

Oral History Interview
with
MCKINLEY WOODEN

Mechanic in Battery D, 129th Field Artillery; served under Captain Harry S. Truman in France.
Cattle buyer in years after World War I.

Lee's Summit, Missouri
February 12, 1986
by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
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JOHNSON: I am here at the home of Mr. McKinley Wooden, who was in Battery D with Mr. Truman back in World War I. I'm going to start out, Mr. Wooden, by asking you to give us the place of your birth and the date of your birth, and then perhaps your parents' names.

WOODEN: Well, I was born in Harrison County, Missouri, March 2, 1895. My father's name was Charles Wooden; my mother's name was Elizabeth. When I was three years old, I got off of the train in Walker; Missouri, about 8 miles from Nevada. We moved onto a farm. We shipped from north Missouri five horses, three of whom died the first summer. We moved into Walker the next year.

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My father bought a grist mill there. That was in 1899. He gave a mortgage on this mill: a team, wagon and harness, and lost them all.

We moved out south of Walker, about two miles, in 1900. My father fired an engine in a sawmill, for \$1 a day. Then we moved down by Dedrick, a little town. I never started to school until I was pretty nearly eight years old. It was a frame schoolhouse called Flycreek. The teacher drew \$30 a month. That fall, we bought a farm down on Clear Creek, with a log house and 53 acres of land, all on payments. We finally paid \$50 down on it, and when we sold it we had \$90 to the good.

I'd never had a suit of clothes; I was eleven years old at that time. We went into Nevada and we splurged. We bought all us kids a suit of clothes, three brothers and myself. You could buy a suit of clothes for a kid then for \$2.50 or \$2.75, knee britches and a coat. And we had our picture taken. Then we went to a cafe for lunch. At the end of the lunch, the waitress set a dish of ice cream around at each plate. Us kids didn't know what it was.

Then we moved out by Milo. We lived out there

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for two years. I attended a Christian Church Sunday School for a year; finally got a Testament that I kept until I joined the Army. I forget what I ever did do with it. From there on we moved down to Montevallo, and I went to another country school down there. The teacher drew \$35 a month. At one time it was county seat of Vernon County. They're making a historical site out of it now. There was a battle fought there in the Civil War. There's some old soldiers buried there.

Right there is where I finished my education. I wound up the eighth grade, as far as I ever got. At the commencement that night, I had a suit of clothes that cost \$3.50, a hat that cost a dollar, and a pair of [high?] kid shoes, that were scuffed up pretty bad. But it rained and I walked out on the grass and got them wet, and they looked better when I got them wet. All the rest of the kids got nice presents. I got one. There was a doctor's daughter there, older than I was. She was pretty friendly to me and she admired me and said I was pretty good with my books, which I could have been.

But anyway, when I graduated from the eighth

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grade, 231 in Vernon County took the examination. I headed the list with a perfect score in arithmetic. The county superintendent gave me quite a bouquet that night at the commencement.

JOHNSON: Was that Montevello town school, or was this a country school, that you graduated from?

WOODEN: It was a country school that I graduated.

JOHNSON: What was the name of that school?

WOODEN: Diamond Grove.

JOHNSON: Now your father was still a farmer at this time?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: He was still farming?

WOODEN: Yes, he wasn't getting along. I had a bad life.

JOHNSON: What year was that that you graduated from the eighth grade?

WOODEN: 1910. We moved out close to Walker and I worked around there for the farmers all the way from 50 cents a day to \$20 a month. In 1916, I took an immigrant car

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to Idaho, for a man I was working for. It was a week on the road. I had two mules, two horses, a cow and a couple of chickens.

Well, I got out there to Idaho and unloaded them. He was there with his family in Idaho Falls, and his brother. I called him up; he came down the next morning, and we started unloading everything. I went out that morning to take care of my stock in the stockyards. The chickens were couped up in the car yet. I got up there, and the Plymouth Rock rooster had rung his head up through the slats and hung himself. I said, "Well, he's the smartest one of all of us."

Well, we got into Idaho Falls one night. It was dark, but it was the most lit up town you ever saw, beautiful. He was staying with his brother and his family, and this man had four kids too. So I got out and I stayed at a cheap rooming house, 75 cents a night. I didn't have too much money with me. I had about \$200 in the bank out at Walker, and I saw that I was soon going to run out of money. Well, I commenced looking for a job. I went out to a sugar factory; they weren't employing anybody. It snowed about two days that time; it was bad. I think it was a Monday morning when

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I saw an old farmer drive up with a bobsled to a feed store. He bought some salt, and some coal and some other stuff. I went to talking to him, and told him who I was and where I was from. He said, "Well, my wife and two boys are staying here in town. If you want to, you can go out there and stay with me and my oldest boy on the ranch. All we're doing is taking care of the livestock." It was either the first of April or the first of May. He said, "I'll give you \$40 a month." Well, of course, I went out there.

Well, we got in his sleigh, and we started out. Just as we got to the edge of town, he said, "See that mountain yonder?" I said, "Yes." He said, "My ranch is right at the foot of it." I thought it was off three or four miles. Well, the horses never stopped, and it was getting sundown and we were just going into the foothills. He said, "Well, we're halfway there now."

Well, I worked pretty near all that summer. He had gotten rich down in the valley and then he lost all of his money in speculation. Then he took this government claim up there; he had his own irrigation system, you know, and he was a stone mason. He made the prettiest barn you ever saw, three stories high.

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At one time he represented the Russell Threshing Machine Co. in Idaho Falls. He had a threshing machine outfit and we threshed around up there. So that fall, about every morning when I'd get up -- it must have been October -- the snow would be down a little further on Mount Taylor. I said, "This is no place for me." I said, "I'm leaving." So he paid me up. I went out to Idaho Falls with him. I got on a train. I thought I'd go to Twin Falls; I knew some people out there. I got to Pocatello, and the train I got off of was going to Salt Lake.

Well, I had to wait two hours to get a train into Twin Falls. I said, "Hell, I'd just leave be in Salt Lake." So, I just bought a ticket and I went on down to Salt Lake [City]. I got down there, and I got a job working with the Utah Fire Clay Company. I boarded with an old Mormon lady; her address was 857 South Second West. Now that seems complicated, but it's easy. The second from the Temple, you know, at 857 South. Four or five guys stayed there.

Well, I worked there; I don't know just how long. They had an engine there in the power plant, and the engineer didn't know much about it. Of course, I'd

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tinkered with engines all my life and guns. By God, he was having trouble starting it Monday morning. We shut down at noon on Saturday. So I told him that I'd get some stuff that would make 'er go. I went downtown and I got some ether and stuff. I took it down there, and the next morning I poured the mixer full, and we turned that engine over a time or two. It backfired and the damn thing caught on fire and they called the fire department. There went my job.

JOHNSON: What kind of engine was this?

WOODEN: I don't know the name of the engine. It was some kind of an oil engine, I don't know. I couldn't tell you, but I know it was pretty good size.

Then, by golly, I got back to Walker on Presidential election day, 1916. I went to work for an old boy that I'd worked for in 1914. So it went on that winter and I bought me a nice saddle horse, and a new saddle. I always kept the finest saddle horse in the country, and always a new saddle. About the time they got thinking about war I commenced to get nervous. The night of the fifth day of April, 1917, we were in war.

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In this little town of about 300 population, they were talking war, war, war. I didn't sleep very good. I got up the next morning, and I said, "Jim, I'm going to leave. I'm going to the Army." He said, "Well, I guess I can't stop you." He said, "I'll do the best I can."

So, I rode my horse to Nevada, sold him, sold my saddle, and went back to Walker. I put the money in the bank, got a few clothes, got on the train, and came to Kansas City.

I arrived in Kansas City the morning of April 7, 1917. I knew nothing about the Army. I knew there was an infantry, artillery, and engineers. I could have joined the Regular Army but I wanted to get in a new outfit. While waiting to decide what branch of service to join, I took a six weeks course in the Rahe Auto and Tractor School at Eleventh and Locust; that was one of the best things I ever did. So come along to the 11th day of June, I walked down to the convention hotel, that's where the auditorium is now, and enlisted in Battery D, the Second Missouri Field Artillery.

JOHNSON: But you hadn't had any military experience prior to this at all, you hadn't been...

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WOODEN: Oh, no.

JOHNSON: ...in the National Guard, or the Missouri Guard?

WOODEN: No. But then on the 4th day of August, 1917, we were mustered into the Regular Army, see. It was known as Battery D, 129th Field Artillery, 60th Field Artillery Brigade, 35th Division. All right, then in September we entrained for Ft. Sill, Oklahoma.

JOHNSON: All right. Just to back up a little bit. He was Lieutenant Truman at this time, and he was in Battery F, I believe it was. Had you gotten acquainted yet with Truman? You hadn't met Truman yet, when you went to Oklahoma?

WOODEN: I'll come to that in a little bit. Well, we went down there to Ft. Sill, and we put in the winter down there. The dust would blow from the south one day and from the north the next day, and all. And along about April we entrained for New York.

JOHNSON: Now can I get you back to Ft. Sill? Do you remember some incidents there at Ft. Sill that stand out in your memory?

WOODEN: Yes, I do a couple.

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JOHNSON: Yes.

WOODEN: Well the first thing we did down there -- of course, I was just an ordinary mechanic at that time. They had a wind that was so bad. They had a bulletin board in front of the first sergeant's office and they'd tack the bulletins on that you know -- battery orders, regimental orders and so forth. Well, the wind would blow them off.

Well, I went down to the supply house and I got some window sash. I put it on hinges, put a latch there, and put it on there. Well, the old colonel came along and saw it and he issued a regimental order that every battery in the regiment should copy that. Well, that helped me out, see.

JOHNSON: You were a mechanic?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: What was your rating?

WOODEN: I was just a mechanic, see.

JOHNSON: Is that what you had asked for. You'd asked to be a mechanic?

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WOODEN: Well, they just gave me that when I went into the Army, you see.

JOHNSON: Because you had some background with engines?

WOODEN: Yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: You said there was a second incident too. There were a couple of things that you remembered.

WOODEN: They watered their horses in those galvanized tanks, you know, and sometimes they'd freeze some ice on it. Those rookies would go out and cut that ice and they'd accidentally cut a hole through the tank, see, and it would leak. Well, I studied out how to fix that. So, I'd take a file and I'd file that hole out bigger. Then I'd take some lead, rivet it, and put some of this "stickem" good on the outside, you know. It might drip a little, but it saved the tanks.

Well, I was getting along pretty good down there then by that time. Well, like I say, then we got into New York.

JOHNSON: Do you remember that canteen, the Battery D canteen there?

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WOODEN: I've been there.

JOHNSON: The 129th Field Artillery canteen? Now you're looking at a photograph we've got marked 58-366; the fifth man from the right, this man right here, do you think that is Harry Truman?

WOODEN: I don't think so. I don't think so.

JOHNSON: The one with the strap under his chin?

WOODEN: We had chin straps.

JOHNSON: Now you have that in that book you showed me too, you know, in this book here, this picture.

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Does that look like Harry Truman to you? Or would you be able to tell?

WOODEN: I wouldn't say so, mister, no.

JOHNSON: Well, does he show up anywhere else in that picture?

WOODEN: Well, I wouldn't think so. But he and Eddie Jacobsen ran this canteen.

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JOHNSON: Did you buy stuff from that canteen? Do you remember that?

WOODEN: Oh, I bought some candy bars and stuff like that, you know.

JOHNSON: Do you remember them when they ran that canteen?

WOODEN: Well, I didn't know at that time who was running it.

JOHNSON: I see.

WOODEN: No, I just went down there because it was a canteen.

JOHNSON: And it was well-run; that was the reputation, that it was well-run.

WOODEN: Well, yes, I guess it was, it made money.

JOHNSON: Now to look at this photo again, is there anyone you recognize in that photograph?

WOODEN: Well, mister, I couldn't say...

JOHNSON: But you're not in it, apparently.

WOODEN: No, I'm satisfied I'm not. I'd just go down there and buy candy bars and stuff.

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JOHNSON: You can keep that for a souvenir if you like.

WOODEN: Well, let's see where I was.

JOHNSON: Now these are the two things you remember especially at Ft. Sill? Is there anything else you remember at Ft. Sill?

WOODEN: No, that's about the size of it.

JOHNSON: Was this Colonel [Karl D.] Klemm running things down there?

WOODEN: Yes, he did. He went off to a school and Colonel [Robert M.] Danford took it over. He ran it quite a while. We got some letters, compliments of Mr. Danford. I expect they're out here in the Library.

JOHNSON: He was the commanding officer that you remember, Danford?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: What kind of a man was he?

WOODEN: We all liked him. The boys didn't like Klemm. Well, Klemm was a West Pointer. He had married into a rich family here in Kansas City, and it seems like he kind of had it in for D Battery. We were pretty rough; there's no doubt about it.

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JOHNSON: You went into Battery D. Most of those people in Battery D were supposedly from the Rockhurst area of Kansas City.

WOODEN: That's true.

JOHNSON: They were Irish Catholic.

WOODEN: That's right.

JOHNSON: Are you Irish?

WOODEN: No.

JOHNSON: You're not Catholic?

WOODEN: No.

JOHNSON: Is that still your denomination, the Christian Church?

WOODEN: I don't belong to any of them.

JOHNSON: How did you end up in Battery D? How did they assign you to that? Do you remember?

WOODEN: Just like I say, the 11th day of June, I just walked down there and enlisted into the Second Missouri Field Artillery.

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JOHNSON: And they put you into Battery D.

WOODEN: Well, they were recruiting for Battery D. There were four men there; Arrowsmith; Mike Flynn; Morris Reilly, who lived out on Wyoming; and N. [Newell] T. Paterson.

JOHNSON: Those were the first ones you met.

WOODEN: They were the ones that set at the table when I joined the Army on the 11th day of June, you see.

JOHNSON: Do you remember exactly where that was?

WOODEN: It was at Convention Hall.

JOHNSON: Convention Hall.

WOODEN: Yes sir.

After we were there for a while, we got into a fight with the Shaw Taxi Cab Company. We had a boy that got out and a couple of those taxi boys beat him up. Some of the boys that lived in Kansas City would go home at night, but the rest of us would stay at Convention Hall, you know. Well, when they dismissed us that night, about fifty or sixty of us started down there to clean up on these Shaw Taxi drivers.

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Well, they saw us coming around the corner there; they took out, some of them went into the hotel. We knew not to go in there, you know. We just milled around there in the street, and Morris Reilly, a second lieutenant, came along. He blew his whistle and lined us up in the street, and marched us down on 15th Street in front of a vacant lot and gave us hell.

Well, the next morning old Captain [Charles B.] Allen called us up on the carpet in Convention Hall. There are seats all around up above, and then a floor down the middle, you know. He lined us up there and Colonel Klemm came in, with his swagger stick, hot damn. Of course, they called us to attention; they came in, and he just stood there and he looked at us. Seemed like a half an hour, you know. Of course, it wasn't five minutes. And directly he said, "All of you men that was in that fracas down at the hotel last night, one step forward, yoho." And every sonofabitch stepped forward, every goddamn man. Oh, he laid us out -- "you've disgraced the uniform, you've disgraced the flag, you've disgraced the organization." Oh, he just laid us out. And he said, "I'll tell you what, if this thing ever happens again, I'll court martial every damn one of you." Yeah. Well, of course, he

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left then.

In later years -- see, we had two dinners every year, St. Patrick's Day and Armistice Day. Well, I was visiting Mr. Reilly one night, and I brought this up. Well, he said, "The colonel got hold of me and he wanted me to pinpoint three or four that were ringleaders in this. I said I told him there wasn't any ringleaders, that it was just the whole outfit. One was just as guilty as the other. If he had pointed out a few, you see, the old man would have court-martialed them.

JOHNSON: Did you actually get into a fight with these taxi drivers? You scared them into the hotel.

WOODEN: No, we didn't, no. No, they just took out.

JOHNSON: That was the first brawl that Battery D got involved in?

WOODEN: That was the first one. There was another one up here, but I wasn't there. It was at a reunion. I didn't use to come; I wasn't financially able to. They were throwing things. I know they turned in a riot call and the captain of the riot squad was the uncle

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of one of our boys in the Army, so that's all that saved their bacon. But I wasn't there.

JOHNSON: I've read about that one.

Do you remember when you left Ft. Sill? Was that in May of...

WOODEN: It was in April, I'm satisfied.

JOHNSON: April of 1918.

WOODEN: I'm just guessing at that, but I'm sure that's right.

JOHNSON: You came through Kansas City on the way...

WOODEN: No, we went through St. Louis.

JOHNSON: Truman went ahead; he was with an advance unit.

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you know him by then?

WOODEN: No.

JOHNSON: You still didn't know him.

WOODEN: No, I'll come to that directly. And so we got to New York where I guess we spent a couple of weeks. We

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got on a boat for overseas. The ship was an English ship, the *Saxonia*. It had been a freighter and they had made a troop ship out of it. We were 16 days crossing the pond. There was quite a convoy of us, and the Navy had big battle wagons all surrounding us, you see. Well, we landed in Liverpool as I remember. We stayed a couple of days in England, or maybe three or four, and then one night we got on a little old boat, the *Viper*, that took us across the Channel. The next morning, about 6 o'clock, we got off at LeHavre. Just then there was an ambulance train that came in with wounded from the front; that was our first taste of war, you know.

Well, they quartered us right outside of town, and it was the firtiest, just cinders, coal cinders you know, rag tents, the firtiest place you ever saw, two or three days. Then we got on a train and went to Angers farther south. Those French boxcars are about 24 feet long; on the car the sign says "8 Chevaux (that's horses), 40 Hommes" (that's men, see). Well, we had 43 men in this goddamn car. Well, we got down there, and got off at Angers, and we had to walk out in the country about six, seven miles, maybe eight, to a

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bowling alley. That was where we were going to be quartered. That was a long bowling alley, and they had straw ticks for each man to lay on, you know. We were there about two or three days, and we walked into Angers and unloaded guns and caissons and stuff like that. We didn't have any lunch. That night we figured on having to walk back to camp. But as I say, we had nothing to eat, and one of the men said, "If you buy a bottle of that white wine, it's just like a meal."

Well, I bought a bottle of that white wine and I drank about half of it. It didn't taste good and I gave it to somebody else. Well, about that time, a truck company came along and was going to take us back. The truck beds were about that high. We got in there and after I drunk that white wine, on an empty stomach, and that truck started to rolling, things went to going around, like that. I saw I was going to fall out, so I sat down right in the corner. Well, when we got back to camp, I got out and the cooks had a hell of a good supper for us. So I had supper and I went to bed and the boys never did know I was about half drunk. To this day, they say, "Well, you never did drink anything in the Army nor smoke anything, did you?"

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Well, Captain [John H.] Thacher was running the battery then. He was the third one we'd had, you see.

JOHNSON: You started out with [Charles B.] Allen.

WOODEN: Then we had [Rollin] Ritter, he was...

JOHNSON: Okay, Ritter and then Thacher.

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: What was your opinion of Allen and Ritter?

WOODEN: Allen, he got right in there right at the start, you know. He had been down on the border and had a little military career. I don't know what ever became of him at all. N.T. Paterson, who later was with the Farm and Home Bank, got to be a major and I visited with him down in Nevada. He told me he knew they were going to get rid of him. I can't tell you a thing.

JOHNSON: How about Ritter?

WOODEN: Ritter was a West Pointer. He came over there, and said, "Well, I came over here to straighten you fellers out." He said if there was any trouble they'd "get it

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right here." He lasted about 90 days, probably not 90 days. He wasn't getting anything done. Oh, it was tough; there are no ifs or ands about it -- that goddamn Irish.

JOHNSON: When Ritter took over, you were at...

WOODEN: Ritter took over at Ft. Sill.

JOHNSON: Was it Thacher who went over with you to France?

WOODEN: Yes. Well, we had been there in Angers about three or four days, or it could have been a week, I don't know. But they sent me to a French artillery school at Coetquidan, Napoleon's old artillery range.

Well, I was there about six weeks, I guess, maybe two months, until the battery came up. Well, Harry took the battery over, right there, the 11th day of July, 1918. The first day he addressed the battery, he said, "I didn't come over here to get along with you fellows; you're going to get along with me." Well, the boys came back to the tent. I said to an Irishman, "What do you think of the new captain, Mike?" He said, "Ninety days."

The next night he sent his orderly down for me to come to his tent. I went up there. "Well," he said,

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"I'm going to promote you to chief mechanic." I said, "Thank you sir. I'll do my best." He said, "That's what I expect." Just like that. But that started a friendship that lasted for 54 years. I never talked to him again, for I don't know, quite a little while. I just went ahead and did my business and took care of the guns on the range and everything else. We were firing about every day then, you know.

JOHNSON: So you met him at Coetquidan?

WOODEN: Yes. That's the first time I ever saw him.

JOHNSON: At Coetquidan, when you were doing firing practice.

WOODEN: Yes, sir.

JOHNSON: And he got acquainted with your ability to keep the guns in shape.

WOODEN: Of course, they had my records, you see. I worked on the guns at Ft. Sill, those old three-inch guns, you know.

JOHNSON: The three-inch, at Ft. Sill.

WOODEN: Yes, they weren't worth a damn.

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JOHNSON: When did you first work on 75s?

WOODEN: At Coetquidan.

JOHNSON: Okay, so you were using three-inchers at Ft. Sill.

WOODEN: They were no good. We would have lost the war if we had gone over there with them.

JOHNSON: What was the big problem with the three-inch?

WOODEN: The recoil [mechanism] on them; they had three springs in there, you know. They'd bounce around. You couldn't do anything with them; they weren't any good.

JOHNSON: The recoil was what was bad?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: And the recoil on the 75 was among the best, apparently.

WOODEN: The best there ever was.

JOHNSON: Well, what was your job as chief mechanic? What did you do with weapons?

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WOODEN: The field artillery drill regulations says the chief mechanic is responsible to the battery commander for all materiel in the battery and shall be with the firing battery at all times. Now that's it. I had to be right there. I heard every shot fired. I had to be right there.

JOHNSON: What kind of problems would you have to work on?

WOODEN: We didn't have very many. The recoil systems had to be adjusted frequently, in a long battle. That was the main thing, a very fine deal.

Then in about two or three weeks we pulled up to the front. There was a quiet sector up there in the Vosges Mountains. So the brigadier general wanted to start a little excitement, and we moved one night from our position. That was all day; it was cloudy, and they couldn't observe us at all from a plane. That day for lunch all we had was two crackers and a spoonful of syrup.

That night, the regiment fired 3,000 rounds. It had been going on about 15 or 20 minutes. Harry was standing back of the guns, about from here to those cars out there. He motioned to me. I had never spoken

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to him since he promoted me. I walked over there. He said, "How's our guns performing?" I said, "Perfect, sir." "That'll be all."

JOHNSON: He didn't waste time with idle talk, apparently, did he?

WOODEN: Not a bit.

JOHNSON: Was this when you were firing over towards the Germans?

WOODEN: We were firing on them

JOHNSON: Do you remember what kind of shells?

WOODEN: Gas.

JOHNSON: These were gas shells. Was that chlorine?

WOODEN: Yes. Well, we got back to camp...

JOHNSON: Wait a minute. There was another incident. Isn't that where the Germans bracketed you and started firing back at you? The Battle of Who Run?

WOODEN: Well...

JOHNSON: What do you remember of that episode?

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WOODEN: Well, I'll tell you all about that. We had a first sergeant, a little bitty old squawky guy that was down here on the border, and those guys -- most of them -- didn't last in the Army, just like Allen, see? He was 30 minutes late in getting up there with the horses.

JOHNSON: Was the name Wooldridge? Glen Wooldridge?

WOODEN: Yes, Wooldridge, I think it was. A little bitty old squawky, hard boiled fellow -- yeah a hard boiled boy. Just as quick as a few shells came over, he said, "They've bracketed us, everybody run." Well, you couldn't blame the boys, damn it, they had to obey an officer. He was over them, you know.

All right, I didn't. Me and Skinny [James T.] McNamara, gunner of the number four gun, that little man right up yonder [points at photo on wall]. He was the sergeant that fired the first gun, the first shell. We sat down on the trail of the number four gun. We got back to the camp, and the cooks had a wonderful dinner for us. It must have been four o'clock in the morning. They had a wonderful meal. We lined up and I came along with my mess kit and Harry was standing there. He said, "Feed McKinley good." He

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said, "he's one of my best soldiers." I'd rather that he wouldn't have said it. Now that's a goddamn fact. I'd rather he wouldn't have said it.

JOHNSON: But you did see some men run, then. Apparently a couple of artillery pieces were stuck in the mud and they left them there, and then got them out the next day. Do you remember that?

WOODEN: I don't remember anything about that.

JOHNSON: It was muddy?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you remember anything about Captain Truman's horse falling down and tripping?

WOODEN: No. No. When this barrage was going on, this bracket or whatever it was, me and Skinny McNamara sat right there on the number four gun, on the trail. He was the gunner, and he was awfully fast. He was about the fastest one in the regiment.

JOHNSON: You mean, in loading the gun the fastest.

WOODEN: No, he handled the range and stuff like that,

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you see. He sat on one side of the gun, and the number one man sat over here...

JOHNSON: To the left?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: The number one man was to the left of the breech?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: And the number two man...

WOODEN: The gunner, he sat on the right. He handled the range, whatever it was, and all.

JOHNSON: How many were there on a gun? How big a crew?

WOODEN: Well, let's see, I think it was five, if I remember.

JOHNSON: Were you attached to any of the particular guns, or you were just kind of floating.

WOODEN: I was over all of them.

JOHNSON: You were just checking -- you floated around to all of them.

WOODEN: And if they had problems with the recoil, then you were supposed to do something. I was there. I was the only man that was supposed to do that, see.

JOHNSON: Did you have any problems in that first engagement?

WOODEN: Very few. You see we only fired 3,000 rounds and that wasn't much of a strain on those guns. But when we got up into the Argonne, now that was a different deal, you see.

JOHNSON: After you got back from this first engagement, Captain Truman came up to you. He said you were a great soldier, or...

WOODEN: No, that was when they fed us that breakfast there after we got back off of that little battle. He was standing there and when I came along with my mess kit, he was standing there at the head of the line and said, "Feed McKinley good; he's one of my best soldiers." I would rather he wouldn't have said it. He gave me a lot of compliments. You know, in talking to a lot of people, if I quote him, they say I'm bragging, but every damn one I tell you is right.

JOHNSON: That's right. If it sounds like bragging, that's too bad. We just want the facts.

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WOODEN: That's a fact. There's no ifs or ands about it.

JOHNSON: By the way, what did they eat for chow? What did you have for chow?

WOODEN: Well, at that time, I forget now, we had prunes, and we had anything you would want in a field ration.

JOHNSON: It was a lot better than C rations and that sort of thing?

WOODEN: Oh, yes. The cooks cooked these all up for us.

JOHNSON: You ate pretty well.

WOODEN: Yes. Well, then we weren't there too much longer until we came back down to Kruth, and then we started to St. Mihiel. We got up there. The battle was fought the 11th day of September, 1918. It all started, and we got orders to move into the front. Before we got started, the order came down that stopped us, so we didn't get in action there at all.

Well, from there on we started to the Argonne. We traveled at night. Oh, that was a long old trot, I'll tell you.

JOHNSON: Yes.

WOODEN: Stay hid in the daytime, you know, in the timber, and stuff like that.

JOHNSON: Before we get into this battle at the Argonne, do you want to just reflect a bit on some other names, some other buddies that you had there? Like Vere Leigh; do you remember him?

WOODEN: Yes, I remember Vere Leigh; we called him "pup."

JOHNSON: Eddie McKim, do you remember him?

WOODEN: Oh, he was with us, yes. I forget just what section he was the sergeant of. You see, the firing battery consists of the first four sections. That was the ones I was affiliated with. I didn't know many people in the other sections at all.

JOHNSON: What was a section?

WOODEN: About 16 men.

JOHNSON: Sixteen men, and one gun for each section?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: One gun with 16 men and about a dozen horses?

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WOODEN: Yes, that would be about right.

JOHNSON: Did you have anything to do with the horses, or the harness, or just the guns?

WOODEN: That wasn't my business; the stable sergeant took care of that.

JOHNSON: How about the caissons with the ammunition.

WOODEN: The caissons were under my supervision. Yes sir, all the materiel...

JOHNSON: Who were your closest buddies would you say?

WOODEN: Well, I'm a poor mixer, mister. I don't know; the boys all liked me pretty well. They treated me awful nice. They were all out of Kansas City and most of them were well educated, and out of good families. I was just a poor boy, and they just kind of adopted me.

JOHNSON: You were friends to just about every one of them then?

WOODEN: Yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: Meisburger, and Murphy, and...

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WOODEN: Oh, Eddie Meisburger, sergeant of number one gun. I went to see him when he was in the hospital, and we had a great visit one afternoon. I went to leave. He got up and shook hands with me, and told me to come back. He died that night.

JOHNSON: Is that right?

WOODEN: Yes, sir. And Pat Tierney, the sergeant of the second gun, was as good a friend as I ever had.

JOHNSON: Tierney, another Irishman?

WOODEN: Yes. And then a fellow by the name of [Verne E.] Chaney, the third gun. I wasn't too close to him; he was all right. And Ralph Thacker, that middle man up yonder [points to photograph on wall]; he is the best friend I ever had.

JOHNSON: What's the name again?

WOODEN: Ralph Thacker. He's given me more compliments. I heard him tell some fellows one time -- he said, "That boy can adjust a gun so that you can fire it a half dozen times and put the level on it and it'll still be there." He has given me more compliments.

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JOHNSON: Is he still living?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: How about Major (Marvin H.) Gates? Do you remember him?

WOODEN: I remember him. Major Gates was major of the second battalion. Yes, sir, I remember him.

JOHNSON: Was he well respected and liked? What kind of man was he?

WOODEN: Well, of course, I didn't meet him much. I don't know much about him. I just know he was a Major Gates; that was all.

JOHNSON: Okay, now you're on your way to the Argonne. I guess you entrained for a town named Bayon. Do you happen to remember that? You got off the train, I think, at Bayon.

WOODEN: Something like that.

JOHNSON: And there was a couple of dead horses, I think, near the platform, and you thought for sure that you were right there in the battle zone, but I guess

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that they had been killed by a veterinarian for some reason. Well, you were talking about that march. After you got off the train, then you had to march a number of miles, didn't you, a forced march I guess. You went through Nancy, the town of Nancy. Do any of those places ring a bell?

WOODEN: Yes, that was the most miserable night I ever put in in my life. That was when we went through Nancy. It was raining and foggy and you could hear the guns, you know, and we were all worn out. Oh, boy, that was awful.

JOHNSON: Did everyone have to march? No one got to ride?

WOODEN: Nobody got to ride. The horses were hardly able to pull the guns.

JOHNSON: How did they set up their march? Where did the guns come in, and how did the men arrange themselves on this march?

WOODEN: "A" battery led the regiment, followed by B, C and D.

JOHNSON: All right, they are in alphabetical order.

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WOODEN: Each section had their guns and caissons right along with them. We all had a six-shooter, a piece we carried on our hips.

JOHNSON: Where was your place in the column?

WOODEN: Anywhere I wanted to be. I could be anywhere. I had to be with the guns, and I was responsible. Nobody could head me in, only Captain Harry.

JOHNSON: How many guns was it you were responsible for?

WOODEN: Four.

JOHNSON: You were responsible for four guns in that battery?

WOODEN: Yes sir.

JOHNSON: And that's the night you remember as the worst.

WOODEN: Yes, that was a bad night. Rainy, drizzly, worn out...

JOHNSON: And apparently you marched for another week. You marched for a whole week, is that right?

WOODEN: I expect so.

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JOHNSON: To get up to the Argonne forest.

WOODEN: That's right.

JOHNSON: Then you were double-timed up Tule Hill. Do you remember being double-timed?

WOODEN: Well, now, Klemm came along; Colonel Klemm came along. Of course, he was quite a disciplinarian, and, of course, we just kind of took care of ourselves. He said, "What organization is this?" Somebody said, "Battery D, sir." He said, "I thought so."

JOHNSON: So that was your first encounter with Colonel Klemm?

WOODEN: Oh no, we had met him before, but that was where he took his spite out on us.

Well, by God, we went on up there, and we went into position in a little old timber. The trees weren't very tall, but they kept our guns shielded, you know. They were massing troops up there for this Argonne drive.

JOHNSON: I'm going to ask you if you remember Truman letting

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you sleep, or rest, in the ditch along the side there?

WOODEN: All right. We just went into position on the front see. Well, they were moving troops up every night, every night. Some of them were the infantry, and the machine guns would come on by us, you know. So I had a guy with me, and we had stretched a little old tent there in the brush. He had never been in action at all before. So the Germans commenced firing over us, just anywhere. I heard a shell come over. He said, "Is that us or the Dutch?" I said, "That's the Dutch." He said, "Good-bye." He took out. The boys had dug a trench behind each gun about three feet deep and they're a pretty safe place, unless they made a direct hit on you, you know. So I got up. They weren't coming very fast, and they were going way on over us. I put on all my clothes, got my gas mask and my gun, and walked out and thought I'd get into that trench. Hell,

they were lined up, and there wasn't room for a mouse in there. So I sat down on the trail of a gun until they ceased firing. One shell lit pretty close to us. We had a cook by the name of [Lee A.] Heillman, and he had rigged up a stovepipe, twisted

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some sheet metal you know, and a piece of shell hit that, and knocked it down. He came running down and said, "Goddamn, they shot the stove pipe down." But that didn't last very long.

But the night of the 26th day of September, as I recall, twenty minutes to eight, the fireworks started. And I mean to tell you it was the greatest artillery battle the world had ever seen up until that time. You never saw anything like it. I mean to tell you, for seven days after that, our guns were still warm, all the time. They'd fire those guns, then they'd pour a bucket of water down the muzzle and it'd come out the breech just a steaming, you know.

JOHNSON: How about wet gunny sacks, did they use those?

WOODEN: We never used no wet gunny sacks. We just poured water down...

JOHNSON: You actually poured water into the muzzle of the gun?

WOODEN: Right into the muzzle of the gun, yes sir.

JOHNSON: And let it run down into the breech.

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WOODEN: Yes sir. Yes sir.

JOHNSON: You never had to worry about anything cracking, the barrels cracking?

WOODEN: Never had any trouble at all, never had any trouble at all.

JOHNSON: These were rifled barrels, weren't they?

WOODEN: Yes. But you see, the number three man, I think it was, before a shell went into a gun, he took his finger and some grease and run it right around that shell on that brass rotating band. If they kept that good, those rifles lasted awful good; that's one thing that you've got to do.

JOHNSON: So it was lubricated as it went through the barrel?

WOODEN: That's right.

See, if you didn't that would sure cause you trouble.

JOHNSON: Friction, yes.

WOODEN: Like I say, the next morning, we started forward. We didn't run into much opposition that day. Of course, the infantry did. I believe that night, or maybe the

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the next night, I can't recall -- see that's been a hell of a long time for an old man to remember.

JOHNSON: But now can I ask you a question? When that barrage started, that first big barrage that you're talking about, according to a quotation in a recent book by Richard Miller, you "smiled and told Lieutenant George Arrowsmith, 'Sir, this is what I've been looking forward to all these years.'" [Richard L. Miller, *Truman: The Rise to Power* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1986) p. 133.]

WOODEN: I guess that's right.

JOHNSON: Do you remember saying something like that?

WOODEN: I can't say that I did, but it sounds typical of me.

JOHNSON: You could have said that to this Arrowsmith?

WOODEN: I wouldn't doubt it. I wouldn't doubt it.

JOHNSON: Lieutenant Arrowsmith, was he one of your closer friends?

WOODEN: He sat at the table the day I joined the Army, see. But he wasn't with us; he had transferred to some other outfit.

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JOHNSON: But he recalls you saying that, apparently, Arrowsmith does. You weren't afraid, or all that nervous and anxious, when those guns started?

WOODEN: No, I was just as calm as...

JOHNSON: You didn't think that the Germans were going to fire back, apparently?

WOODEN: Well, they finally did.

Well, I was going to tell you. The next night we stayed in some timber and then we started forward again. We were keeping in touch with the infantry at all times, that is the Captain was, and the regiment, the colonel and all them. I didn't know anything about that; that wasn't my business. My business was to know that the guns fired and fired accurately. That was Ely business. I didn't have anything to do with the other stuff.

JOHNSON: How about the rolling barrage? I guess you had to increase the elevation?

WOODEN: That's right.

JOHNSON: Gradually.

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WOODEN: That's right.

JOHNSON: To get longer distance.

WOODEN: That's right. You started out here and you'd just zip, zip, zip, zip.

JOHNSON: You had to check it after each firing?

WOODEN: Oh, no, I didn't have to bother with any gun unless there was something wrong at all. I'd just monkey around there and go from one gun to another, and just watch them, by God, like a hawk.

JOHNSON: Okay.

WOODEN: We started out the next morning, and we came to a big tree. I forget how many dead soldiers were piled under it, out of the sun. We got down to a little town named Cheppy.

JOHNSON: Are these American soldiers?

WOODEN: Yes. A little town named Cheppy. We turned a corner there. There were two of the 110th Engineers standing there, and one of them was a boy I knew in Kansas City.

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JOHNSON: Who was that?

WOODEN: Pat something.

JOHNSON: It wasn't Veatch?

WOODEN: No, he was just a private with the engineers, the 110th Engineers. They said, "If you don't get these guns up on the hill, they're going to have all the 138th, 140th Infantry killed." We pulled up around the hill, and we put a gun under an old apple tree, each gun, and we commenced shooting at machine guns. There was a valley down there and then a slope up, and this slope was lined with machine guns in pillboxes. The old boys would just look down the barrel and give a yank. If they didn't get him with the first shot, on the next shot you'd see him go up in the air.

JOHNSON: These were German machine guns?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: You were firing at machine gun nests?

WOODEN: Yes.

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JOHNSON: And you saw the shells hit and you saw some Germans flying through the air?

WOODEN: Yes. Well, we finally got them all silenced, and then we fired on three or four towns. I can't recall the names of them now.

JOHNSON: You were near Cheppy at this point? Is this near Cheppy where you saw the American dead?

WOODEN: Yes. That's right.

JOHNSON: And you were in an orchard there?

WOODEN: Yes, outside of Cheppy. It was up a big long hill, I remember that.

So that day, Captain Harry was down in front of us with an observation post. He saw a battery over in front of the division on the left of us; now I just forget what division it was.

JOHNSON: The 28th apparently.

WOODEN: I think you're right. And this battery was causing them a lot of trouble, you see. Now Harry turned his guns over on them and we destroyed them. Then by

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God, they gave him hell for firing out of his sector, you see. But we got a letter from the commanding general congratulating us for doing it, see.

Well, we destroyed two or three towns that afternoon. About sundown Captain Harry came back in and he said, "Well, we've sure done some execution today."

JOHNSON: Charpentry, I think, was one of the towns. Did you fire directly at the towns?

WOODEN: No, no, that was all blind firing with us. Harry figured the data out, and sent it in, you know. I couldn't see where the shells were lighting at all, or anything, see.

JOHNSON: Would his targets be the town itself?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Why would they zero in on the towns?

WOODEN: Well, they were fortified, and the Germans were in there. The infantry boys told us it made it a hell of a lot easier for them to go in after we shot those towns up.

JOHNSON: So the Germans took over the towns, and the French

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residents moved out, I presume.

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: So these towns were just like fortresses. Is that it?

WOODEN: Yes sir, that's what it was.

JOHNSON: Did you see more American dead? I guess they did kind of shred the American infantry.

WOODEN: Yes. Well, it was just a little before sundown when a German plane came right over, right over our position. By God, you know what Harry did? He moved us back about 100 yards, and to our right about 200 yards, right in a little cut in the road, a chat road.

The muzzle of the guns just swung right over the bank, the trail of the guns set back here. It wasn't fifteen minutes until they just shot that orchard all to hell. If he hadn't done that there might not have been a one of us left.

JOHNSON: You moved out of that orchard after you were spotted by a German airplane.

WOODEN: Yes sir. If he hadn't moved us out there probably

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wouldn't have been a one of us left.

JOHNSON: He realized that you were being spotted.

WOODEN: Well, he was right there, and saw it. Yes. He probably saved the whole damn battery's life right there. Of course, the main thing of the artillery is getting the location. You locate them, and it's just about dead duck. Now that's all there is to it.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's a lot of shrapnel.

WOODEN: Yes sir. Well, we were up there, I don't know how many days, in the Argonne, when the 35th Division Infantry was relieved. They marched right back by our guns and them old boys would pat those old 75s on the muzzles and say, "Boy, they're all right." They kept us there for four days to support the artillery of the First Division, you see. They couldn't get their artillery up. We finally got a letter of recommendation from the major general of the First Division for backing them up.

We got relieved one night about 10 or 11 o'clock. We were already to move out; we had to go through Varennes, and them sonofbitches started to shelling Varennes for about an hour. We just had to sit there and wait and wait and wait.

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JOHNSON: The Germans were shelling Varennes?

WOODEN: Yes. So then we moved out.

JOHNSON: That was about October 2 that you apparently pulled out of your positions?

WOODEN: I imagine it was. I can't tell you the dates, mister, because hell, time didn't mean anything to me, no. As far as the dates on that are concerned I don't know.

JOHNSON: Did you lose any men in that operation?

WOODEN: We had two men wounded, I think, was all.

JOHNSON: Two men wounded in that Argonne offensive.

WOODEN: Yes.

But C Battery lost five or six men. The shell hit right among a gun crew, pretty near got them, see. Joe [Joseph E.] Coyle was one of our boys wounded; he got to be Postmaster of Kansas City, Kansas you know, after the war.

So then, by God, we came out from there and we rested up a little bit, and then we moved up on the

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Somme de front. It was a quiet front. We didn't do much there, just protected the infantry.

JOHNSON: Was that near Verdun?

WOODEN: Well, it was about half way between the Argonne and Verdun.

JOHNSON: So you're on your way...

WOODEN: It was right in the timber. We must have been there, oh, I won't say how long, a week or ten days, and then we moved on to Verdun up on Dead Man's Hill. We moved it up there one night about 10 or 11 o'clock. It was the prettiest moonlight night you ever saw in your life. We put the guns in some old French gun pits. There were some dugouts there the gun crews got into. I never saw so much ammunition piled around in my life. You see they were getting ready to drive on Metz. The ammunition train had been storing this ammunition up there for us you know. Captain Harry always called me by my first name, the only man in the battery. He

said, "McKinley, we anticipate a German retreat up here." I said, "From the looks of the ammunition here, something's going to happen."

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Well, I found a little old ammunition shelter right close to the guns. There was a place in there about that wide, and two or three shelves over here and two or three here, where they stored small ammunition. Well, I spread my blankets out and went to bed. I woke up the next morning; the sun was shining. I looked over on this shelf, and there was a skull there, a bullet hole right through there. Then, over here on this shelf, there was another skull, a bullet hole right through here. I looked outside and saw a blown-off man's leg sticking up out of the ground. That's where the crown prince lost the war in 1914; 35,000 men were killed on that hill. An old Frenchman told me the Dutch had crossed that road four times in one day and they drove them back four times.

JOHNSON: Well, now you mention the "Dutch." Did you refer to them as Huns and worse?

WOODEN: Yes, they called them everything. We didn't do much there. Just like I say, they were just massing troops up there to drive on Metz. I have since understood that they were going to start on the 13th, but I can't vouch for that. But I remember the morning of

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the 11th of November, the morning of the Armistice.

JOHNSON: Okay, before we get to the armistice, I would like to mention this letter that Harry Truman wrote home. He wrote it on November 1, 1918 to his cousin, Nellie Noland. He said the commanding general of the 35th Division had written a commendation for him for the "Best taken care of guns in the brigade." And Truman wrote that the general had recommended that the 12 other 75mm batteries follow his example. Then Truman adds, "My chief mechanic is to blame for it. He knows more about a 75 than the manufacturer, but as usual in such cases the CO gets the credit. I'm going to endorse it and give him the credit and file the copy." You did get a copy of that commendation, plus two or three endorsements, didn't you, including the commanding general's of the 35th Division?

WOODEN: I've got a photostatic copy of that down home.

JOHNSON: You sent that copy to Harry Truman in 1959; you sent the original, three sheets, to Harry Truman. I made a copy, which I've given to you today, a xerox copy. You said something in that letter about folding them up and putting them in your pocket and that's the way they

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stayed for the rest of those years.

WOODEN: Yes, I had them in my blouse all the way home, and then I kept them in my desk down there for a long time.

JOHNSON: Do you remember what Truman said to you when he gave you the citation? Do you remember that incident when he made out that commendation for you?

WOODEN: Really, I can't, mister. Really, I have so much to think of and it's been a long time.

JOHNSON: But he gave you this piece of paper.

WOODEN: Yes, I remember that.

JOHNSON: With his signature on it.

WOODEN: Yes, he sure did.

JOHNSON: But you don't remember what he said at the time.

WOODEN: No, sir, I sure can't. Of course, that's been a long time and I'm getting older.

JOHNSON: But he put it in writing, so it is there in writing.

WOODEN: Yes.

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Well, what I was going to tell you. That morning we fired 150 rounds in support of the infantry over there. They had a little attack, I guess about 7 or 7:30. Twenty minutes after 10 Harry came along. His office was down in the chat road about 100 yards. He said, "McKinley, look here." He pulled out a piece of white paper about as big as my hand. It said, "Please cease firing on all fronts 11/11/11, General John J. Pershing." Prettiest piece of paper I ever saw in my life. He went up and told the rest of the battery. We weren't firing. The French battery there did; they fired right up until 11 o'clock, and there was no need of it.

Well, sir, it was the damnedest feeling you ever experienced when that stopped. Words can't express it. Just a few hours before you were killing people, and all of a sudden, France was in peace for the first time in four years. Well, we just stood around there and looked at one another. Finally someone said, "Why don't we go home?"

JOHNSON: I can imagine.

WOODEN: So that's where we wound up the war, right there.

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JOHNSON: It had to be a great feeling.

WOODEN: I never experienced anything like it. I never did.

JOHNSON: Then what did they do after this silence?

WOODEN: Well, we stayed there three or four days.

JOHNSON: But you celebrated, right?

WOODEN: Well, there wasn't anything to celebrate with. We didn't have...

JOHNSON: Didn't they find some vin rouge? No red wine?

WOODEN: No couldn't get anything up there.

You know, after you were in France six months you were entitled to a ten-day furlough. Well, of course, Harry wasn't going to let me go until the war was over. So he called me up to his office, and he said, "Now, McKinley, the boys are going out on a furlough down in southern France. I guess you want to go." I said, "Anyplace, to get away from here." And he told me when they were going to leave, and all, and gave me a pass. Well, on that evening, why, me and let's see, there was how many of us. There were eight of us all together, D Battery. Eddie Meisburger

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was one, I remember him well. I forget some of the rest of them. But anyway, we walked down to Verdun. The railroad station there was all shot up, and all we had for dinner that night was a can of tomatoes. We got some window sash and doors and warmed the tomatoes and ate them. It was just a bite or two for each of us. The damn train that was going to take us hadn't got in there, and we went to bed on the floor there in the ladies waiting room.

Well, the damn train pulled in there, I don't know what time in the morning, and so we got on it. On French passenger cars, you get in on the side, see, through compartment doors. There's a compartment here for about four men to sit right there and four here facing them. Well, that figured all right; we got along all right. So we didn't try to sleep any that day. You couldn't buy anything and know where you were going to eat, only sardines. If you stopped at some little town you could buy a few sardines. But we stole a loaf of bread from Army Occupation, and we had that, so we got along pretty good.

JOHNSON: Where were you going?

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WOODEN: A town down in southern France. It was called Laberbeau. It was right in the mountains; oh, it was a beautiful place. You could run around in your shirt sleeves in December.

Well, the next night we decided how we were going to sleep. We said two would sleep on this bunk, two this bunk, and the two littlest men could swing their shelter halves up here with ropes; they could sleep on them. And me and another tall boy were going to sleep on the floor.

Well, the damn train stopped and started all at once, about the time we got to sleep, and the ropes broke and here they came right down on top of us. Well, we got down to this goddamn place where we were going, about 6 o'clock in the morning; of course, it was dark. They assigned us to hotels. I drew the Richelieu Hotel. See, I remember that well. They set me up with a nice room, a

bed about that high. The French beds are all high. Oh, it was nice. I shaved and cleaned up and took a bath. They had a bath house there that had 100 tubs in it. The water came hot out of the mountain you know. Well, I said, "I don't know whether to go to bed or go down and eat

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breakfast." I went down, and the French serve everything in courses. Guess what the first course was that they sent me? Two damn sardines.

Yes, we stayed there about 10 days, I guess it was. Then we went back.

JOHNSON: What did you do while you were there?

WOODEN: Oh, just like I say, you take a bath every day and they had a fruit stand there. It was a wonderful place. Now that's all there was to it. We enjoyed it, all of us did.

JOHNSON: How many of you were there?

WOODEN: Well, there were eight out of D Battery. There were some other batteries there too, you see.

JOHNSON: In the meantime Truman had gone elsewhere, hadn't he?

WOODEN: I don't know where the hell he was.

JOHNSON: You mentioned Meisburger. Do you remember the others that were with you on that trip?

WOODEN: I can't. I remember Eddie awful well.

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JOHNSON: How about [Harry E.] Murphy? I've got a list here that we might quickly refer to.

WOODEN: I know some of the boys got Eddie pretty well shot one night.

JOHNSON: How about Lawrence Becker. He was the other chief mechanic.

WOODEN: Now, wait a minute. I shouldn't tell this. But you see, he was one of the boys that was down on the border in old B Battery, you know, and like I tell you, those boys didn't get along. He was the original chief mechanic. There were guys, you know, then that couldn't make the grade. Well, something happened in New York; he ditched the train or did something. He didn't make the boat to go across.

JOHNSON: Oh, so he wasn't there with you in France?

WOODEN: No, we never saw him after we left New York.

JOHNSON: Well, who were the other chief mechanics, any others?

WOODEN: Just me. I was it.

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JOHNSON: Okay, what was your rank?

WOODEN: Chief mechanic.

JOHNSON: But sergeant's rank, or...

WOODEN: Oh well, I was over the sergeants as far as that was concerned.

JOHNSON: You were over the sergeants?

WOODEN: Yes, I could tell them to fire a gun or not fire it.

JOHNSON: Weren't there some sergeants with you like [Walter B.] Menefee, [Thomas E.] Murphy, [Edward L.] Sandifer?

WOODEN: Now, wait a minute. Our gun sergeants were the ones that I was best acquainted with. Meisburger, number one; Pat Tierney, number two; [Verne E.] Chaney, number three; and Ralph Thacker, number four. Now those other sergeants I remember well. But they didn't have anything to do with the gun sections, you see. The four sections of guns were my bunch.

JOHNSON: Was Eddie McKim with you on this trip?

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WOODEN: No, I don't think so.

JOHNSON: There was a [Harold J.] Bowman, [John M.] Carnie, [George F.] Brice, [James J.] Doherty.

WOODEN: Bowman was in the fifth section, I think, if I remember right.

JOHNSON: [Lee A.] Heillman.

WOODEN: Yes, he was a cook.

JOHNSON: [Leo P.] Keenan, he died in France.

WOODEN: Leeman, I got a letter from his widow just yesterday, it's right there.

JOHNSON: Who's this, what's the name?

WOODEN: [Earl] Leeman.

JOHNSON: No, this was Keenan.

WOODEN: Oh, Keenan, he was supply sergeant; yes he was supply sergeant.

JOHNSON: [Thomas L.] Taylor, [Carl] Werner.

WOODEN: Tommy Taylor; he was amateur lightweight champion

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of the world at one time.

JOHNSON: Werner, Wickline...

WOODEN: Wickline, he was the first death we had in France.

JOHNSON: Yes, he died in France. [Joseph E.] Wimmers.

WOODEN: Wimmers, he was stable sergeant at one time. He was from Fort Scott, Kansas.

JOHNSON: And Young, Ernest Young.

WOODEN: He was a stable sergeant.

JOHNSON: There was a Sieben, Paul Sieben.

WOODEN: Paul Sieben, yes, I knew Paul Sieben well.

JOHNSON: And there were others of course. You can have that sheet for a souvenir.

When Mr. Fuchs, from the Library, was interviewing Eddie McKim, apparently he had a picture and it said something like, "Wooden, looking down the wrong end of a 75," in a photograph. Do you remember any pictures being taken of you looking down the muzzle of a 75?

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WOODEN: I can't say anything about the pictures. I won't say I wasn't guilty of doing it.

JOHNSON: McKim apparently had a picture of you looking down the muzzle of a 75, but you don't have that photograph?

WOODEN: No. I expect I'm guilty, but...

JOHNSON: Do those remind you of anything? These are photographs from our collection?

WOODEN: Goddamn yes, number three!

JOHNSON: Number three. Can you identify any of those in number two? Can you identify those men, or number three?

WOODEN: Well, there's Pat Tierney, he's sergeant of the gun.

JOHNSON: He's the right hand man on that photo, 126. He's the one at the far right, that's Tierney. Okay.

WOODEN: Yes, sir. I think that's right. Oh, he was a good boy, yes sir.

JOHNSON: Do you recognize any of the others there?

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WOODEN: Well, really I can't.

JOHNSON: How about number three?

WOODEN: That's Chaney's gun.

JOHNSON: Chaney was the gunner?

WOODEN: No, he was the sergeant of the gun.

JOHNSON: Sergeant of the gun.

WOODEN: I think that's him standing right there.

JOHNSON: To the right, the far right?

WOODEN: Yes, I think it is.

JOHNSON: That's probably Chaney.

WOODEN: Oh, I tell you, that Pat Tierney was a fine guy. Him and Eddie Meisburger, and Ralph Thacker, they were princes. Of course, Chaney was just as good, but he was just a little distant.

JOHNSON: How about the city of Verdun. Do you remember Verdun looking like that, the church there?

WOODEN: Yes.

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JOHNSON: Okay, and those are guns you helped maintain.

WOODEN: They are the ones.

JOHNSON: Do you have any photographs of your own, your own album?

WOODEN: No.

JOHNSON: After ten days of recuperation, R & R I guess we'd call it now, of rest and recuperation, you went where?

WOODEN: Well, we went back to a town called Bar-le-duc.

JOHNSON: Right after you left this resort?

WOODEN: No, I think we went right back to our camp. I can't say now, but we moved from there, if I recall, to Bar-le-duc.

JOHNSON: Okay, you went back to camp and then the camp moved to Bar-le-duc.

WOODEN: Before we left France the Division was reviewed by General Pershing. The night before, Harry called

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me to his office and said, "Now, McKinley, we are going to Commercy tomorrow and I want you to go along and see the General." I would not have went if he had not asked me, but I was glad I did as I got to see the Prince of Wales, who later gave up the throne of England to marry an American divorcee.

JOHNSON: I've been looking at some of the regulations that they had for the American soldiers there at the end of the war. Apparently, they were having problems keeping discipline and so on. There were memos to the batteries prohibiting purchase of wine or liquor from Frenchmen or others passing through the camp. They weren't happy about the cleanliness of the billets and the stables and they didn't want people, you guys, tearing down buildings to use for stove wood or whatever.

WOODEN: I'll tell you one on that. You know, I had a carpenter in my section. Of course, he had all the carpenter tools and stuff like that. Well, we moved out of a little town -- I can't think of the name -- and we were billeted up over an old widow woman's place. We had a stove up there and there was an order out you

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couldn't burn any wood that was over three feet long. There was a sawmill about a quarter of a mile away. About 2 o'clock of a night, four or five of us would go down there and carry that lumber up and the next morning there wasn't any of it over three feet long. Then, in that little town, the boys got to shooting dice out on the sidewalk and it got to be bad. The French couldn't get along, you know, They didn't give a damn after the war was over. So, the Mayor, whoever was in charge of the town, got on the colonel and they issued an order -- no more crap shooting in the regiment.

JOHNSON: This is after the armistice you're talking about?

WOODEN: Oh, yes, after it was all over, probably forty days. So things were pretty quiet, but one morning, it was kind of chilly, and some of them met some of the other batteries around the corner of a rock building. It's all rock there, you know, there wasn't much brick. They were rolling the dice there and Lieutenant Colonel [Arthur J.] Elliott walked up on them. They jumped up, you know. He took their names; two of them were from D Battery. He told them to report to the battery

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commanders. He went down and told Harry, the lieutenant colonel did; he caught them down there shooting dice.

Harry said, "Well, as many places as there are here to hide to shoot dice in this little town, if you don't know any better than to get out there where the colonel can find you, you can just peel potatoes three days."

He didn't give a damn how much dice they shot, but he didn't want them to get out where the colonel could find them. He was proud of his battery. There were no ifs or ands about it.

JOHNSON: What kind of a place did you have to stay in during this period we're talking about? You know, when you're shooting craps there and you're just waiting to be sent on home, you don't have much to do. Do you remember what kind of quarters Captain Truman had?

WOODEN: I don't remember. I don't know anything about his quarters.

JOHNSON: Were you still in tents or did you have barracks-type wooden buildings?

WOODEN: We were just spread around over town, you know,

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in barns and houses, and places like that.

JOHNSON: Okay, you were quartered in houses and barns in the town.

WOODEN: Yes. No, I never bothered Harry at all unless he sent for me; that's how we got along so good. If he wanted me, he'd send for me.

JOHNSON: But you weren't one of those that got caught playing craps? Did you ever get caught for anything?

WOODEN: No.

JOHNSON: You never did anything to...

WOODEN: I never did gamble in the Army, you might say. I didn't...

JOHNSON: You didn't drink?

WOODEN: No, I never did drink.

JOHNSON: You never got drunk?

WOODEN: No.

JOHNSON: You didn't like the wine? Do you remember anything about drilling holes through a car, a wooden tank, I guess, and letting the wine out?

WOODEN: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: Where did that happen?

WOODEN: Well, we were on a troop train going to the front. I won't say what town, but anyway the French shipped wine in great big casks, you know, on flat cars. So we got a little hole drilled through there.

JOHNSON: And had your own little fountain of wine.

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: This is while you are on a troop train during a stop, I suppose, in a railroad yard?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: And they...

WOODEN: I'll tell you, they'll do anything, no ifs or ands about it. But after Harry took the battery over they knew they were going to the front, see. He took it over at a good time.

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JOHNSON: Right after he took it over, there was an incident where they staged a runaway. They staged a runaway, they had the horses running and they were trying to get the new captain excited, get Truman excited, but he realized that they were staging this runaway. Do you remember anything about that? About them testing Truman right after he became captain, or commander of Battery D?

WOODEN: No. I do know that they wanted him to court martial this first sergeant that run off. I do know that.

JOHNSON: And he didn't do it.

WOODEN: He didn't do it. They transferred him somewhere. We never heard of him after that.

JOHNSON: There were other rules about speeding through camps and towns and disregarding the uniform regulations. The rules refer to typhoid, firing revolvers at night, saluting. I mean these were problems that they were writing these memoranda about. Did you recall some morale problems there while you were waiting to go back home?

WOODEN: Well, I can't really say that I did.

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JOHNSON: Did they get into fights or brawls?

WOODEN: No, we never had many fights as far as that was concerned, as I recall. The Battery got along good among themselves.

JOHNSON: Did they have games, sports, and so on to take up their time?

WOODEN: Oh yes. There was a little bit of everything.

JOHNSON: They didn't have to worry about venereal disease?

WOODEN: Oh well, hell, I guess some of them got it. I know a lot of them had to go to prophylactic stations, go to the Red Cross for treatment and stuff like that.

JOHNSON: This, of course, was one of the problems that they had to deal with. The French women -- what was their attitude towards the soldiers?

WOODEN: Well, I didn't come in contact with many of them.

When we were down there on that vacation, I was up to the fruit stand one night. I used to eat a lot of fruit. There was the best-looking gal standing there you ever laid eyes on. So I went to talking to her and hell, she could talk English. She was educated

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in England and she was a school teacher. She was teaching there in the school there in this town where we were. Laberbeau was the name of the town where we were. I'm not sure of the spelling.

Well, I made a date with her to come see her up at the school house the next night, you know. I thought, goddamn I've got it on these guys around here. They're making signs to these French girls; I've got one I can talk to. Oh, she was a beauty. So I went up there and we were getting along pretty good. She goes to show me some pictures she had there. She was going to show me the picture of the last American soldier she had -- a black "nigger." The French gals thought more of the niggers than...

JOHNSON: You mean this was a teacher, who was entertaining soldiers. Are you implying she was a prostitute?

WOODEN: Oh, no, no.

JOHNSON: There was none of that?

WOODEN: No, no, she was a fine gal. No, I never met any of them. I never went to Paris or anything like that.

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JOHNSON: So then finally you get the word to get on the train and get ready to go home.

WOODEN: That's right.

Well, we pulled into St. Nazaire; that was where we were going to get on the boat. The night before, they fed our regiment in about fifteen minutes. You just walked through about eight or ten abreast and they hit you once. It was a little stale, and the next morning my stomach was a little out of shape. I didn't want to complain because I wanted to get on that boat. If I had turned in sick they might have left me, you see. We pulled out about 2 o'clock, I guess, in the afternoon, or three, on a brand new ship, the *Zeppelin*. It was a German ship on its maiden voyage. It had been bottled up over there and the whole regiment was on it. It wasn't a big ship, but it was awful fine inside and out. Well, the next day I never was sicker in my life. Oh, I was sick.

JOHNSON: The flu or what do you think it was?

WOODEN: Seasick. It didn't bother me going over. If it hadn't been for that dinner I would have been all

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right. Well, I met Captain Harry up on the deck. He said, "You go down to the canteen and get a jar of those sour pickles and it'll cure that." I went down to the canteen and got a little three-corner jar of pickles; the pickles were about that long. Sour, I never tasted anything so sour in my life! I went up on deck; I never had anything that tasted any better in my life. I walked right up across the deck and up they came; they tasted as good coming up as they did going down.

JOHNSON: That cured your seasickness?

WOODEN: Well, it helped a little. We pulled into New York on Easter Sunday, if I remember right, in 1919.

JOHNSON: How about the decision to honor Captain Truman with a loving cup? Do you remember anything about that?

WOODEN: I can't recall it.

JOHNSON: You don't recall this loving cup they decided to buy for him and engrave?

WOODEN: The boys all liked Harry. Harry was firm but he was fair. He was firm; he wanted you to soldier.

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JOHNSON: You can't remember they took up a collection for this loving cup, or got some money from you to buy this loving cup. You know, it was like a trophy that they engraved for him. You don't remember?

WOODEN: I can't recall it.

JOHNSON: They probably got some money from you.

WOODEN: Yes, I expect I was in on it.

JOHNSON: You got back on Easter Sunday. What did you think when you saw the Statue of Liberty?

WOODEN: One of our boys said, "If you ever look me in the face again, you'll have to turn around." The Mayor had a welcoming committee out there, a boat with the colors, and a band, some pretty girls. They unloaded us; oh, they had a wonderful lunch for us, and they took our picture. It's out here in the Library now. A lot of people goes out there and picks me out in that picture.

JOHNSON: I don't know if this is the one you're referring to, but I've got a picture of the outfit here.

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WOODEN: Gene Donnelly had a better picture than anyone.

JOHNSON: Is this the one?

WOODEN: Yes sir. Can you pick me out?

JOHNSON: 58-365-3. You're identified on the back, so I was able to find you in that big group. Where was that taken?

WOODEN: That was taken the day we got off the boat.

JOHNSON: The day you got off the boat in New York City. They are identified there on that sheet, so we are able...

WOODEN: Here I am right here, a good picture of me here. Right there.

JOHNSON: Is that the first row or the second row?

Yes, they've got you here, the second row from the bottom, left to right, next to Curto, Private John P. Curto.

WOODEN: Yes. Yes, that's me right there.

JOHNSON: Okay. That was the last time you were together?

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I guess you got on the train from there didn't you?

WOODEN: Yes, we got on the train there.

JOHNSON: That was the last time you were together as a group I suppose.

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: You got on the train. Do you remember where that was taken in New York? Where you were when that was taken?

WOODEN: No, I don't. Camp Mills I expect, but I wouldn't say.

JOHNSON: Okay, so then you got on the train at Camp Mills and came out here to Kansas City.

WOODEN: Yes. They put on a parade here. They had a big feed first in Convention Hall.

JOHNSON: I suppose you remember that pretty well.

WOODEN: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: That was an exciting time.

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WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: And then you went out to Camp Funston to get discharged?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: You went back to civilian life? Where did you go?

WOODEN: Well, I went back down to Walker and stayed around there a little bit; then came up here to Kansas City and went to work for the Witte Engine Works out on 17th and Oakland, out in the east bottoms. It's out of business now.

JOHNSON: I should ask you too, do you have any brothers and sisters?

WOODEN: I had three brothers.

JOHNSON: What were their names?

WOODEN: Hobert, he was named after a Vice President; and I was named after a President. And there were James and Joe -- Joseph.

JOHNSON: James and Joseph.

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WOODEN: Yes, they're dead.

JOHNSON: Your father was a Republican? He named you after President McKinley?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: He was a Republican down here in Missouri?

WOODEN: Well, of course, I was born in Harrison County, Missouri you know.

JOHNSON: He was in a minority wasn't he?

WOODEN: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: There weren't many Republicans in Vernon County were there?

WOODEN: Well, there's good many now.

JOHNSON: But not in those days.

WOODEN: We've got three or four in the courthouse now that are Republicans.

JOHNSON: Did your father stay Republican all those years?

WOODEN: Yes. I've voted both ways.

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JOHNSON: You came back to Kansas City. I guess you kind of liked what you saw here, and decided to come back and get a job and

WOODEN: Well, I didn't stay here long.

JOHNSON: What kind of a job was that that you had?

WOODEN: Oh, it was working in a machine shop out there, making gasoline engines, at Witte Engine Works.

JOHNSON: A machinist?

WOODEN: Yes. I went back to Walker and by God I thought I'd start farming. And I went broke in 1920. If I had waited another year it would have been all right; everything went to the dogs. So, I started to grinding feed and I got hold of a feed mill down there and I ran it for a number of years. Then I bought a farm out at the edge of town with the best feedlot in the county on it. I got to feeding cattle and hogs. Then I had to give up the grain business on account of the dust was getting next to me. I got a little gas in the Army. I don't know if it has ever bothered me, but it hurt my eyes a little bit.

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JOHNSON: Oh, you did get a little chlorine?

WOODEN: Yes, just a very little. Then I went to buying cattle. I bought cattle for 35 years. I bought cattle in Joplin for 20 years and I bought for all the feeders around there in the county too. And I bought cattle for a slaughter house down there in Joplin.

JOHNSON: You were self-employed?

WOODEN: Absolutely. I took title to every one I bought; it was mine.

JOHNSON: After you went broke on the farm, you went into cattle buying, on your own.

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Where was it you started this?

WOODEN: I lived in Walker, Missouri. I lived there, you might say, all of my life.

JOHNSON: Did you have a stockyard there, or a cattle yard that you...

WOODEN: I had a feed yard there. The best in the county. It's a high hill; it wouldn't get muddy you know. I

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fed a lot of cattle and hogs out there. Then I bought cattle for all the feeders there in the county. There's a picture of a man right up there in the center. He died here awhile back, worth 8 million dollars. I bought cattle for him for twenty years.

JOHNSON: What was his name?

WOODEN: Finis Moss. His write-up was in the Kansas City paper.

JOHNSON: Finis Moss.

WOODEN: Yes sir. He had controlling interest in six banks. He's worth around eight or nine million dollars.

JOHNSON: And he's a Walker, Missouri man, businessman?

WOODEN: Yes. He died here about three months ago.

JOHNSON: Did you get married?

WOODEN: Yes, I got married on the first day of September, 1923. My wife passed away the 16th day of September 1966.

JOHNSON: What was her maiden name?

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WOODEN: McCoy.

JOHNSON: What was her first name?

WOODEN: Lena.

JOHNSON: Lena McCoy. How did you meet her?

WOODEN: Well, she lived right close to me there in Walker. I was batching there in Walker then, and she just lived down in the next block.

JOHNSON: How about the Battery D reunions? Did you come back for the Battery D reunions?

WOODEN: I never came back to them until 1947. I just didn't want to spend the money, to tell you the truth about it.

JOHNSON: Is that right? But you got invitations every year?

WOODEN: Oh, yes, I got an invitation every time. Fred Smith was running it then. When I finally came, he said, "I'm getting tired of you sending me a notice you won't be here."

Well, I came up here in '47. We had a division

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reunion in Kansas City. We stayed at the Hotel President; Harry stayed at the Muehlebach. We never stayed at his hotel, we didn't want to embarrass him, you see.

One afternoon he sent for us. We went up there and they put us in a great big room, and he brought Eisenhower and the Admiral of the Navy in and introduced them individually to each one of us. By God, he called pretty near all of us by our first names.

JOHNSON: Is that right?

WOODEN: Yes sir.

JOHNSON: That sure did help make him popular didn't it?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: You mention in this little write-up you're doing for this talk, "When Harry ran for the Senate in 1934, he made a speech in my home town of Nevada, Missouri."

WOODEN: That's right.

JOHNSON: "It was there that I first met his mother, his wife and daughter, Margaret, who was 10 years old. I was amused at my neighbors who said he did not have a chance."

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WOODEN: Yes, they rubbed it in on me.

JOHNSON: "The night of the Primary the chairman of the Democratic Party said, 'You will know where your captain stands.' I said, 'Some day he will be President.'"

WOODEN: That's a fact.

JOHNSON: Okay, in 1934 you did distribute literature for him down there.

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: So you met him in '34.

WOODEN: Why, sure, I met him there in Nevada when he made his speech.

JOHNSON: Was that the first time you had seen him since you were discharged from the Army?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: You hadn't visited his haberdashery down here? You didn't patronize the haberdashery?

WOODEN: No. No.

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JOHNSON: Okay, so this is the first time you got to see him after...

WOODEN: Yes. It was in the paper that he was going to talk. I told my wife; I said, "We'll drive down and meet Harry." We drove down and parked. In about five minutes, he parked about two cars from me. I said, "Well, there's the Captain." I got out of my car and he saw me and he came running to me. He took me down and introduced me to his mother, his wife and Margaret. The Democrats thought so little of him down there. They were all for a man, I believe, by the name of Tuck Milligan from up here in north Missouri.

JOHNSON: Yes.

WOODEN: They didn't have anybody out there to introduce him. They had to send down to the Farm and Home [savings and loan] to get the old Judge to come up and introduce him. There wasn't but forty people there to hear him talk. After it was over with, I went up and shook hands with him, and wished him well. He gave me this literature and stuff, eight or ten of the prettiest pictures of him you ever saw. Years later, I was visiting with him and I brought this up. He said, "It didn't look

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like my chances were very good did it?" Oh, they were strong for this other guy! They rubbed it in on me, when I was distributing those pictures and stuff around, you know, in the business places. "Well, hell, he won't even get nowhere." Yes.

JOHNSON: Did he lose the county?

WOODEN: I imagine he did.

JACOBSON: He appreciated your helping distribute his literature, no doubt.

WOODEN: Sure.

JOHNSON: When did you meet him the next time?

WOODEN: The next time?

JOHNSON: Was that in '47?

WOODEN: No, just wait a minute. Yes, '47.

JOHNSON: So you didn't see him again from '34 up until '47.

WOODEN: That's right.

JOHNSON: What did you think when he became Vice President?

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WOODEN: Well, when he became Vice President, he ran with Roosevelt on the same ticket.

JOHNSON: In '44.

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: That's right, he was on the ticket with Roosevelt.

WOODEN: Paterson, you know, was president of the Farm and Home Savings down there at Nevada. He sat on the table when I joined the Army. He was coming up here to a dinner, you know, Armistice dinner. And he came to me and he said, "Do you want to go up with me?" I said, "No, Pat." I said, "there's a big cattle auction here and I'm going to make some money." He said, "What do you want me to tell Harry?" I said, "Well, tell him I'll vote for him when I don't have to vote for Roosevelt." He went and told him. He came back and he said, "Harry said, 'Ain't that just like that cuss?'"

JOHNSON: You're not a Roosevelt man, is that right?

WOODEN: I voted for him the first time, but I never did after that.

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JOHNSON: You didn't. You didn't like the New Deal?

WOODEN: Right there's where things started going to pot and it's been getting worse ever since.

JOHNSON: What did you think was wrong with the New Deal?

WOODEN: In the first place, they started paying people for not doing anything. And that's the wrong thing.

JOHNSON: You mean you're against the WPA? Were you for or against the WPA?

WOODEN: I'll tell you about the WPA. They had two projects down there with us. They built a big reservoir out there for a rich man who could afford to build his own reservoir. But he had political pull. I came by there one day. I was driving an old car I bought here in Kansas City for \$110. Every car that was parked along there was a better car than the car that I had except the man that was manager, and he was a foreman because he was a politician. He was driving an old Model T coupe because he couldn't drive anything else. They had a rock crusher out there and I was out quail hunting with a friend of mine one day, and we walked up and looked over there. There were 12 or 15 men

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there to be working crushing this rock, you know, for the highways and stuff. There was only one working; the rest were just standing there.

JOHNSON: Well, you worked every day I suppose, cattle buying. The Depression didn't affect your business that much, is that right? You were never unemployed so to speak?

WOODEN: Oh, boy, I was on the go continually, every day and Sunday.

JOHNSON: Buying cattle was a six or seven-day a week business?

WOODEN: Yes, sir. It sure was, nights too.

JOHNSON: Did you have to go out and solicit business?

WOODEN: I never went to a farm house unless they called me, and I had a world of people down there that was all for me.

JOHNSON: So you would collect those cattle in your feed lot, and then you would sell them to the packers?

WOODEN: If they were fat cattle, I'd take them right on

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to the packers; the packing house down at Joplin.

JOHNSON: That's where you sent most of your...

WOODEN: Yes. There were five or six people down there. I'd bid them on their cattle and they wouldn't sell them to me. They'd sell part of them to the Kansas City Stock Yards and they'd come back and sell me the rest of them. People got to wondering what I did with my cattle. The banker down there that fought me for a long time kicked me out, and then worked against me after he did it. He finally told somebody, "I don't know what Mac does with his cattle." I got to buying his cattle, and his son's cattle. I stood at the head of the class, mister.

JOHNSON: Well, when Roosevelt died and Truman became President, you probably remember that day, don't you?

WOODEN: Yes sir. I remember it very well. There's an old lady down there that was a very strong Republican, oh, she was a died-in-the-wool. I met her and she said, "Oh, it's awful, it's awful, what will we do now?" I said, "Well, hell, you're in better shape now than you was." That's what I told her; she's dead now.

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I helped carry her off; I helped carry four of that family off. I have been a pallbearer for more people in south Missouri than any man down there.

JOHNSON: So you thought Truman would make a good President?

WOODEN: I thought he would. Of course, he made decisions and he made them right now, and right or wrong, that was it.

JOHNSON: Did you ever correspond with him? Did you ever write to him when he was President?

WOODEN: When he was President I got three or four letters from him. This girl right there's got them down there.

JOHNSON: What girl?

WOODEN: Her and her husband. I've known her all of her life.

JOHNSON: Who is she?

WOODEN: Her name is Broughton.

JOHNSON: What's her first name?

WOODEN: Catherine.

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JOHNSON: Catherine Broughton.

WOODEN: Yes, I got a letter from her last week. Her dad kept me from going hungry there along about 1920, '21, when I went broke. She's got all of my stuff. She's got three or four letters that I got. The letterhead says, "The White House." That's all it says on it. Did you ever see one?

JOHNSON: Yes.

WOODEN: That's right, isn't it?

And when my wife passed away, he sent me a nice sympathy letter.

JOHNSON: Do you have any children?

WOODEN: No. I haven't got a living relative.

JOHNSON: So this is a friend of the family, your best friend so to speak? And she has letters...

WOODEN: She's got everything I've got up until I came up here. It would take you an hour to look at all of it.

JOHNSON: Including World War I stuff?

WOODEN: Yes sir.

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JOHNSON: What did you bring back? Did you bring back some souvenirs or equipment from...

WOODEN: I stole a luger off of a German soldier and I carried it until I got on the boat, and some sucker stole it away from me. I don't know what became of it.

JOHNSON: Was this a dead German soldier?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: And that's the only thing you brought back, the only souvenir?

WOODEN: I brought a magneto off of a plane they shot down, about 200 yards from our position up at Verdun.

JOHNSON: Do you still have that?

WOODEN: No. By God, I took the magneto off of it. The boys were getting souvenirs, you know, and I took the magneto off of it. It was awfully hot. It was a Bosch mag. You could take a piece of paper and put in a circuit and turn that and it would light that piece of paper. Somebody stole that off of me.

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JOHNSON: So you don't have any equipment or souvenirs now from...

WOODEN: No, not a thing in the world. Not a thing in the world.

JOHNSON: You don't have a helmet or a gas mask?

WOODEN: No, none of that. I had a gas mask but I threw it away. The helmet, I guess it was thrown away or something.

JOHNSON: Okay, in '47 you came up here to Kansas City, you say, for a Battery D reunion?

WOODEN: No, it was a Division reunion.

JOHNSON: 35th Division reunion, the first one.

WOODEN: Yes sir.

JOHNSON: And what did Harry say to you?

WOODEN: Well, he introduced me to Mr. Eisenhower and the Admiral of the Navy and said, "This is McKinley Wooden."

JOHNSON: Well, sure, we know him.

WOODEN: Quite an honor.

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JOHNSON: Best mechanic he ever had there, right?

WOODEN: The only one he ever had.

JOHNSON: So you got to talk to him a little bit, for the first time since 1934.

WOODEN: Then he came down to Lamar when they dedicated his birthplace, you know. I met him down there [in 1959].

JOHNSON: What did he have to say then?

WOODEN: Well, we just had a little visit, not very long. He invited me up to the Library; he wanted me to come up and see him. Of course, I had been to the Library. I was there when they dedicated it. The Battery took up a collection to build that.

JOHNSON: Did you talk to Harry Truman on dedication day up at the Library?

WOODEN: No.

JOHNSON: You didn't get to talk to him?

WOODEN: No. But I never will forget it. There were 15 busloads of us from the Muehelebach Hotel, and I rode

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out there with Mary Jane Truman on the bus.

JOHNSON: She was on the bus?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: With the Battery D people.

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: How about Vivian, was he there?

WOODEN: I don't recall them. I've met him.

JOHNSON: How come Mary Jane was riding with you, just to be friendly?

WOODEN: I don't know. I don't know.

JOHNSON: So you were acquainted with Mary Jane.

WOODEN: Yes. She used to come down to Walker. She was -- what kind of a lodge is it?

JOHNSON: Eastern Star?

WOODEN: Yes, she was strong in that.

JOHNSON: All right, let's go back. In 1947 you saw

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President Truman at the 35th Division reunion, and you talked to him.

WOODEN: That's right.

JOHNSON: Did you see him again while he was President?

WOODEN: I don't believe I did.

JOHNSON: So the next time was when they dedicated the Library.

WOODEN: Well, when they dedicated the Library it was a hot old day.

JOHNSON: Yes, that was July 1957. It was a hot day.

WOODEN: Old lady Roosevelt sat up there with a little old white hat on. Old Herbert Hoover had a big old felt hat on, and he was the coolest one in the whole damn group.

JOHNSON: He looked pretty cool.

Then later on, you were invited back to the Library by Harry Truman for a personal tour.

WOODEN: That's right.

JOHNSON: Was that just you or were there other Battery

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D people?

WOODEN: Just me.

JOHNSON: Just you?

WOODEN: Yes sir.

JOHNSON: And he took you on a tour. Do you remember the tour? What did you do?

WOODEN: I remember it well. I sent my card in by his secretary, Rose Conway. He came out to meet me. He took me in and set me down at that desk in a big chair. The desk says, "The Buck Stops Here." He said, "Well, McKinley, I want to show you around." He showed me all over the Library. A lot of people there.

WOODEN: And we went out to that old 75; he had a colored boy take a tarp off of it. There was eight or ten men standing there. Harry said, "Gentlemen, here's a fellow that knows more about that gun than the people who made it." And he went back into his office. He said, "Now McKinley, I'm going to give you something very few people's got." He reached in his desk and pulled out a plaque of that mural, and he wrote on it,

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"To a Good Friend, McKinley Wooden, who knows what it's all about, Harry S. Truman."

JOHNSON: You still have that.

WOODEN: I have a photostatic copy of it down home.

JOHNSON: What happened to the plaque?

WOODEN: Well, the plaque is still down there. The plaque's down home.

JOHNSON: Still down home.

WOODEN: Yes, it's down there. That girl right there's got it.

JOHNSON: And her name is Broughton.

WOODEN: I've known her ever since she was born.

JOHNSON: After that tour of the Library, when did you see him again after that?

WOODEN: Well, let's see. On the dates I might be mixed. I know he had us out there to his place twice.

JOHNSON: To his house?

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WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: On Delaware?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: What do you remember about that house?

WOODEN: Well, I'll tell you. This is a good one. When we had our fiftieth reunion, I knew that would be the last big one, you know. The boys came from California, Florida, Pennsylvania, and everywhere. I was dating a gal up here on East 15th Terrace. So I came up here and she said, "I never did meet Mr. Truman." I said, "You're going to meet him tomorrow." "Oh, no." I said, "Yes, you put on the best duds you've got," and she had plenty. So we got in her car. We drove to the Library. They were all out there with their wives. I guess there was 50 or 60 of us. I know it took two buses to take us to his place. Now I said, "When you go in, shake hands with him and Bess; just tell him your name."

Well, she was walking right ahead of me. She shook hands with Harry and said, "Mrs. Blackburn." He looked over and saw me, and he said, "By God, McKinley,

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you look natural. You haven't got a damn bit more hair than you ever had." Right before all of them. Oh, she was awfully religious. Right before the whole bunch. Now that's a goddamn fact.

JOHNSON: So what did you do, turn a little red? Did you blush a little?

WOODEN: Well, I talked to Bess a while, and then when we came out the TV boys were taking pictures there, see. My friend's nephew was in the Air Force in Alaska and saw us and picked us out that night. Isn't that something?

JOHNSON: Yes. You enjoyed that visit there didn't you?

WOODEN: Oh, yes. Yes.

JOHNSON: How was Harry Truman at that point? He was showing his age I suppose.

WOODEN: Well, he held his age pretty good. The other time he had us out there, there wasn't anything big going on, but we were all up here and he had us out there. We took buses out there. We had a battery reunion; I guess it was Armistice. But anyway, we went into his house. We came down a hall. There's

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a colored girl standing there and she said, "You drink punch out this way." She said, "It's pretty strong, out this way." Of course, most of them went pretty strong. Got out there and Harry's out there pouring the whiskey.

Harry was proud of the battery. I don't see why. We got a letter from him one time after he wasn't able to come. This girl's got it down there. He said whenever he met one of the D Battery men on the street, it was just like meeting one of the family.

JOHNSON: Battery D went to that inauguration in January.

WOODEN: I didn't go. I couldn't afford it, mister, at that time.

JOHNSON: You didn't go in January of '49?

WOODEN: No, I had an invitation and everything else.

JOHNSON: Did you go to any of the reunions...

WOODEN: After '47 I made them all.

JOHNSON: You made them all after '47.

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WOODEN: I made the division reunions in St. Louis, Little Rock, Springfield, and Topeka. I made them all after '47. But up until then I just couldn't afford it, to be just plain about it.

JOHNSON: We've got a photograph of one of those reunions, and you're in it. Let's see if I have a copy here. I suppose we have programs for those sorts of things, but what did they do to entertain themselves mainly at those reunions? What do you remember about them that was most enjoyable?

WOODEN: Oh, they just sat around and shot craps and played cards, visited, one thing and another. Of course, we always had a parade, you know.

JOHNSON: A parade.

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: And war stories?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Yes, here's the photo.

WOODEN: Yes!

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JOHNSON: Now what year is that? Let's see. It says on here, 77-23-43. All right, this is back in 1954, and you're right here.

WOODEN: I think so.

JOHNSON: Yes, you're third from the left.

WOODEN: There was one I missed. My wife was awful sick and I didn't get to go to one. But now there's one reunion they had there. I forget which it was. I have a picture of it down home. But do you remember when Harry was Senator, they got a kind of a scandal up in Washington. They called it the "Whole Truth Squad." Do you remember?

JOHNSON: I am not sure.

WOODEN: I won't say what, but there was a Whole Truth Squad. Well, I've got a good picture of this dinner down home, a beautiful picture. They had a banner that said, "The Whole Truth Squad" on it and they had four guys dressed up like Senators with plug hats on. Eddie Meisburger was one of them, I remember that. They said I was the tallest one and I had to carry that, so we were all hid back there. They all got seated. I came

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in carrying this. I walked right up this aisle, turned around in front of Harry, you know, brought this thing back and set it down. That was quite a show. I've got as pretty a picture of that that you ever saw.

JOHNSON: Now what was this thing?

WOODEN: It said, "The Whole Truth Squad."

JOHNSON: Was it kind of a standard, or a banner, or...

WOODEN: Oh, yes, it was a great big banner on a pole. Yes, I wish you could see that picture. It's a honey. Yes, it's a honey.

JOHNSON: And those reunions mainly were where?

WOODEN: We always had them at the Muehlebach, up until the last few years. Then we went to having them at the Golden Ox. The Muehlebach got so they didn't feed us worth a damn.

JOHNSON: Now was there a bottle of champagne or something that the last man was supposed to get?

WOODEN: Well, I've heard about that all my life. I don't know anything about it.

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JOHNSON: All these survivors that you know of right now are yourself, Thacker, Ralph Thacker...

WOODEN: Yes, sir, and Jerry McGowan.

JOHNSON: You have a picture on the wall of the three of you.

WOODEN: That's right.

JOHNSON: When was that taken, what year?

WOODEN: That was taken last summer.

JOHNSON: Last summer, this one up here. You had a couple of others here too.

WOODEN: They're ahead of that picture I'm sure.

JOHNSON: All right, here's one of four of you.

WOODEN: Yes, but one of them has since passed away, about six months ago.

JOHNSON: What's his name?

WOODEN: Mike Flynn.

JOHNSON: Okay, that was Mike Flynn. Now, that was taken

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what year?

WOODEN: Oh, it must have been two years ago.

JOHNSON: About '84 or '83.

WOODEN: Somewhere along there I would say.

JOHNSON: This one here shows just the three of you.

WOODEN: Yes, Mike wasn't able to come. This one was taken a year ago, before that one there; that's the last one there.

JOHNSON: Now the one on the wall is the last one. This is next to the last, and this would be just about three years ago then.

WOODEN: Yes, that's right. You can have those if you need them.

JOHNSON: Can we copy these?

WOODEN: Take them with you if you want to.

JOHNSON: I'd be glad to. Can we copy that, and we can mail them back to you?

WOODEN: Well, yes, if you want to. I'd like to keep one;

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that's all I care for. Do you want this?

JOHNSON: If we can borrow this one just to copy it, we'll return it to you. You can keep that. We'll make black and white copies, because black and white will last a lot longer, and won't fade. I appreciate that.

Anything else that stands out in your memory that you'd like to leave on the record?

WOODEN: Well, I won't say. Like I say, Harry gave me a lot of compliments. He pushed me to the front every time he could.

JOHNSON: The last time you saw him, was that that meeting that time you were at his home there on Delaware? Was that the last time you saw him, when he commented about your hair or lack of it?

WOODEN: It could have been. I won't say. I know I didn't think I would get to go to his funeral. I just got out of the hospital with gall bladder surgery about ten days before, but the Army sent a major over from Ft. Leavenworth with his chauffeur and took me to his funeral.

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JOHNSON: Where were you living at that time?

WOODEN: I was staying with this lady up here in Kansas City. She took care of me after I got out of the hospital.

JOHNSON: So you went over to the funeral.

WOODEN: Yes. I couldn't have gone if it hadn't been for that. He couldn't go into the service, but he held my coat and hat. Major something; I've forgot his name now. I wrote him a thank you letter after it was over with. He had on his dress uniform; goddamn he was a good looker!

JOHNSON: Did you get together with the other Battery D men over there too then?

WOODEN: Yes, I visited with them before the funeral some. I introduced him to some of them that I knew.

JOHNSON: So you enjoyed those reunions after '47?

WOODEN: Oh yes. I missed one on account of my wife being sick. That's the only one I missed.

JOHNSON: When did you move into Kansas City?

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WOODEN: About eight years ago I guess. Meanwhile, in the early 1960s I serviced a Mutual Telephone System in Walker, Missouri for years. We had about one hundred subscribers and our dues were one dollar a month. The phones were wall type and lightning would burn them out, then I would take them to my shop and repair them and they were as good as ever. We bought a new switchboard. The telephone man wanted two hundred dollars to wire it up. I wired it up in two days and it worked fine until the Southwestern Bell cut us off.

JOHNSON: You were living in Nevada, Missouri for...

WOODEN: I lived there for about six or seven years. See, I had stomach trouble for 15 years, and I was treated by 20-some odd doctors that I can count up. I was five days out at the VA and they couldn't find a damn thing wrong with me. I came up here. I thought that I'd get some place where I'd get some good doctors maybe and get some good cooking. I tried to get someone to cook for me down there and I couldn't. They wouldn't work. They'd stay a while and quit, and be gone; they wouldn't show up. And so, then I came out here three years ago.

JOHNSON: To John Knox Village.

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WOODEN: Last November. I kept eating down here in the dining room. I got in pretty bad shape about six months ago. I mean I was in bad shape; now that's all there was to it. And one night I just rolled and tumbled and I rolled out of bed and couldn't get up. I finally got to the phone and called security. They came and got me up. I was just simply getting in bad shape. I went and bought me two crock pots. I quit eating in restaurants. I'm doing all of my own cooking, and my stomach's in better shape than it's been for 20 years.

JOHNSON: So you know what you need and that's what you fix for yourself.

WOODEN: I'm eating seven or eight dollars worth of lamb every week. I'm eating beefsteak. I'm eating everything I want. I'm five pounds lighter than the day I joined the Army.

JOHNSON: Is that right?

WOODEN: Yes sir.

JOHNSON: How long did you live in Walker, Missouri?

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WOODEN: Well, sir, I'll have to tell you. I got off the train there the day I was three years old. Then we left there, and was gone a long time. Then I drifted back up close to there in 1911. I was working for a farmer out there. I came into Walker one Saturday. It rained. They were playing baseball, or pitching ball out in front on the livery stable. I played ball a good deal, amateur. I said to one old boy; I said, "Let me throw him a few." I cut a few into this old boy. "By God, man," he said, "you've got some smoke." He said, "Can you put a hook on them?" I said, "Oh, not much." I threw him an out-drop and he threw his hands up and it hit him in the belly here. He said, "Son, where do you live?" I said, "I'm working for Mr. Jones out here." He

went over to the depot. The man who ran the depot was the manager of the team. He called him over, and he was the catcher. He said, "You throw me a few." He said, "Would you pitch a game of ball for us Sunday?" I said, "Yes." I came in there and from then on I was a hero.

JOHNSON: You were a pitcher?

WOODEN: That gave me a lift, you know. I came into Walker

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on Saturday nights. Those businessmen would buy me ice cream. I thought I was going to town. We had a wonderful team for a little town; we beat everything from Ft. Scott up to Clinton, Missouri.

JOHNSON: How long did you play baseball?

WOODEN: I quit baseball in about '28 I think.

JOHNSON: Oh, this is after the war?

WOODEN: My best years I played before the war. This was before the war, and after I came back I did awful good for a few years and then I gave it up.

JOHNSON: But you were living in Walker all this time?

WOODEN: Yes, I had a wonderful arm, a wonderful arm. Now, this foot is kind of deformed. It turns out like that. I couldn't run. Now we went up to Clinton one day -- no, it wasn't Clinton, it was that other town up there. There were four brothers who played on the team up there. Their dad was manager. I've got one of their pictures in here. I struck out the first nine men at the plate. They just laid her down and walked back.

JOHNSON: Now, was this baseball or softball?

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WOODEN: Baseball. Oh hell, no softball for me. I was all tanned and black you know. I'd been out in the open. They inquired down there, "Where'd you get that fellow?" They said, "Why, hell, he lives down there at Walker." They said, "Walker, hell, that son of a bitch is an Indian." They said, "They brought him up here from Oklahoma." The first nine men at the plate just laid her down and walked back. That was all there was to it.

Then there was a colored team down there from Crowberg, Kansas. They had quite a reputation. They came up to our town one Sunday. They warmed up on the diamond like a house a fire. I thought we may be in trouble. Well, I pitched the first seven innings and they hadn't got a man past first base. So I gave it up to another boy. I had to pitch at another game at a picnic on Wednesday, so I gave it up to another boy. But they hadn't gotten anywhere with me at all. Well, about that time, the Joplin team was affiliated with the Cardinals you know, St. Louis.

They sent a scout up there to interview me. He had me throw him some balls. He said, "My God, may, you've got the speed." My catcher used to put a handkerchief under his glove

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between the glove and his hand. And he said, "Can you run?" I said, "Not too good." I got up to bat and I knocked one out in left field and hell, they threw me out at first." He says, "Oh." You see I couldn't run.

JOHNSON: What happened to that foot?

WOODEN: It turns out just like that. It's natural; I was born that way.

JOHNSON: Oh, okay. But you didn't get injured in the Army or wounded or anything like that?

WOODEN: Oh, no. I could walk all day. Hell, I walk three miles every day. I get out here sometimes as high as four. One day I walked five miles; didn't bother me at all.

JOHNSON: That scotched your chances for the minor leagues?

WOODEN: The pitcher finally didn't have to run, you know, in later years. But then they did.

JOHNSON: So you were doing that and buying cattle. You're playing hard ball and buying cattle?

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WOODEN: Yes, I bought cattle for 35 years. I've owned a lot of them, mister.

JOHNSON: And you lived in town all those years?

WOODEN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Well, I appreciate the time you've taken to talk to me about your career and your connections with Harry Truman.

WOODEN: Well, there's only two men in my life that ever helped me any. One was Harry Truman. Of course, that never helped me financially, but it gave me some confidence in myself; it sure did. And there was a banker down at Nevada, a red-headed banker, who ran the Thornton Bank for 50 years. When they kicked me out at the Walker Bank, I owed them \$500. I was elected tax collector down there. The bank had been going the collector's bonds for the use of the money. Well, none of the bank board liked me at all. They wanted to keep me working for them for nothing, see, and I beat their pet gal that ran against me, a retired schoolteacher. I beat her two to one. That burned them up.

Well, by God, this banker came over to this feed

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mill one day. He said, "Well, Mac," he said, "we had a bank meeting the other day and Mr. Arnold, he's the President, he spoke very well of you." I said, "Well, I'm surprised." "But," he said, "we decided we wouldn't go any more collector's bonds." I said, "That's all right." I said, "You're running the bank but I'm tax collector."

The next Monday morning I got on a train. I went down to Nevada. I walked into the Thornton Bank. This old red-headed boy was sitting there; I introduced myself. Of course, he knew me. I told him my trouble. He said, "How much money will you collect?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Go over to the courthouse and find out." I did and came back and told him. He said, "Yes, I'll go your bond."

Well, I knew I was in trouble because I owed the Walker Bank \$500 you see. I said, "Well, Mr. Logan, can you use some more business?" He asked me a few questions. At that time I had 70 acres of land with a \$3,000 mortgage on it. That's where my feed lot was. Of course, I had some cattle and stuff out there. I had a couple thousand dollars worth of livestock and grain and stuff. He said, "How much money do you need?"

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I said, "I have to have a thousand dollars for six months to start with." He just reached over and pulled out a note. "Sign right here." I went back and I paid those guys off, see. They said, "He'll be back here. They won't fool with him; he'll be back here in six months." That's been 58 years this September, and I'm still with that bank. I've got \$100,000 in that goddamn bank down there now.

JOHNSON: I read something in our collections about you making a will and 50 percent is to go to a scholarship...

WOODEN: No, that was the first one. We changed it. When my attorney made that will down there, we had a Salvation Army that I liked awful well. I liked the work they were doing. I had lived in that county all my life and I wanted to do something for the people where I grew up. A friend of mine was on the advisory board, Tom Thorpe. He ran the appliance store down there. Me and him were just like that.

So I had this will made out. I forget how much I left to the Library, and how much to them. Well, it went on and their old building fell down down there, and it looked like they were going to leave town, the

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Salvation Army. Well, they had been there 85 years. I went in to Tom one day and said, "Mr. Thorpe, we can't let the Salvation Army leave here." He said, "No, but there isn't much interest, and the town has to furnish a building for them." And he said there isn't much interest. I said, "Well, I'll give \$100." That boy right up there that I bought cattle for said, "I'll give \$200." Another friend of mine said, "I'll give \$100," him and his wife. We raised \$15,000. Some of the women took it up. Tom Thorpe's wife took it up. She was very, very popular.

Well, we bought what had been a super market, just a half block off the Square, a good building, from a man who represented Vernon County in the State Legislature. He sold it to us, worth the money on account of where it was going; \$15,000. We paid him for it. Well, they refurnished it all up, made a chapel and clothing room and a dining room and an office and everything. Well, this old man then had to retire, he and his wife. They commenced getting some younger ones in there and they weren't worth a damn, just between me and you. I never did like them. The first ones were pretty good and they just kept getting worse. Well, finally, do you

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know what they did? They sold that damn building and the building we bought for their home, and took out. Where we made the mistake was not keeping a title to the building. But we made the title to the Salvation Army; we never dreamed of such a thing.

Well, that made me sad. I went to work and I went down to my attorney. I'm looking for him up here next week. He's up here every about two or three times a year. I said, "We're going to change things." By God, we changed the damn will.

I'm sorry I didn't bring a copy of it up here. My copy's in the bank down there and he's got the other copy. I left 5 percent to that girl there. I left 10 percent to the Appleton City cemetery where my wife's folks are buried. And there's 85 percent of it that goes to the Truman Library. That'll be the biggest goddamn deal they ever got, unless I run through with it. Right now, my estate will run close to half a million dollars. See, I've got \$250,000 in money, besides the farm down there.

JOHNSON: Well, that's something.

WOODEN: Eighty-five percent of it now goes to the Truman Library.

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JOHNSON: Are they aware of that?

WOODEN: I told Mr. Curtis, I think, one time. I told Harry when I made the first will but of course, that one's been changed. After the Salvation Army took out down there, I just marked them off and gave it all to the Truman Library. The Truman Library has been a good thing in my life. That is, from the time I met Harry Truman till now, everybody's greeted me awfully nice, and Harry always pushed me to the front. He gave me all the bouquets he could. By God he could have appointed somebody else chief mechanic, but they weren't qualified, you know. It was just like he said when he promoted me, "That's what I expect. That's what I expect."

JOHNSON: Yes, do your best.

WOODEN: It didn't make a damn bit of difference if you were a Catholic or a Mormon or what you was if you could do the business. And I was qualified. In fact, to tell you the truth about it, like I say, I hate to brag, but if I would have got bumped off, there wasn't anybody in the battery that could have taken my place. They might have got another man off another

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battery down there, but there wasn't anybody in the battery.

JOHNSON: Sure, you were specially trained.

WOODEN: Yes.

When we got that letter from old General Traub, you know, that major general, that fixed tile deal.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's real good.

WOODEN: Now, just to show you how Harry was. He didn't say, "Look what I did." He turned around and gave me the big end of the credit. I was the poorest goddamn man in the battery, and now I expect I'm the richest man.

JOHNSON: When his haberdashery went broke, I don't think they'd blamed Harry Truman did they? His men wouldn't have blamed him for it.

WOODEN: No. When we were down at Little Rock, Arkansas at a division reunion, Harry flew down there. He and Louis Johnson. Louis came in a different plane.

JOHNSON: Harry Vaughan was there probably too.

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WOODEN: Harry Vaughan. You know that damn Harry Vaughan, I only saw him once and he saw me come across the street and called me by name once.

JOHNSON: Is that right?

WOODEN: Yes sir. He was always there. I kind of liked old Harry. Well, down there at Little Rock, Harry flew down there and he had breakfast with us one morning in the Hotel Merriam. The Governor and all the big shots were down there.

Yes, sir, he treated me mighty good. Hell, I was a soldier. I didn't bunt and I never bothered him after the war. A lot of the boys ran to him after jobs, you know. Of course, we had four or five Postmasters through his influence. I was foreman of a Federal Grand Jury up here for 18 months in '59 and '60, and battled for Judge Ridge. I liked to fell over when he appointed me foreman of the damn thing. Hell, I was right out of the stockyards you might say. I had a juror that was a lawyer. He didn't like it a damn bit either. I don't know his name.

JOHNSON: Now this Ridge, you got acquainted with him in World War I.

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WOODEN: Oh yes. I saw him every day. He was in Section 4, the section of Ralph Thacker's.

JOHNSON: He was a good man, was he?

WOODEN: Yes. He was very slender. I often wondered how he made the grade then, but he got to be a wonderful good-looking man. He gave me some awful compliments over the Grand Jury deal and when it was over, I got a letter from the District Attorney -- that gal's got it -- and I prize it as much as any letter I've got. Only an 8th grade boy.

JOHNSON: You did all right. Did all right.

WOODEN: I saw it all, my friend. I saw it all.

This is the end of the story of my life. It may not be one hundred percent perfect, as I will soon be ninety-two years old and my memory is not like it used to be. As General MacArthur once said, "Old soldiers never die they just fade away." I will soon fade away.

JOHNSON: Okay, I appreciate your time.

WOODEN: I've seen it all from the bottom to the top.

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