

Interviewer: I want to thank you so much for taking the time to share your story with us. I know this will be a very significant the whole purpose of creating the set of video files from this project is to enable people years from now to be able to come back and get an idea of what life was like from people who have lived it you know and certainly that's the best source to go to. Could you start out by telling us a little bit about yourself tell us your name and

Atkins: my name is Mary Ann Atkins and I was one of the Jones girls before I married. And I am 71 will be 72 next week and I've lived here this is basically my home in this community but we have lived away from here at different times for long periods of time. But it was great to get back here.

Interviewer: Wonderful did you I guess maybe I should go ahead and jump in ask you what was life like here before the war? Before WWII began?

Atkins: Well it was just a simple country life. There was nothing to be afraid of nothing ever happened for instance I walked two miles to school by myself and you never worried about anything. That was a couple of years after my older brother had finished elementary school and before my younger brother started. But being afraid you know you just weren't afraid of anything. And you just weren't sick much we weren't everybody a in school had whooping cough at the same time so we just all went on to school you know we didn't take time to get sick. And the same thing during that time was birthday parties everybody had the whooping cough so it was a pretty noisy thing. But we were just unbelievable healthy we ate good nourishing food. I had never heard of a Coca-Cola I don't know that it had even been developed then but we didn't have junk food we ate good nourishing vegetables and fruit. And we got lots of exercise I think that kept us healthy because there were no school buses. And also I think it made the behavior in the classroom much better we worked off that energy going to school we had to save some to walk home with you know. So it sounds like the old days it was a kinder gentler life. We never had behavior problems at school in the eight years that I was elementary school. I can never remember any discipline problems if there were minor infractions that kid was kept after school and had to walk home by himself or herself which was the absolute worse punishment not to get to play with the other kids on the way home from school. And it was you know we didn't have all of these various subjects now. But I don't think anybody ever graduated from that little school that was not a good reader that couldn't do math that couldn't spell. And that was the gateway to everything else so I know the kids today know a lot more than we did learned a lot more. But we just had wonderful teachers they were from the community they knew us sometimes were related to us and if we didn't behave they knew exactly who to tell about it. You know there were just no problems. We had nothing any of us it was a very poor time. I never heard the word depression until probably I was an adult and certainly never dreamed that I lived through it because our life didn't changed here on the farm. We still had the good food and that was about all we had beforehand really.

Interviewer: That's very interesting.

Atkins: And then I read now about how terrible the depression was and I never thought about it being terrible. But I think farm families fared better than people with businesses and so forth because we still had our lively hood.

Interviewer: Now did that ring true later during the war period someone living in the city verses someone being on a farm?

Atkins: Yes we didn't see much difference where with the rationing except you couldn't get chewing gum very often. If you bought toothpaste you had to squeeze that tube and then take that metal tube back and turn it in. And we didn't have much sugar which was just a real hardship for me but other than that. Tires you couldn't get new tires my brother wrecked our car once and tore the tires up and you couldn't get anymore so daddy finally found an old car and that's what we rode in until new cars became available. But that didn't seem to be a hardship at the time you know we kids didn't drive there was nowhere to go but church and all. So all in all I just had a childhood that I would not change or exchange with anybody. And I wish all the kids had that today.

Interviewer: I think we do to. You are already giving us interesting background of you growing up on the farm here in this community and it's a beautiful community still today it's just amazing. You had mentioned in our conversation earlier about you being in school. Were you already in college by the time the war started or were you still in grade school?

Atkins: No I was in high school and that was a really patriotic time. All the guys in my graduating class had either left school or else had already signed up to go when they graduated.

Interviewer: What was that like knowing how eager those young men were to serve?

Atkins: It was just the strangest thing because we didn't even know what war was rally and I was talking to my husband the other night about he joined the Navy. Somehow he talked his parents into singing for him to go before he turned 18.

Interviewer: Really

Atkins: I couldn't believe that because he was the apple of their eye their only son they had six daughters you know. And I said why did you do that? And he said well three of my buddies and I decided that's what we wanted to do we didn't want to wait until school was out we wanted to go on. And I said oh you had friends and he said well we all joined up and the day the bus came for us they didn't show up and so he went by himself. And I said didn't you wish you were back? He said I never wished that a time. But to be you know he had never been anywhere before then and I don't know where all he went Rhode Island and one of the lakes and finally on to Hawaii and the Phillipine Islands. And but I think it was an experience he really enjoyed but I still can't imagine his mother agreeing. But it was what people did you know they really wanted to be patriotic and in this community all of the young men were farmers and they were not drafted.

Did they have some sort of farm deferment?

Atkins: Yeah guess what the main crop was tobacco. At that time that was not an evil crop that was a necessary thing to send the soldiers their cigarettes and all of that. I find that sort of amusing.

Interviewer: Well that seemed I've been told that that was a very significant thing that cigarettes were also very difficult for civilians to get because they were being sent to the soldiers.

Atkins: Yeah and we saved our grease from cooking bacon and so forth. I think they used that in making ammunition or something I believe that was right.

Interviewer: Oh that's interesting Ms. Atkins that's something brand spanking new I haven't heard that.

Atkins: And people who had any scrap iron would sell it or give it or something. I know my aunt had this most beautiful rod iron bed that I ever saw and I asked her in later years I said what happened to that bed. She said oh you know they needed that during the war. But it was the prettiest thing you know it had clusters of grapes with the leaves all twined around. Oh it would just be priceless today but she said they needed that during the war.

Interviewer: What a wonderful sacrifice she made for that.

Atkins: It was to me it seemed to be one because I thought that was the prettiest bed.

Interviewer: Wow well you've told us little bit you've been able to share with us what it was like to have the young men preparing for graduation and being enlisted in the military and the different branches. Ms. Atkins what do you recall the what you were doing and where you were when you first heard the announcement of the bombing at Pearl Harbor?

Atkins: Well then we did not have electricity our radios ran on batteries you didn't just turn them on for anything you know. I didn't know about it until the next morning when we got to school.

Interviewer: You heard it at school.

Atkins: And our principle at the high school was also my uncle and he announced that. And I don't know if he told us we didn't have to go to class but we didn't all day we were just dumb struck you know we just couldn't imagine because we never felt that we were in any danger from anything. But if they got to Hawaii you know you would think that they might fly over here and we were frankly quite scared I think and just couldn't believe it.

Interviewer: Well had your classes been studying anything I mean were you as student during this time were you aware of some things that were going on? Were you aware of the war going on in Europe and the scare of the Japanese?

Atkins: Well we knew it but it just didn't seem very close to us you know just didn't seem very close to us.

Interviewer: Well what was the reaction of you family when they got the news also?

Atkins: Well nobody could believe it just couldn't believe that this had actually happened. But as the news trickled in and we had one young man from our community in the Navy who was lost at sea.

Interviewer: That certainly brought it even more closer to home.

Atkins: It really did my mother was teaching school at the time and his mother was teaching with her. And I remember mother saying that Ms. Clara went on home that day the next morning she was back at school to teach.

Interviewer: What a dedicated lady.

Atkins: Well we didn't have many substitute teachers then you know. And there had to be a real reason for a teacher to miss school and I guess losing a son didn't rank up there with I don't know it was just an odd thing to think about.

Interviewer: Maybe that was just who she was.

Atkins: Yeah she was just a strong person.

Interviewer: That's incredible.

Atkins: Of course his body was never found or anything no a lot of closure there that we talk about so much today. I think all of the other guys in our class came back safe and sound. They were in various theatres of war but there was you know seems that we were all such kids and it was hard to imagine them going off to fight a war. It was

Interviewer: I can sit here and I can only say that I agree with what you are saying. I have no idea of imagining what that must have been like to have been a young person in that situation and certainly to be begin off to be fighting a battle and a war which you have already shared with us that was the least furthest things from your and the people around you minds at that time. Must have been very shocking.

Atkins: Now when I read about how poorly prepared the United States was to fight a war it is amazing that we won. I just can't believe that and I have a friend he is older than I am and when he went in the army they didn't have guns to drill and practice with they had something cut out of wood because they didn't have anything to use you know. Of course they got a gun before they went overseas but that just seems really strange. But I think the young men from Tennessee and the south who were used to hunting and had a knowledge of guns proved to be very good soldiers. But I would hate for us to have to go through that again.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am. Let's see you are sharing so much with us and I appreciate this. During the war after the declaration of war do you recall hearing about President Roosevelt and

Atkins: Oh yes I think that was a little more traumatic for us than the announcement of Pearl Harbor. We were just lost again we heard it at school you know after we got to school. And we didn't have classes that day we I guess were more familiar with him than any president even way back you know. And of courser even then we didn't know all this physical problem that he had we were amazed when we heard that because they covered it up pretty well.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am they did.

Atkins: That he was as ill as he was. And not too many years ago Kelly and I had to go to Callaway Gardens for a company thing. And we went to Warm Springs that was the most modest little house you ever saw Roosevelt's summer home there. Of course the pool that he exercised in and everything. And it was a whole different lifestyle from what our president's enjoy now.

Interviewer: Ms. Atkins what was it like to did you see some of the young men come back early or be discharged or whatever or maybe I should even include in closer to the end of the war. What was it like did you see changes in people that you had known?

Atkins: Yes we had one neighbor who came back he was on Ewagema he was just a basket case never got over it.

Interviewer: It was just a traumatic experience for him.

Atkins: And I'm sure there were others but that is the only one that I personally knew and it was just terrible.

Interviewer: Let's see let me think now over the period of the war you made a transition from being in high school to going to college.

Atkins: Actually it was pretty much over by the time I graduated from high school. That was in 46 you know and we hadn't recovered economically or anything like that. You know you still couldn't buy a car or any of these things that we take for granted now. And Kelly came back from the Navy about the time that I graduated from high school and the rest is history.

Interviewer: Was he a in the Navy?

Atkins: He was in the Navy and he came home on leave I guess and then had to go back for his final discharge. And he had a cousin and I had a best friend who were dating and they just knew we would be suited for each other. Nothing would do we must double date you know this was a blind date. And I probably shouldn't tell this in front of my grandchildren if they are going to see this I may not send it to them. But he proposed on our first day well you know I thought he was kidding and I said well I'll have to think about it a few minutes or something. Well he went home that night and woke his mother up and told her he had met the girl he was going to marry. I can imagine they were a little concerned about him but you know he never wavered from that purpose. So thirteen months later we were married when I finished my first year in college. And it's lasted almost 54 years so we think we're going to make it. Also I think his main goal in marriage was to embarrass me irritate me pick on me and he has carried that out to perfection. He has a marvelous sense of humor and he's irritated me.

Interviewer: Well thanks for sharing that with us. I have so many questions and I'm trying to weed them down so apologize if I have moments where I am quiet I'm really thinking. Maybe a question that I might ask would be as a young lady you've told us some of the things that were difficulties even though you've mentioned that being on a farm was certainly a lot easier than it would be for someone living in a town because you had your vegetable and livestock and things of that nature. What was it like to make the transition into the war period? It seems that what we observe today looking back it seems that everyone was part of this war effort as to what you observed as to the roles that you and your family played personally. What you did for the war effort in your own way and sacrifices that you made whether small or great.

Atkins: Well I can't think of anything really that we did. We made sandwiches to send to the USO and all and a lot of the girls in this area found their husbands there. I was really young to be looking for a husband at that time but that was an interesting thing to do. I always remember when we were riding anywhere daddy would stop and pick up every soldier there were always at least two and now a days I don't know that you would do that. And it didn't matter that we had to sit in each other's laps in the back seat you know you just didn't pass a soldier you know. And none of them had cars just none of them had cars. And I always think of that and to this day it is hard for me to pass anybody without wanting to pick them up I don't do it but that was just something that you didn't do was pass a soldier

up. And I'm sure other people felt the same way about it you know. And if we met some sometimes we would invite them to come out and eat with us things like that.

Interviewer: What a wonderful hospitable thing to share.

Atkins: And one in particular that came to our house several times I liked him pretty much. And he would go to church with us on Sunday morning and we were a little country church we sing slowly slowly well he was hot piano player and he would get up there and just play and play and play and we were just gasping for breath we couldn't keep up. I know the people thought that was a strange thing in our church that jazzy music. And he came back from the war safely too I corresponded with him some after he got back. These guys were lonesome lonesome lonesome.

Interviewer: And they were from all over too weren't they?

Atkins: Yeah

Interviewer: Far away from home.

Atkins: And that was before they had any housing at Fort Campbell there were no families you know. But a little bit later on after Fort Campbell well it was Camp Campbell then got to be a thing and the soldiers started bringing their wives. So they had a thing in the paper the USO begging people if they had a spare bedroom they had no accommodations to call and they would assign a couple to us. Well we decided to that was something we could do we lived in town by then and we had two small children. So this couple came and they were from Buffalo New York and we just hit it off great you know just enjoyed them so much and they were newlyweds. And they just spoiled our kids rotten you know and over these years we corresponded it's been 52 years now. Well this last year I knew that he had had a heart attack and died and I had a call from her and she said I am coming to see you. She had always said I'm coming to Tennessee again before I die so we were so excited. And she and her sister and her husband came down of course Clarksville was just sort of a wide place in the road when they were here. She just was dumbfounded we drove all over you know and back by the house where we lived and one that they later rented they weren't with us too long they were able to get a house. And of course we had had the tornado and she just couldn't believe all of this damage because of course she was familiar with all of those places. We just had the best visit so we carried them to the catfish house and showed them what southern cooking was like. They fell in love with that too you know so I'm looking forward to another visit from her that was just so pleasant.

Interviewer: When we were talking earlier you mentioned Camp Campbell and the coming of the soldiers and the transitions from them being just here and being alone to the coming of their families and later on to housing. What was it like to have grown up here in this area and see Clarksville transition from as you lovingly and joking said a wide spot in the rode to a town that supported a military instillation.

Atkins: They must have found it the most boring place in the world because we had nothing for them to do except to go to the picture show. And they came in droves to the picture show and just walked up and down the street you know that was on Saturdays weekends you could hardly stir on the streets. Just soldiers and the country people too they all went to town on Saturday they also had the USO to go to and a lot of them did but of course there wasn't room for all of them. And at that time Dunbar Cave was really a swinging place and they loved to go out there and just dance. You know some of them were just

such good jitter buggers they were great. And all of us young people would go out there and I think now what a safe place that was you could walk all over that area in the dark never have to worry about a thing. There was never a sign that anybody was drinking no fight no nothing just a good fun place to be. And of course no air-conditioning anywhere else and that was wonderful during the summertime. That was wonderful and we had big name bands too that came down. It was real funny when we moved to Memphis the doctor that I chose was an older man and I forgot what was wrong with me but when I told him I was from Clarksville oh you know about Dunbar Cave. He said when I was in medical school at Vanderbilt he went down there well I never got to tell him what hurt. Every time I ever went to see him he had to relive the Dunbar Cave bent. Evidently that was really a big thing when they were medical students over at Vanderbilt. But it was a great place and I hope they are going to do something good with it. It has such potential you know to really be a tourist attraction if that's what you want but it was just a great place. Families would take their picnic supper out there when hot summer time and sit there in that cool cave to eat. It was just great it really was.

Interviewer: Well that really gave the soldiers the young GIs to be around families the young people and their families. Was that really reinforcing to them and maybe made their stay a little easier?

Atkins: I'm sure it did to have a fun place to go to. We just had nothing very few restaurants and I'm not sure they could have afforded to eat in them you know on a GIs pay.

Interviewer: Well you mentioned that your father would stop and you wouldn't let too many of them be passed by at all that you'd usually pick them up when you would see soldiers on the road. I guess that would be the only way they could get to another town was to hitchhike.

Atkins: Yeah hitchhike I don't know that we had any buses you know to amount to anything. But that was the way they got around.

Interviewer: I think that is really interesting I know that our future viewers will appreciate knowing you know the hospitality that you mentioned and how the young gentlemen would be invited into homes and just be invited to have dinner. And like you said the young man that went to church with you I just think that is such a wonderful welcoming. I think that we certainly don't see so much of today

Atkins: Sadly

Interviewer: Well earlier when we were talking you mentioned all the things you mentioned some of the things that were rationed. Just how difficult was life as far as having the rations and did you this is probably well I've got to ask this question. You mentioned the gum did you and some of the other young people find ways of I've heard rumors that there were stores that you could still purchase things that weren't

Atkins. Well we had a little country store up here on the highway where we got off the school bus after we were in high school. And we would hit the front door you got any gun you got any candy. Well they rarely had any candy except this pink and white stripped bar which had coconut and it was gross. That was all you could get so we ate that candy I don't know if it even had a name or not. But we weren't that big on Cokes at the time you know we never had that much experience drinking Coca-Cola. But we couldn't get pineapple much and we happened to like pineapple. And of course the sugar was the only thing that hurt because mother made deserts every day and we had to sort of cut back on that. And of course coffee but we kids didn't drink that so that didn't matter that much. But you know it really wasn't

hard. Nylon hose were almost impossible to get and if we heard a store had them you know we would have to go get some of those. Sometimes the soldiers could get them I don't know exactly how for a girlfriend or something but now the gas rationing was a little rougher. Of course we didn't go much anyway I suppose farm people just got by easier than anybody.

Interviewer: Did you have friends and acquaintances that served in different ways in the civilian part of the war effort?

Atkins: When they were building Fort Campbell any carpenter anywhere around worked there. Plus they came from all over and had nowhere to stay so I knew families near Fort Campbell who took them in they boarded them you know. I had an aunt who had several and we were a backward town we had nothing and somehow they got Fort Campbell built. I always felt so sorry for the people that had to give up their land. Farms that had been in their families for generations and some of them had lovely homes and you just had to give them up. And I don't remember anybody refusing or holding out for more money or anything they just you did this if your country was gonna be at war. But I know it was difficult.

Interviewer: So you saw many different forms of and when I use the word sacrifice it doesn't necessarily have to mean a negative thing. But so many different people gave and such as the people you were talking about that would give their land in order for the military instillation to be created. What was it like did you see a boom in Clarksville right as the camp changed to a fort and with the coming of more and more soldiers with their families?

Atkins: There had to have been a building boom I personally didn't know much about it. They did have housing for the GIs on base and this friend of mine he came down from Buffalo could not believe how nice they were now compared to what they had when she, she didn't actually live in them but she knew what they looked like. But when the GIs came back and could get the government loans we started having the subdivisions and houses and things.

Interviewer: Well I just noticed something on the sheet here that has to do with a question I haven't asked you in any form and that's I don't know how to phrase this question. It has to do with being a young woman what it was like during this period of the latter stages of the war and seeing Fort Campbell growing. And you making the transition of going to school and getting married. What I guess what I'm trying to find out is what would you define a woman's role during this time?

Atkins: Well most of us were just had a goal to be homemakers and mothers. And that goal has stayed with me my entire life. But a lot of the others have gone to work you know. In fact there was 7 of us girls we were best friends during high school if one spent the night all of us would go in a group you know. And I don't know how our parents stood it but they did not object we just always ran as a crowd. And after the guys left you know there were all of us to go places and do things. And you know all of them did go to work after they got out of school I didn't you know and I didn't have to. We could have had more things but I learned then that you know where I would rather be was home. This has been very fulfilling for me. Now I tell them I said all you worked and you didn't and now I am the only one who has a husband left. They have all had heart attacks or cancer or something and died. And that's sad it really is.

Interviewer: What were some of the sorts of jobs that they took that your friends took.

Atkins: Oh one of my friends was a dental assistant. She didn't go to college but this dentist that we knew hired her to work there for years. Another one was worked for the board of education as a librarian she wasn't an aid but she wasn't the head librarian she worked there. And then one had a kindergarten in her home this was before we had public kindergartens did that for many years and then she opened a florist shop. And then one went to secretarial school and went to Washington DC she worked at the Pentagon there. Incidentally she lived across the road from me after we built here and she died a few years ago of diabetes and complications. And then one also went to secretarial school and she was in the admissions office for a college so and then one she and her husband had a business and she worked there. I was just lazy. But no I always felt a little guilty that I was not helping my husband make a living but we survived you know just fine. We might not have had all of our wants but we had all of our needs.

Interviewer: Well thank you for sharing with us about your friends and about them being ladies that got out and got into the working force during that time. It seems to me that is a transition in our history in our country where women did leave the home place and they went out and began not only working in the home but began working outside the home also.

Atkins: Well my mother was a school teacher and her brother and all of her sisters everybody assumed that I would want to be a school teacher but that just never interested me at all. So I was used to the idea of women getting out and working I just didn't want to do it you know.

Interviewer: Well what was it like Ms. Atkins since a lot of what we talked about is what was happening during the latter part of the war and your experiences during that time. What was it like when well maybe I should back up you know I don't know how much information was shared about the invasion of Europe. But I was wondering if you could share some thoughts with me on when your recollection of when you heard the American's had gone into France and the invasion and then you might share with us about that. And possible what your feelings were and your family when you heard that there was victory in Europe in 45.

Atkins: Well before the days of television we didn't see all of this about the war and I remember one of the worse things to me was thinking about the children in London being sent to the countryside to live during the war. And people spending the night underground in the bomb shelters that was just the most horrible thing to contemplate children being sent away. And what we heard of the war in Germany and all of that was just horrible but we didn't see pictures of it you know so we just heard about it. And I know when I guess we were just taking precautions or maybe there was a danger that we would be bombed and would have blackouts along the eastern coast. And I know the planes from Fort Campbell that flew over were all black. They were the grimmest looking things and I could hardly stand to look. And you know I thought is this our plane or what you know no red, white and blue everywhere. And I don't know where they had come from but you know they did fly over quite a bit. And every time I would hear a plane way high there was a peculiar sort of a wine and you know I would stop and think now what it this. And it was scurry probably no basis for being scared but it was just all so foreign to us. And if we would have heard about the Holocaust them I guess we would have been ruined.

Interviewer: So was there certainly a concern in the community by your fellow neighbors that when you did hear

Atkins: We didn't talk about it I may have been the only one. But you know we weren't used to seeing the airplanes much and they were little twin engine things if we did. But these big old rookie airplanes they were scary looking they really were. So I believe it's good we didn't have television then.

Interviewer: Well did you have a lot of communication in the community with like for example at church was that a hub where people would share stories and letters that they had gotten and things like that?

Atkins: I think so I think there was quite a bit because after church was visitation time we stood around for an hour or so just visiting with the neighbors. And I'm sure this had to have been a subject. We didn't have anybody in our family but I'm sure it was.

Interviewer: Well was there a lot of I asked in a previous interview about this and I'm just curious I'd like to ask you. If some of the time of a lot of the time in church services during this period were spent with the congregation and the pastor in prayer towards the war and the safety and

Atkins: That was always mentioned. Although we might not have had any that we knew personally it was a personal thing for us. And I know that gold star mothers you know had their gold star and it was displayed. And the ladies we didn't do it out here in the country but the ones in town rolled bandages and did all of these kinds of things for the Red Cross. I don't know how sanitary they were you know but they did I guess this was the Red Cross auxiliary that did that. But they did roll bandages and things like that.

Interviewer: It sounds like there was a lot of different people doing a lot of different things and making contributions to the war effort. I think probably some we can't even imagine and so you're shedding more light on those things.

Atkins: Well I don't know if Lynn mentioned out older people's group got together a book and in fact that's why he wanted me to be interviewed because of the story I put in there. But there was one woman who was considerably older and she said I was Rosie the Riveter. She went to Nashville to work on airplanes now this I could hardly believe it I had never known that about her although I have known her quite well that had never been mentioned before. And she went to I guess it was Vol T was the airplane company in Nashville and worked on those airplanes.

Interviewer: That is amazing sounds like she was indeed she fix the description of Rosie.

Atkins: Yeah that was

Interviewer: And this is someone that you met.

Atkins: Oh I have known here all of my life. Just not because she was a little older than I am and I never knew this about her because I was busy in school I guess when she went there.

Interviewer: That's fascinating. I bet she shared some interesting stories.

Atkins: Yeah since then you know we ask her about things. Because when she wrote this she was really crippled with arthritis and in a wheel chair. She since has had a lot of surgery and is walking but the idea of her climbing up in an airplane and riveting things you know is just amazing. It really was.

Interviewer: Well you mentioned the book what is your story in there?

Atkins: I'll let you read it, it is so dumb and my best friend said where was I when this happened. And I said you were sitting on the other side of me. She said how did you never mention that? I said it sounded so silly. I'm not going to tell it.

Interviewer: You're going to make me read the book?

Atkins: You're going to have to read it.

Interviewer: That's fine I thought I would ask just in case. Well I'm being reminded that I need to be sure and ask what it was like because I kind of made a convoluted question earlier and I was wondering what it was like for you and your family and friends when you found out about the war being over in Europe. What was that like?

Atkins: Well I think we stayed all night on the streets of Clarksville rejoicing. And of course when I started to Austin Peay the guys who were in the Army or Navy were just getting back and they outnumbered the women about three to one. Because Uncle Sam was sending them to school you know and they were fun you know they forgot about the war. But the odd thing was of course there weren't many students there then but nobody had a car. No parking problems like you find now but maybe just one or two cars on campus that was it. It was a different place then. We tried to help the GIs with their homework. And one day Dean Woodard was our Literature teacher in English teacher and so forth and there was this one guy that I did help. And he said Ms. Jones Mr. Morrison's paper sounds like you might have written it. I said well I helped a little bit he just laughed. And then after we married we lived down the street from him and his wife and I was collecting for some charity or something. And he said Ms. Jones do you remember I said yes sir. You know we felt sorry for these guys they had missed out on school and everything else we did sort of help them get through. But I didn't realize that I had a distinctive style of writing you know.

Interviewer: He recognized it.

Atkins: Anyway they got by they could have gotten by without any help because nobody was very hard on these guys.

Interviewer: They had certainly put in an awful lot of effort prior to coming to school hadn't they?

Atkins: Oh they had. It's amazing they could come in and sit down in a classroom all day.

Interviewer: Did any of them ever share any stories or anything in the classes? Was that pretty much something that was kept quiet?

Atkins: I guess they just didn't want to talk about it. I don't know what they had been through or anything. But they just never talked about where they had been what they had done or what they had seen.

Interviewer: I thought about sneaking back in and seeing if I could get you to share about that story but I'm not going to I'll wait and I'm sorry I'm just doing that to share some humor but. I guess what I would like to ask now is to you mentioned your husband and you meeting when he came back from the Navy I

guess he was being discharged from the Navy after his service time. What was the period of time that he was in the United States navy?

Atkins: I think it was only about a year and half.

Interviewer: And it was towards and was it in 45 or

Atkins: Let's see he came back the last part of 46 he was getting out. He says that when the Japanese heard he had joined the Navy they just gave up. I don't know if that's really true or not but that's what he says.

Interviewer: I can't wait to talk to him.

Atkins: Oh me I don't think you need to talk to both of us. But he was in the Philippines and there were still Japs hiding in the mountains and you know it wasn't the war wasn't just over right there. Man a PT boat or something it sounded bad to me because I had not heard anything from anyone in the Navy didn't correspond with anybody didn't know anything about it.

Interviewer: What brought him to this area was he from this area?

Atkins: Yeah he lived in Clarksville we had just never met you know.

Interviewer: Well I'm moved to say thank you so very much I really appreciate you taking the time to share with me your story just to find out a little bit about what it was like to be a girl growing up in this area in a country community just outside of Clarksville. And to see the coming of the Fort and all of the soldiers and your experiences that you've shared with us and I just want to say thank you and let you know we really appreciate you sharing your story with us.

Atkins: Well you're quite welcome. One of the funny things I must tell you the soldiers used to come out and bidwhack you know on the farms around. Well naturally we all went and watched them you know. I don't know if they objected to that or not but that was fascinating to us and they did that quite often.

Interviewer: So that was common that they would be out in the country around doing their maneuvers and bid whacking.

Atkins: We never heard any firing I don't know what they were doing out maybe just learning how to put up a tent and set up camp I don't know. But we would go and watch all of us kids.

Interviewer: Well thanks for sharing that. That was something I started to ask you earlier if you had seen any local activity like that because I had been told by different people that they were all over the place during that time training.

Atkins: Yeah just about a mile from here on another road was a favorite place for them in an open field there. And it didn't take us long to get up there to check on it.

Interviewer: Ms. Atkins thanks for having us and for sharing.

Atkins: Well you're just welcome.