

Interviewer: Well Mr. Schaeffer we can start with some really basic stuff first. If you want to tell us your full name and the year and place you were born.

Schaeffer: I'm William B Schaeffer Jr. I was born in Mobile Alabama on December the 27, 1926. At the age of eight my dad went into road construction work and I was raised in road construction. We were building the roads in Oak Ridge at the time I went in the army. I wanted to some of my buddies had already went in and I tried this I tried to join the navy. I was 16 and my dad was going to let me do it. So the navy turned me down because I was color blind.

Interviewer: Okay right I remember you saying that.

Schaeffer: And I was determined that I was going to the navy one of my buddies daddy was an optometrist and so I memorized the color blind book. And we did real good and he swapped the pages a couple times on me and got me confused. And that didn't work out but they I was encouraged to wait until I was 18 years old and let the draft do it. And at the processing center the fellow with the color blind book and I tried to read it and I couldn't and he looked at me and he said if you think you're going to get off that easy you are mistaken. And he marked me right.

Interviewer: Sent you right on.

Schaeffer: And I gave him a big wide grin.

Interviewer: And went ahead. That's great so what year would that have been?

Schaeffer: I didn't even have to be devious about it.

Interviewer: You didn't even have to trick him just be honest and go right ahead. What year was that?

Schaeffer: This was in 1944.

Interviewer: Forty four

Schaeffer: December of 44 I was 19 years old and I we had quite a time I did basic training.

Interviewer: Right where did you do your basic training?

Schaeffer: Huh

Interviewer: Where did you do your basic?

Schaeffer: Camp Gordon Georgia it's Fort Gordon now.

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: And I took extra weeks of jungle survivor training on top of basic.

Interviewer: Wow could you tell us a little bit about what that was like?

Schaeffer: Oh that was an experience in itself.

Interviewer: I'm sure it was.

Schaeffer: Because we was naturally outside of Camp Gordon Georgia and there was a nice big swamp.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: Real handy Okeechobee Swamp or something. Anyway they put us out there and they had already give us our instruction on the kind of things you could find that were eatable.

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: In fact we had a class where they had some of that stuff. Some of it I determined I would starve to death before I'd eat it you know.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: But anyway we were out in the swap and it come night and we climbed up in the trees because you was walking around in knee deep water in that swamp. And so you climbed up in the trees to sleep.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness.

Schaeffer: Well the fellows that were training us you've seen the army have these real big firecrackers. And they'd set them off underneath the trees you know and you would be a sleep and one of them would go off and out of the tree you come. But we did real good and from there well I went to Fort Orr and processed to go to the South Seas to fight. And one morning we was standing on a sand doom watching the liberty ships come in that we knew were going to take us. And they come out there and told us that we could join regular army in order to know when we would get out. And I was wanting in the regular army anyway I didn't know how I was going to work it. So I went into joined it well alright that sent me back to Fort McPherson Georgia and reprocessed me and from there I went to Camp Shanks New York to deport and then to Lahara France.

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: And from there they sent me to 3rd army Headquarters Company as a driver.

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: Now it turns out that I'm driving a duce and a half for 3rd army mess top three grade.

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: Alright that's the general and

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: And occasion and hauling rations in and everything and meal times come up we got to eat in the kitchen.

Interviewer: Oh okay

Schaeffer: So I can say I have ate with the general.

Interviewer: Exactly so I assume that this was the farthest you had ever been from home right?

Schaeffer: Yes now of course out of the states. In the states I had been pretty well traveled on the count of road work plus one time I decided I wanted to be a welder.

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: And I went to NYE to learn to be a welder and they sent me to Brunswick Georgia to work in a ship yard. And I found out right real quick that wasn't for me.

Interviewer: Right you didn't like that work didn't like it?

Schaeffer: It was one of _____ were shipyards it was famous for putting out a ship a day.

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: And I found out why he was able to do that.

Interviewer: Hard work

Schaeffer: We worked around the clock and everything welding you know it was always every day you complained but this is for the cause.

Interviewer: Right do you remember how much it paid?

Schaeffer: Not off hand I don't remember that. But I come back home after that before then I decided I wanted to be a cowboy.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: And so I went to a ranch in Okeechobee Florida just outside of Okeechobee. I did most of a summer as a cowboy I did pretty good there but still with it I just wasn't built heavy enough for it.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: I was just ____ for it and so I come home from that one.

Interviewer: Now that's a good point you were talking about everything being for the cause.

Schaeffer: Yeah

Interviewer: Before Pearl Harbor how seriously was your family taking the threat of Japan and the rising threat of Germany? Was that something you heard a lot about?

Schaeffer: Well at that point in time we had you know the news of Germany and what Hitler was accomplishing over there and everything. And really didn't think too much about Japan I don't guess it was really in the news much or anything like that. So one day we was in North Carolina working on a TVA dam and a radio playing and they announced that Pearl Harbor had been bombed you know. And that's the first time that Japan really come up and we knew well Japan to us was the country that was fighting China and _____ or something like that. And discussions a lot of time was why were we putting money into China to fight a little nation like Japan. It was nothing.

Interviewer: Right guess we should reevaluate this.

Schaeffer: And look where it's at today.

Interviewer: Yeah were you getting most of your news from the paper or from the radio?

Schaeffer: From the radio.

Interviewer: The radio did your family have a radio?

Schaeffer: Huh

Interviewer: Did your family have a radio or did you get it like because I know sometimes people their churches would have a radio or their stores would have a radio.

Schaeffer: Yeah well the radio was pretty well part of our lives which didn't mean they were necessarily everybody's.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: But my dad he was running a little grocery store for a while in there and he was a big fight fan.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: And let's see what was it Joe Lewis and Max Millen fight or something. Anyway he went and got a radio.

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: He even went and dug and put a T-Model tank in the ground filled with water and hooked wire to it to give his antenna more ground to make it more powerful to you know. We were sitting in Mobile Alabama and the fights in New York Madison Square Garden.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: And he got it. There was more static than there wasn't but from then on as far as I can remember we always had a radio no matter where we sent. So you know it wasn't nothing special or nothing.

Interviewer: Do you remember hearing President Roosevelt doing his fireside chats and things like that on the radio?

Schaeffer: I heard just I heard him make the statement This Day of Infamy. That's about all I remember about him.

Interviewer: Do you remember having discussions with your parents or your friends about the fact that war was coming? Did you have a sense that American was about to be involved in war?

Schaeffer: Not really no it was President Roosevelt was pushing it real hard. And we in fact we converted one of the Camp Shelby Mississippi Camp Shelby it was a CCC Camp.

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: And we went in and updated it and made it an army camp.

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: And the still you know everybody was saying we're not going to go to war and everything. Everybody was more or less looking at this as one of them things politicians do.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: But they brought in they took these fellows and promised them a college education if they would serve one year in the army. They didn't get to serve it was all over with. Now my opinion no I'm not going to go there.

Interviewer: Are you sure we'd love to hear it you don't have to.

Schaeffer: No I more or less saw it to some extent then but I was so young doing my thing.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: But Roosevelt did the National Rehabilitation Act. For all practical purposes that the government gave the people money and then told them how they was going to spend it. And that's the first step into socialism so we really and truly to me became a socialistic state and it was a very hot topic back then. I remember that we would at home in Mobile we would stay in the house at night before dusk because there were gangs roaming the streets. The government gave these people little stickers they called they had NRA on them and that and the eagle and all this stuff. And every place they found if it was a house all the windows got bashed in and the people that were in there got drug out and whipped. And automobiles were turned over and burnt and these kind of things. It was a real scary time at that time because the gang in the now this was in the city. Now what was happening in the country I don't know.

Interviewer: Did your family have any experience with any kind of vandalism or did you have friends that were vandalized or anything like that?

Schaeffer: Not that I know I was too young really. But yes it was but the thing of it is had we not did that we would not have been in any kind of shape what so ever to take on World War II. And all of us would either be speaking Japanese or German by now you know because it saved American really.

Interviewer: So do you remember conversations that you might have had with your parents or other friends in the neighborhood talking about approving or disapproving of the job that FDR himself was doing? Did people think he was leading the country into a just war or did people think that he was because like you said earlier you know sometimes politicians are doing things for selfish reasons?

Schaeffer: Now who are we talking about now?

Interviewer: President Roosevelt.

Schaeffer: Roosevelt no doubt that he was a great man. We heard stories you know we heard stories that he would have a bill or something before the house and both sides were dead set against it and he would sit up at night calling them sometimes it was up into the next day talking to them and the bill would pass.

Interviewer: Right

Schaffer: So you know you have to wonder you say well we're fixing to send so and so and so over to your house tomorrow. But he really stayed in office to long and everybody that we talked to agreed that if you took one look at Truman you knew good and well you didn't want him in there no longer than you could. But honestly the that's one of the best things that come out of it and I'm of the opinion that we don't need 80 and 90 year old men sitting on the congress trying to run a country that's done got so far ahead of them.

Interviewer: That's a good point.

Schaeffer: I think there should be a limit on that.

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: Because yeah

Interviewer: I definitely understand that I think a lot of people would agree. And FDR obviously he passed away when he was serving so. Do you have going a little further back do you have memories what it was like pre-World War II throughout the great depression?

Schaeffer: Yes I have a memory about that part of it because we happened to be poor. And we were poor in poor times so I have went to bed many of nights with a slice of bread with margarine come in now margarine back then was in a block. And you get a little tube of coloring if you wanted it to be look like butter.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: Otherwise you know you had just for all practical purposes it was sort of flavored lard you know. But anyway you get some of that and smear it on a piece of bread and that's what you had for supper. And you'd get up in the morning and very likely that's what you had for breakfast.

Interviewer: Did you have siblings?

Schaeffer: Huh?

Interviewer: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Schaeffer: No I was the only child. But and you pretty well turn lose I've taken I have taken a little wagon and go around now I'm talking about I was six, five or six years old. And I would go around and gather scrap iron.

Interviewer: Okay right

Schaeffer: Now it was about six blocks or better down to the wharf where the boats and things were. And we there was a junk dealer down there and I'd haul it down and he'd give me a nickel or a dime. Then I'd go to the grocery store and I'd spend at least an hour and half or two hours trying to pick out which I could buy that would last the longest.

Interviewer: Right with your money from your scrap drive.

Schaeffer: And you know we all get candy now and don't even think about it. But that was the only way I got any candy I had to work for it. And we'd go down on the wharf and catch crabs go crabbing and that kind of thing. But I was born a Catholic and those first few years I went to the ____ School they had school in the church. And at seven years old I had the first Holy Communion but we was on the road we went into construction work and up and down Mississippi and everything building roads. Mississippi the National Rehabilitation Act allowed the states to borrow money to build roads and they government would pay for half of the roads. Okay we build a highway from Memphis down to Vicksburg Mississippi.

Interviewer: Wow

Schaeffer: And so it Mississippi had a law that if you went to school at one city and you moved to another city you was automatically put back a grade. And I would go the way my situation and everything is I had to put myself in school and see that I went to school and these kind of things. But in the second grad I left ____ School I was in the second grade they was wanting and so I told them I was in the third grade.

Interviewer: So you could stay where you were.

Schaeffer: Well that worked pretty good except you'd get to some schools and they teacher would say that's a stupid law we'll just put you in the grade you're supposed to be in. That ain't the grade I'm supposed to be in.

Interviewer: Wow

Schaeffer: I wouldn't have a clue to what was being taught or nothing. So it amounted to when I got about 15 years old well I just dropped out of school it was too much trouble.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: But I don't know whether you know when I decide I want to do something I want to know about it.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: Okay and so I learned that the library could tell you everything you wanted to know. So I didn't bother with school if something come up I'd go to the library and learn it. It doesn't really sound like too much but I can tell you how it paid off. After see I never did get a high school diploma and so I the kids were up for and I was in a job that looked like a dead end and I wanted to go to work someplace out at Fort Campbell and I had to have a high school diploma. So I went down and went to the dean at Austin Peay and informed him that I wanted to take a GED test for a high school diploma. He said well alright he said have you taken the class? I said no. He said well I ain't going to give it to you because you will be wasting your money. He said that would just be \$25 you throwed away. I said sir it's my \$25 and if I want to throw it away I don't see why you won't. Boy he went you don't talk to the dean that way. And he said alright I'm gonna give you a test but you ain't gonna pass it. And I took the test and gave it to the lady and she come in and got him and they both went in a little room and they looked the test over. And he come back he said Mr. Schaeffer he said I'm gonna give you your high school diploma he said but he says there's one thing I want you to do. He said take a semester of English to do something about that atrocious language. And he said and when you pass that study he said I'll give you your degree.

Interviewer: So is that what you did?

Schaeffer: Smarty if I'm that smart I don't need to paper.

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: I had in my mind going to Fort Campbell and I couldn't see taking my time. And then later on I was glad I did that because all the young people going to the class every day working real hard to get that degree and I walk off with it without an effort it ain't right. I wouldn't know all the little ends and outs that make up the knowledge of having a degree.

Interviewer: That's true

Schaeffer: It's like that company they would award a fellow by giving him an elephant. That would have been my elephant I couldn't have supported it.

Interviewer: When you were working traveling with the road construction did your mother work too?

Schaeffer: Yes uh huh she was my dad was a superintendent or supervisor or whatever and she was a head bookkeeper.

Interviewer: Okay what were your parent's names?

Schaeffer: My father was William B. Senior and my mother was Ola Bond Schaeffer. Now you they were both highly educated don't make no mistake now they were both highly educated and she knew a bookkeeping system that was so complicated they just quit using it. But she learned it in college and everything and it had to do with a double entry and I don't know whether I will try just a little bit. But what you did you figured your work from left to right and then you figured your work from top to bottom then you figured it from bottom to top. And all balances had to meet one another and I have seen her and her book would be five cents off and I'd see her spend four or five hours finding that five cents. And I got curious about it one time on one of them and on that one it was two cents and it went to \$500 and then it went back to \$50 and then I forget. As she found mistakes and corrected them it would change the balances. But I my dad agreed to help a fellow that was in it wasn't an illegal business but it wasn't licensed because the license didn't exist. But anyway the IRS Internal Revenue Service was going to audit him and he asked my dad to see what he could do. And my dad went in there and it took him about a month or a little under but he set bookkeeping set up his books and now the man had restaurants, beer joins, and some rental properties. He now he had a whole bunch of stuff but in any case IRS come in they spent two weeks and when they left the man shook my dad's hand the most perfect set of books I have ever seen. He knew they were crooked but he couldn't prove nothing.

Interviewer: Right I love that.

Schaeffer: So they were highly educated people but circumstances the depression and this kind of thing make a person do what he has to do to survive.

Interviewer: Did they had a large interest in making sure that you went to school and that you did you?

Schaeffer: Huh

Interviewer: Did your parents was it important to your parents that you go to school and stay in school?

Schaeffer: Well I don't know my parents and I'm not psychotic or nothing but they I was not planned for. They set up their lives to live without children.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: So everything was doing alright in Mobile because she had an aunt that pretty well took care of me as much as she did. And they got the road construction going well they sent me to one to Mobile and Mobile would keep me a while and send me home. Well they'd take me to Vicksburg to his parents they'd keep me a while then send me home. Then finally one day they told them that he's your kid you raise him come see us but don't stay.

Interviewer: Come see us but don't stay.

Schaeffer: So I was and so when they came there I arrived on the job where I was at and they told me just very plain their work and everything they just didn't have the time to look after me. That I was old enough that if I went to school I went to school if I didn't go to school I didn't go to school.

Interviewer: How old were you then?

Schaeffer: Eight

Interviewer: Okay

Schaeffer: And if my teeth got brushed it was because I did it if I took a bath it was because I did it.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: I was expected to help wash my clothes and things one time or another. But in all for all practical purposes I was to be responsible for myself. So I for me I didn't see nothing great other than that me and school had problems in Mississippi you know.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: No I love them they are good parents they took care of me they just didn't have time for me.

Interviewer: Just a little unconventional that's okay.

Schaeffer: Of course I had cause they didn't really get completely free of me. Little things like we were in ____ doing ammunition plant building roads and I was getting old enough that girls. Girls I had a bicycle and we had a trailer park in these people's back yard and the hill come down and it turned into the back driveway and through the back. And this little gal sat on that back porch in the evening well I learned to ride my bicycle standing up on it. And I came down through there and I made the turn and I stood up you could see me riding my bicycle me standing up like this here. There was two big oak trees and my bicycle wheel hit a rock or something and turned me just a little bit and the bicycle went between the trees and I almost didn't. And the thing of it the reason I'm telling it all is that a little café there I went to the door I had a broken arm you know and I'm carrying it. And I went to the door and the people in there looked out and saw me and they got all excited and everything and so a couple of the guys took me to the hospital. And at the hospital I was sitting there and my dad and mother come in there they were 90 miles an hour you know. And they looked at me just as funny we were told that you were hit by a train. I didn't get hit by a train I said I hit a tree.

Interviewer: Goodness slightly different just a little bit different. That's funny your poor parents I'm sure they were having a heart attack all the way over. Well after you were talking about the training that you did in your early days and you said you were sent to France is where you went after you left New York. Right?

Schaeffer: I'm listening

Interviewer: Oh that's alright you said after you went to New York you went to France. Right

Schaeffer: Right

Interviewer: Could you tell us a little bit about what exactly you did in France in the unit that you were with and what your day to day duties were?

Schaeffer: Well I wasn't there very long. They were at Lahara France and it was Camp Chesterfield and it was redeployment camp. And we was there about a week maybe two weeks and then we I was we were loaded in trucks and my truck went to ____ Germany. And that was where I was assigned a duce and half truck. But now one thing I didn't tell you was when I went in the army I was a mechanic in a Ford

dealership an automobile. And the reason I'm bringing this up in ____ I was with Head Quarters Company and it was of course ____ was right at the foot of the Vivarium Mountains with is part of the German Alps you know. Alright now its winter time and about snow you could just barley travel. And I was going around one of them little roads on that mountain one day and it just struck me I had two weeks of jungle survival and here I am driving a duce and a half in two foot of snow.

Interviewer: So it didn't exactly prepare you for where you ended up I guess.

Schaeffer: I drove and the little German towns they would build buildings on both sides and then they would build on top of the road too you know. And ____ had about three or four buildings spaced apart about as long as this house is and they was across the road on a little narrow road. And my truck backfired while I was in one of them little off caves you know. Oh boy but no sooner than my truck backfired then a little hole showed up in my windshield. And I looked at it where in the world did that come from? Then my mind got going I heard a gun go off I've been shot at.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: But it was still hot times then but they had little pockets of resistance all over Germany that they were fighting.

Interviewer: Is this in 44 or 45?

Schaeffer: Ma'am

Interviewer: Was this in 44 or 45?

Schaeffer: This was in 45. This was in 45 because of me going backwards and forwards and mistakes and these three discharges I was late getting over there.

Interviewer: Right

Schaeffer: And I found out that my being a truck driver for Head Quarters Company had arterial motives. The executive officer had acquired one of the little German sports cars and he didn't have nobody that knew how to work on it.

Interviewer: And you were it.

Schaeffer: So he'd get me to work on his. And they worked that thing around that beings I got shot at they went ahead and assigned me to be his driver instead of a truck driver. And so I would take his sports car go to his apartment pick him up and bring him to work. And he had a cute little German maid that took care of his apartment. Well he was fussing one day because he wasn't making no time with her and I was sitting there with them you know and he started talking about it and I started looking and I was like this here. And the company commander got to laughing and he looked at me and I never got to drive his little sports car anymore. But we moved when Patton got killed we moved to Heidelberg.

Interviewer: Okay were you living in barracks then?

Schaeffer: I had one of them pictures here. See that building that was made up of them buildings like that and one building would have G4 with all the G4 and S4 and G5 and all in each one. Now we had one of the buildings for our group and you'd go in the front door and on the left was the orderly room. And then you'd go on in there and there were rooms and there were two men to a room. And you had you they were big rooms there was plenty of room in there and of course down the hall they had the showers and all that stuff. But yeah it was living first class.

Interviewer: Did you this is a more sensitive question obviously. I know you were a driver and you were obviously shot at did you see combat?

Schaeffer: No it was all over when I got there except you know there were hot spots.

Interviewer: Sure right

Schaeffer: But one thing that really brought it home to some extent. The German people see they were so far away from it where we was at and everything the German people did not believe the gas chambers had happened.

Interviewer: Wow

Schaeffer: And so they had the newsreels and the pictures and everything of it and the army struck uncut pictures they were real. And we would take duce and half take a section of it and load them up load the people up and bring them down to a theater and show them them pictures. And oh man it was pitiful the they'd get sick they'd pass out they would cry and holler and carry on. And well it really upset me because I almost believe it could be handled a little bit better than it did but I mean you know. You know they didn't have time to cut them you know. You take a well you've seen that truck a duce and a half and you load them up in the back of it haul them down there put them in the theater then drag them out and take them back home.

Interviewer: These were civilians that you were taking to see to the theater. Did you ever have resistance from people like people saying I don't want to go I don't want to go see it?

Schaeffer: No that is one of the I guess that's sort of a unique thing. It's a little bit hard to explain but a people that has lived under a dictator don't protest they don't ask questions. They know better than so when authority comes up and lines you up you get in it and you do it see you don't question it. And this is what and to make a decision on their own about something they don't have that ability. That's something they have to learn how to do because under a dictatorship they're not allowed to think. In working at AAA people in Clarksville here mechanic a German I don't know where he had come from whether he had been a soldier or whether he had but he was trying to he wanted he was a mechanic in Germany he was a mechanic. And so we hired him as part of some kind of deal with something but anyway I was told to watch out for him you know and because he knew I had been over there and to help him. Alright something come up a little ole something the shop foreman told him to do a certain job and he did it but he did it wrong. And he come to me all to pieces he said I did this wrong he said what am I going to tell him. I said he's just a shop foreman. No he said this is terrible. I tried to assure him I talked to him I told him you know we all he didn't know and it happens. And finally we got the shop foreman involved in it and he told him what are you getting upset for it happens. Just don't do it again and he went around there and he still had that on his mind for about another week then he disappeared. We don't know where he went or what happened to him. But it's really an experience to

be around people that have been done that to you know. And I believe one of the reasons why were was able to whip them the soldiers because all you had to do was get him out of his element and he was lost. You saw the story of Sergeant ____ you know all he did was just gobble like a turkey and that just. What are you doing with a but they I talked to that friend well I got to be friends with some of them. And gotten friendly enough with one of them that he opened up and he was honest. And he told me he said you people blame us for thinking so much of Hitler and he said we couldn't help ourselves. He said you stop and think that my daddy was a brick mason and he'd take a suitcase to work with him and when he got through work they'd put the money in that suitcase that he worked that day. And the inflation was such that it would fill that suitcase he'd stop by the bakery and buy a loaf of bread and he'd go home with his suitcase and the loaf of bread. He said we were starving you couldn't get no work. He said Hitler came in and he started the work force the work gangs and changed the money and he said for the first time we had food on the table we had clothes on our back and we had a good job. And he said you can't have a man that will do that for you and he made one other statement the main thing. He said there were three different Hitlers. He said if you'll just stop and study it that one Hitler the first Hitler built us up built the roads and gave us jobs and everything. And somebody tried somebody was supposed to have assassinated him.

Tape ended