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AN INTERVIEW WITH BEN FRANKLIN

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INTERVIEWED BY
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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Ben Franklin on October 20, 2004 at his home in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler ...

BRAUM DENTON: Braum Denton.

JOHN ROMEISER: John Romeiser.

PIEHLER: Well, let me begin—you can tell this story however you'd like, but let me start—could you maybe start talking a little bit about your parents and growing up?

BEN FRANKLIN: Well, my father, whose father was full-blooded Cherokee Indian, and his mother was of the Jenkins family here in Knoxville. And her family disowned her because she married an Indian. In those days in the late 18—1870's, 1880's in the state of Tennessee the feeling of the public toward Indians was about equivalent to what later it was against the blacks. So there was a lot of prejudice from the very beginning in my family. This was taught to me—every opportunity my grandfather had, he pointed that out. And So I was raised perhaps as an unknowing political liberal because of the effect it had on my grandfather. My father was a soldier in World War I, severely wounded and placed on disability—he had a war-related disability. He married my mother when she was sixteen or seventeen, which was not uncommon in those days. My grandfather, who was a successful carpenter, built them a house where I was born in 1925. My father, when he came back from the war, went to the University of Tennessee and took a course in veterinary medicine. Although, he was not a veterinary doctor, he did neighborhood work. At that time, believe it or not, everybody in the city had animals. We had horses and we had cows and ... so my father practiced veterinary medicine in the neighborhood, perhaps illegally. He later also went into the contracting business. He had some black men who lived behind us on Nichols with one of those scoops and two mules and they would pull it and they would grade land. He helped build Magnolia [Avenue]. And then I don't know what happened to him, but he lost all interest in everything and in late '20s, in the early '30s, and he became a habitual drunk, which was not uncommon in my generation. Many, many people—I call it the “Desperate Generation” and ... Cracow—what is his name? The newspaper reporter...

PIEHLER: Kuralt?

FRANKLIN: No, no ... Tom Brokaw calls it the ...

PIEHLER: “Greatest Generation.”

FRANKLIN: Yeah, I call it the “Most Desperate Generation.” As a result, my father—as a result of the election of ... Roosevelt in '32, my father's compensation for his disability went from a hundred and eleven dollars a month to thirteen dollars a month. Perhaps this had an effect on him. But, from my earliest memories of my father, he was extremely bitter toward the government because they had promised them a bonus and they didn't produce. He was pushed to the side. But, he did benefit from the veteran's hospitals. He spent a lot of time in Johnson City and various other hospitals.

... My mother's family of Irish and English descent, her father was English and her mother was Irish and although that her father came to America through Ireland—and he considered himself English. He was a rather—he was an eighteenth-century gentleman. He believed in wearing a tie n Saturday and Sunday. He went to the library often, Lawson McGhee Library. He was a good reader and if I had any intelligence, which I doubt I do, I got it from him because he insisted on reading and making me read even as a young boy. And then he would question me about what I had read and my opinion and everything. And I'll never forget to this day he asked me one time—and his ... dream was to have a perfect student who had such knowledge of the English language that he could express himself so that anyone would understand. So he asked me one time, he said, "I want you to think about this." He says, "Why do you think you're poor?" And I said, "Well, you know, Granddaddy, you know." This is my mother's father—I said, "You know, the reason we're poor is daddy stays drunk all the time." And he said, "Can you not say it better than that?" And I said, "Well, all I'm trying to do is tell you, answer your questions. I'm poor because my daddy's a drunk." He said, "No, I can say it better." I said, "I'm listening." He said, "Listen to this. I am poor because of my father's inability to practice moderation in the use of alcohol." Now it's amazing that I have retained that memory for seventy, seventy-five years. But it only ... demonstrates the influence that a grandfather can have on a grandson when he kindly takes him under his wing and teaches him the things that are important to his generation. Now, I just spent a month with my grandson in Europe and, believe me, I imparted enough knowledge to him about sex, drinks, alcohol, women, how to act in public, blah, blah, blah. (Laughter) But, he will never, he will never perfect everything I taught him.

But, now—well, I grew up very poor. I went to work at age thirteen. I was a student at Park Junior High School down here. I went directly—I had a bicycle. I bought a bicycle, or my mother bought a bicycle—she took in washing for the neighborhood and she'd give two dollars, or a dollar and a half, for a bicycle from a boy named Jack White who lived on Glenwood. And he was older than I, and he went to Knoxville High School, later he went to Knoxville High School. But, I took that bicycle and I would ride it to school and then when school was out at three o'clock I went directly to D.L. Turner's grocery store on Cherry Street and I delivered groceries until eight o'clock that night. I made a dollar seventy-five cents a week but, I got all of his old potatoes, all of his old bananas, all of his old vegetables that he couldn't sell, all of everything that he had that he couldn't sell he gave to me. And my family existed, primarily, off of that through my young life. So when World War—and of course, I must add, I was not a good student. I was—in some things perhaps I was above average, but in my unwillingness to sit down by a kerosene light, we did not have electricity, and study after I had been riding a bicycle from three 'til eight trying to make a living was not an attractive thing to me. So I did no homework, I made, (Laughs) I made very mediocre grades and most of that was by the sympathy of my teachers. Although a couple of them took interest in me, unfortunately it didn't pan out.

When I graduated from Park Junior, at that time they had a system in Knoxville that if you were a better student you would go to Knoxville High or Central (High School) or the normal high school, but if you were "limited" (Laughs) in your ability, you would go to Stair Tech, which was a high school over where Broadway and Hill—it's a big white building there right behind that. So that's where I went. I went and I stayed there until, I was in the middle of my sophomore year and I still worked for D.L. Turner, but I am now making seven dollars a week

because I was a good delivery boy. I may not have been good at anything else, but I was a good delivery boy. I had a way, a deportment that I could get along with our customers and they all liked me. So D.L. kept me, although I was not always the best of boys—he had a young daughter and I was extremely interested in her—but he insisted that I not approach her in any way, which was normal at that time. But I had some evil thoughts, let's put it that way. (Laughter) Never consummated in any way, are you following me son? (Laughter)

DENTON: Yes, sir. (Laughter)

FRANKLIN: So when the war broke out, and honestly, I must say that my reaction immediately was anger. And this anger was a ... copy of my environment—people around me were angry and so I immediately adopted that, as young boys will do. But, my inner thought was, “Here is my escape. Here is how I'm going to get out of Knoxville. Here is how I'm going to get away from delivering groceries. This is—I'm gonna become a hero. And then, everybody who shunned me in life and thought I was dumb or stupid, they're gonna regret it because I'm gonna come back home a hero.” So this was a little boy's imagination—I was sixteen years old, although in a month I would have been seventeen. This is in December the ... December 8, December 17 somewhere in there. In January, the 19th, I would have been seventeen years old. Anyway, enough of my, is that enough of my ...

PIEHLER: Well, I have one or two questions, actually, about growing up.

FRANKLIN: Okay.

PIEHLER: One question is, your father, what did he ever tell you about his war? I mean, you said he was badly wounded. What did he tell you?

FRANKLIN: Yeah. My father, he was in a Remount Section. Unfortunately, I was too young to understand or grasp the significance of what he did and I gather by his conversation and my memory, that he broke, took horses that were wild and rode them until they were disciplined and then they put them with the units that pulled artillery pieces and the captain of the company rode and all of that stuff. He was in the Remount Section of the Eighty-Second Division, which was a Tennessee/North Carolina National Guard unit at that time. Although, he was not a member of the National Guard, he was drafted into them. And that ... he definitely saw nothing romantic or heroic about the war and somehow he got wounded, either delivering horses—he didn't like to talk about it. He was very—my ... father was a disciplinarian, as were most fathers of that period, and my most ... outstanding memory is that when I did something wrong he'd knock the shit out of me without question. My mother would whip me with her hand and then my father would whip me with a belt and he was rather brutal. But all men that way, they treated animals in a brutish manner. It just seemed that the ... philosophy of manhood at that time dictated that they demonstrate their manhood through brutality to animals, their children, and so on. And mothers, on the other hand, had to be the ones who softened the wound and petted you and consoled you and all of this. So when my—eventually I got to where I did not like my father.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

FRANKLIN: I really did not like him. But I had the deepest respect for my mother. I'm sure that every time that he did something wrong, that I got her opinion of what it was and never his. And as I later learned in life there's two sides to (Laughs) every story and perhaps he was not guilty of everything he was accused of, perhaps, it was untrue. But, at a young age, you're, you don't have the mental capability of differentiating between guilt and innocence. You accept what you are told and live with it. So my ... mother struggled—of course when I went into the military, part of the incitement for me to go was that I gave, at first, I only gave ten dollars of my money and the government gave forty. Well, later in June of 1942, the Army came out with an increase in pay. Up until then I made twenty-one dollars a month as a private. Within June of 1942, I made fifty dollars a month. Now they took out twenty dollars out of my pay and the government added thirty and sent it to my mother as allotment. So she had fifty dollars, and fifty dollars at '42 was ... quite comfortable, you know, if you manage your money right and manage your household good. And I maintained that allotment until '48 or '50 ... '50, '50 yes. And then I came here on recruiting duty and I took a more direct action in taking care of my mother and then we supported her most of our life, and then when I retired and my wife got a job making eighty-six thousand dollars a year, we could afford to support her better and we did so the rest of her life. She had a very comfortable end life. Now, as opposed to my father, my father at that time—I was here in 1950 and I stayed, no I was here from '49 through '50, and then I went to Fort Jackson. And when I went to Fort Jackson my father came home from the G.I. hospital drunk and my mother kicked him out and he went right across the street there and sat down beside of a tree and froze to death. Of course, they called me at the Army at Fort Jackson and I came home for the funeral. Uh, the emotions there was not regret. The emotions was guilt because I had pushed him out of my life ... I had cursed him, you know, in my emotional state, I had, I was quite unsatisfied with my father. And to this date, he does not represent to me a loving, enduring, coaching type father, you know. He was a brutal son-of-a-bitch that took no bullshit and did not spare the rod for any reason. Now, enough of my parents?

PIEHLER: Well, your father—did he join any veterans' organizations?

FRANKLIN: This I don't know.

PIEHLER: You never recall joining the VFW or ...

FRANKLIN: No, I really don't know. See, I was born in '25.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Yeah.

FRANKLIN: And by 1932, I was only seven years old. Well, at that time, that's when he went, went bad.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

FRANKLIN: From, well, up, you know—when the Depression hit, from—maybe even '29 he started getting bad. I don't remember the particulars of it.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

FRANKLIN: But I don't remember him belonging to any veterans' organizations. Although he could've, I'm sure ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: ... I'm sure ...

PIEHLER: You just don't remember him going off to the veterans' ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah, because, because they had a promise of a bonus in Washington.

PIEHLER: This really meant a lot to him, the bonus ...

FRANKLIN: Beg your pardon?

PIEHLER: The bonus really was something that really mattered to him.

FRANKLIN: Yeah, and ... I gather that since you asked the question, where did he find out the information about the bonus unless he got it from some veterans' group? Because they organized and they went to Washington, he might have even gone to Washington, I don't remember.

PIEHLER: You don't know ...

FRANKLIN: I don't remember. I don't remember if he did.

PIEHLER: But you were very—it sounds like growing up you were very conscious of this bonus, the issue of the bonus. Even if you didn't know all the ...

FRANKLIN: I was very conscious of what?

PIEHLER: The bonus. You were very aware of it.

FRANKLIN: The bonus, oh, yes! Yes! This ... is gonna be the deliverance! (Laughs) This is the great deliverance that's going to deliver all veterans from poverty, it's going to make them wealthy, you know?

PIEHLER: That was really the thought.

FRANKLIN: That was really the thing. It was, I remember around the dinner table they discussed it, "I'll win the bonus,"... "When we get my bonus we'll do this ... " Uh, but my father was not much of a dreamer. There are some fathers who love to dream about what's going to happen in the future. I don't ever remember my father being joyful in anticipation of tomorrow. I only remember his bitterness for today and yesterday. I had—cut it off a minute.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: You were saying about your grandfather that he had, he had built, [that] he was a carpenter.

FRANKLIN: Yes, yes ...

PIEHLER: And a very attractive looking man. (Looking at photograph)

FRANKLIN: When he came, when my grandfather, Grandpa Franklin, came from North Carolina, the reservation, he was a nineteen year old boy and he came to Sevierville [Tennessee]. Now, this is a ... excuse me, this is a story he has told me many times. He had no way of making a living so he stopped in Sevierville and asked a man who was working as a carpenter if he could help him, and the man said, "Yes," he said, "you can." So he hired him at that time for whatever wage was going to pick up lumber and do that. So he asked my grandfather what was his name and he told him, "Running Bear." And he said, "Hell, I can't call you Running Bear." He said, "What's your English name?" And my Grandfather remembered the town of Franklin in North Carolina, so he said, "Franklin." (Laughs) And the man said, "Well, I guess your name is John." And he said, "Yeah, my name is John Franklin." So that was his name. That was his ...

PIEHLER: So that's where the origin of the Franklin ...

FRANKLIN: That's where the origin of the Franklin—now, there's a lot of Franklins in East Tennessee, but they're not the drinking families. (Laughter) They're the sober Baptist Franklins. My family are the drinking Franklins. (Laughter) So he stayed with this man in Sevierville until he become a journeyman carpenter which entails having to work so many years first as an apprentice and then as a journeyman and then as a master. They had a system set up. And then he came to Knoxville when he had saved money—he was a very frugal person. He didn't drink, except on Friday nights. He took one little bottle of whiskey and he drank it on Friday night and he drank—took Castor oil on Friday night. And he wore a medicine bag around his neck his whole life. He lived ...

PIEHLER: Do you remember seeing the ...

FRANKLIN: I remember smelling it to this day. I can smell, every time he put me on his lap, I could smell that terrible medicine bag. (Laughs) He could have put it anywhere, but he kept it around him. So he bought a ... block we would call it now, on Glenwood and Nichols, and he built one five room house on Glenwood and he lived in the basement of that thing and he rented it out. And he took the money from that and built a shotgun right behind. A shotgun is a house—a little three room house that if you shot a gun through the front door it would go all the way through and out through the back door. He built that where a black family could live. And so a black family rented that, then he made money and then he built another one and another one and every time he would duplicate it with a ... shotgun. When my father was making money from the government, and then on the side grading, the people who lived behind my house—I lived on Glenwood—he, my grandfather built a house for my mother and father. Then all of us

children were born in that house. It belonged to my grandfather but he gave it to—behind it was a lady, my black mother, she worked for my mother to pay for the rent, see. She took care of us children. She ... she was our mother. She did the cooking and my mother was something of a socialite in neighborhood when my father was making money. And my mother was an extremely intelligent woman, not educated, but intelligent. You know, one of those native Irish intelligent people. And the Irish have this knack for words, expressions, memories, and poetry, and all this stuff and she had that.

So my mother, my black mother ... when I came home from World War II—I'm digressing a little bit here—she was no longer there. Her husband had died and she was in the poor house up on Maloneyville Road where the Three Acres Golf or Three Ridges Golf Course is located. So I went to see her. Of course, she had no social security. She had no safety net at all. I went to see her and she was in a little house with about thirty other women, black women, and of course she hugged me. I'm her baby, you know, and she's my mama—hugged her and kissed her and everything. I'd never, everybody looked at me. This tall boy in uniform kissing a black woman—at that time I became a die-hard Democrat. Although, initially I was just a left-wing liberal because of my grandfather, but now I'm a die-hard Democrat and since that time I have been very politically conscious about the well-being of our older people, and so ... which is not important to you. That, perhaps, will explain my personality and the way I look at things and ... perhaps some of it comes from my mother—of course there's a symphony of conflicts here. My brutal father, and I had some brutality in me, and my Irish, poetry-loving mother, and that's a conflict. I'm sure some of it's in me, and I'm sure on occasion I demonstrate this in one form or other, although, I try to be humorous as much as I can. As a soldier I was brutal at times, but all soldiers are brutal. War is a mutual endeavor of equal brutality. That's all war is. And we have never learned to do anything about a war, we are too stupid, you know. Now, back to where you ... my parents. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Well, one thing I wanted to say—'cause the neighborhood you described, it sounds like you had a lot of black playmates. Is that, was that the case?

FRANKLIN: No, no, no.

PIEHLER: No, you didn't, you didn't ...

FRANKLIN: No ...

PIEHLER: The black and white children didn't play together?

FRANKLIN: No, the black children that lived behind me were my playmates. They were my playmates. I didn't know what blacks being unequal meant. I had no idea what that was because the black children, we played together, my black mother took care of me, she whipped me when I did something wrong from the time I was that high (gestures with arm) on 'til—for all least six years, she was primarily my main keeper. But, still after my family, my father lost his income, I still would go to her house and she was still my mother and she will always be. She ... I invited her here one time when, before she died from Maloneyville and I had to go get her and bring her here and Ute couldn't believe the rapport we had between the two because she is, you

know, she is my mother. That's just the way it was. I had no animosity toward blacks any time in my life. Even though I'm sure my father did, because he was the boss. When he had the grading contract to build Magnolia, he was the boss over blacks and I remember vaguely him criticizing—that's normal with white southerners. They like to put blame on somebody. This is an inherent Scottish-Irish trait that we'll always have and can't get over it. But, I don't remember my family ever overtly being ... aggressive or mean to the blacks. My grandfather had treated them, my grandfather had gone through the same thing, you know being ostracized from his ... yeah. So ...

PIEHLER: It's sort of interesting how he builds this neighborhood, this block. It's in many ways an integrated block ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: ... I mean, admittedly, the blacks are getting the shotgun apartments but there still ...

FRANKLIN: With everyone else.

PIEHLER: ... there ... isn't much separation.

FRANKLIN: Cut this off, I have a ...

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: Your grandfather was a shrewd, shrewd businessman ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah, shrewd businessman. I've got to tell you something else about my grandfather and this, and I want to tell you this for the benefit of this young man (Gestures toward Braum Denton). Once every summer, between the age of eight and fifteen I would say, fourteen, my grandfather would take me and a horse and buggy and we'd go visit his people on the Indian reservation in North Carolina. Now, today that sounds like nothing, but then, that was the greatest exciting tour/adventure of all time. It took a week to go there. It took, well, not a week, it took four days to go and four days to come back and we had a basket and there was food in the basket and we'd stop along and pick apples and we'd sleep on the ground. And here my grandfather—I had the security of my grandfather knowing what to do being a good Indian and everything and that was a great adventure of my life. Today, you get in a damned airplane and you're there in ten minutes, you know. (Laughter) And that is the difference in my generation and your generation, son.

PIEHLER: Having sort of an Indian grandfather—I mean, you remember the medicine bag ...

FRANKLIN: Yes, yeah.

PIEHLER: What was it like to go to movies and to see images of cowboys ...

FRANKLIN: I adapted just like my ... friends. The Indians were the bad people and the white hat/shirt was the good people. I ... had no problem with that, it didn't bother me. The only thing that bothered me was when people degraded the Indians. Of course, my grandfather told me about the Trail of Tears. He's the first to tell me about it because much of his family had to go to Oklahoma, but they had moved down into the southern Appalachia, away from the reservation. And, so I was familiar with that. But as far as my childhood and our relationship to other people and their opinion of the Indians, I just adapted what they did, you know. It was a cowboy movie and they shoot 'em up and it's all a lot of fun. We didn't get to go to movies very often anyway, we couldn't afford it.

PIEHLER: Well, you mentioned you studied by kerosene light, kerosene light.

FRANKLIN: We had no electricity.

PIEHLER: What about running water?

FRANKLIN: We had a well in the back yard with a great big iron pot that we did the laundry in every Friday. I took a bath only on Friday. My mother built a fire under that pot and she brought the water inside and we had a regular tub. We stood in that tub and the whole family took a bath on Friday and I put on clean clothing on Saturday morning and I wore them 'til the next Friday and this was normal. You see, you're only poor when you see a rich person. If everybody is poor then you are not so poor. She's got to take our son to the doctor (Talking to Dr. Piehler about his wife). Uh, so there was nothing unusual for this. We had no running water and an outside toilet, we had a cow ...

UTE FRANKLIN (BEN'S WIFE): Dr. Piehler, I might see you again. I might see you when I come back, but I don't know how long it will take.

FRANKLIN: We had a cow and I had to milk the cow, we had a grape arbor with grapes on it, and we had a barn. All in the city, you know, we're just over the ridge.

PIEHLER: No, I mean, this is now considered down ... you know ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah, yeah. Downtown.

PIEHLER: ... inner city, I mean, Downtown Knoxville, so this would be ...

FRANKLIN: We're, like, five minutes from where I was born.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: And of course it's all black now, but that's not important to me, I could care less. I've never been bothered by that problem.

PIEHLER: Is your house still standing?

FRANKLIN: Yes, it's in as good a shape as it was when I was young. My grandfather was an excellent carpenter and I remember—that's something about my granddad, you never touch his tools. You don't pick up his saw, you don't pick up his hammer, that's a crime and he would flat punish you quickly, you know. (Laughter) He didn't want to, but he was an excellent carpenter. But it took him a long time to build a house. He didn't build it in a month like they do now. It took him half a year, as I remember. It just seemed like it drew out forever and ever and ever. Of course they had gables and ...

PIEHLER: And you said the neighborhood is Magnolia, do you remember ... what number?

FRANKLIN: Yes. The block that my grandfather—my father graded was where Tyson [Lawson] McGhee library is which would be the 2600 block, Magnolia. That was his, he worked on that part of Magnolia, and I remember, I really remember every morning him going out in the cold. It's so cold—'course at that time, we did have heat in the house, you know, we had a stove in the house and we put wood in it and it heated up everything. But my father would go out to the barn and had to hook up these horses and the black fellas would come and they drove over to Magnolia and I remember him coming home at night. In fact, I remember on a couple of occasions, carrying his lunch to him. You know, walking over and taking his lunch. It was not, it was a not a joyful time, but it was ... a time, or it seemed that, emotions and hunger and dreams were suppressed. It just seemed that everybody was—I can imagine people living in coal towns in Appalachia, how depressed they would be. And for a young person who had stirring dreams of travel and adventure and everything, it just put a damper on that, you know. And, of course, those dreams come from my mother and her poetry and, and occasionally they'd get on a religious kick. (Laughs) This, I guess happens to all Irish people. They get on this religion kick, and I had to endure that ...

PIEHLER: What happened on a religious kick?

FRANKLIN: Well, they would go from one church to another. In my lifetime I've been a Catholic, because of my mother's family. I've been a Holiness, because the Eight Avenue Church here was handy and were very receptive to people and I've gone over there and watched them role around on the floor and all that ... (Laughter) I've been a Seventh Day Adventist, which was another within walking distance of here over on Fourth and Gill ... I come to the point where I just rejected—I had little faith in religion and 'til this day I have little faith despite the fact that Pat Robertson just stated, within the last six months, that there's no use in voting. He talked to God and God said that Bush is gonna win by a landslide. (Laughter) So in spite of that I went and voted and I voted against Bush, which means I voted against God. (Laughter) So therein is a history of my religion ...

PIEHLER: So before you went into the Army, you went to Catholic, the Catholic Church downtown?

FRANKLIN: I had already made up my mind. I had no preference. And on my dog tags, you know, if you're Jewish you had "Jewish" or "Hebrew" and if you have Catholic, you have, they had a designation for all religions ...

PIEHLER: But you had no designation?

FRANKLIN: Just N.P., “No preference” on my dog tags. In fact, I’ve got my dog tags in there right now. My type-O blood, your blood is on your dog tag and your religion, and of course your name, and I had no preference. And ... perhaps this is not fair, but it’s evidence that our environment dictates our life regardless of what we do or what we think. And when it was time for my children to decide whether they wanted to be religious or not, I and my brutish intellectual conflictual manner made them attend all the churches and give me a written report on what they thought of the churches. The conflict being that I wanted them—if they were not willing to sit down and give me a concise written report on the advantages on going to that particular church, then obviously it wasn’t for them. As a result, neither of my children go to church, they’re both unreligious. But we also drink wine at the dinner table, we spoke German and French, they don’t speak German, they don’t speak French and they don’t, they hardly drink any wine, they’re not drinkers at all. (Laughter) So was I successful? I don’t know if I was successful. (Laughter) But, they’re not religious people.

PIEHLER: One of the things that you’ve said is that—I mean, I’ve read a little bit about Knoxville’s history and it strikes me, sort of projecting on it, just when I read how dirty the air was because of the coal. You know, your white shirt would turn basically, I’ve read it would turn black, and I’ve read a little bit about Cass Walker. Um, what kind of dreams did you have before you went into the Army? Because you said you felt that it was a place that was beating you down and you did have some dreams. One ... it seems like, was travel. What other sort of dreams did you have growing up?

FRANKLIN: Well, of course Tennessee and its football program was the dominant sports subject that we children talked about, and of course we knew all George Caefgo and all of those great football, Neyland and all those people. But, like all children I suppose, we were unaware of how poor we were or how bad the pollution was or how bad the economic situation was since everybody was in the same boat, you know. We were all struggling, but my dreams went beyond that. I had a ... as I remember, I had a worldly dream because of my mother and this damn poetry that she said and she’d read and she would write poetry, my mother would write poetry. Of course they were never published or anything. I don’t know even know what happened to them. But anyway, she would—and her way extremely intellectual and she would sit us down and she would talk to us and all of this stuff. Of course, some of that rubs off. And our father, I don’t ever remember sitting down and having a conversation with my father. It just, it just didn’t happen.

PIEHLER: Whereas, you would have conversations with your mother.

FRANKLIN: Oh yes. Yes.

PIEHLER: What poetry did she like the most? Do you remember?

FRANKLIN: I remember my mother talked about writers and music. She liked music and she was, she could play the—all of her family, everybody in our family could play an instrument, everybody. And she was a good pianist. In fact, when she went to church she played the piano

at the church at the offering. So she taught music and ... particularly about writers. At that time, it was way before your period, or your period, there was a man called Erskine Caldwell.

PIEHLER: Oh yes!

FRANKLIN: Yes. And he was writing about *Tobacco Road* ...

PIEHLER: Oh yeah!

FRANKLIN: ... and *God's Little Acre*, and that so fitted, that so emphasized our economic position that she easily would talk about that. Now, the Irish writers, of course, she was prone to talk about them. Now, my grandfather was more open. He wanted you to know all subjects. In fact, I was perhaps twelve or thirteen years old when he told me about *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, yeah, yeah. (Laughter) And I have *Lady Chatterley's Lover* here in my library, yeah. And we talked about it and they way he would talk about things—first, like I say, this is my mother's father. He was a unique person in that he believed in wearing a tie and putting on a clean shirt and that he was a blacksmith by trade. In fact, that's how he met my grandmother. He was a blacksmith. He came ... he was indentured [indentured] slave from Ireland. He signed an agreement with some iron works in, on the James River in Richmond, Virginia, that if he would come over and work for two years, they would pay his way over. The minute he finished his contract with them, he decided to come west and he came to Knoxville and went to work for Knoxville Foundry, which was down on Jackson Avenue. It was a big, big iron works plant. Well, there's a mine down in Crab Orchard and, by the way, the name of it now is Franklin, but that wasn't the name then. (Laughter) It's a mine where they'd cut out this precious, no, not precious, but big particular stone, Tennessee marble I guess it was. And they had a mechanical problem that needed a sheet metal man. So he went down there to work, they sent him down there to work, and the boss invited him to stay with him. And the old boss had a daughter, and she was a sixteen-year-old girl and I guess, I suppose, I wasn't there, but I suppose that the hormones were pumping, you know, when a girl gets sixteen and so they ended up marrying. That's how he, an Englishman married an Irish girl. Her family were Wards. That was their name. They were all people that worked in Crab Orchard. But that is my grandfather. But he was more educated, more intelligent, more casual, more inquisitive than my grandmother. My grandmother was a typical woman who believed in cooking and putting' food on the table, cleaning the house, and taking the children to Catholic Church. She was very Catholic. And my grandfather was open to D.H. Lawrence, other writers of that period—he had an opened mind. And when he would talk to me, of course, my grandmother did not approve of it. She would come out and say, "What are you talking' that trash to that boy for?" You know, you know how they are, but that's ... unimportant, but that's family, way families are formed in the way they're influenced for the rest of their life.

PIEHLER: It's striking when you mentioned reading D.H. Lawrence. I mean this must have been sort of very—I mean, by the standards of the day this was pretty, this, I think, is even before the lawsuit. This was sort of a forbidden book.

FRANKLIN: Yeah, and this is why my grandfather ... was a leader. [It wasn't until] later, maybe twenty years later that I realized why. My grandfather left England because he was a

rebel. He went to Ireland and left Ireland and came to America because he was a rebel, because he failed, he refused to conform to his position in life. He thought that intellectually he was better than that. Well, if you will read D.H. Lawrence, you will find out that he was a rebel. He is against, he was against the nobility of England and the ... Victorian morality. He was against all of that, and this is why my grandfather loved him. Well, in this of course—when I realized why I said, “Damn! That’s me too! That’s what I like!” (Laughter) Because I am a rebel, you know, in my own way. I hope I’m not boring you.

PIEHLER: No, no, no. These ... I’m curious because you mentioned you didn’t have a lot of money for movies ...

FRANKLIN: No, no, no.

PIEHLER: What did, I mean, what, broadly speaking, what did you do for fun? And you also had a lot of—you started working at a young age, at thirteen ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... you had this really exhausting delivery route.

FRANKLIN: My only free day was a Sunday. And this is why I objected stringently against spending the morning in a church. Listening to some conceded, boring preacher talk about some mythology with which I was uninterested. So you can understand that point. But, in the afternoons we would put—we could have skates, and we’d put ‘em on a two by four and put a handle up and we would ride them. Or we would put, if we could afford it, we would put skates on our feet and we would play tin can hockey with skates on in the middle of the street. There was no cars then. You know might’ve seen two cars a day. So we’d get out in the street and skate and with a stick and a tin can and we would play hockey. And, of course, we’d play football and, of course, we’d play baseball. There was always something the boys were doing. Unfortunately, due to my employment at the store, I didn’t have the time except in summertime. But in the summertime they made me work all day, or they didn’t make me work, I was privileged to work, you know. Speaking to that point, “privileged to work” reminds me of another reason why I am a Democrat, you know. If, had the Republicans been in charge, I would have worked fourteen hours a day, seven days a week in the damn coal mine because they were against child, or they were pro-child labor and the Democrats and the left-wing liberals come in and liberated America from child labor and I talk to people today—you’re not interested in that ...

PIEHLER: No, no, no, no. (Laughs)

FRANKLIN: It is part of my persona, you know. John has heard it all, he knows I am.

PIEHLER: You mentioned going to the reservation with your grandfather. What’s the—where else had you traveled until you joined the Army? Where else had you been to?

FRANKLIN: I got—I went to Chilhowee Park, on a bicycle, which is ...

PIEHLER: I mean now, now today you wouldn't even think ...

FRANKLIN: We absolutely did no traveling. It was just out of the question. And if you rode the streetcar it cost a nickel. Well, a nickel would buy a pack of cigarettes, a nickel would buy a pound of coffee for your mother, you know, or your black mother. Your ... a nickel was an instrument worthy of keeping. You didn't just foolishly throw it away. So I did no travel except with my grandfather, and there was a rift between my grandfather and father. Once my father become a drunk, my grandfather, although he let us live there in the old home place, in that house, he kind of moved away from my family because of my father. He ... disliked my father as much as I did, and he was in a position where, you know, it just broke his heart. 'Course, my grandmother had died. She died of tuberculosis—Grandma Jenkins did. So Grandpa Franklin just occupied one of his empty houses and had a very lonely life except for me. And I, I can't say I was a good grandson because I was more interested in working. It was more necessary that I worked than to entertain an old man, you know. So I felt somewhat guilty about that also. You know, life is a matter of taking advantage of somebody and then feeling guilty about it. (Laughs) Your whole life, you seduce a girl and then you feel sorry you did it, you know. Or you make a good business deal and then [you say] "Shit, I shouldn't have taken advantage of that." (Laughter) And this is life. That's the way it is. Or you fail in your conduct with the people you should love. You fail to demonstrate to them that you love them, you know. This is ... the essence of life. That's it.

----- END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE -----

FRANKLIN: But I'm sure you've heard much of this before.

PIEHLER: I just, it's more of an observation, but it sounds like you never made it, say, to Nashville ...

FRANKLIN: No.

PIEHLER: ... or ... Kentucky or ...

FRANKLIN: No, no, no, no.

PIEHLER: Never made it—so, you never saw the ocean until you were in the Army?

FRANKLIN: Yes, yes. The travel, the excitement, this is, this is the thing that I loved over the next hill. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Well, you—but from your one grandfather, and that would be your ... grandfather ...

FRANKLIN: ... my Indian grandfather and my one annual trip to the reservation.

PIEHLER: But also, your other grandfather had you do all this reading.

FRANKLIN: Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: Well, I mean, you knew there was more out there.

FRANKLIN: I knew, that ... awakened the fact that the world was bigger than Park City. But, let me go back—that there was a lot of people who were very interested in the world. But it also made me aware of the fact that I would never meet them as long as I lived in Park City. And therefore, the escape of World War II, to use it as an escape mechanism fitted me perfect, see. This was the thing. Because my grandfather, on my father's side, was very content to stay in Knoxville in his house than to accumulate a little more wealth or whatever he was doing and, and to make an annual trip to the reservation. That was his life, to go to the reservation. He chewed tobacco and I can smell that tobacco today. He wore that thing around his neck, that medicine bag, and when we would go to the reservation they would spend two or three days just looking for stuff to go in the medicine bag and he would not let me go with him. He and the other Indians, you know. I would play with the other little boys and we'd go down to—there was a stream running through the reservation, I don't know remember the particulars, but we would go there and fish. That was the main thing and ...

PIEHLER: And the reservation you would go to, this is the current reservation for—do you remember the ...

FRANKLIN: I haven't been back. But I would think since that was deeded to the Indians or since they were forced to occupy that back in the late 1800's, then I would think it's the same place as now. Is now ...

PIEHLER: The Cherokee Reservation.

FRANKLIN: Mm hmm

PIEHLER: You mentioned you were not a good student in school, partly 'cause you didn't do homework..

FRANKLIN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Do any—it also sounds like you had some teachers that liked you. Is that ...

FRANKLIN: I had a lovely teacher named Miss Parker. And she was my English teacher and she absolutely loved me. She really thought that ... she thought that I had some potential and so she went out of her way to be kind to me. And, of course, I had no lunch. You know, we didn't have lunch, and most of the people would take sandwiches to lunch, but we couldn't afford that until I started working at the grocery store at age thirteen or fourteen. We could afford a peanut butter sandwich, but you didn't have a Coke or anything like that to drink and she'd always let us go out in the hall and get water to drink. But on Sundays, occasionally, she would tell me to "Come and wash my car." And she lived over here on Fifth Avenue in those apartments at the corner of Bertrand and Fifth Avenue, she occupied an apartment there. An attractive lady, an attractive lady. Maybe real old, maybe, thirty or thirty-one you know. (Laughter) And I would

go over and she had a little 1929 Ford, uh 1939 Ford with a rumble seat, and I would wash it and polish it and she would take out that thing ... and she give me a quarter, big money ...

PIEHLER: Which—yeah, that was ...

FRANKLIN: ... take me inside, and give me peanut butter sandwich with banana on it and milk and then we would talk about school. She was real concerned because I didn't do too well in school. When they had a political discussion, and I remember this—1936, I think. Roosevelt was running for election, so it must have been later than, maybe 1940. It was 1940, I'm sure, when Roosevelt was running for election and they had a political discussion in the school and she was in charge of it. Well, she particularly invited me, especially to see if I'd come, hoping perhaps that I would show some enthusiasm for something other than making a quarter and getting a peanut butter sandwich. (Laughter) But unfortunately the war interrupted—that is not to say that I would have been better or educated than I am now, because I still only had a fifth grade education—formal education. I took the GED and, you know, that sort of thing. It's paperwork you know. But I ... accumulated some knowledge through reading and associating with people like you, and Doctor Romeiser, and a student. I have never given a class that I didn't learn something. I learn something from everything I do. But is it worth a damn? It's worth nothing. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You mentioned, you mentioned on more than one occasion that you're ... a Democrat, and a hard-core Democrat or a ...

FRANKLIN: Well, actually not. It's my, I don't want to shock you, but we really do not have a democracy. If we have a democracy—and as a Socialist, which I am, I elected, I voted for a Socialist candidate and he happened to win one seat in the Parliament, then I would be represented. But, if I'm a socialist and I don't have anybody to vote for I am not represented in our form of government. Therefore, I'm a parliamentary-type socialist is what I am. (Laughter) But since we don't have that type of government, the only thing close to an entity concerned with the well being of the people is a Democrat and this is why I'm a Democrat.

PIEHLER: When you were growing up, I mean, how much thought did you give to politics?

FRANKLIN: None, none. Now, my father hated Roosevelt. Cut him from ... a \$113 to \$111 down to thirteen. So he hated Roosevelt and I guess that meant that he also hated the Democrats, I guess, I don't know. I never heard my grandfather, either of them, speak of politics. My Grandfather Compton, the intellectual, a blacksmith that's intellectual, can you catch the significance of that with his black hands from folding steel? But when he put his hand on you it was like just a damn vice. (Laughter) You knew you had something. And we would meet a lady and he'd stop and take off his hat and bow and I thought, "What the hell is this? We're going' to the library. We're not out playing Prince Charming." But he, that was just the way he was. He was a ... he was a royalty in a workman's uniform is what he was, and that's the way that I remember him. I'm sure he had his faults, as does everybody, but I remember the good things of him.

PIEHLER: What did you growing up—I mean, how much did you know, follow the news? I mean, did you get a newspaper at home?

FRANKLIN: No.

PIEHLER: How much of—how aware were you of what was going on?

FRANKLIN: Not at all.

ROMSEISER: Did you go to the movies? Did you get any news from the movies or ...

FRANKLIN: We eventually and I don't know we acquired it, but eventually we had a battery-powered radio. And I don't, I had no idea where we got it or what. But, we only used it to listen to the news. But, I was not really that interested until they started talking about Hitler and the war, you know. And, of course, all the young people, and I'm not talking about my youth, my age, I'm talking about eighteen, nineteen, twenty year old people or twenty-five year old people, were they aware that something was wrong in Europe? You know, when Hitler in June invaded Poland in the September of '40 and '39 and '40, they had become very aware then I could hear them talk about it. Of course, I was in an age where I was really not that concerned with it, you know. I thought it would never happen where America would do anything. But then when it did happen where America did, [I thought] "It's my escape; I'm going get out of here. I'm gonna to see what's over the hill."

PIEHLER: Before—yeah, Braum ...

DENTON: I was very curious. You had a very diverse ...

FRANKLIN: Son, I don't hear good.

DENTON: You had a very diverse family growing up, religiously and culturally.

FRANKLIN: Yes. Mm hmm.

DENTON: And your community was fairly diverse.

FRANKLIN: Yes.

DENTON: What were holidays like as a child, or as a young man?

FRANKLIN: First, son, there was little to celebrate, very little to celebrate, even Christmas. Was ... it was a sadder time than a happy time because you've read books where people are happy and they had presents and everything, and you had nothing. So but not only you but the people next door had nothing, the whole neighborhood has very little. So I don't remember holidays as being a ... great joyous time. Other than the holidays that freed me from either work or school, and of course that was time that I was free to play sports or to do something else that I

liked to do. I've never been influenced by religion, by holidays, by patriotism. I'm bothered by patriotism ... and I think that we are now, and I hope this is off the record ...

(Tape Paused)

DENTON: Oh yeah, I was just thinking about the holidays. Since your mother was Irish ...

FRANKLIN: Mm hmm.

DENTON: ... and she brought a lot of that tradition, I'm assuming, with her ...

FRANKLIN: A lot of sentimentality.

DENTON: Right.

FRANKLIN: Yeah.

DENTON: So did they bring that into the, into the house during holidays?

FRANKLIN: Oh, well not only during holidays. She had brothers who played instruments and they would go—one played the saxophone and a couple of them played the guitar. She had six brothers, they all served in World War II.

DENTON: So they would all get together and have a ...

FRANKLIN: They would get together and they'd play music and cry and all that ...

DENTON: Oh yeah. (Laughter)

FRANKLIN: Very sentimental ... people. And I found it, I found it to be a little overboard. Of course, I've been a cynic most of my life perhaps because of Grandpa Franklin. He taught me to be a cynic because if he was not good enough for the Jenkins family, how could I ever be good enough for any family, you know. You know what I mean? So I have this chip on my shoulder since I'm a little boy and I ... and just impetuously I find fault with whatever is presented. And this is not a very comfortable position to put yourself in because you make a lot of people—not enemies, but you make ... a lot of friends who don't take you too seriously. (Laughs) Because you seem to disagree with everything they say. But he did it, he did it to me and I've lived with it and I'm not sure that he wasn't right. I'm still questioning this, because still to this day I cannot see, I cannot see why there is animosity between whites and blacks, Jews and Baptists, Irish and English, we're all of the human race. We're all of one race. Some of us have blue eyes and some of us have brown eyes and some of us have hair—I was political ... campaign chairman for a black man who run for mayor of Knoxville. (Laughs) And this is the incident that happened—his name is Casey Jones. He has more money than I'll ever have. But he wanted to run for mayor, he was city a councilman.

PIEHLER: When was this?

FRANKLIN: Casey Jones ...

ROMEISER: Uh was it in the ...

FRANKLIN: He owns a insurance ... out there over on the hill.

ROMEISER: It was in the '80s maybe?

FRANKLIN: Huh?

ROMEISER: In the 1980's? Eighties—1980's.

FRANKLIN: Oh ... it's when Testerman run.

ROMEISER: Yeah that would have been ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Mm hmm.

ROMEISER: Yeah, well okay it was before Ashe. Ashe came in '80 ...

FRANKLIN: Well, I played golf with ... Casey at Whittles ...

ROMEISER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: And he knew I was—I had the gift of gab. And so he, he called me one day and said, “Ben, what are you doing?” and I said, “Nothing. My wife is in Europe and I’m just sitting here drinking.” (Laughter) And he said, “Can I come up and have a drink with you?” And I said, “Yeah!” So he came over and he said, “I want you to be my campaign manager.” I said, “Casey, you know that there’s only twelve or thirteen percent of blacks in Knoxville. Who are we gonna to get to vote for you?” He said, “That’s why I’m coming to you. Because you can help me influence the white people.” I said, “Okay. You’re a fine man and successful. If you will keep Whittles as a city-owned golf course.” He said, “I’ll promise you that.” I said, “Okay.” (Laughter) So I become his campaign manager.

Well, a few days later, I pick up the paper and it’s listing, and all of the candidates—“Mayor Testerman, graduate of this and that and this and that and a law degree” and then it comes down to “Casey Jones the only black candidate for the mayor’s office.” And that struck me as not being the appropriate thing to say. Other people, it wouldn’t bother them, but perhaps because of my grandfather it bothered me. So I called Casey and I said, “Casey, you’ve got a few minutes?” And he said, “Yeah. What you got up?” I said, “Come on, we’re going to the *News-Sentinel*.” Then, the *News-Sentinel* was on Gay Street. (Laughs) So we went in, and course they know Casey and they didn’t know me, but they knew him. So we worked our way in until we got to the editor. The editor said, “What’s your problem?” I said, “Well, I’m speaking for Casey Jones. I’m his representative, so I want you to understand this, that when I say something it’s coming from Casey Jones. But why did you not identify Mayor Testerman as the only bald-headed son-

of-a bitch running for the mayor?” (Laughter) “And why did you not identify this other man as the only stupid one running for mayor and why did you not ...” And I went down the list of everyone and I gave him a derogatory statement. And he said, “You know, I never thought of that.” He never thought of that. And I said, “Well, when a person reads the paper, particularly these rednecks, what are they gonna say? ‘There’s a damn nigger running for mayor,’ you know. Or ‘there’s a damn Jew running for mayor’ or ‘here’s a damn Baptist running for mayor’ because we’re fragmented.” Our society is fragmented. It’s up to you to do something about it (Points to Denton). It’s too late for me and Dr. Piehler and him, but your generation can do something about it. Instead of saying, “Casey Jones, successful businessman is running for mayor,” it had to identify him which put a stigma on him from ... the get-go and he had no chance of getting elected, and that’s the way our society functions. Perhaps even at the university [of Tennessee], I don’t know the politics. But, I do know that I gave a lecture to a lady or to a group in the architectural section and I met a lady who was the dean of that section.

ROMEISER: Marlene Davis, yeah.

FRANKLIN: She is a very gracious lady and very charming and outgoing, and although I know nothing about the subject I’m sure she was qualified otherwise she wouldn’t be there. Next thing you know I read in the paper that they fired her, they ... or didn’t fire her, they reduced her from the dean to something and I thought, “Well, every institution has its politics.” And those politics quite often are governed by what I learned from my grandfather. And in your generation it’s what your grandfather learned about blacks or Jews or whatever, you know, and you have got to be different and you have got to be an open-minded Democrat. That’s what you’ve got to be. (Laughs) I’m pressing the point a little too much, though. Dr. Piehler, I hope I haven’t bored you.

PIEHLER: One question I wanted to ask and we’re gonna, it’s sort of jumping ahead, but it’s one—when I met you several years ago for lunch at the Red Lobster, the biggest surprise I learned about you, ‘cause I had heard your Normandy talks ...

FRANKLIN: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: Was when you came out of the Army, when you retired from the Army, you decided to sort ... of send your wife out to work ...

FRANKLIN: Yes. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: ... in the 1960’s and you ended up taking care of your children and I had, you know, I now know more about how your were raised. I’m just curious, one, why did you decide to do that? And given your sort of, your experiences as the child in the parent/child relationship, I get a sense that you thought about this quite a bit.

FRANKLIN: Yes, yes, I have. Coming from your chair you would not understand how difficult it is for a person with a tenth grade education to get a job. Particularly one who has enjoyed the position of authority and dignity, and now he’s got to reduce himself to a position of manual labor. And if he only has a formal education of ten years, you’re not gonna to hire him, you’re

not gonna to hire him, and you're not gonna to hire him. (Points to all three interviewers) But, because I am able to present myself in a manner becoming of someone more intelligent than an average tenth grader, I thought I would have no difficulty in getting a job. But I found every place I went I had to put on my application how much formal education I had. And, of course, when I was called in I already a strike against me. I know that. This is one of the shortcomings of life. Your history is never forgotten. Your history is with you in your back pocket forever. And if you don't complete school it's with you. I know that I was qualified to direct men, in fact, I went to one job—and this is another problem, and the man, he seemed to be a little open-minded. But, he had a sergeant major who worked for them at Shale Brick Company over on the river. They make bricks. And they needed a man to be in charge of where they store the bricks, the storage area. They had a sergeant major in charge of it and he's retiring, so they needed someone to replace him. Well, I went over. Perfect fit you know. (Laughter) One sergeant-major replaces another sergeant major. In other words they needed a boss. And I thought, "No problem I'll get this job easy." And I went in and unfortunately I have a personality that rubs people wrong. The first question the man asked me was, "What church do you go to?" And I said, "Do you want a preacher or sergeant-major to run your damn depot?" (Laughter) I didn't get the job, son. (Speaking to Braum) Yeah. Now, my wife, she's educated, she's got degrees, she's smart and all this time she could have—now, how I know was when I was here on recruiting duty. She went to Oak Ridge and they were willing to hire her in 1950 at \$600 a month. I made a hundred and twenty-eight as a ...

PIEHLER: No, that's a good, that's a really good salary.

FRANKLIN: Providing she'd sign a statement that she would stay there for four years. And she wouldn't do it because she knew I may transfer. So that immediately told me that the most important thing when seeking employment is your education. Very obvious. Both my children have college educations, I made sure of that, because I didn't want them to be handicapped with my stupidity, you know. So you remember that and that's the answer right there. I was confronted with an impossible situation, which I had no means of overcoming. I could not go—if I took time to go back to school, my family starves to death, you know. She's got to go to work, that's all. So we sat down and discussed it and I said, "Well, I've got this income ... my retirement," I don't remember what it was, but it wasn't as much as it is now. And she says, "Well, I can go to work if you can take care of the children," and I said, "Well, great! I can take care of children. Hell, I've taken care of children now for twenty-five years, you know. That's all I've done is taking care of children." So I was rough on them. I was tough. Got them up and inspected their beds. (Laughter) And I went in and tore out everything, pulled drawers out of everything ...

PIEHLER: So you really did inspect their ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah, yeah. (Laughter) I was tough.

PIEHLER: What year was this that you ...

FRANKLIN: They, funny my children, they demonstrate ... a love for me. Perhaps it's ... perhaps they feel guilty for having hated me when I did all of this to them, you know.

PIEHLER: How ... how old were your children when you started—you've been since became a ...

FRANKLIN: Mark was thirteen and Nora was ... eight.

ROMEISER: In the early '60s, then. About '61-'62 was when ... Ute went to work at Oak Ridge, right.

FRANKLIN: 1963.

ROMEISER: Three.

FRANKLIN: Yeah.

ROMEISER: Okay.

PIEHLER: This was really not very common for men to do this.

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: What was it—I mean, I guess ...

FRANKLIN: It was rewarding and I'll tell you why. Because I was, for eleven years I was a first sergeant. I got up every morning at fifteen after five and left and went to work. To get to the Company and wake them up and get on with it. And I stayed until seven, eight o'clock at night because I was a good first sergeant. I was really good. And then I would come home and the children would be in bed when I left in the morning, in bed when I come home at night. So I only got to see them on Sunday because I worked on Saturday, too. So I really didn't know my children. Anything to do with children, my wife took care of. That wasn't my problem. So I thought well, this is a good opportunity to learn your children. And I didn't like what I learned. I didn't like their slobentry. I didn't like their attitude. There's a lot of things I didn't like about the children, so ... (Laughs)

PIEHLER: So there was a reason for the inspections and the ...

FRANKLIN: That's right! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, you also mentioned earlier that you, you tried to teach them French and German and you drank wine and you had them write reports on churches. What else ... I mean what was a typical day like when you were taking care of your, you know, when you were the, you were in sense the "house husband."

FRANKLIN: Well, when we had school to go to—of course my wife would leave early and I would make sure that they're ready and they would go to school. And Mark went to Park Junior and Nora went to ... not Belle Morris, but Brownlow right over, right over here. So they could

both walk, no problem. Once they were out, then I had no problem. I would get my golf clubs and go to the golf course or do whatever I wanted to do because it's really not that much work running a household. You know, we're snowed, we're bullshitted by these women. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Now, would you do the shopping?

FRANKLIN: Sometimes, sometimes. For ... particular groceries that we used everyday ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: ... cereal, milk, butter ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: Stuff like that, but for the main stuff, see, Ute would come home and she would make dinner.

PIEHLER: So she would make dinner, oh, you didn't ...

FRANKLIN: I didn't. Yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: So I didn't have to worry about that.

PIEHLER: Now, what about the summers? How did ...

FRANKLIN: She made dinner in the summertime.

PIEHLER: But then you ...

FRANKLIN: [She'd say], "They eat all the damn peanut butter." [I said], "Peanut butter's good for you, I'll tell you. (Laughter) And they ... we would, we have always, I've always believed in this, see, there is one thing in life, and I'll never forget it. I remember bringing a schoolmate home with me. I must have been eight, nine. And we'd go into the house and there's my dad drunk. You cannot believe how a child feels when something like that happens. And, of course, the little boy that was with me, he probably forgot it the next day, but I never forgot it. You know, my whole life I've thought, well, you can't even bring a friend home, you know. So I had never had the home that I thought I could create. One, whether it was joy and discipline and culture and music and language and everything, political conversations and so on. So I tried to create that when I become the house *frau*. (Laughs) I tried to create that at the dinner table. And we would have almost a formal dinner and one night we would speak French and one night we would speak German and always encouraged them to talk about politics, religion, sex, anything. In fact, I told my daughter, my daughter, a beautiful girl, absolutely a gorgeous girl, ask John [Romeiser]. Never had a date while she was in this house. Had her first date when she went to college because of the simple rule, "If you date my daughter, you walk. You put my daughter in

a car and kill her, I'm gonna kill your ass." And boys think more of a car than they do of a girl. (Laughter) Get a bicycle and come up here and get my daughter and go on a date, that's okay. Just walk or get her a bicycle and go, but not in an automobile. That was the basic rule. (Laughter) So none of the boys in the neighborhood could ever give up that car for a girl, regardless how pretty she was. So I didn't have that problem. So I had to tell her about sex. And from the age of thirteen, I explained to her that sex was a normal thing, absolutely a normal thing. Been going on for a million years, without it we wouldn't even be here. It's not a sin, that's a bunch of bullshit. But, there's certain diseases you can catch from it, there are certain implications that go along with it that require a responsible mind. If you don't have the responsible mind, then don't have sex. If a girl is good enough for you to sleep with she's good enough for you to marry. That's what my boy was taught. You, you don't just go out and screw every girl in the neighborhood and get her pregnant and then think you're gonna to get by with it, you're going to marry her, you know. And the girl, I told her what to do. And I told her mother when she got to be old enough, I said, "take her to the doctor and put her on birth control pills." Because you never know, in one of those weak moments of life, when a girl is gonna to give herself to some son-of-a-bitch that ain't worth nothing, you know, and you end up with a mongoloid in the family. (Laughter) So put her on birth control. You've got to be blunt and face life and of course, to my cultured wife this was a shock. But to my children, they thought every daddy talked like that. (Laughter) So it was not a ... disinteresting part of life. It wasn't boring. It was fairly joyful.

PIEHLER: So you enjoyed being at home, it sounds ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Yeah. Mm hmm. I enjoyed the power. Powers corrupts. I enjoyed the power. I'm the big wheel, I'm the boss, you know. I say what goes on here. Everybody—we all have that instinct, you'll develop it if you don't have it. And we all like to control other people, and we do it through money, knowledge, grades, you know. How do you think your professor controls you? (Laughter) With grades, A or B, you know?

ROMEISER: Well, did Ute, while she was working and while you were home, did she resent the fact that she had to go to work?

FRANKLIN: Ute absolutely loved to work.

ROMEISER: She loved to work.

FRANKLIN: See, she took physics at the university. Her father was a professor of mathematics. She come from a very intelligent family, and to marry and damn, dumb soldier you can imagine the shock that her mother felt, you know. So of course, I was a good soldier and that was the only way I knew of making a living so, Ute—also, I was a young, tall, slim, good-looking boy and I knew a lot about sex, you know. I was in France, son. You couldn't go to France, son, they'd eat you. (Laughter) So I knew a lot of that stuff and yes, this thing called women—love, women do really believe in it. They believe it a lot. And she loved me, and so she stuck with me, but I'm sure that all her life she felt my education—her minor was chemistry. Her major was physics, her minor was chemistry. So all of her life she felt, you know, "Why did

I go to school to take care of diapers and ... dinners or so on?" So when I freed her to practice her education, well, she just jumped. She loved it. Absolutely loved it. Yeah.

PIEHLER: This wasn't that common too for women in that—I mean, how many women did she work with at Oak Ridge?

FRANKLIN: Oh, she didn't work at Oak Ridge. Oh, at Galbraith Laboratory.

PIEHLER: Okay, Galbraith okay.

FRANKLIN: Uh, there were seventy-two people there and she was in charge of them you know. She'd—a sample would come in.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

FRANKLIN: And they would say we want to know how much—well, I'm not a chemist, I don't know, but how much carbon or blah blah and whether it was a makeup of this sample, and she would take that sample and she would say, "Well this goes to so-and-so or so-and-so or so-and-so or so-and-so," who specializes in that particular thing. And they would do it and she would write the people a letter, "You have this, and you have that, and you have some," and those people would pay the lab and that's essentially what she did. She assigned the work. First, she had to know what the work entailed and who they assigned it to, and then how to notify the people. She did not have anything to do with the money. Once the money came in it went to a separate secretary. But, she made terrific money for then. If you think fifteen years ago she was making \$80,000, you know. So I didn't complain. One thing I insisted on, which was a mistake, I could take you right now and show you a beautiful house we could have bought for \$24,000. Absolutely gorgeous. I said absolutely, I said, "No, we don't go in debt. By God this place is good enough for me, and it's good enough for our family and we're gonna stay here." Well, now if I had that house, it's a \$200,000 house. (Laughter) You know, or \$250,000 isn't it Doc John?

ROMEISER: Yeah. It is and its one thing interesting, maybe it's your generation, but you said many times that you always wanted to pay in cash. You never took out any kind of loans for anything. A car ...

FRANKLIN: No, no, no, no.

ROMEISER: ... or anything like that.

FRANKLIN: It's true. And perhaps I get that from my grandfather. My grandfather always said, "If you can't pay for it, you can't afford it." It was a simple philosophy. You can't pay for it, you can't pay with cash, you can't afford it. So that was my philosophy although I transgressed a few times. I bought a car and the damn payment was too high and eventually I had to turn the car back in, you know, I couldn't pay it. And that stuck within my craw forever. And today if we want something we go buy—pay cash and buy it or we don't get it. That's just the way we are. And I've taught my children that. But, children don't always listen to their mother and father. They've got to learn the hard way and there's no lesson like the school of

hard knocks. And believe me I've been to it. Yeah. Now, I hope I haven't bored you all. Y'all want another glass of wine? Doctor Romeiser's getting nervous over here. (Laughter)

ROMEISER: Oh, I'll get just a little bit. I don't want to lose my edge here. How about you, anybody?

PIEHLER: I'll have a little more.

FRANKLIN: You'll have another one?

PIEHLER: Yeah, I'll have another.

FRANKLIN: Son, how about you? You'll have something?

DENTON: I'm good.

FRANKLIN: Alright, Doctor Piehler, it's really a pleasure to sit down and talk to you although I've done all the talking you didn't do any talking.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) Well ...

FRANKLIN: But, I wanted to talk to you. You are from New York?

PIEHLER: New York and New Jersey.

FRANKLIN: New York—New Jersey.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: Well, as a young boy I was stationed in Governor's Island. I've got to tell you a story. Don't put this on the tape. (Laughter)

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: Growing up—before the war, had you thought of joining the military?

FRANKLIN: No.

PIEHLER: That was not a ...

FRANKLIN: No. I ... was really wrapped up—I guess that's an expression from your generation. I was really wrapped up with what I had to do, my responsibility. Because I—suddenly I'm placed into the role of the breadwinner in the family. And ... it it's an unfair thing to make a child do this, but before my generation and my generation, we all had to do it. That's just part of it. So now you wouldn't think of it. People wouldn't think of doing something like that now. But at that time it was just the thing to do. When you could get a job, you took it.

And I don't care who you were and what the job was you did it, you know, whatever it was as long as it put food on the table. Well, I more than put food on the table because we got all those potatoes and oranges and bananas and whatever was just a little too bad to sell. Then he gave me that ... D.L. Turner did. And I was fairly wrapped up with that endeavor. I thought it was the most paramount thing in my life. It was the most important thing in my life. And I never thought of leaving or getting away, although a lot of people did. At that time a lot of people were going to the North to ... particularly Detroit. And a lot of people were hoboing—getting on planes, or trains and going California. Well, I wasn't old enough to do that. Anyway, if I did it what would my family do? So it's just a, I didn't even entertain the thought, kept it for them.

But, the war was a different thing. Now, this encompasses the whole nation. Everybody's gonna be involved into this and how dare them damned Japanese come do that, you know. The—even young boys were indignant. And ... so, an escape from a life of boredom and I took it. And I must say that most of the time in the war, it was a great adventure. And there were more times than one that I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed being around the people. And most of all, I enjoyed the power—dangerous. But, the power of life—holding another person's life in your hands or being responsible for the life of six or eight other people makes you, it makes the heart beat faster. It gives you ... adrenaline is a little freer to flow, you know. And then over the next hill there's a beautiful town. Over the next hill there is simply a valley and another hill, you know. And most of the war I enjoyed it because it—basically it was not that difficult for me. I was in excellent shape. I was young. I didn't have enough sense to understand the gravity of the situation. ... I was lucky I had good officers, which is a rarity. Today we have poor officers, very poor today. And I'll give you an illustration of why I say that in just a moment if you'll remind me. But, we, I had complete confidence in our officers.

And as the war kept going, of course my attitude became a little fatalistic. I would have to say that eventually—when I remember my friend Dickerson saying, “Ben, do you think we can make it through the war?” And I said, “I don't see any way,” you know. [I said], “We're down to—at that time we was in Normandy, we were down to twelve people in the company. We started out with a 180 we got twelve left—how can I make it, you know? Eventually we're gonna get it.” ... And you adapt that ... philosophy. And that makes things a little easier for you. Of course when you're cold, when you're hungry, when you're tired, you have a different attitude. But then you're in a village and you get a kiss from a young maiden, you get a glass of wine from an old man and even a ... piece of warm bread in you, life is different. It's more enjoyable and you learn to suck every bit of juice from the orange. You know, you squeeze an orange, you kept squeezing and you get everything out of it—well, that's what you do in a war. You squeeze everything that you can get out of that orange and that's the only thing you've got to hold onto is that. Now, I said, you don't have it on do you?

PIEHLER: Yes.

ROMEISER: About the officers?

FRANKLIN: Huh?

ROMEISER: About the officers?

FRANKLIN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: If you want something off the record I'm happy to put ...

FRANKLIN: You can record it if you want to.

PIEHLER: Okay.

FRANKLIN: In today's Army—and like I said, I was a First Sergeant for eleven years. Every seven months we would get a new company commander. The average time we kept a lieutenant as a platoon leader was seven months, and then he would go to staff duty as an assistant S-2 or S-3 or something, or a motor officer, or this, or the general's orderly or the general's guide or something, and he only stayed with soldiers for about seven months. And we old enlisted men had absolutely no respect for them. This is the new army. This is not true in World War II. They stayed with you until they died, you know. But after World War II things started changing. Now, we get officers like General Powell, and his whole military career has seven months of troop duty, of being with a troop, being in command of troops. Now, you've got to remember that you've only have three leaders in the whole American army. That's a squad leader, a section leader, and a platoon leader. A squad leader is a sergeant, a section leader is a tech sergeant or a staff sergeant, and a platoon leader is a lieutenant. Above that you have commanders: a company commander, a battalion commander, or a regimental commander. Now, what is the definition or what is the difference between a commander and a leader? A commander has four men under him. He has a company commander of A company, B company or he has a platoon leader, a first platoon, second platoon, third platoon, but he only has four men. He has—don't have troops under his command. So he forgets—well, he never knew from the beginning, he never knew what it really takes to be a soldier. To, you know, have your ... the utmost hate and the utmost love for your fellow man. Meaning you're in a hole with them even on maneuvers or training, after years you develop a friendship that's indescribable. You never have that feeling. Then you go to ... MBA School. They all gotta go to MBA School, but the Army is not a business. The Army is a killing machine. That's all, all armies, all they do, I don't know one army that's ever had a successful business. If you know of one tell me one, but I can name you a million armies that have killed people.

Now, in killing people you learn to conquer nations. To conquer a nation, there is five basic rules to conquer a nation. Anybody that's read Clausewitz or knows anything about Alexander or Attila, or anybody that knows anything about military history will know that the first thing you do is you conquer them and you disarm them. Genghis Khan, disarm them, that's the first thing you do. Next, the second one is you take all means of communication away from them. No radios, no television, course in my days they didn't have that. But, we took all, everything. Third, you declare martial law, which states that after seven o'clock at night if we catch you on the street we'll kill ya. We shoot you. That's martial law. So you put the fear of ... Jesus the Corporal right into their ass from the beginning. Five, you secure the borders of that country so that nobody comes in to help them or to influence 'em. And our generals do not know that. We need sergeants to command them the conquering of other nations. Until we get sergeants who have served in the hole with rifle troops for a period of—it's my contention that every man who

becomes an officer should be a sergeant for at least three years. So he learns something about how to deal with men, how to deal with brutality. How are you going to judge whether a general is good or not? I have a friend, he was my Company Commander in Africa. He ended up as my Division Commander when I retired. John Corley, right over there. (Points toward his home) I absolutely love him, greatest man you've ever seen, would do anything for you. I go to his office to visit him and have coffee and he's got an in basket and an out basket. The only other man above him that's ever come to visit him is the Secretary of Defense comes down to Fort Benning once a year. So when the Secretary of Defense comes down to look he goes in and sees, if there's more paper in the in basket than there is in the out basket, General Corley isn't doing his job. That's why I say he's an "In Basket General." You take all your in-basket shit and put it over in your out-basket, now you're a good officer. (Laughter) You've do a good job, you know.

And that's what we got running the war. They tell you, one, we don't have enough troops to control Iraq. Well, first, if they would have thought—that if I would have been in command as a sergeant and they said, "Take Iraq." I'd say, "Wait a minute. Hold it just a minute. Do you know anything about Iraq?" And he ... I'm sure [George W.] Bush, who couldn't find it on the map, I'm sure he doesn't know anything about Iraq, but you'd say, "Now listen, here we have Shiites, here we have Sunnis, and here we have Kurds, they all hate each other. Now, on this flank in Iran we have Shiites and on this flank in Syria we have Shiites and Druze, and the minute we go in there, those three functions are going to start fighting each other. And the outside force is gonna come in to influence them and we're gonna get involved into a war that's going to last for a hundred years. And you want me to take my troops into there? Hell no, I won't do it. I resign." [Heinz] Guderian would resign, General Guderian. Uh—well, I'll be damned. See how bad my mind's getting? [Karl Rudolf Gerd von] Rundstedt, General Rundstedt resigned. Even Hitler, when he gave those stupid, he's the dumbest son of a bitch of the world. Thank God he was dumb. If he'd let his generals run it, we'd still be fighting them, you know. But, Hitler interfered when he shouldn't have done it. So he would give these stupid orders and they would say, "No, we resign." So they would quit. But, not one American general has resigned, not one. That's why I say—now a sergeant, you know, what a sergeant would do? He would just buck up, and just bow up in his back, and get stiff necked, and he'd walk around with his head down raisin' hell, kicking gravels, that's what he would do, but he wouldn't, he wouldn't carry out a stupid order. Well, I've digressed and I'm sure it's not interesting to you, but it might be interesting to you. Am I trying to influence you? (Speaking to Braum Denton) Yes. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What ...

FRANKLIN: Do I think I will succeed? No. (Laughter) Because if you have the opportunity to look up to the advice of a tenth grader or a professor of French, you're certainly not gonna listen to the tenth grader. (Laughter) So I suggest you listen to the more knowledgeable people. I call them my "learned friends." (Laughter) That's what I call Doc John, "my learned friend." Because he knows—he doesn't know as much about life. He does not know as much about death, but he knows the important subject of education, which is the basis of life and death, see. He knows the Genesis of life and death and I don't. If somebody asked me the square root of

four, I'd say, "Hell, I don't know. What the hell do I care about the square root of four?" But Doc John can tell you or Doc Piehler. Done giving him a lecture, huh? (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Let me, uh ...

----- END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO -----

FRANKLIN: I was a part-time father of two children, I was a part-time husband of my wife, I was a part-time lover of a few women here in Knoxville, and I was a full-time failure. And coming to that realization that you are a basic failure in life is quite disturbing. And I expect the Republicans any day will come out with an amendment to the Constitution that anyone who has failed and commits suicide will be punished severely. (Laughter) Don't you think so Dr. Piehler?

PIEHLER: Um. (Laughs) Going back to the war, just ...

FRANKLIN: Okay.

PIEHLER: ... why the army or not the air force or the navy or the Marine Corps, or the merchant marines? What led to the Army?

FRANKLIN: Even then, when you went into the military it just—the first thing that was on the top of the list was number of grades attended at school. And all of those with higher grades, eleventh, twelfth, some of them went to the Air Force. And all of those with a specialty like people who had worked with tools or construction or something, were sent to the engineers. And those who rode bicycles and delivered groceries was sent to the damned infantry. So becoming sharply aware of this very quickly when I went in, I realized well, I might as well pick out the best of the worst. So I volunteered for the infantry with the one provision that I take heavy weapons training and become a machine gunner. Because in my little mind I had heard that machine gunners had a donkey or a mule and they carried that gun on the donkey and the mule and you walked along pulling the donkey and mule. Well, when I got to the regiment we had the damned little cart that you put the machine gun in and you'd pull that cart. But when we got to Africa, the wheels would sink into the sand and it was harder to pull than it was to carry. (Laughter) But, anyway I selected machine gunner. I ... they would have put me in the infantry whether I volunteered or not because again, it's education.

PIEHLER: Yeah, you could have stayed in school. I mean, you joined largely to support your mother.

FRANKLIN: Yes. Yes. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: Your mother had to sign for you.

FRANKLIN: No. No. No. I went out ... Market Square used to have a big building that all the farmers would bring their fruit and stuff in there ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, the old Market, yeah ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Yeah. And around that was all the drunks and all the bums, were around that. So I went out to it and found a bum and I said, "Sir, would you sign this paper for me?" He said, "What is it?" And I told him I enlisted in the Army. And then I remember—it was a while ago, he said, "I'm going to sign it for you son," said, "But, you gotta promise me, son, one thing. You go and kill them God damned Japs." And I said, "Sir, I'll kill as many Japs as I can." (Laughter) I never saw a Jap. (Laughter) They sent me to Germany, but he signed it. And I took it back and they said, "Okay, tonight at five o'clock be at the bus station, or be at the train station, and your train will take you to Fort Oglethorpe." And I left and when I got to Fort Oglethorpe and I wrote my mother a little note. And I told her what I'd done.

PIEHLER: So you ...

FRANKLIN: I told her not to bother to try to get me out because this is what I wanted to do and she would have an allotment and, you know, she still didn't have to worry about that, and it's a matter of me doing it now or next year or anyway. Eventually I would have had to go, I knew that.

PIEHLER: So you didn't say goodbye? You didn't ...

FRANKLIN: No.

PIEHLER: You just ...

FRANKLIN: No. Didn't say goodbye to anybody ...

PIEHLER: You left a note.

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: Had you, you had never been to Georgia before. You had—this seems like the furthest trip you had ever took.

ROMEISER: First time on a train maybe ... yeah?

FRANKLIN: Yeah, first time on a train. No, no, I had rode trains, but it was a freight train. All we used to do, every Sunday afternoon in the winter time, is down here where Glenwood ... Washington goes across the train track, well they used to have these trains that went up through there with big lumps of coal on them and they'd go all the way up to John Sevier. Well, we would climb on the train—me and some of the boys in the neighborhood would get along the track and we'd throw off coal. And this is in—then those boys would pick it up and we'd take it home and that's how we kept warm, you know. It was either that or go cut trees down. (Laughter) It's easier to steal coal. (Laughter) It's easier to steal coal than it is cut wood. So that's what we did. That was a big recreation, stealing coal from the coal company. (Laughter) But, you know, this was—nobody thought anything about it, you know, like, who knows a coal

company? You know, it's not like stealing from Dr. Pepper who lives next door, I'm sorry Piehler who lives next door. It's a coal company, there's somebody you don't even know, so you steal from them. But, I didn't steal anything else. Oh, I remember—I wished I'd had been a Lutheran. I had a Lutheran priest. Better cut that off. This is a true story. (Laughter)

(Tape Paused)

FRANKLIN: If someone asked me, "What is the most powerful thing that you encountered in a war, in the war?" I would have to say it was humor. I don't care how filthy we were, how dirty we was, if somebody farted everybody laughed about it. It was a big, "Aw!" You know a big joke. Somebody got killed, "Aw! Yeah, I told the son of a bitch that blah blah blah." There was always humor about everything in the war, and that was uniquely American. That's very uniquely American. The American man is the most humorous individual in the world. If you get him out of ... the institute of intellectual indifference and get him out into the field of mankind, he is a very, very humorous individual. And this is what sustains people in a stressful time because, you know, somebody's laughing at you or gonna laugh at you or you're gonna laugh at them or something stupid, you know. Because, war is a ... manual of stupidity. Everybody does something stupid. We used to get orders from battalion headquarters and when we did you would not believe, even the company commander he'd say, "Oh, those stupid people back there ..." The company commander talking about his fellow officers, you know, 600 yards back, how stupid they were. (Laughter) Well, the platoon leaders were talking about how stupid he is and the sergeants are talking about how stupid the platoon leaders are, you know, we're all accusing each other. And this sustains the American soldier. I think you've learned very little today, Dr. Piehler.

PIEHLER: What happened at Fort Oglethorpe?

FRANKLIN: Fort Oglethorpe?

PIEHLER: Yeah, what ...

FRANKLIN: Well, when we first got there they issued—first thing I remember is they asked if anybody had any military training. And I remember the man next to me had been in the National Guard. He stepped out. So they took him and I don't know what they did with him. (Laughter) Then they took us and gave us uniforms, and they took us from getting uniforms—we got shots in a great ole big tough fella passed out getting his shot and we all a laughed about it. You know, this is humor. And then within a couple of—wait a minute, and they had a speaker, we were in a two-story building, and they had a speaker if they wanted Private Franklin they could make an announcement. Well, we didn't know they could hear you, what you said, you know. So they made they made an announcement about something and somebody said, "Oh, screw you!" Well, the next thing we knew we had a corporal up there. And he got us all out and he made us run, you know. (Laughter) That's mass punishment there. And then somebody come down, I don't even know who it was, with spinal meningitis. He's not in our barracks, or if he was I didn't know, I didn't know him, it could have been from downstairs. And they just loaded us up on trains and took us up to Camp Forrest and we did nothing, absolutely nothing. 'Course we talked about the war and then ... we ate. We'd go to eat and then come back. We couldn't

get off our barracks. And we had a special mess hall. Although none of us were ill, but spinal meningitis at that time was a big thing. And when they brought us back to ... Fort Oglethorpe, then they assigned us to where we would go. Some people went to the Air Corps, some people went different places and I went to the infantry in Camp Wheeler.

DENTON: How long were you in the ... quarantine?

FRANKLIN: Beg your pardon?

DENTON: How long were you in quarantine?

FRANKLIN: I really it's a difficult for me. Time is difficult, but I would say at least six weeks to two months. Maybe ... eight weeks, I don't remember. Not—all I remember is that we had good food and we didn't have to do anything, which was pleasant. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: And you were getting paid.

FRANKLIN: Of course we had no mail and I had concerned about whether my mother was getting an allotment or not and later I found out—see, I never got to come home. I left and I didn't, it took me four years before I got back home.

ROMEISER: Wow.

FRANKLIN: I left in December 9, 1941, and I come home in November of '45.

ROMEISER: Gosh.

FRANKLIN: So how ever long that is ...

PIEHLER: So you enlisted two days after Pearl Harbor.

FRANKLIN: Yes. Mm hmm. The next day. I enlisted ... Pearl Harbor was on Sunday, on Monday I went up and enlisted.

PIEHLER: So even before Roosevelt's address.

FRANKLIN: No, no. His announcement was on Sunday as I remember.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

FRANKLIN: The men—well, I tell you, half of Knoxville was lined up up there. Yeah. It was all kinds of people. People with suits, neckties, all kinds of people lined up. To say that my generation was patriotic ... is probably true. Was there patriotism based on love of the country, love of environment, love of family, love of values? I have no idea. I suspect that their patriotism was from getting away from the way their situation was just like me, hoping for a better environment. Maybe run up on a better looking woman, getting away from a wife that

was a shrew. A lot of things breed patriotism. (Laughter) But I know of my patriotic feeling was to create a better life for myself and I did, I did. Mm hmm.

And you make friends. You make friends, which it's ... difficult, this is the most difficult thing. You absolutely love this fellow human being. You know you would stand there and die. But there's something about him that, you know, you don't like because you don't want to get too close to him because what is going to happen when he dies, you know. What are you gonna do if he is taken out of your life and now there is a void? So after you enjoy this experience a couple of times, you develop an attitude of "well, I don't want to be too friendly with anybody." But it's hard, it is very hard to not love a person who is guarding your life. And what I mean by that is, every night on the frontline you have what is called a fifty percent alert. Half of the people stay awake and half the people sleep. And generally there is two of you in a hole, so one will stay awake for an hour while you sleep and then you will stay awake while they sleep. And you just hump up like this (Gets in fetal position) and get a raincoat and you sleep from exhaustion and all the boredom or the stress, the stress of being in combat is very ... energy consuming. Yet, you know that if you—well first, homosexuals in my time, goddamn, they'd take a homosexual out and shoot him, you know. You didn't dare touch a—I never meet the Doc and I don't wanna hug him. Well, you didn't hug a man back in 1941. You hug a man and, "That son of a bitch is queer," you know. He'd take you home and beat you up or kill you or something. (Laughter) So that is an element you had to always guard yourself against.

You can't be too close, yet emotionally—now Dickerson, that was his name, now, we shared the same women on numerous occasions, you know, and in fact we had a standing joke. Dickerson and I, we're in Oussetlia in Africa, and a damn Arab went by with some camels and Dickerson said, "Ben, let's go screw one of them camels." We had been in the desert now for months and I said, "Oh, about on my way." And he said, "Well, if you could which one would you take?" I said, "I'd take that one," and he said, "Well, no damn wonder you picked ugliest one in the bunch! No wonder you want to screw her." (Laughter) Things like this, you know, that I remember.

And he got killed in Aachen [Germany]. And when he got killed in Aachen my world ended. Right then I quit. I absolutely refused to do anything. I walked through the numbers, but a lieutenant—I'm leading my machine gun section, we're between a little town called Osterode and Braunlage, and we had one of the eight wheel recon cars. They called in an M-8 from the Fourth Recon and it had a 37-mm gun up on top and a lieutenant standing in the thing, and he's on the road and I'm giving him flank protection, I'm walking here [to the left of the car]. Well, you know how roads are, roads are straight and narrow, but you walk in the woods and you're up a hill and down a hill and then ... So he stopped and he motioned for me to come over and I went over, and this is true—how I got away with it I don't know, well, I do know how I got away with it. But he called me over and he said, "Sergeant, you're holding me up." He said, "Me sitting here going this slow I'm ... Dutch meat." He said, "I could get knocked out. I'm not supposed to go this slow." And I said, "Lieutenant, what do you want me to do?" He said, "You gotta speed up." I said, "Fuck you." And I turned around and went back. Well, had he reported me to the regimental headquarters, I'd been in deep shit. Well, what happened is he topped the hill and the Germans hit him with an 88-mm gun and last time I saw him he was hanging over the back of the thing, dead. And I thank God he was, because I'd been, you know, the war is

over and I don't want to get in trouble now. I just want to mind my own business. But, that is how brutal all people become. Your officers are brutal, your subordinates are brutal, you're brutal, your enemy is brutal and you can't afford attachments that will create a void. And that's why I say that this bullshit of apple pie and patriotism and stars in the windows and yellow ribbons around trees, it's all bullshit. It's all superfluous. What is, what a war is, "I hope this man doesn't go to sleep while I'm asleep." That's what war is. Because if he does you end up getting killed, you know.

ROMEISER: And going back to your friend Dickerson in Aachen ...

FRANKLIN: Mm hmm.

ROMEISER: I think you once said that one of the most difficult things you have ever had to do in your life was to go back and talk to his parents ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Mm hmm.

ROMEISER: ... in Long Island and tell about the circumstances of his death. Do you wanna ...

FRANKLIN: First we were so close. We were, we took basic together and we went through the same regiment, we were in the same platoon. When I become section sergeant—when I become squad leader, he became squad leader. When I become a section sergeant of the first section he became the first section sergeant of another section, you know. And we were always attached to the same company. Most of [the] time to I Company. My platoon was always in I Company. Well, and we were always together. We all kidded each other. We had fun. In fact, in a little town in France we got squeezed out and we come to a lake, you got that cut off? We come to a lake and we ...

PIEHLER: Did you want this off the record?

FRANKLIN: Yeah.

(Tape Paused)

PIEHLER: I can understand why you wanted to go off the record on that story.

FRANKLIN: I can't understand you Doc.

PIEHLER: I said can understand why you didn't want that story immortalized ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: ... on the Internet.

ROMEISER: About—going back to Dickerson and after he died ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. You know, Jim Bottomley started to shoot me over Dickerson. First section was in this typewriter factory, my section. He was next door in a factory. And I don't know what kind of factory it was—the reason I know it was typewriters because some of the guys was shipping them by mail, rolling 'em up and shipping 'em by mail back to America. What the hell you'd want with a German typewriter, I don't know. But they were doing it, you know. I wasn't that smart to mess with typewriters. But I'm here and Dickerson hollered across, hollered for me, and I looked out the window and he said, "Do you have any cigarettes with you?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "I'll come over and get a pack." And I said, "Okay." So he went down somewhere, I don't know where he got out of that building, and he come in-between the two buildings and a mortar shell hit right behind him and killed him. Well, I went and got him. And it's raining and muddy and so, you know, when he fell he turned kind of like this and fell with his face in the mud, and it was really, really upsetting. Anyway, I got him and I brought him into the building and we cleaned him up and I sat and held him. Ah, Shit. Goddamn it. Excuse me.

DENTON: Sure.

(Tape Paused)

ROMESIER: You'd been to his home ...

FRANKLIN: Well, anyway. I apologize.

PIEHLER: No, no, no. No need to ...

FRANKLIN: But anyway, the platoon moved forward, had to move out, and I wouldn't leave. I stayed there with him. I could not imagine leaving the boy there just like another dead American. So I stayed there with him. Well Jim Bottomley came over and he said, "Ben, I'll send somebody back for ya." He was our platoon sergeant. By the way, he was from Brooklyn [New York], Irish fella. Forty-two years old with no teeth, he had false teeth. ... But he had been in Panama and China and everywhere, really an old soldier, good, good man. And I said, "Don't bother 'cause I'm not leaving." And he says, "Well, I'll come back." And the next morning he did, he come back, and he said, "I told you let's go," and I said, "No, I'm not gonna go," and he said, "Damn it, you are." And he pulled out a pistol and he put it on me. He said, "You either go or I'm gonna put you right with him," and I said, "Okay, I'll go," 'cause Jim would. I know he would shoot me. So I left him and I always worried about what happened after I left. You know, did he stay there for a day or a week or did anybody ever find him or, you know. It's stupid to think of stuff like that, but it happens, it happens to you. After all, you're still a human, although you're not acting as a human, you are still a human.

But, then after the war—what happened my regular unit we ended up in Falenau, Czechoslovakia. And they moved us back to Bamberg, Germany. And we stayed there about two or three kegs of beer, I'm sure. Because everybody, all the old people were drunk. And then they moved us down to Schweinfurt. Well, from Schweinfurt they started calculating how many points you had. It took seventy points to come back to America. I had a 123 because there's so much for every month overseas and all, they had it all calculated, didn't have

computers back then, son (Speaking to Denton), they had to do it by hand. (Laughter) Anyway, they sent me down to Nurnberg to fly to England to get on a boat from England to America and I got on to Nurnberg and outside of Nurnberg there was a little town called Furth—out Highway 8 and go up the hill and it's an airbase up there, a fighter airbase. They had some C-47s. And so I just checked in, didn't have anything to do. And this is in ... June I would think, of '45. And I looked over and they were playing softball. Well, I was a good softball pitcher when I was young, so I went around and said, "Y'all need a pitcher?" And they said, "Yeah!" And I didn't know it, but the man on first base was the ground commander or major and the man on short stop was the air commander. They had two majors who commanded one on the ground and one in the air and they had P-38s. That's what air planes they had. So I played and they said, "Who are you?" and I told them. They said, "What happened to you?" and I said, "I'm on my way to England." And they said, "Oh, you're in the Thirty-First," and I said, "Oh, wait a minute. Whatever." And they said, "When are you supposed to go?" and I said, "I don't know." They said, "Well, you want to stay and play some ball?" And I said, "Sure," I said, "What I got to do?" And they said, "Nothing." I said, Hell, that's something I hadn't even known. So I said, "I got buddies up in Schweinfurt. Can I once in a while go visit them?" And they said, "Oh yeah. We'll give you a Jeep." (Laughter) So here I got a Jeep and then didn't have anything to do, and I stayed until November. Well, I stayed until October to ... 'til the season was over. I had nothing to do. And then I got on a—went to England and got on a Liberty Ship and came to Boston [Massachusetts] and then from Boston I was assigned to ... Indiana—not Indiana Gap, that's in Pennsylvania—Edinboro—no, not Edinboro. Well, it's in Indiana. Anyway ...

PIEHLER: Atterbury?

FRANKLIN: Huh?

PIEHLER: Camp Atterbury?

FRANKLIN: Atterbury, Atterbury, Indiana, yeah. That's where I was going to be discharged. Well, I had to go to New York City to go there. And they gave us train tickets from Boston down to New York and then we was suppose to go, so, I said, "Well, I'll just go out and visit my buddy's family." They know of me, you know. I spent a weekend with 'em. So you've been out on Long Island (Speaking to Piehler). I went out on Long Island. They live at ... Bridgehampton and his sister had married a test pilot in Bell Aircraft. Bell had a factory someplace—that's one of the details I remember about the family. Well, when I got there the father ... was a little shaken up, but the mother just broke down, you know. And so, I'm in the living room and it's late in the afternoon, pushing evening as I remember, and she's in the kitchen and he went into the kitchen and all I got is a little bag, you know, a little hand bag. I checked my duffel bag in at the ... station. I just got a little handbag. And I heard her say, "Well, why didn't he get killed instead of Mark?" Or something—it was Mark. And I thought, "My God. What the hell have you stepped in now" you know. So when the husband come back I said, "I've got to go. I've got a train to catch." He said, "No, no, no ..." He tried to keep me, but she was crying, the mother was crying. And justly so, you know. Here somebody comes along to remind her—they'd already told her a year earlier that her son had been killed. He got killed in October, the middle of October of '44 and this is the middle of October of '45. And ... I thought they would want to know some of the details, you know. That's not true. Parents don't

want to know the details. I found that out. So I just kind of got up and walked out. I said, “I’ve got to go.” I realized I had caused a problem. That’s not the problem, you get out on Long Island and if you’re at the wrong station you can’t get a train back into New York. (Laughs) So I sat there all damn night sitting with the bag with nothing to do before I could get a train the next morning into New York. (Laughter) And I cursed myself the whole night. I said, “not only have you made a mistake by going to visit the family, but you’ve made a mistake by going to Long Island, that’s the big mistake.” (Laughter)

PIEHLER: It’s interesting because I—the reaction of the family because I’ve actually met orphans who never knew their father and have sort of contacted me to say we’d love to know what happened to our father in the war. Because their, you know, their ... mothers had them when they were, when they were young, you know, while their fathers were overseas and they died and they want to know. But in this case you were sort of saying this family really didn’t want to know ...

FRANKLIN: The father was receptive ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, but the ...

FRANKLIN: ... but not the mother. She was—in fact, the minute I got there, you know, she said, made just little remarks. She didn’t say anything out, but ...

PIEHLER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: ... but, I could tell that it was not a bad—not a good thing to do.

ROMEISER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: So I didn’t tell them the details. And I never did. That was the last time I ever went to anybody to pay sympathy to anybody. Although, we had a man—it was too bad y’all didn’t get to meet him. His name is Albert Jones and he came into my platoon about—we were at Chaumont [France], remember Chaumont?

ROMEISER: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

FRANKLIN: And down at that little La Feret Mace.

ROMEISER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: He entered tour there and from there till the end of the war, he got six Silver Stars, five Bronze Stars, and six Purple Hearts. He was absolutely crazy. You’ve never seen, if you’d a met Albert you would have known that he was crazy. From the minute you, he had them wild eyes and a ... strong chin and he looked at you, he challenged you. Every time you told him something his eyes challenged you. So later—I’ve got to prove my point to you. Just, just hold still.

(Tape paused)

FRANKLIN: (Showing a photograph) This is him. ... This is him right here, Al Jones. And that's his obituary. Read it to this young man (Points to Denton), will you please?

PIEHLER: [reading] "Jones, Albert E. Age seventy-nine of Powell [Tennessee] passed away Wednesday, October 1, 2003 at Saint Mary's Hospice. Member of Glenwood Baptist Church. He was a World War II and Korean War Veteran with twenty-one years of service. He was second lieutenant decorated with five Silver Stars, five Bronze Stars, and six Purple Hearts. Proceeded in death by his parents Samson and Lassie Jones, brothers Jack and Roscoe Jones, sister Freddie Hobson. Survivors: wife Mary E. Jones, brother and sister-in-law George and Barbara Jones, sisters Bertha Lindsey of Spartanburg, South Carolina, Gladys England of Powell, Ellen Smart of Ohio, sister and brother-in-law Blanche and Paul Hill of Knoxville, Josephine Pike of Powell, several nieces and nephews. Family and friends will meet 2:45 P.M. Thursday at Highland Memorial Cemetery for graveside services and 3:00 P.M. Reverend Perry Austin officiating. Military honors provided by East Tennessee Volunteer Honor Guard. Mynott Funeral Home in charge."

FRANKLIN: Mm hmm. I just thought that it would be great for you all to ...

PIEHLER: Yeah, no, I mean, it's ...

FRANKLIN: But ... after the war, Al stayed with the regiment. A lot went back to the regiment. And Al was crazy. Then Korea broke out, Al went to Korea and joined the Second Division. They give him a commission in Korea and he was a platoon leader in Korea. Well, when the Korean War broke out—I mean, finished, they kicked him out of the officer's corps and I used to kid him about being part of "America's Royalty," an officer. (Laughter) He said, "You're son of a bitch." (Laughter) Anyway they kicked him back to sergeant and he came back to the regiment. Well, I had, I was First Sergeant of D Company, and he was the Recon Platoon Sergeant. And he got in a young lieutenant, and we're in ... Baumholder, Germany and Al walked in my office and I'll never—anytime Al come to see ya, there was a problem. But believe it or not, there's so much politics with the old World War II First Division people. There's more politics—you could get anything if you were old World War II men, they protected each other. I don't care what it was, they protected. So Al walked in, and I knew there was a problem. Al said, "Ben you gotta help me." I said, "Al, what have you done?" He said, "That damn lieutenant," Al said, "I had to take him in the woods and beat the shit out of him." I said, "My God." (Laughter) I don't know if you remember when [Ross] Perot, the man who run for President ...

DENTON: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: ... appointed a man named [John] Singlaub ...

PIEHLER: Oh yeah.

FRANKLIN: ... Singlaub as the one in charge of the one that was going to go and recover the prisoners of war that were still in Southeast Asia. Well, [John] Singlaub was his Regimental Commander, was a Regimental Commander, Singlaub was. I said, "Oh God, we've got problems. I know that dumb son of a bitch there ... Singlaub." So Walt Cannon a boy that was a corporal in our platoon in the war, was now Division Sergeant Major. Good soldier. So I call Walt, I said, "Walt," I said, "guess who's in the office?" He said, "Who?" I said, "Al is." He said, "Oh, Al! Don't tell me, Ben." (Laughter) I said, "What we got to do is you gotta get in my company fast." And he said, "Don't tell me the details," he said, "are you gonna handle it?" I said, "I'll handle it." He said, "I'll call you back in a few minutes." So fifteen minutes later he called me back and said, "You've got him. They're cutting orders at Division to transfer him to your Company." I had a Company Commander named Brown who was a quarterback at Texas A&M. Good Company Commander—tall, slim, really good. I went up to Captain Brown and I said, "Captain Brown, don't ask any questions. But, we got a new man in the company; I want you to give him Article 15." Which means if he gets an Article 15, now they can't court martial him because he's already been punished. He said, "Well, what do you want me to do to him?" I said, "Restrict him to his quarters for two weeks." And Captain Brown said, "Type it up." (Laughter) Well, then I had my clerk type it up took it in and the Company Commander signed it and I said, "Al, go home and stay there." And Al said, "Ben," and I said, "Get the hell out of here, Al. Go home and stay there." Well, Al went home. Two days later, Captain Brown and I are standing in front of the Colonel. He is so damn mad, you can't believe how mad he is. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: This is Singlaub?

FRANKLIN: Yeah. He said, "You son of a bitch ..." And Captain Brown just stood there at attention and I said, "Sir, I'm responsible for this." He said, "Sergeant, you're not responsible for nothing. Officers are responsible." I thought, "One time, Goddamn me, I'm glad I'm not an officer." (Laughter) Anyway, when I become sergeant-major I made Al the first sergeant of the company. So when they got us, brought us to Fort Benning and I'm the sergeant major and, of course, General Corley is division commander—I immediately went to General Corley and said, "Now, we got Al down here in D Company and they can't promote him to E-8," he was E-7, and Al already told me he wanted to retire, and I said, "If we can, Al, if you'll just hold on 'til I can getcha promoted to E-8, that will mean about thirty bucks a month more, you know." "Oh, to hell with it, I'm getting out. I'm going home. To hell with it." He's from Knoxville. So he wouldn't wait. I went to Corley and Corley said, "As soon as we get an application we'll give it to him." So but he retired first. Well, I didn't hear from Al until one day I picked up the newspaper, and over at the corner of Winona and Magnolia there's a filling station. And a young black fellow went in there with a knife to rob the filling station. Al reached in a drawer and took out a pistol and shot him eight times. (Laughter) Shot him eight times! You know, got him lying on the floor and Al's still shooting him and the policeman said, "Why did you shoot him so many times?" He said, "Son of a bitch was still wigglin." (Laughter) 'Course they didn't do anything to Al, but I told Ute, I said, "Honey, for God's sake don't let Al know that we're here." (Laughter) [I said], "If you do, you know, he'll be here." He's just trouble. Al was just one of those people, just trouble. But anyway, when he died, or when he got real ill—he got cancer. When I found out someone broke into his home and stole his medals and Duncan, Congressman Duncan come down to give him his medals back and they made him an article ...

ROMEISER: In the *News-Sentinel*.

FRANKLIN: ... I went out to see him then. But now, Al getting killed doesn't bother me one bit, people dying don't bother me one bit. Only a close friend like, you know. It's not interesting to you people, I know, but such is life.

PIEHLER: You mentioned earlier, when you went in as a—before you went overseas, did patriotism not mean anything to you, or the symbols? I mean, now having gone through four years of the war and being career Army it's sort of—I understand what you're saying about ...

FRANKLIN: Before I went overseas ...

PIEHLER: But before as a young boy, who's not even ...

FRANKLIN: I was more patriotic before I went to Africa than I was in Africa. And this goes back—we had a man in the company that made the statement, somebody asked him, and it just holds true. I did not make the statement, but I heard about it. Somebody said, "Aren't you ready to die for your country? Don't you have any patriotism?" And he said, "No, I'm too goddamned close to the Germans to be patriotic." (Laughter) He said, "I'll go back to the regiment if you want patriotic people." That was me. (Laughter) Once I got close to the Germans, I quit being patriotic. I started becoming a survivor. Do what you need to do to survive. You forget patriotism and all the other stuff. Up until that point in my young educated, uneducated dumb ... mind I did feel some feeling of patriotism, but I have never been able to figure out what the hell we were doing in Africa. That was the question.

PIEHLER: When you were fighting in ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. What the hell? This place ain't worth fighting for and we're fighting here and the Germans are fighting, what the hell are we doing here? I didn't realize the overall picture.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: Which later ... I did. And I gave it some thought, and I talked to Doc John about giving a class, a history class in conjunction with it. Few people realize it—this maybe boring to you, you can cut that off, but few people realize it, but when we went to Europe in August of 1942, we thought that we were going to England to get ready to jump off and invade France. And that was the American thought including all the generals, and politicians, everything, that we would immediately establish a second front in France to relieve the pressure on Russia, you know, which was part of the geopolitics. I did not realize how inapt, how untrained, and how unofficered, and how unsoldiered we were when we got to Europe, you know. I did not know that.

PIEHLER: Now, did you land in England or in Northern Ireland?

FRANKLIN: England.

PIEHLER: In England.

FRANKLIN: Went to a place called—when we landed, we went over on the *Queen Mary*. We landed in the Firth of Clyde and then we couldn't go into shore and they took us in with little boats. We got on a train and went to Tidworth Barracks, which is down in, near Stonehenge. I can't think of the name of the district and—boy, my mind is getting bad. I haven't drank enough wine. (Laughter) Anyway, then we went from there—we stayed there some time, then went up to Scotland and we took maneuvers, and then we got on boats and went to Africa and led the invasion of Africa. Well, while we were at Tidworth Barracks, the Second Canadian Division and a battalion, the Fifth Battalion, Fourth Battalion of American Rangers invaded Dieppe in France. And they got the shit beat out of 'em. I mean they got stomped. Ten thousand of 'em, just wiped out, prisoners—dead. So that ... we became sharply aware that this wasn't just gonna be “get on a boat and go over take France.” This was gonna be a problem. And thank God we had—they sent us to Africa and we learned how to fight, we learned how to move, we learned how to hate because that's the basic ingredient of a conquering army is hate for your enemy. That's a ... basic ingredient. So we learned that in Africa. Have a drink (Pours wine). But further and afterwards, I have to think about it, what we did, and without realizing it, was Roosevelt and our Chief of Staff and our generals all thought that we were ready to go into France and we were not. We were not trained good enough. So we trained in Africa and in Sicily, but we did more than that. When we invaded Africa, the Germans had to occupy all of France because we now represented a threat from their south. So they withdrew fifty-seven divisions from Northern occupied France and had to put them down to defend unoccupied France, now Vichy France, plus Italy, plus the ... coast of Yugoslavia. They had to deploy fifty-seven divisions down there just because we're in Africa, and later in Sicily, and later in Italy. So what we did is we softened the Atlantic Wall whereby it was easier for us to invade from England over there. This would make a very good history class to someone interested because I'm sure this boy is just about much interested in that as he does a young blonde who lives next door him. (Laughter) But that's what we did.

And of course, what happens when a unit goes into combat, you have privates that are worthless, you have sergeants that are worthless, you have lieutenants that are worthless, you have captains and colonels and so on that are worthless and you weed them out. The longer you're on the frontline, the more the worthless you move out. And I don't mean worthless as individuals, I mean as participants in a particular situation that you're there in. And you get people who are more worthy of that position promoted to them. When we went into Tunisia in Northern Africa, half of our officers had to go over to the Thirty-Fourth Infantry Division to become commanders over there because they're, they were National Guard troops, and all the—most people don't realize it, the National Guard does not in anyway compare with a regular Army unit. It just does not. You take the First Division stationed in New York, where is all your West Point officers going to go? When they graduate, they want to be in New York where the women are and where the good living is, so they all went to the First Division, you know. And the Thirty-Fourth Division, an outfit of the National Guard that had lawyers, and bankers, and school teachers in it, and here they are in combat. Well, they weren't worth a damn. So we had to send half of our officers over there to command 'em. And also, we weeded out two colonels in our regiment.

We landed with a man named Colonel Cheadle and he disappeared. I don't know what happened to him.

PIEHLER: He literally just disappeared?

FRANKLIN: Well, no, I don't know.

PIEHLER: Yeah. From your perspective, he was there one day ...

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Then we got a man named Fouche. Well I—it was after the war that I found out what happened to Fouche. He was one of those people that set fires and got his gun off, you know. Paro? What do they call them? Paro, paromaniac?

ROMEISER AND DENTON: Pyromaniacs?

FRANKLIN: Yeah.

PIEHLER: He really was a pyromaniac?

FRANKLIN: Yeah, he really was. Yeah. And he did something and somebody shot him. (Laughter) And they evacuated—then we got a man in named Taylor. George A. Taylor. Absolute brilliant colonel. He ended up as a general, you know. Absolutely brilliant, but he took no B.S., you know. I had to go before him and he told me ... in Tunisia, we're fighting, had a lot of casualties. The Fifteenth, the Third Division is back at ... in Spanish Morocco. The Fifteenth Infantry has sent replacements to my regiment, the Sixteenth Infantry, the Third Division Infantry, but when the Third Division got into Italy and we're in Sicily, and the Third Division got wounded and casualties they wanted the the Sixteenth Infantry to send them replacements there. Well, I had just been A.W.O.L., so I was on that list to go to the Third Division. Well, I went to see the Colonel. And I said, "Sir, I started my Army career with this unit." He said, "Why shouldn't I send ya?" I told him, and I said, "I love this infantry." He said, "Bullshit! You don't love nothing. You damn worthless bum." (Laughter) And he didn't ship me, he kept me in the regiment, you know. I really did like him. And then we came back to England and got ready for D-Day. But it was interesting and hadn't it not be for [Winston] Churchill, had we tried to invade across the channel at that time, and still, you know, I was talking to a doctor of dentistry, you would think, fairly educated person.

ROMESIER: Right.

FRANKLIN: He said, "What do you think about ..."—and he's a good friend, I can talk to him ... without reservation. He said, "What do you think about our involvement in Vietnam?" I said, "We're in a shit pot. We're in, we're in deep doo doo." He says, "Well, we just can't let those people come over here and take over the country." I said, "Dick [Hyatt], do you realize it took us a year and a half to get ready to cross twenty-one miles of channel in England? It took thousands and thousands of assault boats and millions and millions of machine gun ammunition. It took brilliant people to figure out this and figure out that, and those damned Arabs are gonna come over here and take over?" I said, "How they, what are they gonna come over in, pontoon

boats? What are they gonna use as artillery? They hadn't got—five times a day they kneel down and face the east and pray.” I'm hating Arabs now as I ... “So how the hell—if they're gonna lay 'em down five times and day to pray, how are they gonna fight?” If you'll read the ... the one-eyed general of Israel ...

ROMEISER: Oh, uh ... Moshe Dayan?

FRANKLIN: Moshe, Moshe Dayan, yeah. You read his book and he tells you that the Syrian tank brigade come charging down at his battalion. He was on the northern border of Israel. He fired one shot and they stopped and run back to Syria. (Laughs) Because they are not fighters, they're prayers. Now, I've got nothing against people who pray, as long as you don't want me to fight for you, you know. (Laughter) So those people aren't gonna come over here and bother us. We don't have to worry about them. Now, do we have to worry about going over there? Now we got a different problem, you know. What right do I have to come to Dr. Piehler's house and say, “Dr. Piehler, I don't like your religion, I don't like your politics, so we're gonna change it. I'm gonna kick down your door and I'll make your children go to my ... kind of school and you're gonna become a socialist.” That's what we're doing there, see. People don't have nothing but ...

----- END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE -----

DENTON: I wanted to ask you a question ...

FRANKLIN: What son?

DENTON: When you enlisted you were sixteen years old.

FRANKLIN: Yeah. Mm hmm.

DENTON: Did you have any problems convincing the recruiters that you were ...

FRANKLIN: No, no they didn't ... there was so many people there, and I was tall, slim, I weighed a 192 pounds, I was six foot three [inches]. A good sportsman, you know. And I had the responsibility of a family on my shoulders. So I maybe looked a little older, you know. Uh, some place there's a picture of what I looked like then.

ROMEISER: Ben, did your name, you've got a name of a famous American has. Did your name ever present problems for you? Did people think you made up your name ...

FRANKLIN: Always had trouble. Anytime there was a formation where they had to call roll. (Laughter) And they called my roll, “Benjamin Franklin!” Well everybody laughed. I was the, that was the thing. And this is it.

ROMEISER: Didn't somebody actually, some guy call you out one time and said, “Smart aleck!” you know and ...

FRANKLIN: No, that was in Sicily.

ROMEISER: That was in Sicily.

FRANKLIN: Yeah, we ended a Sicilian campaign at the foot of Mount Etna. When they decided they, we were going back to England, they first took us and moved us back to a place called Licata on the southwestern coast of Sicily near Gela where we had landed to make the invasion. So in order to move back, [General] Patton had put out the order that everybody had to wear necktie and a steel helmet. Well, I'm sitting in the back of a two and a half ton truck. I've been fighting my butt off and I'm disgusted with everybody. Me and Dickerson had our helmets in the floor and didn't take another tie, and they stopped the truck. So the MP come around and he's taking people, "What's your name? What's your name?" He asked me my name, I said, "Benjamin Franklin." He said, "You going down, smart ass son-of-a-bitch. Get off of there." (Laughter) He took me to the MP headquarters, you know, and the truck went on. Now, I'm, now I've goofed up again. (Laughter) The unit's left me and I'm in trouble with the MPs because my name's Benjamin Franklin. Finally, I showed a captain of the MPs my dog tags and he said, "Okay." And he put me in a Jeep and they ... (Laughter) But, I had a knack for getting in trouble 'cause I didn't really didn't care. I really—because I knew the division would take care of me. Whatever I did they ...

ROMESIER: How man times did you go A.W.O.L.? I know about Paris, but there were other times?

FRANKLIN: Well, I went A.W.O.L. in Paris. Well, I went A.W.O.L. in Licata.

ROMEISER: Yeah.

FRANKLIN: ... Dickerson and I, we took our—we hadn't been paid in six months. We had not been paid. Because they give you cigarettes, they give you toilet articles, they feed you, you know, you're on the frontlines, so they don't pay you. So they paid us and everybody's gambling. (Laughter) Big crap games. So Dickerson and I, we went to the crap game and we just put all—they paid us in Sicilian Liras. I had a handful of them Liras. We just put the whole pile on there and shoot one time. Well, I made a seven.

ROMESIER: Ooh.

FRANKLIN: We picked up a whole pile of money and we went into town. And we went into this hotel. Well, they had beads on the door and on the windows. They had blinds that you can close from the outside. And they do that in, because it's hot. It keeps the heat out. So we went into this hotel and we told 'em what we wanted. We wanted a couple of girls and we wanted to stay there. And they said, "Well, that will cost so much money." We just drug out and we just counted the damn money and we'd give them all the money they want. It had absolutely no meaning to us. And after three of four days, I don't remember when—we ate eggs, spaghetti, drink what we called Dago Red wine and ... we had these girls, couple a girls. The MPs knocked at the door. (Laughter) And the man that was supposed to be the bartender come up and told us that there was somebody at the door, MP. And I said, "I'll go talk to 'em." And I went

down. I had on my, my red OD ... OD undershirts and I had OD pants, but I did have my shirt off and my dog tags around my neck. And I went down and opened the door and I said, "What do you want?" He said, "Where's those Americans?" (Laughter) And I said, "What Americans?" He said, "You goddamn it, come on." (Laughter) So they took us to the stockade, this is a true story. They had pup tents at the stockade. I'm in this pup tent and I got so hot, absolutely burned up. I got malaria and it just came on at that time, and I had been there a couple or three days in this pup tent.

So they took me to a doctor and all I remember him saying was, "Get this man to the hospital immediately. He has a temperature of 105.4." So they rushed me to the hospital and there's a field hospital up on a cliff and I could hear the water hitting the rocks down below, and I loved it. I would have stayed there forever. (Laughter) Nurses, warm bed, good food, and they keep you for thirteen days. When you got malaria—although after about five days, you know, you're okay. But, they keep for—I stayed there for thirteen days. And then when I went back to the company they had me on this damn list to go to Third Division. (Laughter) It was just one problem after another. Then I went A.W.O.L. in Paris, on the liberation of Paris and ...

ROMEISER: That's for another day.

FRANKLIN: That was, that was the trip. Oh. I left Paris ... I was thinking about the joy—the one experience, the exhilarating experience of life is to liberate Paris. Unfortunately, nobody else will ever be able to do it. It happened one time and that's it. But, Paris was an absolute wild city and I went in with the Fourth Infantry Division truck, me and Dickerson with two cases of C-rations, a 45 pistol, a toothbrush stuck in my canteen thing, and that's it, we went into Paris. And we had these and two girls saw us and I mean people are wild. They were just grabbing boys every place. And these two girls, oh, they come and grabbed us and ... and my French was—although I learned a little French in Africa, it was not really good, but I knew what *douche* meant. And she asked me do you want a *douche*? A bath. And I, we hadn't had a bath since Normandy or since England or since that pond, we laid in it and took a bath. So yeah, so they took us home. They lived in Saint-Germain des Prés. Got on the subway and went out there and we went to their apartment and I took a bath. We sold my pistol and we sold his pistol. (Laughter) She had a record of this *foo foo foo foo*. I don't know if you're familiar with it. You know the organ grinder ...

PIEHLER: It is the ...

FRANKLIN: ... that said, *foo foo foo foo, da da da da da da, foo foo foo foo*. (Singing)

ROMEISER: Oh, yeah.

FRANKLIN: Well, that's the record. We danced to that record, we drank wine, we had sex, we eat, we smoked a cigarette—well we run out of cigarettes, now we're dangerous. So she had sold our pistols, our belt, and I kept my toothbrush, that's the only thing I kept. No, I sold—I lost my toothbrush. (Laughter) Yeah, that's right. It was in my canteen thing and I sold it, too. Because I remember—I did everything to her, but I would not use her toothbrush. I brushed my teeth with my finger like this. That's how boys are, you know. (Laughter) But anyway, the MPs

got us 'cause I went out to get some cigarettes, Dickerson and I. We figured we'd find an outfit we could bum some cigarettes from, we just go down on the street and they got 'em. Then my regimental was at Soissons. We left here that day, southeast of Paris just out of town. We caught 'em at Soissons. You should have heard my battalion commander. You should have heard him. He's going to put us up against the wall and shoot us for desertion to face the enemy. (Laughter) But, one thing, I left Paris clean. I took a bath all the time, every day I took a bath. My stomach was full, I was sexually saturated. I had all the sex I'd ever need again in my life and I was ready to die. I didn't give a damn. (Laughter) So when the colonel told me and Dickerson that he's gonna have us shot, "Lined up against the wall and 'em shot down like a goddamned dog." And I said, "Well sir, I don't care." He said, "You son-of-a-bitch, you're busted!" Anyway, they busted us and put us, sent us back to our company. But, they made us still do the same job. I was still a section sergeant but I'm a private. (Laughter) Jim Bottomley said, "You're gonna do you job." But, it was funny. Some things happened that were funny.

PIHELER: Well, we have to end today. But, I want to just first on tape say this concludes today's interview with Ben Franklin on ...

FRANKLIN: I can't hear you Doc.

PIEHLER: ... this concludes today's interview with Ben Franklin on October 20, 2004 at his home in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler ...

DENTON: ... Braum Denton ...

ROMEISER: ... John Romeiser.

PIEHLER: And thank you very much.

FRANKLIN: My pleasure.

----- END OF INTERVIEW -----

Reviewed by Stephanie Crump 9/06/05

Reviewed by Cinnamon Brown 9/20/05

Reviewed by Kurt Piehler 1/9/2005