The Late J. E. "Lige" Edwards of Belhaven

By Lisa Waters and Paula Carawan

Introduction

On December 8, 1989, on a sunny, windy day, Dr. Armstrong, Paula Carawan, and Lisa Waters, "Mr. Lige’s" granddaughter, drove to Belhaven, North Carolina, to talk with J.E. "Polo" Edwards, the eldest son of the late Mr. James E. "Lige" Edwards. Polo shared some of his father's adventures with us. James Elijah Edwards was known as "Mr. Lige" to his friends and "Poppa" to his many grandchildren. "Mr. Lige" was a prominent businessman in Belhaven. He was the president of the Guarantee Bank and Trust Company, as well as one of the first members of the board of trustees of Beaufort County Hospital.

J. E. "Lige" Edwards was a handsome young man with thick black hair and a short stocky build. As an older man with his hair gray and balding, he had become a highly respected and admired family man. He had two children by his first marriage to Vere Teel, J. E. "Polo" Edwards and Nancy E. Waters. He later remarried, to Rena Morris, and at age 59 had a third child, Rena Elizabeth Edwards. He also had four granddaughters, one grandson, and fifteen great grandchildren.

As a businessman, he was very respected; he had the reputation of being very conservative, so conservative that some people have joked that he may have squeaked when he walked. "Mr. Lige" was also known for his ability to tell
Mr. J.E. "Polo" Edwards reflects on the life of his father, James E. "Lige" Edwards of Belhavens

stories. These entertaining stories tell of the many exciting hunting and fishing adventures which he had experienced during his life.

Life: Where was J. E. Edwards born and where did he grow up?

Mr. Edwards: Do you know where Black Jack is, close to Greenville, not far from Grimesland? He was born there August 18, 1898.

Life: What kind of business was he in?

Mr. Edwards: He grew up in that area, and when he was a young man, they had a small bank, Greenville Bank and Trust Co. in Grimesland. Mr. Billy Woolard, who was president, hired him to manage that little bank. Well, soon after that, they closed that bank and opened up a new branch of Greenville Branch and Trust in Belhaven. So they sent Granddaddy down to Belhaven in 1931 to be the cashier of the new bank. To start, it was called Greenville Bank and Trust Company. They started putting branches all over Eastern North Carolina: Snow Hill, Bethel, Williamston. So Mr. Woolard felt they should change the name from Greenville to Guarantee, so they changed the name to Guarantee Bank and Trust Company.

Life: Lisa was telling me he had a reputation of being a story-teller.

Mr. Edwards: Well, I don’t know too much about his story-telling, but he was a participant in a lot of stories.

Life: What were some of those?

Mr. Edwards: I’ll start off by telling you that my father loved a drink of whiskey. He never but twice in my life had too much. But there was nobody who enjoyed a cocktail or social drink better than he did. So sometimes, you know, when you are a sociable drinker and you go fishing or something, you have a tendency to overdo it a little bit.

I’ll tell you some stories. He had a neighbor up on the creek that he thought a lot of. His neighbor’s son-in-law was down here visiting one weekend and wanted to go fishing. And Daddy told me he’d take him. So he loaded the boat up and went on down the mouth of the Pungo River, and they started fishing. The fish started biting, and they were feeling pretty good, so Daddy reached in his tackle box and pulled out a pint of whiskey. He said it is customary on this boat that every time you catch a fish you take a little drink.

Well, they started drinking and catching fish. It wasn’t long before that pint was gone. Well, they were doing pretty good. They were catching plenty of fish, and, lo and behold, his friend’s son-in-law named George reached in his bag and come out with a pint. They were feeling good. The fish kept on biting, so they kept right on nipping along on that pint until it was gone. It was getting late in the afternoon, so Daddy said we’d better head back up Pungo Creek. They started back, and when they got almost to the neighbor’s pier where he was going to let George out, he noticed George sitting in the seat, nodding. He wasn’t saying anything. Daddy said George’s wife saw them coming, and she ran out on the end of the pier to help tie the boat up. She saw her husband sitting there sleeping, so she hollered, “George, wake up! You’re home!”

Daddy said George just stood straight up, right slow, and kept right on overboard, clean out of sight. Daddy, he scrambled around and got his arms down in the water and got the guy by the coat and pulled him up and finally got him in the boat. With the help of his wife, they got the man up on the end of the pier. Daddy said he was standing up there, and he felt so proud, said “Doggone, I’m a hero! I done saved a man’s life!” About that time his feet slipped out from under him, and overboard he went. George’s wife had to jump in the boat and grab him by the coat and pull him up. He felt kinda bad about that. That’s a typical trip Granddaddy had.

Life: Do you have another story?

Mr. Edwards: Well, we went on a goose hunt one time that to me was funny; of course, if you don’t know the characters involved, it’s kind of hard to convey the feelings that you have.

We went down to Lake Mattamuskeet goose hunting one afternoon: Daddy, I, and a good friend, Captain Clyde Potter, who was about the same age as Daddy. They were hunting and fishing partners. We went in the goose blind, but the geese weren’t flying. They have a law that you have to stop shooting geese or duck at four o’clock. It’s called “the four o’clock law.” It gives the geese a chance to come in and feed late in the afternoon before dark. Well, we sat there all afternoon, and nothing was flying. Just about four o’clock we looked at the watches, and it was time to really quit. But we looked coming across the lake, and two geese were coming, heading straight for us. Daddy said, “I’ll tell you one thing; if they come in here, I’m gonna take one shot at ’em.” So they kept right on coming, and about ten minutes past four, they passed close enough that we all three jumped up and took a shot at ’em. Well, Daddy was bragging and said, “Well, boys, I know daggone well I killed that goose; there ain’t no doubt about it!” He just insisted that he killed that goose. He went out, picked the goose up, and come back.
So we started on out the path, which is about 300 yards out to the highway where we had the car parked. All the way out there Daddy was teasing Captain Clyde and myself ’cause he killed the goose. He said, “Boys, this here goose is gonna make some fine gravy, and I wish y’all could have some.”

We got out to the car, and parked behind our car was a game warden. We walked up, and the game warden said, “Well, fellows, you realize you were shooting after four?”

Captain Clyde, he was a character of his own, said, “I tried to tell that little short son of a gun not to shoot that goose.”

So Daddy said, “Well, I reckon you got me; there’s nothing to do but admit it. I know I killed the goose.” So they charged Daddy under the federal law for shooting migratory fowl after four o’clock. After the warden wrote up the ticket, Daddy told him, “At least I’ll get some good gravy here.”

The game warden said, “I’m sorry, but I’ve got to take the goose as evidence.” So he lost all the way around. He lost a hundred dollars and the goose. He also had to go to federal court in Washington.

**Life:** About when was that?

**Mr. Edwards:** Well, I guess it’s been about 20 years ago.

**Life:** When did your father pass away?

**Mr. Edwards:** He’s been dead about ten years.

**Life:** I guess the most famous episode is the shipwreck.

**Mr. Edwards:** Yes. I was about fifteen, sixteen years old when it happened. That’s been a long time ago. And it’s kind of vague. Except for the feeling, I’ll never forget the feeling I had.

**Life:** How did the trip start? Who owned the boat?

**Mr. Edwards:** Mr. Goldee Ruark. He was in the seafood business. He owned a crab processing plant. He came down from Maryland and started the crab picking plant, and he had this boat built, the Dixie, about 40 feet long. It would accommodate about twelve people.

**Life:** Was it a fishing boat?

**Mr. Edwards:** Sport fishing. It was customary that they would take a crew of seven, eight, or ten, go over to Hatteras, spend a weekend, and go offshore fishing. This was a trip that Daddy arranged; he had banker friends and some doctors from East Carolina, actually the East Carolina Teachers College at that time. He invited them all down, and Mr. Ruark sent his son, Victor Ruark, and Jesse Keech to operate the boat. Jesse Keech was the captain. They left and went across to Hatteras, went off shore fishing, had good luck, caught a lot of fish, and Sunday they left Hatteras.

On their way back to Belhaven across the sound, it had breezed up, and it was real rough. The boat was new. When they had built the boat, the “head,” which, you know, is a bathroom on a boat, the check valve for the commode going overboard was made out of lead and didn’t have a safety trap in it. And in coming back across the sound, it [the wind and water] beat and broke that lead pipe, and the water started flooding in the boat. Well, these fellows were all having [playing] a game of cards. They were down below sitting around, and one of them said, “Where is this water coming from? I’m seeing water around here on the floor.” They started looking, and they couldn’t figure out where the water was coming from. It started getting deeper and deeper. And
they started trying to bail the water out, but it was gaining on them. By the time they found where it was coming from, it was too late then to stop it up. The boat had sunk, the engines had died out, and then it sank right down. The top of the boat was even with the waves breaking across it.

*Life:* They were coming back from Hatteras?

*Mr. Edwards:* They were on their way back from Hatteras.

*Life:* So they were in the sound?

*Mr. Edwards:* Right in the middle of the Pamlico Sound when the boat sank. So Daddy said that he just felt like they all were really doomed because there they were out in the middle of the Pamlico Sound, and nobody knew that they were in trouble. The boat had sunk, and as it was going down, he took his gold watch with a gold chain on it and tied it to the windshield of the boat so that, at least, if the watch would be saved, his wife could have it if there was any value to it. I don’t know why he did that, why he was even thinking about a watch. I wouldn’t, but, anyway, he did. He said when the first swell broke off the stern of the boat, it just knocked the windshield all out, and a piece of glass cut him pretty bad on the arm. That was Sunday during the day. They hung onto the boat all night and the next morning.

*Life:* Were they in the water?

*Mr. Edwards:* Oh, yes! Everyone of them was in the water. See, this is the hull of the boat [shows us a magazine showing how the boat was in the water]. And when it sank, it was right level, and the swells were breaking across it. But there was enough buoyancy to hold it up so that they had something to hold on to. They were all holding onto the railing of the boat, parts that still weren’t torn up. They did have a lifeboat on board, a skiff. So the next morning they figured that the wind had subsided some, that it wasn’t quite as rough. They figured it was their best chance to let four of them get in the skiff and try to row ashore. They had drifted enough that they could see the trees over on the Hyde County side. So they, Daddy and three other fellows, got in the row boat and headed for the shore. They didn’t realize it, but they were heading right into the mouth of Par Creek, going into Engelhard. A boat coming out happen to spot ’em, picked ’em up, went on out, and picked the rest of the people up off the boat. So they got rescued. All eleven of them survived.

*Life:* So they were just hanging on to the boat all night?

*Mr. Edwards:* Yes, hanging on to the boat all night, and the other guys till the middle of the day the next day. But what was really distressing to me, as a kid back at home, was just getting news here and there about what happened. You know, you always think the worst. Well, there was a freight boat that ran from Engelhard to Hatteras, one round trip a day. On their trip back that morning, they picked up a mattress floating out in the middle of the sound with the name Dixie on it. So when that word came down, we just knew they were all gone. It was kind of a hairy experience.

*Life:* What did your father say when he got back? Was he overjoyed?

*Mr. Edwards:* I mean! All the men met at our house, which was right on Main Street at that time, and, boy, that was a happy bunch of men! They were all weather-beaten, all had blankets wrapped around them.

*Life:* The ship sank in the afternoon?

*Mr. Edwards:* Sometime in the middle of the afternoon on Sunday.
Life: When were you expecting them back?

Mr. Edwards: Sunday afternoon.

Life: And when they didn’t show?

Mr. Edwards: They didn’t show, and it had been rough and windy.

Life: They didn’t have a radio?

Mr. Edwards: Back in those days they didn’t.

Life: Did you think they were lost?

Mr. Edwards: Yes, yes, especially when we got the report that they’d picked up the mattress. That kind of destroyed any hope we had then. But then, late that afternoon, we got a phone call from Engelhard that they had been picked up.

Life: Do you remember some of the reactions of some of the other people that were on the boat? Were they just very happy and thankful?

Mr. Edwards: I mean! In fact, one of the gentlemen, my daddy said, kind of a big, heavyset, fat man, for some reason or other, didn’t have his clothes on. I guess he had taken his wet clothes off and put the blanket around him because it was dry and because they had been exposed to that air and night cool. So he didn’t have any clothes on, but he was so excited when he got there to the dock, he just dropped his blanket and grabbed his wife.

Life: What time of year was this?

Mr. Edwards: In the spring, May 29, 1939.

Life: But even then at nighttime the sound would be cool.

Mr. Edwards: Yes, it’s cool, especially when you lie in that water all night long, too. Even in the hot summertime it would be cool. And not only that, they were all blistered from the sun exposure and exhausted from hanging on.

A funny thing one of the gentlemen said, Daddy used to tell. I think it was Dr. Wooten. The day before, he had caught about a 30-pound amberjack out in the ocean. They had him in the fish box in the stern end of the boat, but when it settled, all the fish floated out and started floating all around and away. For some funny reason, the current, the wind, or whatever just gradually carried the amberjack around to where Dr. Wooten was hanging onto the side of the boat. Here came that fish slowly drifting around the boat and right up to him. Dr. Wooten said, “You know something, I watched that fish die and now I reckon he’s going to sit here and watch me die!” It kinda broke the spell for a little while by him making that remark.

Life: How many hours were they in the water?

Mr. Edwards: Eighteen hours. The guys hanging on in the water actually stayed in there for probably six to eight hours longer than Daddy and the other three men. One of the fellows, Howard Moyer, a banker from Greenville, was so intent, Daddy said, in getting that boat ashore that he wouldn’t let anybody take the oars away from him. He just rowed and rowed. Daddy said he had blisters on his hands and had blood running from them, but he wouldn’t let anyone take the oars from him.

Life: Do you remember any stories your father was involved in as a banker?
Nine of eleven who were aboard the "Dixie;"
J.E. "Lige" Edwards fourth from left

Mr. Edwards: Yes. There was a robbery fixing to take place. This was in the Thirties, and I’ve heard him tell it a number of times. In fact, he went to his grave not forgetting what happened. It seemed that there was a group of bank robbers that lived somewhere in the Greenville area. They had robbed several banks, and the law was out trying to catch them. One of the members of the gang, for some reason or another, fell out with the rest of the gang. So he told them that this crowd was planning a robbery in Belhaven, that they were going to hold up the Belhaven Branch of the bank. He told them the day it was supposed to take place and even about the time of the day it was about to take place. So the sheriff’s department notified the Belhaven police and the Beaufort County sheriff, too. They stationed men in the bank in different places with sawed-off shot guns with buckshot, and they were prepared for them when they came. Well, the man told them the way this was going down. One man was going to come in and walk up to a teller, put a twenty dollar bill up there, and ask for
change. When he did that, then the rest of the bank robbers would come in, and they would go ahead and hold up the bank. They told Daddy that. Daddy had some lady clerks. He felt like maybe he could handle the deal better than they could. So about the time the robbery was supposed to go down, he took over the teller window. Everything was real tense, and everybody was scared to death 'cause they were expecting these guys to come in with guns and stick them up. Daddy said he was sitting there, and in came a stranger about the time the robbery was about to take place. They had never seen him before. He walked up to the teller's window, threw a twenty dollar bill up there and said he wanted twenty ones for that. Daddy said he went all to pieces. He got to shaking so bad, he couldn't get the ones out. He felt like he was going to faint, and Ms. Ruth Johnson, who was the usual teller next to him, had to come around and give the man the twenty dollars change. The man went out with a blank look on his face. He didn't know what the devil was going on. He wasn't the robber, of course. It wasn't long after that, they got a call from Washington from the sheriff's department that they had caught the guys before they had got here. So they didn't ever make it. Daddy said when that stranger walked up and threw a twenty-dollar bill up there, he went all to pieces.

*Life*: In the various interviews that we have done with people who were adults during the Depression, we have gotten a constant story of how hard times were.

*Mr. Edwards*: That reminds me of a case that happened as a result of the Depression, Daddy said. One day, we had just had Hurricane Hazel in 1954. I'll never forget it. This man from down at Hyde County, a farmer, came in the bank, and he had a bag, some kind of leather box or bag. I can't remember the exact details of what it was, but he had a wad of money, stuck all together, molded, and you could tell it had been submerged. And the guy was worried because he hadn't paid income tax on the money, and he didn't know whether
he should come in and report it or not. What had happened is
the man didn’t have any faith in banks, so he had buried his
money in the back yard. When that storm came, about three
or four feet of water covered all of it, and somehow the water
washed it out of the ground or wherever he had it hidden. Six
to eight months later he found it out in the woods hung to a
barbed-wire fence. It was so bad and molded that he decided
to bring it in and asked Daddy if he’d get in any trouble if
he’d try to get it reclaimed. Daddy said, “No, they have no
way of knowing whether you’ve paid taxes on it or not. I’ll
send it to the Federal Reserve Bank in Richmond and see how
much of it they can salvage and how much they will give you
currency for.” And they did, and the man got almost all of his
money back. That was cash.

*Life*: Did your father’s bank close during the Depression?

*Mr. Edwards*: No, sir! That was one of the few banks that
didn’t.

*Life*: Well, that was quite an accomplishment to stay open like
that.

*Mr. Edwards*: You’d better believe it was! Mr. Billy Woolard
was the president of the Guarantee Bank and Trust Company,
and he was a very, very, very conservative man. Of course,
you had to be conservative back in the Depression days. That
leads to another saying I’ve heard. Daddy was educated the
whole time he was in the bank business by Mr. Woolard to be
conservative. He couldn’t operate today because I’ve heard
Daddy say that Mr. Woolard’s theory was never to let more
than fifty percent of your deposits ever be put back out on
loans. Today if they don’t get ninety-five to a hundred percent,
they are not making any money they feel like. So since he was
educated that way and brought up through the Depression
days, Daddy was a little too conservative. When he got ready
to retire, he had a reputation of being real conservative, and
I’ll give you an example of what I’m talking about.

One day three local business men were sitting over in the
snack bar having a cup of coffee. There was a rumor that there
was a robber in the area that had been robbing some banks. I
think that they had robbed a bank in Washington. Well, this
one fellow said, “I’ll tell you one thing: there ain’t no need
for them to come to this branch bank down here because he
ain’t going to get a dime, because if he comes down here and
sticks a gun in Mr. Edwards face, he’s going to tell him,
‘Sorry, I’m going to have to take it up with my board before
I let you have it.’” That’s what got them through the
Depression because he was so conservative-minded that he
just wouldn’t loan out but fifty percent.

*Life*: Was the problem with banks during the Depression just
that they had loaned out money and the people couldn’t pay
it back?

*Mr. Edwards*: Yes, that was most of it.

*Life*: And then you had people who had deposited money and
wanted to withdraw their money?

*Mr. Edwards*: They would make a run on the bank, and then
the bank closed up, especially if they had more of their
deposits out on loan. Also, Mr. Woolard, the president, had a
bank and trust in New York City; the president of that bank
was a real good friend of Mr. Woolard. And he helped him
out right much, too. He loaned him money when he needed
it, but he went through some tough times. In fact, when he
opened the branch down here, he followed right behind a
farmers’ bank that had gone under. In fact, there were two
other banks in Belhaven that had folded up. Of course, one
of them had folded up because the president and assistant
president had stolen all the money. They skipped town with
all the money; one of them got caught, and the other guy, to this day, has never been caught. He's probably dead by now.

*Life:* You mentioned that your father hunted and fished a lot. Did you ever go with him?

*Mr. Edwards:* Yes, I did. Daddy and I were real close, and the Lord knows how many times we went fishing and split a pint of whiskey. We had a good time. We really did and caught a lot of fish.

*Life:* Do you remember any other adventures you had hunting and fishing?

*Mr. Edwards:* A little duck hunting trip we had over there on Pungo Creek. Daddy lived on Pungo Creek, and a neighbor, a doctor, lived right down the creek from him. The neighbor was a great duck hunter. This particular year he had built him a duck blind right across the creek, about a mile to the other shore across the creek. When he first started hunting it, he wasn’t killing anything. He was talking to Daddy, and Daddy said, “Well, I’ll tell you how you can kill something if you want. You go get you a bushel of corn, and everyday you go over there and you spread a ten-quart water bucket full of corn up under your blind. Once those ducks find that corn, you’ve got it made.” After a few days, he’d put that corn out there. The ducks found it, and they started flying in there. The neighbor had a ball shooting ducks. There were two days left in the season, and the neighbor had to go back to the hospital.

So he told Daddy, “I left my decoys in the blind. If you and Polo want to use the blind, you go ahead the last two days. Just take my decoys and put them in the boat house when y’all get through.”

Daddy thanked him and said, “I’m sure we will try it.” My son-in-law was down here at that time, and it seemed like it was during the Christmas holidays. So we, the three of us, decided to go. We all met over at Daddy’s house the next morning, about daylight. In the meantime, the night before, the temperature dropped way below freezing, and the creek had frozen over. It was a solid mass of ice, all the way across the creek; it was about a mile of it. I had a little old wooden skiff. We could see the ducks flying back and forth across the creek, but they couldn’t get down to the corn because it was frozen.

I said, “If we could ever get over there and break out a hole, you’ll have to beat them off.” So it took us two and a half hours of breaking ice and poling to get across the creek over to the blind. When we got there, we broke out a hole in the ice about as big as this house, put the decoys out, and got in the blind; and, man, here came the ducks! We just shot and shot and shot and had ducks all over the place. Some of the ducks would come in, and you would kill them, and they would hit the ice and skid three hundred yards right out across it. Anyway, my son-in-law had to go back to Grifton to work. So I invited him, and he and Daddy and I went back over there again the next morning. We had to break ice again to get there. The first day we didn’t have to break ice coming back because during the middle of the day it warmed up and the ice melted enough and the wind breezed up. It [the warm weather] broke the ice up, and we came on back without any problem. But that night the temperature dropped again, and it froze over so we had to break ice two and a half hours again to get over there. But it was worth it. We got over there, and here came the ducks! They were flying, and we were shooting! Every time a flock came, two or three ducks fell.

Daddy’d say, “Man, I got two of them! I know I got two of them!” About three times he said that.
So I whispered to my buddy, "The next time they come, don't shoot. Me and you ain't gonna shoot and see what happens." Well, here came a flock, and Daddy jumped up. He blasted away two times, and not a daggone feather dropped. He was a long time getting over that.

*Life:* You reckon he hit any of them?

*Mr. Edwards:* Well, he probably killed a few.

*Life:* Tell us something about your life. What have you been involved in?

*Mr. Edwards:* I was in the insurance business. I had an independent agency here in Belhaven.

*Life:* Have you always lived in Belhaven?

*Mr. Edwards:* Yes. When World War II was over, I came home from the Navy and went to work for the bank as a teller. Daddy had a little insurance company on the side, and there was one other agency in town. The owner of that passed away, and it was up for sale. So Daddy bought it and merged the two agencies together. Then I quit the bank and went into the insurance business full time. I stayed in the insurance business for 35 years, until I retired five years ago this coming January. I turned it over to the lady who worked for me, Lorna Shephard.

*Life:* What is the biggest change you've noticed in Belhaven since you were a boy?

*Mr. Edwards:* Well, the biggest change that I've seen is in the ecology, our environment. And it makes me want to cry, to see the way this water out here has been polluted. When we moved to Belhaven in 1931, I was nine years old. I thought I had moved to heaven. I loved this place. You could go down to the river soft crabbing. On summer mornings I stayed in the river. I could go right up here by the community house, start crabbing, and crab down the shore and catch three dozen soft-shell crabs every morning. People could go right out here straight out and catch gray trout, all you wanted, and croakers. Now you can't even go to the mouth of the river and catch a gray trout.

*Life:* What do you think the problem is?

*Mr. Edwards:* It's a lot of things, I think. The chemical run-off of farms is one. And it's overfished. You take this modern method of fishing now. A troller goes out in the ocean just off the coast, and they'll catch a whole school of gray trout. Well, those trout are our breeding stock. You catch them up, and how do you expect them to come in and spawn and replenish the breed? They have got to put some restrictions on the fishing industry, is the way I see it. Like right now they've closed the oyster season [1989-90].

*Life:* That's what I've heard.

*Mr. Edwards:* Yes, they closed it. This is the poorest oyster crop production in the history of the Pamlico Sound.

*Life:* They closed it because there just aren't any oysters?

*Mr. Edwards:* Yes, that's right, and the oysters they are catching, I understand, are real small, right on the borderline. They figured they'd do more harm to go ahead and let them catch them. Somebody was telling me today that one local oyster house had a hundred bushels of oysters and they were small enough, that they made them take the whole hundred bushels and dump them back overboard.

Well, I'm going to tell you how I really feel. The seafood, to lose it, to lose our wildlife and such as that, that's terrible. I
can’t think of anything any worse, except man perishing, himself. How can we live in an environment when wildlife can’t live in it? Unless we wise up to that, I just hate to think what is going to happen to the future generations, our children’s children, down the line. I’ve got some grandsons who love to hunt and fish as much as I do. If it changes as drastically in their lifetimes as it has in my lifetime, before they are old men, they won’t be able to go out and kill a squirrel or catch a fish or anything.

_Life_: Have you noticed any other changes in 50 or 60 years, say in entertainment?

_Mr. Edwards_: When I was young, we went to the moving picture show downtown. In fact, my wife and I probably would average five nights a week going to the movies. And when television came along, that took care of the movie houses. They gradually closed down. Now you find yourself sitting home in front of the tube.

_Life_: Yes, a lot of people we talk to say that in the Twenties, Thirties, and Forties there was more family socializing than today.

_Mr. Edwards_: Yes, that definitely is a fact. Yes, when I was in high school, we had three places that we could hang out at. They had a little shop downtown here called the Dr. Pepper Shop. It was a hamburger joint, and the kids could go there and dance and just get together. Also, there was the community house up here built by the WPA [Work Projects Administration] for us during the Depression. You could go up there and dance. They had jukeboxes and a big dance hall. We would be going to the moving picture show, and we’d go by the drugstore, hang around about an hour or so before the show started. So that was another hang out. But these kids today don’t have anywhere to hang out.

_Life_: What do you think about the new school in Yeatsville [the consolidation of Bath and Belhaven high schools]?

_Mr. Edwards_: Well, I personally like it. I’ve got grandchildren going out there.

_Life_: They went to Belhaven?

_Mr. Edwards_: Yes. I’ve got some of my grandchildren that go there, and then some of them go to grammar school here in town. If I was in their shoes coming along now, I would welcome a school with the facilities that they have. I can remember when I was in high school here; we didn’t even have an indoor basketball court. We had an outdoor basketball court. And, brother, if you don’t think that was bitter playing, you go out and there and play basketball with a northeast wind blowing and the chill factor down about twenty degrees.

_Life_: Weren’t you one of the first football players in this area?

_Mr. Edwards_: Six-man football team, yes.

_Life_: You were on a six-man football team?

_Mr. Edwards_: That was back in 1940 and 1941 when the school wasn’t able to buy equipment. In fact, I had to buy my own shoes. I think the school furnished a helmet and shoulder pads. I bought everything else. Each kid that played football did. Well, they could only afford enough for a six-man team. Somebody had the wise idea, which was good, that these small schools could participate in football with a six-man team. Later it went to an eight-man team. Nowadays since they’re consolidated like Northside, they can afford to have twelve- or eleven-man teams, but there was an article in the Washington _Daily News_ about the first football game between Belhaven and Bath in 1939. I was in that game.
Life: Did y'all win?

Mr. Edwards: Beat them 44-0.

Life: I guess you did!

Mr. Edwards: Bath had been playing about three years when we started. They had great big fellows. In fact, the sheriff, who is retired, Red Davis, played on the Bath team. Red weighed about 215 pounds and I weighed about 135 pounds. Anyway, at the time when he read the article and got his wife to call me to see if I had read it. I talked to old Red thirty minutes. First time I talked to him since he retired. That was a real experience.

Life: You mentioned you were in the Navy during the war.

Mr. Edwards: Three years in the Navy.

Life: Where were you? Did you get out of the country?

Mr. Edwards: No, I was fortunate, very fortunate. I went to school the whole time I was in the Navy. I loved boats, and I loved the water. So I joined the Navy with the intent of going to sea, on an aircraft carrier or destroyer or something like that. You know, young with big ideas about what you wanted to do! But when I went in, they needed airmen to fill some positions they were void in, so they didn’t give me much choice. So I went to aviation machine school first; then I went to Radar school and gunner school. With the operations and training mixed in, I spent three years going to school. The last six months, we were stationed in California, and our outfit had gotten its orders. We were going to the South Pacific to be assigned to an aircraft carrier. I was a turret gunner on a torpedo bomber, and we were going out there to replace some people who had been out there for awhile when they dropped the atomic bomb. When they dropped the bomb, there was no
After successful fishing trip in West Palm Beach, Florida, left to right: Lillie Ruark, Vera Edwards, Goldie Ruark, Ann Winstead, "Lige" Edwards, Dr. Ellis Winstead

need for the crewmen on the planes. At least that's what they told us.

_Life_: I was just thinking, today is Pearl Harbor Day.

_Mr. Edwards_: It sure is.

_Life_: I guess you were fortunate, though.

_Mr. Edwards_: I really was. I was not begging to go overseas because I got enough scares as it was without going flying with someone else at the controls.
Conclusion

Polo Edwards fondly remembers his father, J.E. Edwards, as a genial, often entertaining person with family and friends, and a proficient man in the bank business. A versatile and clever man, J.E. Edwards often took his son, Polo, hunting and fishing. The bank in which he worked, Guarantee Bank and Trust, weathered the Depression, and J.E. survived a shipwreck. J.E. Edwards’ life was unquestionably filled with adventure, risk, and amusement.

Polo Edwards received our questions graciously and responded in a straight forward and winsome way. He not only informed us directly about his father’s life, but indirectly how much he admired, respected, and loved J.E. Edwards. The interview was an informative and entertaining experience that we will remember, and we would like to thank Polo Edwards for sharing his memories with us.