The University of Arizona, College of Agriculture and
the Arizona Historical Society Oral History Programs
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Administration

Lakin: I think the big mike is not working right.

Leisz: I think there's something I'm supposed to read off but I don't know what it is. We seem to have lost that piece of paper, but...it's the same stuff that's in the stacks that you signed.

Lakin: Oh.

Leisz: You know, stating that you're willing to do this oral history and we'll do the transcriptions and the originals will stay at the Historical Society and you'll get copies of them and can share them with whoever. I guess we'll get started. I'll just go through and ask you a couple of questions and then you can start telling stories and whatever you feel is important, you can start off and put it on tape and add it to the transcripts. I know that you were born in Kansas back in the twenties. What part of Kansas are you from?

Lakin: Fort Scott, which is south of Kansas City, a hundred miles or so. My family, my mother and father lived there for quite a few years. My dad was born in Iola and my grandmother was born in a place called Kokachee, Kansas, which was on the Indian reservation. She grew up on the Indian reservation. My dad was a dairy farmer. He also worked part time for the telephone company. He raised light harness horses and was a partner in an overall manufacturing company in Fort Scott, the Lakin-McKee Overalls, which later sold out to Oshkosh B'Gosh (laughs). Ever hear of that?

Leisz: Yeah. Big heavy canvas overall and big denim.

Lakin: And because of the family's health he elected to come to Arizona on the advise of doctors so we'd be more healthy. So he came out here in about 1919 or 1920 and made some connections and decided this was indeed where he wanted to be and went back and sold the farm and moved us all out here late in 1921.

Leisz: Now what was your dad's name?

Lakin: Lloyd Case Lakin. My mother's name was Ethel Irene Smith.

Leisz: Where is your mom from?

Lakin: She was born in, I believe in Peoria, Illinois, or Decatur. One or the other; I can't remember; one of the other. She lived in both those towns, well she was born in one of them and I can't remember which one.

Leisz: How did she meet your dad? He was in Kansas the whole time?

Lakin: You know, I don't know that story. I have an older sister that still lives that probably could supply that information, but I don't know, sorry to say.

Leisz: Now how many brothers and sisters did you have?

Lakin: Three sisters, no brothers. All the sisters were older, which leads many people to think that I was a pampered kid, but that was not quite the case. Heavily picked upon. (laughs)

Leisz: I can imagine with three older sisters.

Lakin: They never called me by my correct name. It was usually something like "termite" or "insect" or something like that.

Leisz: That's not very nice. Now what were your sisters' names, and do you remember when they were born?

Lakin: Well, my oldest sister, Lois, was born in about 1912. My next oldest was born in about 1916,

and then my youngest sister was born in about 1918, and then I came along in 1921. My oldest sister and I are the only two remaining in the family. Unfortunately, I didn't produce any sons, so the name is down the drain. And I suppose I could adopt a son but that doesn't seem right.

Leisz: Did your family have to deal with the flu epidemic that was going around at the end of World War I? Did they ever talk about it?

Lakin: We had a lot of respiratory problems back in Kansas, but I'm not sure that it was influenza specifically. That was why we came here. You know, in those days if you had any kind of respiratory problems, including tuberculosis, they sent you to Arizona. When I was a kid, of course, Sonny Slope was the tuberculosis settlement in north Phoenix. They came out here by the hundreds and put up little tarpaper shacks in the desert and thawed out and turned brown in the sun and it worked for some of them. For a lot of them it didn't work because they got here too late. For many years, Arizona had the highest tuberculosis mortality rate in the U.S. for that very reason. Everybody came here to die. I remember when we used to go by there, for some reason we'd go just as fast as we could. We were on bicycles or horseback or whatever, we'd hold our breath and try to get by there because we knew we were going to catch tuberculosis if we got too close.

Leisz: That was up in the north valley?

Lakin: Sunny Slope, yes.

Leisz: Where is that in relation to what's around there today?

Lakin: Well, Sunny Slope now is a thriving community. It starts I think at maybe Dunlap and goes north from there to...I don't know where the north boundary of Sunny Slope actually is

probably uh, north of Hatch or someplace. It's not a very large area geographically.

Leisz: So when you dad moved you all out here, you settled in the north part of Phoenix, or central area?

Lakin: The first house we lived in was on Fifth Avenue south of Roosevelt for a year or two, and then I don't remember that of course. But then we moved to Fifth Avenue and McDowell. Then in 1928 approximately my dad had built a new home on Palm Lane and Alvarado, which is now virtually downtown, but it was on the north fringe of town at the time. There was really nothing much north of it but citrus. Now it's way south of the population center of the city. Kind of strange.

My dad was, well, when we got to Phoenix, some of the people that he had met when he came out here before he moved us here were a fellow named George Peter and his brother Dave Peter, and I can't think of some of their names. One of them was the founder of the Phoenix Title and Trust Company, **George Mickle**, **Haley Moore**, the number one mortician in the city, and he sort of adopted our family and treated our family well. In fact, when my mother and my sisters and I arrived on the train, I was in my mother's arms and he met the train, saw us off the train. And my mother handed me to the mortician from the train. You know, that seems a little backwards. Most people leave this life in the arms of the mortician, but I sort of arrived here that way. Of course, his son, **Almore**, longtime good friend of mine now, so a generation friendship goes on.

Dad invested in the Arizona Wholesale Grocery Company and that's where Dave and George Peter and George Mickle fit in. They were all partners in the Arizona Wholesale Grocery Company. Dad bought into it with the proceeds of his farm sale in Kansas. After only

about six or seven years, the company prospered enormously, had a string of retail outlets called **Pain-Take-It Stores** and they sold the whole thing to Safeway. My dad's cut of that after a relatively small investment in a few years was at three-quarters of a million dollars. Now, in 1928, I believe that was the date, three quarters of a million dollars was a bunch of money. So, that was also just about the time of the big stock market crash that signaled the on come of the Great Depression onset. So he wound up losing a lot of that, but he also made some good investments and he made some bad investments. He and his partner George Peter got a number of ranches around the state. They also did a little bit of developing. They developed Encanto Subdivisions for one thing. You know where that is?

Leisz: I think I've driven through it but it's slipped my mind where it is.

Lakin: It's a sort of a historic area now, a lot of high-priced homes in there, older homes. In fact, many of them were built in the twenties. But the timing was outrageous, the Depression came along. After they built all the infrastructure and paved the streets and did all that, they never sold a single lot. They built four expensive spec houses in the $30,000-$40,000 range and that's a million-and-a-half or two million today.

Leisz: Wow.

Lakin: They never sold one of those. They were allowing people to live in them rent-free just to keep them up. And eventually, they sold the whole thing for taxes. They always thought that, in retrospect, they felt that they could have saved it. They could have come up with the money to pay the taxes and save it and probably salvage the whole thing. But then, they agreed that it was a lost cause and one of the reasons, you'll never believe, it was too far out of town. And that's just north of Encanto Drive between Encanto Drive and Thomas Road and west of

Fifteenth Avenue. So, (laughs) it's virtually downtown today.

Leisz: Yeah, there's a law center right there now where Earl Peter, the guy that does the 4-H, does our legal advise for 4-H is there.

Lakin: Is that right? So that was one of the failed things that they did.

Leisz: Now did they start the work on that development before the stock market crash, or did they go . . .

Lakin: They started before the crash. For their everlasting credit, they did not relax their deed restrictions, so they could've sold lots if you could put up a tarpaper shack there, you know. But they said no, you had to built a certain quality home or none. And so, nobody could afford to build that quality home so they just, they didn't want to be responsible for starting a slum so they just let it go for taxes. I know a few people that live in that area now and it's considered a very nice place to live.

Leisz: Good size lots, nice homes. Now, where did you go to elementary school then?

Lakin: I went to Emerson Grammar School, which was on Seventh Avenue and McDowell. Then I went to **Phoenix Union High** for three years and then they packed me up and sent me off to New Mexico Military Institute. I spent two years and then I came back and went to the UA and finished four years of college. But some of my units didn't transfer and I was not the best of students, so I flunked a few subjects and that's why I didn't graduate. Of course, there was the war mentality and people weren't really paying much attention to their scholastics in those days.

Leisz: What organizations were you involved in on campus?

Lakin: The Sigma Nu House, I was a Sigma Nu. That was about the only organization on campus that I had anything to do with. Quite a few of my friends were in the Aggie House, but I knew more

guys in the Sigma Nu House, a lot of Phoenix guys were in it.

Leisz: That was where you pledged out to?

Lakin: Yes.

Leisz: Now, when you went into the service, you ended up in the cavalry back in Kansas. But when did you first get involved with horse training and horse driving and working with the cavalry?

Lakin: Well, I grew up in the cattle business so I was riding when I was a kid. The first real formal riding instruction I got was at New Mexico Military Institute where they taught us the cavalry seat. And that continued at the UA because we had a horse cavalry unit, an ROTC unit at UA, I guess you knew that. Then, I naturally ended up at Fort Riley, Kansas, in the first OCS class. It was by a very strange bit of fate I wound up going to southeast Asia instead of Europe, instead of hitting the D-Day operation. Most of the guys in my college class ended up in Normandy as recon outfits and they had a very high casualty rate, like 80 percent casualty rate. But because I had a date with my girlfriend, who's now my wife, on Saturday night, I believe the date was May 6, 194 . . . see, I was still in college in 1943 because of being in the ROTC program I got to stay. We had our choice to come up to Phoenix and get sworn in on that Saturday, May 6, but instead I went up on May 8 because I had a date with Maxine on that Saturday night. It so happened that they guys that went up there and signed in on the Saturday got assigned to the 38th and 39th OSC classes at Fort Riley. But because I was there two days later to sign in, those cavalries were filled and I wound up in the 41st OSC class. By this time, they had filled the cavalries going to Europe and I wound up back at Fort Riley in the 41st OSC class and then stayed on there for a little while in the communications school and then my first assignment was at the Republican Flats Basic Training Center, teaching recruits to ride and

equitation and mounted drill and creeping and crawling exercises and what have you, you know, all the stuff that goes on in basic training. I nearly froze my butt off that winter and then . . .

Leisz: That was the winter of 1944?

Lakin: That would be the winter of 1943-1944. Then I was assigned to the 115th Cavalry group, which had a patrols mission in southern California but were scheduled for overseas assignment. I did a few months of patrol activity in southern California and then our whole entire cavalry group went to Camp Hood, Texas, for army ground force tests which we proceeded to flunk.

Leisz: How did you flunk the ground course test?

Lakin: Army ground force, they put us through a bunch of maneuvers on the Camp Hood military reservation with a [part of tape inaudible] and all that, the reds versus the blues. We turned out to be not combat-ready. Says we're not gonna ship this outfit overseas, they just broke us up and sent us here and there.

Leisz: Were you still working with mounted cavalry on the patrols or were you working with the mechanized?

Lakin: The patrols that we were in in southern California was mech. The last horse activity that I had in the Army was at Fort Riley as an instructor at the Basic Training Center. Then after they, they were in the process of deactivating a unit, I went in to the group headquarters one morning with my exec. officer and I was at this time I was a brand new second lieutenant, of course. We saw a sign on the bulletin board saying "Officers wishing to volunteer for 'hazardous jungle duty' sign below. Admission will be LRP." We had no idea what "LRP" meant but we said, "What the hell, let's sign it." So, we signed it up. We later discovered that the letters "LRP" meant

"long range penetration" and that might have frightened us off, but anyway, they shipped us right off to mulepack school, I think sixty days' worth or something like that and then we jumped on a boat and went to Burma through India and what was then Pakistan and then into Burma. We spent a short time in a replacement depot at Lido, India. It later became Pakistan and is now Bangladesh. But spent a short time in the replacement depot there and then joined the Mars Task Force, which was the unit that took over from Merrill's Marauders. Everybody's heard of Merrill's Marauders, nobody every heard of Mars Task Force but our job was to finish the mess they made. I shouldn't say that, they did the first half of it, we did the second half. They didn't make a mess, scrub that statement. They had a tougher fight than we did. But they reorganized and formed what was called the Mars Task Force and we went on and took back the Burma Road from the Japs which was the primary objective of the whole campaign.

Leisz: Now what different units were you working with? Because you had . . . weren't the Australians involved in that?

Lakin: Not in our unit, no. There were Australians, there were Brits, there were Chinese units in the area. Our particular unit was all American, although we were supposed to be fighting in cooperation with the Chinese 38th Division. They were not very reliable and we stayed just as far away from them as we could. But the brigade, was the overall unit was called the 5332nd Composite Provisional Brigade, composed of two square regiments, the 475th Infantry and the 124th Cavalry. Although one was infantry and the other was cavalry, you couldn't tell them apart, same table of organization, table of equipment, everything, same number of mules, same number of men. Two battalions of field artillery attached, six truck, and six Thirteenth Tact mule pack artillery. We had no real vehicles of any kind because they were no usable roads. There

were lots of roads but there were no bridges. North Burma has the second highest rainfall of any place in the world, sometimes as high as 400 inches a year, all of which falls in six months, period. That means there's a river about every fifty feet it seemed like, not quite, but quite often we were . . . and most of them had bridges at one time but somebody had blown them all. So we forded rivers where they could be forded and we had to make pontoon bridges and things like that to cross them.

Leisz: What type of artillery pieces were you carrying?

Lakin: Seventy-five millimeter Howitzers. Mule-pack Howitzers. Very challenging pieces to pack on a mule because one of the components of, I'm not in the artillery in all but I know a little bit about it, one of the components, the trail leg of the piece, weighed over 300 pounds, something like three hundred and fifty pounds. And the pack saddle that we used, the Phillips Cargo Saddle, weighed ninety-one pounds. So that mule was carrying well in excess of 400 pounds. And that's a lot of weight to put on a mule, plus we picked the most rugged mules for that and they were the only ones that'd get a day off, every other day. We used two mules to carry the trail leg, one today and then the other one tomorrow. And all the other mules were packed , and of course, the barrel weighed two hundred and fifty pounds or something like that a piece. Our loads in the rest of the unit were not anywhere as close to as heavy as the trail leg, but we had some mules carrying 300 pounds, over 200 pounds on a saddle that weighed 91. Those big stock mules are the best mules that money can buy, and came from all over the Midwest usually and went through the Remount Training Center in Fort Green in Oklahoma. We joked that when they said they were broke, they shipped to us an allegedly broke pack, they'd throw them down, tie a pack on them, let them up and when they quit bucking they were broke. So . .

. (laughs)

Leisz: You had a lot to work with, had to train them.

Lakin: Yeah, but you know when you cover as much ground as we did day in and day out, it didn't take long for them to get settled.

Leisz: Well what was an average pack day like then? How much distance were you covering?

Lakin: Oh, I never calculated what average was, but probably fifteen to twenty miles, I guess. Some were much longer than that, and some of them started early, before daylight, and ended up in the middle of the night. We'd arrive at a bivouac area and just more or less get bedded down and they'd kick us and say "Gotta leave" and get up, your eyes glued shut and try to pack a mule in the middle of the night, that's a hazardous occupation in itself. The saddles are so heavy that it took two men to saddle a mule, a man on each side of the saddle and you'd basically pick it up and walk it over his rump. Sometimes those mules had to be talked to quite a bit before you could walk up behind them. (laughs)

Leisz: I can imagine the jungle in the middle of the night, and you're straight off the farm in Indiana or something.

Lakin: Yes. Amazingly enough, they didn't send us boys straight off the farm in Indiana. They sent us boys straight off the street in Brooklyn or someplace like that that'd have never seen an equine other than the one the policeman on the corner was riding.

Leisz: Oh wow.

Lakin: So they had something to learn and most of them hated their mules, I mean with a passion, to start with. And over time, they developed a very close relationship and then during a lot a part of the campaign you didn't want to insult another guy's mule. You might have a fistfight on your

hand. (laughs) It was very strange to see the friendship grow between the trooper and his mule.

Leisz: You were over there from the summer of 1944 to the close of the war?

Lakin: Right, until late 1945.

Leisz: How long did the Burma Campaign last then? Was that your total period of operations or did you . . .

Lakin: Well, what it is is just a small part of the theater of operations that China, Burma, India was the theater. Eventually, before our campaign was over they divided that into the China theater and the India-Burma theater and it was about the time General Stilwell lost his job and they sent in, I can't remember the general's name that took over as theater commander. I never met "Vinegar Joe" but he was quite the character. They said he was an excellent troop commander but a lousy theater commander. (laughs) He always wanted to be on the front lines and the theater commander doesn't belong there.

Leisz: So you spent most of the war at [part of tape inaudible] and Burma then, at that campaign, or did you end up going up to do any island hopping?

Lakin: No no, none of that. I spent virtually all the time overseas in Burma, a little while as I mentioned in that replacement depot in Lido. Well anyway, after we finished the campaign in Burma, we'd finished our objective there and the Japs were, for the fact of the matter they were completely routed. There was a lot of little pockets that was hit...there were instances of Japs in the islands that stayed for ten years and finally came out of their holes and said, "Is the war over yet?" (laughs) [end of side one, tape one]

. . . Training nationalist Chinese soldiers in the art of warfare, difficult task.

Leisz: Did you know the language at that point or no?

Lakin: Oh no. Very smattering of it, you know. Enough to ask for food and water and a few basics, but we had an interpreter assigned. The problem being that one interpreter was never enough because any group of Chinese soldiers, they might speak three or four different dialects. And some of them could understand each other a little bit, and some couldn't understand each other at all. So our interpreter, the official interpreter, had to select somebody in the class that knew two dialects and he would interpret the interpreter, and of course, even if everybody knows the same language, you start passing information down and when it gets to the end it usually doesn't very much sound like what it started out with. You probably heard that game where you sit in a circle and you whisper a message to the next guy and it comes all around and it never sounds much like what you started with when it gets back. Well then you're dealing with several different dialects and these people are largely illiterate anyway. Funny example, I remember one...and the classes were enormous. We might have a hundred students in a conference room there and I'd have to teach the subject. We're talking about signal communications and going through the different options and we got to the radio and mentioned that we used the radio for this and the radio for that and I sensed that it was not getting through to these people. They had this perplexed expression on their faces. And I asked the interpreter to ask the class how many of them knew what a radio was. And just a few hands went up. I said, "Maybe they didn't understand the question. Ask them how many have never, how many don't know what a radio is." And they practically all held their hands up. So I said, "Okay, I guess this calls for a demonstration." So I sent for a couple of walkie-talkies and got in there and I put one guy in this corner of the lecture room and another guy in the opposite corner and told him, "Now push the button and talk into it." And he pushed the button and said, "Wei?" That's "hello" in

Chinese. “Wei?” And the guy would hear him in the opposite corner and say “Wei?” but he didn’t realize the sound was coming out of the radio. So, now this isn’t gonna work so I had to put one guy clear outside the building who would talk to each other. And when the guy answered him from outside, the guy looked at his radio with a shocked expression. “My God, that sound came out of this thing!”And then they got to chattering on and don’t you know they had a high old time.

Another interesting experience came I think that same day. I was going over some of the other options . . . no, this was another lecture. This had to do with air-to-ground communications, how do you on the ground communicate with aircraft. Of course the radio was the first choice, then there was other options like ground panels. You lay strips of white cloth on the ground in certain designs which the pilots can read, meaning “Drop your bombs 500 yards in this direction” or something like that. Another means of communication was through the flare, flare gun, a red flare meaning one thing and a green flare meaning another. They had this flare pistol we called a “very pistol” for some reason or other, I don’t know why we called it a “very pistol” but it was very intimidating I guess. It used a cartridge that was about I think maybe 30 or thirty-five millimeters to shoot flares. This lecture room was in a rice paper building, very temporary building made out of bamboo and rice paper, and next to the lecture room was the headquarters office where all the big brass was, generals and light generals and the chicken colonels and so on. When I finished with my lecture about the “very pistol,” I showed them the pistol and I showed them the ammunition and I put the ammunition in the gun and I said, “Now, what you would do is point it up in the air and pull the trigger.” I of course didn’t pull the trigger; I unloaded it and stuck it in the holster, then proceeded to, when the class was over, I

proceeded to gather up my stuff and leave and I totally forgot the "very pistol" and there is was. The next morning when the "gook" we called him, the Chinese, assigned to come in and clean up the lecture room, I think he was one of them that was in the class the day before. He found the pistol and managed to get it loaded and pull the trigger.

Leisz: In a rice paper building.

Lakin: In a rice paper building. Well, the projectile went through the wall into the room where all the big high brass were, had their desks, and deployed a parachute flare in that room. I don't think there was that much float timing there, but, it so alarmed all the generals that the description I got from it later was that they were all under their desks. They thought that World War III had started and I at that time had gone out to the artillery center to arrange for a demonstration of air to ground communication controlling artillery fire. I got back right at lunchtime and I went into the mess hall and when I walked in the room I noticed everything got very quiet. (laughs) And I said, "What the hell's the . . . " I sat down next to a friend, I said, "What the hell's going on here?" He said, "Buddy, your ass is mud" and he explained briefly what happened. Well I had to answer to my unit commander and the commanding general and everybody else. And the commanding general, after chewing me out quite a bit, he broke down and started laughing. He said," That was the funniest goddamn thing I ever saw." (laughs) It did not set the building on fire and I don't know why. (laughs)

Leisz: Probably a good thing.

Lakin: Yeah, cause they'd have never put it out.

Leisz: Now the training that you did with the Nationalist Chinese, this was in anticipation of the Communists that were coming in and the Red Army?

Lakin: Yes. Which none of us understood at the time. You know, we knew that there were two types of Chinese soldiers: one type had blue uniforms and the other type had khaki uniforms. And the word "communist" didn't really mean anything to us. We weren't that well versed in international politics or what have you. So we didn't quite understand that they were mortal enemies, but I was in the hospital in **Kung Ming** on the day that they dropped the first bomb in, was it Nagasaki or Hiroshima, I forget.

Leisz: Hiroshima.

Lakin: Hiroshima. And the rumor went through the wards like fire that we had dropped a bomb that was the equivalent of a couple of thousand tons of TNT and thought, "That can't be right but it sounds good." That was what touched off . . . this . . . maybe it comes out in some history books, I don't know, but that sort of triggered the day when the Nationalist and the Communist troops in China had been allies. That's about what - fighting the Japanese. And as soon as they figured out the Japanese were finished, they turned and went this way. They had to evacuate the hospital I was in about a day after we got the news that they'd dropped the bomb because the Communist troops came in and took it over.

Leisz: That's pretty quick.

Lakin: Yes.

Leisz: I've got in my notes someplace here that you had a, you won a Purple Heart and Presidential Unit Citation and a few other awards. Do you want to talk about any of those?

Lakin: Well, the Presidential Unit Citation of course is that I just happened to be with the right unit at the right time, but I'm still packing a little piece of schrapnel around in my left leg. That's how I got the Purple Heart. It wasn't that I was any great hero or anything. I was cowering in a

foxhole when it happened. (laughs)

Leisz: Probably a smart place to be.

Lakin: Normally you're pretty safe in a foxhole, but when you're in the jungle it's not much safer than lying on the flat ground because if an artillery or a mortal shell hits in trees above you, the schrapnel comes right down in the hole with you. And that's what happened.

Leisz: Was that during the Burma Road campaign or sometime after?

Lakin: Yes, during the Burma. During the Burma Road campaign. Kind of a funny little anecdote to connect with that. My CO, Captain Wilkinson, of the 475th Headquarters Company, and I were sharing a foxhole. One of the reasons we got that early morning bombardment was that we'd made a very dumb move and we moved into an old Jap bouvuac area. We thought it was neat because all the holes were already dug, see. And, (laughs) it was the first time we'd had that opportunity. We didn't realize that when the Jap patrol had determined that we'd moved into their old bouvuac area and they had all the firing coordinates. They didn't have to fire one long and one short and then fire for effect in between. They just set their guns and they were excellent with their artillery, quite accurate. So, just about daylight the next morning, the "whistling Willy" we called him, the seventy-five millimeter Howitzer that they had . . . we called it "whistling Willy" because they bored holes around the base of the projectile that made a whistling sound, anti-morale instrument I guess. Very scary sound. But of course you eventually learned if you heard the whistle that one wasn't gonna hit you. The one you don't hear is the one that gets you. But, boy, I mean, they were so sudden. We were starting to get ready to pack and leave and the shells whistled in. And this foxhole that Captain Wilkinson and I were sharing was an L-shaped affair, nice deep one. The first shell came in, we both dived into the

hole and just a few seconds after that was the tree burst that hit right above us. And I heard Captain Wilkinson moaning, "Oh my leg, oh my leg!" I had felt the thud like somebody hit me in the knee with a pole, but Wilkie was moaning over there so I called over there to him trying not to expose my butt and said, "Where are you hit Wilkie?" And he said, "I'm not hit; I sprained my leg when I jumped in this hole!" (laughs) So I said, "Well, hell then, take care of me, I'm hit!" So anyway, it wasn't too awful serious, just good enough to get me out of the combat zone for a couple of months. They put me in a 4050 VAC hospital in **Michena**, Burma, on the banks of the **Urwade** River and stayed there about a week and then went on to a...they decided to leave that shrapnel there because it would do more damage to take it out than just to leave it, so it's still there. Occassionally sets of a metal detector at the airport, but (laughs) . . .

Leisz: That would be kind of amusing, trying to figure out where it's coming from.

Lakin: When they crank them down real tight, it'll set it off.

Leisz: And cowboy boots will do that too.

Lakin: Yeah, they sure will.

Leisz: After you were done in China...

Lakin: Well, then it was all over. We went and came home. It was almost the end of 1945 and I was on a "terminal leave" they called it. It sounds sort of scary nowadays but . . .

Leisz: Kind of a good thing back then.

Lakin: Yeah, terminal leave sounded real great. And that gave us about a month to get any dental work or anything we needed that the Army would still do for us before we went and . . . and I had to go to Louisville, Kentucky, to get mustered out. It was right after New Years, 1946.

Leisz: Your whole unit go to Kentucky, then?

Lakin: No.

Leisz: They just do you in different places?

Lakin: Sort of different places. You didn't go as a unit. In fact, the unit was disbanded in Burma. It was organized and deactivated overseas.

Leisz: Wow.

Lakin: I went over as a replacement officer and joined the unit after they'd already marched. That was Camp Landis, **Michena**, Burma. They were one day out of camp and I caught up with them with a Jeep and that's the last time I saw a Jeep for the next nine months. (laughs)

Leisz: Oh wow. That says something about the roads.

Lakin: (laughs)

Leisz: You supplies were all done by mule train then?

Lakin: The supplies were all done by airdrop.

Leisz: Airdrop. From the 24's or the 17's or the smaller Mitchells?

Lakin: The old C-47, or same thing as a DC-3. Twin engine transport, that was the workhorse of the entire Army, Navy. It probably carried more cargo that any airplane has carried before it or since. Wonderful, very reliable old two-engine thing. They'd start them out . . . had a little configuration than the DC-3, which became the standard commercial airline . . .

Leisz: Passenger airline . . .

Lakin: . . . Right, passenger airline right after the war. But of course these were configured for cargo, so they'd have a big old cargo door in the side. They'd start out in the A.T.C., Army Transport Command, and they'd put seats in them for carrying soldiers. They'd get a few hours on them, few thousand hours on them I guess, and they'd turn them over to the combat cargo unit. At

that point, they'd take the cargo doors off of them and throw them away, and just leave that hole in the side because it was too much trouble to open them and close them. And they used those airplanes to carry all our supplies to us: food, ammunition, everything. And in theory, they would . . . we'd arrive at a suitable air drop field, where there'd be a little clearing of some kind in the rain forest, and tried to get done every three days. We'd come in and drop, parachute drop a lot of stuff. And then when they could, they'd bring sacks of oats for the mules, free drop them. They wouldn't be in parachutes; they'd be in three 30-pound bags in a larger bag, making a 90-pound bag and they'd kick those free drop out of the door of the airplane. They'd hit pretty hard. The Chinese troops that were adjacent to us were anywhere close to the 38th division when we had an air drop, why the Chinese soldiers were always lurking around there trying to steal whatever they could get. And they'd get I guess, from what I understand, they'd get a nice pat on the back or an extra dish of rice or something if they could bring back a sacd of mule feed. They'd be dropping these 90-pound bags from a fairly good height, and the Chinese soldiers would run out there, be there, get there first and some of them got clobbered (laughs) by the thing, driving them right in the ground.

Leisz: Oh my gosh.

Lakin: But probably more often than not we didn't get the feed. There were too many other important things they had to bring us, like ammunition and...so the mules had to basically survive on what they could get along the way. I don't know if there's time in this interview to talk about mules for a while, but . . .

Leisz: Oh sure. As much time as you want.

Lakin: . . . But, people sometimes ask the question, "Well, why did we use mules instead of

horses?" The answer is pretty simple. Horses couldn't cut the mustard. Mules could. They can survive on what they can forage on along the way. They basically lived on what they were able to graze on mostly during the ten-minute breaks during the day when we'd march for fifty minutes and then sit down for ten. And you'd sort of...there are two men assigned to every mule. We'd take turns doing the duties. One of them would kind of take the leader up, let the mule pick around, get some bamboo shoots or whatever there was around, and that's most of what they ate. When we had time, after we'd get into buovuac, why then we'd go out and stake the mules out and let them graze. An interesting comparison between horses and mules is this: every unit, at the start of our campaign, every unit of company size or bigger had a one, two, three, or four riding horses attached. And all that horse had to do was carry the saddle. The reason they were along . . . I mean just a riding saddle . . . the reason they were along was for crippled people that had marched casualties or gunshots wounds or something and couldn't be evacuated. They would ride this horse. But unfortunately, after about a week we noticed the horses were not doing very well. They couldn't get along on the same kind of forage that the mules were thriving on and if they didn't get their oats, which was most of the time, they just basically were starving out there. Wound up, after a month or a month and a half, all the horses were gone. We had to destroy them.

Leisz: Wow.

Lakin: And the mules just kept right on going.

Leisz: The mules could survive just on strict jungle forage. That's interesting.

Lakin: For example, they loved bamboo. Young bamboo is just like candy to them. In fact, one of my first mistakes was tying one end of the picket line to a big piece of bamboo. Bamboo gets to be

six inches in diameter over there, you know, it's not like the little . . .

Leisz: The little shoots here.

Lakin: . . . Some of that bamboo gets six inches in diameter and they're very strong. So I thought that's fine to anchor one end of the picket line to this bamboo. Well, during the night, the mules ate the bamboo and turned themselves loose. (laughter)

Leisz: How long did it take you to get all those mules back?

Lakin: Oh, not too long. They didn't get too far. They were all grazing around there somewhere. I made sure if I had to use a bamboo to anchor one end of the picket line after that, that I wouldn't tie a mule close enough to it that he could reach the bamboo. Even though they preferred the young stuff, they'd eat the big stuff if they couldn't get tender shoots.

Leisz: That's funny.

Lakin: They'd eat this elephant grass that was like so many sawblades. It was terribly coursestuff but they'd eat that.

Leisz: How many mules did you have in your company?

Lakin: In the headquarters company which was where I spent most of my time, I'm a little rusty on this but it seems like we had around a hundred mules in there. We had fifteen hundred mules in all in the three, in the three battalions in each regiment. I think I made a mistake when I originally described...they were not square regiments, they were triangular regiments. They had three battalions in the infantry regiment and three squadrons in the cavalry regiment. (laughs) Same thing, but just different names for it. About fifteen hundred mules in each regiment. About three thousand mules in the two regiments, plus coming up behind, another thousand or so with the quartermasters coming along as replacements.

Leisz: That's a lot of pack animals, a lot of mules. How did they fare in some of the fire fights?

Lakin: Of course, they caught lots of shrapnel and of course, the Japs would shoot them with rifle fire too. If they couldn't find a human target, they'd kill the mule. So they had lots of casualties. They preferred . . . we didn't have many . . . to visualize what our warfare was like over there, it wasn't real heavy duty fire fights like there were in other areas. It was a lot of patrol activity and snipers. The Japs would put a sniper up in a teakwood tree and camoflage him heavily and he'd sit there for days. You know, they'd maybe figure out what our, what trail we were on and he'd maybe sit there for a day or two waiting on us. Typically, they'd let part of the unit go on past. If he could identify an officer, that's who he'd pick off. Wait until he tried to identify an officer. So, officers did not wear their rank in plain sight. They pinned in it on underneath the collar of your coveralls. We wore GI coveralls. You'd put your rank underneath your collar so they couldn't see it from the tree.

Leisz: That keeps you from being a marked man?

Lakin: But usually, you know, they'd get off one shot and that's really anybody saw where it came from and . . .

Leisz: That was it.

Lakin: That guy was meat.

Leisz: Do you want to talk a little bit about coming back to Arizona from Kentucky? Were you and Maxine engaged before you went in the war?

Lakin: No. Well, we were for a short time and then we had a fight and didn't even correspond for a long time. Then after I got back in early 1946, I went through my little black book and all the girls I knew were married and had kids and by that time. But she came back into town visiting a

girlfriend and I think they leaked the information to me and I thought, "Well, I better go see the old girl and see how she looks." And that was it. So we married in June 1946 after I'd been home for six months. I was just starting to work here.

Leisz: Your dad started this operation, right?

Lakin: Yeah. That's an interesting story in itself. When my dad mentioned he was in the Arizona wholesale grocery business, he happened to meet some guys that were . . . he liked hunting. Dad was a great hunter and was a pretty good hand with a shotgun and loved to hunt ducks. In those days, there was a lot of duckhunting in this area. The Gila River . . . this area was right on the migration route, duck route, from Canada to Mexico. They'd come right through this area . . .

Leisz: Mallards, or . . .

Lakin: All. Many species or breeds. Mallards, widgens, pintails, spoonies, wood ducks, buffleheads. And they were looking for a good place to hunt ducks and along the Gila River here was a, there were several pretty good areas. But they discovered this sluice here, it was called the Hearsh Sluice. There was about two hundred acres, it's now a farm. It was a bog, not just a bog, I mean a sluice with cattails and tulies and the ducks were in here a lot. So, these guys got together and tried to, decided to buy this property. They had to buy the whole thing, nine hundred and twenty acres, to get the sluice. The rest of it, the rest of the nine hundred and twenty acres was a pretty sad looking piece of ground that was either so alkali it was as white as this calendar right here or it was salt cedars, and in fact, salt cedars will grow right in that white alkali. The better part of it had mesquites, and among these mesquites there was some bermuda grass. But anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself. They developed this sluice into a nice

little private duck pond, duck preserve, and built a little clubhouse, hired a caretaker and the caretaker's job was to run off poachers and to feed the ducks. When they would start arriving in the start of the migration when it started to cool off, or excuse me, when it started to, yeah, when it started to cool off they'd come south. They'd buy great truckloads of maize heads [end of tape one, side two]

. . . That's quite very, very illegal to feed migratory water foul but it was okay then, so they fed the ducks and they'd stay right here. And then they came in and built little islands out in these ponds and put metal blinds and I'd come out here with my dad when I was just a small boy. And before daylight in the morning, the gents would assemble in the clubhouse, which was a little wooden shack about the size of this room, by the fireplace and they'd have a big roaring fire going. And the gents would have a toddy or two and draw straws to see what blind they would get, and then we'd wade down there just before daylight, or just before sunup, and get in the blind. Then as soon as the sun peeped up over the south mountains down there, why we'd uh, we could start shooting. And I tell you, it was wonderful, wonderful hunting. It was just like playing ping pong. A duck would fly in, somebody would shoot him, and a whole bunch of them would get up, and "Pow, pow, pow," and they'd be falling all over. And then the ducks would go on down toward the Gila and maybe they'd sit down down there and somebody would shoot down there and they'd come back. So, it was wonderful shooting.

Leisz: Now how far south was the main [part of tape inaudible] because this was all flood plain then, right?

Lakin: And it still is, according to the government. But the Gila is about two miles from here.

Leisz: That's not too far.

Lakin: No. And anyway, so eventually, during the Depression, the members weren't able to pay their dues and the thing fell on hard times. My dad and his partner scraped up enough money to buy this nine hundred and sixty acres at approximately thirty five dollars an acre and made one of the company branches out of it. The duck club went out of business, but the only thing it had going for it was a lot of cheap water. When they bought the property they inherited the contract that the previous owner, a Mr. Lennox, and negotiated with the Salt River Valley Water Users' Association to get all the wastewater that came through the corner up here on 115th Avenue a quarter of a mile north of Broadway. That's the low corner of the entire Salt River Project service area. So they maintained the canal down through here that they called the Little St. John's Canal. That water was free to us for maintaining the canal. So we had to pay to maintain the canal and get all the water from down there. And that was more water than we could possibly use. There was always a lot of water that would flow off into the Agua Fria and end up back down in the Gila. So with that kind of water, Dad and George realized that it would be possible to reclaim this terrible piece of wasteland here. So when I got out of the Army, very little had been done, just a little bit right around the headquarters here. Some of this west of us and maybe 20 acres over here across the road, and that's all there was. There was actually, it had actually been developed. They had fenced the place and they were running a bunch of cross-bred cows out there. They could get enough picking through those mesquites and then there was Bermuda growing out there in the low places. Turn the water loose from that canal and just let it run around, they didn't really irrigate. They just flooded whatever would flood. So it became my job to clear and level this farm. Some of that was pretty hard clearing when you had a solid block of 40 acres of mature mesquite. It's pretty hard going.

Leisz: Good wood for barbecues.

Lakin: You know, you could be put in jail for bringing up as much really good mesquite wood as we had in those days.

Leisz: Oh wow.

Lakin: In fact, you could be put in jail for building a fire like we built. We heaped up piles of trees; we rented big bulldozers and dozed them out and piled them up in piles and then when they got dry we set fire to them. Had some great barbecues. (laughs) I mean, we'd make a party out of it. We'd come out some night, we'd bring some beer and we couldn't get a stick long enough to do marshmallows (laugh), you couldn't get within a hundred yards of the damn thing or it'd burn you. But it was fun starting those big fires. Of course you couldn't get away with that today. But eventually, it took about I imagine 15 years to get this whole nine hundred and sixty acres, nine hundred and twenty acres I guess it was, cleared and kind of halfway leveled. We didn't have very sophisticated leveling techniques there. I bought an old GI scraper and RD6 Caterpillar tractor and I did a lot of that myself. And you'd see an obviously high place and obviously low place, you'd go low the high place and put it in the low place, and you get on your belly and you look around and kind of eyeball the thing, and it's just strictly eyeball leveling. And if you broke the borders close enough together and put enough water in there you could get it all wet. Normally our borders, of course, back in those days, the standard border was thirty three feet because in a quarter of a mile that's an acre. And that was just standard. Nobody asked the question, "Did it fit the equipment?"

Leisz: Yeah, did the equipment fit it.

Lakin: Did the equipment fit thirty three feet, that was immaterial. In other words, we had to have an

acre in every quarter of a mile. So, as I say, but putting enough water in there we'd have enough irrigators out there to handle it, we could get it all wet. But they'd have to run ahead and build checks and spread the water around, even the big head of water. Of course, nowadays with laser leveling we can, our standard border on this farm is a hundred and ten feet, and the irrigator hardly knows how to use a shovel because the water just goes from border to border and all he has to do is watch and figure out when to change it to another set. And so . . .

Leisz: It's a big difference.

Lakin: Yeah. But then, you know, we went from thirty three feet to, I think the next . . . was forty five because that fit our mowing machine and rakes a little better. We could get an even number of windrows of hay in there. Of course, we were also grazing a lot of this. Most of it was grazed in the early days. Later on we started cutting a lot of hay. We had over 800 acres of Bermuda grass here. We imported some **stoens** of coastal from the coastal experiment station in Tifton, Georgia which has developed coastal Bermuda. And we planted a little nursery of coastal Bermuda right down here in the sandier end of the farm. We grew **stoens** which we transplanted into, probably half or more of this farm was in coastal Bermuda grass at one time. Great for grazing.

Leisz: And you said you had cross-breed cattle out here? What were they? What were you running?

Lakin: Well, you know, whatever you could get. Most of them were **brim crosses**, whatever, Texas crossbreeds, a lot of them have fourteen different breeds involved. But a lot of them had some Durham and Herford and Angus and . . . crossed up in many different [part of tape difficult to

understand] We raised calves on the ranch at Camp Wood and then would bring them down here after we'd wean them, bring them down here and pasture them for a while and put them in the feedlot. That ultimately led to pellet meal, and maybe I'm jumping ahead a little bit but I know that I can foresee the question; you're gonna ask, "How did we get into this pelleting business?"

Leisz: Yes.

Lakin: In the 1950s we had already changed the ranch at Camp Wood to a steer operation. Cow calving was not working out; it was a rough piece of country and when calf crops weren't very good it didn't seem to improve much no matter what we did.

Leisz: But that was only one of your park fulls. Did you move the cow calf operation someplace else or just import other people's steer?

Lakin: We just bought calves from other people. We bought a lot of Texas crossbreds. We'd buy calves and put them up on the U-Van and let them grow out, bring them down here and maybe graze them a short time on these Bermuda pastures and then put them in the feedlot. But as beautiful as that Bermuda pasture was and green, we never were satisfied with the gains we could get off of it. A half pound a day would be a really good gain. We tried supplementing, you know, feeding vitamin mineral supplements and cotton feed and everything else out in the fields but none of it seemed to be cost-effective. So my dad was always . . . he was wonderful about reading. He read a lot of stuff and I think he read in the Farm Journal or one of those journals about somebody down in the southeast was dehydrating and grinding and pelletizing coastal Bermuda hay and feeding it to calves. They were doing it . . . maybe it was back at Tifton, Georgia, where they were doing it. I've forgotten now. But they reported getting up to

two pounds a day gain on 400-weight calves on pelletized Bermuda grass. I said, "My God! That's four times what we're getting here. We've got the Bermuda grass, maybe all we need to do is put in a pellet mill and we'll get wealthy." So Dad sent me over to California. I went to the representative from the California Pellet Mill Company and we went up and down the coast looking at pellet mills. There were quite a few of them in operation then making alfalfa pellets for export in the late 1950s and early 1960s to Japan mostly.

Leisz: None of them were doing anything for domestic use though?

Lakin: Very little. Most of them were running them for export. So I took pictures of these plants and notes and diagrams and came back and built the mill. Spent better part of a year just putting the thing together. We spent zero for engineering. I was the engineer and I didn't have any . . . I wasn't even very good at math.

Leisz: That's pretty impressive.

Lakin: People, many people asked if I had a blueprint of this mill and I said, "No." My working drawing was on the floor with a piece of soapstone out there on the concrete floor. And it got rubbed out, so. And this is essentially the same mill. All the equipment's been upsized and upgraded and just about everything out there. We're making probably about four times the output per hour that we were in our original mill. So, the story goes from there that we got the mill in and we...well we had, we didn't go at this totally blind. We had some Bermuda grass ground and pelletized at a local plant and he told us the stuff was really hard to make pellets out of but he said maybe with a little practice he'd do a better job. We didn't listen to him quite well enough. But anyway, we made some pellets . . . actually **Bill Corkstein** at Valley Seed and Feed did it for us. So we put some calves in the feedlot and we fed Bermuda hay to a

bunch of them and Bermuda pellets to another and the calves getting the Bermuda pellets were outgaining the ones getting the same hay in the long form by two to one.

Leisz: Wow.

Lakin: And so we said, "Man, this is it." So we decided to go ahead and put in the pellet mill.

Leisz: And did you stop the grazing on the Bermuda fields after that, or?

Lakin: Well, pretty much, yes. We started mowing the hay out there. We didn't bail it at that time. We started out by mowing and wind drawing the hay, letting it cure, then going out there and chopping it. I had three great big wagons, self-unloading wagons, built that we chopped that hay right into these big wagons made by **Carl Cono** of **A... Liberty**. And then we'd bring them right in and run them off the wagons onto the conveyer that went into the grinder and then into the pellet mill. And it was a nice concept and it was beautiful as long as everything was working right. But one little link in the chain broke down the whole operation stopped. So, we had a little shower out there, there was no production. It stopped. That part wasn't very well planned. So eventually we soon realized that we were gonna have to bail the hay so that we could work during foul weather and everything else. And when something would break down in the field, we didn't have to stop the mill. The calves did gain as advertised, but we hit a down market and we got some disease problems, things were looking very bad. The cost of production was about twice what we had anticipated and it was pretty hard to make a profit when your cost of production is double what you'd factored in in the planning stage. So what the problem was, which I go back to the conversation I had with **Bill Corkstein**, he said, "God, this stuff is hard to pelletize." All the production figures that we got out of California Pellet Mill Company was based on alfalfa. We didn't stop to think that Bermuda was a different cat, it was much higher in

fiber and much harder to grind. So, our output, instead of four tons an hour that we were planning, was about two. And we were replacing bearings in the pellet mill roller on a weekly basis, expensive bearings and a lot of downtown. So the picture didn't look good. Then, my dad actually got to the point, he said, "You know, this isn't gonna work." He said, "Why don't you get the cutting torch, cut that thing up and sell it for scrap iron and we'll go back to grazing." But in the meantime, we'd been raising quarterhorses since 1948, we got into quarterhorses, we bought a stud and some nice mares and we were raising a lot of good quarterhorses.

Leisz: And were you involved with the farm that's down here on...what is it, I think 115th and...

Lakin: Buckeye?

Leisz: Buckeye, yes. Lower Buckeye.

Lakin: Not then. In fact, we only got involved in that just a very few years ago. I'll get to that later if I get time, but...where was I?

Leisz: Getting into quarterhorses.

Lakin: Oh yes. So we'd been raising quarterhorses and I had been doing some little experimenting with these pellets and the horses and I noticed the horses that were on pellets were just doing wonderfully well. They were slicking off and looking great, which was a better horse feed than ever could have been a cattle feed. We looked into a little basic nutrition, bovine nutrition compared to equine nutrition. There's a world of difference. You know, bovines need to ruminate, they need rumen stimulation which a pellet really doesn't give them. Calves were doing okay. It seems like rumen stimulation isn't any big deal in a calf. But when he gets up to 500 pounds or so, he starts needing to rumenate and so the deficiency factor went to hell after

the calves started to get up to about 500 pounds. And we needed them to be 600 or so before we put them on full feed. So actually, it's a much better design for an equine digestive system than it is for a bovine digestive system. So I told my dad, I said, "We need to promote this for...sell this to the public. It's a hell of a good horse feed." And he said something like, "What have you been smoking kid?" or words to that effect. (laughter) "Horses eat hay." So we had a big squabble about that. I almost quit. I was not gonna take a cutting torch to that thing. I'd sweat blood over building it. So he finally relented. He said, "I tell you what. I'll give you 2 years. If you don't get it back in 2 years, you're out and the thing goes."

So I spent the next 2 years nursing this pellet mill and ringing doorbells and giving away free samples. We sacked it in burlap and hand-sewed the bags and started giving away lots of product to get people started on it. It was really, really a tough, uphill battle to get people to even try it. I got laughed out of more places than you can imagine, one of them being Southwest's Best Seed and Feed, right over here in Glendale. I went in there and said to Mr. ... I'll think of his name, but I went into his office and I said, "We've got this great product for horses and we don't have any sales force or any way to promote it. We'll give you the original franchise." And he laughed and laughed and said something very similar to "Don't let the door hit you in the ass on the way out" or something like that.

Leisz: He's probably kicking himself now. Or shortly after that.

Lakin: Well, shortly after that. It didn't take him long to regret that move because by 2 years it was starting to grow. My first big breakthrough...you ever hear of **Dr. Pardee**? He was a...he passed away maybe fifteen years ago but he was considered to be the dean of thoroughbred breeders in the state. A character, total character. He'd been a bronco rider, and auctioneer,

you name it, a roughstring rider, he'd been everything, a rodeo hand. But he was raising lots of good thoroughbreds and I was trying to get him stuff. In fact, I went and he wasn't impolite, he just kind of laughed me off. I went by and I left a half a ton or so of sacks of my Bermuda pellets in his barn and I said, "Doctor, if you get a chance, give them a try." But we had two mares that were owned by some racehorse owner that had been on the track and had gone off their feed and they were...a racehorse can go off feed and actually die of starvation. They just quit eating sometimes. And these mares were in bad shape and Doc was trying sweet feed and mash and all sorts of things to get them to eat and they weren't responding. And he finally told me later, he said, "I thought about those pellets and I thought, 'Well, it can't hurt, you know? Let's see what they do.'" He went and got some, dumped them in and the mares started eating. And the guy came around after about a month and he couldn't believe his eyes. He said, "That's not the same two mares I brought here." They were slicking off and feeling good and Doc became a believer and he went out and ordered some huge big bulk bins and from then on, he never had a bale of hay on the place until the day he died. People started copying him and then I...shortly after that **Darrel Willis**, who started the Pretty Penny Ranch, which is now the biggest boarding and training stable in the state, has been for years and years, Darrel started using it. A guy by the name of **Charlie Deiz** was his manager, and it just went from there. Word of mouth. We never had a salesman, ever, in the field. Did very little advertising, occasionally, and we still do very little. We put an ad in the Bridle and Bit now and then and the Horse Connection, we usually do a full page ad there, but as far as real money promoting, it's all been word of mouth. And we just finished the biggest year that we've ever had, last year.

Leisz: That's amazing. Now when did you start selling in [part of tape inaudible]

Lakin: In 1959. Finished it in the spring of 1960.

Leisz: By 1963 you had the pellets, right?

Lakin: Well, by late 1960, we were making pellets and we were still trying to feed them to cattle. It was 1961 when they really started trying to promote it for horse feed. Didn't take us very long that it wasn't gonna work for calf feed. By 1963, the thing was...and I told you he gave me 2 years to get in the black...I didn't quite make it but I came close. By 1963 or 1964 we were in the black and my dad died in 1968. I was able to tell him that it was making really good money and that pleased him a lot. And it's just gone from there. From 1963, I'd say, until 1985, we drew an average of a thousand tons a year in sales. In mid 1985, when the government started tinkering around with the tax laws and destroyed a lot of the horse business that time, so now the year Reagan business crashed and a lot of the other horse enterprises went down the tube and the government said you can't call it a business, it's a hobby. You know, most horse breeders didn't qualify as a business so then they couldn't write off their expenses. That went a long way toward wrecking the horse business. And it wrecked the feed business along with it. And then, gradually it got better, sort of flattened off and maybe dipped a little bit in sales and then it came back and we sold 26,000 tons of product last year.

Leisz: Have you still got all your own Bermuda or do you bring stuff in?

Lakin: We grow all our Bermuda. We grow about half of the alfalfa. For many years after we...back up a little bit and let me explain something...when we were making it out of total Bermuda grass then we discovered soon enough that by mixing a little alfalfa in with it, it made it much easier to pelletize and made a quality pellet. And so by 1963 or so, we were probably making them half and half, alfalfa and Bermuda. And that's when we introduced this product we called a **stray**

brand. The original one was called Bermuda brand, and then in probably in 1966 or so we started calling it **a stray** brand. The state chemist's office told us we couldn't call it Bermuda brand unless Bermuda was the principle ingredient. They don't do that anymore but at that time they required that you could not name a brand after an ingredient unless it was the principle ingredient.

Leisz: Okay.

Lakin: It makes some sense. So we had to back off. Bermuda was no longer the principle ingredient so we came up with the name of **stray**, the mountain down there. Then we gradually got to where we took the Bermuda out of it altogether, the more alfalfa we used, the more effecient the production was, and the better the quality of pellet we could make. And strangely enough, back in those days, higher protein was considered to be a higher quality product. The more the protein, the better the quality. Nowadays, and it was like that for a long time, I'm a bit ashamed of the fact that we're at 14 or 15 percent protein product, sometimes higher. A few years ago, everybody started saying, "Well, too much protein is bad for a horse. It'll ruin his kidneys" and all this sort of thing, which was a complete...but a certain group of veterinarians bought into that idea and you still pick an article in these magazines, "Oh, feed a horse alfalfa and you'll destroy the horse's kidneys." I talked to a woman today that had that impression, and I very patiently explained to her that, yes, in fact if you have a horse that had impaired kidney function because of a disease and you know he has this kidney function, you should not feed him a high protein diet. But alfalfa never ever destroyed a horse's kidneys because it...or any high protein diet. In fact, the proof of the pudding is, and I usually ask them, "What do you think the protein... and where are some of the finest thoroughbreds raised in this country?" "Well, Kentucky, or

course." "And what do they eat?" "Well, bluegrass." "What do you think green bluegrass has in it in protein content?" "I don't know." "Would you believe 30, 35 percent?" "No." "And has it destroyed their kidneys? I don't think so."

Leisz: Complaining about a 14 percent protein count.

Lakin: (laughs) But, the practical thing in business is that, at least in this case, it's much easier to give the customer what he asks for then try to retrain him, you know. If he's got the idea that alfalfa's too much protein and he's dead set on that because he's heard all these high fashion veterinarians say that, okay, then we'll make one lower in protein. So then we introduced the lakin Light Pellet a few years ago. And I joked that Lakin Light means that there's only seventy five pounds in an 80-pound bag. (laughs) That's only a joke.

Leisz: That'll cut your protein down a little bit.

Lakin: But then we started running into Bermuda, and I couldn't find any really good quality Bermuda, so we started turning some of this old alfalfa ground back into Bermuda grass. Full circle. Went back to doing know what we were doing thirty-five years ago. So we're doing all our Bermuda. We will have, I think, probably close to 500 acres in Bermuda by the end of this season. Bob? "Yeah." How many total acres of Bermuda is out there? More than 500 you think? "No, no, not that much." Not that much? "About three hundred fifty." Well, I thought we had that much already. "No, we've got 200 in cotton weigh in." Okay. Because it's hard to... [part of tape inaudible] and we like to emphasize the fact that the Bermuda hay we put in this is a high quality ingredient because the only real competitor that we have is making a product that [part of tape inaudible]. It's going over quite well, this Lakin Light. It's picking up.

Leisz: Could you give me some background to the mix that you have in it?

Lakin: Actually, we put in a third Bermuda and two-thirds alfalfa. But then we add a vitamin mineral package and molasses and when it's all put together in the end, it's one and a half percent of the total.

Leisz: You definitely couldn't call it molasses feed or something.

Lakin: No, absolutely not. And this lady that I talked to today, she was concerned because her horses were all hyper...I said, "Ma'am...they're just hopping and high strung, that's all." But some people think that in hot weather they have to energy away from them and it's actually the opposite. But, so when it comes right down to it, she's feeding only about 4 pounds of pellets a day to these big Dutch hornbreds that are fifteen hundred pounds and she says they're too high and these 4 pounds of pellets they're feeding them is making them hyper. (laughs) It's making them hungry. She's also feeding...I mean, that's a lot of...but she's also feeding...[end of side inaudible]

Leisz: Now, let's see. You and Maxine got married in 1946, and you've got 4 daughters?

Lakin: 4 daughters.

Leisz: And how many grandchildren now?

Lakin: We have 10 grandchildren and about 4 and two-thirds great-grandchildren.

Leisz: One of your grandkids expecting?

Lakin: Yes. (laughs)

Leisz: So when do you become a great-grandparent again?

Lakin: In a couple of months I think. Let's see...our oldest grandchild is Monica McCain **Schutt.**They live in St. Louis. He works for an aircraft plant in St. Louis. She's on her third child now.

Leisz: When were your kids born then?

Lakin: Well, we started raising our family right off. The oldest daughter was born in 1947, late 1947. I'm not exactly sure, about two years...we didn't do one a year but every other year. So our youngest one was 1940-something. I don't keep track of all that but Maxine can recite their birthdays but I can't. One of them lives in...well the oldest one lives in Mormon Lake, Linda McCain. She's been a career nurse and she just retired just last week. Why, she's got to be 50.

Leisz: She worked at the hospital up in Flagstaff?

Lakin: She did for a while, and she worked in various hospitals around. In fact, she worked in a hospital in...she worked for Boswell Hosptial here for a while. They lived here in the valley for a while, she worked at Boswell. Then in Texas for a while, she worked in hospitals down there. My next oldest daughter, Charlene, is living in Middlebury, Vermont, and works at Middlebury College in the library. And then the third one is working for Scottsdale Center for the Arts and just now changed job and opened up a new museum over there, so she's associated with the Scottsdale new museum, art museum. And the youngest daughter is a school nurse in Albuquerque, actually Rio Rancho, married to a guy who's in the floor covering business there in Albuquerque. They're all getting by. None of them are setting the world on fire but they're doing okay.

Leisz: Were they all in 4-H?

Lakin: Actually the only one that we got involved in 4-H was the youngest one, Patty. She started out showing horses at 4-H and then she proceeded on into quarterhorses and the quarterhorse shows. She did rather well for quite a few years. We showed quarterhorses for, I guess, 10 or 15 years before Patty got involved. When she was probably 12, she got involved in showing

horses and did pretty well. I had a...looking back, it was a mistake. I should have gone out and bought horses for her to show, but I insisted that she show horses I raised. And I did raise some good ones. But, you know, the ideal kid's horse is the hardest thing to come by and there weren't too many of them that we raised that could really be made into a push-button kid's horse. So, she had to get by with what I could raise. But she did very well. She was...won the novice trail horse...Arizona novice champion trail horse one year on a mare that I raised and she was always up there in the ribbons somewhere. But I didn't buy her high-priced horses and the kids she was showing against, their parents would go out and spent 10, 15, wouldn't think nothing about it, $10,000 or $15,000 for a horse you know. So she was at a little bit of a disadvantage but she did rather well. Now, her younger daughter, Hillary, we just got word she just days ago got a huge belt buckle, I think covers half her tummy, for the rookie champion . . . AKHA champion rookie of the year for the state of New Mexico. So, boy, she's on cloud nine. I went through 3 horses...you know, I don't raise horses anymore so, in fact, I wouldn't have insisted that she ride something I raised anyway. But I went through 3 horses before I found the right horse for her and this horse had a little age on him and was supposed to have had a little nervicular disease and it turned out to be nothing to it. He's sound as a dollar and just...the two of them are just perfect. And they're winning. This coming weekend, they're gonna be in a three day show, quarterhorse show there in Albuquerque. And she gets into every doggone class she can qualify for. She's a go-getter.

Leisz: That's gotta keep her parents busy.

Lakin: Pardon me?

Leisz: It has to keep her parents busy with that.

Lakin: That's right. Well yeah, you have to dedicate yourself. And we keep telling Patty to start showing again because she might as well, she has to go to all these shows and she's got another mare that I bought for Hillary that was just a little too much horse for a 12 year old kid. But Patty gets along fine with her and she could start showing. She's a little bit busy being a school nurse. It's hard to find the time to work at it.

Leisz: Did you field horses as a kid then, or were you involved in 4-H or FFA?

Lakin: I never was involved in 4-H or FFA. Never showed horses until we started raising them here in 1948, I believe.

Leisz: How long did you raise horses for?

Lakin: Well, we started in earnest in 1948. We bought a stallion named Hub Thomas and some string of good quarterhorse mares. Joe Hancock, Joe Reed, several other bloodlines that were popular at the time and we had a lot of good horses. We didn't race any horses. We'd never liked that end of the business. I've seen too many of them messed up, so, but we sold lots of good roping horses and cutting horses. We were cutting...there's a trophy right up there, a mare I raised was a novice champion in Arizona one year and was in the Pacific Coast competition in, I believe, 1960, about the right year. She was a full fifty-five. And she was in front of the pack in the middle of the year in the Pacific Coast Cutting Horse Association, bulged a tendon, took her out. She still finished in the top 10. I roped on horses. In fact, Hub Thomas my stud was my best rope horse and I really found him to be a great roping horse.

Leisz: Did you take him around to competitions or did you have him working on some of the ranches?

Lakin: Hmm?

Leisz: Did you have him working up on some of the ranch country?

Lakin: Well, I used him a little up there but not much. We used him down here most of the time and we had lots of cattle to work here in the feed lot and moving cattle along up and down the roads and from pasture to pasture. We had lots of work to do. I had some, 12 or 14 head fullcrops some years. But we never made any money at it, you know. A lot of them turn, even the best cross you can come up with, it doesn't always knick and produce a good foal. When you do get a good one, why, it's hard to get enough money to cover all the cheap ones you have to sell. For every thousand-dollar foe I've sold, I've had to cover for a bunch of $500 ones, you know.

Leisz: Makes it tough to be in that business.

Lakin: Most I ever sold a horse for was $25,000, which was the top number I ever got for a horse. But it was fun, I enjoyed it. Finally got tired of it. I showed all those years, but all those ribbons are more or less...I think all those ribbons are mule ribbons (laughs)I've won in the last few years. But, I've got 2 or 3 garbage bags full of ribbons that I won back in the old days. A few of those bronz trophies up there on the shelf are ones from my...those are 1955 to 1960 along there.

Leisz: Where did the snake skin come from?

Lakin: It was a rattlesnake we killed right here in our stacklot.

Leisz: Nice. That's a good sized snake.

Lakin: Yeah. He measures...what is it, just under 6 feet, I believe, and 8 inches across. It was 8 inches around. We saw his track out there in the stacklot where all our hay is stacked. The tracks enough to scare you to death, it looked like it was 4 inches wide where he slithered from stack to stack. So he was eating rodents and doing really well. One day...we knew that he was

gonna...that we'd find him sooner or later because we'd be tearing these stacks down, and then they came and said, "We've spotted him." Then we got out there and we had a long hook that we used to pull bales of hay down out there. And I could see him back in there between some bales and I tried to pull him out, but couldn't, that didn't work. So they had to tear down about 50 tons of haystack (laughter) just to get to this snake. Finally, went in there to get a block and came out, had cut the snake's head with the squeeze. When we came out with this block of hay here's this snake dangling there, thrashing around. So, his head was pretty well mashed by that time. Didn't take much to kill him then. So, I put him in a plastic bag and took him home and threw him in the freezer. I figured I was gonna take him to a taxidermist and get him mounted. I had visions of putting him on a board, coiled you know, tongue out, fangs. But I never got around to it, and every once in a while, my wife would go out to get a roast out of the freezer or something. She'd come out with that snake and she'd cuss me, and I got cussed a good many times. She said, "If you don't do get rid of that snake, I'm gonna throw it in the trash." So I thought, oh well, I'll just skin him and dry the skin, which I did.

Leisz: I was gonna ask if you told her that it was in the freezer, or she found out on her own.

Lakin: I warned her, but still she'd forget about it. She'd be digging around there for a roast and she'd come out with this thing and scream. (laughter)

Leisz: That's great. So you're back to working with mules?

Lakin: Yeah, I mentioned I kind of got weary of not making anything on the foals. My daughter had outgrown showing and I've long since tired of showing. My heart really wasn't in it anymore. I had a couple of nice quarterhorse brood mares left and I thought, "Well, I think I'll have a little fun breeding to a jack." And Truman McDaniel, a friend of mine, quite a mule guy, bought a

young jack named Warrior. And he was so cute, he was just like a...I just fell in love with that little old jack. He had cute little dish face and I said, “Truman, as soon as that jack’s big enough to breed a mare, I want to breed a mare to him.” I wound up breeding about 4 times to that jack and I still got one of them down on the harness. You wanna go down? She’s been on the harness, she’s probably about worn out. She’s been on there for 3 hours.

Leisz: Okay. Well, we’ll stop this thing for now.