

Oral History Interview
with
COL. EDWARD F. THELEN

Associate of Harry S. Truman in the Reserve Officer's training program, 1930-40, and Regular Army officer, 1946-61.

Columbia, Missouri
June 6, 1968

by J. R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

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FUCHS: Colonel Thelen, I wonder if you would start by giving me a brief statement of your career, your life.

THELEN: O.K. I was born in Sedalia, Missouri, the 21st of October, 1906. I lived in Sedalia until I was about eight years old. My father had died when I was six, my mother remarried, marrying his brother, about two and a half years later and we moved to Kansas City. We lived for a month or so in Kansas City just across the line into Kansas, and then moved to the northeast section of Kansas City, Missouri where I grew up. I attended Northeast High School. It might be of interest to you people that this is

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also the school Maxwell Taylor attended. He graduated from Northeast High School back in 1917. I graduated there in 1924. In relation to what we're talking about, I took a couple of years of R.O.T.C. at Northeast. I then came to the University of Missouri. During my freshman year they informed me that because of my two years of military in high school I could go in the advanced course at the beginning of the second semester. I did enter the advanced course of the R.O.T.C. during the second semester; and this led, of course, to my military background, such as it is. I was out of school one semester in the 1925-26 school year because I had gone to the advanced camp during the summer and I had to make money in order to return to school. But I did come back. In June of 1927, I guess it was, I completed the R.O.T.C. program in what would have normally been the end of my junior year. I was not commissioned until the

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following October when I became twenty-one years of age. I was commissioned a second lieutenant in the field artillery at that time. I graduated from the University in 1928 with a degree in education and went to Kansas City to teach. While I did not become involved the first couple of years in the Reserve activities in Kansas City, I did become involved along about 1930, I believe it was. I attended many of the Reserve officer meetings, unit meetings and one thing or another, and a number of summer camps. After many summer camps, I was asked by one of the former instructors of our unit in Kansas City, if I would be interested in going into the army before Pearl Harbor. I said, "Yes," and Jo Zach Miller, who then was vice president of the Commerce Trust, and a member of our unit, had orders cut and I went to Fort Leavenworth for examination in November of '40. I passed it. Somewhere the examination got lost and then ninety-six

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days later in February, '41, they ordered me up for another one. This time they had a doctor up there who said I had a bilateral hernia and turned me down. Well, the upshot of this was that I went back to Kansas City and all the doctors down there, including Dr. [Wallace] Graham, said I did not have a hernia and advised me not to have anything done about it. In early 1942, they threatened to take my commission away from me if I did not get something done. I went to Ft. Leavenworth and had another examination. This time they said I had a weak ring. My doctor said, "Well, if you want to get into the Army, we'll operate." So, as a result, I was a little bit late getting into the Army, reporting for active duty in August of 1942.

While serving, I, of course, expressed an interest in a Regular Army commission, but they didn't do much about it. In late 1945, I was released to go back to Kansas City to teach.

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I thought I was suffering from the standpoint of my career, and the war was over. Shortly after I got back to civilian life in Kansas City, the Army sent us a pamphlet about Regular Army integration. I applied in March of '46 for integration into the Regular Army. That's how I became a Regular Army officer. I had a rather varied career. As a Regular Army officer I went to Artillery School the first year. The second year I attended the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. Then I served three years in Trieste, followed by a six month's stint with the CIA. Then I went with the Third Corps Artillery at Fort Lewis, Washington and Fort MacArthur, California. During the latter period I was deputy director of the atomic tests at the

Nevada testing grounds. From there I went to the University of Oklahoma as Professor of Military Science. While there I requested attache duty and was named the attache to Burma.

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FUCHS: What year would this have been?

THELEN: This was in 1956. I got to Burma in the first part of 1957. I stayed in Burma until late December of 1958, and was then assigned to the First United States Army in New York, originally as G-1. Subsequently, about nine months later, I became deputy chief of staff, first for administration, and then for both administration and operations. I was retired December 31, 1961. After a short period of vacation in Puerto Rico, I came to the University of Missouri as Foreign Student Adviser. About two years later I was made Director of Student Affairs for Men in addition to my Foreign Student Adviser title. I've enjoyed it very much. I think my military background has helped me very much in this work with foreign students.

FUCHS: Very good. Back in 1925-26, you said you

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went to advanced camp, R.O.T.C. Where was that?

THELEN: That was at Fort Knox, Kentucky, At that time it was Camp Knox, and they used the old pre-World War I barracks. They had no paint on them and were pretty crude. We had a tick which we filled with straw for a mattress. Those were in the days when they had the horse artillery and we spent a good deal of time working with the horses, and the horse drawn artillery. A very interesting experience.

FUCHS: I'm familiar with Fort Knox. I went through basic there, and then officers school, then back again, and then was assigned overseas from there.

THEUN: Well, Fort Knox is not the same place now that it was when I was there, Camp Knox, by any means.

FUCHS: No. Now, when did you first come in touch

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with Mr. Truman?

THELEN: I would say that it was about 1930 or 1931 when I became active in going to the Reserve meetings, I attended them in the old National Guard Armory on Main Street. They had an artillery section and, although I was assigned to a unit with headquarters and instructor in St. Joseph, Missouri, I attended the meetings there at the Armory. This is where I first saw Mr. Truman. I wouldn't say we became acquainted at that time. Probably I became a little better acquainted with him along about 1932 or 1933.

FUCHS: You probably met him along in 1930-31.

THELEN: That's right.

FUCHS: How frequently did you meet?

THELEN: At that time I believe that we were meeting

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every other week at the Armory through the winter months -- fall, winter and spring. Later on, as I recall, we had weekly meetings and started meeting at the old Medical Center at 34th and Broadway. I cannot remember the exact year that the Reserve Headquarters moved over there, but I remember that Colonel George M. Peek was our instructor. I think that President Truman had something to do with keeping Peek there beyond the normal number of years of his assignment. His tour lasted more than the normal four years, as I recall. We had a room in the medical building which was for the artillery group alone. Then, of course, they had their auditorium down on the first floor used by the Reserve Officers Association. Frequently, we would have a meeting of the Reserve Officers Association, followed by a section meeting, the cavalry and the infantry having separate

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rooms for each. We had our own room. I can remember that at these sessions, where we would have a lecture, or some instruction in a particular phase of artillery firing, or an artillery problem, and then we'd have some practical work. I remember one of the things that we had was a mechanical gadget which could simulate artillery fire. It was a metal object, about three feet square and it had a slit in it. Someone could stand to the side and they could push a little ball down and it would look like an artillery round landing on a certain spot. It was all calibrated so that if you would say move it so many yards right or left or increase the range, why, this would act in accordance. I remember distinctly that Colonel Truman (his rank then) would come to the meetings and he would sort of supervise this firing, and critique it from time to time.

FUCHS: Who was actually the leader of the group,

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though? Was that Peek?

THELEN: Peek.

FUCHS: Of the artillery section?

THELEN: Yes, Colonel George M. Peek. He was United States Army Officer. I believe Colonel Peek had graduated from VMI. He had been, at one time, assistant commandant of the Artillery School. I believe this was just before he came to us. He was quite a horseman, but had been injured in a fall. He got very, very much interested in the training of Reserves, and did a magnificent job. As we go along, you'll see that he, in conjunction with Colonel Truman, was very much interested in developing our ability to handle artillery fire. They had a lot of schemes worked out to improve the instruction in this particular phase of artillery work.

FUCHS: I see. Now, you knew him then as "Colonel

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Truman." Was he a full colonel at that time?

THELEN: Yes, he was a full colonel.

FUCHS: That would have been, then, subsequent to, according to my record, June 17, 1932, which was when he became a full colonel.

THELEN: That was when we were over in the Medical Center. I couldn't say that I knew just what his rank was prior to that.

FUCHS: Well, he became a lieutenant colonel on May 28, 1925 in the Reserves.

THELEN: Yes. Of course, he had been elected senator, I believe, in 1934, was it?

FUCHS: 1934.

THELEN: And there were a couple of years in there, I think, when we were over at the Medical Center before he went to the Senate. He used to come back from Washington, and whenever he was in

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town and we had a Reserve meeting, he usually attended. And again, he was always willing to critique a problem rather strongly, because I was the subject of it. One summer, I believe it was 1937, we were out at Fort Riley for our summer encampment, and we used the Bishop trainers to fire problems when it was raining, and we had to go to an area where we didn't have the full range. We were firing over in the riding hall. Now a Bishop trainer fires about a one-inch steel ball, and to propel it they use a .22 breech; it's a gadget that has an artillery sight on it and has everything that you would find on an artillery weapon, except that it's done on a 1 to 1/100 scale. We were firing in the riding hall and I was shooting. They had a blackboard there on which they kept a record of the problem. But I knew that when we got up on the firing point we would not have this blackboard and I was trying to shoot by carrying the factors, etc. in my head. I was firing a bracket problem.

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If you're familiar with that, it's where you have an over and a short, and you keep splitting the bracket until you get on the target. I got an over at 3,200 and a short at 3,000, and I immediately said: "3400."

Somebody laughed, you know, and a fellow said, "You jumped your bracket, Thelen."

And I said, "Yep, that's what I get for not using the blackboard."

Well, this was early in the week. Later in the week when it was not raining we went out to fire on the range. You are probably aware that Colonel Truman gave a prize each year for the best problem fired. The year before I had won the prize.

FUCHS: This was in summer camp?

THELEN: Yes. The year before I had won the prize and he sent it to me through General Vaughan, who was then Lieutenant Colonel Vaughan. It was

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a pair of spurs. Under the rule I was not supposed to be eligible to fire this year for the problem, but I got there and we were firing what we called a large "T" problem. That is where you're looking at a target and your guns are firing from such a direction that what you see as right or left is really over or short in range as far as the gun is concerned. Jo Zach Miller was in charge of the point -- a major at that time -- and Jo Zach said -- we were getting down to where it was almost the close of firing -- "Thelen, I'm going to give you a problem."

I said, "Jo Zach, I'm not eligible. I won the prize last year."

"Well, the boss said to give you one."

I said, "Well, we are about to run out of ammunition."

"Well, you get the problem."

So, he gave me a target. I figured my data and, lo and behold on the second round I got a

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target. I knew what to do. I called for five rounds and then I got two targets, I think, and three or four overs. Then I had to adjust that to get a still finer adjustment. I worked this out and they ran out of ammunition. The next finer adjustment came up and they said, "We're out of ammunition."

Colonel Truman says, "Tell him to figure it out."

So, I figured it out. He said, "O.K." Then he said, "Jo Zach, is that the target you gave Thelen?"

"Yes, sir, that is."

He turned to me and said, "Well, Thelen, that's pretty good shooting, but I saw you jump your bracket down in the riding hall the other day." Now I did not even know he was standing there, but he remembered this. I think this is one of the characteristics of Colonel Truman. He

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could see these things and he retained them. He knew when you made a mistake. He was aware of everything that was going on, just like that he picked it up and he "hung" me on it.

FUCHS: You did not win the prize?

THELEN: He walked over and handed the prize to Lou Craig, who, at that time, was one of the assistant Jackson County engineers, in Kansas City. He was also a lieutenant in the Reserves, and he gave Lou the prize. I have a great deal of respect for his ability to critique a problem. He watched every little detail and he knew what was going on. I really thought he knew his artillery very, very well, He was real good at it.

FUCHS: You say this was probably 19...

THELEN: ...it was 1937 as I recall. I had won the prize the year before. As I say, he sent

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these spurs, and when I was on Governor's Island after I had returned from Burma I wanted to have the spurs silvered and engraved, I felt rather sheepish about writing the President and asking him if I could have these spurs silvered and engraved. So I wrote Rufus Burrus and asked him if he would mind checking with the "Old Man," as we called him, to see if he would object to me doing this. I got a letter back and he said, "By all means, go ahead." So, I had them silvered and engraved with "Excellence in shooting, 1936 summer camp," I have the date on it and "Given by Colonel H. S. Truman to Lieutenant Thelen." I did not put "President Truman" because he was not President at the time he awarded them to me. I thought it was rather interesting.

FUCHS: That was at Fort Riley in 1936.

THELEN: In 1936.

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FUCHS: He would have been Senator then.

THELEN: Yes.

FUCHS: Now, did he come to those summer camps when he was Senator and stay for the two weeks?

THELEN: He would come and stay two weeks as a rule. He put on a uniform and his eagles and you could not call him "Senator." You called him "Colonel Truman" at that time. I think as I look back on it that this influenced a lot of people's lives. I'm sure you're aware of Terry Allen. Because of the fact that Colonel Truman was also a Senator, the people stationed on the post were more attentive. Any military organization that did not would certainly be remiss. The commanding general, I'm sure, had Colonel Truman over for dinner and one thing and another, and various people on the post would come out to visit us in our camp. Incidentally, Colonel Truman slept

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in a tent up at the head row of the camp. He did not sleep in a barracks or a cottage or anything like that. One of these people was Terry Allen, and I happened to hear Colonel Truman on several occasions say that Terry Allen was a good artillery officer. Well, of course, during the war, Terry became division commander in Big Red One for one, and later, I'm sure, Mr. Truman influenced his career to some extent. He was very much impressed by Terry Allen.

FUCHS: I was wondering about a point here. You, and others, have referred to Mr. Truman, going to camp in the summer when he was Senator, but we have a statement of his military service from the Adjutant General's office, 14 August 1945, and it just gives his active duty dates as going up through 30 August 1933. Now, I wondered about this.

THELEN: He may not have been on active duty orders,

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but he was there. He put on his uniform and came out, which of course he could do. Being a Senator I'm sure that nobody would object to him going out there. But he was out there almost every summer. I can't recall a summer that I went to summer camp that he was not there.

FUCHS: That's an interesting point then. He was probably going there on his own, because he had interest...

THELEN: On his own, that's right. What was the chaplain's name up at Leavenworth that he was so friendly with?

FUCHS: Are you talking about Father Tiernan?

THELEN: Father Tiernan used to come out there too and I'm sure he was not on duty. It might be interesting to note that on at least one occasion that I know of, Father Tiernan drove

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an old car out there, and in the back end were some liquid refreshments that were used in camp, because Kansas was very dry.

But he was there. We had many events in which he played a rather interesting part. One of the things which we did almost every summer was to have what was known as a "badger fight." This is where you take the wise guy among the lieutenants who knows everything and you talk for about a week and a half about this badger fight, which is a fight between a dog and a badger. You get these people all interested and one thing and another and then you select one fellow to be the referee. He has to put on a lot of equipment and one thing and another, padding to protect himself, to keep this badger from getting into the crowd and one thing and another. You build this up. I remember one time, I don't know whether it was in

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'36 or '37, when Colonel Holmden, who was a lawyer here in Kansas City, in the middle of the ceremony, arose and said, "Gentlemen, I protest. I represent the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals."

"Boo, sit down."

They treated him pretty rough. Of course, I'm sure it was all an act. Holmden sounded like he was very mad. Colonel Truman would always step in and say, "Now, gentlemen, Colonel Holmden is entitled to his say." He'd have his say and everything and finally they'd get the fight started. The lieutenant had to pull the badger out of a cage, using a long rope tied to it. They'd open the cage and he'd pull. Of course there would be a little potty tied onto the end of the rope. Colonel Truman used to get quite a kick out of this particular event because this is one way we taught humility to some of our bright, young lieutenants. They

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would always know everything at the beginning of the camp and when they got suckered in on this they soon sobered up.

FUCHS: Now, what was the unit that Colonel Truman was commanding at that time?

THELEN: Oh, boy, you got me. It was the 379th Field Artillery, I believe.

FUCHS: Well, there was a 379, a 380 and a 381st. Most of the records I have seen showed that he was head of the 379th and John Snyder was of the 381st.

THELEN: I would say the 379th, and Snyder had the other one, and there was a gentleman from Nebraska, I can't recall his name now, had the other one. He was a full colonel. But Snyder and Senator Truman both came out almost every year.

FUCHS: General Vaughan has said that he commanded

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the 380th from about 1935 to 1940. Mr. Truman the 379th, and Mr. Snyder the 381st. Would you say that was probably correct?

THELEN: That's probably correct. What was the first year that Colonel Vaughan said that he...

FUCHS: He said from about 1935 to '40, he commanded the 380th.

THELEN: I'd say that was probably true. The 380th was commanded by a fellow from up in the Nebraska area at first. Vaughan being from St. Joseph, would be pretty much in the same area. I don't know when they changed that command. I've forgotten the name of that Colonel who commanded that for a while. I can picture him, but I just can't call his name.

FUCHS: You do think that Mr. Truman had the 379th as Vaughan says. Now, what would be the meaning of this, as noted in the *Independence Examiner* on July 25, 1932, when the camp was winding up

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its affairs, "the officers presented Col. Truman with a handsome wrist watch and strap engraved with date and name from 'officers of the 381st Artillery.'"

THELEN: I didn't know about this at all. When did this happen?

FUCHS: 1932.

THELEN: No.

FUCHS: You see my point, why would the officers of the 381st give Harry Truman a watch?

THELEN: Well, I think I can answer that perhaps. There was a great deal of shuffling of these Reserve units in the early thirties. When I first started going to Reserves, I belonged to an outfit technically in St. Joseph, and it was the 880 something. It was a battalion as far as I can remember. But its number was not one

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of those regimental numbers. It could easily be that they changed that, realigned those units at that time. Now, when we went to summer camp, I think I should say this, that we were all together, all these units. It was difficult to tell who belonged to what unit, who to the 379th, who belonged to the 380th, who belonged to the 381st. For example, I might be tenting with a fellow from St. Louis, who was undoubtedly in Snyder's outfit, which was probably the 381st. When there was enough officers to have a unit in Kansas City, and a separate unit in St. Louis, I just don't remember. It seems to me that in the early part of the thirties, the St. Louis group and the Kansas City group belonged to the same unit.

FUCHS: Yes, well, it could have been. It could have been that in 1932, Mr. Truman was commanding the 381st and then by 1935, when Vaughan makes

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his statement, he was then commander of the 379th.

THELEN: Yes, I belonged to more than one unit. I don't have my records for those days, so I can't tell you what they are. I looked at my records the other night, and they're all yellow and falling apart. The oldest ones have dried out and have just crumbled. I've kept pretty good records on my active duty career because I thought I might need those very badly.

FUCHS: Well, I'm sure that a lot of these facts are available someplace. We don't have them, in my knowledge, at the Library.

THELEN: Now, has anyone related to you about the work that I'm sure, in fact I know, that Colonel Truman did with Peek in relation to weekend training we took in Kansas City. Some of it, I guess, on a non-credit basis.

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FUCHS: What years would this have been?

THELEN: Well, all the time that Colonel Peek was there, which I would say was along about 1934 through -- he left for the Seventh Corps Headquarters about 1938 or 1939. For instance, out in Penn Valley Park, they built a miniature range so we could use this Bishop Trainer to train us in the firing of artillery. It consisted of a little concrete emplacement, which had a front wall which probably stood three and one half feet high, and on this we placed the Bishop Trainer. Whoever was firing the trainer, could stand there and operate the gun. We all felt that getting this built in Penn Valley Park was largely through the influence of Colonel Truman.

FUCHS: This was around 1934. Of course he went to Washington in January 1935 as a senator.

THELEN: Right, but he still had influence in Kansas

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City. We used to go out there. Peek built little houses to scale, little water tanks to scale, and built roads across this area. It was about, oh, I'd say a hundred yards long and a hundred yards wide, which gave us quite an area in which to fire. This was about the beginning of the time in which we had what we called "air observation." We used to go up on a ten-foot stepladder and that was our air observation. We'd fire at these little targets and we became quite adept. I recollect that Colonel Truman, Senator Truman then, when he was in town, used to come out there on days when we were having these sessions.

Another thing where I think he influenced our training a great deal was that he had so many friends there, and we would even draw up reconnaissance problems. We would go out in cars and reconnoiter positions, usually within the vicinity of a farm of someone with whom he was acquainted. The amount of training that

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we received was just invaluable later on.

FUCHS: Do you think he was behind the appropriation of some funds or allocation of some funds from the Army to the Kansas City area?

THELEN: We always felt that he was, that he influenced this training. He attended many of these exercises whenever he happened to be around. I can recall that he was at Penn Valley Park a number of times.

FUCHS: Was this usually on a Saturday or a Sunday?

THELEN: Usually on a Saturday. It was amazing how men would go out on Saturday afternoon and spend four hours doing this to earn credit. When I think that now the Reserves get paid for everything they do, and we did this on our own, just to keep our hand in, not knowing that we were ever going to use it.

FUCHS: Yes. Your meetings back in the old armory,

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and then at the medical building, were they on a particular night of the week?

THELEN: Yes, I'm trying to think. I think it was on a Wednesday night, but I'm not real positive about that, either a Tuesday or a Wednesday night. It was in the middle of the week.

FUCHS: Were you a member of the Reserve Officers Association?

THELEN: Yes.

FUCHS: Did you have any contact with him there, and do you recall any specific events or anecdotes about that?

THELEN: No, we had a meeting, I think about once a month. They would bring a lecturer in from Fort Leavenworth to lecture on some phase of tactics or some problem. I didn't get too much involved in the political manifestations, such as election

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of officers and that sort of thing. I paid my dues, and I went out there mainly to go to the artillery meetings, but did attend the Reserve Officers meetings, and was a member of the Association. I wouldn't say that I was a very active member of the Association at that time.

FUCHS: Do you remember Mr. Truman taking a big lead in any of these activities?

THELEN: Well, as I recall, he did, because they always deferred to him on many things. He, Jo Zach Miller, and Dinwiddie Groves and some of these older people who had been in World War I, were the ones who were practically running that association at that time. I just do not know too much about the Reserve Association.

FUCHS: What was the first year that you went to summer camp?

THELEN: I think my first year at summer camp was 1932.

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I should have gone earlier, but I think the first year I went was 1932.

FUCHS: I understand, according to the records I have, that that was at Camp Ripley, for Mr. Truman at least.

THELEN: I was at Fort Riley at that time.

FUCHS: In 1933, I understand that the encampment at Riley was called off in July because of the depression and then Mr. Truman was ordered in August to report to Camp Pike for Citizens' Military Training. You didn't go down there by any chance, to Arkansas?

THELEN: No, I remember I was out there in 1932. Of course, I don't recall whether he was there or not, at that time. I know that the Olympic team was training down there.

FUCHS: This is at Fort Riley?

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THELEN: Fort Riley, and one of my old instructors from here was riding, trying out for the Olympic team. That year I belonged to the unit headquartered in St. Joseph. It was not the 380th. It was a unit under instruction of a fellow by the name of Yancey Le Gette, who was a captain at that time. I feel that Colonel Truman was there every year, I would say from 1935 through 1937, 1938. In 1940, we had maneuvers in Minnesota and I was attached to his cousin's unit that year. I happened to remember that. I was attached to the 128th Field Artillery, which was in the Missouri National Guard, which was in turn attached to the 35th Division, commanded by General [Ralph] Truman, So, we didn't go to Riley that summer.

FUCHS: Did you go to a specific camp in Minnesota?

THELEN: We were in a cornfield outside of a place near Little Falls, Minnesota. At that time, I

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remember I renewed my acquaintance with Peek, because Peek was then the Chief of Staff of the Seventh Corps, and they were up there at that time also.

Another interesting sidelight on Colonel Truman's and Snyder's knowledge of the people who had been in camp, might be revealed by this little anecdote concerning an event in 1956. While I was the attache in Burma, this would be probably in the summer, our (U.S.) summer -- over there it's a little bit different, it's pretty much summer all the time. Somewhere along about June of 1958 Colonel Snyder had gone to a monetary meeting in New Delhi and as he was returning from this meeting -- he was no longer Secretary of the Treasury -- as he came through Rangoon. I do not know whether I had said something to the Ambassador about knowing Mr. Snyder or not. Mr. Snyder happens to be a fraternity brother of mine, that is, he belongs to the same fraternity, although not the.

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same chapter.

FUCHS: What fraternity is that?

THELEN: Alpha Tau Omega. Anyway, the Ambassador was having Colonel Snyder in for cocktails, and he invited me and my wife. I guess we were having dinner, and he invited us over for dinner. The Embassy House there is a rather large place. You come in a door and you walk down a hall to get to a sort of a sun porch. We were sitting out on the sun porch when Colonel Snyder came in. He was, oh, thirty yards away. I stood up and he said, "Hello, Thelen, it's been a long time since I've seen you."

Now, whether or not the ambassador told him I was going to be there, I don't know. But at least he recognized me, because there were other people there. We discussed our old times at Fort Riley. He told me that evening that during the war, Colonel Truman and he had kept track of

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every one of us who had served in their units or had served with them out at camp. I said something about having been such-and-such a place. "Yes," he said, "I know." And he said that they kept track of everybody that had been under them out there and they knew just where we were all the time during the war. That was a rather interesting thing, I thought. Well, it's typical, I'm sure, of Colonel Truman. I think he does this, and I found it most interesting to pick up that little piece of information.

FUCHS: Yes. Now, you only recall Mr. Truman in encampments at Riley?

THELEN: At Riley.

FUCHS: That's the only place where you went to summer camp with the exception of your maneuvers?

THELEN: That's right. I remember one year the first or second time I was down there, that we lived

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in a barracks over on the main post and after that we were over in "Republican flats" as they call it, where during the war they had the training camps. That's more or less on the east side. We did our shooting up in the hills, but we were north of the highway there in a flat area. They had put down tent boards and we had eight man tents, and that's where we lived at that time. The staff had their tents up above the mess halls and I remember that Vaughan was up there in one of them; he was a lieutenant colonel. I remember one of our officers, Capt. Bill Kirby, who at that time worked for the Missouri Employment Division in Kansas City -- I think he was the head of it. Bill was in the tent next to me and I guess we were there close to the Fourth of July -- there were firecrackers around -- and he set those firecrackers out, and Vaughan came down and he said,

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"The old mans getting tired of this noise. Now, cut it off." By this time the instructor of our unit was a fellow by the name of -- from the Reserves here in Kansas City -- by the name of Sellack, Colonel Sellack. He had succeeded Peek. He had come down in his bathrobe and he was pretty irate about this. Kirby had been drinking, I guess, and he kept throwing those firecrackers out and Vaughan came down a second time and told him to stop it. Then Sellack came down, I guess that was the third time, and after he threw it out he said, "Hey, Thelen, quit throwing those firecrackers around."

FUCHS: Were you a lieutenant at that time?

THELEN: I believe I was captain at that time.

FUCHS: By the "old man," was he referring to...

THELEN: He was referring to Colonel Truman. He was getting tired of this noise, too. We used to

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have some rather frivolous times along with the serious. This, of course, was late at night, and people were trying to sleep.

FUCHS: The Colonel never came down?

THELEN: No, Colonel Truman never came down. After Sellack came down that was the end of it.

FUCHS: Do you have any memories of Mr. Truman as a horseman, any impressions?

THELEN: Yes, I don't know how to judge him, except that I did know that when we were drilling he was always out there on a mount. One year when we were living down there on the flats I remember I was the instructor in driving, driving in draft; and he and Snyder and all the others were on single mounts observing this. I gave turns to people to conduct the drill in draft. They were raising a lot of dust, and some of them got pretty irate about the dust, but Mr.

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Truman just laughed. He said this was one of the things that they had to bear with when they were driving in draft. It was pretty dusty down on the flat drill field. We did not do anything fancy in the way of riding. We rode every day. We drilled with the artillery pieces and the caissons and then we also had just plain equitation in which all of us participated.

FUCHS: Did the Colonel participate?

THELEN: Oh, yes, he would be along. But we didn't do any jumping or anything like that. Now, whether or not some of them did go out and jump, I don't know. Some of the people, during part of that time, at least, used to go down and play polo. Dinwiddie Groves, I believe, was in the National Guard at that time, and their unit used to come down there. I know he used to bring a string of polo ponies down there; and play polo. In those days the army played quite a bit

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of polo. During the afternoon, some of them went over and played polo. We usually had part of the afternoon off.

FUCHS: You probably discussed your superiors among the other officers. Do you recall that Mr. Truman was rather well-liked or uniformly well-liked or were there those who were critical of him?

THELEN: I do not think that at our summer camps I ever heard a word of criticism of Colonel Truman. There may have been people there who had political differences. As a matter of fact, I believe -- I wish I could think of the name of this fellow from Nebraska, he was a Republican, but they got along very well. He was a Reserve colonel. I think that Holmden may have been a Republican, I'm not sure; but he had great respect for Colonel Truman. No, I think that in all the contacts with people that I had that they

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sort of looked up to him and most people respected him very greatly.

FUCHS: Did you ever have occasion to come into touch with him in another capacity, his capacity as judge, for instance?

THELEN: No, I never did. I did not get involved in politics. I was in the school system in Kansas City and I was coaching and I did not have much time for politics or anything else.

FUCHS: In 1942, this statement from the Adjutant General's office says that he was relieved from assignment, Seventh Corps Area Assignment Group, Jan. 21, 1942, and was placed in the General Assignment Group by reason of his status as a Member of Congress and reserved for duty under direction of the Secretary of War, 20 January 1942. Is there anything to say about that that would make it more meaningful to a scholar?

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THELEN: Well, what they did there was -- I've always heard, of course, in talking with Rufus Burrus and others, that he wanted to go on active duty and that General Marshall is reputed as telling him he could do more good in Congress than he could on active duty. So what they were doing there was to take him out of this group which, if it hadn't become by that time, shortly after became what was known as a "Service Command." And from that time on they were beginning to deal almost solely with active troops. The reason I say this is because I went to Fort Sill, and Fort Sill was under the 8th Service Command, which had been the 8th Corps. And what they were doing was putting him in this general category of people who -- well, they're not exactly retired, but they're pulled out of a more active group into one that was less active, a general assignment. In other words, he wouldn't be expected to keep up Reserve activities or anything like that.

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Of course, by that time the Reserves were getting pretty well depleted, and most of them were either on duty or had been eliminated because of physical defects or something of that nature.

FUCHS: You probably know of Ted Marks. You know that he was in World War I with Mr. Truman, and he was in the Reserves, I believe for just a short time. He said that once he and Mr. Truman were ordered up to Fort Leavenworth, apparently to take an examination, which as he explained it, orders came over the phone and then they were supposed to figure problems. Do you know anything about what that might have been?

THELEN: Well, there was a time when you had to take an examination before you could get promoted, for one thing. By the time I came along, we were doing correspondence courses, and if you completed a certain number of correspondence

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courses you did not have to take these exams. But if you were due for promotion and had not taken some of these courses, they may have had to take the exam. Was this followed sometime shortly, do you think, by a promotion? Does the record show that?

FUCHS: Ted Marks didn't put any date to it. It very well could have been, He was promoted to lieutenant colonel in '25.

THELEN: He came out of World War I as a major.

FUCHS: He got an appointment as major in the Reserves on Jan. 10, 1920. I think he was a major when he came out. So, that could have been what it was. Marks may have stayed in the Reserves that long. Ted Marks, of course, is dead now.

THELEN: Yes, At one time they did have to pass certain tests in order to show that they were qualified for promotion.

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FUCHS: Were you ever in a poker game with Mr. Truman?

THELEN: No, I've never got in one of those. I'm glad I didn't. I probably would have lost my shirt. We have a professor here who is a poker player and he got me to playing poker with him for a while, and I said, "Well, I don't know anything about poker."

He said, "Don't give me that. Any army officer, anybody that's been in the army surely has played poker."

And believe it or not, all the time I was in the army I never played poker. Finally, I quit the group and I said "I flunked the course, I can't learn to play poker," So it's a good thing I didn't get involved with Colonel Truman.

FUCHS: General Vaughan says that they "were in what was known in the Reserve Division as the 102nd Division, the Ozark Division it's called," Is that what you remember?

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THELEN: I did not know that we really had divisions back in those days, but it could have been. I know that after the war the 102nd came into existence and exists now. It is a Reserve Division. I was on too low a level, I guess, to really know about that.

FUCHS: You didn't think of yourself as being in the 102nd Division, or the Ozark Division.

THELEN: Sure didn't. Could have been though without knowing it.

FUCHS: I see. Do you have any distinct recollections of John Snyder and Mr. Truman?

THELEN: Well, they spent considerable time together at camp. Of course, they ate together and when we'd go into the mess hall usually the colonels were sitting at one table. In those days we were fairly well-trained, we didn't leave until we got excused. We did not start eating either

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until they came. Then on the firing point, I frequently saw them together, although Colonel Truman wandered around the firing point. He was most interested in checking to see how people were shooting. He would go from one to another. They would usually have a couple of these firing points and he'd move from one to another just to follow the problem, to see how things were going. I do not know if there was any relationship -- there seemed to be a closer relationship, of course, between Vaughan and Truman. Of course, at that time, as I recall, we were all aware that during one of the campaigns, Vaughan had served with Colonel Truman in the election. I do not know whether he was his campaign manager the first time or not, but he at least had been active in his campaign.

FUCHS: What about John Snyder, Do you have any anecdotes about him?

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THELEN: None other than what I told you, except that he was a very quiet man when he came to camp. He did not seem to say very much. It could be that because he felt when I was around him that he was not as closely related to me, although I think I did go up to him and tell him that I was an ATO and was aware that he was one from Vanderbilt. I really do not recall too much in the way of separate anecdotes about him.

FUCHS: Was he thought of as a competent artillery officer?

THELEN: Well, I would think so, yes. I think he was. He seemed to know what was going on and I do not think he would have become a colonel if he had not been fairly competent. Most of the people I served with out there were pretty competent I thought. They went on, most of them, to pretty good jobs.

FUCHS: That would apply to Harry Vaughan, too, although he was a grade behind Colonel Truman.

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THELEN: I thought that Harry Vaughan, while at our social events he was kind of boisterous, seemed to know what he was doing. I never did see him fire a problem or anything like that, because he was above the rank where you did that sort of thing. But on reconnaissance problems and that sort of thing he seemed to know what he was doing. Of course, out there, you know, you're limited when you go out to hunt positions and reconnoiter for positions and one thing and another. It's very difficult because the terrain out there just did not offer very much. It is not like Fort Sill or one of the big artillery bases where you have a lot of places where you can go check for positions and that sort of thing. As I recall on that type of a problem he'd make mistakes. I

remember one time there was a fellow by the name of King who was an instructor from down at Little Rock, a Regular Army officer, We were riding across the hills,

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and one of the officers couldn't make up his mind, I believe it was Vaughan. King stopped and said, "Just a minute. My fanny's getting sore. Let's just stop and decide what we're going to do instead of riding hither and yon," Well, that settled everybody down, of course, and they went to work. But this was one of the things that can happen at a place like Fort Riley where every hill looks almost the same. Trying to find an observation point or a gun position is really difficult because of the fact that you go over one hill and all you see is another one. They look alike. And, of course, we were Reserve officers then and did not have the experience that we received later. Looking back on it, I think that considering the training we had that most people did a fairly good job.

FUCHS: Do you recall any other personal contacts with Mr. Truman?

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THELEN: No, I don't. I have tried to think about this since you called me. I had no other contacts with him. As I say, I was not involved, except through other people. I do remember about the time I was integrated into the Regular Army he appointed Judge [C. P. "Cap"] Le Mire to the Tax Court. Of course, I was happy about that because Le Mire was a good friend of mine. That, of course, was extraneous, except that I knew how Judge Le Mire felt about him. "Cap" Le Mire had been a captain of a football team here back in 1912; and then he was a lawyer in Kansas City. He was with that old firm of -- one of them was Howell -- I don't recall the other members. But he was a tax lawyer. I remember we both left Kansas City at the same time, I guess as a result of Mr. Truman appointing both of us, because technically he nominated me for the army. He did not know I was being nominated, but about the same time he nominated

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Judge Le Mire for the Tax Court.

FUCHS: In Washington?

THE LEN: Yes. They were good friends of ours. Through them, of course, I've heard some things about Truman. Mrs. Le Mire was a member of the same P.E.O. chapter as Mrs. Truman,

FUCHS: Here?

THELEN: No, in Washington. I remember in what high regard Le Mire held Colonel Truman. To him he was "Judge" because that was when he first knew him. And then later when he was President he referred to him as the "Boss." As I say, indirect contact of that kind is about the only I've had.

FUCHS: Do you have any recollections of anything that he might have related to you?

THELEN: Not too much that I can think of. I remember

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one that he related about Vaughan. Judge Le Mire's daughter's husband had been in the service during the war and was up in Alaska, and he had died. I think they had been living in Dallas at the time, or Houston, someplace in Texas. They couldn't get any action on the veterans insurance. "Cap" called Harry Vaughan and within a few days they found the file. They had not been able to find the file, but it didn't take them long after that. The thing that this points out is that among these people there was a tremendous bond of friendship. I did hear "Cap" make this comment -- that "Harry Truman never let a friend down," and I can well believe this, of course. It's been one of the things that's been so outstanding about the President.

FUCHS: Did you ever have any direct contact with him, except for encampments, after he became Senator, Vice President or President, or since he's been out?

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THELEN: No, I've been to the Library once since he's been retired, and I had hoped to get to speak with him, but I did not. I took a bunch of Indians up there, oh, three or four years ago, and he came out and spoke to them.

FUCHS: Too bad you didn't come around to the back door and see his secretary. You would have been able to see him if he was still there.

THELEN: When I wrote the letter I informed him who I was and said I would like to bring this group of foreign students up some time when he would be available, or would be there, and they designated this Saturday morning. I do not like to push things at all, and I did not want to feel that I had imposed on him, I thought that maybe they would tell him that one of his old underlings was going to bring in this group and he would say something. But I was so pleased with his performance that day. I'll never forget, one of

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the Indian students -- I say Indians, but there were more, the bulk of the group were Indians, but there were a number of foreign students -- one of the Indians got up and said, "If you were in Mr. Nehru's shoes" -- this was about the time of the Chinese -- "what would you do?"

I remember his answer so clearly, he said, "Well, I'm not in Mr. Nehru's shoes. He knows more about it than I do. He's got all the information, and I'll leave it up to him to decide. I haven't any business commenting on what he should do."

And I thought that was a pretty good answer, and he gave it, you know, in his rather blunt fashion. He handed it right off the cuff to them that day. I thought this was real good. I have nothing but very fond memories of him. As I say, in the Army I never at any time let anybody know that I had served under him, you know. I didn't want to use his influence in any way,

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shape or form. I tried to avoid this. Not that I think he would have done anything because he would have said, "Well, if you merit it, you'll get it." I got everything that was coming to me in

the Army. I moved along pretty fast. I never at any time had any reason to ask for any favors, nobody took any action against me that I'd want to call on someone for help.

One of the things you brought out, it was interesting to note, we who were at the camps were not aware of the fact that he was not on orders to summer camp. But he was there many years, I would say several years, while he was Senator. He came to camp, and he apparently came on his own and this was all the more laudatory, I think, now that I know. Because I'm sure if you talk to others, you'll find that he was there, that I'm not the only one that believes this. It's not a dream. I have a pair of spurs there that I know he gave me in 1936. If he wasn't on

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orders in 1936, he was certainly there.

FUCHS: These were prizes that he purchased out of his own pocket?

THELEN: That's right.

FUCHS: Were they normally spurs?

THELEN: Well, no, my year they were spurs, but the next year it was a pair of sterling silver lieutenant bars. And, as I said, he gave those to Lou Craig. Lou, as I recall, he was in the Jackson County Engineers Department. Lou, now, as far as I know, lives in Lawton, Oklahoma. He got out of the Army at the end of the war and then he was called back, and I believe went to Turkey. I can't recall when I did see him, but I saw him someplace in uniform. I can't recall whether it was in Leavenworth or where, but he had been called and was going to go to Turkey for some assignment, probably on a military assistance program or something of that nature;

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because he was a civil engineer. I knew Lou fairly well, because he married the sister of a very good friend of ours, who was a classmate here at the University. We were in contact with these people when I was down at Fort Sill during 1946-47. But at that time, Lou was not in the Army; I don't know whether he ever became a Regular Army officer or not. But he, of course, would know considerable about Senator Truman, because he worked for the County, in the early years at least, while he was in the Reserves.

FUCHS: He's where now?

THELEN: In Lawton, Oklahoma, that's as far as I know.

FUCHS: Did you know Eddie McKim?

THELEN: Oh, yes, quite well. One year he tented with me. He was from Nebraska. It is kind of hard to remember all of those fellows, but there

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was McKim, and then there was a fellow by the name of Bash, a Kansas City boy, who used to come down there.

FUCHS: When you attended Reserve meeting in Kansas City at the Medical Center and Armory building, was there drill connected with that or did you just have problems?

THELEN: Well, problems. You see, all we had was one room smaller than this, actually. In advance we would, perhaps, be told to read up on small "T" or large "T", which were types of firing. Or if we were going to fire bracket type problems, we'd read up on that, and then we'd have usually some instruction in this particular phase. One person would be named as instructor and he'd teach, using the blackboard and other equipment to illustrate; then if we had time we'd fire some problems on this simulator. Sometimes, we'd have nothing but a lecture by someone who

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had been given a topic to teach at that particular meeting, This was all pretty much under control of the unit instructor who kept it in sequence so that you were moving along at a proper rate.

FUCHS: Then you didn't go down into the auditorium and have a foot drill?

THELEN: No, no foot drill or anything like that. That would have been real good if we had something like that. Those fellows had a hard time. The National Guard, of course, does this, in their weekly drill.

FUCHS: Unless there's something else you recall, why, that's all I have.

THELEN: Well, that's about it.

FUCHS: Have you any photographs from those days?

THELEN: No, I did not own a camera. I do not recall

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that we ever took a picture of any of the units out there either. It's a shame we did not, when I look back on it.

FUCHS: Yes. Well, thank you very much.

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