

Faxton Bell

Interviewer: This is Rick Burr the date is November 16, 2006. I'm here with Mr. Bell in Clarksville, Tennessee Mr. Bell go ahead and state your full name for me please.

Mr. Bell: Faxton Bell

Interviewer: Faxton Bell where were you born at Mr. Bell?

Mr. Bell: Stewart County.

Interviewer: Stewart County and what branch of the service did you serve in?

Mr. Bell: Quarter Master Service Tech.

Interviewer: For the Army?

Mr. Bell: Yeh for the Army.

Interviewer: Okay and you said Quarter Master.

Mr. Bell: Yeh

Interviewer: Okay your parent's names what were they?

Mr. Bell: My parent's names Laurence Ellis and Lula Bell.

Interviewer: Okay and let's see do you have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Bell: Yeh I've got one brother.

Interviewer: One brother.

Mr. Bell: But I don't know where he's at he was in the Army but I don't know where at had one brother.

Interviewer: He was in WWII also?

Mr. Bell: No I don't know I forget now what he was in it's been a long time ago.

Interviewer: Okay

Mr. Bell: I went to see him one time but I when he was up in Kentucky in Kentucky.

Interviewer: Okay you said you were raised in Houston County is that right?

Mr. Bell: Yeh I was raised down there at Cumberland City.

Woman in the background: Stewart County

Mr. Bell: Stewart County

Interviewer: Okay you were raised in Stewart County then?

Mr. Bell: Yeh

Interviewer: Okay alright tell me a little bit about growing up there in Houston County you guys live on a farm was it a urban area?

Mr. Bell: I worked for a worked on a farm all my life.

Interviewer: Did you own the farm?

Mr. Bell: Huh

Interviewer: Did your parents own the farm that you worked on growing up?

Mr. Bell: No white folks owned the farm.

Interviewer: Really

Mr. Bell: I worked for whites all the time.

Interviewer: Really

Mr. Bell: My parents didn't own no farm they just had a little farm a little house up by the grocery up there. See I worked with whites all the time see I worked on the farm with white folks all the time yeh.

Interviewer: Okay your parents also did they work for white farmers up there?

Mr. Bell: Mother my mother washed and ironed for different ones you know like families go around in the country and wash and iron for people. Yeh my mother did.

Interviewer: Okay you remember much about the great depression?

Mr. Bell: Yeh when I worked for a quarter a day I ought to.

Interviewer: What did you do for a quarter a day?

Mr. Bell: Yeh I worked for a quarter a day plowing with a mule for a quarter a day. That's right

Interviewer: During the great depression huh?

Mr. Bell: Yes sir re and I'd take fifty cents and I'd go to the store and buy more than I could tout. Okay I was come up in them a dime fifteen cents worth and a quarter and half a quarter what a half a dollar was see money was money when I come up hon see I worked for white people and money was money that's right when I come up. See it all amount to something then you see.

Interviewer: How old were you would you say when you were plowing the farms and stuff?

Mr. Bell: Twelve and fourteen years old.

Interviewer: You started right at twelve years old?

Mr. Bell: There about that's right.

Interviewer: You remember you remember when Pearl Harbor got bombed?

Mr. Bell: Yeh I remember that a white lady come and told me about that.

Interviewer: Were you working?

Mr. Bell: Woman Maribel told me about that she lived in Erin this Lorene Maribel living in there sold cars then and she come told me. Said well I wonder if they'll draft me she said well you look for a call most anytime and I got a call in a week or two and I went to Fort Wachu, Arizona.

Interviewer: Okay so about two weeks after Pearl Harbor you got a call

Mr. Bell: There you go

Interviewer: And you were drafted into the army at that time?

Mr. Bell: That's right.

Interviewer: And you said you were a Quarter Master?

Mr. Bell: And was Quarter Master.

Interviewer: What exactly is a Quarter Master what do they do?

Mr. Bell: Well they listen that's the name of the Quarter Master of the ship that time.

Interviewer: Oh okay

Mr. Bell: That's right had a trucking battalion haul gas on the front line

Interviewer: Uh huh

Mr. Bell: A trucking outfit yeh that's right.

Interviewer: Okay you realized when you heard about Pearl Harbor that you would be drafted?

Mr. Bell: Yeh yeh they come and told me about it the woman told me about it Mrs. Lorne Maribel told me that and I was in the field I went down to the barn then she said well slim you'll be drafted most anytime.

Interviewer: Really how old were you when you got drafted you remember?

Mr. Bell: Oh let me see drafted I was about sixteen, seventeen years old.

Interviewer: Sixteen or seventeen.

Mr. Bell: That's right

Interviewer: Did you go to an induction center?

Mr. Bell: Huh

Interviewer: Did you go to an induction center?

Mr. Bell: Yeh port wall in Georgia.

Interviewer: Okay down in Georgia?

Mr. Bell: Yeh

Interviewer: Okay did they test you on different skills IQ skills and school skills stuff like that before they started your military training?

Mr. Bell: No I done all of that after they shipped me to the staging area you know after they shipped me to the staging area you see. They didn't do much down there just examine me and run you through there.

Interviewer: Okay did you go someplace else for basic training? Or were down there in Georgia

Mr. Bell: Yeh I went to basic training I went to Naples for basic training Naples overseas.

Interviewer: Okay is that the first place you went to from Georgia then?

Mr. Bell: No I went to North Africa the first place.

Interviewer: Oh okay

Mr. Bell: North Africa up on that hill from the port down there where they brought the ships in

Interviewer: Uh huh

Mr. Bell: We went up on the hill a bunch of us the ship carried us over there and put us off down there and little ole boats would come and get us from the ship brought us in there to the staging area and carried us up on the hill to what was the station there. A whole bunch of us you know a whole bunch of boys white and black.

Interviewer: You guys worked together then it wasn't

Mr. Bell: Yeh

Interviewer: Everybody's working together

Mr. Bell: Yeh

Interviewer: That's good that's good. Tell me just a basic day from sun up till sun down about what time you got up and what you did on a normal day when you first got overseas there.

Mr. Bell: When I first got out of the Army?

Interviewer: No when you went overseas in the army just what your typical day was.

Mr. Bell: Well what did I first do?

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Bell: They asked me what could I do and I told them I could cook and they said well I'll take you over to the mess hall. Said I'll make a first second cook out of you see the mess Sargent said I'll make a first cook mess Sargent asked us all that.

Interviewer: Uh huh

Mr. Bell: And see he made a first cook out of me and I went all the way cooked in the army. Set up them field stoves you know in them tents you know stretch them field tents. And them units you put coal oil in you know to cook with gas you know.

Interviewer: What time did your day normally start?

Mr. Bell: Huh?

Interviewer: What time did you normally get up to start for breakfast?

Mr. Bell: Get up in the morning?

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Bell: Oh we got up regular time we got up at 5:30 we got up at 5:30 started cooking and would start a meal about 7:00. We got up 5:30 to get cooked you know get set up

Interviewer: Right

Mr. Bell: And you the breakfast done you see that's why we got up early all the cooks got up early we got up early the cooks did you know that cooks did.

Interviewer: You still did the military training the basic training and stuff like that?

Mr. Bell: Yeh that's right yeh

Interviewer: How long did that last do you remember?

Mr. Bell: Military training?

Interviewer: Yeh basic training before you got shipped over or once you got

Mr. Bell: Oh we stayed we laid around Fort Worth Chukka a long time in the basic training you know show is how to shoot you know and all like that.

Interviewer: Right

Mr. Bell: And exercise and tout our riffles and all like that you know how it is all

Interviewer: And you said you were only 16 or 17? How old are you now?

Mr. Bell: Me

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Bell: I'm 80

Interviewer: Your 80 years old?

Woman in the back ground: He's 93

Interviewer: 93?

Mr. Bell: Yeh 93

Interviewer: 93 years old okay. Let's see you said you traveled over to North Africa on troop ships?

Mr. Bell: Yeh we landed in North Africa and went up on the hill the ship brought us there.

Interviewer: How long of a trip was that?

Mr. Bell: Huh

Interviewer: How long of a trip was that from the United States?

Mr. Bell: From the United States?

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Bell: 15 days

Interviewer: About 15 days?

Mr. Bell: 15 days

Interviewer: Do you remember where you departed from which port?

Mr. Bell: Well I started from New York.

Interviewer: Okay

Mr. Bell: New York we shipped from New York yeh yeh

Interviewer: About how many soldiers would you say were onboard that ship on the way over there could you estimate?

Mr. Bell: Yeh we stayed in the basement you know how them ships are fixed

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Bell: And we stayed slept in the basement and come out on the deck in the day time and just call for chow and all of that you know. And we stayed we had an air raids you know when the Germans come over we all hit the deck you know go down in the basement and that's all like that. But it's routine that's all.

Interviewer: And you said you worked with General Patton he was in the same place you were at?

Mr. Bell: Yeh he was a field marshal.

Interviewer: Where was that was that in Italy or in France?

Mr. Bell: North Africa

Interviewer: In Africa?

Mr. Bell: North Africa yeh North Africa he was up on the hill.

Interviewer: Did as the cook in the tents and stuff out in the field and stuff did you see any any combat as far as fighting?

Mr. Bell: Yeh no I was behind the front line when in Marsa France I was on the first line you know we had fox holes you get in them fox holes and that bomb that was bombing us you know like lightening we was behind the line whit pup tents. But you look out at night them cannons you know we had them little cannons you can look out at night and them bundles in front of us and them air raids would come over and tell us how to hit a fax hole. You see we'd get out of them pup tents and hit the fox hole.

Interviewer: Did that happen very often?

Mr. Bell: Yeh they'd ring that and we'd know we'd get in the fox hole you see and be lay quiet.

Interviewer: Did that happen more than once or twice a day?

Mr. Bell: Yeh sometimes three times at night they have them before supper time and before lunch time and supper time and lunch before day light you'd have an air raid.

Interviewer: What kind of weapons were you trained with during basic training do you remember was it a riffle or a hand guns?

Mr. Bell: We had riffles they had riffles we went to the riffle range and we went you had pistols you could shoot when they showed you how to shoot pistols you know with them targets.

Interviewer: So you trained with both pistols and riffles?

Mr. Bell: Yeh we had targets we had targets had to tie it up boom shoot them thangs.

Interviewer: Over there when you were in Africa did you have any down time? What did you do in your free time?

Mr. Bell: Africa?

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Bell: I had a lot of fun them Alba girds just put a hole in the arm and sell mattress covers we was selling mattress covers

Interviewer: Uh huh

Mr. Bell: You know they stuck holes through them make a dress out of them put a string around them in North Africa.

Interviewer: Once you left how long were you in North Africa would you say?

Mr. Bell: Until we got shipped?

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Bell: We was in North Africa about let me see we were over there we were in North Africa about six months and we got shipped and was shipped oversea went to Japan. You see trucks come in and got us you know.

Interviewer: Uh huh

Mr. Bell: And see now I went to Quarter Master in Rome in Naples you know in Quarter Master.

Interviewer: You were in Italy also?

Mr. Bell: Yeh

Interviewer: Okay let's see did you write a lot of letters or receive any mail or anything while you were overseas?

Mr. Bell: Yeh see let me see the white lady I used to cook for she'd write me letters you know. She'd write me letters you know Ms. Emily down here when she was down on the river the lady I cooked for she'd write me letters, mother would write me letters my girl write living overseas. And me see I couldn't write to good but a boy I stayed with Blow boy he done most of my writing you know.

Interviewer: Really

Mr. Bell: And he did all my writing see my momma wrote my wife write me letters the white lady I cooked for she'd write me letter send me money overseas.

Interviewer: So you were mailing letters back too? Having somebody else write your letters?

Mr. Bell: Yeh

Interviewer: Okay did you guys play cards or do any reading or anything like that?

Mr. Bell: Oh we played we played cards played checkers and all the like of that and different things have little games we played you know overseas.

Interviewer: Right

Mr. Bell: You know games we played.

Interviewer: How were the how did they supply you guys food wise to feed the troops and stuff was did you have a lot to work with or was there not a lot to work with as far as getting those meals together and stuff? When you were cooking for the soldiers and stuff?

Mr. Bell: Oh yeh see I had mess Sargent I lived with the mess Sargent he'd put a menu up there you see all and you'd go over that menu. That mess Sargent we had we'd go over we cooked everything potatoes, chickens, beef.

Interviewer: It wasn't to bad them huh?

Mr. Bell: No everything them big cook pans you know and them stoves you know shoveling them ovens them field ovens. We cooked everything like they do here it wasn't no different we cooked everything chickens and beans and potatoes they had potatoes every meal sliced potatoes you know and baked potatoes salad , mashed potatoes and butter in them and all like that. We'd cook a whole we'd cook about two bushels at a time or three for the battalion see. Then they kept the officers club they had an officers club you know and we had to cook for the officers and all the like of that.

Interviewer: During the 30s and the 40s I know there was a lot of discrimination here in the United States and stuff when you joined the military and went overseas did you experience that over there and in the military as well like you did at home was it the same or was everybody kind of working together during the war?

Mr. Bell: Just a little bit was all I couldn't tell much difference no I couldn't tell much difference. There I couldn't tell much difference that much just a little bit but not enough that you could tell about it.

Interviewer: Okay alright let's see were you what was the general with the Germans were they feared, respected as soldiers and stud what was their reputation?

Mr. Bell: The Germans well now they are particular about that you see you'd have to the Germans they were good people the Germans they take

Interviewer: The German civilians?

Mr. Bell: Yeh civilians yeh they good they take a liking to the civilians colored folks you know. I couldn't tell no difference I was over there but I couldn't tell a bit of difference when I was here now I'm going to tell you. Just different names you know they speak the names like you know.

Interviewer: Were you ever wounded or anything like that during your service?

Mr. Bell: Huh

Interviewer: Were you wounded at all during your service? While over there at war?

Mr. Bell: No

Interviewer: Did you have any wounds combat wounds?

Mr. Bell: No

Interviewer: Any close friends

Mr. Bell: No I didn't have no see I never did get hurt. All that I had when I went before I went into the army they pulled all my teeth out Fort Wachu, Arizona when I was active see I had bad teeth you know they pulled my teeth out.

Interviewer: Pulled those out before you went in the army?

Mr. Bell: Yeh that's all I never was sick much.

Interviewer: Did you have any close friends or anybody that lost their lives over there or got wounded?

Mr. Bell: Oh yeh I had plenty of them.

Interviewer: Really

Mr. Bell: I had friends all kind of black and white I had all of them like I do here.

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Bell: I had all the time

Interviewer: Is how long were you overseas during the war?

Mr. Bell: How long?

Interviewer: Yeh do you remember what year you went over? What year it was?

M. Bell: Let me see

Interviewer: Pearl Harbor happened in 41 so you got drafted pretty soon after Pearl Harbor is that right?

Mr. Bell: Yeh but you know when they bombed Pearl Harbor when they bombed Pearl Harbor well I got drafted see they were drafting the white lady see knew something before. Mrs. Lorene Maribel come around drafting us boys you see drafting just right after they strike Peal Harbor get soldiers to go overseas and I signed up and after I signed up about two weeks they give me a call to come traveling ticket to go to Fort Wachu, Arizona yeh Fort Wachu to get basic training. I left Fort Wachu and went overseas.

Interviewer: Do you remember what year you got out of the military.

Mr. Bell: I don't know let me see.

Woman in the background: He got out?

Interviewer: Yeh

Woman in the background: 1945

Mr. Bell: Yeh

Interviewer: So right at the end of the war there you were in for the whole the whole shebang huh?

Mr. Bell: Went through all of that sir I'm going to tell you I went through the flame I jumped in them dam holes when they had air raids I duck and hit them holes.

Interviewer: Were you aware when you were in Europe with the military with the army did you guys know what was going on with the Japanese while you were in Africa.

Mr. Bell: Well no you see they didn't tell us too much.

Interviewer: Really

Mr. Bell: No they didn't

Interviewer: You guys didn't have access to maybe radios or anything like that.

Mr. Bell: Yeh we had radios but it would be different it would have been they put on the radio what they'd want to put on and they wouldn't put on the rest of it. We had radios but something's they didn't put on now that's the way it was. Just like these

Interviewer: Sometimes haven't changed have they?

Mr. Bell: There you go there you go that's the way it is like they share that's right they put what they want to on.

Interviewer: How do you remember in your experiences over there and the five years that you were the five or six years that you were involved the war over there how do you remember that positively, negatively when you look back on it?

Mr. Bell: Well you see I don't know when they was making me they was making good ones see I can remember things you see they when they made me they weren't making no clones. You put right smart up there you never forget nothing like her daddy always told me you never forget nothing.

Interviewer: Yeh looking back on the experience though I know you lost a lot of close friends and fellow soldiers and stuff like that

Mr. Bell: Yeh they tell me some of them was in the army and a lot of them went with me over there see I lost some of them you see a lot of whites and coloreds went with me and stayed around me all the time but see I lost a lot of them and I miss them when I got out.

Interviewer: Yeh

Mr. Bell: See I still miss them.

Interviewer: There's a pretty good sense of comradely then with the soldiers

Mr. Bell: Yeh we didn't have no trouble

Interviewer: Really that's good

Mr. Bell: We'd all stick together

Interviewer: You had to

Mr. Bell: That's right and we didn't have no trouble black and white all the same we didn't have no trouble.

Interviewer: When you got out of the military and after the war was over in 1945 you went ahead and separated from the military is that right?

Mr. Bell: Uh huh

Interviewer: Okay they asked you if you wanted to stay in or leave?

Mr. Bell: yeh they asked me they come brining a slip

Interviewer: Uh huh

Mr. Bell: You sign this slip if you want to go home and I signed the first slip they give me. Said the day the ship comes you'll be we'll get you away from here the day the troop comes.

Interviewer: So you came back to Stewart County?

Mr. Bell: I come to Cumberland City

Interviewer: Okay

Mr. Bell: Come to Cumberland City I was hunting my wife then you see I come to Cumberland City the colored woman stayed in Cumberland City you don't know Ted Dowdy and I come to Teddy's house of course I stayed around Teddy before I left you know went in the army. And I come back to Cumberland City and I come to Clarksville I come to Clarksville my cousin place and I called my wife I called let's see that's right.

Interviewer: And you've been here ever since?

Mr. Bell: Huh? Been around Clarksville and Houston County ever since.

Interviewer: Really

Mr. Bell: Stewart County

Interviewer: What kind of work did you do after the war was over with in 45 what kind of stuff did you do to make ends meet or make a living when you got out of the army?

Mr. Bell: Worked for contractors

Interviewer: Really

Mr. Bell: Worked at Fort Campbell drove through Fort Campbell and drove at some saw mills I done everything farmed worked on the farm.

Interviewer: It's grown a little bit out there at Fort Campbell since then hadn't it?

Mr. Bell: Done everything I've done everything.

Interviewer: Really

Woman in the background: You worked at Austin Peay.

Mr. Bell: I worked at Austin Peay janitor over there built them walks around Austin Peay you know where they run the concrete mixer and pour them walks. I worked for a contractor.

Interviewer: It was different totally different when you got back from when you first left for the war was it not? Just coming out of the great depression

Mr. Bell: Yeh

Interviewer: Then when you came back had it changed quite a bit since you left?

Mr. Bell: Yeh changed a whole lot.

Interviewer: Did it

Mr. Bell: Changed a whole lot that's right see it changed a whole lot.

Interviewer: I bet your wife here how long were you back before you guys got married? What year did you get married in?

Woman in the background: We got married in October.

Interviewer: What year do you remember?

Woman in the background: 1945

Mr. Bell: Yeh

Interviewer: Okay so you got married as soon as you got back home didn't waste any time.

Mr. Bell: Yeh went to Hopkinsville a colored boy carried me and her to Hopkinsville and married us. Yeh a colored boy he carried us in a old B-Mosel Ford to Hop Town and me and mother got married a good buddy of mine he had cars all the time. And I've been had that ole plug ever since.

Interviewer: Ya'll have any children?

Mr. Bell: Yeh

Interviewer: How many children do you have?

Mr. Bell: Had two girls two a girl and a boy Norman and Sissy. My girl works at work up here at Medicare in Nashville Medicare center that's where my checks come from that's where the checks come from yeh where she works.

Interviewer: Well I think that's all I've got. I greatly appreciate your time and talking to us.

Mr. Bell: I'm glad my buddy brought you over.

Interviewer: Yep I appreciate it let me go ahead and stop this thing.

Mr. Bell: Yes sir re I'm glad I met you.

Interviewer: I am too I'm

Mr. Bell: Yeh you don't hardly ever meet good ones. Yes sir re

Interviewer: We're going to put you in that museum.

Mr. Bell: That's right.