

Interviewer: We are here today with Ms. Martha Cogburn and Ms. Cogburn when were you born?

Cogburn: I was born in 1925 in Montgomery County Clarksville at 1443 Golf Club Lane but that time that was route 2 Clarksville.

Interviewer: And you would have been a small child or youngster during the great depression is that right?

Cogburn: Well I the only thing I remember is that my daddy was working at Miracord which was a division of the agricultural experiment station at the University of Tennessee. And he was transferred to Knoxville and I must have been about four years old at the time three and a half or four. And the great depression came and my father was a person that paid everything by check his line of work was discontinued by the government and he had no job. Everything we had was in the bank and the bank went broke or something during the depression and every bit of his money was tied up which it took him years and years and years to get. He never did get all of it as a consequence we moved back to Clarksville to the home place and I went to first grade school in Knoxville. I remember coming to Howell school in the second grade.

Interviewer: Did you happen to know anybody that was long term employed or in that span of time the great depression leading up to WWII was there anybody that just simply could not find a job?

Cogburn: Oh yes my daddy had a terrible job and my daddy was a graduate of MTSU now but it was Middle State University I don't really know the correct name of it but he was in fact he taught school in a one room school house I remember him telling us about that. And it was hard it was very hard my daddy worked very hard uncommon jobs to him because the world situation. There were no jobs and everybody was having a hard time. We were lucky though we had grandmother and grandfathers place and we were kind of self sustained. We had a cow for our milk we had a hen house we had chickens and we had one pig that was harvested every fall. And then we had quite a bit of land there and daddy had two full gardens that kept us going.

Interviewer: Did you know of anybody or did your father himself take advantage of any of the New Deal Programs that Roosevelt put in place?

Cogburn: No I remember talking about it but I remember daddy got so desperate to work and to help he mother would talk about it tearfully how he went to work one morning and was there a WPA back then? And he was I think mother said he made a dollar a day and she just couldn't stand that and she wouldn't let him go back anymore. I've heard her tell that story so many times but he was a car salesman and he was a night watchman over at Di Nobili cigar factory here. And of course I think he finally got some of his retirement that helped out and of course us girls kind of helped out too when we got of age. They had the home place and that was the main thing.

Interviewer: How did your father or your family in general feel about President Roosevelt? Did you have any strong opinions about him?

Cogburn: Oh yes my daddy was a very strong democrat very strong democrat. And he wasn't too fond of his wife but we won't go into that.

With everything going on during that time did your family pay attention to what was going on overseas with the Nazis or the Japanese?

Cogburn: I didn't I was too young. I'm sure my father did because he loved to read and as long as he was listening to local or international news on the radio or reading he was happy. Of course being the school teacher he was he was a book worm.

Interviewer: Did you find it surprising or did the vast majority of the people you knew find it surprising when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor?

Cogburn: Oh yes oh yes oh yes what year was that?

Interviewer: It was 1941.

Cogburn: I was well I graduated from Clarksville High School in 1942 oh yes.

Interviewer: Did you ever did anyone ever imagine we would be at war with Japan or Germany?

Cogburn: No no no no and my husband who was Thomas Seay Jr. I think we graduated in the last of May and he volunteered to go into service and that was the year of 42 1942. He first went in the Merchant Marines and didn't like that and disenrollment in that and got into the Navy and of course that's where he was when the war was over.

Interviewer: Did the vast majority of young men that you knew at that time enlist to go overseas?

Cogburn: Oh yes practically our whole senior class. I remember a group of us went to the bus station to put them on a bus. They thought they were going to Saint Petersburg Florida is there a Petersburg? Yeh where it was nice and sunny and so forth and they ended up being taken to New York and there was a base of about 200 service people there. And that was in Sheepskin Bay Brooklyn New York. And he was very lucky he was alerted to go overseas about six or eight times but for some reason he was lucky and never got out of the New York Harbor. He was there on the base and we lived in Sheepskin Bay for three or four years. When he was alerted or quarantined to go overseas why I would come home and about the time I got a job everything settled why we're not going come back. So I would catch the next train and go back but they were good days and they were hard days but it was good too. Of course it wasn't good in the reality of war and everything but it was good that you could be together at those times. I found work up there I worked at Brooklyn Trust Company on Avenue J in Brooklyn and then we came home on leave for Christmas and his parents had bought a new farm and it was bad and he wanted us to see it that farm. And we got the ole work horse and I fell off the horse and broke y collar bone and didn't have a job to go back to it took me so long to recover. Then I worked at base hospital there in Sheepskin Bay I qualified I mean I applied as a secretary and I ended up doing electrocardiograms and most everything else somebody in the medical world would do, I learned the hard way.

Interviewer: So we you and your family actively involved in the war effort what specific jobs did you happen to do during that time?

Cogburn: No not that I know of my sister was secretary to the president out at B.F. Goodrich and one of the times that I had come home and Tommy was alerted to go overseas I went and applied for a job at B.F. Goodrich. And they had given part of their warehouse to Chemical Warfare they did not make gas masks here but they assembled them. And they had quite a big warehouse and it was quite busy I can remember my superior Captain Burkseth very nice man that was head of it here. The only thing I disliked about him he loved a cigar and he would chew on it incisively when I was taking dictation from him but he was a very fine fellow. But I didn't work there but about seven or eight months then I went back to New York. But I really don't know how long they stayed with B.F. Goodrich or whatever but that was my experience working there. And I remember what the gas mask looked like but as far as having any contact with the people that were assembling them I didn't have.

Interviewer: Do you remember how much you were paid at B.F. Goodrich was it a decent wage or did you find it lacking?

Cogburn: I don't remember there but I remember at this commercial bank that I worked at in Brooklyn the name of it was Brooklyn Trust Company I made 27 dollars and a half a week. And I thought everybody thought that was a good salary way back then but my goodness some people make twice that an hour now.

Interviewer: Did most of the young women and wives who were left behind were they parts of the war effort that you knew of?

Cogburn: No not really I'm not familiar with them some of them might have. When we graduated from high school and the war was so chaotic all of our friend's relatives and whatever were going in different directions. But everybody was doing their cause and I can remember I must have been 7, 8, 9, 10 years old we saved you remember the well I guess it still does the chewing gum that was wrapped in foil?

Interviewer: Yes

Cogburn: Oh we were told to save that then you would take it somewhere and donate it for the war effort. I remember I had a ball about well a little bigger than a baseball I was so proud of it. That particular day I had the biggest ball of aluminum foil or whatever they called it back then. But everybody was doing their part.

Interviewer: Were you impacted very much by the rationing?

Cogburn: Well I guess I was very lucky they were as I said we lived there in Sheepskin Bay and there were little groceries in what am I trying to say food market and produce whatever where you'd go by maybe to buy two or three potatoes with your rationing. And there was one ole fellow that was Italian was especially nice to all of us service people and I'd order two potatoes and I'd get home and I would have four. And the same with shoe rationing of course everybody wore high hills to work and everything back in those days I had one pair of brown suede shoes that were very comfortable and I wore them

very often . And I had this shoe maker shop there or this shoe shop and this ole fellow I remember taking them in there to be half soled and the fourth time I took them in there he said honey there is nothing to half sole on this shoe. You're going to have to get you a new pair of shoes and I he said do you have a shoe ration and I said no sir I don't he said now you do mums the word and I remember that very clearly. I that was the fourth time I had taken that pair of shoes back to be resoled I'd worn them out because no body had cars back then. It was subway, buses or walk mostly.

Interviewer: Do you remember much about the neighborhoods holding scrap metal drives and aluminum drives and rubber drives?

Cogburn: No I sure don't.

Interviewer: Do you remember the stars that some neighborhoods the houses if they had a service member who was in the military they would out a gold star or a blue star.

Cogburn: That's right right they were very common all over town in fact you could not hardly go down the street and find a house that didn't have a star in the window of some sort.

Interviewer: Were you affected at all directly by any losses overseas?

Cogburn: No well my husband was an only child and I had two sisters and they were not connected with the war effort at all. Although not too long after the war my brother in law married to my youngest sister worked at the arsenal in Alabama in Huntsville and he was an engineer. And retired from IBM having worked for them they are living in Concord North Carolina now. That was we were kind of a small family.

Interviewer: Do you remember how you got your news back then did you listen to the radio

Cogburn: Oh yes

Interviewer: All the time or was it pretty much newspapers?

Cogburn: That desk over there in the corner was a floor radio and my mother was very frugal she could imagine and make anything out of nothing. And that was the radio and she took it down to Young's Antiques on 6th Street and had them make a desk out of it. And when Mom and Dad died I became the air of that and I'm very proud of it. But I can remember sitting on the floor waiting for Jack Benny for the JELLO program. Did you ever hear of that?

Interviewer: No

Cogburn: Oh it was quite popular and they had a few Amos and Andy. And I was little but I remember it we would always fight for the closest place to the radio. We sat and listened to it oh I don't mean fight but we always scurried to get the best seat.

Interviewee: As the war progressed did you feel a close tie to President Roosevelt did you really look to him for guidance and leadership or did your opinion of him change?

Cogburn: No I really had a I mean I always had a nice feeling about him his relationship with the people I thought he was doing his best and he had a big mess to pull us out of and did it very successfully.

Interviewer: When he passed away what were your feelings then and how did you feel about Truman stepping up to the presidency?

Cogburn: I really didn't know too much about him except he was a very opinionated person very sharply spoken sometimes. But he did a good job I don't know that I could have bombed but he I guess he thought it was for the best.

Interviewer: How did you feel on VE-Day when victory was announced in Europe?

Cogburn: Very happy very happy. Oh it was a circus in New York bells were ringing and everybody out in the streets it was very festive a very happy day that we long awaited for.

Interviewer: And were your feeling similar on VJ-Day? When they announced that the war was officially over and Japan had surrendered?

Cogburn: Yeh yeh yeh very much so.

Interviewer: You mentioned the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki the atomic bomb how did you receive news of that? When did you find out that the United States had done that?

Cogburn: Well I really don't know I guess by radio or newspaper.

Interviewer: Did it really impact you did it

Cogburn: Not at first because we didn't realize what all had happened. We didn't know the horrible part of it that the people was suffering and so forth.

Interviewer: Was there anytime during the span of the war did you know of anybody whose loyalty may have been borderline may have had German or Japanese sympathies?

Cogburn: No no no it was a different era a different age and a different attitude in those days it really was. Your country more or less came number one everybody treated it that way. And from what I remember everybody was just anxious for the war to get over because there was so many boys that died. Then you know they had the draft then and my husband volunteered and but I remember the conscious objectives. I couldn't understand and I didn't really know any of them personally but I wasn't in favor of it.

Interviewer: Did not of the young men that you knew did they volunteer

Cogburn: Yes yes practically the whole senior class. There was an article in the paper about it but of course they were just at the right age right before being drafted or I think the age was 18 then I'm not real sure. Then we were all 17, 18 years old when we graduated. Clarksville was real different then we had one high school which is now Greenwood Apartments. And that was the only county and city high school around and then Howell School which is no longer it's on Franklin Street right across from Heitts

Florist there that just they I think the tornado took most of the school down and they never built it back it's just a vacant lot now. But that was the only school in the city of Clarksville then. Clarksville population was around 9,500 at that time can you believe? I remember and there were no school buses I walked two miles to school to Howell School I walked two miles back and when I was 11 I remember my birthday and I came home and mother wanted me to go look under the back porch steps. And I said what for well just go look and I had a bicycle and oh I was so proud of that bicycle I rode my bicycle to school and back until I got to high school. Then I rode with the neighborhood kids and I can remember mother would run out of thread or need some piece of material and of course there was no place in town to my mother of course McNeal and Edwards which is part of I don't know what now on Franklin Street next to the corner there. But she would say Martha hop on your bicycle and she'd give me a spool of thread and get me spool of thread like this and I want you back here in 30 or 40 minutes. And I'd say yes ma'm and I'd part my bicycle in front of McNeal and Edwards and run in and get it take it back home.

Interviewer: Would you say that the quality of life in Clarksville improved after the war?

Cogburn: Yes yes slowly but certainly much for the better. Well you know we were poor but we didn't know we were poor with so much love and understanding. Like I said we had mother was so talented she sewed for us and of course the church was very important in our life. We were there just about every time the church doors opened we went to First Christian Church and I'm still a member of that church. But they were happy days we didn't know how poor we were I guess mother and daddy did all the worrying for us. But they were good days and we didn't lack for anything material wise or love wise either.

Interviewer: Was the church pretty active in supporting the war?

Cogburn: Oh yes yes yes

Interviewer: How did people feel about Germany did they feel that we were at war with Hitler and the Nazis or the German people in general?

Cogburn: Well I don't know about anybody else but myself but I found it hard after the war well my husband and I he got out of the service in 46 and we bought the Plaza Grill later the Plaza Restaurant and now it's the Cumberland Grille down there on Madison. And our children I have boy and a girl Dickey Seay and Janet Seay Mosley and they were in diapers when we bought that place it was June 7, 1947. And Tommy had a heart condition and he had an aneurism directly to his heart and died in 67 so I went on with it for awhile. Twelve years later I remarried and we I think I was married 12 years and he had lung cancer and died I sold the Plaza in 94 and retired. But I didn't like it and worked I've been working as a receptionist over at the Salvation Army for 7 or 8 years I work four hours a day five hours a day Monday through Friday 20 hours a week is all I work. Get's me out of the house and I like it seeing people and so forth.

Interviewer: During that time during the war I know a lot of celebrities at that time and some of the names such as General Patton or Eisenhower, MacArthur they would come to the home front and make

speeches drive support for the war effort. Did you ever happen to see any celebrities or meet any or go to any of the rallies?

Cogburn: No I can remember I was in the kitchen at the restaurant one day and this has nothing to do with the war but Danny Thomas was sitting out front eating and that was about the only and Elvis Presley stopped at the gas station next door one time in route to Memphis or somewhere and back. And Danny Thomas had been taping a show in Nashville for Kraft he was very nice he liked our homemade yeast rolls. And I think he took a couple of those back with him. My purpose I got off way off talking to you awhile ago my purpose in telling you the restaurant and so forth I remember that when Fort Campbell was Camp Campbell at first and then Fort Campbell was very active out here. And I would need waitresses and everybody was unstable and they would turn over very quickly seemed like I was always needing help and I hired a bunch of well not a bunch but several German wives of our soldiers. And I found out real quick I had to go talk to myself about my feeling but I got over it I think I was no exception everybody felt kind of ill toward Germany. Of course they had nothing to do with what Hitler did they was victims of circumstances. And once I finally realized that it was okay.

Interviewer: Well looking back on the war years do you think that it was a great time to have been alive a truly unique time to have been alive?

Cogburn: Oh yes

Interviewer: Are you very proud of your

Cogburn: Yes yes yes I remember being in Time Square New Years Eve God forbid I never want to go back. It's a wonder we hadn't gotten crushed but it was quite an experience. I did and saw things that I never would have seen before Radio City Music Hall and all of those places. Of course we went back a couple of times after we got out of service and things had changed so much. We could ride I rode I remember my first trip to New York. Tommy said now if you get lost just ask the conductor and anyway I rode from Sheepskin Bay to Time Square the fare was a nickel. And they had express and local and I didn't know the difference or didn't think about it well I rode down there on the local and I saw Sheepskin Bay so I got on it going back. I ended up at Coney Island because it was the express well two hours later I finally decided I better ask somebody. And the man was so nice he said honey your getting on the express you need to get on the local. I said I'm been on this train all day going back and forth. But the transportation was so cheap but a nickel was a nickel back then believe me. I don't know what it is now but I bet its well over a dollar it has to be maybe more I have no idea.

Interviewer: Several people such as yourself who have lived during that time they express sort of a psychic well being just an overall good feeling after ten years of depression and then the war and then after the war concluded everybody seemed to have had a job the quality of life seemed to have improved.

Cogburn: Yeh right

Interviewer: Did you kind of feel there was a unity America had that?

Cogburn: Yes yes yes very close bond between everybody. I don't remember took much about well I do I had no feelings about the depression because I guess I was too young when I realized you know the seriousness of it and whatever. After I got what 12, 15 years old why I well if you heard the stories or you realized the stories of what your family went through or the sacrifices your mother and father made for you like I say we were poor but we didn't know it. We had everything everybody else had and they didn't dwell on it. I know they were very hard times for my mother and dad. Mother I don't think mother ever really got over it she had just been through one level of quality of life back to having to just take and do what you had to do with. But she did a wonderful job of it like I say we didn't know the difference so it was a happy life for us.

Interviewer: Well if you have nothing else to say anything you want to contribute to the interview I'm all out of questions so

Cogburn: Okay

Interviewer: If there's nothing else you'd like to say we'll go ahead and conclude it.

Cogburn: Well I was glad to do it and I appreciate I had no idea what it would be like.

Interviewer: Well I thank you very much for allowing me to do this.

Cogburn: Well you're very welcome glad to be of help I hope in some small way I have helped I don't know whether I have or not but I did all I could do.

Interviewer: Well I appreciate it and I know Austin Peay appreciates it thank you.

Cogburn: Well we love Austin Peay we graduated both of my granddaughters and my son I think went over there three years and went into business. And my daughter got married and moved out of town and she went to business school. But we were now there again she was (tape ended).