

Interviewer: For the camera could you say your name for us so your name will be at the beginning of the interview?

Riggins: Lawrence Edward Riggins.

Interviewer: And you're from Clarksville correct?

Riggins: Yes I was drafted from Woodlawn Tennessee down below Clarksville, Dotsonville community

Interviewer: Alright I'm going to start with some of your family history. What did your parents do when you were growing up?

Riggins: We were farmers really sharecroppers we would work on the farm and share the crops with the land owner 50/50 for several years when I was teenager. I got to go to town and get a job.

Interviewer: What year were you born in again?

Riggins: Born in 1928 June 21, 28.

Interviewer: So you grew up during the great depression?

Riggins: I'm not sure I had some pretty I forgot what year I was born in 28 it was along in there I think the latter part of the depression I think. But we all had it kind of depressed we didn't we had what we eat on the garden we raised a garden and had cows to kill for meat and all of that but as far as money we didn't have any. We was all poor folks.

Interviewer: So that put you around your early teenage years 10 or 11 when stuff started happening in Germany and Germany invading Poland and stuff like that. Do you have any memory of that or were you knowledgeable of that or did you remember

Riggins: I was always up on current events but it's been so long ago. Of course I remember it of course I went in during the Korean conflict but I do remember them talking about all of the war that I was you know that was in my age group. I remember about Germany Hitler and all of that and Mussolini from Italy and so on and so forth you know. That was before I guess that was before the Korean conflict. Don't remember a whole lot about Korea I know we were subject to go to war anytime. But it was during that conflict that I went to Germany some went to Germany from over here and some went to Korea. And we were subject to be called from Germany anytime but I spent 19 months over there in Erlangen in Germany.

Interviewer: I'll get to that part a little bit later if that's alright. I'll do these and then I will get to those. What was your opinion and your family's opinion on FDR do you remember?

Riggins: On FDR?

Interviewer: Yeah during the great depression and

Riggins: I just slightly remember him and Franklin Delano and his wife Eleanor. But I can't remember a lot of details I know it was a tough time. I think it was real tough and I think he done something had to do something the economy was so bad he did something but I forget the details.

Interviewer: And I was looking at your form in there from the army it said you had eight grade education when you went into. Did you go to work after that or where did you go to work or were you on the farm?

Riggins: After service or before?

Interviewer: Before service after your schooling.

Riggins: Oh yeah when I left the farm sharecropping I went to Clarksville and got a job at Borden Harrison Wholesale groceries. Three of us kept up all the vehicles they had a wholesale business in Clarksville and that's where I went. Worked and went to several other jobs service station and so forth until I was called in the army from Borden Harrison and left there and come back there. They had to give you your job back you know which was alright too.

Interviewer: So you did wholesale groceries for a while?

Riggins: Yeah we kept up their vehicles.

Interviewer: Oh so ya'll worked on the vehicles?

Riggins: Yeah at that they delivered all of these groceries you know in fact Harrison was one of the top E.H. Harrison was the president of the wholesale grocery in the United States at one time it was that big in Clarksville. And big covered trucks they had 21 trucks had 16 salesmen car so that's how many we kept up three of us. So I did that worked there 10 years including the two I was in the army and then I out Alco Controls for ten years. And so my wife and I bought a farm a couple of farms after that and so we she worked in town and I worked in town after the army service.

Interviewer: So what year or when did you start working for the wholesale grocery business?

Riggins: Fifty- two to Sixty-two.

Interviewer: Fifty-two is when you started?

Riggins: 1952 and I went into the army in 1954. Left there and went in and come back there.

Interviewer: So did you work with your family during when WWII was going on on the farm?

Riggins: I can't remember WWII even what year it was really to tell you the truth. I remember it of course but I don't remember the dates. I remember Korea and of course all of these later wars but.

Interviewer: Okay you don't have to remember the dates but do you remember any difficulties with any rationing during the war or anything like that?

Riggins: Yeah I remember having to get A, B, C you know your things to put on your windshield that told what kind of gas you could get. You were eligible to get gas was hard to get you had to have a I forget which was the preference A, B, or C. I think A was farmers got some preference you know over others they were able to buy gas back in that time you are talking about.

Woman in the background: Shoes were rationed.

Interviewer: What about anything else do you remember difficulty with like she just mentioned shoes or having to butter or anything like that not being able to get ahold of it during the war?

Woman in the background: And sugar

Riggins: Hey shoes I remember seemed like sugar was hard to get ahold of and maybe butter I'm not sure but.

Woman in the background: Coffee

Riggins: But we made it through by having a garden see. We always had a garden I had cows and hog meat you know we killed hogs. We had plenty to eat raised our beans and all go to the mill take our corn to the mill and get it ground wheat you know so it was pretty good as far as eating back then.

Interviewer: So ya'll ate pretty well since ya'll had

Riggins: And then the saw bank come in and the land owners stopped having sharecroppers and hired hands much very much you know. And people moved to town and had to do the best you can you know. Like say I went on and got a public job my wife and I and I married in 1951 and we both worked. And then we bought our own farm when we did both farm and worked out at public work.

Interviewer: Did you have any family or friends that were involved in WWII or any gold or blue mothers?

Riggins: To tell you the truth I don't remember a whole lot about WWII. I think my yeah I take that back my dad was going I believe it was 1918 he was born in 1901 and he was on his way and they the war was over and they declared you know an end to the war. And he turned around and came back home he said that was my dad Duruy. But he didn't serve in it but he was on his way when they I did remember that in 1918 I believe.

Interviewer: What about in WWII did you have any friends or family that was involved in that?

Riggins: That's what I'm talking about WWII.

Interviewer: Okay

Riggins: I think that's right but I forget I don't know my dates. But I remember that he was 18 and they sent him back because the war was over at the time when he was drafted. But other than the details I can remember I listened to the radio of course a lot and all but that's been so long ago.

Interviewer: Did ya'll have a telephone or did ya'll just have the radio?

Riggins: Back then there was very few telephones a lot of times I mean the real early part of my life we had them later of course but the real early part maybe just the land owner and maybe one person in the community would have a phone if he was lucky. And an automobile and later on of course we didn't even have electricity or running water of course. But later on you know 10, 15 years of course it got better.

Interviewer: And, go ahead I'm sorry.

Riggins: That's all I was going to say. It got a little better as time went on and we didn't have it bad. We had a lot had eight in our family eight children four boys and four girls and we had it was loving time. My parents got along all of us well together but it was tough work we had to work that's for sure and if you made it you did. Nobody wasn't gonna give you nothing much I mean you didn't have all that stuff like they got today. You know you made it or you didn't but we I look back and it was pretty good life.

Interviewer: That's pretty much all the questions I've got on WWII. I'm getting up toward Korea now so. And you said you were drafted?

Riggins: Yeah drafted in I was deferred on the farm back then you could get deferred on the farm you know that was a critical part of making it. The farm people you know produced food and all of that of course. But you could get deferred and I was a farmer so I got deferred for several years and then they caught up with me. Sent me a letter from the local board said you know come on in. So I went in in 1954 August 54 went to Fort Knox for the first eight weeks. Then I got to stay there the second eight weeks. Most of the time a lot of the draftees or the enlistees or whatever go there the first eight weeks and then they get sent somewhere they go somewhere the first and second eight weeks may not be the same place. I was lucky to get close enough to home a little closer to home. So I spent my first eight weeks and then the second eight weeks at Fort Knox Kentucky and then I was sent to Germany stayed 19 months over there during Korea.

Interviewer: If you had your choice would you have chosen another branch of the service other than the army or?

Riggins: I'm not sure we didn't have a choice of course when you're drafted two year draftee.

Interviewer: So you didn't think about it if you would have preferred

Riggins: No I didn't think about it we just done what we were told. Of course if you know they called them RA or USs or draftee. And if you volunteered for three years or whatever you had a three year service well draftees two. Three or more you had a choice I guess for the whatever air force, army or navy whatever. But anyway I wound up in the army which they take whatever they can get. And it was okay.

Interviewer: And you were your method of service was a cook?

Riggins: Yeah they told us they had an opening for eight if anybody wanted it and I said that might be alright you'd be close to the food and all that. You don't have to have no guard duty so I said yeah I'll take one of them so after they determined what you MOS they called it would be the cooks. So they sent me to food service school the second eight weeks there in Fort Knox so I become a cook officially.

Interviewer: So how was basic training back then is there anything you remember?

Riggins: Yes but I was a pretty tough bird being off the farm for a working boy. We went to Fort Knox and it was hot in August. They had two hills they called them Mrs. and Hill and another big name pretty tough hills you know to climb. I remember walking by several when they'd have you out hiking. One guy I won't call his name was from Clarksville I walked right by his head when he was laying out. Some of them couldn't make it you know they would fall out or couldn't they were stragglers so they would bring a truck in behind and pick up the stragglers. But I remember this one boy I walked right by him you can't show any emotion I mean you know you can't stop you've got to keep going. He was laying out it was hot is what I'm saying but I was used to it so I mean I was used to hard work so it didn't bother me that much. But it they put you through physically.

Interviewer: So what all did they what else did they do as far as basic training? Was there gas masks or

Riggins: Oh yeah the first eight weeks of course is just getting you physically fit hopefully. The second was more I believe well like I say I went to food service that time but along the first part of the eight weeks you know they have the M1 riffle and an automatic and a machine gun. And they teach you about the gas mask they will through gas in your ranks and you grab your mask you know put it on and all of that. And have bayonet training you know I remember one of them you would have your bayonet stick it on the end of your weapon your M1 and they'd say what's the spirit of the bayonet? And you would have to say To kill To kill To kill. You know trying to teach you of course the war was going on and they wanted you to be that's what it was all about. But anyhow they teach you all phases of that and infiltration course you know where you go under the wire and things blowing up around you and they're shooting over your head and so forth. And then like I said the second eight weeks was easier you just went into what your job like food service they were teaching you how to cook and take care of the food part all of the health rules.

Interviewer: So the second eight weeks when they were training you there what did they teach or tell you? Was it in-depth as far as cooking or just kind of the basic?

Riggins: Yeah it was all about cooking you know cleanliness and all of that of course. And what was the proper food and all of that you had to go through all of that. And they had it spick and span you had to go through what they expected you to be you know to take care of the troops you know the eating part and the health part as far as that health the eating part.

Interviewer: I've just heard stories about army cooks so I understand the cleanliness and I understand the getting the quantity down and stuff like that. I just wonder if they focused on teaching ya'll taste much or making sure people didn't get sick and everybody had a full belly.

Riggins: They teach you the right things to do but when you get over there you see something a little different. You know the MO sergeant the Mess Sergeant you know if they run out of something they'd substitute you know some ingredient.

Interviewer: Sounds like you have a story or two about that.

Riggins: No but I'd say I can imagine if it was during a war now we wasn't in an actual war. But you know they would have you training as such as if it was. But I do remember maybe I shouldn't tell it but this ole Mess Sergeant would trade some of the food to the Germans for beer. I didn't drink back then I quit in

1952 just before I went in the army quit drinking. But anyway and Germany is known for its beer you know big beer gardens. But anyway he traded some of the some of the food service stuff some of the material the Germans didn't have for beer. I remember that be out in the field we had to go out in the field trip every two weeks every six months to train you know in actual in the field. Take the gas cook you know things that you cook your meals with the little gas utensils whatever you call it. Went up on the Check border to Grafenberry they call it I believe that's right the name of it. Every six months for two weeks that was the way it was over there.

Interviewer: So what year did they finally send you over to Germany around was it

Riggins: Well I went in in August 54 it was well I took eight weeks and then another eight weeks 16 weeks and then they sent me over. It might have been about January you figure up from August to

Interviewer: And I'm guessing that was a boat ride?

Riggins: Yeah I sure did I went over on the US Langford left New York and went to oh what's the name of that place? Oh I'll think of it a port over there in Germany I'll think of it. Anyway I went over on a ship there were 2600 of us on the US Langford. And I come back I flew back the only reason I got to fly back was I had an appendicitis just before I got out and my group they'd try to keep a group together you know kind of mustard out when we was leaving getting discharged. I was a little late so they sent me back on a plane which I was proud of that verses a boat. That's a long trip on that ship some of them get sick I didn't vomit but I got sick not enough to go all the way.

Interviewer: So what part of or what unit did they assign you to?

Riggins: The 30th field artillery. I was in the artillery I forget to add that the big guns. Of course like I say working in the kitchen we just concentrated on that. We were pretty lucky we didn't even have to have guard duty you have a certain kind of like firemen you'd have three days on three off something like that you know. And we didn't have to have guard duty and so forth so we were really a little different from some. I kind of liked it, we went over there and had some good barracks over there in Earlang and they were the ones Hitler's they say soldiers that Hitler had those barracks were tile. Man they were nice back then or at least we thought they were compared to where you could have been in Korea you know.

Interviewer: So what part of Germany did they station you all in?

Riggins: Erlangen, ERLANGEN, it's a little nice little town there and of course a camp right on the edge of town and I don't think it's one anymore. It was a nice little place pretty little town down in there flowers and cobblestone streets and such. It was nice.

Interviewer: So what was yawls opinion of or what was the local German's opinion of ya'll being there?

Riggins: I'm not sure I didn't mingle too much with them but we got along. I'm not you know I'm not too much on that didn't really go out too much you know back then. But it seemed like everybody got along pretty well you know it was occupation during that time and I didn't hear any anti too much myself you know either way. I know the soldiers would go downtown you know and all of that and we had some Russian KPs you know they'd hide them back then the mark was 25 equals a quarter which was real good for people that was over there Americans that had their dependent. Of course I didn't have mine because I didn't have the rank if you had enough rank the government paid his wife's way over and so

forth and they could hire their own maid for a little of nothing back then on the dollar. But it was pretty we had it pretty good I felt lucky to be there compared to where I could have been. But you were just lucky you don't ever know whose going overseas some that wanted to go overseas didn't get to go and ones of us that didn't want to go I'm glad I went now. But we had a little baby and I hated that was the hardest thing I ever had to do walk away from my month old baby and my wife and not knowing you know back then the wars going on. But anyway it worked out and I was glad I got to go. I got to travel a little over there I went to Europe and Paris and Italy Rome Italy while I was there.

Interviewer: What was the soldiers in your unit what was their opinion of the Germans? Was it fairly positive or did some dislike them?

Riggins: I'm trying to think all I know they got along I didn't

Interviewer: You didn't hear anyone talking bad about them or who just couldn't stand them?

Riggins: No I guess it was a better time then you know. I forget how long it had been occupied after WWI. World War I was the German war wasn't it?

Interviewer: Germany was in both of them.

Riggins: I'm thinking about the Korean of course Korea I know. Of course Germany and Italy was in they were fighting the American's during that. And the Russians let's see Russians and English and Americans were teamed up weren't they World War

Interviewer: World War II yeah.

Riggins: And then Germany and Italy were allied forces weren't they in but I forget what year that war ended that's all I'm saying.

Interviewer: World War II with Germany, Italy and Japan ended in 45 so it's only a couple more years. So I thought I would ask and see if some people were still if you had any older like sergeants that fought in WWII that had animosity towards the Germans or anything like that.

Riggins: No I really honestly I can't remember there wasn't much brought up about that. I guess it was a different time you know a little bit and they got over it.

Interviewer: So by this time things are starting to get a little tense with the Soviet Union. How does how do you recall that being reflected or worrying about?

Riggins: To tell you the truth I can't remember. I know just by reading history and listening I don't remember any thoughts or anything too much but I know they was into it over there on the Berlin airlift and all that. And they like I say the Soviets and the Americans were allies at that time but they and England you know and Churchill and all. But they wouldn't I guess as to how they divided Germany up you know and all and then they cut us off from Berlin had to have airlift you remember. And couldn't get there in the trucks so they had to airlift I remember of course listening to all of the news on all that you know. And it didn't go too good but I guess they were allies but they didn't they had their own interest you know Russian and American and English. I don't know who all I remember Mussolini and of course Italy he sided with Hitler. But we stayed in I went where Billy Graham came over there once and had a

service. And that's where Hitler's hill where Hitler spoke from he spoke from the same podium Billy Graham.

Interviewer: Hitler's parade grounds?

Riggins: Something I forget where it was but I went to the service that Billy Graham had. It was 65,000 people in that valley and they said that was where Hitler had spoke form when he was in power you know. And like I said we used the barracks that the Germans had, they were pretty good they were tile. Pretty good for an old country boy back then.

Interviewer: So there wasn't much thought about were ya'll worried about a Soviet attack or anything like that? Because that's part of the reason I guess ya'll were there. Was there a whole lot of tension or

Riggins: Now I can't remember that I really don't. I of course remember listening I listened to the radio all the time read then and now too over back what happened but there wasn't a whole lot going on within our rank as to about that at the time. But I do remember reading about and hearing about the friction. I guess it's been that a way off and on kind of a cold war and then it got better what they call the cold war.

Interviewer: How were what did you do for free time when you were in Germany?

Riggins: Well let's see I kindly kept to myself I didn't well I'd go out but like I say I'm not bragging I didn't drink or anything and a lot of them a bog percent of them did. They'd go to bed and go out at night which we did have we went to chapel services me and a friend or two of mine and we did go on trips with the Chaplin service you know. They'd take trips to like say Rome and Paris France and stuff like that and other than that I just read a lot during that and write to my wife every night she'd write to me so. And kind of enjoyed my friends there roommate with a guy form New York he and I were roommates John Lombardo from Rochester we were roommates for 19 months the same two guys. So we had you know we had our friends didn't do much exciting stuff.

Interviewer: And you didn't run into that much contact with Germans or

Riggins: Not as much as a lot of them did. They rode a lot of bicycles and you'd see them and you'd see it was kind of strange to get out on the auto bond and you'd see a truck with three wheels. You know the front wheel like a tricycle and you maybe you'd see two one truck pulling another I mean have a trailer behind it great big long ones you know with one tractor. Like I saw the three wheel trucks and bicycles had a lot of bicycles. But had a lot of pretty flowers and a lot of water ways you know real nice town they kept it clean you dind't see garbage strewed all over the place cans you know how they do over here sometimes. And then the forest where it looked like there were plenty I don't know if they were pine or what but they like I say the water ways the cobblestone streets over there the city park. But it was a beautiful they kept it up I liked it. I have to admire them for it.

Interviewer: Do you have any interesting or funny memories you'd like to anything really memorable?

Riggins: No the only thing a little bit I guess it is a lot of them I can't remember were those KPs that were hired from Russian immigrates I guess you'd call them. The government would hire them and they'd work as KPs in the kitchen cleaning up you know and they had to get a job I guess you know. We had three of them and they the old mess sergeant he'd tell them something to say you know that wasn't too

appropriate and they didn't know the language so they'd say it out. And the GIs that knew what it meant you know would get to laughing because them guys didn't know what they were saying. I can't remember all of it but I don't remember too many too much other than that. A lot of people draftees like me were married and all and wanted to get home they was looking. If you had two years you'd go one year and they called it going uphill and the other was downhill after one year. They were counting the days they'd get to go home you know. I remember several one guy especially several that I knew went berserk and you know the anticipation of going home you know and anxiety whatever right at the last. A bunch of them went berserk not a bunch not a whole lot but I remember one or two. From the stress you know anticipating so I was waiting to get home to my wife and little child. I come back home I called from Fort Jackson I believe I got out. They put the little boy on the phone and he was scared of me the first time I ever heard him talk you know after 19 months. He was just a month old when I went over and he was kind of afraid of me when they come and got me picked me up you know discharged in the car he was with us and he was afraid of me for a while. That was David my son David I had two boys David and James. But that's about my big long two years.

Interviewer: Were there any memories that weren't so fond or difficulties living over there other than having your family over here?

Riggins: That was the main thing not you know the real loneliness in a way. But we made it through faith, faith in God. I say I went to the service and depended on God I'll be honest with you. And so we made it through all that but that was the biggest for me by far missing my wife and child you know. And of course all of them were the same way I'm sure. But we compensated we had friends you know like I say we laughed and have fun the best we could. Wasn't all that bad we had the good duty over there in Germany. They say that's the preferred duty of American GIs now in Germany and I expect that's right.

Interviewer: And what did you do after you came home?

Riggins: I went back to like I said Borden Harrison Wholesale Grocery Company keeping up vehicles. Worked two more years no I worked I worked 10 years total and I left there in 62 and went out to Alco Control out there by Trane. And worked 10 years out there and we bought a farm in the meantime on the side. My wife worked at Clarksville so we farmed and we raised cows and hay did both worked in town and on the farm too in Dotsonville drove about 12 miles each way. So we enjoyed that you know have a little bit of city life and a little bit of farm life.

Interviewer: Anything you'd like to add?

Riggins: That's about all as far as service you know armed services army

Interviewer: Well I thank you.

Riggins: You're welcome I'm glad to