

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
August 31, 1988
by Andrew Dunar and Robert Ferrell

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Summary Description:

Topics discussed include the following: three-inch guns in World War I; Battery D in Kansas City and at Fort Sill; transport of Battery D to Europe; commanders of Battery D; Battery D in combat in World War I; procedures of firing French-designed 75-mm artillery weapons; McKinley Wooden's relationship to Harry S. Truman after World War I, and Truman's campaigning in Nevada, Missouri in 1934.

Names mentioned include Jerry McGowan, Ralph Thacker, Mike Flynn, Charles B. Allen, Orrie Goosey, Morris Riley, Karl Klemm, Arthur J. Elliott, Lawrence F. Becker, John H. Thacker, Rollin Ritter, Harry S. Truman, James T. McNamara, Grover Cleveland Alexander, Edward L. Stauffer, Albert Ridge, L. G. Berry, Emery T. Smith, Robert M. Danford, Peter Traub, Edward Meisburger, and Vic H. Housholder.

Donor:

McKinley Wooden

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WOODEN: The only other boy alive is in the hospital. He's right there next to my picture, standing there with a suit on. There's two of us; that was our last dinner over here, celebrating Truman's birthday, a year ago. He wasn't able to go to this last one, and I had it all to myself.

DUNAR: This picture here.

WOODEN: Yes.

DUNAR: Who was the other man? Is that Jerry McGowan?

WOODEN: Yes, that's Jerry McGowan. He's in a rest home somewhere; the last count I had of him. Now Ralph Thacker, they buried him a week ago Friday. He was the best friend I had in the battery. He was sergeant of number four gun; he fired the first shot in the war, that is of D Battery's participation in it. That's him up there on the top, in the

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middle. He's been in bad shape three or four years, and the last two or three dinners he couldn't eat nothing. He'd lost a lot of weight. So it just leaves me and McGowan left out of 220. [Editor's Note: Two other veterans of Battery D still living in 1989 have been identified subsequent to this interview. They are Lorain H. Cunningham and Floyd T. Ricketts.]

DUNAR: I'm going to try not to repeat the things that you were asked before. But I am a little curious about some of the training, because I know you had some background as a mechanic. How did you learn about firing -- I guess at first it was six-inch guns -- at Ft. Sill?

FERRELL: First was three-inch.

DUNAR: I'm sorry; three inch guns at Ft. Sill. Can you tell us a little about the training at Ft. Sill for learning how to operate the guns?

WOODEN: Well, we were down at Ft. Sill; we got down there, oh, I'd say in September. I don't know just the damn date, but we had those American three-inch guns, and they weren't worth a goddamn.

FERRELL: Were those what were called the "crime of 1916?" Or were those the 1903 guns?

WOODEN: I couldn't tell you, mister. All I know is they were three-inch guns; they were a good looking gun, but they were

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no good. The recoil mechanism was handled with three spiral springs, and we'd go out there on the range and fire the damn things a few times, and I'd have to work on them a day or two to get them back in shape. They were just simply no good. And if we had went to France with them, we would have never won the war.

DUNAR: They got out of alignment, is that what happened?

WOODEN: Sure.

DUNAR: They wouldn't fire, or they got out of alignment, or what happened?

WOODEN: Oh, they'd fire all right, but you couldn't depend on them.

DUNAR: For accuracy?

WOODEN: That's right. That's right. Well, they were a joke now, no ifs nor ands about it. Before we left there they got in some 4.7s but I never had any experience with them because we left right away; but they were the good looking gun.

Now, briefly I have tinkered with guns all my life, I expect I've owned a hundred; my first one cost a dollar. Me and my brother raised popcorn with a hoe, and had about three or four bushel and we couldn't sell it, nobody'd buy

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it. Finally an old man gave us a dollar for it and we bought a little Hamilton rifle. It loaded underneath the barrel, about half way up; and a box of shells cost 15 cents. Now where we got that 15 cents to buy that I don't now. We got a box of shells somewhere; we might have stole them.

We took turns about shooting it, you know, and since then I've owned all kinds of guns. I used to do a lot of hunting, and then I got to trap shooting. I was a pretty good shot when we were hunting quails and ducks, pretty hard to beat, but then I got to shooting trap and I couldn't afford it, so I quit. I didn't hunt nor shoot anymore for thirty years. And then I got back in again and I made it pretty good. I understood the boys; they knew I was there. But when I had a heart attack about 15 years ago, or 16, I had five trap guns. I had a Winchester 1200, a Winchester 1400 -- that's automatic -- the 1200 was a pump, a Remington 870 pump, a Remington 1100 --that's an automatic -- and an Ithica. I didn't think I could ever shoot again. I sold them all one Sunday, laying in bed; lost \$400 on them. If I had kept them now they would have made \$1,000. That's a

fact. The gun then that I bought just to hunt with, a cheap 870 Remington, is as good a gun as was ever made. It cost \$120 -- now it's \$279, the same gun -- that's how things have changed.

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I'd give anything today if I was able and could go out here and trap shoot and shoot a box of shells; can't do her. Afraid I'd let a gun go off and hurt somebody or something. Ain't no business doing it. Well, just ain't able to do it, that's all, but I've had a lot of fun with it. It's been my life and that's one thing that helped me in the Army.

To top it all off, the night of the fifth day of April, 1917, I was working on a farm, twenty bucks a month. Me and the boss went into town that night, and they was talking war, you know. Nobody had heard anything about war then, or the Army or nothing; it wasn't like it is now. So I didn't sleep very good that night, and the next morning I told the boss; I said, "Jim, I'm going to leave, I'm going to join the Army." "Well," he says, "that's your business." He said, "I'll try and get along." Had the best saddle horse in the country and a new saddle; rode him into Nevada. I sold him and sold my saddle, went back to Walker and put the money in the bank. I got a suitcase and some more stuff, and came to Kansas City to join the Army.

Well, I got up here and I looked around, and I knew there was an infantry, and I knew there was an artillery and I knew there was engineers. I could have joined the Regular Army, but I thought now I ought to get into something where they're all starting so I've got an even break. See, if I joined the Regular Army, I'd just been another boy in there

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you know and all the rest of them soldiers you see would have had it on me.

Well, I started around that night; there was an automobile school there at 11th and Locust and I said, "I'm just going to take that and I can quit any time when I get ready to join the Army." So I bought a scholarship in that; cost me \$75. I've got the diploma right here. And so that helped me out too you know. It was all right. it was one of the best things I ever done, see, so far as that's concerned.

So then, in June, the eleventh day of June (now that there says I joined the Army the sixth day of June, but that's a mistake, that's when I left down there; of course, they got that balled up), but it was the eleventh day of June when I joined the Army. That man sitting right up there on the bottom picture in the middle there, Mike Flynn, who was a lieutenant, set at the table the day I joined the Army. They buried him two years ago; he got rich in the stockyards. He sat there at the table the same day. All the boys who sat at the table the day I joined the Army, they are dead and gone. One of them was president of the Farm and Home [Savings and Loan]; you've heard of it, biggest savings and loan I guess in the State of Missouri, or right at it anyway. So, after I joined the Army, why they quartered us at Convention Hall; that's where the

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Auditorium is now you know.

FERRELL: What did that place look like? That was built in 1900, wasn't it?

WOODEN: That was built for....

FERRELL: For Bryan.

WOODEN: It was built for a Republican Convention, I think, or something, Convention Hall was. I can't say just when it was built.

FERRELL: A great big barn-like place.

WOODEN: Yes. Yes. That's where we used to stay. All of us boys that didn't live in Kansas City, we stayed there at night, and the boys that did, they let them go home at night. But they had to be back at 8 o'clock the next morning, you know.

DUNAR: Did you drill in the Convention hall?

WOODEN: Sir, we were out on the streets.

DUNAR: In the park right out here?

WOODEN: Some in Convention Hall, it was a big place.

Well, things were going along pretty good; they fed us around at different restaurants, and I remember, me and my

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bunch we drew a restaurant that was, as near as I can tell, about 13th or 14th and Main. They called it Stoddards. It wasn't worth a damn. And so we had a guy there that joined up; he was kind of a sissy guy and had a cream suit on, and all this, that and the other. He thought he was somebody. And he went up to Captain [Charles B.] Allen, and he said, "Captain, I've got to have a different place to eat." "What's the complaint?" "Well," he says, "there was a fly in the beans." And Allen says, "Oh, you're very lucky; you're very lucky. Down where I ate there was a mouse in my beans."

Well, we were really getting along pretty good. We had a boy by the name of Orrie Goosey; he was awful well-liked, but he was quarrelsome, and quite a fighter, and he got out one day and I guess got a little drunk. A couple of Shaw Taxi Cab drivers beat him up. Well, that night when they dismissed us, you know, about 5 o'clock or something like that I guess, there was about 50 or 60 of us started down around there to clean up on these taxi drivers. That's where trouble started for D Battery, right there. Well, we come around the corner up there -- I forget -- it was on Twelfth Street, and the Shaw Taxi Cab Company was the only one I think in Kansas City at that time. Well, there was some cabs parked out there in front, and they saw us coming and some of them got away, and some of them went in the hotel.

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We had sense enough not to go into the hotel, you know; we were lucky there. And so we were milling around there and Lieutenant [Morris] Riley came along; he blowed his whistle, and lined us up, and marched us down on 15th Street, in front of a vacant lot and gave us hell and dismissed us.

Well, the next morning, old Cap Allen, he got us all up there on the -- in the center -- there's this big flat place down there, where you go. I don't know how big it was now, you know, and old Colonel [Karl] Klemm came in; he just stood there in front of us. He was a well-dressed guy; he was a good looking soldier, as far as that was concerned.

FERRELL: You didn't like him, did you?

WOODEN: Nobody did. Well, that's where we got in trouble, right there, and it lasted all through the war. We just stood there and directly he says, "All of you men who was in that fracas down at the hotel last night, one step forward, yo ho." Every man stepped forward, all 220 men, every one. A lot of them were five or six miles away from there at home in bed. And every one of them -- that's the trouble with D Battery, they all stood together, every one of us. A lot of the batteries didn't. We never had no trouble. I don't think there was even a fight among us in the whole battery while we were there. Now, that's something, boys. I'll tell you it is, before some of them get drunk, you know.

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Well, "you men," he says, "have disgraced the uniform, the service," and oh, he just simply gave us hell, and directly he says, "Now, I'll tell you, if anything like this ever happens again, I'll court martial the whole goddamn battery."

So right there's where trouble started with Colonel Klemm, and the boys and him never did get along, and he had it in for D Battery all through the war. At one time, him and the Lieutenant Colonel [Arthur J.] Elliott, they wanted to bust D Battery up, and scatter them around to the other batteries, you know, just swap 15 men for 15 men, you know. But the other captains, they objected to it; they didn't want none of us. But when D Battery got up to the firing line, they were among the best. They settled down when they got to France. They saw what was coming, and they settled down.

FERRELL: Did Klemm carry a swagger stick?

WOODEN: Who?

FERRELL: Klemm, the colonel.

WOODEN: Oh, yes.

FERRELL: He had this silly stick?

WOODEN: A lot of the officers did then, you know.

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FERRELL: That's British.

WOODEN: I don't know that, but a lot of them did then.

FERRELL: What was Elliott like, Colonel Elliott?

WOODEN: He was a large fellow; I didn't see him an awful lot. I'll tell you later about a bunch of crap shooters we ran into over there when we were out again, but down at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma they issued us these campaign hats. They were a Stetson hat with a broad rim you know. A good hat. I'd like to have one now. So we had an Irishman, and this Irishman had no business being in the Army; he was 35 years old when he joined. I said, "Mike, what the hell did you want to join the Army for?" "Well," he said, "I had two drinks of Yellowstone whiskey and the band come along, and I followed them down there, and the man said, 'Sign right there,' and hell, I was in the Army."

Well, he took this hat, and he bent the sides of it up, you know. Well, he ran across Elliott one day, and Elliott was just giving him hell you know, disgrace to the uniform, this, that, and the other, and when Elliott got through drinking, he says, "Well, sir, that's the way Washington looked when he crossed the Delaware." (You've seen that picture of Washington crossing the Delaware.) He had to peel potatoes three days for doing that.

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Down there at Ft. Sill, of course, you read about that other deal I pulled there at Ft. Sill. I fixed their bulletin board there. That's one thing that old Klemm done for me. The wind blew awful hard down there. It would blow from the south one day and in the winter time it would blow back from the north the next day, and dust, you never saw the like. They'd tack bulletins on the bulletin board, you know, and the wind would blow them off. Well, I looked at it one day, and I went down to the supply house and I got some window sash and put hinges on it, and a hook, and latch you know, and now the wind couldn't blow it. Well, the old Colonel saw it, and he issued an official order that every battery in the regiment should copy that and have one like it, you see. Well, of course, that gave me a little boost. Of course, I was just a \$36 [a month] man then; I got up to a mechanic see, that was all. So that gave me a little leeway.

That winter the tanks where they watered their horses would freeze a little bit of ice on them, and them damn rookies that didn't know nothing, out of Kansas City here, the officers and stuff, they'd take an axe and chop that ice. They'd also chop a little hole in the tank, you know, and leave. Well, tanks were hard to get, and so I'd go down there and I'd cut that hole out a little bigger, and then I'd take some lead and then I'd solder it in there, and then

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I'd take some of that rubber orange sticking glue that comes on roofing, you know, and put around that. It might drip a little but it saved the tank. Well, that helped me out, you know, so I was doing pretty good by that time.

Well, then along in, I'd say April, I guess it was, I don't know the date, gentlemen -- but hell, you can't remember dates -- we got on the damn train and started for New York. I don't know how long we were on that damn train, quite a while, but we got there in New York and we stayed there for I guess probably a couple of weeks before we got on the boat. But when we got to New York -- well I'll go back to my story.

The bunch of these boys that was in old B Battery down at the border, you know, when the Mexican deal started down there, did you ever read about that? Well, B Battery was down there, we still had B Battery with us see, but most of them guys was just going for the fun of it, and they never did do too good in the Army. Very few of them ever got along very good.

DUNAR: Was there some tension between the new people and the people who had gone....

WOODEN: Sir?

DUNAR: Was there some animosity, some bad feeling between the

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people that had gone down to Mexico and the people who were coming in?

WOODEN: No, I can't say there was. They might have felt maybe they knew a little more about soldiering than we did. I know we had a fellow who was a horseshoer, a blacksmith; we got along pretty well. I can't say -- I couldn't see a thing wrong with them. Now, they treated me okay and we got along. See we didn't get too many out of B Battery; we got some, but I don't suppose we got more than seven or eight out of old B Battery. Our chief mechanic was out of B Battery. He used to work for the Studebaker-Riley company here in Kansas City. Well, he's gone; he wasn't too hot.

FERRELL: Did he take off in New York?

WOODEN: Now, that's the question. I can't tell you, but when we got on the boat he wasn't there. I don't know what became of him; I've never heard of him since, or nothing, see. I don't know. Down there at Ft. Sill I'd done all the gun work. Yes.

DUNAR: But he had the title and you did the work.

WOODEN: That's right. That's right.

DUNAR: Could I just say before you go on from Ft. Sill, did you go into Lawton?

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WOODEN: Yes, I got into there once or twice.

DUNAR: What was the attitude of the people in Lawton towards the soldiers?

WOODEN: Well, they treated us all right, what little I was there. Now, I was only there a couple of times, I think. One time we were out on the pistol range; we had a Lieutenant Brown, as fine a fellow as you ever saw, and he was from Louisiana. That's next to your country down there isn't it?

DUNAR: Pretty close, yes.

WOODEN: He talked funny. He called a coyote a "coyotee," see; he was a swell fellow. Now, understand, I liked him and me and him got along pretty good, but he was the executive officer over the guns, see. Well, by golly, after that, and after the war was over, they transferred him to the ammunition train. Now why, I don't know why that happened, but three boys from my hometown was in the draft and was in this ammunition train and in this company, and they found out where he was from, and they were asking about me. He told one of these boys -- he told me three, four, or five years after the war -- he says, "That man knows more about guns than any fellow I ever saw in my life." Now that boy told me that that Brown told him, and I wouldn't doubt it. But what I'm going to tell you about Brown, we was out there

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on the pistol range one day and I had all the pistol ammunition you know, see. They come, I guess, twenty-one shells in a box, as I remember right. So Lieutenant Brown said he would like to have a couple boxes of those shells. And I said, "Yes, and I'd like to go to Lawton Saturday too." So, when I got in, I went up to his tent, and laid two boxes of shells there. He was sitting next to the fence, and I went to Lawton. And so me and the first sergeant down there, we took two horses one Saturday and I took a lot of these shells and we rode over there on the mountain, Signal Mountain, and shot them up over there. We had a hell of a time.

Well, we're back to our New York story. Like I say, we never saw this [Lawrence F.] Becker anymore. I don't know what became of him. You fellows might find out; you can get a record there somewhere I guess. I don't know whether he was put in with some other outfit, but that's all over the dam.

Well, we got on the damn freighter, an English ship, the *Saxonia*; it had been a freighter and they made a troop ship out of it. We pulled out of New York harbor, oh, I'd guess about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The boys stood on the deck, and they watched the ocean sixteen days on that damn boat. Oh, there was a big convoy of us. The Navy had big battle wagons all around on the outside and big old guns

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sticking out, you know, and the English fed us and about all the English fed us was Australian jackrabbit. Yes.

Well, we got off of this boat, in Liverpool I think it was. Then we got on a boat and we went to - what was the name of that damn little town there, and we were there a day or two. Well, some of the boys got drunk and upset the statue of King George one night, but we didn't get no repercussions off of that. Then one night we got on a little old boat to cross the channel. It was the *Viper*, I remember, and I looked around and got up on deck, and there was a pile of rope

there, and I said, "That would be a good place to sleep." I unrolled my blanket and laid down there, and the wind either got up or we changed course or something. I woke up and I was freezing to death. We got off at LeHavre the next morning, and I guess about 6 o'clock -- it was daylight I know that -- but the first thing, a big ambulance train pulled up in front, you know, with a bunch of wounded. That was our first taste of war. They took us out there in a little old yacht, the dirtiest damn place you ever saw, rag tents, cinders. We were there three or four days, and then they loaded us in a boxcar, a freight train, and took us down to Anjers, France, and I guess we were a couple of days anyway on that. I know those French cars are about 24 feet long, and they've got a sign, "8 chevaux, 40 hommes" (that's men, see); well, we had 43 in

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our car. Now, you just about had to lay on your side to sleep at nights.

We got down there. We got off in this town, and it was at night. Then we had to walk about seven, eight miles out in the country to an old bowling alley, and that was our quarters. We're going along; it was a beautiful night, and we couldn't hear a sound. Once in a while, a dog would bark, and we were wondering where we were going and the boys were a cussing and we come to a crossroad and the sign says, "St. Collias," and a finger pointing. One boy says, "Well, let's go. At least we'll know where we're going."

We got to this place, and oh, I don't know how long it was, but a bowling alley you know would be pretty long. But the whole battery was in it, and they had straw ticks just about that much room to walk between them for every guy to lay on see, and they fed us pretty good there. Well, we had been there for about three days, as I recall, maybe longer -- hell, I can't remember. But old Cap [Captain John H.] Thacher, he sent me to French artillery school at Coetquidan. See, he was the third captain we had had. We had [Rollin] Ritter after Allen left; I don't know what ever became of Allen, but he was no good. You see, at the start, the boys in the battery in the National Guard appointed their officers, and the man that was most popular, he had a job.

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Well, Allen was a good-looking man, a Rockhurst College graduate, and a big football player, you see. And then this Ritter came along, and he'd heard about the deal. The first time he addressed the battery, he said, "Now, I came over here to straighten you fellows out." He said, "If any of you want anything, you can get her." In about 90 days he was gone. Then we got Thacher; now Thacher was a good old man, and the boys kind of respected him, but he was too old. He liked me, old Thacher did. I even got a letter from him when he was in the hospital in San Jose, California. And so like I say, he sent me to this artillery school. I don't know how long I was there, probably six, eight weeks, something like that, till the battery came up. Mostly I was getting acquainted with the French artillery gun, you see, which I did. I got all the books on it I could get and done everything. I got by pretty good there and passed the examination good. Well, then the battery came up...

DUNAR: Was that mostly classroom instruction? Or were you firing the guns, or taking them apart, or what?

WOODEN: We hadn't got to firing the guns yet, see; we couldn't fire the guns until the battery came up.

DUNAR: At the school did you have guns to work with, for taking apart and working with the mechanics of the gun, or was it strictly classroom?

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WOODEN: Well, we had both. Both. We had both. So then the battery came up. Well, then they went to drilling on these guns and getting used to them, and they went to firing out on the range. We had a pretty good deal there, and I know there was one little mistake, the French ammunition. They had shells about that long, just a little under three inches in diameter. The projectile was about that long, and on the base of the shell is one mark; that's the normal charge. That's for shooting low. And the reduced charge, that is just for pumping over a hill, or something, you see. Well, we were shooting the reduced charge one day, and some rookie got one of the normal charge and shot it in the gun and got the damn thing blasted over there six, seven miles. He damn near hit the major's car. That is about as near a calamity as they had there.

So we were there; I guess I wouldn't say just how long, and I know we were still there the fourth day of July, because the French put on a parade there and I remember the general. He had these red britches on; I remember that. Then we loaded up for the front. And old D Battery commenced to soldiering by then. And old D Battery loaded quicker. We had four guns, with the caissons, and all the horses. I don't know a damn thing about the horses; that wasn't my business. I was

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responsible for the six-shooters and machine guns, the caissons, and the 75s; that was my business. I didn't pay no attention to this. But the boys got them loaded quicker than any battery in the regiment, see, and we pulled up pretty well behind the front. We could hear the guns there, you know. We got off at a little old town; I believe its name was Kruth.

DUNAR: Now that was after Captain Truman had taken over, by the time you got to Kruth?

WOODEN: Truman took the battery over on the 11th day of July, right there. No, I've got it wrong; I'm talking too damn fast. He took it over the eleventh day of July, 1918 at Coetquidan.

DUNAR: That was before you went to Kruth?

WOODEN: Yes, sir. I wasn't making no formations or anything, but the boys told me when they come in. They said that he said he didn't come over here to get along with you fellows; they were going to get along with him, see.

DUNAR: The loading record. Had you beat the other batteries in loading before Truman took over, or was that after Truman took over?

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WOODEN: Well, that was after he took over. Yes, yes, he was in charge then; that's right.

DUNAR: Okay. Let me ask you about Captain Thacher too. You said that most of the men respected him, and that seems to be everything that I've read too; that seems to be the case. But there's a story about the battery having gotten rid of three people. That wouldn't really apply to Thacher would it? They hadn't pushed him out at all, had they?

WOODEN: Well, it was just because he happened to be Captain, that's all.

DUNAR: But he was here.

WOODEN: We didn't have nothing against Thacher.

DUNAR: Yes.

WOODEN: Of course, he would never have gotten over, I don't think, commanding the battery in the war. He was too old. There was some kind of advocate general or something, I don't know where.

DUNAR : But there was nothing in terms of the battery trying to get rid of him?

WOODEN: No. No. There ain't nobody you can talk to now,

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except Jerry McGowan, and he probably wouldn't be able to talk. No, the boys always respected old Captain Thacher. He always kind of cross-boned with some of us, and we had a prize fight after the war was over. We lost about three thousand dollars on it, and he wired back that if there was any money that wasn't covered, he wanted it. He liked D Battery; yes, old Captain Thacher did. Now he was a smart man. I think he was a lawyer.

I won't say for sure, but the next night, Harry sent his orderly down for me and I went up there, and he says, "Now, I'm going to promote you to Chief Mechanic." Of course, he had my records, you know. I said, "Thank you, sir, I'll do my best." "That's what I expect." Yes. That's so.

Well, I never talked to him anymore. Some of the boys had gotten the habit you know, of bothering the Captain. I always figured that if the Captain wanted me he would send for me. I wasn't going to run up and see him about this, and that, and the other. If I couldn't run my end of the business I'd give it to somebody else. He could run the battery and I'd run my end. I'd run it my way, win or lose. But I guess that's the last time I talked to him until we were up in the Vosges Mountains.

We went up there and got off of this train in Kruth, you know, what I was telling you about. And one

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night we moved our guns forward about, oh, I guess three or four miles, and it was cloudy all the next day, and drizzling rain. We didn't have nothing to eat but two crackers and a spoonful of syrup, and that night we fired 3,000 rounds of gas shells. Boy oh boy, it's a pretty sight, the fire coming out of them guns, and the guns would throw fire about 40 feet you know; sure looked nice. And directly, after it was all over, the first sergeant -- now he was one of the boys that was down on the border; he was a little old quacky, short kind of fellow, hard-boiled -- and he went nuts. Harry told him to have the horses up there at 8:30; he got there at 9. By that time the Germans were throwing some shells over. I think they hit a horse or two maybe later, and he threw a fit and he hollered, "They're bracketing us; everybody run." Well, we didn't all run. Me and Skinny [James T.] McNamara, gunner of number four gun, sat down on the trail of a gun and sat there, and there were several of the boys who didn't run. I guess we would have been court martialed if we didn't obey a man that was over us. He was over us as far as the first sergeant, you know.

Well, we got back to camp, I guess along towards morning, and the cooks had a wonderful lunch for us, breakfast, or whatever you call it. And Captain Harry

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stood right there at the end as we came along with our mess kits; when I came along, he said, "Feed McKinley good, he's one of our best soldiers." I wished he hadn't said it. Right before all of them, you know. Well, hell, of course, old Harry liked me, now I know this. He put me through it every time he got a chance. Yes sir.

Well, that wound that deal up there and we went from there to St. Mihiel, and we went from there to the Argonne. At St. Mihiel we were just in reserve. They had already given us orders to move, and we got ready, and then the order came down. They moved us to Sommedieue, and we didn't do much there; wasn't much fighting there, and then from there we moved on up to Verdun. When we got up to Verdun there was one of the prettiest nights you ever saw in your life. I never saw as much goddamn ammunition piled up in my life. The ammunition trains had been putting it up there you know, to participate in the drive on Metz, see. Metz was the last German stronghold. Say, I left out that Meuse-Argonne battle didn't I? Sorry.

DUNAR: Yes.

WOODEN: I did. I'm sorry, but it's all over now. That was awful.

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Captain Harry said, "McKinley, we anticipate a German retreat up here." I said, "From the looks of the ammunition piled around here, something's going to happen." Well, we put the guns in some old French gun pits, and the gun crews got dugouts there, of course. I had to always be with the guns. I found a little ammunition shelter where they stored smaller ammunition, and two or three shelves here and two or three there; well, that wide between spreading the blankets down. It was dark; I went to sleep and woke up the next morning. It was daylight and the sun was shining. There was a skull laying on this shelf over here, and a bullet hole through here. I looked outside; the bone of a man's leg was sticking up out of the dirt here. That's where the Crown Prince lost the war in 1914; 35,000 men died on that hill. That's where they wound up

the war, right there. And I was the first man that Harry showed the order to cease firing in the battery. I was standing out there and he came along; he had a little white piece of paper about as big as your hand. He said, "McKinley, look here. 'Cease firing on all fronts at 11/11/11, General John J. Pershing.'" The prettiest piece of paper I ever saw in my life. That was it.

You know it was the damnedest fear of telling the rest of the battery. They all gathered around. It was

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the damnedest feeling you ever experienced; words can't tell the feeling that went over you. One month you were killing people, and the next the world was at peace. We just stood there and looked at one another like damn fools. Some rookie says, "Why don't we go home?"

But I'm sorry about leaving the Argonne out there.

DUNAR: Could I ask you a couple of things that I haven't seen anything about?

WOODEN: Sure.

DUNAR: About the whole process of firing the guns and about how you tried to keep the barrels cool; about just the positions that the men would have and what their responsibilities were; and what you did while they were firing. Could you explain a bit about that?

WOODEN: Well, now there was no trouble with our guns on that first little battle we were in. We didn't fire enough. But when we got up there in the Argonne it was a different deal, see. That is, I don't know how many thousands rounds of ammunition we fired, but hell, them guns wasn't cool for seven days and nights, I guess, or longer. We stayed with the First Division for four nights and days. We got a letter of commendation from the commander of the First Division for the backup we

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gave his men. I studied those guns.

DUNAR: What was better about the 75s? Was it mainly the recoil mechanism, or what?

WOODEN: Well, that was just the nice part about them. But there's other things too. Now you know that barrel, what we call the barrel -- the tube they call it -- it's very heavy, about nine feet long. It slides back about four feet, over-shot, you know, and then it comes back in battery see. Well, this recoil mechanism is managed by oil. This oil gets hot; it expands, then this gun will jump, you know. Well, I would have to release some of this oil out of that cylinder down to a certain place, then it would go right back. Also, those slides on there was greased. Well, after so many shots being fired, maybe that grease would get kind of gooed up or something and I would notice that as the gun went back in battery it didn't go back smoothly. The sergeant said, "Have your men grease the slides again," see. That's one reason why we got the good recommendation, see.

DUNAR: You noticed it before a problem developed though.

WOODEN: Oh yes, yes. And that poor boy that we buried two weeks ago; I've heard him tell many a man that I could

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adjust the recoil on one of them 75s, and you could fire it five or six times and put the level on them and it'd still be there. He gave me a lot of compliments.

FERRELL: The idea was to control the lubrication then, right?

WOODEN: That's right. That's right.

FERRELL: And you had to be there and watch that.

WOODEN: Yes, sir. I was just right from one gun to another. The Field Artillery drill regulations says, "The Chief Mechanic shall be responsible to the Battery Commander for all materiel in the battery and shall be with the firing battery at all times." I heard every shot fired, every shot. And I saw every gun, pretty near, fired; you can't see them all because you couldn't look at one and see the other.

DUNAR: Did you have spares for the critical parts of the gun, or did you have to jury-rig something?

WOODEN: No, we didn't have any of that. Ordnance took care of that. Ordnance took care of all that. Did you read that (I know it's in the Library), the letter we got from the major general commending the condition of the guns after the Argonne? I've got it here. I got one

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here from the Truman Library; I'll show it to you directly.

FERRELL: Okay.

WOODEN: Yes. Harry told me that there was kind of a move on to draft me into the Ordnance, see. Well, they can do it; you see they can draft you anywhere they want you to go in the Army. I said, "I don't want that." I said, "This war is soon going to be over and you want a discharge from a combatant outfit, see." If we had gone on much longer, the chances are I wouldn't have been with D Battery, see. Yes, they sure do.

FERRELL: Did the other batteries have trouble with their guns?

WOODEN: I couldn't tell you, mister. I don't know what they did and I couldn't tell you. I know what we got.

DUNAR: When you were firing, you just went back and forth between the guns.

WOODEN: Yes, I just...

DUNAR: There was a gunner on the left, right? And a guy who adjusted for firing was on the right, is that right?

WOODEN: Yes.

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DUNAR: Were there other people in the battery?

WOODEN: Yes, we had one man there that loaded the gun, and another man there. I can't recall just how many it did take now; I just don't remember, see.

DUNAR: You had at least four then.

WOODEN: Oh, I don't know; it was five or six.

DUNAR: Five or six.

WOODEN: It's been a long time, mister, and I've forgotten most of it. Some things I still remember.

FERRELL: Now, when you went to this automobile school for several weeks, you learned some things there, isn't that right?

WOODEN: You're damned right. I studied all of their books and stayed up at night. I used to be a pretty good mechanic; I used to have trucks and cars and gasoline engines. I didn't used to ask anybody for any information on them, but of course, I'm getting old and forgot about it, and they've changed. Cars are not like they used to be. I never asked anybody to take one of my cars or trucks to a garage. I could time a motor just as good as anybody. Of course, I've forgot a lot

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about it. I can't see any more and my hands don't work as good. After a few years you fade a little.

DUNAR: I think you're doing great.

WOODEN: The boat -- well, before we got there we saw a little town not far from a town named Bar-le-duc, and we were quartered out in a little old town, rock buildings. They didn't have nothing, only rock there, you know, and there was a little stream for water. The women washed their clothes in this stream with a paddle, you know, and my section was quartered up over an old widow woman, upstairs. She had farm machinery downstairs, and then she had a room there. Poor old thing. I saw her trying to build a fire with some little old branches you know. We had a stove up there, and there was orders out you couldn't burn no wood over three feet long, see. There was a sawmill about a quarter of a mile away; and about 2 o'clock at night, four or five of us would go down there and load that lumber up. Of course, I had a carpenter in

my section, you know. He had saws and stuff, and the next morning there wasn't any lumber over three feet long.

Well, when we went to leave, we stole some blankets from some of the other boys. We had too many blankets, and this old lady, she got all this material. I saw she

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didn't have no fuel, and I took a couple of those over and she threwed them back at me. Well, when we went to leave, we gave her all our lumber, and we gave her our blankets, and the old woman cried.

Right there in this little town, the boys got to rolling dice. Oh, they got ornery, you know; the war was over and they got to rolling dice out on the sidewalk and they and the French couldn't get along. So they turned in a complaint, and the first thing you know, there's an order, "There will be no more crap shooting in the regiment." Yes, he just included the regiment. Well, some of the boys got around the corner one morning, it was kind of chilly, and got to rolling dice there. There happened to be two of them out of my battery. I don't know where the other boys were from, and Elliott walked around on them. He took their names, and told them to report to their battery commander. Well, they went and told Captain Harry and Harry said, "Well, it beats everything I ever saw. As many places as there are here in town that you can get to shoot craps, and you get out where a lieutenant colonel can see you; three days KP." I expect he would have helped them.

Well, then we get on down to St. Nazaire, I think it was.

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DUNAR: Was Captain Truman generally willing to sort of look the other way, and go on?

WOODEN: What?

DUNAR: Was that one of the ways that he dealt with Battery D, sort of let you do what you did as long as you didn't get into serious trouble?

WOODEN: We got along all right. Let me tell you something. Did you ever know an Army officer, battery commander of any kind, that took care of his boys like he did, or took care of them after the war was over like he did? He had us out to his house a couple of times and went around out there. He came to our reunions. He came clear to Little Rock, Arkansas to one of our reunions. He had us all up for breakfast every time there was a reunion. I got down at Springfield when we were down there. We all had breakfast one morning at the Shrine -- a Masonic Shrine -- I don't know what the hell it is, and Ronald Reagan ate right across the table from me. We had him down there. Of course, he was young then, yes. And you've heard of that baseball pitcher from the Cardinals, old Alexander?

FERRELL: Grover Cleveland Alexander?

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WOODEN: Yes, one of the greatest pitchers that ever lived, I guess. But he died and they made a history, a play of his life. We had her [his wife] down there as a guest too. Yes. Yes, them were great days.

I remember old Harry flew in; you know, we all met him out there . How many damn Army officers would have a bunch of old rowdies out to his place like that? You don't know of any do you?

DUNAR: No.

WOODEN: The letters he wrote us, like that letter you know how every one of them he met on the street, the same as meeting one of the family. I don't know how many letters I got from him while he was President; and I got one from him when my wife died. They're out there in the Library; most all of my stuff is out there. The gal come down here and got a lot of it. This one I'd like to get; it's down at Nevada, but I haven't been able to get a hold of it. That's the one he gave me when I went to visit him at the Library. I'd give anything to get it; I think I may get it too. That gal should let me have it. Well, she has all my stuff; she gave me a lot of stuff back, but she kept it.

I sat down too long, boys.

FERRELL: Are you all right?

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WOODEN: Yes. Oh yes, hell, I can walk two miles after I get up; yep, I ought to have my feet up on a stool.

Let's see, you saw that history out there, didn't you?

DUNAR: Yes.

WOODEN: Well, there's something you didn't see. I was foreman of a Federal grand jury up here for 18 months, in '59 and '60. There's a letter from a district attorney I prize as much as any letters I've ever got. How's that for a boy who never went to school? One of you can read that while I am getting this other one out, boys.

FERRELL: What does it say?

DUNAR: "We appreciate most sincerely your faithful cooperation in the above matter which was tried last week resulting in a verdict of guilty on three of four counts, and in which case your testimony was required as a Government witness inasmuch as you have been foreman of the Grand Jury for which the alleged perjury was committed. While Mr. Redpath did an excellent job in handling the prosecution, nevertheless, we are always dependent upon the availability of necessary witnesses and the fact that you came into Kansas City ahead of

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time to ensure your presence was also indicative of your fine fidelity to duty. I think I have thanked you before; however, I wish to here place in writing our appreciation for the excellent manner in which you conducted the Grand Jury which was impaneled by His Honor Judge Ridge, and of which you served 18 months as foreman. The record shows that you attended every session and convened the panel forthwith, properly and with dispatch. With renewed good wishes from all of my staff and myself. We remain cordially yours, Edward L. Stauffer."

WOODEN: How's that for a boy who never went to school? I had a lawyer for one of my jurors. He didn't like it too.

FERRELL: He didn't like it?

WOODEN: I think Harry had something to do with me getting in on that deal.

DUNAR: Judge Ridge; he was in Battery D too wasn't he?

WOODEN: Yes.

Now, Harry gave me this, right up there on Dead Man's Hill, just a few days before the war was over. I carried it in my blouse, and when I got home I put it in my desk. In 1959 I mailed it to him. And [Niel]

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Johnson brought out a xerox copy and gave it to me.

Now, you have to read the first one, and the middle one, and then the last one.

FERRELL: That was pretty good.

DUNAR: Is this from the Independence paper, the *Examiner*?

WOODEN: Lee's Summit.

DUNAR: The Lee's Summit paper [Lee's Summit *Journal*].

WOODEN: Oh, I've got a lot of write-ups here. I've even got one from high school down home.

DUNAR: But why did he call you by your first name and nobody else in the battery?

WOODEN: I don't know why he did. He always did. When he introduced me to Eisenhower he said, "This is McKinley." Yes, always did. If you look at the letters out there at the Library, you'll see where he addressed me that way. That's pretty near proof isn't it?

FERRELL: Those are real nice, yes. That sort of says you're pretty good. Well, this is a nice story, yes.

WOODEN: I sat right up there beside of Mr. Volker and the Kempers and all the big bankers in Kansas City. I was the first man introduced.

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I'll tell you boys, I've seen it all.

DUNAR: That's real nice. I have seen those at the Library. They do have those at the Library; I have seen them.

WOODEN: Sir.

DUNAR: I have seen copies of these at the Library; they do have them there.

WOODEN: They do.

DUNAR: You mentioned a little bit about passing out leaflets; that was when he was running for Senator, right?

WOODEN: Yes.

DUNAR: Were you active at all in any of his campaigns in Jackson County?

WOODEN: No. No, see, at that time I lived down there about eight miles from Nevada, at a little town named Walker. All my life, pretty near. Well, I got off the train the day I was three years old there. And I hadn't seen Harry since we got out of the Army in '19 and this was '34. That would have been 15 years. They had meetings up there twice a year, but to tell you the truth, I just couldn't afford to come; that was all. And so, by God,

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I saw where he was going to speak there in Nevada. I told my wife; it was in the paper. I said, "We'll go down and meet the captain." So we drove down there and parked about two cars from him. I said, "Well, that's Captain Truman."

I got out and he came to meet me; he saw me and knew me, and we talked a little bit and he introduced me to his mother and his wife and Margaret. Well, they were damn Democrats down there. That's a Democrat town; they were also for Tuck Milligan, up here I think from Richmond, Missouri. I won't say his name, because it don't make a difference, but they didn't even have nobody up there to introduce him. They had to send down to Farm and Home to get old Judge Hoss to come up and introduce him. I brought that up with Harry one night; he said, "It didn't look very good, did it?"

Well, after he got through speaking, I shook hands with him. I told him good-bye and wished him well. He had this man give me a lot of stuff you know. And then they sent me some later on. And then I was buying cattle in Joplin, for twenty years, and around all over Vernon County. When I was going around to these towns, you know, during the visit I just stick up some

literature you know. But all my people there that worked in Nevada that knew me, you know, they'd laugh at

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me. "Well, Mac, he hasn't got a chance." And a further thing about it, the chairman of the Democrat Party there in Walker, he didn't like me very well. He was pretty high hat. So the night of the Primary, in August you know, I was coming across the street. "Well, Mac," he says, "it won't be long until you know where your old captain stands ." I said, "Hell, Jim, some day he'll be President." Sure did.

DUNAR: Were you in any veterans organizations? Were you in the American Legion or the VFW?

WOODEN: I was in the American Legion down here at Walker until it closed up. It got so there wasn't none of them left, see. That was all.

FERRELL: Back in World War I did you ever see General [L.G.] Berry, the brigadier general?

WOODEN: Hell yes, I saw him.

FERRELL: Was he around very much?

WOODEN: Well, down there at Bray was an old general; he'd been 37 years in the artillery, who was from Syracuse, New York. That's where he come from. And the last time I talked to Harry, I don't know how long, it wasn't the last time, but one time he told me that this Berry, he'd

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come out to the firing range there in Ft. Sill. His chauffeur drove an old Dodge. It had a flag with one star on it, you know. I remember one time -- the officers would take turns about firing problems out there -- and that they called on the first lieutenant, you know, and he said, "Well, sorry, but I can't fire." Berry said, "Well, goddamn it, you're a first lieutenant, ain't you? Goddamn it, get up there and shoot somewhere." That's right. That's right.

And he made a speech just before we left France. He said, "You gentlemen are going back to where you started off," and he says, "there will be people telling you that there'll be no more wars, but let me tell you that there will. They've been fighting ever since Adam and they'll always fight." I've always thought about it. Now, that's the last time I saw Berry, and just where that was in France, I can't recall. But I remember it well. Yes, he was an old man at that time.

FERRELL: Klemm came back to Kansas City and got out of the Army, right?

WOODEN: Yes, that's right.

FERRELL: And then he was a suicide.

WOODEN: That's right; he used his .45 gun, the one he

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carried in the Army.

FERRELL: What was the matter with him?

WOODEN: Well, I'll tell you what I think. You see, Klemm was a graduate of West Point. He was, I think, a second lieutenant when the war broke out. Of course, you know, any man who had any military experience, he was on the way up. Well, he was appointed colonel of the 129th Field Artillery. Rumbolt was the head of the 128th out of St. Louis; I remember that. That's nothing to do with us, you see. And he [Klemm] married a rich gal here in Kansas City; her name was Heims. They had the Heims Brewery, the St. Joe Interurban Railroad and Electric Park, see. Well, he was an upper crust. If he had stayed in the Army he would probably have been better off maybe; maybe he wouldn't. But anyway, her family kind of took him in, and I guess he didn't fit in with them too good or something. So one night down there in the Commerce Trust Company, he just ended it all. When we came back from France we stopped in Kansas City and they put on a parade for us there, you know.

FERRELL: He'd come back earlier hadn't he?

WOODEN: Oh, yes, he came back after the war was over.

FERRELL: Why did they let him come back early?

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WOODEN: Well, I don't know; maybe he had some political influence or something. He wasn't needed or something. I don't know nothing bout that. I only know he left. So we brought a colonel by the name of [Emery T.] Smith. I don't know too much about him; I just knew he was there. It didn't bother me any, of course. The war was over. Like I say, they put on a big parade, and in Convention Hall all the women had a big dinner for us, you see. The boys voted on whether they were going to let Klemm lead us on the parade, or Smith. Klemm was sitting in civilian clothes on the sideline and saw this parade.

FERRELL: Oh.

WOODEN: That's right.

FERRELL: They wouldn't let him in?

WOODEN: No sir.

DUNAR: I think Truman had something to do with keeping him out of it, too, didn't he?

WOODEN: He could have. He bawled Truman out, yes.

DUNAR: When you got back, or do you mean earlier?

WOODEN: Oh, no, over there.

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FERRELL: Earlier, over there.

WOODEN: One night he came along and we were on a march. We were up day and night going to the Argonne, and everybody was wore out. He came along and said, "What outfit is this?" And this voice says, "D Battery, sir." "I thought so." Now, that's a fact, and don't I suspect he hunted Truman up and got on him. They had some words. They didn't get along.

I've got a letter right here Harry Truman wrote Bess. I've got it here; you can't hardly read it. He told her I knew more about those French guns than any man that lived. It's right here in my desk right now.

FERRELL: Now, you liked Colonel [Robert M.] Danford, at Sill?

WOODEN: He was all right.

FERRELL: He was okay.

WOODEN: Yes, sir, he treated us boys right. Let me tell you; this Allen, like I say, was a political captain. He was no good; he never got nowhere. [Rollin] Ritter would never have got nowhere; he was a West Pointer and he was going to bull it over us. Now the boys were all smart, most of them; I was the dumbest guy in the

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outfit. Most of them were graduates of Rockhurst College out here. But if you tried to get along with him, you could. But if you didn't, you was in a little bit of trouble. That's one thing about Harry; he was fair, and he was firm, and he wanted you to soldier. If you did, he left you alone. You got to give the old boy credit, now, he knew his onions.

DUNAR: I've seen in other oral histories too that other people have made comments, that when they are critical of some of these people they mention the fact that they are West Pointers. Was there kind of a general feeling about West Pointers, or was it because of the nature of these individuals?

WOODEN: The West Pointers; a lot of them kind of high-hatted the National Guard officers. Truman would tell you that. I think it's in one of his books somewhere, you know. He tells somewhere about one coming along there up in the battlefield and had his orderly with him and all you know.

DUNAR: Did the rest of you all feel that way too?

WOODEN: No, we didn't pay much attention to them.

This [General Peter] Traub that signed this, he went right by our position one time up there. He had

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three or four aides along with him, in the Argonne. He wasn't firing then, but I was working on the guns and I never saw him until he got by. Some of the boys said, "Say, don't you know that was General Traub just went by?" I said, "The hell he was." I said, "He's gone now."

Harry saved our lives up there; he sure did. I don't know whether it was the second or third day and night, I guess it was. I don't know just what it was, but we pulled down to a little town, name of Cheppy. It was all shot to hell; we had shot it down. Just before we got there, there was a big tree standing out there and there was about 18 or 20 Americans piled under there dead, you know, out of the sun. We got out at this little Cheppy and these two engineers were standing there on the sidewalk. One of them was a boy I knew in there on the hill, and get those machine guns," he says, "they're going to kill all the infantry we got."

We pulled around up the hill. There was some apple trees out there and we put a gun under each apple tree. There was a valley down through there, and then there was a rise, and there was German field boxes, on this rise, you know. And the infantry was down on this flat, and they were cutting them [the Americans] down. Well,

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just as quick as we located one of them, we just "ka-bing;" if you didn't get him the first shot, on the next shot you see him go up in the air.

Well, along about 2 or 3 o'clock, we had all of them out of business, and then we destroyed a town or two. I don't know the name of the town. So about 3 or 4 o'clock, orders come down from Harry to swing your guns away around to the left. There was a battery over there, a "Dutch" [German] battery, that was holding the infantry, the division on our left; I think it was the 30th or the 28th -- I don't know -- it doesn't make any difference. They were just taking a big toll on them. And Harry located this battery, and we destroyed them in about ten minutes, just simply put them out of business, you see. Well, that evening, oh, just about sundown, Harry came up from his observation point. He says, "Well, folks, we've done some awful execution today." Of course, he was where he could see it; we couldn't see but he could. He was down in front of us, down there someplace. Well, about that time, there was a plane came over, right over, and I think they crippled a horse maybe or something. They didn't hurt no men, but they got our location. Harry just called for our horses and moved us back about a hundred yards, and to our right

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about two hundred yards, to a cut in the road. The guns were set up on the chat, on the trail back here, and the muzzle just slung over a bank, you know. We hadn't more than got over there, got our guns positioned, until they shot that orchard all to hell. See. See what would happen. They found out where we was, and they just about got the whole damn outfit.

Now, you've got to give the old boy credit. He did the job there. D Battery owed him something; yes sir, no ifs, nor ands. I was right there; I knew all about it. I saw the whole damn deal. Of course, if he hadn't moved us, we would have stayed there, see. He was the boss; he run the battery. If there was anything needed to be done to a gun, why, it was Wooden. He didn't know nothing about the damn gun itself.

DUNAR: He let you take care of that.

WOODEN: Oh, I remember old [General] Berry well. I didn't see him more than three or four times, but I remember he was a sandy-haired fellow.

Oh, that [Lt. Colonel Arthur J.] Elliott, one thing about him -- down there at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma he took his car down there with him. And one of the boys in my section was his chauffeur. That was a pretty good job, you know, driving a lieutenant colonel, you see. He had

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a Hudson automobile, a blue one; speedster they called them. I guess it was about a '16 model, touring. Now the Hudson was the best automobile that was ever made -- later on -- and it was a good car then except for one fault: the motor had three-point suspension in front, and one here and one here, understand? Well, you get out there and cramp that, and you break one of these off on one side, you know. Well, they got out there in the field and broke one and he found out you couldn't get it welded in Oklahoma City.

Well, this chauffeur couldn't get his car started, and he come down to my place, and I went up there and I started it for him. So this colonel was going to send this boy to Oklahoma City with this car. So I said, "Hell, what if it would go dead on you?" I said, "You would never get it started." I said, "You go up there and tell him that you've got to take me along." He did and we got a three-day pass to Oklahoma City. We went there one day and the next one we got it fixed, at noon, and then we stayed there as long as our passes would let us, you know. Them good-looking girls wanted to take a ride in the colonel's car, and they let them. That's the only break I ever got down there.

Well, I've seen everything fellows. There ain't a man in this place [John Knox Village] -- over 2,000 people

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live here -- and there's not another boy here who's had the experience, all the experiences and stuff that I've had, from the top to the bottom. I've went hungry; I've slept in barns, haystacks, and done everything else. I lived in three log houses when I was a kid, and never started to school until I was pretty near eight years old. I never went but six terms of school, and the highest priced teacher I went to got \$35 a month.

FERRELL: You got the top grade in mathematics, right?

WOODEN: Yes. This last teacher I went to took a liking to me. He was an old bachelor, his name was Brown, and he played the violin; I remember that well. He'd bring it over there and

play at school once in a while; he put in a lot of time on me. In fact, I expect he robbed some of the other kids of some of their time; I won't say for sure. I liked mathematics, and I was good then. I ain't any more. I make mistakes now. I've went out and dollared off two carloads of cattle right out in the pasture; write them a check, and never used a pencil. I've done that twice, thirty-eight head one time, and forty head another time. When we took that ace grade, I would have been eight years old in March; I started school in September, and I went five months and we moved. That's all the school I got the first term.

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When I was 14 that was my last school year. That's when I graduated from the 8th grade. That night at the commencement, I had a suit of clothes that cost \$3.50, and a hat that cost a dollar, a pair of old high kid-leather shoes that were scuffed up, but I walked out in the wet grass and got them wet, and they looked pretty good before I went up on the platform. The county superintendent was out there and he gave me quite a bouquet that night; I remember it yet. He did; he gave me quite a bouquet. Of course, all the rest of the kids there had folks who were pretty well fixed and all, and they got a lot of presents and stuff. I got one present. There was a doctor's daughter there; she was older than I was, but she had kind of a crush on me, because she thought I was pretty smart in the books. She was a swell gal. She gave me a book, *The Rospur Rivals*. I remember it yet, but that's the only present I got. The last time I heard from her, her and her husband were running some kind of a bookstore, I believe, in Springfield. Yes, sir, them was the days.

DUNAR: President Truman used to say that he got his education in the Army. Did you have a lot of classroom work and so forth? I know that he did as an officer. Did you have that sort of work too, training in the Army?

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WOODEN: No, no, I didn't have no class work in the Army, not much, no. Like I say, I studied machinery and engines and stuff like that all my life. I read all the books I could, you know, all the books I could get on my French guns and stuff like that. Of course, we had the American six-shooters, you know, and then we had two machine guns, one on each side of the battery you know. We never used them as I know. I don't think we fired a shot out of them. That's in case of an attack on you, you know. I don't think we ever fired a shot with them; I didn't even know they were there hardly. Them old 75s; now let me tell you, during that Argonne battle they got a workout. They sure did.

DUNAR: I've read some things about what you had to do to keep the barrels cold, or cooler anyway, not cold.

WOODEN: Oh, we just poured a bucket of water down them.

DUNAR: And you had to rest them once in a while too, didn't you?

WOODEN: That man that was here, Johnson, felt that that would warp the barrel or something. Well, it didn't, and I guess they weren't hot enough or something, but they were pretty warm. That old water would come out the breech down there, just a steaming. But you see, on

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those projectiles is a rotating band, brass -- copper, not brass, copper. Goes round that; see it's soft. That engages in the rifles, the grooves, in the barrels you see. Well, this rookie puts grease on every one of them before it goes in see, and that keeps that lubricated. If it wasn't for that they'd shoot them out I expect. That's one thing you want to do, you want to see that that's done. I was right there watching them too. Yes sir, I was right there watching them. That, and keeping the barrels greased and adjusting the recoil was the main thing. Of course, you had to keep them cool when you could, but it's all over now. All the boys that was there are gone except me and that old boy, and he's in bad shape. I ain't too good. Oh, I walk a mile and a half every day.

DUNAR: Good.

WOODEN: My worst trouble is, if I set down in that chair, it's awful hard for me to get up. Now, see that chair over there, that's at my desk. I've got one at the table, up high. See here how I put these up.

DUNAR: It makes it easier to get up and down.

WOODEN: I've got my bed built way up there, see.

FERRELL: Can you read very much?

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WOODEN: Not too awful much; I read a good deal, but not too awful much. I just got me a new pair of glasses the other day. I can't look at TV. I got a little gas in the Army, not much. It burnt my eyes at the time. The boy that was with me got more than I did. He died in '47; he's from Clinton down here. I can't say that it ever hurt me, but ever since then, anything bright bothers my eyes. I can look at TV 20 minutes and then it commences to bother me. Outside of that it doesn't bother me. I never even reported it then in the Army. That shell burst that threw that gas on us was 200 yards away from us. I saw that floating in the air, you know; that's bad stuff, that gas is.

FERRELL: If I gave you a book on Truman, is it possible for you to read that?

WOODEN: Well, hell yes.

FERRELL: Well, give me your address and I'll give you a copy of *Dear Bess*. How's that; we'll send it to you.

WOODEN: Well, I'll appreciate it.

FERRELL: That's from both of us.

WOODEN: I sure appreciate it.

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FERRELL: Well, wait till you see it; you may not like it.

DUNAR: That's the letters that President Truman sent home to Bess.

WOODEN: I've given away a lot of my stuff. They sent me a lifetime pass to the Library, see, with my guests. I don't have to pay when I go in. I just walk right in.

FERRELL: Well, you deserve it.

WOODEN: Well, I gave them 85 percent of my estate.

FERRELL: My gosh.

WOODEN: I ain't got a living relative see. And my estate will run way over \$400,000.

FERRELL: Is that right?

WOODEN: Yes. I got a copy of the will right in there. It was rewrote a while back. Hell, D Battery's been good to me. Harry was good to me; all the boys were good to me. What would I want to give it to someone else for? Yes, I was just an orphan when I got in the Army. All of these boys was out of Kansas City, and hell, they just adopted me; they treated me just as fine as you please. A lot of them are graduates out of rich families, and out here at Rockhurst College, you know.

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D Battery has been good to me. So was Harry, and so was all the officers we had. They didn't bother me; it was just the battery didn't like some of them.

Now, there was Sergeant Jordan who got to be Postmaster in Dallas, Texas. Me and him visited on the road over there; if old Klemm had known some of the things that he had told me, he'd have court martialled him. He got so he couldn't come. He used to come up here to the dinners all the time and I got in there a little late one night when I was coming from Nevada. Eddie Meisberger said, "Say, Lieutenant Jordan here will want to see you." And Housholder, he was the executive of the firing battery; he used to play football at KU, a very powerful man. Of course, he was right with the firing battery at all times you know, and me and him got along fine. I got along good with all the officers we had in the battery. Harry and Housholder were about the only two I had any contact with; and like I say, they didn't bother me. Harry didn't bother me on the front or nothing like that. The guns were firing and that was what he wanted. So he didn't bother me. I didn't bother him. We got along real good.

FERRELL: Well, that's nice.

DUNAR: That picture on your door, does the Library have a

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copy of that picture?

WOODEN: Oh, I don't know. Well, that's a second grade picture. There's the original right up yonder. I was down at Nevada to see about the farm. I've got a farm down there at Nevada, and I used to go down there a couple times a year, and maybe more. So lately I only go about once. And so I was, of course, in my motel there in Nevada, and the high school out at Walker heard I was in town. So they come in there and took my picture and interviewed me; gave me a big write-up. I guess you can read that one too, as one reads the other.

FERRELL: Well, oh, here it is, yes. That's a good picture.

WOODEN: Yes. That's pretty good. That's kind of funny now, if you've just got a few minutes to read it.

FERRELL: Yes, sure.

WOODEN: It's a knock-out.

FERRELL: It says you're a history book.

WOODEN: Yes, it's a knock-out.

DUNAR: They have Ralph "Flacker" here; that's not right. It's Thacker, isn't it, Ralph Thacker?

WOODEN: Yes.

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FERRELL: Jerry McGowan is the only one left, other than you?

WOODEN: Yes, and he's in a rest home.

FERRELL: How come you were named after McKinley when McKinley wasn't President yet?

WOODEN: That's right. That's right, he wasn't elected President yet when I was named after him. I had a brother that was named after the Vice President.

FERRELL: Oh.

WOODEN: Yes, later on.

DUNAR: The picture on your door; you're in uniform there, aren't you, the one that's on your door outside?

WOODEN: Yes, that's it over yonder. Well, wait a minute. Yes, I guess that's right. I wonder where the heck the other is. There's my picture over there at the deal where I made the speech you read about.

FERRELL: Oh, that's nice.

WOODEN: They took that. I didn't know they took that. They took that when I was walking through to the table. There's a picture over there, and there's me sitting at the table you know, beside a guy from Hallmark Cards.

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DUNAR: Here's the one. This is the one; here's the one out there.

WOODEN: Now, they've got a good picture of me out there in the Library. It's this one enlarged. This picture was taken the day I got out of the Army, right here.

DUNAR: They do have that at the Library?

WOODEN: Yes, and it's enlarged; it's a better picture. See, you can still see my chevron right there, see.

DUNAR: Yes.

WOODEN: That was taken the day I got out of the Army. There's the letter that I wrote when I sent that citation in to him. See there, March 16, '59. Johnson brought it back here to me.

DUNAR: That's great.

FERRELL: That's quite an article here. That's pretty good.

WOODEN: I've got several of those here. I got one in this little paper here. I used to ship a lot of cattle to St. Louis. I got two or three write-ups in my St. Louis paper; I've got them in the Kansas City paper.

FERRELL: Have you been in the Kansas City paper?

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WOODEN: Yes.

FERRELL: You've been in there.

WOODEN: Yes. And I've been in the Independence paper, the Joplin paper, Nevada paper, and finally the Lee's Summit paper.

FERRELL: I know a fellow named [William] Tammeus who writes for the *Star*, and I sent him a letter this morning and said he ought to interview you. So you may hear from him. You'd be glad to talk to him, wouldn't you? He's a nice fellow.

WOODEN: Well, of course, boys, I'll tell you, my memory isn't quite as good as it used to be. I used to be a match for all of them. But I'll soon be 94 years old. A lot of the boys never made that much.

FERRELL: Well, you're going to live to be a hundred.

DUNAR: You're doing great. Keep walking. Keep getting your exercise.

WOODEN: You never can tell; you can't tell anything about it.

FERRELL: Well, we'd better go, Andy.

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WOODEN: Been walking all my life.

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