

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with

JOHN R. PIKE

Transportation, Army and Army Reserves, post Korean War.

1995

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**Pike, John Robert**, (1931- ). Oral History Interview, 1995.  
Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

John R. Pike, a Madison, Wisconsin native, discusses his Army service in Korea shortly after the Korean War. Pike recalls following the news about World War II as a boy, seeing VJ-Day celebrations in Madison, and his awareness of the Cold War. As a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison when the Korean War broke out, he discusses the atmosphere on campus and personally expecting to be pulled into the war. After being in the Reserve Officers Training Corps all four years of college, Pike talks about graduating in 1953 and receiving orders to report in a year. He mentions refresher training at Fort Eustis (Virginia) and assignment to Korea. Pike addresses regional diversity in his ROTC transportation unit and tensions between Blacks and Whites, and between Northerners and Southerners, during ROTC summer camp. He details the journey to Asia on a troop ship, arriving in Inchon, being sent to a replacement center at Ascom City, and noticing the destruction and poor conditions still evident from the war. Assigned to the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division transportation office, he speaks of the train ride north and the location of his camp near "Little Chicago" (Tongduch'ōn). Pike states that M\*A\*S\*H, the television show, had details that were "surprisingly accurate." He discusses daily life: watching movies in the evening, the availability of liquor, and work involving the railroad and distribution of supplies. Pike comments on accidents, including fires from petroleum pipeline spills and jeep crashes caused by poor road conditions. He comments on the segregation of officers and enlisted men, the prevalence of higher education experience at headquarters, and morale. Pike recalls little incidents that made the soldiers take garrison duty very seriously, such as men being killed on the road and an air raid. He describes his interactions with Korean, Scottish, and Australian troops and duty arranging transport for other nationalities of U.N. troops. He portrays a wild Belgian soldier, who escaped from camp naked to rendezvous with a Korean woman, and a highly disciplined Ethiopian unit. Pike states he also served in Seoul at the 8th Army Headquarters for a few months, and talks about checking off his last 100 days abroad on a calendar. He touches on his homecoming and reassignment to the Port of Seattle, where he was released early because they had no work for him to do. Pike speaks about participating in Reserves activities and using the GI Bill to earn a Master's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and to study at the London School of Economics (England). He discusses living conditions in Korea and the cold winter weather.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Pike (b.1931) served active duty in the Army from 1954 to 1956, and was in the Army Reserves until 1960. He earned a Master's degree in economics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1957.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995  
Transcribed by Karen M. Emery, WDVA staff, 1997  
Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011  
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

**Transcribed Interview:**

Mark: Here we go. Today's date is June 21, the first day of summer, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. John Pike of Madison, a veteran of the Korean War. Good morning. Thanks for coming in.

Pike: Good morning, Mark.

Mark: On this extremely hot day.

Pike: Nice and cool down here.

Mark: What I wouldn't give for a blizzard sometimes, I tell 'ya. Okay. I like to start the interview by having my subjects tell me a little bit about where they were born and raised and what they were doing prior to their entry into the military.

Pike: Well, I'm one of those unusual people that was actually born and raised right here in Madison, just a few blocks from where we're sitting. Grew up here, went to grade school, high school and undergraduate—four years here at the University of Wisconsin.

Mark: What did you study?

Pike: Got my degree in economics.

Mark: During World War II you must have been, jeez, what? Grade—

Pike: Later part of grade school. Yeah.

Mark: Do you remember much about it?

Pike: Oh, yes, yes. As a young boy it struck me as probably the big event of my lifetime and certainly something that I followed with great interest in the newspapers, at that time the radio. I lived with an elderly grandfather who was retired and who spent a lot of time with me and following the news, so I was very much aware of it. Just as a little footnote, my first job, just having finished grade school, was as a Western Union telegraph delivery boy. The last summer, 1945. So I happened to be up here on the Square for VJ Day and still remember the big celebration.

Mark: It was a big one?

Pike: Big one.

Mark: Lots of jubilation?

Pike: Lots of jubilation. Lots of noise and excitement and, of course, there were a lot of people in training both from—it was then Truax, but also all those programs out at the university. Everything from the Navy—I think they were called WAVES at that time, the young women.

Mark: The Navy women? Yeah.

Pike: To the men—so there were lots of young people around. They had a particular interest in it finally being over.

Mark: I'm sure. And so as the Cold War set in, then, you were in high school?

Pike: Yes.

Mark: Now, were you as aware of the confrontation with the Soviets as World War II?

Pike: I think maybe a little less so, but I went to the old university, Wisconsin High School, and we had a pretty active program of social sciences and some teachers that were interested in getting us informed. There was a lot of hope about the United Nations. I remember that we studied a lot about their programs and how this was going to help resolve some of the world difficulties. But, yeah, I think everybody was aware that things were deteriorating in terms of Russian relationships. And I think we also—things like the Berlin Airlift for instance, made a big impression.

Mark: Right. You must have been tenth, eleventh grade or so by that time.

Pike: Yeah.

Mark: You graduated when? '49, '50?

Pike: From high school, '49.

Mark: And you went to the university then, right away?

Pike: Yes.

Mark: And you joined the ROTC?

Pike: At that time the first two years of ROTC were mandatory.

Mark: That's what I was wondering.

Pike: Everyone went in and at the end of the, my freshman year, the war, the Korean War started, so everyone was up in the air and nobody knew what was going to happen. As I remember, the biggest uncertainty arose in the end of 1950 when the Chinese entered the war and it looked as if it might blow into something bigger.

Mark: Right. Now you were on campus at the time?

Pike: Yes.

Mark: You were a twenty-year-old guy?

Pike: Yup.

Mark: Are you thinking, gee, I'm going to end up over there? Are other young guys thinking the same thing?

Pike: Absolutely. Everyone was thinking about it, and the question was always whether to enlist or whether we should just sort of wait and see how things developed. I know at one time I went in and talked to a recruiter, thinking that there was no way that we were going to finish school and so I might as well try to choose a branch or do something to try to get yourself a little better situation. We ended—most of us, I think, that could stay in school decided to ride it out, but there was a lot of pressure on people for grades because those that didn't stay in school were drafted almost instantly.

Mark: Yeah. This brings up something I was getting towards anyway. A decade-and-a-half later a war in Asia caused a lot of unrest on campus. Now you were on campus during the Korean conflict. What was the atmosphere like? How did people on campus view the war? Obviously, much different, outwardly anyway, than during Vietnam.

Pike: Yeah. There certainly were no demonstrations except there were a few small groups. There were people we thought were Communist front entities. What they really were I have no idea. But they were small; they didn't seem to attract much of a following. And among the males, and it was totally male at that point, I think it was acceptance of the fact that sooner or later we were going to do a stint in the service. It was a question of whether it would be done interrupting school, after you finished, and whether you got any voice in what you did.

Mark: Did people think that, perhaps, it was going to become a third world war? Or did they view it as kind of a sideshow?

- Pike: I think there was very real concern about that third world war threat when the Chinese first came in and when the U.N. forces really got socked and driven back, as they were in very late '50, early '51. That caused a lot of concern about that. That was certainly the darkest day.
- Mark: Now, had you finished college before the 1953 cease-fire?
- Pike: I finished in June of '53 and the cease-fire was in July.
- Mark: So you entered the military right after you graduated college?
- Pike: No. Curiously, I got my degree, my commission, and my orders at the same afternoon event, but I wasn't to report for almost a year. I didn't report until June of '54. By that time they really had, the war had settled down into that stalemate and they had pretty well filled the pipeline. There were a lot of ROTC products and they were essentially backed up.
- Mark: I want to go back to something a second. You mentioned for the first two years ROTC was mandatory. And for the second two, presumably, it was voluntary?
- Pike: Voluntary.
- Mark: And you stayed in?
- Pike: And I stayed in, but at that point the very pressures we're talking about, I think, produced an abundance of applicants. My recollection is it was far from certain that you could go into the second two years and the program then was able to be somewhat selective, so people were anxious to get into that. Those who didn't, some cases were drafted. I think most cases finished school and then were drafted.
- Mark: So describe for me if you would, your entry into the military. To whom did you report and where and when, and when did you get the haircut and the whole sort of business?
- Pike: The closest thing to basic training, of course, was a summer camp program between your junior and senior years. And that's where you got the KP and the all days out in the sun. And that was all held at Fort Eustis because I was in the transportation corps, ROTC for transportation. Then when I reported in June of '54, I reported to Fort Eustis again, which is a nice warm place down next to the James River in southern Virginia, and went to a, what they called a transportation officer basic course which was six or eight weeks of refresher stuff of what you'd had in ROTC and some of the preparation for overseas—the live firing and stuff of that sort. And then—and this was a bunch of other

ROTC graduates from all over the country—and in the midst of that, six weeks into it, we got orders for our first permanent duty assignment.

Mark: Which was?

Pike: And in my case we were to report to Seattle for shipment to the Far East. It was pretty obvious where we were going. And there were a bunch of us that got that same set of orders.

Mark: Now, did you finish your training there? I mean, this was, you finished training and then you report to Seattle? They didn't pull you out of school, did they?

Pike: No, no, no.

Mark: I see.

Pike: Finished the training.

Mark: How would you describe your fellow officers? What sort of backgrounds did they come from? Were they working-class kids who used this to finance their education? Were there a lot of middle-class kids who could afford college in the first place? Smart, dumb, regional differences—just a general portrait.

Pike: Everyone, of course, was a university, recent university graduate, from a variety of places. The program was set up so that there were certain campuses that had transportation, so you had geographic differences but not uniformity. I think we had a greater representation from the South than anywhere else. The group that sticks in my mind most clearly, for a variety of reasons, were Texas Aggies. They were—well, I still have biases about Aggies because of that experience—but Wisconsin was one of the biggest programs in transportation and so there were a good number of kids from here. They were probably typically middle-class, probably reaching down. I mean, middle-class and even to the lower-middle-class. The kind of people who in that period went to state universities where costs were a good bit less than they were at private schools.

Mark: Now, you hinted at some of the regional differences. I mean, did they sort of—from your perspective as a Northern kid, were Southerners still fighting the Civil War? Did these tensions ever get beyond the ribbing stage?

Pike: It happened that in this basic course—just last week I had a visit from one of my classmates that ended up in the same company with me overseas and we pulled out a picture. There was not a black face in that course.



Mark: That was my next question.

Pike: There was none. But, going back a bit—that summer camp. Some of those racial tensions came out very strongly. The barracks I was in was predominately black because there was a big contingent from a black school in Louisiana called Southern. And in particular, those Aggies were very aggressive about this and there were some brawls. More than just two guys trading punches.

Mark: Between blacks and whites? Or between Northern and Southern?

Pike: Both. In other words, in many cases, I remember some cases Wisconsin kids got involved because they felt offended by the behavior of the Southern whites. The black kids tended to be, not exactly passive, but they weren't terribly aggressive in defending their turf, but there were plenty of other kids, not just Wisconsin, who felt the need to keep an eye on them. Keep in mind that this was in southern Virginia in the early '50s so you still had segregated facilities—fountains, washrooms, and everything else—off the post. The military was completely integrated.

Mark: Yeah. Now, did you get off the post much?

Pike: Not that summer.

Mark: You were pretty busy.

Pike: Pretty busy. There wasn't much of that. But later when we came back to that officer program, yes, we did.

Mark: And did you find this—of course, the civil rights movement was just beginning. '54 was Brown vs. the Board of Education.

Pike: Right.

Mark: Did you remark on this at all when you went there? Other Northern guys, did you—

Pike: We'd heard about it but we'd never seen segregated facilities before, yes. We did remark on it. We thought that the South was, well, in some ways still fighting the Civil War. We took the huge number of southern Civil War memorials everywhere you turned in Richmond or some of those towns where there were memorials, and we thought this is just the evidence. Their behavior and their monuments are all stuck ninety years ago.

- Mark: Okay. So, you go to Seattle. Can you describe for me, if you would, your voyage to Korea? I imagine you had to stop in Japan, for example.
- Pike: No, no. What we did was we reported to Tacoma, to Fort Lewis, and we, as usual, had to wait around there. Some of the guys, again it's the usual random process, some of the guys were lucky and got shipped over by air. The military seemed to be purchasing extra seats from civilian carriers so that they flew over and were there early and as a result came home early. I went over on a troop ship that left the Port of Seattle called the *General John Pope*. It was good sized, we had a lot of extra capacity, but that simply meant that they put everybody in a few sections, kept the others closed, so the conditions were as jammed as they always are on troop ships. As officers, even as young as we were, we were on the main deck and had decent facilities. The trip was long.
- Mark: Decent facilities meaning what? You had like two or three officers to a room?
- Pike: Right, right. And a porthole. I remember we had air and we didn't have that horrible stench that inevitably comes from people getting sick down in the hold. Those were miserable situations. This was in September or early October and we hit a storm out there. We really got beaten around in that storm. A lot of people got sick. And the other interesting event that happened was that we got, we essentially stood still out there for the better part of a day to have a rendezvous with a freighter which had a sick seaman on board. And in high waves and what seemed to me difficult conditions, they fired a line over and pulled this guy over in one of those baskets. Everybody lined the deck to watch this operation. But we had a doctor and we took him on board and took him over with us. I think the whole thing took something like sixteen or seventeen days, 'cause I know we were running low on food and we weren't taking showers. Supplies were getting down there. We stopped and dropped a small group, maybe a company, in Okinawa, but that was just a brief stop and then we went into Inchon. We tied up, we came into Inchon, must have been at night because they got us up at dawn. I still remember that sight. The first thing you saw was the hospital ship floating out there with the big red crosses on it and the famous mud flats which are a stinking, awful bunch of muck. And the town had been pretty well beaten up, too. Shelled pretty heavily.
- Mark: And this is still evident several years later.
- Pike: Oh yeah. And the ship had to tie up well out in the harbor and then lighters took troops into, through kind of channels that had been dredged in this mess. And they put you on, I suppose, trucks, and you went to a replacement center nearby called Ascom City.

- Mark: Ascom City, right. And as you drove through the countryside did you have any particular impressions?
- Pike: Uh hum, it was depressing. The impact of that war was, on an already poor country, was pretty vivid.
- Mark: War scars were still evident?
- Pike: Plenty of war scars and the conditions—I mean, a lot of people living in shacks, huts of various kinds. Things made out of old corrugated that GIs had abandoned. Pretty tough conditions.
- Mark: Now a lot of the vets that I've spoken with, they often remark on the Korean method of fertilizing the fields. Is this something you'd—
- Pike: Oh, yeah, nobody could miss that. Yeah, the rice paddies were bad. The stench was awful. And one of the things that got into the folklore, what the truth really was, was that the Koreans themselves, individually, were afflicted by parasites and that the parasite eggs were out there drying in the fields and then blowing around so that you could pick it up just by going by on the road.
- Mark: In Ascom City you went through some processing and you got stationed in a particular place. Where was that?
- Pike: Yeah. I, again, this whole shipload of people took awhile to sort out and so forth. But I guess as my favorite illustration of how naive we were, was that here was this, I think there were about twenty of these transportation corps second lieutenants who essentially knew nothing, milling around there and they were all sent to the places you would expect—to the ports, the truck battalions and so forth. One name in the middle of this list was somehow selected to go to the 7th Infantry Division and I was sent to what was called the 7th Replacement Company, and it said in brackets next to it, “pipeline.” And I remember people telling me that that meant that I was going to work on the petroleum pipeline that brought fuel up to the—well, everybody up North. In fact, of course, it only meant I was in the replacement pipeline and I was just headed for the division. So they took us, by truck—it's not too far—into Seoul. There was an old Japanese-built railroad station, sort of an imposing building, and we waited around there, I remember, forever, and they finally put us on a train which had no heat or light and this was probably leaving at 6:00 at night, and it took something, and it headed North and I was supposed to be—nominally I was the troop commander on that train. And we must have made ten stops along the way, at each of which there were units where people had assignments. So some non-com in each group would take their records and try to get these guys off at the right stop. But this train trip took forever. I remember thinking we had to be in the middle of Manchuria by the time this

thing finally reached the 7th Division where all of us were headed for the replacement company. At that point we spent, I think in my case, one night in the replacement company and then were sent out to our individual assignments.

Mark: So the 7th was stationed right on the DMZ?

Pike: No, not right on the DMZ. One regiment was up pretty close. I was, actually—in fact, I really had a job identified for me. It was in the division transportation office in the division headquarters, and we were probably, oh I suppose as the crow flies, five to ten miles from the DMZ.

Mark: That's still fairly close. You're not in Pusan or something?

Pike: Oh, no.

Mark: You're up there, up in the hills, I take it.

Pike: Up in the hills. In fact, an area not too far, from what I can judge, is the setting for that TV series, M\*A\*S\*H, because they talk about Little Chicago. Unless there's another one, that was the nearest town for us.

Mark: I always hesitate to bring up movie and TV images when it comes to these interviews, but M\*A\*S\*H was just so prevalent. Everyone knows it and that sort of thing. You watched the show. When it comes to your daily life in Korea, how accurate do you think that show was?

Pike: I am struck by some of the things that are surprisingly accurate. The point I just made is an example. Another that's easy to point to is that there were only, by this, the time I got there was the draw-down and they were consolidating, so there were two divisions. First it was the 1st Marines and then they left. And I think it was the 24th, came back. But those two divisions plus the British Commonwealth division had, as their headquarters, I Corps, First Corps. M\*A\*S\*H refers to the I Corps headquarters back in Oijambu [?], and that's exactly where it was. They talk about Little Chicago. They talk about other things that I know are accurate. The relationship with some of the U.N. people, which I've seen in a couple of the episodes. The sets, in some ways, are quite good.

Mark: That was filmed out in California somewhere.

Pike: Uh huh. The hills aren't quite the same, but the—I'm thinking of the way the tents are set up and the little painted rocks, some of that kind of thing, are pretty good. Somebody had some photos or did something to check it out.

- Mark: I'll get back to your military duties in a minute or two, but when it comes to your day-to-day life, since we're on the M\*A\*S\*H subject, you know, Hawkeye—they had the still and they play cards and the whole thing. What did you guys do in your free time, if you had any?
- Pike: It sounds surprising, but we didn't have an awful lot of free time, although we had free evenings. My recollection is we had a lot of movies, that they would regularly show a movie in the evening, that that was sort of an optional thing.
- Mark: Fairly current American movies?
- Pike: Reasonably, I think. Yeah, American movies. And I think reasonably current. There was a lot of letter writing. And they also certainly had an ample supply of liquor. It wasn't homemade.
- Mark: It was [TALKED OVER] or did you make your own?
- Pike: Oh, no. It was, no, no, not made your own. It was—
- Mark: Brought in?
- Pike: —brought in. There was an ample supply of very expensive, I mean the high quality French champagne, German beer, American whiskeys, plenty of it and easily available.
- Mark: Brought in by the military?
- Pike: Yup, yup. So there were people who had developed some problems with that. No question about it.
- Mark: Yeah. That's fairly common in the military anyway. So as for your duties, describe your duties in a typical day.
- Pike: Well, let me first say that I think it's kind of unusual for somebody, a second lieutenant with four months or whatever I had of active duty time, to end up on a division staff. But there was a real shortage at that time of, particularly of, captains. So there was a captain rotating home and I came in, essentially, as his replacement. We had a small group. There was a major that was the division transportation officer. There were, it turned out, two lieutenants with him. And some sergeants and some clerks. So we ended up doing whatever needed doing. In my case, most of it focused on the rail. The reason was that we were near a railhead that brought up the bulk of supplies, much of it from Pusan; Inchon wasn't a very active port at that time. So it ran the length of Korea and the most effective way to bring it in was rail. So when you're

bringing in supplies for twelve thousand guys there's a lot of traffic, a lot of unloading, a lot of distribution.

Mark: I'm sure it's a very complicated thing.

Pike: Yeah.

Mark: Are these like food and that sort of thing? Or is it weapons?

Pike: Well, it was everything. Everything but petroleum, which did come by pipeline.

Mark: Someone moved on the pipeline and brought it up. Surprisingly, to some people transporting all these things can be fairly dangerous. There are a lot of accidents. You know, car accidents, car-train accidents. I'm not sure if "casualties" is the right word to use, but did you have "casualties?"

Pike: Of course. You're absolutely right. Just mentioning the pipeline, there were actually people killed with that. But that was really, call it vandalism or theft. The Koreans would literally smash the thing to get at the petroleum and so you'd have these spills, which then would get ignited. And that, of course, was a pretty dangerous thing. To the point where we would patrol it; I mean, send rifle companies out, yeah, to patrol the pipeline. As far as the vehicles were concerned, the other reason that the rail was a good system was that the roads were so terrible. There were no paved roads up there and that meant that the trucks were going pretty slowly. I'd say more of the accidents occurred with Jeeps, which were easy to roll over, and kids weren't always very careful about how they drove them. So that was more of a problem than the trucks, which were essentially plugging along at twenty, twenty-five miles an hour.

Mark: So you were in command of some enlisted men at some point?

Pike: Not at this point. Not up at the division. I was really a staff officer, as I say, responsible for a variety of things, but not really a command role.

Mark: Did you have much contact with enlisted guys at all? I'm getting at the officer/enlisted relationship. You don't seem to have had much at all.

Pike: At that point it was a small number of clerks, administrative-type sergeants, in our small section. And just the guys I encountered in the regular, the headquarters company personnel.

Mark: What was discipline like? I mean, was it officers and enlisted men, there was a lot of "Yes, sir," "No, sir?" I was in the medical field and worked with a lot

of doctors and there wasn't much of that sort of thing at all. I often hear stories of the real Army or the real military. I'm just curious about—

Pike: Yeah, there was a reasonably strict level of that. Certainly the segregation was complete. You didn't, you weren't quartered or eating or even showering with the enlisted people. They were expected to salute, address you as "Sir." In terms of their individual relationships, it varied a lot. I think it's fair to say that there was a pretty clear sorting of personnel, and the farther you got away from the division headquarters the fewer, let's say college graduates or college people of any kind you had among the enlisted guys. Our group typically would be guys who had gotten drafted after a couple of years in college. I remember we even had one case of a kid, for some reason, had gotten drafted with a Ph.D. and he was—if they hadn't plucked him off at Army or corps, they got him at division headquarters; he never went any farther down the line than that. So that our group of enlisted men was different than most.

Mark: It's not really your area, but I'm going to put the question out anyway. I'm wondering, I'm interested in sort of morale and being stuck up in the boondocks after the fighting was over.

**[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]**

Pike: I think that the depressant was a feeling that you really were in a poor situation, physically. Certainly, conditions weren't very good. And it was a forgotten kind of residual that nobody cared about. But there was an awareness that the thing really may not be over. The Chinese were still the principle concern up there. And we got, at my level, got very limited amounts of intelligence, but we knew there were a lot of them still there and they had a lot of fire power. We were, certainly, concerned about the ability of the ROK Army to hold on so that people didn't think it was just a complete exercise in foolishness.

Mark: It wasn't the same as garrison duty in Fort Lewis or something like that?

Pike: No. I'm sure—

Mark: It was taken more seriously?

Pike: Yeah, I think it really was. Every once in awhile you'd get some little reminder of that.

Mark: Like what?

Pike: We had a few people killed out on the roads.

Mark: Snipers or something?

Pike: Yeah. We never knew who they were. The division would post some special precautions and you'd—no one was allowed out on the roads without weapons and ammunition, whereas the rest of the time you'd travel without it. And they may have been nothing more than thieves, but they never found them, they never knew what happened. We even had, believe it or not, we had an air raid.

Mark: One of these five o'clock Charlie-type things?

Pike: Exactly.

Mark: I see some chuckling when you say that.

Pike: Yup. And the reason I'm chuckling, it was a biplane and it came so low over the hills that the radar missed it and it actually went over us and farther south and they shot it down, south of us. So little things like that would cause you to think this is different than garrison duty.

Mark: Did you have much contact with the local Koreans at all? Did you get a sample of the local fare?

Pike: Very little, very little. The town—

Mark: Or were there many residents?

Pike: That's what I was going to say. There was very little activity around there. This town that I mentioned called Little Chicago, the real name is Tongduchon, was off limits, for the obvious reason of prostitution. But that just meant that a lot of the business ladies used to try to get into the compound and would manage rendezvous with GIs out in the edge of a rice paddy somewhere or whatever.

Mark: There's \_\_\_\_[?].

Pike: Exactly. But we had almost no contact with them up there.

Mark: Now, you mentioned the ROK Army. I'm interested in sort of, this was sort of a coalition effort—the U.N. and Korean and American. How, and there's a saying in military affairs that "there's one thing worse than having an enemy; it's having allies," something along those lines. I can't remember exactly. I'm interested in your perspective on how these different nationalities and different armies under different commands got along together.



Pike: Well, first of all, unlike the situation we're reading about on Bosnia, there's no question that in Korea it was the United States that was pulling the main weight and it was also fully in command.

Mark: Not unlike the Gulf, I suppose?

Pike: Yeah. That's a good analogy. So that was the easy part. And as I understand it, the United States had made a lot of political effort to get other countries to participate. As far as the ROK Army was concerned, they had been just terribly beaten up and were in relatively bad shape. Nobody really had a sense of how good or bad they were, but they were considered second string. And the question was, if anything ever happened, could they hang on? They'd had some units that, of course, had fallen apart. Even at the equipment level—they had all the, what we called World War II vehicles, older stuff. They carried the same weapons we did but the rest of their equipment was old and presumably less effective. Poorer shape. So there were very real doubts about them. As individuals, the few we knew, which would be kind of liaison. There was a program called KATUSAs, which was Koreans Augmenting U.S. Army or something, and these were—of course, language was a tremendous problem, but these were hardworking kind of guys that ended up getting the donkey work. I mean, the heavy hauling kind of fell to them. But I guess by their standards it was a better deal than what they had back in their units, so it worked out all right. The other thing that probably was the most unusual about my experience was the exposure to the non-Korean United Nations forces. And the reason I got involved with them was that they were either in our area or actually attached to the 7th Division. The biggest exception was what was called the British Commonwealth Division, and they were immediately on our left. There was an area by the Imjin River where they had been fighting and had stayed through the truce. When I was there, there was a regiment from Canada, Scotland, and Australia. And just sort of by osmosis I got acquainted with some of the Australians and Scots.

Mark: There wasn't much of a language barrier.

Pike: Not at all.

Mark: Although more than you might think?

Pike: Right. There was certainly some. But they were good guys and I think I'd say, particularly with the Australians, we seemed to hit it off. They were an easy group to know and to feel comfortable with, so that part was fine. The other distinction, I guess, would be that the Commonwealth Division was the only one that didn't use U.S. equipment. They had their own weapons, ammunition, vehicles, food, everything was done on their own. For instance, one of the treats that we used to look forward to was on a certain road there

was a kind of a white-washed thatched hut, a little old England kind of thing, that was a NAAF house.

Mark: What's a NAAF?

Pike: Navy, Army, Air Force, something.

Mark: Oh, an exchange or something?

Pike: It's like a PX. And you could get a proper cup of tea and a Cadbury bar and a few other little British treats that were just simply unknown to us. So whenever you were in that area you'd make it a point to go to the NAAF house.

Mark: I'm sure they were happy to take your money, too.

Pike: They were. They seemed perfectly glad to see some GIs. But then back to this assignment in the division, one of my responsibilities was dealing with the other U.N. forces, particularly when they were rotating. They rotated as units, not as individuals, and I'd be responsible for getting them to Inchon so that they could be loaded on ships to go home, and as a result I had contact with, and a couple of weeks of work planning and so forth, with people like—oh, there were Colombians from South America, there were Belgians, Ethiopians, Greeks, Turks—it seems to me there were, oh, Thailanders and Filipinos.

Mark: That's quite an amalgam.

Pike: Exactly.

Mark: Did you get any impressions on their military capabilities, why they were there, did they enjoy their duty? Was it just a sort of fun thing? You must have been all of twenty-six by this time?

Pike: Oh, twenty-four. Yeah. And this was really eye-opening to me. I guess that could go on for a long time, but just to give you a sample, when we sent the Belgians home, it was just a company, we didn't send them to Belgium. We sent them to the then Belgian Congo because these guys had been sent out, they were essentially guys who had gotten in trouble, criminal problems usually, and were given the choice of going in the Army and being shipped out to Korea or going to jail or having some other discipline, and the Belgian government didn't want them back in Belgium, so they went to the Congo for the rest of their stay and some of them were absolutely wild men. I mean, we had a guy, one of them in the group—one of the problems was always rounding everybody up and getting them to the trucks and to the rail cars, we had one—we had one who was so incorrigible that the company commander

took all his clothes. This was in the summer, fortunately, but even so, stark naked, he ran off into the hills where he had a rendezvous with his Korean girlfriend. They knew where he was and had to bring him back and clamp, put him on the train, forcibly, just to get him down to Inchon.

Mark: That's an unusual story, I take it?

Pike: That was unusual, sure. Some of the others were highly disciplined. A group that comes to mind were the Ethiopians. Almost none of them spoke English. Very few, even officers, could translate. The rumor we had was that the then emperor, Haile Selassie, had used this group as his palace guards. It's hard to know what the truth of that is. But they'd see a young guy like me fifty yards away and they'd leap to their feet to salute. They were tough. We had one, that morning that they shipped out, there was one that was in the hospital—I think appendicitis—but had had some kind of surgery on his middle. And they pulled him out and said, "If you're going home, you're going on your own two feet with your own gear, with your own unit." And the thing broke open and he couldn't stand up and they left him. We had to get him back to a medical unit. So they essentially just took a hard line with everybody. The Turks were also hard as nails. Just extremely disciplined, tough on everybody, including any Koreans that got in their way. And their reputation, apparently during combat, was equal to that.

Mark: That's what I've heard. I've never spoken with anyone who's been with them in combat.

Pike: Yeah.

Mark: So, when it came time for you to go home—when you went to Korea, did you have a fixed tour?

Pike: Yes.

Mark: Was it eighteen months?

Pike: It was sixteen.

Mark: Sixteen months. And so you knew when you were going back. Did you mark the calendar and the whole bit?

Pike: Yeah, when you got down to one hundred days. That was sort of the custom. You started what we called a chokey [?] chart and you were clicking them off. I should also say that this tour at the division only lasted, I think it was about eleven months, and then I was transferred down to a company, transportation company, down in Seoul at the 8th Army Headquarters, so the return was from

that company, from Seoul. Things, living conditions and a lot of the physical situation, changed, were a lot better down there.

Mark: Yeah, I'm sure. How'd you feel about leaving? Glad to go home?

Pike: Overjoyed. Sure.

Mark: Sorry to leave your buddies?

Pike: Overjoyed. You were sad to leave your buddies but it had been happening the whole time. You'd get acquainted with somebody and he'd rotate and go on, so that really wasn't much of an issue at that point.

Mark: I see. Did you go back by boat?

Pike: No. They sent us back to Japan and it was a replacement center over there where you waited around for a plane. It was the old propeller, so it was twenty-four hours of flying time. A stop in Wake and Honolulu and then coming into Travis, outside of San Francisco.

Mark: So, how much military time did you have to do yet? I'm sorry if you stated or not, we haven't gotten that far.

Pike: Yeah. I had, in my two-year tour, I had about four months left. And I came home on leave to Madison and was then reassigned to the Port of Seattle where I went after a thirty-day leave, or whatever, and spent a fairly short time. And they gave you—first of all, they really had nothing for me to do. Things were, people weren't being shipped out. There wasn't much activity in the port itself. And, secondly, I was so short that there wasn't much point in it. So they had a program in which they said if you want to hang it up early, you can take it. And I did. And so I then returned home again, probably in March.

Mark: And so you opted not to stay in the service?

Pike: That's correct.

Mark: Did you have reserve time to do or something like that?

Pike: Yes. Yeah. My recollection is you had a two-year active duty and six-year reserve requirement.

Mark: And you were never called back or anything?

Pike: Never called back. But I did participate in reserve units.

- Mark: I see. So, then by the end of '56, January of '56—
- Pike: Yeah, that's when I came home. March or so of '56 I got out.
- Mark: And you were done?
- Pike: I was done. And I came back. And you mentioned the question of what impact the military had on other things. I was one of these guys who would, even though I had a degree, I wasn't at all clear where I was going to go, what I was going to do. And so I opted to use that GI Bill and ended up starting with summer session, June of '56.
- Mark: At UW here?
- Pike: Back here, yes. And the following academic year and got a masters in June of '57.
- Mark: In what field?
- Pike: Again, economics.
- Mark: Now, there's a Korean GI Bill that was different from the one the World War II guys got?
- Pike: Yes.
- Mark: Did it cover your grad school expenses or did you have to work? Were you able to finance your college degree through your military service?
- Pike: Two out of three. What I did that year was I returned to my old fraternity and the dean approved my going in as a house fellow so I got free room and board, back up on Langdon Street. I got the GI Bill. And then I joined a reserve unit out on Park Street and got that weekly pay. So those three things gave me a pretty reasonable level of support.
- Mark: Yeah. And after you got your masters, then you were able to find employment or do something to—
- Pike: Yes. But if you want the rest of the GI Bill story—
- Mark: Oh, there's more?
- Pike: There's a little more to that in that I went to Milwaukee and, again, joined a reserve unit. There was actually a shop battalion, railway shop battalion, in

Milwaukee which had a spot and took me in. So I was in that, I suppose, for about a year and a half. I know I went to a couple of summer camps with them. And I worked in the investment business down there. Well, I won't get into the personal side, but I ended up getting married, and for a couple of reasons really related to my personal circumstances, decided to leave the job. And we thought, my wife to be at that time and I, thought this was the time to grab an opportunity, so I wrote to the London School of Economics and said, "I understand your school year begins in September and that's when you want people there, but my GI Bill is expiring and if I don't get in by, whatever the date was, it's over for me and I'd like to come over and start in January." And they accepted me. So we left from the wedding in the end of December and the first of January went over to London on the GI Bill.

Mark: That's quite a feather in the cap, too, I'm sure.

Pike: Well—

Mark: Prestigious.

Pike: Yeah. And it was a fine year. We spent a calendar year there. But the GI Bill was a big part of that. And not many people can tell you about this, but I can tell you that the GI Bill, for a married guy at that time, was the equivalent of the average wage in the English factories. So although we didn't have all the subsidies that they were providing for housing and so forth, we were able to live quite adequately on the GI Bill in London, renting a little apartment.

Mark: That is interesting. Now you mentioned housing and that sort of thing, too. There were veteran housing programs. Did you use any of those at any time?

Pike: No.

Mark: Okay. In general, did you think you service hindered or helped your eventual career goals?

Pike: Okay. The easy answer to that is "helped." As I said, the GI Bill—just to finish that point, I went to London for a year. Again, for personal reasons, her final illness—my mother was very sick—and we came home, as I say, in about a year. And I picked up again out here.

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Pike: —picked up at graduate school here and ended up getting by Ph.D. In large part, not for the full time, but in large part, the GI Bill carried that. It made a lot of difference.

Mark: Yeah. I've got one last area I want to cover, and that involves veterans organizations and reunions and that sort of thing. Did you ever join any of the big groups?

Pike: No, I never have.

Mark: The Legion, VFW. Is there a particular reason? Just too busy, you don't like them?

Pike: Well, I send them modest contributions, so it isn't a question of disliking them. My father had been in the first World War and was active in some of them so I don't have any bias. But I guess I don't feel much identification with them. I just don't see—I don't know enough about what they do, but I just don't see that I'd fit in much.

Mark: What about, I know there's a group of Korean War vets that are organizing. Join any smaller sort of—

Pike: I'm not even aware of that.

Mark: Okay. I guess that about covers it, actually.

Pike: Okay.

Mark: Is there anything you'd like to add? Anything you think I missed? You grew up in Wisconsin.

Pike: Yes.

Mark: Korea is known for its cold winters. I like to ask those who have spent a winter in Korea and Wisconsin—it's kind of a trivia question I understand. I'm just curious.

Pike: No, you're absolutely right. And the fact if we haven't used that word "cold."

Mark: I don't think we discussed the weather.

Pike: I don't know how we let it slip by, because that's got to be one of the strongest memories that anybody has. The winters were severe and the conditions you were in were such that you really felt it. You were cold a lot of the time.

Mark: Now did you stay in a wooden building, or a tent like Hawkeye did?

Pike: We had tents that had frames. I mean, they had a wooden floor under them so we weren't right on the—except when you were in the—we'd go out on field

problems and then we'd be out on the ground, but the rest of the time we had a frame. But it was very cold. You had a hard time getting warm. Sleeping bags were, I mean, they had feather and down bags but it wasn't enough for me anyway.

Mark: Did the Army give you enough equipment, enough warm clothes, boots, that sort of thing?

Pike: If you ever put it all on and could still move, yeah.

Mark: I see.

Pike: By the time I got there, you had things like those thermal boots, and they were great, they really keep your feet warm. But, as you know, the field jackets and the parkas had linings and so forth, and by the time you got all that stuff on you really could hardly walk. And as I say as much as anything, the nights were so cold and you'd get, I used to get cold, even in the sleeping bag. It's a tough climate to be outside in.

Mark: Sure.

Pike: Although I don't think it's any, I don't think it's as cold as Madison. I mean, by temperature readings.

Mark: But cold enough?

Pike: Cold enough.

Mark: Okay. Well, thanks for coming in.

Pike: Well, thanks for having me.

Mark: I appreciate it.

**[End of Interview]**