

Black: I was born in a town called Mendota Illinois LaSalle County it's about 90 miles west of Chicago.

Interviewer: West of Chicago?

Black: Yeah

Interviewer: I was born in Champagne.

Black: Okay

Interviewer: What year?

Black: November the 1st 1924.

Interviewer: What did your family do?

Black: My dad was an electrical engineer with the railroad and my mother was a school teacher.

Interviewer: Did she teach in a

Black: She taught in a rural country school. She had gone to what they called Decal Normal Teachers College in Illinois there. My dad came from here in Tennessee was not in ___ and hit the road and he was walking down a railroad track come up on a signal crew and from there why they asked him if he was looking for a job he did and he worked for the railroad then for 44 years.

Interviewer: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Black: I have one sister older one sister younger and three younger brothers.

Interviewer: How much younger were they in the service?

Black: Yeah all four of us boys wound up I was in World War II and my the next to the youngest brother was in the Korean War. And my brother the one on the other end he was in college and he went during the draft he had to spend two years so he went in two years come back out and then went back as a doctor.

Interviewer: How did your family deal with the great depression if you recall?

Black: Very well very fortunate. I know that were living at that time in 1929 we moved to Detroit Ferndale a suburb in Detroit and I know the neighborhood around there people were out of work but my dad always had a good job with the railroad. That was one of the jobs during the depression that was always good. And I know that there we had neighbors around there maybe weren't doing anything they might work a day or two a week and that would be about all. And my dad always did the grocery shopping he'd do it on Saturdays that's when we'd go grocery shopping. I can remember my dad would go and buy our groceries and then after he got our groceries he'd go back to the grocery store and he'd buy more groceries take them to neighbors around there that he knew needed them which was a great lesson for me if you've got a little bit extra you share it.

Interviewer: Do you recall where you were or what you were doing when you heard of Pearl Harbor?

Black: Yeah it was on a Sunday afternoon and my mother and I were sitting listening to the radio in the living room the other kids were around when the news came on I was 17 at that time and a senior in high school.

Interviewer: So did you know I mean what was coming?

Black: No no there was no idea because

Interviewer: Do you remember Roosevelt's speech?

Black: Sure very well.

Interviewer: Did you

Black: The day that will live in infamy.

Interviewer: So did you enlist when you turned 18?

Black: No in April of 42 I was still a senior and my dad decided to move us down here because he didn't want us living in that city just in case you know the big cities would be targeted if it got to that. So we moved down here my dad had bought a farm down here in 1934 and we built a house down here and we'd come down here to spend out summers. So we moved down here and I was too late to get in school here so I was put off a year and I had to repeat. And then when I turned 18 in November that year I had to get a deferment well they gave me a deferment until I finished high school.

Interviewer: What branch were you in?

Black: Navy

Interviewer: Navy

Black: But I was drafted right after high school by the army but I was turned down and sent back home. Failed the physical part of my kidney problem they said. So I came home went to a doctor he gave me some pills and everything and I went and volunteered but I volunteered into the navy.

Interviewer: Where did you go for training?

Black: Well it was a man called Walter Winchler who was a columnist and a radio commentator. I went to boot camp in Camp Sampson New York that he deemed the Navy's concentration camp. I went in the middle of December and boy it was on a warm day it would get up to zero most of the time it was around 20 below.

Interviewer: Was that why they called it that?

Black: I don't know why he called it that it didn't bother me. But he said they were so strict they had inducted him and kicked him out. I think he was a little old at the time.

Interviewer: How was training for you?

Black: well it was different you know getting up at four o'clock in the morning and having to run around what they called the brine it was the complex it was a half a mile each way and a quarter mile on each end. And every morning you get up and first thing you did was get your clothes on and you'd get out and you'd run that whole flight and then back to your barracks and then of course make up your bed and get dressed for mess and everything like that.

Interviewer: So that part was tough?

Black: Yeah well it was different but you got used to it. I didn't think it was all that bad really.

Interviewer: What job were you trained for?

Black: Well when you finish at the end of boot camp they ask you what preference you know what training you would like to have and I applied for radio gunner school and was accepted. Then come home on boot leave when I went back off of boot leave they said the whole company the choice has been canceled and they sent us all to hospital core school at Norfolk Virginia because the marines were killing off call their medics were getting killed over in the Pacific so. I got sent to hospital core school in Norfolk Virginia.

Interviewer: What did you do there?

Black: You were trained in you have the same training as a nurse. You learn to give shots IVs suture stuff like that. Just you were a mini doctor really in the field.

Interviewer: Did that come easy to you?

Black: Oh yeah it didn't bother me. I didn't want it but I mean everybody else had to have it because see the navy furnishes the medics for the marine core.

Interviewer: So what were you where did you go from there?

Black: I went to Jacksonville Florida a naval air station at the hospital there. And we had the ward I was working on was the VD ward. And I didn't like the nurse she and I didn't get along very good and I was about to get in trouble and had a friend in the clerk's office and he put me on the transfer list got me out of there. Went from there to Camp Walter's Texas it was an old army base been converted in to a navy boot camp and we ran recruits through they were all from Texas some of them as much as 500 miles away from home still but they were Texans. So we run them through boot camp and my name being the top of the alphabet every time a transfer come up so I got transferred then to Camp Pendleton California marine base. And went through field medical training very similar to what the marines did but you had to learn to we learned to practice landings off of LSTs we learned how to climb down a rope brave off the side of a ship. And then we had we went through the field training of crawling on your belly and going through with them shooting over your head and all that stuff ____ because that's the way it would be in combat.

Interviewer: Did you ever think of going into anything medicine or anything prior to joining the service?

Black: No

Interviewer: I can't imagine somebody just saying you're a nurse.

Black: No now my brother became a doctor. From the time he was little he said he was going to be a doctor and he did. No I always believed in getting by as easy as I could.

Interviewer: Where did you go from did you say

Black: From there from I went to the Hawaiian Islands to Oahu and from there you were dispersed it was called an OGU out going unit and I was transferred from there over to Maui to the 4th marine division. And I was in the medical battalion in the 4th marine division for a short time and then my name came at the top of the alphabet I was transferred to the 3rd marine division medical there on Guam. And I was on Guam when the war ended.

Interviewer: Really

Black: Yeah well it's in Marietta Islands and it consists of Guam, Saipan and Tinian and that's where the bombers took off to drop the atomic bomb. It was kind of funny because almost a month prior to the time they dropped it the air force guys were going around taking bets in the war being over in two months. They said it was a secret and then of course when they dropped it I said hey they knew about it something big was going to happen.

Interviewer: So after training you went to Hawaii right?

Black: Yeah in the 4th __ division.

Interviewer: Right

Black: We were staging getting ready for they were making plans for the invasion on Japan.

Interviewer: What would you do?

Black: Just regular medical stuff you know they had sick hall and stuff like that. Guys would cut themselves of something they would come in we'd patch it up or get some pills.

Interviewer: Did you work in were you just in a normal camp or?

Black: Yeah well it was all tents.

Interviewer: Uh huh so would you make would they come to you or would you make

Black: They came to us.

Interviewer: Uh huh what was the normal medical complaint?

Black: Mostly gold bricks wanted to get out and do something make sick hall. We had what they called KBC its acetaminophen _____ we called it an all-purpose capsule. You'd give them that here take two of these make you better.

Interviewer: Did what was a typical day like just?

Black: Get up in the morning take a shower and pick up you didn't do a whole lot of anything just mostly wait.

Interviewer: Did you get tired of getting transferred all the time?

Black: Yeah a little bit but I got to see a whole lot. See when the war ended then in December they started rotating guys on and everything so finally they sent us all there were 12 of us next thing I know they are sticking us on an airplane. We flew from there to Okinawa then from Okinawa to Shanghai China so I spent five days in Shanghai and was transferred up to a city called Tenzin at that time I don't what they call it now which is about 60 miles from Beijing we call it now in Northern China. Spent six months there they were rounding up Japanese soldiers and stuff.

Interviewer: So what would you do there?

Black: Well I was I worked in sick officers' quarters SOQ they called it. And worked I was with the amphibious core at that time in a medical battalion there. I worked in it then rotated the jobs I had to take one month as a cook cooking for the medical battalion. That was a good experience I had the early shift morning. Get up at three in the morning go down break two or three cases of eggs. You had a field range gas stove it burned 100 octane ignition fuel you had to take a bicycle pump pump up pressure on it and then light that thing. We'd break eggs in a pan like that about that deep.

Interviewer: Were you any good?

Black: Yeah got pretty good at it but I had a Chinese man that was helping me then we had Jap prisoners that he's boss them around tell them what to do. Maybe I was overseeing the Chinaman did the cooking really.

Interviewer: How did you get to doing that how did you?

Black: Well everybody had to take a turn.

Interviewer: Okay

Black: Being cook we didn't have any cooks in the medic battalion.

Interviewer: Right

Black: They were all navy personnel.

Interviewer: So now did you mainly just deal with did you ever deal with wounded soldiers or just sick soldiers?

Black: A few but not that many.

Interviewer: Did you ever

Black: One now even after the war ended we'd go out on patrol and you'd find a Jap straggler or something and we did have were Guam was so much jungle they had just cleared out spots for towns and everything. And the medical battalion was sitting down in a lagoon and every now and then we'd catch one slipping into the mess tent to get something to eat. And it was down you know but you'd go out on patrol and you'd get shot at once in a while but we always got them anyway. It wasn't my job to shoot I just had to patch them up if they got shot.

Interviewer: How was the culture just what did you think when you got to Hawaii?

Black: Huh

Interviewer: What did you think when you got to Hawaii?

Black: Well they didn't you got to go out we went out just a very few times on leave went to Waikiki Beach at that time the Royal Hawaiian Hotel was the big hotel there on Waikiki Beach. And I looked at it it was kind of funny because the navy had taken over you had these clothes lines hanging out you'd hang clothes out the windows to dry out and everything it looked kind of strange. The beach was beautiful I did get to go on one luau where they dug the pit and killed the hog. It was interesting how they heat these rocks and everything of course you've to the big old skin butter it any everything. They put those rocks inside him they lay down a pile of leave then they put the pig in then they load the inside with rocks then they put them over then they put more leaves then they burry it in the sand. And you wait several hours and it's cooked.

Interviewer: Was it good?

Black: Oh yeah delicious.

Interviewer: What about Guam what was that like?

Black: Jungle

Interviewer: Really

Black: It was mainly jungle they had a big airbase there for B25s for bombing runs they had. That was the biggest cleared area on the whole island I guess.

Interviewer: Jungle makes me think animals did you see?

Black: No not in the pacific you don't have the animals you have small but no big ones there's no big animals.

Interviewer: What about bugs?

Black: Bugs maybe

Interviewer: What about China how was?

Black: China was really interesting. We got to Shanghai we left Guam you could swim in the forest. We got to China and it was snowing in December and they took us to the Race Horse Hotel one of the finest hotels down there and it's got a race course back out in the back horse racing everything all this big fine hotel. And we all got in our rooms and there was two of us to a room they put us in and a bunch wanted to go out on the town and me and another boy decided we didn't want to we were going to stay there. So we went down to the dining room and there were these big chandeliers crystal chandeliers these tables with clean white table cloths and silver real silver and everything. It was the fanciest place I ever saw and all we had to do was go in and sit down and here come the waiter with his little towel over his arm you know and took our order and brought our food. Of course we didn't have to pay anything for it but it was nice.

Interviewer: How was the food normally in camp? I was going to ask you that too what did you think of the food?

Black: Oh the food well I tell you what they said the sea rations were so bad but I gained weight eating them. We had some good cooks in the marines they could take those old instant potatoes they tasted like cooked pasteboard but they'd find some cheese or something like that and add to it and make them good it wasn't that bad. Now k-rations were just cans opened up spam and a candy bar wasn't much in them was there those k-rations.

Interviewer: Where did you go after you went to Shanghai and then?

Black: Went up to Tenzin we flew up there in a goose burg airplane and I swear that thing could flap its wings more than a buzzard. Because over the China Sea it is always rough weather anyhow and boy they'd be going I was sure glad to get up there and land. And we went we landed actually at ____ which a harbor town and then trucked into Tenzin. And we were put up in apartment buildings and it was some of the guys we were replace some that were sent back home and you had a number one boy he kept your clothes washed he shined your shoes he woke you up in the morning in time to get up he had your coffee for you. It cost you \$3.

Interviewer: How long were you there? Six months you were in apartments?

Black: Apartment building that was with the 3rd amphibious core at that time I worked at the sick officer's quarters. And then the 3rd amphibious core was sent home being at the top of the alphabet I was sent over to the first marine division at a field hospital there. I stayed with them until I came home in June.

Interviewer: How was working in the hospital?

Black: You see a little bit of everything.

Interviewer: What would you do in the hospital?

Black: Well I worked in minor surgery for a while. We did doctors showed us how there was a lot of guys that before they got out wanted to get circumcised. We did that we did minor surgeries like cists things like that.

Interviewer: I can't imagine. Wow

Black: And then they had a guy that suspected him ___ had him in isolation and me and three other guys took a rotating shift for people put in isolation. And all three of us our time we were on a list to catch a ship coming home and boy when we were in isolation the guy died isolation to see that we hadn't contracted it. And we right at the last minute they got out they rushed us down to the port as the ship was getting ready to sail put us in a little ole boat got us out there and got us on the ship on time. And we left ___ Harbor in the middle of June the 15th of June going down to ___ and pick up some more troops. Then we went down to Shanghai and I don't know what we were doing there except I think the captain just was sightseeing. But the we had to go and we were going to Hong Kong and we had to pull into Shanghai because there was a typhoon between the mainland and _____. And we waited out until it died down a little and we spent I guess it was about three days there waiting. When we sailed out of Shanghai and went down there the seas were still rough. It was so rough about everybody on there got seasick but the ship would ride up and go up like that and all of a sudden the bottom would drop out and slam down and you think the ship is was touching the bottom the screws would come out of it and go. But yeah that was a good ride we went down to Hong Kong then and spent I believe it was five days down there and then we came sailed from Hong Kong coming back to San Francisco. It was July when we got back middle of July we spent 30 days aboard that thing.

Interviewer: What did you do after you got home?

Black: Well we landed in San Francisco and went to Treasure Island there and caught a train out of Oakland and took it cross country to St. Louis and from St. Louis down to Memphis. Got discharged at Millington Naval Base over there in Illinois. Come home and they had what they called the 52/20 program. You could draw \$20 a week for 52 weeks while you were trying to get tested and I drank every bit of it. My momma had six kids and I was the black sheep but any way and when that ran out I got to thinking I'm gonna have to go to work. I said wait a minute I've got the GI Bill so I went to Cumberland University.

Interviewer: Before you left did they tell you don't do surgery on anybody?

Black: You ought to ask my kids I used to buy penicillin you used to could go to the drug store and buy penicillin and give them shots I didn't want to take them to the doctors. And a few of them still talks about it you didn't want to get sick daddy would ___ you. I've still got my field medical bag that I carry. Got forceps, sutures, scalpels and stuff they're getting a little rusty looking now. I plan to keep them.

Interviewer: What did you major in when you went to Columbia what did you do or Cumberland?

Black: Math and History.

Interviewer: Wow what did you want to do?

Black: I had a well I had well I really didn't know. I wound up with three years of Latin and three years of history, three years of math. Well before in the meantime well during that first year I was just doing nothing and drinking pretty much me and my buddy. And we had gone in we volunteered together when we went in the navy down in Chattanooga he and I got a little we had a friend that was a highway patrolman _____. He was a patrolman over in Lafayette we'd go over there he was driving we said hey you want a drink of good white lightening he said yeah come around back of the stock yard. And we

drove around there and he opened up the trunk he had some fine white lightening well we got to drinking a little bit and we decided we'd go down and join the navy reserve. Bad mistake in the meantime I think that was 46 and in 49 I got married and kindly settled down a little bit well actually I had dropped out of Cumberland for a year and went to Gupton Jones College of ___ Science. I got a degree in mortuary science. Boy what a life I've had but anyway I got married lived in a part where there wasn't no undertakers so I went back to college to teach school. And I been accepted for my student teaching was going to teach out here at Buffalo at a country school and low and behold the Korean War broke out and in November I got orders and so did my buddy. We both got orders to come on back we want you so we went back. And I went back in December of 50 to the navy and.

Interviewer: Where did you go?

Black: I was fortunate I went to York Town Virginia and I knew the boy man a little older ___ and they sent him to Korea and I took his place at the naval dispensary at York Town Virginia. And I say I was lucky a few months later he was back he had been wounded. He also got a Silver Star for it too.

Interviewer: What did you do there?

Black: I worked at the naval dispensary and mainly the sick hall and gave physicals. They had about almost I don't know how many thousand civilian workers there that's where they made the mines and torpedoes and every so often we had tug boat and we'd go out to Chesapeake Bay and practice laying mines. They wouldn't but they had to have a Core man with them in case something happened those were just the normal ___ nothing ever happened and you didn't have to do anything. And of course you would have your guys get sick and everything. In our dispensary we had I believe it was 50 beds which was a pretty good size dispensary. They called it a hospital here now we called it a dispensary. Most of the navy hospitals were hundreds of beds.

Interviewer: Did you after he came back did you the gentleman you replaced after he came back did you remain there or did you?

Black: Well he got transferred somewhere else.

Interviewer: So did you stay there throughout the

Black: I stayed there until I got out in June of 52.

Interviewer: Did you become a teacher like you had planned?

Black: No because at that time I had two kids we had two children and came back and I had to find a job I had to support a wife and two kids so. I went to work at ___ and I went I worked there until they had a layoff and they were opening Yale Tile in Gallatin and I got laid off on Friday and went to work there on Monday.

Woman in the background: Tell her what Yale and Tile was.

Black: It was a lock company they built door closures screen door closures and stuff and Yale locks. And TVA started building the steam plant there in Gallatin and I wasn't too happy they kept telling me they were going to make me a supervisor and didn't do it. So I called one morning and said I'm going to be

late and I went out to the where they were hiring for the construction for the steam plant and they would out I had been a navy core man and they wanted someone to work at the dispensary so I went for that and I got a job as a medical aid with TVA. And I worked there and then went from there to _____ broke down on stationary steam engineer I went down to New Johnsonville I went through the apprentice program and I went from there to Paducah the steam plant up in Paducah.

Interviewer: My family is from Paducah

Black: Okay and then _____ I did not like that. They started building the Ford Glass Company and I had some of the guys I had worked with in New Johnsonville come up and worked in the power house there at Ford. And we came home for Thanksgiving come home on Tuesday and on Wednesday I went down there I heard they were working down there and I went down there to see you know some of my old buddies. And got down there and one of the foreman he said you want a job? I said I don't know what's it pay he told me it was six cents an hour more than I was making at TVA. I said yeah and its home. So I came to work and went ot work at Ford in 1956 and worked there until I retired.

Interviewer: Well anything

Black: I talk too much don't I?

Interviewer: No anything else you would like to add about your experience?

Black: When I look back on it I'm glad I had it. It really wasn't all that bad. Of course I was lucky but it was a great experience and it's been a real interesting life.

Interviewer: Sounds like it.

Black: I've always enjoyed it.

Interviewer: I think that's about it.

Black: Of course he's enjoyed it more he's a whole lot older than I am.