em back to our rear echelon battalion, or company headquarters, depending on how far back we were. ... We would try to avoid any problems with them. And you're bound to get prisoners. I mean, if you're there, you're bound to get 'em sometime. And so after what we had been through, you'd hope the rear echelon people would take ... good care of them. But they were abusing them, sometimes, back there in order to get some information from them, or things like this. Totally uncalled for, I think.

KP: Yeah, I was struck by that ...

WD: So that we're not immune to some of the devastations of war as some of our people think. We're not lily white because who have [we] got, you know, running this? Originally, the army during the early part of World War II were made up of National Guardsmen, who had been in it for-- to avoid conscription. And they came in and became ... did perform their National Guard duties. And many of them didn't have much of an education. The National Guardsmen today don't. They're trying to bring in more educational opportunities for them. But they're not getting it. And they need to be better educated so we avoid some of these atrocities of war, which there shouldn't be. I'm sorry; I shouldn't have probably mentioned all these things in my memoirs. But they were there because that's what actually happened. So we're not lily white.

KP: But it sounds like the mistreatment of prisoners was really not in your front line; it was the rear echelon people.

WD: Oh! That's right. Here we go to, you know, to bring in these prisoners free from any harm. And then we take 'em back, and ... I see them being abused back there. And that gauls me. It's like I'm the big guy on the block and I'm going to knock the-- out of you. You know, whether you like it or not. And look what you did, look what your country did. Well, this guy, might be perfectly innocent. He didn't want to be in there in the first place. So you're better off taking prisoners. Well, sometimes they said, "We take no prisoners on this one. We're out for everything." And I said, "Whoa!" That's ... means real mess. They don't want to be bothered with prisoners sometimes because they're a ... nuisance. You're losing men taking these guys back. You got two or three guys going with 'em--one in the front and two or three in the back--taking this group of 50 men or 100 men back to some rear echelon area, when we needed these guys up at front lines. Our ... rate of change over was quite rapid. We never had full complement troops during the war.

KP: And, in fact, you lost more and more men, who were either killed or wounded or ...

WD: Yeah. When we lost, we would lose two and get one replacement back.

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

KP: This continues an interview with Walter G. Denise on March 25, 1997 at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler ...

JL: ... and Jennifer Lenkiewicz.

WD: That was the ratio that they used, yes. Yeah, when I was up to taking over the platoon, I had nine men. That was platoon strength. Platoon strength is normally 56. And with 56 you say, "Gee, where'd I get all these men?" You know. But when you're down to nine men, you just have really only a squad. Not even a full squad. And when I was told to take my platoon up to the woods, I mean, I wasn't platoon leader then, but then I had staff sergeant rank. And I was in charge of a platoon by then. I'd left men behind walking up the hill; they were so pooped and inexperienced and so forth, so. But to try to do platoon strength, you just didn't have it. We never had it. If you were in, ... I guess there's ... no such thing as a normal war. You count on, you had to count on having replacements available, reserve troops. We were on reserve; we would rotate companies around and battalions around. So you'd have two on line and one in reserve back. And what would happen if you were attacked? You'd fill in behind the others, if you had to. So you did get some relief from the actual front line activity, but it was ... a good many days on line. We figured we had 270 days on line.

KP: It was a long stretch.

WD: Yeah, yeah. But that's, c'est la guerre, I should say.

JL: How hard was it to adjust to the different sleeping conditions and food rations, and things on the front line than what you were used to?

WD: Well, you ... cope with it. It's just-- well again that's c'est la guerre, c'est la vie. ... The food rations were, could be anything. If you were in a static situation you might be able to get pancakes or something with syrup, which was dead cold, and the syrup could hardly pour, but at least you got pancakes. In mermite containers the mess sergeant would bring down in the jeep, dodging fire to get down there to get hot food to us. But, for the most part, ... we were able to survive. I will say this, that I feel my stomach ... shrunk in capacity because I can't eat a meal like some people do.

KP: You were very fond of your mess sergeant, which I was surprised. A lot of people viewed the mess sergeant as really trying to avoid harm's way. But your mess sergeant really tried to get you a hot meal.

WD: Oh yes, yes. ... That's why I had a high regard for him. He was the reason I came to Company K. [laughter]

KP; I mean, originally.

WD: Yes! ...

KP: But, I mean, he kept that pattern up all through the war. It sounds like he ...

WD: Oh yeah, yes, yes.

KP: If he could get you a hot meal, he would try.

WD: Oh yes, no question about it. He would try, definitely, very hard. That was when we were on outpost positions. And he would ... just risk it because he'd say, "My men have got to get something to eat." But K-Rations, you can survive on that, it's, you know, crackers and pork roll, things like that, stuff ugly. That's why I can't eat Spam today. [laughter]

KP: Because other people have said they still like Spam from their military service. And you ...

WD: Oh! Oh! Well, we would eat the pork roll in the morning and at lunch time we had to eat the cheese, which ... came from lunch K-rations. And it's a good thing because otherwise I don't know how I could've functioned because one loosens up and the other tightens you up, so it offsets one another. D-bars-- we would eat a chocolate bar about a little larger than my thumb and about that long. We'd carry that on patrol. And if we got caught [behind] the enemy lines and couldn't get back until the next night, we'd have a meal. That was a meal. Believe it or not, the rules on there say, "Do not eat in less than a half an hour." There's no way you could eat it in less than a half an hour, unless it was melted. And I don't know how you could melt it. But we were ... cold out there, winter cold. And you had [a] D-bar; it was hard as a this [knocks on table]. And you try to chew something, you can't. You can put it in your mouth and jaw on it a

little bit and get a little bit of flavor. But that's about it. It's tough. But it made you respect good home meals?

KP: You mentioned, I wanted to ask this earlier, but I think it goes well with the mess sergeant. The way you wrote of the mess sergeant, you viewed him as really a front line. Or he's not really a rear echelon person?

WD: Oh no.

KP: But what did you think of the rear echelon people? I mean that's something Bill Mauldin made a lot ...

WD: Yeah.

KP: And ...

WD: He made a joke out of it. The rear echelon people are, well, you need them. And some of them are going around and getting Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts. Wait a minute, we're up here; how'd they get that? You know, they didn't deserve that. They're back there where it's safe. And they may have been attacked one night or something like that. And they got hit or they got, they did something heroic. They went, and they saved the typewriters or something, I don't know. [laughter] But that was-- ... we had respect for the rear echelon, but we didn't hold them in as high regards as we would the front lines men. ...

KP: Because it sounded like you had respect for rear echelon people who provided services, like the mess sergeant.

WD: Yeah.

KP: But, for example, you were very critical of the way rear echelon people treated prisoners of war.

WD: Yeah.

KP: It almost sounds like, to front line people, rear echelon people had to really prove themselves in providing a crucial function, otherwise you were a little ...

WD: Well, we think that, well, Bill Mauldin characterizes them well.

KP: Well, one thing he characterizes is MPs, which apparently were not thought of fondly by front line people.

WD: What do you think about cops? [laughter] That's what they are, cops. Directing traffic, but they have a responsibility, yeah.

KP: But ...

WD: They had to keep the supplies moving.

KP: Yeah.

WD: And if you had a ramshackled truck that's coming through with some replacements or if you have an ambulance coming through, ... some vehicles have priority over others. And there has to be someone there to say, "Well, okay, we got to get this guy's ... unit through because they got to get up to the front lines. And get somebody." The ambulance for one, the gas trucks for the advancing tanks. I mean there are certain, they know what the priorities are. But ...

KP: But when on leave Bill Mauldin shows how MPs could be a real irritant to front line people.

WD: Well, front line people, when they get back, if they're on leave or something like that, tend to be very rowdy and loose, and want to have a lot of fun. Well, the MP's are right, they're picking on them all the time. And you say, "Wait a minute." ... There was a certain feeling that, when I was at the hospital ... at ... Fort Bliss, William Beaumont General Hospital, there was a feeling about the people [that] had been wounded in World War II in the Pacific when they came back. They felt that everybody owed 'em a lot of liberties. And it was very difficult to control it sometimes. They were pretty outspoken about some of their, you know, "their rights" or something like that. And I think they deservedly should be respected, but sometimes they carried it to an extreme. And I think that's where the MPs were probably having difficulty. ...

KP: We both enjoyed reading your account, and you talked at length about, for example, how you had to dress, and particularly how bitterly cold ...

WD: Yeah.

KP: ... cold it was.

WD: We were blue men out there. When we'd take off our clothes and go to the showers, my word, you've lost a lot of weight. [laughter]

KP: If you could just amplify how cold, and how miserable you could be at times.

WD: Well, the thing ... you know, it could be twenty degrees and humid. That it could snow or it could drizzle cold rain. And then, staying in that 24 hours a day. People have no idea how that could penetrate. And you realize that you need a lot of stuff to cover you, to keep you from having that cold and damp penetrate. It's terribly penetrating. Sit in a fox hole and there's water in the bottom there, and you're glad you have the rubberized boots. We call 'em "packs." That you could wear your packs in ... combat. But they're uncomfortable and ugly as all get out. I mean, they're not handsome in any way, but we needed them. And we were glad to get 'em. And even with them, some of the men were getting their feet frozen, and I explained about how we

were transported from one place. How ... I sweated and froze. I tried to walk; I couldn't walk. My feet were frozen.

JL: How many people were allowed on the trucks?

WD: You couldn't move on the truck. You had to sit there and wait. The army has a saying, "Hurry up and wait."

KP: Yes. ... I enjoyed that.

WD: Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up! They want to be everything all in line, when the command comes, go! And if they're not on line, they're gonna be straggling. You might lose the war or the battle or the conflict.

JL: You were, you were in a patrol one night, where you got your Bronze Star and a Purple Heart.

WD: Yeah.

JL: Would you like to elaborate on that?

WD: What?

JL: Would you elaborate on that, on that situation?

WD: Well, I thought it was pretty well covered in that. ... I was not anxious about going out with a large group because there's always noise, more noise than you expect. They did cut the concertina wire, which I was not aware of. ... There were four of us who were regular scouts from the battalion. And we [were] out with I-Company. And they put half the platoon up front, and the other half of the platoon behind us. So we ... were getting through and getting to the enemy side; we could branch off. One ... part of the group would go to the left and the other part to the right. And two of us would go with each group. That was the intention. So they got into the-- cut the concertina wire, which I wondered why we were holding up. I had no idea what was going on. We're back, you know, twenty, fifteen to twenty people back. And we try not to be too close together because you're too vulnerable if you're right behind one another. So all of a sudden, one of the men saw a German and a machine gun or something, and shot him. And that's when all hell broke loose then. And just everybody started getting out. And at that, the four of us, who were regular patrolmen, stopped where we were and set up what we call a defensive position. Covered while ... the rest of the group evacuated out of there. And the concertina wire that they had cut was behind us now. And when the people ran out, they ran out and ran into another concertina wire. ... Outside of the break, they didn't know where the break was. And that's when they let off these land mines. And that's when we pulled out of there. Four of us covered, as I said. And then when that got quiet, and they were gone, then that's when we decided to come back. And that's when I encountered our lieutenant, who was in charge of the group; [he] was blown into the wire. And I got knocked over, out over the wire, or something.

And then I cut him loose. He said, "Look at my rear end." And I looked at it. And I said, "Well you've got a little cut there. But you'll make it back all right." But I said, "Get! Take off and go now!" So he took off. And he fainted when he got back to our lines. ... I then heard this kid crying, "Mama, mother!" I didn't like the sound of it, so I went back towards the German line, off on an angle, where he was. And he had stepped on a mine. Blown off both legs. And that's when I felt that I gotta get him back. I can't leave him here. It was imperative, ... to my way of looking at it. And so in the meantime, the Germans were getting all set to do what they can to repulse us, or get rid of us or kill us or something. The wounded man was asked if he knew the Lord's Prayer and he said, "Yes." They repeated the Lord's Prayer for a long time. Fortunately, four tanks had been through there and left some tracks. And I'm talking about tracks, maybe that deep or that deep, but not deep tracks, you know. So the stories goes-- gets through the gory details. And I get him back. And got him to the aid station. And I think I mentioned, no, maybe I didn't mention, Kevin Coin went down to Washington to get the documents and confirm what had happened.

KP: Yes, you had mentioned that before we started interviewing.

WD: Yes, and found that somewhat encouraging, to have people realize that I wasn't telling stories, just fabricating, because there was a tendency for some people to do that, sure. But this is reality. This kid never passed out, and I ... thought it was remarkable from ... a medical point of view. The loss of blood, the loss of two legs, he ... should've gone out, if not died. And they were amazed that he was still alive. And he sat up and watched them, cut the loose meat that was ... holding his one foot on. You know, I thought then, I said, "My, what this body can take. This is phenomenal." But he survived and went back. And he was very despondent. He said, "Well, why didn't you just--" you know, he didn't talk to us; he told his mother. His mother wrote to Sgt. Benezet me about how he had been so despondent; why we didn't just left him there to die because he had, in essence, really, a kind of a drag on society because he's [a] double amputee, broken his arm too. And I didn't know he'd broken his, lost his arm too. So we corresponded with the mother a couple of times, but not ... since.

KP: Did you ever find out what happened to him?

WD: Yes, he moved back to Chicago, I think it was. And married and had a couple children. And I think he [was] doing some kind of work, at that time. And about four or five years ago, I heard he was coming to the reunion. Died. I ... still find that hard to talk about.

KP: No, that's okay. As a soldier, what struck me in reading your account was you really did not like to use your weapons, if you could. You mentioned it earlier, that you really-- you talk most about saving people's lives.

WD: Well ... I would ... the concept that I was trying to portray was the fact that, even though I was trained to kill, my aim was not to kill, but to suppress or reject, or something of that nature, rather than go through a situation where I did kill someone. And I'm grateful now that I can say that, as far as I know, I never killed anybody. I don't want to have that burden on my head. I don't ... want to convey that I just went to combat as an infantry man just to save people. That

was not the case either. I was there to fulfill my obligations as best I could. I would've done [it] if I had to.

KP: In one of your missions you did have to throw a grenade.

WD: Oh yeah.

KP: Which apparently didn't kill anybody.

WD: There was nobody there.

KP: Yes, yes.

WD: They sent me out ... with a ... small patrol, to investigate a building that was out there not in the ... what do you call it? The front line. I mean, out in the outpost area there. People were seen going in and out of there from our front line stories. So we went down there and used the normal approach to buildings that we would, no matter if we were in a town or wherever it was, how you approach 'em. One person gets and goes, and stops, and another person comes up. So it's not always just ... everyone coming up at one time because that way there you [have] less exposure, less noticed, and so forth. And you could do a lot more that way, more effectively. You couldn't go on out there with ... a big patrol, and assault ... the place. And you'd kick the door open, throw a hand grenade in there. And we didn't have a flashlight, so we couldn't see what was inside there. But we did grope around. I think someone had a cigarette lighter or something. We did, you know, look and see if there was anything there. There was nothing. It was a surprise to us. And when we came back and reported it, they were surprised too. So it is not always what some people see sometimes, but what people think they see. Well, we went out and did what we had to do. Who they gonna ask? They're not gonna ask the rifle company; they're gonna get the scouts to go out there and do it.

KP: S. L. A. Marshall, I don't know when you first learned of him, but he wrote shortly after the war, that most soldiers ...

WD: Who?

KP: S. L. A. Marshall.

WD: Oh.

KP: I'm not sure if you've heard of him.

WD: No.

KP: But he did a study of the time, and wrote after the war. And he said that soldiers didn't want to shoot their rifles. He based this finding on after-action interviews with soldiers. In your unit, how many people had a reluctance to use their weapon? Did you observe this?

WD: I wasn't aware of it. When we were on that patrol that night, we had two B.A.R.s with us, Browning Automatic Rifles, which was possible to use rapid fire. And the guy, instead of firing rapid fire when we thought we could use it, he was pulling off one shot at a time just the same as a rifle. And I asked him later, I says, "How come you didn't use it?" He said, "Well I was afraid of exposing my position." They already knew you were there. What are you afraid of, you know? ... They were so indoctrinated ... not to expose their position, that sometimes they'd use dumb conclusions to ... rationalize why they didn't do something. So you get frustrated. I mean, if we had the fire power shown there, maybe we could've overrun 'em and done something to alleviate the situation. But no. This guy, this-- both of these guys didn't do anything except pull a gun, a trigger, one at a time. Come on! We had all this fire power with us, and nothing was showing.

KP: You, at one point, had not wanted to be an officer, but you were, in a sense, were promoted. How did it feel to be in a position of command versus being a PFC?

WD: Believe it or not, it didn't seem one bit different, not one bit.

KP: Really?

WD: No. Here I thought RHIP, and I had no more rank and privilege than I had when I was a PFC. Oh well. C'est la guerre. But things occur during battles. ... Not the respect, but the command of an officer is different. The discipline is different. You're more buddy-buddy as an officer in combat, than you are in station work, in the barracks ... atmosphere. Most of the time, the officers were your buddy, you know. And so that prevailed even after I got my commission. "Hey lieutenant what should we do now?" And not ... you just feel that you don't have the control that you would've had if you were in a camp situation.

KP: Whereas in a camp it would have made a real difference.

WD: Oh, yes. You will salute sir! You see what that is up there. Well officers, some of the officers who got their commission during the war, that didn't mean anything to 'em. I mean, they didn't make anything out of it. If it was an OCS candidate, absolutely. They're gonna-- you see that! You respect that! Sure! [laughter]

JL: Did you serve with any black men in your units?

WD: No, but I do know there were black men because ... a Freeholder in Monmouth County, New Jersey is Ted Narozanick, was also in our division. He was a captain of the transportation department. He had a company, and he had all black troops. And I was not aware, but I knew there were a lot of black troops in the area, but they didn't have any in our outfit. I was surprised we found some Jewish people there. ... Most of the time, we ... wouldn't find too many Jewish people in the front line activity. Not many at all. ... But we had some, and they're nice people. They were just as gung ho, I mean, just as soldierly as we were. And, ... I mean, they were Americans; that's all they were. And everybody was an American, either black or white, Oriental

or otherwise. And they're, as far as I'm concerned, there was ... no real discrimination. Except, I think there was the tendency to group them into rear echelon activities, MP's and in trucking outfits bringing in supplies. And many of them who were in combat situations, just as much as we were, because they had to bring up supplies to us. They were bringing up gasoline to the tanks up in the front of us sometimes. And so they were ... just as brave as we were. See, I couldn't feel any discriminatory sense toward them at all. I worked with blacks on my farm, so I had, ... you know, good regard for them.

KP: Growing up?

WD: Oh, we always had ... blacks, and we had Puerto Ricans, both. Mostly blacks in my early farm experience, and then we got into taking some Puerto Ricans. We housed quite a few of them on our property.

JL: You had mentioned earlier about prisoner camps. When did you first know about concentration camps, and the atrocities the Germans were committing?

WD: Well, you just hear about it.

JL: Through the grape vine?

WD: Yes or through Stars and Stripes.

KP: Did you ever personally liberate any work camps or any ...

WD: No.

KP: ... the concentration camps?

WD: No, no. No. No, that ... was with the Russians and some of the American troops. Some of the First Army, I think, primarily because they-- it was quite a launch when they came. They made a big sweep up in the North. We were in the southern branch of it, near Strasbourg. ... We were in the Black Forest. ... And that was beautiful, but deadly, deadly. You build a foxhole-- you always had to-- ... put logs over the top of it and some other things because of the artillery fire coming down, dropping down on you.

KP: You, like a number of people we have interviewed, and I have read numerous accounts, going to Paris on leave was really one of the great things you could do if you were a GI?

WD: Well, I ... guess. I've never been much of a ...

KP: City person?

WD: ... Man who liked to go around with women so much. But I enjoyed seeing the sites. I went to church there, and met a couple [of] practitioners. ... I find out that one of 'em was a

teacher and she wrote some articles that I just recently found, and I thought, "Oh my! I wish I'd known some of this." But you know, you're in a situation. And I guess my mother had probably written them to tell them that I was coming or something like that. You know how mothers are? [laughter] But no, I ... saw a lot of sites there. We were in a hotel without heat, we had ... our sleeping bags and laid 'em on top of the bed, and that was our bed. I mean, the bed didn't have sheets or anything. I guess they had mattresses, I don't recall. But all I remember was that we were in sleeping bags in this cold hotel room. And ... I walked and saw Notre Dame and Arc de Triumph and other sites in town. I met some people in church who were involved with SHAEF Headquarters, and they gave me kind of a tour too. It was deadly coming back, I'll tell you. Once you're away from it and you start to come back again, you know what you're getting yourself into, and you really dread it. That's, that was the hardest-- I mean, the first time coming in you didn't feel it. But coming back from a trip, ... I ... would almost rather have not gone, to have to go through that again.

KP: I get the sense that you are all clean and comfortable, and then to ...

WD: Yeah.

KP: ... to just go through everything. Besides the danger, there is also just the grime and the ...

WD: Yeah, but you still, when you go on pass you're wearing these ugly boots, clean uniform, yes, and a clean jacket, and, but you stand out from the public there because they're all in ... civilian clothes. And there are GIs all over the place. And here's old dirty Joe or-- coming into Paris to storm the town. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like your chance to attend services, to meet a fellow Christian Scientist was very important for you on leave, though, because on the line did you have any chance?

WD: No.

KP: I mean, were there any other Christian Scientists that you knew in your units?

WD: No, no. We're a small group, but whenever you get to a town, you'd like to have some affiliations ... in order to kind of uphold your spiritual ... strengthening that you need.

JL: You had mentioned in your memoirs, when General Patton had slapped the young soldier, there was a lot of hostility in the United States over it, but you seemed to sympathize with him?

WD: I felt and I found a very similar situation. Sometimes these kids are so frightened that something, a slap, brings them to. And you know, "General Patton slapped my kid!" Well, maybe he needed it. People have no idea what battle fatigue is, and people have no idea what, you know, being a little bit off does occur. And sometimes it just makes 'em, it brings 'em right back again, makes 'em realize: Hey wait a minute. We're looking after you; we're taking care of you; come on straighten up; you're all right; you're going to be okay. And that's all I need. One kid, I brought out how he shot himself through the toe. I thought I had solved the situation, but

by, you know, told him what he had to do. Well I didn't do enough. In that case maybe I should've slapped him. But he shot himself through the toe, and then he regretted having done it after he found out how painful it was. Well, of course it's painful. [laughter] He shattered the bones in his big toe. Boy, oh, boy! And we lose enough soldiers being shot by the enemy, not by their ... own action.

KP: Going back to religion, did your unit have any contact with chaplains? Obviously there were no Christian Science chaplains but ...

WD: I can honestly say, that I hardly ever saw a chaplain out there anywhere. And they would be at battalion headquarters, that's where they were servicing. And they would have, they would counsel troops there. But you'd almost have to leave the line, you know. You're not gonna get a major who is unarmed going up with his cross to front line activity. That does occur, but it didn't in our front; that I could see. And the Red Cross we never saw, you know, either. It was for the rear echelon guys, back at division companies. ... You know, and I said, "Well how do we get to see these things?" Well you don't. You're on front line duties, son. Okay. Okay. [laughter] We wanted to see Bob Hope and ...

KP: I was just going to ask you about USO ...

WD: Yeah.

KP: Did you ever get to a USO show?

WD: Not until after the war. I mean, they talk about doing it for the front line GIs. Well they're not really the front line. The front line GIs are still there, there ... on the front line. These guys are not going to go within ten miles of the front line because they're gonna get hit by artillery if they do.

KP: No, I have heard some funny stories, along those lines about USO shows. Once there was to be a show, and the jeep got shelled driving them. And they just pulled out right away. They were promised there was not going to be any enemy fire and this proved incorrect.

WD: Right.

JL: Do you have any questions about before the war was over?

KP: You had expected to go to the Pacific?

WD: Oh yes, after May 8, May 5, yes.

KP: You mentioned in the memoir you had been counting up your points. Were you disappointed that you didn't have enough points to go home?

WD: Yeah.

KP: Did you think you should be going home?

WD: Well ...

KP: I mean not to be serving in the Pacific, I mean?

WD: No, no, there wasn't any concern about the points at that time. I guess some of the fellahs who had been through North Africa, and Italy, and so forth, they had enough points. They could go home. But we were there ... not even a year. ...

KP: So you did not feel that you should go home?

WD: I didn't think we were-- that I particularly would be entitled to go. And I said, "Well we're bound for the CBI. If you had 127 points, or something like that, you can go home." Well, the CBI was very imminent at that time, and I don't know why we never got to go. We were supposed to go ... through the Panama Canal. No, through the Suez Canal and up through and across ...

KP: Without going home.

WD: ... South of India, without going home. ... They need us over there, fine. But the next thing you know, we were sent home. And I was home on 45-day recuperation leave. I thought, "Great!" That didn't count against my ... leave time, nor the emergency leave I had before going overseas. So I had all this money accruing, of unused leave. ... That was important to me, you know. And so I wound up with a fair amount of money, probably like 1,000 or 1,500 dollars when the war was over, only because I didn't spend any money, sent most of it home, and the other was ... accrued leave time that I got. ... But when I was home on recuperation leave the ... war was over in Japan, and I thought, "Oh thank heavens!"

JL: How did you feel about the atomic bomb being dropped?

WD: I think, under the circumstances it was okay. I think it was very devastating. But it was no different than what they did to us in Pearl Harbor. And war brings out a lot of atrocities that normal civilization doesn't encounter. ... And I think if we had something like that to knock Hitler out earlier, we would have been better off too. It's too bad in a way that ... we had to do it. I feel badly for the people. It's the innocent people that's always getting hurt. It's not the ... leaders, so to speak. Here we got from ... Panama and in the stockades in Florida.

KP: Noriega.

WD: Noriega. ... I guess it is Noriega, yes. It's suppressed any bad actions. He's communist through and through. And, I think, we needed to do something. I ... think, maybe, the one shell apparently wasn't enough, to bring the Japanese to the table. They, already, at the time ... of ... Pearl Harbor, just before that, they had sent two envoys to Washington, to talk about mediating

peace, as a ... ploy, in my thought. That to conceal the fact that they were going to do anything at Pearl Harbor. And I thought that was [a] terrible thing to do.

KP: It sounds like you were also disappointed, because you were hoping for peace. Is that an accurate reading? At the time, were you hoping that we could avoid the war?

WD: Oh yes, anything. ... When you're in it, I'd hate to be involved in any war. ... I don't think, I don't want to see us ever going into an all-out war again, ever again, because it doesn't bring anything but grief to families. And you can see in society the uneasiness, the stress, the lack of civility going on, which is paramount to creating another war. And we got to do what we can as individuals, starting ... [with] you and me, and let that go out like ripples-- ... when you throw a stone in a pond, to go out and go over all mankind [and] eventually, to eliminate the concept of war. If you have a disagreement in Matthew it says, "Go to thy brother and discuss it with him, and if he doesn't listen to you, go and take the elders of the church with you, and then talk about it." But don't go out and fight right away, ... discuss it. And I think we've got to come to the table more often. I think we have to watch that we don't get involved with other things too. I'm concerned about the people in Zaire. Why do we have people there in the first place? If they're missionaries, they know the seriousness of the situation. And I'm sure they're gonna be not hurt either, even though there's an uprising in the country. They're not going to kill missionaries. My wife used to say when I went down to the farm camp when there was an altercation down there, a knifing and so forth, "Don't go down there. I'm afraid something's going to happen to you." I said, "Nothing's gonna happen to me. ... They're fighting between the two of them, not between me and them, or them and me." And ... I think that's true, we have to be very careful we don't get sucked in. And I'm concerned about Bosnia. I'm concerned about Zaire, and the other area; the Mideast is a horrible thing. I don't think they should've flaunted the building of homes in that area, and it just brings on more aggravation. I think both sides are at fault; it's not one side of it. And I think we're wrong in continuing to support people who are flaunting this way. I'm not against Jewish people, but I'm against the attitude that's gonna prove-- that keeps promulgating more wars. This ... thing has been going on, not for five years, [but for] 5,000 years. When is it gonna stop? Mediation comes when people sit down, talk together and say, "Okay we can resolve our differences." You don't solve them with stones or guns. We didn't solve anything with World War II, or World War I, or any war. We didn't solve anything. That was the war that was gonna to end all wars, but it didn't do it.

KP: Before going on to Rutgers, which Jennifer is particularly interested in talking about, is there anything we forgot to ask you about your military experience. I mean, I also, in asking that question, you have written a great deal.

WD: Yes.

KP: You really have written one of the great Rutgers memoirs. There have been several other people have written memoirs, but I think yours are definitely among the best I have read. Is there anything else we have forgotten about, or particularly, anything reflecting today's interview that you did not put in the memoirs?

WD: No, nothing I can remember. I think I've tried to bare my soul.

KP: No, we ...

WD: Maybe more than I should, but ...

KP: No, from a historian's perspective, more is better. Well, I guess partly in segueing into Rutgers, ... one of the things I found very interesting is--you have not been the first to write about that--is how the effects of battle lasted a long time. You wrote about two instances that embarrassed you at the time, but you have been not the first person I've interviewed ...

WD: Yeah.

KP: The one incident I think was leaving with the rustling of the shades.

WD: The venetian blinds, yeah.

KP: Venetian blinds.

WD: That was in church.

KP: In church.

WD: Posh! I dove right down in the pew.

JL: I think the backfire of a car was the other one.

KP: Were these the only two instances where you ...

WD: Oh, no. Oh, no. I just bring it out to show you that there are injuries. ... I don't like to think of them as injuries, but there are lingering feelings that go on for a long time; it takes a while to heal. And I just wish people would understand.

KP: Were you reluctant to talk about the war at first? I mean you had written and typed your memoirs very early, which was somewhat usual for a lot veterans.

WD: You mean the first time?

KP: The first time ...

WD: Back in-- yeah. Well I wanted to write it down, some of the things. But I didn't have by any means anything like this at all. It was just a very short idea of what happened in a couple of places. I supplemented it, ... in this report, with some of the books that we have put out by our division, our regiment, in which we have citations of certain activities that took in certain places. I wanted time to incorporate a feeling of more ... of the big picture so that people would

understand where we were, what was ... our responsibility, what was the sector's, what was involved in the ... larger area. I did try to expand a little bit there, and then I was able to supplement. And, since then, we've had several reunions, and I met people that have helped me bring out certain things. They'd say, "Well, so-and-so's going [to] be at our next reunion," and we'd get more supplemental information. Names escape me a lot from then, and so I had to rely on some ...

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

WD: I know some of the people that I see at our reunions. Some are moving along in age and it's beginning to show on them. And I feel sorry for some of them.

KP: When did you start going to reunions?

WD: Well, it occurred about, let's see, we were celebrating our twentieth reunion. So I would say we were out about 30 years when a couple [of] fellows down in Missouri, one fellow ... owned a farm down there. He was a ... battalion commander or regimental commander, and he wanted to have a reunion of the division. So that first time there ... [were] about twenty of us that went. I didn't move from my hometown of Freehold, so they wrote me a letter based on my home address when I was in the service. So I got the letter and went to the first reunion. And a funny thing happened. I got to the first reunion; the chaplain was picked out for that reunion, and he had a heart attack, and he didn't show up, so he says, "Denise, can you give us a service?" Oh brother! So I had to prepare a memorial service for that first time. And, from that time, I've been doing it ever since. And I keep hearing about one of the chaplains is coming, and he never shows up. Maybe he's embarrassed by what I've been doing. He doesn't want to come and ... change the things and make it better.

KP: When did you join the VFW?

WD: I went to a meeting or two, and, in actuality, I never did join them. I went to a couple of meetings and found they're just sitting around drinking around a bar and everything afterwards. And it just didn't appeal to me at all. I've got better things to do with my life. I didn't know too many [of] the people in Freehold [who] were not ones I was in the military service with, so it wasn't anything that I [was interested in]. I joined the DAV because I felt I could do something there. They have a lot of good programs, I feel, that help disabled veterans, and I would like to help them.

KP: Were you ever reluctant at all to talk about the war when you got back?

WD: Oh, yeah.

KP: When did you really first start talking about it? Was it at the reunions or was it before that?

WD: Well, I was trying to piece things together, but there was still some reluctance about it. My wife didn't ask me until the 50th anniversary, or ... just shortly before that. [She said], "Hey,

where are all your medals?" I said, "They're up in the attic someplace." So she wanted to put 'em in a box, you know, in a glass-covered box. So, that's where they are now, but, oh gee, I didn't want to pull 'em out! I don't know if I could, you know. I don't have all the pieces; there are some there and some are not, and part-- I never did get my medal for my good conduct. [laughter] And so I finally did get that. ... It was years later when I got my third Bronze Star. And the second Purple Heart was late in coming too; that was after I was out of the service. But I had, they were minor wounds. You know, the wounds were so minor. Fortunately, I have five fingers on each hand and five toes on each foot, and I'm still here, you know, complete. And I feel that I was very much protected by, you know, through it. The thing I had, one of the greatest dreads I have, concerns I had, is that--and I voice it in there too--is that somehow or other I got through this and yet, I'm only one of two that out of our original platoon that came back. Why didn't I, couldn't get others to come back too? You know. And it was years going out of my mind about that, worrying. And I finally resolved that by saying, thinking about each experience I was on. And I said, "You know, we never had a fatality on any mission I was on, individual or personal. Ah ha! Now I'm happy, I'm satisfied." But when we had a large regimental attack, I was the point man because I was in trouble for pulling a gun on an officer. Instead of getting a court martial I got front line-- I mean, I was the point man for the whole regiment. [laughter] That means I'm out there all by myself. And I said, "Well, maybe I deserve this. We'll see how it works out." But I forgot my line of thought. But in any event, oh, ... even in that large a group we didn't have a single fatality that day either. And you know, ... you go over these things sometimes, and you say, "Well, I recall this and recall that. So if I happened to be over here we didn't ... have any fatalities. If I was over here no fatalities." But ... they would occur when I'm not with 'em. The night that we lost that outpost, we got raided. It's because I was pulled off of that duty, because I pulled a gun on an officer. I didn't happen to be there when that guy, you know, when they assaulted the outpost. So there are a lot of things in my experience I feel that were kind of God protected, God controlled. And I thank God that I was able to get through it, but I can't feel any glory for those that didn't make it.

KP: You came to Rutgers on the GI Bill and this is a more happy time in this period. I know Jennifer wants to ask you about it because you were quite a man-about-campus. You were very involved in a lot of things.

WD: Yes. ...

KP: How crucial was the GI Bill, you think, in deciding to go back to college? Do you think you would have gone back anyway? Or would you have just gone to the farm?

WD: Well, I think Dad and Mother would have taken care of the college tuition if it were necessary then, because I think they felt they owed it to me earlier, and I didn't take 'em up on it. But the fact that the GI Bill was there, was really a wonderful thing because I got my books. I didn't get room and board, but I got books and tuition. And I think that's a big deal. And I think that was partial compensation for what I did. That's the way I look at it. I lost four good years and an additional five or six in reserves of my life to the army. And I thought, "Well, I don't have any qualms about taking this, the GI Bill of Rights."

JL: You started Rutgers in 1946?

WD: Yes, February, the day I was discharged, I was in through ... the effort of Luther Martin, who was the ...

KP: Registrar.

WD: ... registrar. He and I corresponded, ... when I was still in the military service, at that time. I said I would be out, I thought, by such and such a date. I wanted to attend Rutgers. And he'd made all the arrangements for me. He even found a place for me to stay. And I thought, "This is really working out very well." And, I enjoyed college life. Quite different then the military. [laughter] More relaxed, and everything depended on you studying, and not being someplace at a certain time. So I had, I think, a good college career too. I was involved with a ... fraternity, and with Alpha Zeta, and with wrestling. I was with ... a member of the 4-H Club. And we had a college ... church group, a college organization group here. A couple of other things and then intramural athletics and wrestling.

JL: You also mentioned something about being a photographer, editor of the ...

WD: Oh yes, the Scarlet Letter.

JL: Yes.

WD: Yes. When did I mention this? I didn't, not today.

JL: No I read it ...

WD: In correspondence before. ... Bob Conway was the editor that year, or in those two, couple [of] years. I was photo editor. I'm not sure that I really should claim that fame [laughter] because I think Bob bailed me out on a couple of jobs I was supposed to do, and I didn't do it. But I didn't ... I took some, what I thought were outstanding shots, you know. Also got in the year book.

JL: The church group that you belonged to, was that co-ed?

WD: Yes, yes.

JL: ... NJC, correct?

WD: Right, that was nice.

JL: Did you meet weekly or monthly?

WD: I don't recall. A college org. It may have been every week. My wife and I met at Reverend (Abernathy's?) open house. Reverend (Abernathy?) was ... the chaplain at the school

here. But they had the open houses up here at the Theological Seminary, or at his home because he had a residence up here. ... This is in fall of '46, I guess. No, it was ... maybe late spring of '46. I decided I would go to Reverend (Abernathy's?) open house, and I happened to meet a nice, attractive, young lady there, and I offered to take her home, and she said yes. She lived at Douglass. And I took her over there, and gave her a peck on the cheek that night, and asked her for another date. Well, as it turned out, it was kind of a rouse in that. The ASTP boys had an effect on the college during the war. And this was right after the war, and there was-- one of the fellows was in ASTP, and he was still here. And ... she saw him there, and she was afraid that he was going to ask to take her home. And so ... when ... I asked, she said, "Yes," right away. And she said, "Well if I get home, I'll be okay." And that was to be the end of it. Well, she didn't know how persistent I was, you know. [laughter] So I persisted and, finally, we got engaged in '47 and married in '48.

KP: Was she a Christian Scientist?

WD: No.

KP: No.

WD: It was ten years before she adopted that faith. But she had seen so many things happen that she realized there was something there that was different. She was, ... I guess, Reformed, was probably more close. Her father was a Methodist and her mother was, well, another Protestant denomination. And the two, when they met, they became interested in choir work, and the choir work was in the Reformed Church there. And, you know, the funny part of it is our family earlier was Reformed too. So we thought, "Well this can work out, I guess." And then I took her to the farm, and she saw the land and the people there. I still don't see what she was attracted ... by, but, in any event, she decided it was okay. And it took a few years before she really became interested in our faith, but primarily through some outstanding healings that had taken place in my family and me.

KP: In going to the chaplain's reception, did you go to chapel services on campus at all when you were here?

WD: No.

KP: No. You never went to the chapel ...

WD: I went to our church.

KP: Church, but not to the chapel.

WD: This was more for social and ...

KP: Yes, this was just as part of the social.

WD: Yes. ... And you know, in what better place could I meet, could you meet, a spouse?
[laughter] Right? Some people meet in bars and other people meet at singles clubs and things like this, and, but I thought this would be a nice place.

KP: One of the things you mention is in terms of social life. My students are almost to the point of envious of the social life that was on campus after the war. You had the fraternity life.

WD: Yes.

KP: And you also had a number of dances and ...

WD: Yes.

KP: ... balls and so forth. How often did you attend these?

WD: Well, the balls were, maybe, once a semester or something like that or, maybe once a quarter. But they were big affairs. They'd have Harry James and big band era. And ... we had, the gym would be packed with people. I mean there would be 4-5,000 people there at a dance. ... You'd have full length gowns. Girls would not be there in blue jeans. And the guys are wearing, you know, suits or a tux. And they made a big deal out of it in those days. You got the girl a corsage, a nice orchid corsage. And, you know, these are some of the refinements I think the young people today are missing. It's in going to church today, the young people are coming in it so casually. And I don't think that they respect the church as much as they used to, either. ... I'm sorry to see that go that way. I don't care what denomination, they're all the same. ... Well, I can't say that for some of the Mormons. ... The people are going around wearing suits and look nice yet, but to ... many people that's too much of a stereotype life and too confining and everything else. And ahhh, they want to be relaxed. Relaxed all the time. But we feel church is a special place, and you should go there dressed accordingly. ...

JL: To go back to the social life, how was Homecoming? And I know ...

WD: Oh, that's a big event. Yeah.

JL: There were bonfires.

WD: Yes.

JL: We don't have that, really, anymore. That's why I'm wondering.

WD: I don't suppose ... they do. Do they?

JL: No.

WD: Well a lot of the fraternities would even sponsor programs, you know. And floats, we had parades with floats. I mean, it was a big to-do. Well they do it in California still, Pasadena. That's where the ... Rose Parade came from.

JL: Right.

WD: ... It was a big thing. And I'm glad that that tradition has remained in some places. I'm sorry it doesn't stay here because it was ...

JL: We still have the festivities of Homecoming, but it's just not as big, I guess.

WD: Big of a deal.

JL: Yes. That's the word I'm looking for.

WD: Yeah, ... college, people come here, not always-- well, you have a lot of people coming for an education exclusively. We had 'em then, too, you know. They were the people that were just, some of them were even reading books while they were walking from class to class. And not even looking where they were going, you know. And sometimes they'd walk right by the door, oh! Gotta turn around and go back again. And they read and go in the building. ... I mean, you gotta have a little diversity. You can't be all scholarly, but you can't be all fun all the time, either. And I think sometimes there's a tendency to be ... looking for too much self-indulgence.

JL: Now, before, we were talking on the interview, we were talking about your fraternity.

WD: Yes, Alpha Sigma Phi.

JL: And you were saying that there were a lot, well, considering to today, they're a lot larger. And you said how many again?

WD: Well, I'm trying to recall, but I think 35-40 people. I'm not sure. I could look back. I don't know where I'd look now. The records of my fraternity days are not available. But you know, fraternity was a big deal. The days of having secret meetings and passwords and all this is pretty much gone. It was in ... Grange, and they had passwords, and you had to go through the chairs and everything else. They don't, the Grange is kind of gone. It's part of the old history of the farm communities. It's gone. And you can't-- I would like to see it back because it brought the farm community together. And we're getting overcrowded with developments and people moving down from the city and bringing their mores with them. And I'm concerned about what's going to happen in the future. College, I would hate ... to see some of that go too. Some, when I became a member, inducted as a member of Alpha Zeta, honorary agricultural fraternity, they had a kind of a hazing program. And Dr. Thompson was probably one of the ones who kind of instigated some of this to go on, which was all right. I mean it wasn't difficult. The hazing was an intellectual type of a hazing rather than anything else. And so when I became a member, I got to be in charge of seeing some of ... this being continued. And I remember one individual who came in. We required that they write a paper, and we would critique the paper; that's why I mean

it was on an intellectual level. And this fellow came in--he was very serious about it--and the interviewing team had some extra paper there. And they start ... criticizing his report. And he thought he'd spent a lot of time on it. And they took some blank paper and torn it up, "This is what we think of it." And the guy walked out; I mean, he was hurt! And so that hurt too. ... But you don't have that today, I don't think, in college campuses. ... Here you had a group of supposedly intellectual, agricultural leaders, and I find it a little difficult to even talk about that kind of hazing, even, where someone ... got hurt by it because I don't think it was right that they got hurt.

KP: I have also been told that it was very difficult to haze GIs, I mean, returning GIs. I don't know how much you know about the hazings before the war, but a lot of interviews have talked how brutal the pre-war hazings could be.

WD: Well, I think this is true, but it was after the war when we had people that got drowned and overdrunk and everything else. I mean, so that was after the war.

KP: Yes, yes.

WD: When I was here the hazing involved having your freshman brother make a paddle for you, and I have one made by Sam Race, Class of '50. And he did it. ... And he made a beautiful job out of it. It was a nice varnished paddle, and he got my name and his name on it and it ...

KP: But it was never used.

WD: Never used. No. I mean, ... it was intended as a joke that, you know, they would ... have to walk through a line of guys with paddles and everything else. Well, they didn't ever; I suppose they did it in earlier days, used ... the paddles.

KP: Oh no, they ...

WD: And I think that's unfortunate that some of the hazing was so physically brutal. And especially when ... people have drowned or gotten hurt from being over-indulged in drinking or something like that.

JL: Yes, nowadays they still have the paddles, but they are not used.

WD: Yeah, that's good.

JL: They're just used for a symbol.

WD: That's good.

JL: Yeah.

WD: We like that. [laughter] Keep it symbolic it's all right. But, then soon, ... that fad will drop too, because the symbolism will be gone.

JL: You lived off-campus?

WD: I did for a while. I lived over on, in Highland Park ... in a private home on the third floor. A nice quite little apartment; well, I guess, just a room. And ... I was very fortunate that I had a place to stay where I was kind of off of the track because I did study hard. But then, I became one of the few members who were chosen to re-institute Alpha Sigma Phi on campus. Before it was Alpha Kappa Phi, I think. And it became Alpha Sigma Phi because of a merger of two national groups. And I was one of the first ones, as a matter of fact, I was one of the first one[s] in the house. And I had to check the furnace and everything else, and make sure everything's operational. ... But it was the people in those days [they] were a lot more serious students, ... despite some of the ... frivolity that takes place in ... many other fraternities. I chose to go to this one because of the seriousness in trying to re-institute itself on campus. So I mean, ... they didn't say there would be no fooling around, but you just, we just knew that we had work to do. And we did it. And became successful and moved over on ... George Street or ...

JL: College Avenue.

WD: College Avenue, yes.

JL: How were your classes? Did they start in the morning? And Saturdays?

WD: ... Being an engineer, I got involved in quite a few courses, 21 credit hours a semester, which people think, wow!

JL: Yes.

WD: And I said to myself, "I want to get out fast." And I told Luther Martin that I wanted to get out in '48, and he had me down in the registrar as a class of '49 until almost my last semester. But in any event I took 21 credit hours to expedite it. I did go to summer school one year, one summer; took four courses then, calculus being one of them. And, ... being an engineer, you got involved with a lot of serious, deep courses. I had a lot of math courses, and I had physics, and I had chemistry, and I even got into organic chemistry, qualitative and quantitative analysis and so forth. And the courses ran from eight to twelve in the morning, six days a week. And afternoon laboratories would run anywhere from one to four, one to five, or one to six on Monday through Friday. So I didn't have much spare time during the day. And good thing, I guess; I would've been in trouble if I had. [laughter] But I wanted out early because you're a lot more serious about things. You want to get out and start making a living. And 27 seemed like a ... late time to start working in your field of endeavor, I mean, to start working in a field.

KP: So it sounds like you wanted to hurry up and get out and get on with your life. Is that correct?

WD: Yes, ... and I excelled in the engineering field, and I got to the farm, and I realized that I wasn't involving myself in much of that, either. And with the help of 150 migrants every summer, I decided that we would--my dad and I--would sell the farm. In 1964 we started selling it, actually moved off in '66. Then I went into real estate. I became a real estate broker. And then started specializing in real estate appraisals. And now I have a very interesting experience in real estate appraisals. They're not just the run-of-the- mill house appraisals or commercial appraisals, I'd get challenging things of correcting disputes between family members, or between people as far as deeds and property rights and ownership, segregating agricultural and development rights on farms. And I'm a county commissioner for condemnation work, and so I get involved with condemnation appraisals-- and reviewing them and working in that area. It's just nice challenges now. People have trouble with neighbors because their pool is on their property. I could go into some real war stories, in just ... in that area alone; how people get along-- don't get along with each other. ... I have to go to court frequently, and testify. And to me it's challenging; it's not ... the run of mill work. And it does put my engineering capabilities to exercise.

KP: It sounds like you are still very busy?

WD: Oh, yes.

KP: You're still ...

WD: 60 hours a week.

KP: That's pretty busy.

JL: I just wanted to go back to the farming and agriculture.

WD: Yes.

JL: I read something in a newspaper article. I don't remember what year it was, I think it was in the 1950s, about an invention of yours called "The Monster?"

WD: [laughter]

JL: And it really did not give that much about it, but it just mentioned it. And I just wanted to ask.

WD: Well I built a double decker truck for--I believe that's what you're referring to--that I used for pruning trees.

JL: It said something about trees, yeah.

WD: Yes. Well normally, we have what we call a "flat deck," and in the middle would be a plank, raised by blocks on each end. And then, under the center plank, you have what we call

"skid planks" or "kick planks." And you would have a rope on each end tied, on each end, to the plank. And you can take the rope and slide the board out, and go out on the board and trim the trees. You don't have to get a ladder and ... so this, the one I invented, or made, was this double decker one, because we'd have another one up above about another eight feet or ten feet above that, above the lower one. And that guy could take care of the upper part of the trees. He'd kick it out and walk out there. I mean, we were up about fifteen feet off the ground. The planks ... go down like this when you go out on them. But it was very satisfactory. Now they just go through with a mowing machine and just chop 'em off. [laughter] So "The Monster" was in vogue for a few years there. ... I made a few. We took a big barrel, oh, 2,[000] or 3,000-gallon steel barrel and cut it in half and put an axle [and] wheels under it, and used it for a burner. We used to burn-- when we were trimming--we used to take the burner with us and throw the brush in this burner and burn it while we were trimming. Or we'd gather the brush and put it in that at a later time. Spray machine rig--I had to do all the repairs. And every year we would take the equipment apart and ... recondition the engine and any other part that needed correcting. We'd replace the parts that had rusted out or something like that. Paint it up. Have it all ready for another year. And we were packing apples. And we had up-to-date equipment. We had forklifts when the forklifts became in vogue. And so we had to strengthen the floors in the buildings so that we could run around with a forklift in there with the pallets of stuff rather than having ... conveyor belts and rollers. And went into fork lift operation. We had built, I built, designed and built several buildings on the property, including a huge cold storage building that was sixteen feet high inside. And you could stack the stuff up on the top of each other inside the storage building. And ...

KP: You used a lot of your engineering on the farm.

WD: Yes.

KP: Yes, it had helped you.

WD: Yes. As a result of that I served on the Board of Adjustments in town, Planning Board. And I've just done a few things in town, too, to let 'em know I'm around yet. "When are you gonna retire, Denise?" "Well I think I got another twenty years to go!" I've worked because it's still fascinating.

KP: When you sold the farm, did you sell it as a farm or was it developed?

WD: It was developed. This is an interesting point. My dad paid 7,000 dollars for the farm, for the Colts Neck Township portion of the property. We had 335 acres. This Colts Neck property was little over a hundred acres. And when we sold the property, we sold it for about thousand an acre. You said, "Hum, that's cheap!" Yep, it was cheap. But I mean, that was the going price at that time. We were remote from any water or sewer facilities, and that meant extending the lines out from where they could get them out there to us, so we didn't get the good price for it. So the fellow who bought it was a builder and he worked on it for a few years. And after about five years he got kind of tired, ... I think it was maybe four years. But ... the township ... was giving him a hard time about the plans. And he had to revise and revise. And he'd do something that

would satisfy 'em, and says, "No, I think we like it better this way." And he got so fed up; he was so close to getting preliminary approval. And then we got a ... letter from the township saying, "We now need" I mean we had had a hearing, and it was six months later that we got this letter-- "We now need a hold harmless letter, "hold harmless" agreement letter, and one other thing, and one minor thing." The fellah says, "Forget it! Sell it!" And, by that time, I'm in the real estate business, and I sold the farm for him, for \$5,000 an acre. And I get a commission on it. The commission is almost more than I got for my share of the farm's sale, when ... we sold the farm, because we ... were mortgaged and thousand dollars an acre doesn't go very far. So ...

KP: Which must have been somewhat ironic to be selling your farm again?

WD: But, about fifteen years goes by again, a fellah comes to me with a contract to buy the farm again. And I go to the owner, and the fellow says, "No." I said, "You are turning down 50,000 dollars an acre." He said, "I don't care. I don't want to sell." Okay. A few years go by, and the zoning changes from two acres to ten acres. Now he wants to sell the farm, and he puts it on the market for \$15,000 an acre, and can't sell it. That's ironic because I had the deal for 50,000 dollars an acre. I have the copy of the contract still in my office. However, at that time, I sold it to the first, not to the builder, but to the next person who invested in it. I'd sold out of that seven acres of land, with the house, the 1720 vintage house, a huge big beam barn, a garage building, a couple of other buildings on the property, for 65,000 dollars. And, of course, that was not a bad price at that time. And my commission was supposed to be six percent. So all this time's gone by, the deal worked out, that since he couldn't get street access, that he would be paying rent at 200 dollars a month, which would be applying towards the purchase price of the property. And that sounded like a pretty good deal for them, but it wasn't expected to be a long time, because the developer was gonna do something with it. Well, he didn't do anything at all for all these years. Now, as of right now, there are plans on the property with the seven plus acres-- ready to be closed and to be developed. And the owner is still on the property. And, I mean, still owns the property. And he's working in conjunction with some other investors and they're developing the property. We are finally gonna get a closing on that, and I'm going to get my commission after 25 years-- [laughter] that six percent commission on that 65,000 dollar sale.

KP: See ...

WD: Talk about deferred income, right?

KP: So you've had a long term relationship with this land?

WD: Yes.

KP: That ...

WD: It hangs on and on and on.

KP: Well, does the house still stand?

WD: Oh, yes! The people who are renting it were historian buffs.

KP: That's my answering machine.

WD: Oh, okay.

KP: I turn off the telephone.

WD: I thought it was something here. ...

KP: No, no, no. I turn off the phone and I turn off the ...

WD: Oh, okay.

KP: I put a note on the door so no one disturbs us.

WD: Well anyway, I'm taking too much of your time. Oh dear, twenty after one.

KP: No, no, no. The more is better for us. Oh no, go ahead.

JL: You have three children? Two sons and a daughter?

WD: Yes, but we lost one of our sons.

JL: Okay.

WD: That was about four or five years ago.

JL: And did your sons see military service?

WD: No. When the Vietnam War came up, they were very concerned. Our younger son was 148, or something like that in the poll. And our older son was 354, 364, somewhere in there. And it looked like it was going to be no way that our oldest son was ever gonna serve. However, I felt it was important to let them understand that, if they had to serve, they should go because, I thought, my own experience would be evidence enough to show that if they had to go, they would be protected and be in the right place, and do the right thing that had to be done. And so they were ready to go, willing to go. I didn't agree with the Vietnam War. But it was a law, and I think I wanted to have them respect the law. The younger son was at the point of being called, when the thing was called off. And I thought, "Well, there's our answer. If you're willing to do it, and you know that you believe and looking [to] God for protection, you'll be saved and helped. And it worked out. Our daughter ... has a doctorate in education, ... was teaching at school. She's married and has two girls now. Our ... younger son is married and has four children, and they're living in Massachusetts. So I've got six grandchildren. And they're our grandchildren!

KP: You mentioned that you served in the reserves as a chaplain. In your memoir, I thought you had said you had served as a Christian Scientist?

WD: I served ...

KP: You were appointed by the Mother Church of ...

WD: No, that had nothing to do with my reserve duty. I was in the reserves right after World War II for five or six years, ... '46 to '51, six years.

KP: So Christian Science was not connected to your military service at all?

WD: No other than my own going to ... the other activity started in '58. And I served for fourteen years in that capacity down at Fort Dix.

KP: So you served as a civilian in that capacity?

WD: Yes, that's correct.

KP: You did not come under any military jurisdiction?

WD: Only I had to be controlled that I could only do certain things.

KP: Yeah, but ...

WD: ... It was a wonderful experience because I had credentials to go-- I was serving at Fort Dix, McGuire, Lakehurst, Earle, Fort Hancock, and a couple of Nike sites; that was my tour of duty. ... I would go down to Fort Dix, ... two nights a week plus all day on Friday, to devote to my contacting the young troops out in the field and helping them wherever I could.

KP: What was that experience like, because you did have that when you had been in the military? You really had very little contact with church or chaplains. ...

KP: Except when you went to the city or something.

WD: Well, I was raised that way and you get a lot of indoctrination that you, you don't seriously think about. But it was during the war that I got serious about it.

KP: What were some of the problems you confronted? You were counseling troops and sometimes at a very difficult time. You mentioned the Cuban Missile Crisis.

WD: Yeah, right.

KP: And Vietnam, which was ...

WD: ... My experiences were put in good stead in that situation because, not only, I would go to chapel and be there on Fridays. And when I would do my tour of duty, I would sometimes come back and meet-- the other chaplain would be at the office. And he and I had offices ... separately in the building, but I got to know him very well. ... But we were also at a place where ... a lot of troops were getting ready to go overseas, right next door to where we were. And so we would have troops come in during our service, and they want to talk to a chaplain, I would say, "Well I'll call so and so." "No I want to talk to you." Okay. And, one day, a guy came in and wanted to talk to me. And I said, "Well, can you wait 'till after the service?" "Sure." And he sat there for the service, and we went in the office. And all of a sudden he brings out a gun and puts it on the table. I said, "What's this about?" He said, "Well I was gonna kill three people tonight. And I want you to take this for me." I said, "Okay. Alright." And he and I had a little counseling session about it. And it seemed that he had some social problems with his ... company commander and his wife. I mean he wasn't involved with them in any way, but there was some-- it was compounded by two or three people. And he thought the easiest way to do was to just get rid of 'em. I said, "You know that's not going to solve anything." So I worked with him for a while. Then he left, he was on his way overseas. And he said, "I'd like you hold it until I come back." Not from overseas, but he was going to be around a while before he went overseas. But then he was going to go home before he left, and he wanted to take the gun home with him. Okay. So I ... called up the chaplain, from the chapel in which I was working. And I said, "I have an unusual request of you. In good faith I can't turn this over to the MP because I have his confidence, and I can't, you know, violate that confidence." So he says, "I'll tell you what, I'll meet you at the chapel in the Walson Army Hospital," which is in the lower level there. Okay. The one chapel is not much bigger than this room. And he and I are sitting in the pew, and I had a brown envelope with this thing in it, and I handed it to him. ... "That's all. You'll see it later when you want it." Okay. So a few days go by, and I go and ... I'm sitting at his desk for some reason or other, the phone rings, and I'm looking for a pencil or something, and I open the top drawer. And here's this brown bag right there ... [in the] top drawer and in his desk. And it's not his desk but his assistant's desk. Oh my live! Well it was there the whole time. Nobody bothered it; something said, "Boy Scouts" on it, so nobody thought anything about it. I said, "Okay." I mean, so these are the kinds of experiences you get into.

A young man was in the stockade who I had no affiliation with at all, was of another faith. And I just felt, ... I said, "Wait a minute." He wanted to talk to me. I said, "Well, I think I ought to call your priest for you." He said, "No, no. I don't want to talk to a priest." I don't know whether he's embarrassed, or whatever it was, but he talked to me. And, you know, we struck up a rapport there. He never became a Christian Scientist, but I didn't care. I just tried to really ease his mind about what he was involved with there. And I saw him later ... out of the stockade. And he ... always came over and said, "Hi!" And he'd say, "Hi" to me. ... But I have had several people who were, who had had illnesses, that were healed. I used to go out to the firing range, and some people would have trouble about shooting. And I'd ... [was] able to help them and tell them what they had to do to think about it, you know, from their own religious point of view. So it was a wonderful experience, in a way, too, that, ... I felt you were helping mankind, in a way.

KP: I did not mean to back out of order. But also you served in the reserves and why did you stay in the reserves?

WD: Well ...

KP: Had it been for the pension? Had it been ...

WD: No.

KP: ... you'd thought it would ...

WD: I'd thought I'd get promotions. And I found out after I was in it a while, hey, promotions are not coming along. And when summer camp comes, I can't go because of the crop harvesting on the farm. And so I was kind of thrown to the wolves because I wasn't doing anything about keeping up my reserve and getting promotions and getting, you know, earning rank and ... doing anything about anything. So they said, they wrote out orders, "Mr. Denise, you are to report .. [on] such and such a date, to such and such a place. Your unit is such and such." Gulp! (laughter)

KP: Because you almost got to go to Korea as a reservist.

WD: Yes, yes, yes. And my dad interceded at that time because he was getting elderly and not as strong, and I had three children then. And it just seemed more wise and appropriate that I not go. I would've gone if it hadn't been, you know, for those situations. But, I felt, if I were in the reserves, I could be making rank and earning money towards a retirement pension and everything. It didn't work out. I'm not a ... civilian soldier, really. ... I couldn't get used to barracks life. You know, everything's spit and polish.

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

KP: This continues an interview with Walter G. Denise on March 25, 1997 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler ...

JL: and Jennifer Lenkiewicz. And I was just asking, in 1993 Governor Florio presented you with a Distinguished Service Medal. What did you feel?

WD: Well, I think, politically again. [laughter] I wasn't overly pleased that he was making the presentation, and it worked out that he wasn't making the presentation. It was done by a general who was the Adjutant for the New Jersey Military Affairs. And there ... [were] about a dozen of us there that day. And there has been reoccurrences of this ... presentation, repeatedly over the course of time. But, I think it was a nice honor to get it. But I always say, "That and 75 cents will get you a cup coffee at most places," but I don't even drink coffee anymore. [laughter]

KP: You stayed in Freehold almost your entire life, except when you were in the military and Rutgers.

WD: Yeah.

KP: And Freehold has changed quite a bit.

WD: Yes.

KP: You described it earlier in the interview, and if you read the old WPA guidebook. I mean it was very much an agricultural community.

WD: Yes.

KP: And it is now, in many ways, a suburb.

WD: Yes.

KP: Of New York. In your view, what has stayed the same in Freehold? If there is continuity? And obviously there's some changes. What have been the improvements and what have been the changes for the worse? You have alluded to the traffic, for example.

WD: Yeah, politics has remained the same. [laughter]

KP: It's still a Republican ...

WD: No, no. The county is Republican. The town is Democratic. But, so the sense of the party politics is the same. And the same activity by politicians is the same. I mean, that hasn't changed.

KP: In which ways you say it's the same? I'm just curious. Are some of the issues the same?

WD: Same issues, and also the fact that sometimes they're leaning towards the people they represent, rather than doing something for correctness.

KP: In what area?

WD: Well, I can't think of any specifics, but it's just a feel that it always looks like they're always promoting themselves for reelection rather than trying to do something to benefit ... mankind themselves.

KP: Which is ...

WD: If ... we put in this law, well, that gives me a good chance of getting re-elected.

KP: And that's been a time honored ...

WD: ... It's always the same, no matter where you go. That doesn't change. The people do. I mean they're different people. And I've been affiliated with different organizations, and I find the

caliber of people is changing over the times. They're not as concerned about other people as they used to be. They're not as religiously oriented. They're more materialistic now. Everything is, "What can I get out of this? What's in it for me?" And I think mankind has got to start turning around, otherwise we're going to see another Atlantis or some other form of devastation. People wonder why are we having so many hurricanes and thunder storms and earthquakes. I can't help but feel that some of this is due to the total unrest of ... people, population. There's a lot of unrest going on, all over the world, even in the United States. Dissatisfaction with that, or dissatisfaction with that. And they're gonna take it in their own hands to solve the problem. And that doesn't work. You've got to work it out mutually, together.

... Freehold now, in the last few years itself, has been picking itself up by its bootstraps. Main Street in town is really becoming more attractive. There are a lot of old homes and old structures. There's an attempt ... to keep, to hang onto the old style, and yet we had some monstrous ugly things that are being built. And I don't understand that, you know. If you have a code, as Princeton has, then you retain that charm. So these are some of the things that I'm a little concerned about. There aren't a lot of things that I'm concerned about.

KP: So in terms of Freehold?

WD: What me worry? You know, what's his name? ... "What me worry?"

KP: I have a question about Rutgers which is pretty standard. We always are very curious about why certain professors stick out-- as professor Reager ...

WD: Yes.

KP: You mentioned he was your favorite professor. What do you remember about him, and why does he stick out?

WD: ... I think, I took a speech course with him, which was a very basic course. And I have found it so helpful. There were so many ... parts of it, so many facets of it. ... He was very emphatic. If you were having a meeting of a group of people, start your meetings on time. Respect the people who came there on time. And if they don't come on time, start without 'em. Even if there's only one person there, start. And I changed from a D or a C student to an A student in his class because I found it had helped me a great deal being able to speak before groups of people. And I became Master of the Grange, and a lot of other activities, President of Freehold Downtown Association and on and on. But I wouldn't have been that way if it hadn't have been for ... Reager. He was, to me, an outstanding professor because he gave you the principles of things that you needed, beside[s] education. And, of course, that's education too. But you have more tools with which to work when you're out there. I used to chew my nails and literally, if I had to speak before a group, I was [makes noise], you know, and things like that. I can't do it today. And he was very emphatic about, if you're giving a talk, ah, um, uh, "What was that?" You don't use ah, or uh, or anything. You say what you say. And if you don't have anything at that moment to say, say nothing. And he says, that can be very helpful to you because if you say nothing for a moment it gives them time to digest what you've already said.

And don't run ideas together, separate them a little bit. Give 'em pause to think about what you've just said. Uh, uh, um, no way! ... I mean, there were a lot of things I thought [were] very fascinating about him. And the professor, oh I shouldn't say it, I guess.

KP: Well, no actually ...

WD: I had a professor I didn't like.

KP: Was he an engineering professor?

WD: Who Reager?

KP: The professor you didn't like.

WD: Oh no, psychology.

KP: Oh, okay.

WD: I found in order to graduate from the course with a passing grade, whatever I felt was the logical answer, I had to reverse. Just from my background, I found his teachings were so contrary to-- I wanted to get into philosophy because I felt that would be an exercise of thought processing. But psychology was too medical, too material, that you had to-- there were certain norms and certain abnorms and all this. You were always programming somebody in certain categories. And I didn't like to do that. And it was kind of contrary to my religious thinking, too. So, I had a lot of good professors though, in school-- Ag campus as well as over here.

KP: The reason I ask about the professor you did not like, I have heard stories about this one engineering professor who was really a terrible lecturer. And he used to sell his notes.

WD: [laughter] Oh.

KP: And so, whenever someone has a story, at least from the people who came after World War II, I often hear about this professor who sold his notes.

WD: I must've missed ...

KP: You must have missed him.

WD: I might have been out of the loop. I mean I'm sure there was a loop there that I might have been outside [of] and never heard of this guy selling [notes].

KP: After the war Rutgers was a little bit bigger place, so you may not have encountered him. I think he was in the regular school of engineering.

WD: Oh, okay.

KP: So that also would explain.

WD: Well, I did go to the school of engineering for certain courses, the math courses or physics courses. ...

KP: But I think he taught a very technical type of engineering.

WD: Yeah, well. I may have not have gotten into that.

KP: Well. Oh no, go ahead.

JL: I just had one more quick question. It goes actually way back before we were talking about in the beginning when you were on the ship going overseas, you were very sick? You got very sick?

WD: Yes, I got spinal meningitis.

JL: How did you get treated for it?

WD: On shipboard, no. ... Nobody knew, they didn't know how to diagnose it or anything.

JL: So you had to wait.

WD: I was five days unconscious. And I didn't know what was going on. I was totally out of it. I didn't know anything for five days. And, when the ship got into harbor at Cherbourg I was taken over the side in a litter, put in a skiff, or motorboat and taken to shore, put in the ambulance and taken to the hospital. But I ... came to then. I was already to, at that time. And then I got to the hospital, they did all kinds of diagnoses and determined it was spinal meningitis. And they probed me with needles in my spin, and tapped the fluid. And everything was all right until the last time. They said, "We have to take one more to make sure it's all taken care of." And oh, brother! I dreaded that. The most of anything that last time because you go in there with ... some kind of a fear, and trepidation that they're gonna slip the needle in there and they're gonna hit a spinal cord itself and paralyze you or something like that. And I shouldn't have worried, I guess, but that was the thought. And I sweating bullets, and, when it was over, it was, you know, it was okay. But I did have a little fun there too. I was recuperating and the nurses would come in, "Take your top off, lay down." I'd lay down on my stomach, and they'd pour this alcohol and rub it all over you and then blow. And I thought, "Wow!" [laughter] And I was parading up and down the hall like a cat in a cave because I wanted out of there in the worst way. ... I don't think I was in there ten days or something like that, at the most. But I'd go down to the TB ward, and "You can't go down there." I said, "No, I got ... to do something. I can't stay here." Well, I finally got out of the thing. And I made my way back to the troops by hitching a ride with a civilian. And I didn't even wait for the bus to come and pick me up. I wanted to get back to the outfit. And I caught up with them at Brest.

KP: Were you concerned at all that you might not get reassigned to your unit? That they might ship you to another?

WD: Well, I was concerned that they might have left the ... encampment area before I got back. But I was destined to get back there one way or another.

KP: It sounds like you were pretty determined to rejoin your unit?

WD: Yeah, I wanted to be with them. I don't want to go with another outfit. I don't know anybody, forget it.

KP: Is there anything else that we forgot to ask.

WD: Oh I think you've done two and a half tapes worth here; that's more than it should be here.

JL: Thank you so much.

KP: Well, thank you very much for coming again. And I'm glad Tom Frusciano called me up when you dropped by his office to let me know that you had dropped off your memoirs. So I am glad you dropped them off to Special Collections and University Archives.

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

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