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AN INTERVIEW WITH JIMMY GENTRY

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KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Jimmy Gentry in Franklin, Tennessee on July 22, 2000 with Kurt Piehler and ...

KELLY HAMMOND: Kelly Hammond.

PIEHLER: I guess I'd like to ask you a very basic question. When were you born, and where were you born?

JIMMY GENTRY: I was born right here. Not in town; just out of Franklin, in what is now called Wyatt Hall. My family rented that house. I was there, but I don't remember. (Laughs) So I was born right here.

PIEHLER: What date were your born?

GENTRY: Uh, November 28, 1924 or 5. Don't ask me those questions like that. (Laughter) '25, I believe, 'cause I'll soon be seventy-five. That must be right.

PIEHLER: And you are native of Franklin.

GENTRY: I really am. I have lived in Franklin, outside of Franklin, which is now in Franklin, and now I am back outside of Franklin. But Franklin is my home base, yes.

PIEHLER: And could you maybe talk a little bit about your parents first? I guess, beginning with your father?

GENTRY: Alright. My father originally came from North Carolina. Marshall, North Carolina, as I recall, near Asheville, and then he worked first for the railroad company for a short time. Then he went with South Central Bell—at that time it was called the Bell Telephone System before they broke it up into sections—and came here and worked from down in Alabama to Nashville, putting up pole lines. [He] met my mother at Neapolis, which is between Franklin and Columbia, just south of Spring Hill.... And so, since that time, they married, and so we have lived in this area the rest of the time. I have nine brothers and sisters, and all of us are living but one. I had a brother that was killed in Italy during World War II, the one just above me, two years older than myself. So, that's all he did, all his life, is work for the telephone company. My mother, of course, was a housewife.

PIEHLER: It sounds like that was a pretty good job to have.

GENTRY: Oh yeah, I think so. The benefits from—Bell Telephone Company was generous with their benefits for my mother after his death, so I think it was a good one. Then my brother also, one of my older brothers, spent the rest of his life working for the telephone company. He now has retired, and ... one of his sons is with the telephone company, so it gets into a family.

PIEHLER: That's three generations.

GENTRY: Uh huh.

PIEHLER: I guess now with Bell South.

GENTRY: That's right. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Because in other words, your father worked during the Great Depression.

GENTRY: Oh yeah, sure. I can just remember it. I can remember people—I didn't understand it at the time—bringing food to our house. They were friends of my father, and I didn't quite understand why they were doing that, but I sure did enjoy it. (Laughs) But we all had a hard time. The thing I remember more about that period of time, being so young, was that one time we lived near a railroad, and the hobos would come up to our house and knock on the door, and my mother would go back, and they would say they wanted to something to eat. She would say, "Well, if you split some wood for me, while you are doing that, I'll fix you something to eat." And I was afraid of them, because they were hobos. I didn't know what it meant exactly, but they were hobos. The word hobo scared me, I think, and I would peep out to see what they were doing, and then finally she would feed them and thank them, and they would leave. And we had that happen frequently. We found out later that they had tied a cloth in a tree at the back of our house by the railroad tracks, so the other hobos would know this was a good place to stop. (Laughs)

HAMMOND: Wow!

PIEHLER: So this was a pretty regular occurrence, growing up?

GENTRY: Oh yeah. On sure. Yeah. You had lots of people—of course, they didn't have welfare back then, like we do now, and usually people would take care of the other people around them, and their neighbors, and that sort of thing, so it worked out nicely, I thought.

PIEHLER: Could you maybe ... talk a little bit about your mother?

GENTRY: Oh boy! My mama was just like all the rest, I guess. She was the greatest thing in the world. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: She was also from North Carolina?

GENTRY: No. No. She was from Neapolis, down here in Middle Tennessee.

PIEHLER: Oh, okay.

GENTRY: That's where he met her, at Neapolis. Just south, between Franklin and Columbia.

PIEHLER: Okay.

GENTRY: And so she was not from North Carolina. She had a large family also. Back in those days, it was not unusual to have eight, nine, ten, eleven, dozen kids sometimes. So she came from a large family. She had very little education, my mother or father. Neither one of them had very much an education. The priorities back then was to make a living. It was not to get an education. So she didn't have an education, and he didn't have much of an education. But they were all hardworking and great people, and I just loved my mother, and daddy, for that matter. He died when I was eleven years old, so that left my mother with—at that time, I think there were still seven children at home. You hear of single moms now. Well, here was a single mom with eleven children to raise, and we somehow scrapped around and helped her, and she would tell us that we need something for supper—not dinner, supper—and we would go out and catch a rabbit, or a squirrel, or a fish, and that is what we would have. We raised our own chickens, and pigs, and that sort of thing. She was a great cook. I can remember all those things that she used to make in the way of fudge candy, and let us clean the bowl out. You know how that goes. Snow ice cream. And ... what I called a teacake. Sugar cookies. Sometimes she would set the table for us to eat breakfast, say, and there would be thirteen of us at the table. We'd have a pile of biscuits, and you couldn't even see the other end of the table for the biscuits. But we always ate good, and had a close knit family, and she was sort of the center of it, after my daddy died.

PIEHLER: How did your father die?

GENTRY: He had a heart attack. He was a smoker. I've always blamed that on it, but he was a smoker. And back then, you know, they didn't know anything about that. I remember he rolled his own and all that sort of thing, and he was good to us too. I always loved to go with him. Sometimes he—we didn't have an automobile, but he had a telephone truck that he worked out of, and he would come by and maybe pick one of us up. He tried to be fair to all of his boys and take us with him on his route. He and one other gentleman were the only two telephone men in this whole county, and so he would take us out all day with him. I just loved that, to be with my daddy. Or he would take us fishing, or take us swimming. So I had a good, happy childhood growing up. Had plenty of playmates, too. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: It must have been hard to lose your daddy at such an early age.

GENTRY: Yeah. I think he was just in his early or late fifties, maybe, when he had his heart attack.

PIEHLER: How—I mean, losing your father, also financially, you said the benefits were good for ...

GENTRY: The benefits were good, but my mother—I don't know how she made it. I really don't know. As I said, we usually raised most of our food, or we caught most of our food. We learned to do things that youngsters nowadays have a hard time believing, but we learned to catch fish with our hands, out from under rocks. We learned to catch rabbits with our hands. No weapon, no guns, or anything. There is a way of catching rabbits ... and squirrels with your hands. So we learned to do all of those things growing up, and loved to do it. That was exciting and adventurous. Every day was an adventure for us to go out and catch some kind of animal, and bring it home to eat. Of course, we picked berries, and we robbed honey trees, and all sorts

of things. So, I guess that's how we made it.... Most of our food was—the cost of our food was probably nil, with compared to what it is nowadays. We had to wear hand-me-down clothes. I remember I would wait for my brother to grow out of his shoes, and then we would plug the holes in the bottom of the shoes, cut a piece of cardboard and cover the holes, and keep on wearing it. We were barefooted until we were way up into elementary school, maybe eighth grade, before we started wearing shoes to school. And the only time we'd wear them then was on cold days, and to Sunday school and Church. That was about the only time that we would wear shoes. The rest of the time we loved to go barefooted. So, I don't know. We made it somehow, obviously. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: I guess—you mentioned hand-me-down clothes.... How often did you get to go to the movies?

GENTRY: That was a real treat. A movie then, I think, was a dime and my daddy or my mama, sometime they would give us a dime for each one of us, or maybe three of us would go in with thirty cents, and put in a handkerchief and tie it in a knot so you couldn't lose that thirty cents, and off we'd go to the Saturday movies, old cowboy shoot-'em-ups. And sometimes we would get tickled because we would be in the movie on Saturday afternoon, if we went over a little bit, and I'd hear our daddy. He was in the back. He had come to the movie, also. He would laugh back there, and we knew who it was. That he wanted to see the movies also. So that was a real treat back then, to go to a movie. They were called picture shows.

PIEHLER: ... I assume Franklin had a theater?

GENTRY: Franklin Theater, right. I knew every inch of it. (Laughter) Everything was is Franklin.

PIEHLER: So, I assume you, for example, saw Tom Mix ...

GENTRY: Tom Mix and Buck Jones, yeah, and Roy Rogers came along. He was a little later, Roy Rogers, was. But Tom Mix and Buck Jones were early ones, and we loved those. They were our heroes.

HAMMOND: What was your favorite movie?

GENTRY: ... I can't remember any of those back then. Maybe the early Last of the Mohicans, the first one that came out, something like that, probably was one of my favorites. And I got favorites later on, but in those early ones, they all run together on me now.

PIEHLER: But you really liked the westerns?

GENTRY: Oh, yeah. Oh, I wouldn't go to those old love shows. No. Where they'd kiss. You didn't go to those. Nu uh. I wouldn't go to those. I wouldn't be caught dead in those things. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What about any war movies? Did you ever watch, say, All Quiet on the Western Front, or any of those?

GENTRY: No. Not really. I heard about it, and I ... saw it later, but not in those early years. No. You was insulted if you were asked to go to something other than a western.

PIEHLER: What about Gone with the Wind, though? 'Cause you were ...

GENTRY: Gone with the Wind didn't come along until 1939.

PIEHLER: Did you see it when it came out?

GENTRY: Oh, yeah. I loved that. I've seen it about twelve times. Yeah. That was fine. I liked that. But I was growing out of the westerns by then.

PIEHLER: Yeah, by then. But ...

GENTRY: Great movies right along in that period of time. I think five of the top one hundred movies ever made were made around ... 1939, 1940, right on in there. Gone with the Wind is one of them. The Maltese Falcon was another one. African Queen, Citizen Kane. They all—Citizen Kane became number one! So, it was a good time growing up in Franklin. I have nothing but good memories of it, and I had to have had a good childhood and a happy childhood, 'cause I still like to be around young people, and like to be around kids, and play with them. I go and play with my little grandchildren in the floor sometimes. A few minutes ago—she just turned six. She has some little cars in there, and she said, "Now, here's you some." I said, "Thank you." So I get to play with her. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: I'm curious. You mention your family did not have a car. Did you have a radio?

GENTRY: Yes. Eventually we did. We didn't at first. The first radio I ever heard was in our garden, where our garden separated us from our neighbor, who ... turned out to be the first real radio person in Franklin, Mr. Bob Sewell, and he had one of those little wireless things upstairs. Had the window open. Of course, you didn't have air conditioning back then. And I heard that thing. I went over there, and he let me listen to it, and I couldn't believe that. Then, a little later on, we came up with a radio. So that's about the only thing that we had. We can go back pretty far with the radio, too.

PIEHLER: And, uh, did you have a telephone?

GENTRY: At first, we didn't even have our own phone, with my daddy even working for them. But, finally, we got one, and I think we were on a party line even then. But, yeah, we did finally get a phone, and one of my neighbors was on with us, so they put it together. They didn't have phones all the way out. It wasn't that you couldn't afford one, necessarily. They just didn't have the lines all over the county at that time, so I can skip up and tell you an interesting story about telephones. But I'm skipping now.

PIEHLER: Oh, no. Go ahead.

GENTRY: Way away from early childhood, up until just before about 1940 or '41, just before the war. Franklin was still a small town, and everybody knew everybody else. They not only knew you, they knew you by name, and knew your brothers and sisters, and everything else about everybody. And, so, the telephone operator's name was Lillian. Lillian Wauford was her name. Anyway, to give you an example of how simple it was, the telephone numbers started with number one, and just went one, two, three, four, five, right on up. If you called number seven, you got the laundry. I remember that. If you called number nine, you got Wright's Coal Yard. You knew ... the numbers just by memory. And so, one day I remember calling number seven-nine, and Lillian said, "Jimmy, they're not at home. They're gone to the grocery." (Laughter) That's how close. She knew my voice. She knew they were not at home. Or, we would call Lillian and say—this was later on. This is in about 1940—and say, "We want to go hunting in the morning, or fishing. Wake us up about 4:30." So she would call and say, "Time to go," just like it is in a motel, you know, sometimes. (Laughter) So, it was a small town, and close. Everybody was close at that time. (Laughs) But, the early childhood, as we mentioned, was the happiest days that I could possibly have, because I was doing things that I really liked to do, and that was hunt and fish. Climb trees. There is not a tree out in this section that I didn't climb. We all climbed, and we've got initials carved up in the top. People nowadays are trying to find something for their children to do. We had something to do every day, because there was another tree to climb somewhere. So, we would do all those things, and just had a great time.

HAMMOND: Did you enjoy school?

GENTRY: School? Not really. No. I recall the first time I went to school. The first day. I thought school was going to be really easy.... My mother took me by hand, and we'd go to the old Franklin Elementary School, where the library is now, and went in, and she turned me over to one of the teachers. This is my first day of school, and I remember this. We went up some steps and into an auditorium, a big room, and an old man—boy, he was old. Old man, probably fifty years old. He was just decrepit looking to me. (Laughs) He was white headed.... He made a few remarks and we got up and left. I thought, "Well, there's nothing to this school business," so I go on home. And my mother said, "What are you doing?" I said, "School's out." She said, "No, it's not." And she took me by the hand and took me back. Everybody else went to their class, and I went out. I thought school was over when they let us out of that room. So, that was my first day. And then, I had an unusual situation in school, at least for me. My oldest sister had a little girl, ... and her husband died, just before the birth, and left her with this little girl, and she couldn't really raise her. She was ill at that time, so my mother took that little baby. I was born a month later. So, I'm her uncle, but she's older than I am. We went to school twelve years together, me thinking all along that she's my sister, and her thinking I'm her brother. We bought one set of books between us. One of us didn't use the books much. (Laughter) And we went twelve years. I think I was way up in high school before I realized, "Wait a minute. Something's not right. Her name's not just like mine." And so I count her as a sister, though, because [by] birthright she is not, but she was raised with me, and she is a month older than I am. (Laughs) So, I didn't really enjoy school that much. Now, I enjoyed it more as we went along, 'cause we had a lot more recesses, and more fighting and playing. Then we got

into football, and basketball, and baseball, and all those things as I grew older. Then I began to pay a little bit more attention to school. But, I wanted to go home and go hunting.

PIEHLER: Did you ever take vacations growing up? Did you ever ...

GENTRY: No, no, no. I didn't even know what the word meant. Never heard of it.

PIEHLER: Growing up, before you went into the Army, what's the farthest North, South, East and West you had gone?

GENTRY: I went to Bowling Green, Kentucky, once, to visit my sister that had married and moved up there. That was as far as I had been away from home, was to Bowling Green, Kentucky. I mean, in my whole life.

PIEHLER: So that's the only time that you had left Tennessee? Never went to Alabama? Not to North Carolina?

GENTRY: No, no. Oh, boy! We didn't even know where that was.

PIEHLER: How often would you get into ... Nashville?

GENTRY: Oh, now?

PIEHLER: Then.

GENTRY: Oh, back then? I had a sister that lived in Nashville, and we would go there occasionally, maybe once or twice a year, or something like that. But when you have so many children, you just don't take them all and load them up into an automobile you don't have. And I remember that when we did take trips, a friend of the family would bring the car and take us. We'd go down to visit with my mother's friend that lived down in Neapolis, where she came from, and a friend in Nashville would come out and pick us up and take us down there. And many times, I loved to do that, because she would let us stay three or four days with Mr. Sam Johnson. He raised hogs and lived on his farm out in the country, and we would go down there and spend a few days with him, but we couldn't get back until somebody came to get us. And so, you didn't travel much. You didn't have anything to travel in to begin with. When my daddy died, we didn't even have an automobile for the funeral. So, friends of the family would bring the automobiles over, to take care of the family, and took care of everything like that. So, I didn't venture out much.

PIEHLER: So Franklin really was the world growing up?

GENTRY: That was my world. Franklin was the world. Saturday afternoon, when all the farmers would come in the afternoon, you could not walk—literally, you couldn't walk on the sidewalk without bumping into people, so you'd have to get out in the street and walk a little bit, and get around a group that had stopped to talk. It was that crowded on Saturday afternoon. That was when you'd come in to buy the groceries for the week, and go by and get a block of ice

and put it on the bumper of an old A-model Ford, or on a wagon, and carry it back home, so you could make ice cream on Sunday. Homemade ice cream.

HAMMOND: Was it difficult to get everybody together and ready for Church on Sunday?

GENTRY: On Sunday? Oh, Lord. We did that on Saturday night. My daddy would shine all of our shoes, and he'd line 'em up on the linoleum floor in the hallway ... and get us ready for Sunday school the next morning. We'd have to take our bath. At first, we just had a washtub, and we'd would put it in the floor in the kitchen, and pour the hot water in there. "Alright, you're going first tonight." You'd have to rotate around. You didn't always get the cleanest water if you were last, you know. Bathe in this tub. Well, finally, we got a bathtub put in, but there wasn't any running water.

PIEHLER: You didn't have running water?

GENTRY: No. Didn't have running water. So you'd bring your water in by bucket and pour it in the bathtub, and it had a pipe that ran out under the house to outside, when you drained the tub. So, we thought we was really uptown when we got that. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Now, did you have an outhouse, then?

GENTRY: Yeah, we had an outhouse. Uh uh. Yeah. That was a ...

PIEHLER: So you must remember growing up in the winter, how cold ...

GENTRY: Oh, yeah. You'd make a quick trip out there. (Laughs) Air conditioning wasn't as good. We were talking about that just the other day. When it was hot here, we—of course, you had your windows open, and sometimes it would get too hot, and we'd just take what I call a pallet or a blanket, and get out on the porch and sleep. Or, sometimes we get out in the yard under the tree and spend the night out, which was fine with me, 'cause I liked that anyway. That's the way we'd keep cool at night. Of course, we did a lot of swimming. We'd go to the creek when it got too hot, and that sort of thing. (Laughs) We could go on and on. You're starting to ...

PIEHLER: Oh, no. This is actually—I think we're both enjoying it a lot.

GENTRY: We could be here 'til suppertime if we keep going. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: ... How did you make money, or did you have any jobs?

GENTRY: Oh, Lord. Yes. We didn't have jobs, but ... we figured out ways to make money. I learned to do something that I still like to do. I haven't done it now in twenty years maybe, but I learned to trap animals, mink and muskrat. I would sell those pelts to furriers. That's how I made all of my money. That's how I bought all of my clothes.... Nearly everybody in the family would do the same thing. They had some way of making money. That's how I made my money, was catching muskrat and mink.

PIEHLER: When did you start doing that?

GENTRY: When I was about ten or eleven years old. My older brother was already doing it, and he taught me. So, the two of us started out together, and we'd catch them and split the money, and that's how we made it. Then we'd catch other animals and skin them and sell them to Mr. Martin Thorner. By the way, he was one of two families of Jews in Franklin. And we liked Mr. Thorner. He'd buy furs from us.

PIEHLER: Did he have a store?

GENTRY: He had a furrier. He bought walnuts. That's another thing. We'd gather walnuts and hull them, and sell them to him. And he'd buy furs and hides. He'd buy cowhides. If some farmer around there had a cow to die, we'd go skin the cow and get the hide and take it down there and sell it to him. So, ... that's how we made our money, all the way through. And then, as I got older, up about the seventh or eighth grade, maybe the ninth grade, the bread companies would come out of Nashville about 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning, and I got a job with them, because ... the stores were not open when they'd come through Franklin. They were on the way to Columbia and Mount Pleasant. They'd put the bread out in a box behind the old H.G. Hill store, and it was my job to come along and take the bread and put it in service to everybody on Main Street. So I carried the bread around the corner and put it on the racks for them, and I made two dollars a week, and they took two cents out for Social Security, so I made \$1.98 a week. That's what I was making then. But, you know, \$1.98, I could go to the movies ten times. (Laughs) I could buy ice cream for fifteen cents. So, we got little jobs like that.

And then, finally, where we lived, you could hear from across—about two miles, I guess, if the wind was just right, you could hear music. And I would hear this music. I knew what it was, because one of my older brothers had already gone over there and started working at Willow Plunge. You've heard of this. Greatest place in the world for youngsters. What we called Willow Plunge was a swimming pool. Mr. C.H. Kinnard, this is a story in itself. Mr. C.H. Kinnard started it. He had two sons, and so he dammed up a little creek for his kids to play in. Then other kids started coming down. Well, he got a mule in and scooped out and made like a pond. Well, people started coming to this pond. Then, finally, he cleaned out a place—I guess it was about forty by fifty foot wide, two of them, side-to-side, and concreted it and made it into the most beautiful swimming pool in the whole world. It was fed by springs. That water would come down and flow right into the pool. It had willow trees around it, these weeping willows that would hang maybe fifty, sixty or seventy feet high, and they'd hang all the way down to the water. It was not unusual to have two thousand people there on Sunday afternoon to bathe. But most of us were sunning. Kelly would have been there. All the girls went there, 'cause all the boys went there to get their suntans. So they started taking their suntans and they just—and they came from Nashville. Nashville had only one pool at that time. It was a city pool. But if you were “anybody,” you went to Willow Plunge. So, Willow Plunge just had them by droves, and just car after car after car coming out to Willow Plunge. Well, they had a jukebox, and I could hear that jukebox.... I knew my brother was working there. So, one time, he said, “Mr. Kinnard needs somebody to help drain the pool.” What we would do is drain the pool twice a week. Take the water out and get down and scrub it with a brush, then put fresh water back in. He

needed somebody to work at night. So I went over and started to work there, scrubbing the pool down. And I made more money scrubbing the pool down by finding change that—people used have bathing suits with little pockets. They'd lose a dime, and a nickel, and a quarter. We'd find that while we were cleaning up. Then he'd pay us a little bit. So then I began to add that to my job, working at the swimming pool. And I won't go into all of it, but eventually I ended up being a lifeguard out there, and then I ended up running it after the war, as the manager of it.

PIEHLER: How long did it stay in business?

GENTRY: It stayed in business up until about 1950, I suppose, something along in there. A little bit later, maybe. And then finally, see, what happened to Willow Plunge is that people, ... after World War II, had enough money to build their own pools. Plus, country clubs, plus the lake. These lakes. Then boating came in. That was the big thing for people that had money. So, they went into boating, and building their own pools, and then finally Willow Plunge just faded out. I wish it was back again, 'cause it was a great place.... During World War II, that's where they brought the soldiers from Camp Campbell and from Fort Stewart Air Force Base. All these—they'd bring them there for R&R. They'd bring busload after busload of soldiers there and let them swim and spend the afternoon, and then they'd take them back to camp.

PIEHLER: Were there any, ever, USO dances there, or other, you know—or was the pool just shut down for them, or were there civilians there?

GENTRY: There were provisions there for picnics, and they had the first nine-hole—excuse me, I'm saying it wrong, the first miniature golf course that I ever saw was there. They built it there. And then they built a nine-hole golf course there. During the war, they used the golf course for planes. That was exciting to see those planes come in and land on the golf course. One of ... Mr. Kinnard's boys, Clayton, Jr.—we called him Clay—became a pilot.... He was the second—I think this would be good for your records if you want to check it out, Kelly—I think he was the number two ace in World War II. I think he had twenty-eight and a half German planes to his credit. He would fly in. He was a handsome, good-looking man, and would come in with all that paraphernalia on, and oh, all the girls used to just fall over him, you know, when he would walk by. (Laughter) So, that was Clayton Kinnard, Jr. He was quite a man.

So, (laughs) it was an exciting place at Willow Point. How did I get into that? Oh, the music. Living across there. So I could go on and on. My best friend was a crippled boy. Couldn't walk. Well, he could walk a little bit, and ... finally they took him to New York to an orthopedic hospital there, and removed bone from his back to put in his leg. They used sheep bone, and fused [it] in his back. I don't know what all they did. Joe DiMaggio comes to visit with him and signs autographed balls. He'd bring it back home and we'd knock that thing in the creek and tear it up. It would be worth a thousand dollars now. (Laughter) Anyway, he and I were best friends, and we'd go fishing, and I'd carry him on my back. We'd go fishing, maybe carry him half a mile or three quarters of a mile to the creek, and we'd fish. When we got through, I'd pick up him and take him back home.

So, to give you an example of how we lived at that time—[we were] innocent little people. He lived about three miles from me, but I could cut across some fields and cut it down to about two

miles. Just before you'd get to his house, there was a little hill, like a spring house, where they kept their milk and their watermelons and everything. And a little bluff behind the spring house. It had a hole. We knew some animal used that hole, and of course, I was already experienced in this animal business by then. I came across one day to visit with him, and I saw this old mama skunk. We called them polecats. Goin' along, had five little ones right behind her. The cutest little things you ever saw. I just had to have them, but I didn't want that mama, 'cause I knew what she could do. And so I started running just fast enough to make her run faster than the little ones could run to keep up with her, and I timed it just right, and she ran under that rock, into that hole, and I put a rock in behind her and she couldn't get out. Now, I've got all five of them outside. I took my shirt off and took all five baby skunks, and put 'em in my shirt, and took them up to Hoody's house. Hoody Alexander was his name. He's not living now. He was a lawyer. Anyway, I took them up there, and he was the only one at home. I went around to back door and knocked on the door. He came to the door, and I said "Hoody, look what I've got." "Boy! What have you got?" They were the cutest little things you ever saw.... We played with them a little while and I said, "I think I'm going to take them on back, give them to their mama." He said, "No, no. We'll make pets out of them." I said, "No. You can't make pets out of them! They'll stink you." He said, "No. You can operate on them." See, he was smart, and he knew everything. I said, "Now how do you do that?" He said, "Well you operate on them." He didn't say surgery, but operate on them. I said, "Well, do you know how?" "Yeah, we can do that." He said, "You go upstairs" —his mother and daddy were gone— "and get a can of ether and some cotton balls and my daddy's razor." And I go upstairs and get it and bring it down. There was an old oak stump just outside the door, that we used as the operating table. Well, it turned out, he didn't—I'm doing the operating, not him. So ... he said, "Just cut right there, I think." So he would put them to sleep and hand them to me, and I would take the razor and cut. Well, anyway, to make a long story short, four of them died on the operating table, 'cause I didn't have any idea of what I was looking for, or why, or [how to] even sew them back up. One of them, luckily, fell off the table and ran under the house and escaped. So ... one out of the five did escape from there. So, we were always doing something like that. Catching baby animals and playing with them, and just living an innocent, happy life.

PIEHLER: Were you in any clubs growing up, like Boy Scouts, the Y, or ...

GENTRY: The Boy Scouts—I didn't know anything about the Boy Scouts. They had Boy Scouts, but I had not even heard about 'em. And then later on—at that time, you thought that a Boy Scout—when I did find out, I thought they were sissies. Because, see, we had done everything. We knew how to make a fire. We knew how to do this, and we knew how to do that. We didn't need any Boy Scouts. Of course, I didn't realize what was really going on.... But, no. No organizations.

PIEHLER: No Y, or ...

GENTRY: No. Not at all.

PIEHLER: Now, it sounds like ... it's a lot of time outdoors.

GENTRY: All of us outdoors. Finally, when my daddy died, we had to leave the little farm, going out like the interstate, Kelly. We had to leave there and move into town. Well, that was the worst day of my life, was to leave there and move into town. But, as it turned out, it wasn't too bad, because at that time, when you were in Franklin, you weren't but one block away from the country. So, I could still go out and go back to the same places, just walk up that dead end street up there, you know where that is, across the railroad, and there past the river. We'd build our own boats, you know, flat-bottomed boats. We'd get us some boards and nails, and pour tar in the cracks to keep it from leaking, and paddle up and down the river. We were Tom Sawyer all over again. (Laughs)

HAMMOND: And you got along with all your brothers really well?

GENTRY: Oh, yeah. All the brothers always got along. I guess that's a tribute to my mother and daddy, because we never had a cross word with one another or anything like that. I think the worst thing that ever happened was one of my older brothers—my younger brother, Bobby—had sent off to sell some clove salve. You could sell clove salve, and if you sell twenty dollars worth, you keep five dollars, or something like that. And he sold that, and had the money put away, and my older brother got it and said he was going to pay him back. Well, he never did. He got a letter [saying that] he was going to put him in jail, and all. But of course, they finally dropped it. That's the worst thing that I can remember ever happening. He got his salve money and spent it. So, there was something like that happening all the time at that period of my life. My daddy had a sister and a brother that lived in North Carolina, and they would come to visit. It was one of these cases where they'd come to visit, spend a weekend, and stay seven years. (Laughter) That's exactly what happened. Uncle Henry, he was a hobo. I'm older now than when I earlier mentioned hobos. We loved Uncle Henry, but Uncle Henry would drink. And, my daddy would tell him, "Now Henry, if you get drunk you got to leave. No whiskey in this house." My daddy [was called] Zeb, and he would say "Okay, Zeb." But he would stay there maybe three or four or five years, and then finally he'd get drunk, and he wouldn't even come home. We'd know that he was drunk. He'd catch the next boxcar and be gone. We wouldn't see him for maybe eight or ten years, then he'd come back, and we were always glad to see Uncle Henry. Aunt Emma was the other one. She would come and visit with us, and help cook, and clean up the house, and she stayed for quite awhile.... Both of them died. We don't know what happened to Uncle Henry. I think he may have died in a train or something. Don't know.

PIEHLER: Because he left again, and [you] never saw him again and never got a report?

GENTRY: Never saw him again. Nope. Never got any news from him one way or another, just rumors of what might have happened to him. That's the way people lived back in those days.

HAMMOND: So, there was no drinking in your house?

GENTRY: Do what?

HAMMOND: There was no drinking in your house?

GENTRY: No. Not at all. My daddy didn't drink. Nobody in the house drank. I've never even tasted it, much less ...

PIEHLER: Really? Never even in the service?

GENTRY: I believed everything my mother and daddy said. They said, "It's not good for little boys. It's not good for little boys to drink coffee. You drink milk." I still don't drink coffee, and I'm ... seventy-four years old. I still don't drink coffee. I love to smell it. During the war, I did take a hot cup of coffee and put a doughnut in it once or twice, and eat that doughnut. I did alright then, but I ... just never developed a taste for it. It goes back to that, 'cause she said you didn't do it. I didn't drive an automobile until ... well after the war. Number one, some of these guys didn't understand why I didn't drive. Well, we didn't have an automobile, to begin with. Then I went into the Army, and they don't furnish the infantry with automobiles. Then I came back, and I couldn't afford one right off, so I never had driven.... I was way on up before I started driving. (Laughs)

HAMMOND: Your family was Church of Christ?

GENTRY: Do what?

HAMMOND: Your family was Church of Christ?

GENTRY: Yeah. We were members of the Fourth Avenue Church of Christ. I still go there. That's one of those traditional things, because my mama and daddy went there and that's how you got started. It doesn't make it any better than this one or that one. I don't even see any difference in them. I'm for all the churches. But ... I still go there.... I miss some of the things that they used to do. I used to do this when I was little. The older gentlemen at the church, when it was time for prayer, they'd step out in the aisle and get down on one knee. You don't see that anymore.... [As] one of those old guys that goes there, I put on my Sunday suit when I got to church. Well, nowadays, they come in with their shirtsleeves, which is alright. It doesn't make any difference, but ... I'm just so used to seeing the other. It doesn't make them wrong. A lot of them say, "Oh, he thinks he's better than I am." I don't think I'm any better than them. It's just the way I was raised, and you were raised different. So, I still go there. It was an interesting life. I couldn't have asked for it to have been any better, really. I didn't know that we didn't have anything, so I was happy. There's a lot of food now that we didn't even know what it was. If you'd said "pizza," I would have said, "What is that?" We still don't eat pizza. I don't eat it. Occasionally, I'll eat it. The kids, now, they love it, ... and everybody's got it. Well, we don't have it, because I just never knew anything about it.

PIEHLER: Did you have any black friends growing up?

GENTRY: Yeah. Yeah. The first one, as soon as you said it, that popped in my mind, was a black boy named Tig, Tig Pointer. Tig and I were buddies, and we played together. Tig lived across the railroad tracks, down in the bottom down there. One day—why, I don't know, there was not any problem, I picked up a clot of dirt that was hard and threw it, and he was sitting on a fence post. I hit him on the head and knocked him off the fence post. He went home and told his

mama, and she came and told my mama, and I got a good spanking for hitting Tig with a clod. I really ... don't think I even meant to hit him, but I threw it. I was guilty, alright.

So, Tig—but the one that I really loved was Aunt Hattie. Aunt Hattie was—see, I had so many brothers and sisters that my mama couldn't take care of all of them, and Aunt Hattie would come to our house and gather up all the sheets, and pillowcases, and all the clothes, and she'd put them in a coaster wagon, a little wagon.... I was just a little fellow then. I can just barely remember her ... sitting me on top of those clothes, and she would take me home with her. And I loved her—she had a husband named James.... She had two boys, Pap and Pat. And I loved them, too. And she would take an old kettle and wash our clothes and stir our clothes up, and all that sort of thing. So, Aunt Hattie was special to me. She was just like a mama to me, when I was little.... Now, we've gone way back now. Way back. These are just my earliest memories. I wore braces on my legs, all the way to the hips, under my feet. My wife's got pictures, she has somewhere, of them. My legs were twisted, or bowed, or something. I don't know whether it was scurvy or what back then. But anyway, one day I went to a neighbor's chicken house and climbed up on the roof. This is where the chickens would roost. And I fell and hung my brace under the foot on a nail, and I was hanging upside down in the chicken house. Aunt Hattie found me hanging in there upside down and brought me out. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: I can almost hear her laugh.... I mean, she did rescue you, but I ...

GENTRY: She rescued me. [There] was no way I could get down. I was hanging upside down with those steel braces around my legs. They came up around the hip and down around your feet on both legs. They straightened my legs out.

HAMMOND: ... How long did you wear the braces?

GENTRY: I don't really know. The picture shows me, looking like I am about three or four years old when I had those braces on. I don't really know. As I said, this is as far back as I can remember. [I remember] a little puppy getting hit out in the street there, by one of the very few automobiles, and he yelped and ran under the house. I remember that, and I felt sorry for him. But no one could get him out, because they was too big, but I was smaller, so I crawled under the house to get the puppy out. The puppy turned out to be alright. I remember having to take naps that I didn't want to take, because my older brothers didn't take naps, and they would be going off, and I wanted to go with them. I can remember my first episode. We got something new in the house that—it was some kind of a wire or something hanging from the ceiling down, and had a little brass thing on the end of it and a little knob, you know. It was called electricity. One of them was so close to the banisters coming from upstairs, and I would slide down the banisters. One day, I came down and put on brakes right there by it, and reached out and got it and looked at it. "I wonder [what] happens to it?" I put a ... finger in it, and it knocked the fire out of me. I've been afraid of electricity ever since. (Laughs) So, those are my earliest days. I can remember those things.

HAMMOND: How long was Hattie around?

GENTRY: How long what?

HAMMOND: ... was Hattie around?

GENTRY: Aunt Hattie?

HAMMOND: Mm hmm.

GENTRY: She probably took care of me for four or five years there, 'til I was old enough to get around by myself. But I still remember her very well. That's my earliest one. Then, later on, there were a lot of other blacks that I enjoyed being with and talking to. We'd run into them hunting and fishing, that sort of thing. So, it was just a great life. I wouldn't take anything for my childhood. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: It's interesting that you reflect that, because people can't see it on tape, but you live in such a nice house, and someone would say, "You ... really didn't have very much. You didn't have indoor plumbing."

GENTRY: My wife did alright, though. This is her farm. This was her family.

PIEHLER: This is her family's farm.

GENTRY: Mm hmm.... The grave sites out here, the graves, the oldest date out there is 1792. Tennessee became a state in 1796. We could even go back much farther back than that, back into the history of this place. At my mother-in-law's death, she had already split her property up, and gave this section to my wife, because she knew she wanted to keep it and not sell it. So, we're hanging onto it. That's how we ended up in this house. (Laughs) That's one of the ladies that lived here. That would be Aunt Laura. I don't know much about Aunt Laura, but that's Aunt Laura.

PIEHLER: ... Franklin was the world. What did you know about the rest of the world, growing up?

GENTRY: I'll tell you. I think there was something in there that—when we would go to those movies, especially as we graduated away from westerns, I think the first thing I remember about outside of Franklin was playing in the backyard one day, and my mother came to the back door excited, and said, "Will Rogers had been killed." She had heard it on a radio. She was excited, and it excited me. She said—I think she said it was in Alaska or something like that, you know, and I said, "I wonder where that is?" I began to develop an interest in the world then, especially in geography. I liked geography and travel. I liked people. That was my first inkling of outside, but what I was going to say was, when we started going to the movies that had these extras on ...

PIEHLER: The newsreels.

GENTRY: Newsreels. You got it exactly right. Newsreel. And they'd show these strange looking countries and strange looking people and all that, and I liked that. I enjoyed the newsreels. And so, I think I began to feel like that something was going on outside of Franklin.

And then people would come back and say they had been to Chicago, or they'd been to Florida on vacations, on the train. And things like that, I didn't know exactly where it was, but I began to get interested in the world around me then.

PIEHLER: Well, you mention your friend who was crippled, who went to New York.

GENTRY: New York. That's another one. Boy, that must have been a million miles away, that he went to New York. He had pictures made, and came out in the national papers, the New York Times and all that sort of thing. So I got to see what the inside of a hospital room looked like from a picture. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: ... Did your family get a newspaper?

GENTRY: No. We really didn't at the beginning. We did later on. Later on, we began to get the newspaper. We had a boy that would bring them out on a bicycle. So he would bring them, and throw it out. In fact, it caused a lot of trouble. You open up a keg of nails every time you ask a question. His name was Hilliard Green. Hilliard was a good boy. But my friend, Hoody, the little crippled boy, had a mean streak in him. He heard my mother say one day, "I wish that paper boy wouldn't throw the paper on the other side of the fence, just throw it over on this side." 'Cause you had to open it up, and the cows might get out or something. But he heard her say that, and that afternoon, about time for the paper, he said, "Come on, let's go up to the road." I said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "We're going to wait for Hilliard Green on his bicycle." Well, he came ...

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

PIEHLER: You were saying that you ...

GENTRY: Beat him up physically!

PIEHLER: Because your friend wanted you to.

GENTRY: He sort of sicced me on him, and told me that he needed beating up, and I whipped this old boy, and right good. I still kind of felt bad about it, still today. And he was hollering, "Drag him over here to me so I can hit him." (Laughs) So, that was awful. So he was the first paperboy. So in answer to your question, we got papers, and then ... when we started getting papers, we were interested in—baseball began to show up. We got interested in baseball about that time.

PIEHLER: ... Was there a favorite team you had?

GENTRY: My favorite team, at first, was the New Orleans Pelicans, because of the word "pelican." (Laughter) It didn't have a thing in the world to do with the team. I'd just never seen a pelican. And the other one—that was in the old Southern League. And then the Cleveland Indians, because of the word "Indians." It didn't have anything to do with Cleveland. I had

never been to Cleveland in my life. But ... my earliest ones were because of the names.... That made me like them.

HAMMOND: Did you start playing baseball?

GENTRY: Yeah. We ... played baseball early. We started with taking a sock and stuffing it full of old rags, and making a ball out of it. We would hit it with a magazine and run around in the house on rainy days. Had one big room where we all slept. Almost as big as both these rooms. All the boys slept in that one room, and we had enough room to play baseball indoors. And then we started playing it outside, and people started giving us old bats that were broken. We'd tape them up. My daddy would give us some tape, and we would tape them up, and get us a ball, and wear it out and tape it. The ball weighed twenty pounds, almost, before we got through playing with it. So, we started playing a lot then. It became really important to us to play baseball. And then, finally, of course, football came along, and we started into football. We always had enough to have our own team around the neighborhood there. We'd have four, five of us, and we'd pick up three or four other guys. We'd have a pretty good game going, and we always had plenty of room to play in. When we first moved to town and got settled in a little bit, Mr. Yates was the high school coach. I was still down at the elementary school, but he knew we was interested in athletics, and my older brothers were already in high school. That sort of thing. He gave us five or six white shirts.... Plain white shirts. So my mother dyed them, of all colors, black. Then we took some paint and painted numbers on them, so we had our own jerseys, you know. We'd play, that sort of thing. (Laughs) We had hand-me-down equipment from the high school, so we started playing a lot of athletics then. Didn't play basketball much, because see, basketball—you didn't have very many gyms at that time. We played up in the loft a little bit with just a basket or something up there. And too, you had to wear shorts, and if you wore shorts, you were kind of sissy. Tennis, no, 'cause they did wear shorts. And so we didn't want to lower ourselves to that. Of course, we grew into—when I got in high school, I played them all, basketball and everything. (Laughs) But that was after ...

PIEHLER: But ... growing up, you really didn't want to be considered a sissy.

GENTRY: No. Heck no. You didn't want to be considered a sissy. You were a man. You wanted to be a man. (Laughs) The first time I shot a shotgun—a friend of my older brother came out and had—of all shotguns, had a twelve-gauge shotgun. He said, "You want to shoot that?" I mean, I was scared. I was about eleven or twelve or something like that. He said, "Well, I'll put my hat over there if you'll shoot it." He put it over there, and I shot it. Boom! So that was my first experience with a shotgun. Then, one of the best people in my whole life was a man—you don't know who—Kelly won't know who it is, but I'm going to say it: Henry Cannon. That was Minnie Pearl's husband. They're both dead now. Henry was—my middle name is Cannon. There is a relationship through the family. The Cannons had some money. In fact, they even owned the house where I was born. That's how we ended up in that house. He had a twenty-gauge shotgun, a Winchester shotgun. When he went into the service ... early—he is much older, and he went in early. He was in the air force. He bought that shotgun over and asked us to keep it. He knew what he was doing. He wanted us to keep it, but he knew we needed it. That way, we could catch more game and kill more game, if he let us have the shotgun. So, I learned to use that weapon, and weapons were no problem for me when I went

into the service. I had already had my experience with a lot of different weapons. Shotguns and rifles and that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: ... I'm jumping ahead, but since you are on weapons—I have been told by some officers—once I interviewed an officer that said he had a bunch of Kentuckians and Tennesseans, and he said that it drove the sergeants crazy, because these guys could hit the target, but wouldn't shoot the Army way. Did you have any problem with that?

GENTRY: They call that Tennessee elevation and Kentucky windage. (Laughter) That's what they say. "You use Tennessee elevation and Kentucky windage, don't you?" We learned to shoot that way. They tried to teach us something else, but we'd still hit the target. (Laughter) 'Cause we shot so much. Shoot these little sycamore balls on the trees, about that big, and we'd take a rifle and knock them off. Pop, pop, just like that. So if you hit anything that small, then when you got in the Army there wasn't too much problem. You really didn't want to ... be the very best shot in the Army, though. The reason for that, they'd make you First Scout. If you were First Scout, your life expectancy wasn't but a few hours, so you didn't want to be that. So, word got around, "Don't shoot too good." (Laughs) So you had to be careful that you didn't shoot too well. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: You mentioned your love of geography growing up, and Kelly, in fact, said that you had taught geography. Did you get National Geographic at home ever, growing up?

GENTRY: No. No. I just got interested in it. Really, first, before Kelly knew me, I taught biology for thirty-seven years first. And then, after I taught that for so long, they came out with modern biology, and I was teaching the old traditional biology, and they said, "Do you want to go back to school?" I was about sixty years old at the time. I said, "I'm not going back to school." So, I went into geography then, and that sort of thing, so it was a case of—I just didn't want to go back. But I really enjoyed it. I didn't have any problem with it. Tennessee history, I didn't have any problem with it. I also taught Tennessee history also, and geography at the same time.

HAMMOND: What was your favorite subject in high school?

GENTRY: When I was in high school? I think probably history was, naturally. I didn't like math, because I got scared when I was in elementary school, about that old man. He was mean. He taught math. I was scared of him, when I was in his class, so I never really did like math much. But my brother Bobby, that's all he does. He's nothing but a mathematician. I didn't know anything about math, and I didn't know anything about math, but I liked history, I think, probably, and some teachers helped inspire me into that. Plus, just my background. I just liked it more, and then got interested in traveling, and that sort of thing. I haven't done a lot of traveling, but I've done enough, I guess. I've been around different places.

PIEHLER: Do you remember in school having speech contests?

GENTRY: No. We didn't have speech. You don't know this. Kelly knows this. I'm an artist. We didn't even have art.

PIEHLER: You didn't have art.... What about music?

GENTRY: No music. No art. Had some lady that would beat on the piano, and we'd sing in the auditorium. Literally really beat on it. She'd—"Boom, boom, boom." That's the way she played the piano. And we'd sing some patriotic songs, and that would be the end of that. So, no art. I just got interested in it, and found out that I could do it, and was natural. That little boy that was a friend of mine, the little crippled boy, one day said, "Draw a pirate walking the plank." And that's how I began to [draw]. I use to make them do that. Blindfold them and [make them] walk off and drown, and all that sort of thing. So I drew that. He said, "Boy, that's really great! That's great!" And then he inspired me, and then the first thing you know, I'm drawing. And, I'm still drawing. I do it right today.... I've got a drawing of my wife in there now. A pencil drawing.

HAMMOND: I have a drawing of me!

GENTRY: Yeah. You have a caricature, then. Caricatures. I do those by the thousands. Well, Gordon Kennedy. Where was Gordon at your school? He was a year ahead of you.... Saw Gordon the day before yesterday. He said, "I ran across my old caricature. I've got it framed, put on the wall."

HAMMOND: (Laughs) Me too!

GENTRY: So anyway, I got into art just because I could do that. If I see something, I can draw it, and I've never had any lessons in it. I'd like to have some sometime, to tell me what I'm doing wrong, or to make it easier for me. Music, no. Art, no. There was just arithmetic, spelling, and geography, or whatever.

PIEHLER: When you were going to high school, did you think you'd be going to college?

GENTRY: No. Not really. Not really. I don't think I—I knew—see, now you're getting into another era now.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Yeah.

GENTRY: You're completely into another era. We're leaving behind all of these little fun things of hunting and fishing and playing around, and now we're in high school, and more interested in doing more work, getting a little bit more money. You began to say, "Wait a minute, maybe I should be wearing shoes all the time." And at that time, I was still very timid. I'll give you a warning ahead of time. I never had a date until I dated my wife. First date I ever had, and I married my first date. I've never gone out with another girl, had a date with her, or had a conversation with a girl except her, and she invited me! (Laughs) The first time.

PIEHLER: When did she invite you?

GENTRY: What ... happened was—I ought to go get her and make her tell you. She came up with the Junior/Senior Prom. We had that back then. And, I think ... now I'm figuring it out, why she invited me. I think they must have had a rule that you couldn't invite anybody outside of school, 'cause she had dates after—I bet she had twenty-five different boyfriends. Was already engaged to one of them, I think. But, anyway, she invited me to go to the Prom with her, and I had never been out with a girl before. And she wrote me a little note. Have you ever done that Kelly? Pass it around the room. My sister, the one that I call my sister, the one that was in the class with us, she gives it to her, and she gives it to me. I read it. It said, "Will you got to the Prom with me?" And I remember putting "OK" on it. (Laughter) That was my response. Isn't that romantic? And passing it back. That was it. So, we began to notice girls and that sort of thing, and clean up, and as I've said, I played all the athletics that you could come up with.

Then the war came along. See, the war changed everything. I make this statement now. I'm sure you realize it, but to me, World War II had the greatest impact on the world since the birth of Jesus Christ. It changed the world. Literally, it changed my life. It changed everything in Franklin. Everything in the world when World War II came along. Well, see, I was in high school when it came along.... We were playing football, we were playing baseball, we were playing basketball, and I began to pay more attention to my subjects, classes, also. I still didn't make good grades, but I began to say, "Wait a minute. Maybe I need to do better." Because I began to think, "Well, I want to get in the air force." When the war started, I made my mind up that I was going into the air force. I saw that glamorous look of all those guys in the air force, and I thought, "Well, those guys are in the air force, and they get to fly, and they get to sleep in beds and all that, and don't have to walk," and all that sort of thing. And so I never really considered college then, because I knew I was going in the service. You can put this in where you want to, but when I went to take my exams for going in the air force, I passed. I didn't think I could, but I passed the written exam. Then I would go to the physical. I knew I had the physical. I had done everything. I knew I was getting past the physical, and I got the shock of my life when the doctor looked up and he says, "Son, we're going to have to turn you down. You're colorblind." I couldn't believe it. I didn't know I was colorblind. Then I remembered, just the first thing that flashed in my mind, is that my mother used to say, "You need to wear that blue sweater," and I'd say, "It's green," and she would say, "No. It's blue." And I thought, "Well, she's getting old. She just doesn't know colors anymore." (Laughter) She was right and I was wrong. I was colorblind. So, they turned me down.... I said, "Well, what can I do?" He said, "You go home. The Army will take anybody." (Laughter) So, that's how that happened. So that's what I was thinking about. Not college. But I knew I was going into the service, as all others did, too. That was your priority then, with not going into college. There were some—maybe they did. They didn't have to go to the service, maybe. But I hadn't even thought about college.

PIEHLER: I'm curious: before leaving the '30s and going into the '40s, one question. What did your parents think of Franklin Roosevelt, when you were growing up?

GENTRY: I think at that time, [my father] probably [was] a Roosevelt man. Of course, since that time, I have learned to not like him myself, but I think at that time—because they had such a hard time, and I remember there were some little cuts towards him, even at that—like the WPA, which stood for "We Piddle Around." I remember my daddy saying that, 'cause he had seen

some of the workers, and they worked up near where we lived, and there would be twenty-five of 'em up there with a shovel, and one of them would be working, and the others watching him. They began to say, "That's a terrible program," or something. But, really, I think they supported him in the beginning, because of the hard times. It looked like we might get out of the hard times. "No more gruel or slop. Now we'll eat Roosevelt pork chop." I believe that was it. Some people were saying that.... I think they liked him, though, to begin with.

PIEHLER: In Franklin, in the '30s, how important was politics for the town?

GENTRY: Well, back then, in the '30s, it was important. Because the things that were important were the sheriff's race, and the constable's race, and the judge, and all that. There was big excitement on Election Day. The biggest problem we had was having too many drunks on that day, for some reason. They liked to get drunk on Election Day, and they'd have to haul them off to jail. That's the ...

PIEHLER: So you do remember the excitement of Election Day.

GENTRY: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: Were there ever barbecues, or—put out by candidates?

GENTRY: Yeah.... That happened frequently. They would have big barbecues, and get them in there and promise them this and promise them that, and give them a half pint of whiskey, some of those people did, ... to vote for them. I think some of them couldn't even read and write. Anyway, that happened, yeah, and it happened right here in and around Franklin. It was a big day, Election Day. (Laughs) They would flash the results up on the wall, down on the main street, in Franklin. People would crowd all around and cheer for this one when he'd get a few votes ahead, and things like that. Yeah, election was important to Franklin at that time. Franklin, like I say, it was a unique town. It still is, really. It's still a unique town. It's an historical town and a nice little place to live. They'd sweep the streets every morning. They had two guys with horses and wagons, and they'd come with push brooms and sweep the streets before everybody would go to work, and have the streets clean for you in the morning.

PIEHLER: Well, it's sort of interesting, because I've talked to Kelly, that one of the things our center does is we interview veterans and collect documents. I've thought of focusing on several Tennessee towns, to do really in-depth—try to collect as much as I can, do as many interviews—and I thought Franklin seemed like ... a very logical place.

GENTRY: ... It's always been a good place. Its location to Nashville helps. The location. The soil here is really good. It's a dark brown soil here, loam, and if you go very far this way or this way, you run into rock, and ... red clay as you go that way, and it gets red as you go south. But here it's pretty good, so the farming was good here. It's always S.F. Glass, [who] was the first man to move here, and that was his ... granddaughter, and he came here and built this house. He built another house before this and lived in a little log cabin. We've got a little log house down there, ... where I'm pointing now, in this direction.

But the reason that I'm telling you about him at this ... interview is that he would do this, which I thought was real interesting. Evidently, he was a successful farmer. This is back well before the Civil War. He would raise cotton, corn and tobacco. We had lots of his records here.... I don't know where they are right now. (Laughs) They're here, though. And he would cut the best timber that he could find on this farm, walnut and cherry in particular, and haul that down to Nashville, to the riverfront, on a wagon, because the best market was in New Orleans. And then he'd take those logs and make a raft out of them, and then his men would bring cotton, corn and tobacco and load it on it, and he'd float down the Cumberland to the Ohio, then down the Ohio to the Mississippi, then down the Mississippi to New Orleans, where he would sell not only his crops, but his raft, to be shipped to Europe for fine furniture. He would get as much for his raft as he would for his crop. Then, he would buy a ticket on the steamboat from New Orleans up to Natchez. At Natchez, he would buy a horse or wagon or a buggy or something to come up the Natchez Trace back home. That's a lot of history involved there. He'd get back maybe two months later. Now, that brings up something else. They had slaves here. In one of ... the letters, his wife writing him while he's in New Orleans, is that Uncle Ned—oh, I forgot what his name was; we just called him that—that Uncle Ned, died and “we buried him in one of your best suits. We knew that you'd want it that way.” And, so, there was a feeling there for them that was not always brought out in the modern day like it should be. And then Uncle George lived here. He was born here, ... in that little cabin right down there. He lived here on this farm. Never left the farm. He died here ninety-six years later. And he stayed right here on this farm his whole life. He would come to visit my mother-in-law when she was in town.... They moved out here in 1902, and he would come to visit her to talk about the crop or ... about a mule or something. He would come to the door and knock on the door and have his hat in his hand. She'd say, “Now, George, come on in. You go on into the living room.” He'd come to the back door. They had the greatest respect for George that you could ever have. All of these sort of give you a history about Franklin and the area right here. It was good land, a good place to live, and people made good livings here. When the war came along, it slowed them down.

PIEHLER: And also good hunting, I've gathered from your ...

GENTRY: Yeah. Yeah. It slowed them down.

PIEHLER: You earlier mentioned that the World War II changed the world.

GENTRY: I think so.

PIEHLER: But it changed Franklin. Even while you were here. You said—you saw both the war—overseas war, but you also saw a good part of the home front war.

GENTRY: I saw the rationing begin. You could buy five gallons of gasoline per week. That's all you could get. Or butter, or meat, or shoes. I think you could get two pair of shoes per year. You got two pair of shoes now? (Laughter) Two pairs of shoes per year. Everything was rationed. Sugar was rationed. No more nylon hose for the ladies. And by the way, I'll insert this in here. I'm sure somebody's done the research on this. If they haven't, they need to do it. What World War II did for the rest of the world. Nylon, penicillin, radar, television, and ... everything that came out of World War II that we are enjoying today. We didn't have it before

that. I remember the first instant coffee in World War II. Instant tea. Lemonade. Powdered eggs. Powdered milk. All of that came out of World War II. Now, you can't live without it. The biggest one, to me, is plastic. I had never heard of plastic before, until we were in the Vosges Mountains or Hart Mountains, I forgot which one, during the Bulge. We were not right in the Bulge, we were right at it, though. In an operation called Northwind. I don't know whether you are familiar with that or not, but Northwind was a German offensive to the south. They tried to cut off the supply line and to try to pull the troops away from the north.

PIEHLER: It was also aimed at retaking Alsace and Strasbourg.

GENTRY: Strasbourg. That's where we were. We were a little bit north of there, but we went right into that. It was still snowing. Anyway, we got some gas caps made out of this stuff. What is that stuff? I thought it was cellophane. It was plastic. That was the first time I saw it.

PIEHLER: That was your first experience with plastic?

GENTRY: First experience. So, Franklin changed during the war. The biggest change, I think, was not knowing everybody like you used to. The town and the people. See, I, for example, had not been out of the state except once, to Bowling Green, Kentucky, and a lot of the others were similar to me. Now, they were scattered all over the world. Some of those men never came back because they were killed. Some never came back because they found another place to live, or met someone there. And so Franklin began to change immediately during the war. I think the best thing about Franklin was the patriotism, and I'm sure it is true in all other towns, but Franklin had it. The greatest display of patriotism that I saw, certainly in modern time, was when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. It was on a Sunday morning, and I had been to Sunday school, and came around to White's Drug Store around the corner. That was the only thing that was open on Sunday, one drug store. And, we were drinking a Coke. We were all teenagers. And someone turned the radio up, and ... that's when we heard that the Japanese just bombed Pearl. We put our unfinished Coke down and walked out without saying a word. Not even to your best friend. Because we knew we were going to war. We went to war not only with Japan, but with Germany. Then, the boys that were two to three years older than me, and were old enough, began to volunteer. I thought that was the greatest display of patriotism. They couldn't take them fast enough. And my brother was one of those. They just ...

PIEHLER: They volunteered right away?

GENTRY: They volunteered right away. They didn't wait. That day, they were going.

PIEHLER: Now, where did they have to go to volunteer? Did you have a ...

GENTRY: Well, that was a problem. The Army hadn't even built a place for them yet. Camp Forrest, over in Tullahoma, was one place, and then they finally opened a place in Nashville, down on Thompson Lane. Then finally they opened what was called the Classification Center. It took up that whole section between Franklin Road and Nolensville Road. The Classification Center. That's where I found out I was colorblind. Anyway, they started volunteering, volunteering, just as fast as they could, and that's when I said, "They are my heroes. There's my

role model.” And Franklin was changing then. The draft came on. Probably, the saddest part of the war—to me, World War II was exciting, it was romantic, and it was sad—and the saddest part would be when one of the guys would get killed and you’d have those two dog tags, you know. My wife got one that she’s got gold plated. My tag. You can do that; I didn’t know you could even do that. She had it gold plated. It’s in gold now. My same tag, but it’s in gold. Somehow they do it, but I don’t know how.... Anyway, you get two dog tags and one of them, at the death, is put right there, between those teeth, that little notch in it. Tap it in there. Then the other is verified that this one is correct with all the paperwork, I suppose. Then a telegram was sent to Franklin. I remember the first one. See, I was still not gone yet. The first one I saw, this old gentleman comes up the street on a bicycle. And everybody knows what he’s got.

PIEHLER: Now, the guy delivering it, is he just a Western Union—it wasn’t an officer?

GENTRY: No. Western Union. Western Union telegram. And he comes up the street, and he always seemed to pedal really slow. Everybody knew exactly what he had.

PIEHLER: Because he was peddling slow?

GENTRY: Yes sir. They knew he had a telegram for somebody, and if you had a blue star in your window, that meant you had—my brother, we had one in our window—then you’d just say, “Please don’t stop here.” You’d just pray, “Don’t stop here.” The first one I saw, he didn’t stop at our house. He went up and went around the corner and down to the Terry house, and we knew that Mack had been killed. See, so close. That’s where Mack lived. Mack has been killed. As soon as we saw him stop at their house, we knew that Mack had been killed. And then shortly after that, he came up and stopped at our house, and my brother had been killed, and we replaced the blue star with a gold star.

And then, I think, this is something that no one has ever really given credit where credit needs to be given. I don’t know how to do it. Maybe it’s too late. Then again, it may not be too late. But, when my mother put a gold star there and then put another blue star for me, and some people had three or four blue stars and gold stars, and they changed the rules, you know. In fact, I wasn’t even supposed to be overseas until the war was over. I found out that I wasn’t supposed to be there, because I had a brother killed. Saving Private Ryan was based on that. But it was too late. I think they sort of twisted that a little bit. Anyway, the mothers—nobody has ever given tribute to the mothers during World War II, or any war for that matter. But think about what they went through, those mothers, and what a hard time they had of giving up a son, or two sons, and just like that. It was a terrible thing for them to have to go through. I’ve never seen anything written as a tribute to those people, to the mothers. And I remember when my mother got it, she cried, of course. She would just hold us, the children that were still there, and she would cry. Then, first thing you know, I got to leave, and she’d have to go through that same thing over again.

So, I see two things that I wish could have happened. Something about the mothers, and then give more credit to the soldiers that served in Italy. They really had it tough. I think we had a picnic up in Central Europe, compared to what they did in Italy. It was terrible. I’ve read a lot about it. Based on what I’ve read. And my brother was killed there. Ernie Pyle’s book, Brave

Men, he tells something about that. It was horrible. So, in answer to your question, Franklin—all of this is happening as the war begins. Selling war bonds, gathering scrap iron, turning in scrap iron, picking up cigarette wrappers and getting the aluminum foil off of them and rolling it up until you get a big ball, as big as a basketball sometimes, or a softball, and turning that in for the war effort. So Franklin was really beginning to change. People began to come into Franklin, and in Williamson County—I say Williamson County—Middle Tennessee, maybe I'd better reword that. I think twenty-eight Army divisions trained here because ... the terrain is very much like Central Europe, and we used to see those convoys come through. And I'd stand there and see them come through and I thought, "I will be there pretty soon." Sure enough, I did. (Laughs) Boy, it wasn't too long. I was gone.

PIEHLER: Because before the war, there wasn't very much of an Army presence.

GENTRY: No. I mean, no.

PIEHLER: When was the first time you saw a soldier in uniform?

GENTRY: I think it was the war before I ever really saw one. I heard about somebody joining the Army, and you know, back then when someone would join the Army, they were—I don't mean that they were a misfit necessarily, but they couldn't get a job like they wanted, you know, and some of them wanted that adventure, and they would join the Army or the Navy.

PIEHLER: Because ... my graduate advisor and I used to talk, and ... Marines, until World War II meant ... guys with tattoos who were in their forties who drank a lot.... Now you think of a Marine as a nineteen-year-old or a twenty-year-old.

GENTRY: But, I think of the Navy as the one that—I see these guys that—sometimes they joined the Navy and come back with tattoos all over them, and ... rolled their t-shirts up, and put the cigarettes up in here. That's what I thought of them. But then when Army—when the war started, and then the citizen soldiers got into it, it changed.... Then when they'd come home, sometimes they would be with a friend that was from—say some guy is living in Franklin, would bring a guy that lives in Wisconsin home with him. Well, he'd bring him to church, and people would take them home to eat with them.... When I was in the service, I was in Jacksonville, Florida, and I went to church, and they said, "You come home with us." So anyway, ... you asked a question about changes in Franklin. It began to change right then. Big changes didn't come until after the war, though.

PIEHLER: Yeah. But you had a lot of ... service people coming through. You mentioned going to the pool area. The big pool complex.

GENTRY: Oh, yeah. There were lots of them. Yeah. and they were always in uniform. Back then, they had to wear the uniform. They couldn't get out of uniform. They had to be in uniform.

PIEHLER: So you knew they were here.

GENTRY: Yeah. And they had MPs around. The MPs would come around, and see, if they [found] a guy without his tie on, they'd get him. You had to be neat and clean, which I liked. It made the soldiers look good, and made the sailors look good, and everybody.

PIEHLER: Now what about sailors or soldiers getting in trouble? Did you ever have problems with drinking too much?

GENTRY: Not really. We weren't close enough to Fort Campbell. It was Camp Campbell then.

PIEHLER: Camp Campbell. Was there a Legion post in town?

GENTRY: A what?

PIEHLER: A Legion. American Legion, or VFW post.

GENTRY: Yeah. They have one here. I didn't know anything—but they had American Legion here, and I used to see those old gentlemen. They were from World War I, you see. And I thought, "Well, they couldn't fight!" (Laughter) Now, I look at myself, and I don't look the same either. (Laughs) But, I used to see them. Mr. Perk Jennette was one of them, and Bob Jennings, and all these people. They used to tell all these stories about World War I. Mr. Owen Johnson and the attempt to capture the Kaiser. He was one of those people that tried to capture the Kaiser. I really liked that story, though, but they didn't look like they were real good fighting men when they were old like that. (Laughs)

Well, anyway, we got into the war ... about that time.... My brother got killed, and I went in shortly after that, but they changed something when I went in the service that helped me. They said if you were a senior in high school and you passed mid-term—I forgot how they worded it—you could graduate, so I got to graduate.... The graduate class then didn't talk about what college you were going to. You mentioned college earlier. We didn't talk about where they were going, or what they were going to do. We were talking about going into the service, so we knew we'd talk about, "Well, are you going into the Army? Are you going into the Navy? Where are you going?" Of all of them that I graduated with, I was the only one that knew for sure that I was going into the infantry, because I didn't have any choice, because I was color blind, and they bugged me. There were ninety-six of us. We sat on the rock fence right there at Fire Point. Do you know where that is, Kelly? We sat on that rock fence, and Mr. Jennings would come out with his book, and the buses would park there, and he'd call your name, and you'd hop off the fence and get on the bus, and you were gone. So there were ninety-six of us. I looked up and down that fence, and I thought, "We're going to lose the war. This is an awful looking bunch." (Laughs) Anyway, they'd call your name and you'd get on the bus. Well, they were still bugging me. "You're going in the infantry." These were my buddies from school that were close to me.

We'd go from Franklin to Fort Oglethorpe in Chattanooga. They had one room where you go up these steps, and there were three desks as you go in this room. There was a desk in the middle for the United States Army. Then they had the Navy over here, and I think the Merchant

Marines were on this side. And that line went straight through. Wasn't anybody sitting at this desk or this desk. They didn't want anybody else. They wanted foot soldiers. When we went in, it was too late. You couldn't get into the air force. You couldn't get into the Navy. And they had been bugging me. Every one of them ended up in the infantry with me. Every one of them. (Laughter) So we went right straight through and outside and held our hand up, and "Repeat after me." Finally, he says, "Congratulations. You are now a member of the United States Army." And, that's how I was inducted into the Army, right there between some barracks.

Then we get on the train and head to—go south to Atlanta, to Fort McPherson then. I don't know whether Fort McPherson is still there or not, but it's in Atlanta. And that's where we'd get our uniforms and haircuts. Most of us didn't need haircuts, though. We already had a burr or a G.I., because we would see those soldiers coming home. That was the thing to do. We found out it was easier to wash, easier to keep clean, and all that sort of thing. So, we got our uniforms there and got a haircut. I saw one group of men in a room, and I didn't know why they weren't doing the same thing that we were doing. Then we'd take our clothes and put them in a box, and they'd ship them back home for you so your brothers could wear them. Anyway, I found out later that they couldn't read or write, those in that room. And then they put us on a train and shipped us to Camp Blanding, Florida. The longest trip in the whole world. Hot. I mean, it was hot. That's the way we ended up in Camp Blanding for basic training, sixteen weeks in basic training. And, I thought, "What? Florida? That's where people take vacation." There's nothing there but sand and palmettos and pine trees. It was hot as it could be.... At night, you'd wiggle around on your bunk and try to find a dry spot to try to get a little nap in. You'd just—sweat just rolling off until the mattress was even ringing wet. So, it was a horrible, horrible place. But they didn't keep us there for sixteen weeks, what they were supposed to do. At twelve weeks, all of a sudden, you could tell something was not right. We were out on bivouac. They said, "Leave your tent, leave everything here, and get on the truck."

PIEHLER: Just like that?

GENTRY: Just like that.... See, usually you had to take your pack and go twenty miles back, by foot. They put us on a truck. Went back, and the commanding officer said, "Pack your stuff. You're leaving." Just like that. All in the same morning. That afternoon, we were on a train heading to New York. See, we knew what was going to happen. Into New York. To Camp Kilmer in New Jersey. That's where you got all kinds of shots in your hips and your shoulders and everywhere, and get your boots to fit. They give you two pairs of boots, two rifles, two helmets, two of everything. I said, "Boy, I've got to have something to carry all this stuff in." No, you just carry it in your arms. Everybody—you know what they were doing, don't you? That is the way of shipping extra equipment overseas. When you go over—if this fits 10,000 of you, there's 10,000 more that likely wear the same thing. So, that's how we would carry the equipment across. The U.S.S. Wakefield. And I got seasick. I thought, "Any day now, if I could just die, I would feel a whole lot better." That was just the worst thing that I ever felt in my life. I was trying to throw up, and I didn't have anything to throw up. All night, all day. Anyway, somehow—I don't know how—I made it. We got to Liverpool, and from Liverpool, we'd hold each other's belt. So it's dark. The Germans were still fairly aggressive, I think, then. You hold the belt of the man in front of you, and follow him up those steps and down off the train. You could tell you was on a train, after you got the shape a little bit. You couldn't see anything.

Total darkness. And then, to Southampton, and then from Southampton on the LST across the English Channel. I got seasick again for just a brief period there.... It didn't take long to cross the channel. They let the front down, and there's France. That's where we—it wasn't D-Day, now. They were gone, and we waded to shore. And then, they had a guy there. "Put your rifles here, your helmets here, your shirt, everything." They took the equipment that we had brought over away, and then they had a truck come along and pick them up later. Unusual things happened on that beach. As I ... came up on the beach, I went down this way to get back up into Le Havre, the town itself, and I heard my name. That's unusual, because everybody was dressed the same. It was one of my friends that lived here and went to school with he. And he hollered at me. His name was Beverly Chadwell. I called his people not too long ago and talked to them a little bit, because I was the last one to see him alive. He was killed. And that's where I saw him, on that beach, when we were unloading. I don't know whether he came off the same LST or one earlier, or what, but he was there, and he saw me, and somehow he recognized me and hollered to me.

PIEHLER: What did you talk about?

GENTRY: We couldn't stop. It was like, "Hey, Jimmy." And I said, "Hey Bev, what are you doing out here?" "We just got here." And you can't ... stop.

PIEHLER: Yeah. That was it.... But you were the last one from Franklin that you know ...

GENTRY: As far as I know, I am the last one to see him alive. I called his family and talked to them about it. Anyway, that got us over there. I'm going to back up and tell you another little story here in a minute. (Laughs) I went to the Brentwood Middle School this past fall or winter—I don't remember. They were going to Washington to visit the Holocaust Museum, and they asked me to come over and talk. So I did, and I told him basically what I told you, ... the way I heard about the war in a little drug store, how I hadn't been out of the state before, and all that. And, they write letters in response, every one of them. One little girl wrote this. They were all nice letters. This little girl missed the whole idea. She said, "I don't think I could have lived back then, because I would have had to wear dresses." See, ladies wore dresses then. They didn't wear slacks.... She said, "Anyway, you didn't have but one little dinky drugstore open on Sunday. That's another bad thing. But I thought you were cool, and lucky to get to go over there and see France and all those other countries." (Laughter) She missed the whole idea. How lucky can you get? (Laughs) Anyway, I'm jumping ahead on you, I guess, but anyway, we went through camp there pretty fast.

PIEHLER: So I guess you were sent to replacement camp?

GENTRY: Yeah.... What happened to me, I was a replacement that joined the 42nd Infantry Division once I got there. They came in from Marseilles, to the South, and we came into Le Havre, and somehow we got together in a little place called Pettincourt, France.

PIEHLER: Now, where they in the line when you [joined them]?

GENTRY: They were in the line, and I joined them while they were in the line, so I was a replacement.

PIEHLER: How long were you in the Replacement Depot?

GENTRY: Oh. When I got over there?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

GENTRY: About two nights.

PIEHLER: So you didn't spend a lot of time there.

GENTRY: Oh, no, no. No! They were waiting for me.

PIEHLER: ... When did you joint the unit?

GENTRY: In January of '44, '45. It would be '45, or earlier. I might have made it by December of ... '44. I believe it was December.... I know what happened. I know all that, but I timed it—by the way, that's another thing that you people don't realize, is you never knew what day it was, what day of the week, never knew what month it was, you never knew what time it was. We didn't wear watches, so the officers wore watches. We didn't. People didn't have watches much, then, anyway. That was a big thing during the war. So you never knew any of that was going on, what time it is, what day it is, where you are, very little except when you read a sign coming into a little village or something. So, I remember the first time we got there. Of course, it started snowing. That tells me it was in December, rather than January, because it snowed early in December. But there was snow on the ground, and it was still snowing. We got to a place called Pettincourt, France. And it had been shelled—a little farm village. There wasn't much left, but ... my squad, that I joined right then, they had just gotten back and had lost some men, and so I was one of them to replace. We found a room upstairs that still had the wall and the ceiling and the floor. The windows were blown out, and there was a hole in one of the walls, so we hung a blanket over them, and had a little stove about this big and that tall. It was a small stove, and we burned everything we could find. There wasn't anything left much. You could find banisters of stairs coming up, or go to the house that's been bombed next door and drag some wood out and put it in there. We could huddle around it to keep from getting too cold. That's where we'd hover. There were eight of us, and ... just talk, talk.

There was one man there—he was from Chicago. He was older than the rest of us. He smoked a cigar. A big burly guy, and he talked. Boy, he talked. I've never heard such language in my life. In fact, he was the first up-close Yankee I'd ever seen, you know.... Boy, he was tough.... The more he talked, I thought, "As long as he's on our side, the German's haven't got a chance." (Laughter) It made me feel comfortable with him. Old Michael. He was bad news. So, about eleven o'clock that night, a runner from the command post, the CP, came up, and just his shoulder and head were above the floor, where we were up on the steps. He said, "The captain said [to] fall out and draw your ammunition." I knew what that meant. You were getting ready to leave. You'd go down there, ... and there was a jeep down there with a little trailer, and

you'd put those ... cloth bandoliers around it and get two grenades, and go back upstairs and wait. It wasn't too long before he came back and said ... "The captain says [to] fall out." We knew we were going now. And this is where I always thought that there was a difference between the words fear and afraid. I know they're interchangeable, maybe, but I think there is a definite difference between fear and being afraid. I was afraid the whole time. But when we got into those trucks, you couldn't see anything else except the reflection from the snow. If it hadn't been for the snow, you couldn't see anything. But when we got in the truck, they pulled this tarpaulin down, and you couldn't see anything again. It was so quiet, ... I could hear another guy breathing. He could hear me breathing, too. Then, finally, we started creeping forward, and I said, "This is it." All the way from Franklin, Tennessee. (Laughs) And here I am. I don't know where I am or where I'm going. So, I started praying, and I prayed that God take care of me. And I just kept repeating it over and over again, "God, take care of me, please take care of me." And in all that silence there, finally, Michael, the guy from Chicago, he prayed out loud and said the same thing, "God, take care of me." Then I realized that he was no different than any of the rest of us. The fear had hit him. So, I thought then that fear was different from being afraid. And this was the worst afraid, and I call fear, because I didn't know where I was, didn't know where I was going, didn't know whether it was going to be five minutes or five hours or what. So ... that's real fear to me. Fear of the unknown.

Now, when we got out of those trucks, I felt different. I was afraid, but I could see shadows of trees, I could see things, and see something. I was still afraid, but not that fear. Not that fear of [the] unknown that you hear about. That's how we went into combat. Had to, before dawn, get you a hole dug. That was hard to do in the snow. The ground was frozen. We finally got a hole dug, and nearly died getting that done. But the Germans, I don't think, knew we were there until the next day. Well, that's even when they took us in at night, I think. When we got in, nearly froze to death. That was the worst thing in the world, was in those holes, and is that cold. You know, and there was two of us in the hole. Finally got smart, though. I talked to one of my buddies here the other day. He lives in Long Island. On the phone. He wrote me a letter; I've written him some things.... And then I talked to another friend, the one that was in there with us. There was ... two of us in Missouri, and him from Long Island. I can name them all. But anyway ...

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

PEIHLER: This continues an interview with Jimmy Gentry in ... Franklin, Tennessee on July 22, 2000 with Kurt Piehler and ...

HAMMOND: Kelly Hammond.

PIEHLER: And you were saying you were very cold so you dug a big foxhole.

GENTRY: Yeah. We couldn't come out ... in the daytime, only come out at night. So, if you had to go to the bathroom or have a bodily process, you had to wait. You just didn't come out because you exposed yourself. By then, the Germans had discovered us, where we were, and artillery was the worse thing that could happen. Artillery and mortar fire. Mainly artillery,

though. Those hot shells would come in on us. And so we said, "Wait a minute. As long as we're in this hole, we're relatively safe unless we get a direct hit." But the thing that was helping us, is [that] we were under some tall, big trees, and we'd get what we called tree bursts. They'd hit those trees, and the Germans didn't know it, but they saved our lives. They hit those trees and burst, and logs and limbs would fly everywhere, and we would take those and trim them up, dug a big hole where about four or five of us could get in, and put the logs that they knocked down for us on top of us, and then we were relatively safe under those logs. We put pine needles in there on the floor. We got in there, with three or four of us in there, and the body heat would warm it up underneath. [We would] put one guy outside for guard duty, and we'd rotate around. And so that's how they helped us by knocking down some of those trees for us to put over the top of us. That's the first time that the plastic ... gas cape came in handy. We didn't know what to do with that thing, so we took it and spread it over the logs, and then put a little dirt over it, and some pine needles, and the snow and everything, you couldn't even see us under the there. Body heat would warm us up inside, and somehow someone came back, went back behind in the lines and got some canned heat, little cans, and candles, and brought them up there to us. We could see a little bit, and we could write letters, and we had it pretty nice there. Those shells would still come in. By the way, you learn pretty quickly which one is coming in, which one was their shell, and you could tell ours going out. A difference in sound of them. We could tell, "That's coming in; that's coming out."

I have a friend that's ... up in Missouri, Carl Hart, and he was on guard duty, sitting out on an ammunition box behind some logs that we extended out from the hole so he wouldn't be exposed straight ahead. Above they could get him. But anyway, he could hear those shells coming. Well, he had made himself a cup of coffee, but it was too hot. So he sat it on a log to let it cool off, and he heard this shell coming in, so he dives back in with us, head-first, right on top of us, hollering, "Look out!" It hit these trees. By the way, their shells had smoke that was blacker than ours. It was dark, and ours was more of a blue color. Anyway, it all cleared up, and he crawled back out, and we heard him out there moaning and cussing and going on. A piece of shrapnel had gone through his cup of coffee. It didn't turn it over. It didn't have a drop of coffee left in it. And another piece of shrapnel went through the ammunition box that he was sitting on, so he did a good job of getting out of there when he did.

PIEHLER: That, otherwise, had his name on it.

GENTRY: It had his name on it. He lives up in Missouri now. I talked to him about two years ago. One day I didn't have anything to do, so I drew a cartoon of that happening, and sent it to him, and a little bit later, maybe a couple of months later, after Veteran's Day or something, I get a letter back from his daughter, and a copy of the local newspaper, and my drawing is in the newspaper in Missouri. Telling about that, about Carl Hart. He's known in that little town he lives in. Small town. So, that's how we lived there. The nights were really interesting because the Germans would send those—we called them, "Bed Check Charlie." The planes over, and try to find lights so they could draw lines and know where the artillery would need to go. We'd hear him coming. You'd recognize the plane every time. He would fly down. He'd fly all night long. You'd hear him going back and forth. So the nights were interesting. You'd hear animals at night. Everything would get real still at night, and you could hear anything. You could hear the German trucks across the way, and tanks. You could tell the difference between a tank and a

truck, too. We'd hear them start up a tank and moving around over there. (Laughs) Of course, when they were shelling us, our artillery was really shelling then. We didn't find out until later, but we were really giving them a fit. That was the infantry dug in the ground, was what it was. Finally, we jumped off and went over, and were walking through the woods on the other side of the mountains, and a little path through the woods, and you could see where their trees were all shattered and torn up from our artillery, a whole lot worse than ours. And there was a German shoe right beside this path. There was nothing unusual about that—a little hob-nailed shoe—except his foot was still in it, bone, flesh and all, was still sitting in there.... A piece of shrapnel had cut it off right at the top of the shoe. And a piece of shrapnel would sometimes come out of one of those explosions and be like a lawnmower blade. It'd cut a tree down. You couldn't even see it, it was going so fast. So artillery gave us a fit during that period of time. But other than that, we were relatively safe. We could call for what they called "night light." They'd fire those shells up in there, light up the whole valley below us. We'd heard a strange noise, and say, "Well, maybe they were trying to come across." Or sometimes they'd come up, it wouldn't be anything. Sometimes it'd be a deer standing out there.

PIEHLER: So you didn't have any small unit contact? There was never a raid or anything?

GENTRY: No. The only thing that was the worst part of that was—like I say, we was relatively safe as long as we were under those logs in that hole.

PIEHLER: But the shell bursts from the trees.

GENTRY: The shell bursts were all above us, most of it. Very seldom would one ever get through all the way to the ground. But the worst part of it was patrols. They would have patrols, and they'd ask for volunteers to go on patrols, and they'd go across, and you'd take your steel helmet off, and just wear that little hat—not the liner. Just a little wool hat, and blacken their face, and they'd go across. I never went across, but they'd go across, and try to find out where the Germans were, how many were there, what all were they doing, and get back by dawn, and have passwords. Passwords were interesting back then, also.... Most of them were either comic strips or athletics, Orphan Annie, Daddy Warbuck. Anything. Where they'd get you, you know, they'd give you some name like Donald, and it could be Donald Duck, but it could be Donald something else, and they'd give names like that, [which] the Germans would not likely know. So ... at 18:00 every ... night, we'd get a new password. We needed to get the password ... because we had to move around. If somebody stopped you, you gotta know the password. But it was real interesting when those passwords would come down. We looked forward to them, to see what they had for the night. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Before you go on ... I do want to ask you about your sergeants and your lieutenants and captains. What do you remember?

GENTRY: Okay. I have to go back to camp for the one that really made an impression on me. It was the first night that we got to camp. It was about four o'clock in the morning, and [we were] worn completely out. I'd never been this tired in my life. [We had been] riding on the train and sweating, and we just ... looked like we had been swimming. We were so wet. We went to our huts—I think it's sixteen to a hut, a fifteen- or sixteen-man hut—and we thought,

“Oh boy, we’re going to go in there and rest awhile.” Well, this guy was standing there, Sergeant Lacaze, L-A-C-A-Z-E, and he was the meanest looking man you have ever laid your eyes on. He had dark skin, eyes that looked like they’d go right through you, had a little gray coming out from under his helmet. He had a scar that looked like it started and went all over his face. He stared at you when you came in. He said, “Nobody sits down.” Now, that’s mean. He said, “Nobody sits down. Stand.” Now, you’ve got the bunks right there.... The mattresses were rolled up to the head, and you’re standing by it, but you can’t sit on it. He said, “Stand.” After he got everybody in there, he quieted them down. Everybody was quiet, ‘cause they didn’t know what he was going to do. And then he goes around and gives us a little book. He said, “Don’t sit down. Know this by breakfast. Breakfast is at five.” We had an hour to learn the ten general orders, was what it was. He turned to leave, and one little old boy from Griffin, Georgia, a thin, frail little guy, he had rolled his mattress out and was laying on it. (Laughter) Oh God! I thought he was going to kill him! You could have heard him all over. “Get out of that bed!” He made him do push-ups. His little arms weren’t that big, and I felt so sorry for the little old boy. Anyway, he said, “Don’t you ever get back in there. You stand right there. You know these orders.” Well, when he came back, he didn’t know any of them! Well, he jumped on him again. Then he got him ... coming out, going to breakfast, running. He picked on that boy, we thought. As it turns out, we found out, the little boy probably needed it. He did everything wrong that there was, and when we’d march, everybody’s heads would [move the same way], like this. We got ticked off of him, ‘cause he wasn’t doing anything right. Anyway, as time went by—I’ll tell you why I picked out Sergeant Lacaze here in a minute. This guy began to change! He began to get a little stronger, and he would be late for roll call sometimes, and he would chew him out and make him do push ups, and—back then you washed your dishes with your hands. You didn’t have an automatic washer. You’d go pearl diving, they called it. (Laughter) It was so hot you couldn’t stand to put your hand down in there. He’d put him in there and make him do it. But anyway, it wasn’t too long. He began to shape up a little bit, and a little bit more. Finally, he was a soldier, just like the rest of us. He was doing alright. Then, when that day came that they brought us back out and said, “Pack: you’re leaving,” after twelve weeks instead of sixteen, Sergeant Lacaze, I saw him, walking with this—his name was—I’ll think of it in a minute—anyway, I saw him walking across the quadrangle in that sand, with his hand on his shoulder, talking to him. Stopped, shook hands with him, and that was the end of it. Sergeant Lacaze, we had learned to respect him, because he made us do what we were supposed to do. The first thing he made us do was learn the rules, and he made sure we learned them.

PIEHLER: Because I haven’t heard that before.

GENTRY: No. He made you learn the rules, and then he made you obey them! That made you a better soldier. You knew what you were supposed to do and not supposed to do. If you just let them go through, they wouldn’t know. But he made it, and it makes me think of the Ten Commandments. There were ten of those [general orders], and ten Commandments. Do you know them? Do you obey them? If you’re just knowing them and not obeying them, that won’t help you any. And so he made us do that, so I had great respect for him. Some of the guys said, “Lets go to Captain Stevens....” Captain Stevens was an interesting captain that we had. I liked him, too. Of course, I was ... in the front of the first platoon, and the reason I liked him, he was leading us one day, and he stumbled. He turned around and said, “Quit pushing,” and that made me feel relaxed then. (Laughter) I know I didn’t push him, but he had a good sense of humor,

and I liked him, and he got out one day and punted football with us, and played with us a little bit. So we went to him and asked, "Can Sergeant Lacaze go with us?" He said, "No. He's already been wounded three times." Two ... tours of duty in World War II, and he's already been wounded, and now he's there training the others. He knew what he was doing. So I remember him.

Then I have one or two that I remember. I have a sergeant that—when I first went in, he was my sergeant. I ended up as a staff sergeant myself. But he was my first sergeant, and I got closer to him than any of them. He lived in Wisconsin. He was the youngest looking guy. He looked like he was fifteen years old, but he was a tough rascal. He was an intelligent boy, too. I learned to respect him. He and I got along really good. In fact, ... he's the one that got me out of—I'm glad he did—out of a rifle platoon. He got me into a weapons platoon as a mortar man. I had scored pretty high in mortars when I was in training, and so he said, "I want him in my squad," so I got in his squad, and we got along real good. That was Sergeant Farley, and he is not living now.

Then, later on, there was an officer—this was in the Army occupation now. This is the opposite. I didn't have much respect for him, because ... he didn't set the example for us, and I got in trouble because of it, too. 'Cause I was on duty one night, and had these little radios that ... you'd call in ... and it was him. He said, "Sergeant Gentry, get me the motor pool." This was at about two o'clock in the morning.... He wants the motor pool.... This was in Austria. There was snow on the ground, in the Alps Mountains. I plugged it in to get the motor pool. I heard him talk to the corporal at the motor pool. He said, "I need a jeep. Come over and pick me up...." I thought he was gone. I said, "I wouldn't go over there and pick him up at two o'clock in the morning! He's not supposed to be out!" He said, "Sergeant Gentry!" Oh, God! (Laughter) He heard me. But I still—and the next day at breakfast, he just made a little talk about insubordination, or something like that. He didn't say much, because he was the one that was wrong. He couldn't go much higher, or he'd get in trouble himself, so he didn't say anything else about it. But I didn't have a lot of respect for him. (Laughs) That was after the war. During the war, everybody was the same. They'd just keep busy all the time.

But anyway, we got started then, and because of the timing of the war, ... my outfit spent most of the time chasing the Germans. Now, we had a hard time about three or four places, but they'd fight and fall back, they'd fight and fall back. Then ... way down towards the end, they didn't fight and fall back; they were just falling back. But when we first got across the Rhine River, well, before we got to the Rhine, we ran into trouble at the Siegfried Line, where they had the pillboxes and all that. And the artillery pinned us down, and then they ... sent patrols out, and they ended up right in with us. That night, they were in the hole with you almost, and you could see them. What you'd do sometimes was you don't respond. You just ... be quiet. They'd go around and don't see you, then they go back. We didn't even open fire on them once or twice when they came across. So, we finally got through that with the help of ... the P-47's, or whatever came down and bombed them and strafed them, and we finally got through that. But, the hardest time we had was at Wurzburg, Germany. They force-marched us.... You've got to keep up with me now. They'd march us all day, all night. I found out something about the human body that night. You can go to sleep walking. But don't worry about it, because when

you hit the ground, you'll wake up. You'd mumble and get back up and start walking. I did once. I fell once.

PIEHLER: You would fall asleep and ...

GENTRY: ... And then you'd get up—that'd wake you up—and you're okay. You'd had your nap. (Laughter) It might have lasted two seconds. Anyway, that night, we could see up ahead of us, and it was just flashes, flashes, flashes. I thought, "Boy, we're going into the worst thunderstorm that's ever been." You heard, "Boom, boom." I thought, "That don't sound exactly like thunder." Well, what it was—I found out really, just only recently, in Stephen Ambrose's book. The guy was a prisoner of war that was in that book, and he said, "I was in Wurzburg, Germany when the British firebombed it." And that's what they were doing, that we saw. It's in his book. And that helped me—I ... knew they firebombed them, but I didn't know whether it was the Americans or the British. It was the British. He said the British firebombed Wurzburg. Well, the idea of us marching all day, and then all night, was to get there before dawn. They'd have a decided advantage because they had buildings across the river—the Mainz River goes through—and they could shoot us coming across the river. We couldn't. So, we'd get there and get across. And it worked out perfectly because I also read that some of the Germans mistook some of us ... in those rubber raft boats coming across as being retreating Germans, and didn't open fire. Then the engineers got up there and built a makeshift bridge across the river, and we got across over on their side.... We had a hard time from there on. I mean, ... the buildings were still burning. They were all rubble except the churches. You leave the church, you know. Respect to religion. Plus, it was a reference point for us to tell artillery or mortar men whatever we wanted. We always liked to see a church steeple.

PIEHLER: That was a good place to zero in on ...

GENTRY: Yeah.... They'd holler back, "How far is it over there?" You'd say, "Well, two fingers to the right ... holding your hand up to the right of the church steeple. That's where I want to fire." And then there's a way of firing when you fire over them first, and then you fire under them, and then you split the difference.... Let me give you an example of how it works: If you have a target and you think it's 500 yards, okay, you fire 600 yards, and if it hits a hundred yards past it, ... then you fire ... 400 yards, and if you're a hundred yards shy, and you're a hundred over and a hundred under, it's five hundred. See, you ... get the difference. You can fire five rounds or six rounds or eight rounds, ... and then you start dropping it as fast as you can, and they'll hit right at the target. That's how you do it. But you leave the church steeple. But the rest of it was rubble, and burning, and all that sort of thing.... I got against a building, with walls up behind me, and the Germans were up there behind you, too, but they couldn't see you underneath. And across the river, up on the hill, was the Hohenzollern Fortress, or castle.... Marinburg, maybe that's it. Anyway, it had "Heil Hitler" painted there on it. We went along, and it said, "42nd Rainbow Division," something like that, had been painted over it. (Laughter) I couldn't believe it. I [said], "How did you do that, you guys? You nuts!" (Laughter) Back against that wall, there was a door right here, and there was a wide street, and then the river. Cobblestone street. And this door came open, and ... I clicked off my safety, and a gentleman came out, and ... [he was] a nice, well built, tall gentleman with snow-white hair. He had on a black suit and a white shirt, looked almost like a tuxedo. The first thing he said, in perfect

English, was, “Thank God you Americans are here.” And he started on up the way we were going, but he walked out on the cobblestone. And later on, as we worked our way up there, he was laying in the street dead. I don’t know who shot him. I guess the Germans recognized him or thought he was somebody else, or he was us, or they recognized him, maybe, as anti-Nazi, or whatever he was. I don’t know. But he was dead. Then we climbed through the buildings, and we lost some men in here ...

PIEHLER: You did some heavy duty street fighting.

GENTRY: That’s what it was. The snipers, and machine gun fire in the streets, and we lost some guys going through the buildings. We got to this church, and Andy McDavid from South Carolina, he got killed right in front of the church. We were in this building. The church was across the street. They were in the church steeples. They were all in the church. See, they knew that they could be safe in a church. We’ve had a lot of surprises here. I’ll give you one in a minute. But they were firing out of the church, and he got killed right there. Finally, somebody—this is the way it works. It’s usually not like John Wayne in the movies, where some ... officer tells you what to do. Finally, somebody said, “They’re going to kill us all. Let’s go.” You just get up and run. You ran across that street as fast as you could, and up those steps and into the church. And the biggest surprise was, when we went in that church, there must have been twenty-five caskets, and they hadn’t had time to bury the people. Just caskets after caskets, just all in there. That’s the first thing I saw. I went in, and it dropped down like this. A foyer right there, and all these caskets in this church. Well, in the back of the church was the university attached to it. It’s called Neubau University Church, I believe. They had gone into it and climbed out windows, and gone out the back as we came in the front.

PIEHLER: So they weren’t in the steeple?

GENTRY: No, they had come down by then. They caught, though. They got caught. As we came in—we flushed them out—they ran into more fire outside, so we secured that area, and then that night—we didn’t get about a block and a half that whole day. And then we spent the night while it was burning. That was the worst night of my life. The ... shadows of people, and they were in the street, and you could hear the hobnailed shoes. We didn’t have hobnails. You couldn’t hear us, but you could hear them.

PIEHLER: So you could hear a German soldier?

GENTRY: Oh, yeah. You can.... Charlie Theisen, that’s my buddy up in Long Island, we were on guard duty that night about one or two o’clock in the morning, and we backed up to a wall, and you could hear them on the other side of the wall. We was on this side of the wall. But they never came around on our side. As long as they didn’t come around to our side, we weren’t going to go around and hunt them. ‘Cause you’d expose yourself. So you just stayed still and let them move around. If you were smart, that’s what you’d do, just stay still, ‘cause there were so many shadows that they couldn’t pick you out very well. Anyway, to make a long story short, we stayed there that night in that bombed-out building, up on the second floor, and I remember the Venetian blinds and shutters were all hanging everywhere and glass everywhere, but the building still had a roof somehow, and ... the buildings around it were burning. And the next

day, we go up that street until we finally get to a city park. It had an iron fence around the trees, and shrubbery, and all that. A nice little park. And that's where it really caught it, because we'd go into that park and ... they had us. They were all around us. I came maybe that close to not being talking to you.

PIEHLER: Was that your closest call?

GENTRY: Yeah, that was my closest call. That was the closest one. You couldn't get any closer than that one, because ... when we got in the park, they were around us. Ahead of us, behind us, around us. We didn't realize that. We thought they were still in front of us. We lost some men there. I got behind a big tree, the biggest tree I could find, 'cause ... I knew how to hunt. I was getting around that tree. But when I'd get around it, all of a sudden I'd see one of them, and a bullet goes by you, and it sounds just like when you take a rubber band and pop a piece of paper with it. It's a pop. And that thing started popping around my head, and I said, "He's close." And then all of a sudden, these little twigs off shrubs start falling on your face, hitting right at your head.... So I crawled around to the other side of the tree. When I got around to that side of the tree—I still don't know. I can't tell you what happened. I just know what I remembered. I remembered something happening that stopped me, and I remember falling. Just going down. I was already on my knees. I just fell down on my face. I remember that. That's as much as I can remember for awhile. And then, the next thing I know, G Company, or H Company—I don't know which one it was. It was a heavy weapons company. It wasn't with us. We was in E Company. Two of those guys had already hollered at me from back behind, saying, "They're after you." And I don't know whether I answered them or not. I knew they were after me, 'cause they didn't have to tell me. It was that popping. The next thing I know, two of those guys were pulling me by my feet—they was trying to get out of there themselves—[I was] face down. My helmet came off. And they pulled me.... I remember grass in my face and mouth, and nose. I heard one of them say, "He's still alive." (Laughs) They thought I was dead, but I wasn't dead, obviously. Anyway, what had happened—then later on, here I am without a helmet. And, man, you feel naked without a steel helmet. You love those things. There, I don't have a steel helmet. One of them said, "Just lay down right here. They thought you was dead." And I said, "Okay." So, a little bit later on, my helmet—what had happened, I think it had hit the tree and came across the front, right over my right eye right there, and it went through the steel and the helmet liner. Now that's close.

PIEHLER: I've heard a ... similar story from someone.

GENTRY: It's like somebody hit you in the head with a hammer.

PIEHLER: Yeah. 'Cause someone once was knocked, and he said he was hit, and he fell back in the trenches in the Pacific.

GENTRY: I just went straight down.

PIEHLER: And then the guy got up. What had happened is the bullet had gone up and over, and he said, "The three of us just started laughing." You know, it was just that one in a million chance.... They assumed when he was knocked out that that was it, that he'd been shot.

GENTRY: That's what saved me, I think. 'Cause ... if I had stayed up, they would have kept on until they got me. I couldn't get out of there. I couldn't get back. There was too much open land behind me to get back.

PIEHLER: You also didn't have your weapon.

GENTRY: I just dropped it right there. And, then, when it was all over with, I got me another helmet. I picked up another helmet off of a guy that was right to my right. He didn't make it out. I went back to work again. But, I wanted to tell you an interesting story after that day. To me. I love this story and I love to tell it, because it tells you how human nature really is. That night—I don't know whether you realize what I just told you—we walked all day and all night, fought all night and fought all day, without any sleep. Two days and two nights. And we were exhausted. There was no way we'd go on. You just stopped anywhere and you'd almost fall over and go to sleep. So, we had gotten right into the residential area, on the edge of it, and there was a house that had been hit, and it burned, and ... the top of the house collapsed down on the concrete floor and heated the floor. The basement underneath was all blown out, but the concrete heated underneath, so that's where we got inside there that night, so we could go to sleep. And, of course, you didn't have to tell us to go to sleep. We were on a pile of coal, and it felt like a feather mattress to me. Just laid down and went to sleep. It was warm there. And, then the next morning, I heard my name, and I knew what it was. The only thing you look forward to during the war is a letter from home. You don't look forward to what you're going to do tomorrow or tonight. Who'd look forward to getting killed or taking a chance on getting killed? You don't look forward to that. You don't look forward to any of that. So, you don't look forward to the weekend, or whatever. You look forward to getting a letter. That's the only thing you look forward to. So, when I heard my name, I knew it was mail call. And they had brought a jeep up close enough to us. We had secured the city by then, the downtown area. It was not a real big city. A pretty good size city, but not big. Anyway, I got six letters.... I had a big family, and my wife was writing, or I mean, my girlfriend, sweetheart, was writing me. And I got these letters. And I got six of them. And, I said, "Oh, boy." I hadn't had any letters now for two to three weeks. So, I go back ... under there to sit down to read my letters, and we had one guy in our squad—this was the second one from Missouri, and he'd never gotten a letter. We felt so sorry for him. He just never got any. He didn't have anything to look forward to. And I remember that morning I sat there, and he said, "Hey Gentry, Do you mind if I read one of your letters?" I said, "No, Jack. You read three and I'll read three, and then we'll swap." We did that the rest of the time. Now, I want to skip up to 1999. Last summer, I got his telephone number through some guy in Pennsylvania, who said if I sent this information they could find the number. And he did. And I called, and he answered the phone. We had the best time reminiscing and talking. And finally, right in the middle of the conversation, he said, "Hey. There's something I've got to ask you." And I said, "What's that?" He said, "Did you ever marry Rebecca?" And I said, "Yeah. We've been married fifty-four years." He said, "I just wondered." (Laughter) How important was a letter to him that he remembers my letters about her? That was in Wurzburg, Germany, that morning that he read those letters....

Anyway, then we cleared out the residential area, and found one house just full of German soldiers, asleep.... We walked up on the guard before he saw us, and then we saw him run. And

when he ran—we were coming here, and ... he ran up this street. We couldn't see where he went. So, we take off up there, trying to catch him ... to see where he's going. Well, when we get there, nothing. So we go up the street to this one house. The windows are all fogged up. There was steam coming out the windows, and so on. We said, "Uh oh. This is it." So, we get around the house. Some go to the back, some on both sides. I was on one side by myself. Some would go to the front, and some to the back. You could hear them in there, getting in the door, hollering, and "*Nicht schießen*" [Don't shoot], and everything, and going on. All of a sudden, there was a coal shoot under the house, and I saw that thing coming up. There was a little shrub there. I was on this side of the shrub, and there was a little space, and then a coal shoot. And all of a sudden it came up and I saw this black helmet, and I saw a rifle slide out, and a potato masher—that's a hand grenade. Pushed it out, and he came climbing out of there, and when he did, I pushed the safety off and he heard a click, and ... he looked up. I had him. (Laughs) I said, "*Hande hoch.*" [Hands up]. He got up and put his hands on his head. Took him just like that. But he had bad things in his mind, 'cause he wasn't going to be captured with the rest of them when he came sliding out of that door.

PIEHLER: He was going to try to escape?

GENTRY: Yeah, right at my feet. Like where the leg of chair right there, is where he was, and I'm standing here, and I said, "click," and he looked up. There wasn't anything he could do then. 'Cause he had already pushed his rifle out ahead of him.

PIEHLER: Why did you pause? Why didn't you just shoot first?

GENTRY: No. I wanted to take him as a prisoner.

PIEHLER: But, you also were taking a chance though?

GENTRY: I know. But I knew I had him, though.

PIEHLER: Yeah. You knew that.

GENTRY: I knew I had him. He couldn't react. All he could do was slide back inside, 'cause his rifle was already pushed out ahead of him. He couldn't get it out with him at the same time. He pushed it out, and I saw him hands and arms, and then that black helmet when he came up. Just as he started to get up, where he could raise up a little bit, that's when I pushed the safety off. I knew I had him then. He knew it, too. Anyway, that was the end of Wurzburg. We had a hard time in Wurzburg.

Then we went to Arnstein, a little village there, and we lost some men there.... By the way, every soldier has got a story. Mine's just a little trickle of what many of them would have. We got to Arnstein, which is a small village, and they caught us coming across a little field of alfalfa grass, hay, or whatever. It wasn't very high. Just maybe a foot. But that saved some lives, that one foot did. And then there was a creek that separated us from the little town. We had to go to the left and up around, and come back on the other side of the creek. And on the other side of the creek, there was a little ... road with a high ground. And they let us get out in there, and they

really hit us then with machine gun fire. Some of us got back behind a little farmhouse that was maybe 150 yards, or 100 maybe. No more than 100 yards, and got in behind it, and then we set our mortar up. We could shoot mortars over. And they were dug in on that high ground over there. Somebody got on the walkie-talkie and got a TD to come up. That's a tank destroyer. Anyway, he had a ninety-millimeter gun, and he goes up there, and shoots into this bank. The tanker doesn't ever turn sideways, because of the *Panzerfaust* [Anti-tank rocket]. He'd back up, and then he'd move way around, and then he'd come back again and shoot some more. 'Cause if he ever turned sideways, they might hit him with the *Panzerfaust*.

And while he was doing that, there was a guy that got hit right out past us, out the window, and he couldn't move, but he was alright. He was hollering back to us inside the house, and we said, "Take your sulfa tablets," but he said, "I don't have any water." So, we gathered up a bunch of canteens—and I'm right-handed—I was throwing them right-handed. Some other guy on the other side was left-handed. We were throwing them, trying to make one bounce where he could reach it, 'cause he couldn't move. And they were shooting at us through that window, and the wall back here and the door, just splinters flying everywhere. We'd throw, and they'd shoot, and we'd throw, and they'd shoot. Anyway, the tank finally quieted them down. We got up and started down, and I remember we went across a little bridge and came down the side, and underneath that bank. There was a Mexican medic with us, who couldn't speak English very well.... And he was excited up above. I said, "What's going on up there?" He was pointing at the ground and hollering something. We go up there, and this fresh dirt was moving. What had happened, this ninety-millimeter shell hit and knocked the dirt back over on those guys inside that hole, and they were covered with dirt. So, I got down on my knees and started digging, and there was his helmet, just like a big turtle. And I dug all around, and I rammed my hand down under, and he breathed in my hand. I said, "This one's alive!" The other one wasn't. There was two of them in there. The other one was dead. Got some civilians that were coming out, and pointed to them to get a shovel and get him out. They thought we meant to cover him up! They started putting dirt back on him! We said, "No! Get him out! Get him out!" So finally, they dug him out. He'd been hit, though, right then. He got out, and we sort of stood him up a little bit, and just as soon as we let him go, he died. But, anyway, he got covered up there. And a lot of those in that village were Hitler *Jugend* some of them.

PIEHLER: Hitler youth.

GENTRY: The youth. Hitler *Jugend*. But anyway, a lot of them were there, and they were fanatical little boys, too. So, then we'd just go from there to all sorts of places. To Schweinfurt.... The most interesting thing about Schweinfurt was that you got to see a bombing raid, and that's unusual for infantry to see a bombing raid. We surrounded it. We did one of those marches again, all day, and got around to the other side of the city, up on top of a high hill. The city was down below us, and then all of a sudden we hear this roar, and here come those planes coming right straight at us. I don't know ... how many was in there. They'd bomb, and those big smokestacks would give a big shake, and "Woom," down they'd go. And they bombed the daylights out of that city. So, what we were doing there, was we'd cut them off. They didn't know we were up there. They started coming out of the city. The first one that came out was two air force pilots from the United States Army Air Force, and they come up the hill. They had been holding them as prisoners. And they said, "Hey, anybody got a cigarette?" You know.

(Laughs) And we gave them some food and cigarettes and so on, and then we had them cut off. So, that was at Schweinfurt. I remember that real well. Then, from Schweinfurt, we went back south ... to Nuremberg. Somebody else, I think, had already gotten into Nuremberg, 'cause we didn't have any trouble at all going through Nuremberg

PIEHLER: But I'm told Nuremberg—I've seen pictures of it. It was just rubble.

GENTRY: Yeah. It wasn't much.... We went into a suburb area called Furth. I don't remember anything much about it. I remember just seeing it. I don't remember any fighting in it when we went through. I remember some guy found a stamp collection, a book. And he said, "Man. That's worth a lot of money." And he carried it with him for a day or two, and then he finally let it go. He said, "I'm not carrying that thing anymore." (Laughter) Another thing, a lot of people say, "Why didn't you get this?" Well, you were trying to get yourself through, much less something else. Anyway, from Furth we went to Buchdorf, the next place I remember. We lost our commanding officer at Buchdorf.

PIEHLER: What had happened to him?

GENTRY: Well. First, let me back up. When we got there, it was just a little village, and the first thing that happened was I'm up to the right, walking away from the little road, going into the village, and the FO—the forward reserve for the 232nd field artillery—he was an officer—he comes in his driver and a jeep, to call back for artillery fire. And they hit a land mine. And I remember as soon as that happened, I looked to my left, and he came out of that jeep like a rag doll. He was a great big man, 240 pounds. Just like that. He went about twenty or thirty feet in the air and then just, boom, he was dead. His driver went out the other side, and it didn't kill him. The jeep went all of the way ... off of the ground and turned over. Later on, I found out who he was, and everything about him, because a friend of mine, who was in the 232nd Field Artillery, went to school with me. He didn't know I was there, and I didn't know he was there. He said, "That's ... Captain so-and-so." And he told me all about him. So we knew something was going to happen around that little village. And then finally we go down into the little village. There weren't but eight or ten houses, twelve houses. There was a ... German lady there, and she was giving out—had pie. She came out and gave us pie. Somebody said, "It's probably poisoned!" But I said, "I'm going to eat it anyway. I'm hungry!" It wasn't. And then we found some eggs and got in there and tried to cook some eggs, and about the time we got some eggs on the stove—we didn't have a skillet. Just break them on top of the stove—someone hollered, "Fall out, fall out!" And we'd run into trouble. I remember scooping that egg up. It was running all over. Trying to eat it, and yellow was running through my fingers. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So you were just like grabbing it ...

GENTRY: I figured, "I gotta get out of here, and I get a little snack, anyway, before I go." Then they had set up their machine guns, and we walked right straight to them. But somebody had gotten up there on them before they could wake up, and flushed them out. Then we made a sharp turn to the right, and went to a farmhouse up ahead of us, and the lieutenant was out in the field, Lieutenant Lindbergh, and he got hit right in the chest with machine gun fire. And, by the way, after the war was over, his wife wrote me a letter and said that, "Your name was given to

me as being with my husband with he died.” And I was, and she wanted to know if he had suffered. He had two children. He didn’t [suffer]. He just died instantly. He was ... sort of a sandy, redheaded guy. Nice guy. Well built. From Michigan. I think Flint, Michigan. Anyway, I wrote her back and told her that he didn’t suffer, and he was a good soldier. And he was. Anyway, that was at Buchdorf. And then now, about this time, was when we started chasing them. That’s the last place that I remember they just stopped. Well, at the Danube River, they tried to attack us as we were coming across the river, but we fooled them. We went across at midnight, and they couldn’t see us, and the bank was high. We were down here. And by the way, the “Blue Danube” is not blue at night. It’s black and it’s swift. We started across ahead, and some guys said, “Any of you all ever paddled a boat before?” And I said, “Oh Lord...” We’d start here and end up down there.

PIEHLER: And you had a lot of experience?

GENTRY: I had a lot of experience. But those nuts, they didn’t know what they were doing. We’d go round and round with them. I said, “Ya’ll just be still.” (Laughter) Anyway, we got across. And that’s when we really just started chasing them. From there, the next thing that you might be interested in, would be ... that we went to Dachau on April 29, I read later. I didn’t know it at a time. There is an interesting story about Dachau, because we didn’t know what it was. We didn’t know where we were going. The main unit was going on into Munich, but they took us off to the left, E Company went to the southeast, and into Dachau. And when we got there, as I said, we didn’t know what it was. There was just a huge wall. About high as these ceilings here, maybe a little higher, and a stucco-like wall. And we came in on the northwest corner, because that was where they had the big gates, and the railroad goes in. And they have these boxcars. We see the boxcars as we approached. And it was sort of scary, because we had some open field we had to come across. But they never opened fire.... [While] outside, we didn’t know what was inside. And so when we got down there, I remember I went around to the right side to go in. I had about a three-foot space between the track and the wall, to get in the gate. I go around that side, and that’s the door side. That’s where the bodies were. And there were just piles of bodies. Striped clothes.... There were so many that there was pile up even with the door, and some of them were part in the boxcar, and part outside. Well, I didn’t know who they were. They were not soldiers, obviously, and had arms and legs about the size of a broomstick. You could see all their ribs. Their hair shaved off. Chalky white. Maybe a little bluish color. And, so we get on into the inside of the big gate, and there is where we found those big buildings that they had the equipment in.

But in the meantime, you could hear some rifle fire and some small arms fire off ahead of us, and to our right. And what we didn’t know was that some other guys had already entered the main gate, and we finally go down and link up with them. And then, we get to the second wall. First there’s some barbwire, then a moat, and then another wall.... I get emotional here, so I know how to do it now. I used to couldn’t talk about this at all. But, I get emotional when I get to this part, because we went to the gates, and it was all this barbed wire and iron gates, and there, on the other side, were all these faces. Just a sea of faces, that seemed to be dead, but yet they were alive. And we released them. And there was not a whole lot of celebration. The reason I have to close my eyes is I see their faces. And when I’m talking to an audience, I have to close my

eyes because I see faces in an audience.... I wouldn't even talk about it for years and years and years and years and years and years. Then I was convinced that I need to do it.

But, anyway, we released them and someone said, "Don't let them kiss you on the mouth." I don't know who said it, but it was good advice. They'd fall down and kiss your legs and hold onto your legs and kiss your boots, or anything, and so ... here I am, and remember, I'm just a little boy that grew up in Franklin, in and around Franklin. "What is this? Who are these?" Someone said they were Jews. Well it turned out—the ones that I saw, they were not Jews. The ones in the boxcars were. Anyway, we see all of the horrible sites, and some of them so weak they were still in their so called beds or bunks, which was nothing but wooden slats, and they was too weak to get up. They were just all over the place. Laying in the streets dead, and along by the side of the buildings. But the Germans that were there, they were dead also. They got killed. They were killed by some of those that came in the front gate, and also by some of the prisoners. Some of them tried to change clothes, you know. Of course, they was fleshy. There wasn't any problem finding them. But they were all laying alongside the wall there. And, then the crematoriums were way back in a building right outside there, where the bodies were piled in this room, a little bit bigger than this room. They were just piled up in there, like you'd throw wood in there for a fireplace or something. And anyway, that was our experience there, to begin with, and then we stayed there a few days to help. And they brought trucks in, and doctors and everybody came there. And Dr. Guffee, by the way, came the next day. And I didn't know that. Neither one of us knew it for twenty-five or thirty years.

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

PIEHLER: You were saying ...

GENTRY: Yeah. I was asked to speak about fifteen years ago, I guess it was, at the Rotary Club in Franklin. The gentleman that normally introduces the speaker came to me when I got there and said, "Dr. Guffee is going to introduce you." And I thought, "Why's he gonna introduce me?" Dr. Guffee was ... one of the greatest guys you'd ever want to know, but he talked—his language was like—you couldn't understand what he was saying most of the time. But a great guy. He was my doctor before the war. So he said, "Dr. Guffee is going to introduce you." And I didn't quite understand that, and when Dr. Guffee got up to introduce me, he told the story. He said, "I came to Dachau on April 30. He came on the 29th. We were there together, and never knew it, at the same time." And so that really helped me, because I asked Dr. Guffee after I finished that day, "What did you do with all of those prisoners when we left?" He said, "We took those we thought we could save to a German Army hospital, and administered to them. And the rest of them, they just died. They were too far gone." So, he cleared that much up for me. Now, that experience there was a horrible experience. We found some clothing, new S.S. uniforms. Some of them had these wool coats, and we thought, "Man. That'd be great to get one of these back home." It was white on one side, and camouflage on the other. And so we packaged them up, and they piled them out in the street and poured gasoline on them and burned them. We said, "What did they do that for?" It was because of the typhus fever. Fleas. Not only did they do that, ... when we finally did leave out, took all our clothes and burned them. Shaved all the hair off of us, and used something that I'd never heard of before, DDT. They sprayed us with DDT, and gave us some clean clothes. Not new. Clean. That was ... because of the fleas,

off of the rat, and typhus fever was the reason there. And so the guys had said, “Don’t let them kiss you on the mouth.” They burned those things, they burned our clothes, and then we would go to the end of the war. I want to come back to this in just a minute, and tell you a little bit about that.

There we go on to the end of the war, which is really just a matter of chasing them to the Salzach River at Tittmoning, Germany. And ... word had come that the war in Europe was over. We celebrated by taking a bath for the first time in five months. And, no celebration at all. Just taking a bath. I ... got a picture of us from that day we took a bath. I thought, “Boy. We were the finest looking things. Look at us now! We are the sorriest looking [group] you ever saw.” (Laughter) Anyway, the reason that we didn’t celebrate too much is that we began training immediately to go to Japan. And, of course, you know the rest of the story, the atomic bomb.

Now, let me go back to Dachau. When I go to—have been—going to universities to talk—especially universities.... Not ... [as often] in high school. There will be a question come from somebody in there, “Do you really think that happened?” or “What do you think about it being a hoax and it didn’t really happen?” Then I could only answer, when I first started talking about it, to say that “I don’t really know what happened before I got there. I just know what I saw.” But now, I can tell them something. Because a few years back, ... I happened just by chance to pick up a book called Gizelle Save the Children. And it’s ... in Brentwood Academy’s library. I put it in there. And I just picked it up. Just because it had something to do about the concentration camps, and I thought, “Well, I’ll just read this.” It’s about a little girl and her three sisters—so it makes four girls—her brother, her mother and father. And they are in Romania, I believe, or Hungary. I don’t remember where they came from. But the Germans finally come—and I’ll make this short—come and take them away, and take them to Auschwitz, where they began to separate them. The boy goes in one line, the mother and father [in another]. And when they separate the mother away from the girls, she says to the oldest daughter, “Gizelle, save the children.” That’s the last time she sees her mother, father and her brother. Well, her ... book goes and tells about how she goes from camp to camp to camp, appeasing the Germans by being a nurse, or scrub the floors, or cook, do anything they say and try to keep them from exterminating them. So they are successful until, she says, it gets down late in the war and the Russians are coming from the East and the Allies are coming from the West, and they are squeezed in between. They have nowhere to go much. But they’re Jews, and the Germans are determined not to let them go. So she says, “They put us in boxcars finally, as they always traveled,” and listen to this. “On April 29, we peep out of crack and see the word ‘Dachau.’” They are in Dachau. We left to come to Dachau at dawn on April 29th. They were in the camp at dawn, but ... it takes us about four or five hours to get there. For some reason, they are brought out of the camp—I’m quoting from her book now—they are brought out of the camp, several kilometers away, and sidetracked. And while they are sidetracked, another train coming to Dachau, loaded with men and boys, pass them going into Dachau. She thinks maybe her brother is on that train, and she yells back, but can’t get any communication. And then, she said, a little bit after that, all of a sudden the buildings around them, where they had sidetracked, began to blow up, and as these planes began to strafe them, and she was afraid that they were going to hit the train because they think that there are German soldiers in those trains. Anyway, that goes on, then she sees these German soldiers retreating, going this way.... I skipped a day. I’ve got to go over to the next day, the 30th. She says, “I peep out and I see a vehicle. It had a

white star, circle, 'U.S. Army.'" And I love to tell this right here. She said that they'd come to the train and one soldier comes and opens the boxcar where she is, puts his head inside, and says, "Ya'll come on out. You're free." Now, you can tell where he's from. (Laughs) And it is in her book written that way. I thought they would edit it out and say "You all," but it said, "Ya'll come on out. You're free."

Well, she comes out, and she says she goes up to this soldier and he's got a rainbow on. He's one of our guys. We weren't there, though. And he goes up to him and says, "Do you know anything about the train that came through yesterday?" And he said, "Yes. They're all dead." That's the train that we saw. Now, the reason [for] when I go to talk now, everything that she said dovetails in perfectly. The timing, if we had gotten there a day sooner, we could have saved the men. If we had gotten there a day later, they could have gotten the girls and the women at the same time. So, everything was timed perfectly to tell me that what we saw and what happened, she [describes] in her book, and she didn't know me.... So now if somebody asks me, I know pretty much what happened at Dachau. So, anyway, that's what happened at that thing.

And, as I said, the war is over and we go into occupation in Austria, which I think is a beautiful country. Enjoyed Austria while I was there. I wanted to come home, though. And finally, I do come home, though. But anyway, I had some experiences there with the Russians. The first experience I had was I was sent on temporary duty to Genoa, Italy, to receive—and the war is over now. You see, when the war is over, ... you turn in all your ammunition. You don't have any ammunition. You see a soldier on guard duty, he doesn't have ammunition. He's just on duty. But the captain called me in one day and said, "Sergeant, I want you to take—" I don't remember how many. Twenty five men, or thirty, or whatever—"and go to Genoa, Italy, and receive ... flour and wheat, that is being shipped in and is to be shipped from Genoa to Vienna." But, see, Vienna was divided into four sections. And so you had to cross the Russian zone, and what was happening to our wheat and flour is that the Russian soldiers would stop the train and say they sidetracked a car because it has a hot box. And they were stealing it, in other words, is what they were doing. "And you are not to allow that to happen. So, you go down there and put so many soldiers on each train that leaves." Well, I do. And as the train would leave, I would tell the guys—I'd put them in one boxcar, all the guards—"This train is not to be stopped. They're not to take any cars off. I don't care if the wheels are not even turning. Drag it in." (Laughter)

So they left, and then they did that, they did that, and finally the officer in charge down there—It was in the British zone. That was British. He was the only American there, just to represent the United States Army to receive that, and he said, "I'm going to get you transferred to me." And he tried to, but it didn't work. Whoever our commanding officer was ... said, "No. Send him back." So, I got on the last train out of Genoa going to Vienna, and sure enough, they stopped us, and we wouldn't let them take any cars off. Then we got on up to Vienna, and we stopped again without anybody stopping us. The train just stopped. So I get off to find out what the trouble is and this German—excuse me. The engineer ... [spoke] German, and I spoke enough German to communicate. That's all I could do. I can't speak German; just communicate. And I said, "*Was ist los?*" [What's wrong?] And, he was telling me, ... "The Russians wouldn't let you come in." But, he told us to get over in the coal tender behind the coal, where they can't see

you, and we did. He waited until night, and then he started switching around. First thing you know, we were in the American zone. And that's how we got in, slipped in.

Another time, later on, my experience with the Russians was that we ... ended up in a drill platoon after the war. They wanted somebody to put on some show, so they came to our company and asked us to line up and they'd come along, "You step out. You step out. You step out." And they did that all over, until they got all of us the same height, about the same weight. We all looked pretty much the same with a uniform on. Everybody. And I was one of those. So we learned to do all of the manual arms, and wear white gloves, and look sharp, you know. And then they sent us to Vienna to help celebrate May Day, which is a Russian holiday.... Well, when we got there, they stopped us coming in. They searched our vehicle. And I thought, "Well, I thought we was on the same side." You know. (Laughs) Anyway, they put us in a building out there and won't let us come out of that building and won't let us go anywhere else. And then, finally, we get to practice one morning, about two o'clock in the morning, and they take us back, and we go down and have the parade and everything. Then they tried to stop us going out, and frisked us again, just going out. So I thought, "Now wait a minute. These Russians are on our side, but they're not too friendly." To me, they were ... uneducated. I started to say more like animals. Maybe so. But they were more uneducated.... They didn't understand what was going on. So, that was our experience there.

And then, finally, I get to come home. I have one other interesting little story. While I was in Genoa, there was an Italian young man there that had just gotten out of the Italian Army, and his father, evidently, was a high official or officer in the Italian Army, and he lived right in Genoa. And one day he said—he spoke English, and he said, "You come home and eat lunch with me." And I thought, "Well, that would be good." So we go walk up the street, and I thought, "Well, he must live in one of these little houses down here." All of a sudden he opened this gate, and there's—the steps just go up, up, up, up, up to the top. They were right in the city, and ... arbors all over.... It was a beautiful place. It had ceramic tile. His father comes out in these black boots, and he salutes me. (Laughs) I'm a sergeant. And we have lunch. Well, I'm sitting here, and right across the table from me is the scrawniest little man. I never saw such a scrawny little man. He didn't say anything, never said a word. And, I thought, "He can't speak English. He can't speak Italian, evidently. He's mentally retarded, or something." And we was going back down, and ... I asked the guy about him and he says, "Ezra Pound."

PIEHLER: That was Ezra Pound?

GENTRY: Yeah. They arrested him not long after that. No wonder he didn't say anything! They said ... "He's a writer, an American writer...." I didn't understand then. It was after the war before I found out who he was.

PIEHLER: You didn't know the name?

GENTRY: I didn't know him. I didn't even know him. I just remember him saying that's who he was ...

PIEHLER: ... And then later you learned ...

GENTRY: Yeah. Ate lunch with him! (Laughter) So that was an interesting experience there. Anyway, then finally, after occupation there for a while, I see on the bulletin board out in front of the company there that anybody that has immediate kin killed in service ... no longer serves overseas. Well, in ... the movie, Saving Private Ryan, they go back—I think they took that rule and moved it up to the first part of the war. ‘Cause that didn’t come in until I was ready. Then, I saw that, and I went in and told the commanding officer and he said, “You had a brother killed?” and I said, “Yeah.” He said, “You can go home, but I’ll make you a top sergeant if you’ll stay.” I said, “No,” and he said, “I don’t blame you.” (Laughter) Anyway, I had an experience coming home, too.... The Lord was looking out for me. He took care of me the whole time, because he [the commanding officer] said, “You can go home.” He gave me my orders, by myself, one person, one soldier, and now I’m going to leave Hallein, Austria, go over to Salzburg, and there catch a train. But the jeep driver said, “Why don’t you go over to the airport? The Army operates the airport.... See if you can fly home.” So, I go over there and go in. I’m not supposed to fly home. And I go up to this guy, and I said, “Have you got a flight? I’m going home.” He said, “Where are you from?” I said, “I’m from Franklin, Tennessee,” and he said, “I’m in West Memphis. We’re neighbors.” And he said, “What do you want?” I said, “I’m going home.” He said, “There’s a plane, a C-47, out there, getting ready to leave now, going to Paris.” He said, “I can get you to Paris.” He said, “What do you got?” I said, “I got two duffle bags.” He said, “Throw one of them away.” See, they go by weight, too. I gave the jeep driver my other bag, and gave him \$4,000 or \$5,000. You can’t bring it home with you. See, I saved all my money. I never spent a dime. I made money. I sold all my cigarettes for \$50 a carton. You could sell them just ... as fast as you could get them. So every week they’d give you a carton of cigarettes. They gave me, every so often, whiskey, and I’d sell it. So I had all the money. So I couldn’t bring it home. I could bring home what I was making, \$145, plus \$15 for overseas, plus so much for combat. About \$160 a month, is what I was making. All expenses paid, now. Room and lodge. So anyway, so I fly from there to Frankfurt, and from Frankfurt to Paris. And I don’t know where I am. There are nothing but officers on there. High-ranking officers and me. I didn’t say a word. (Laughter)

When we got to Paris, here I am, out of Franklin, Tennessee, and I’m in Paris. And they get off the plane and they have one of these buses that has a stand around the outside, and you just step up on it and hold on. You don’t sit down. You just hold on. They did, and I did, too. I was going with them. And we go to this big building down in Paris. And I go up to find a place to sleep, a bed, and there are hundreds of them. And, finally, about one o’clock in the morning, somebody said, “Hey soldier. Let me see your orders.” I showed them and he said, “You’re not supposed to be here.” I said, “I’m not?” He said, “No. You’re supposed to be on a rail.” Anyway, I said, “Okay.” He said, “Well, just leave the next morning.” And so I spent the night there. The next morning I was hungry. So I go downstairs and ask this guy, and he said, “Well, there’s a transit mess.” He says, “You go out here and turn left and go down this underground subway.” Franklin didn’t have underground subways. (Laughter) So I go and he said, “Now, you get off when you see this.” And I did, and I found it and got off, and sure enough, I got a good breakfast. But then I forgot one thing. He never told me how to get back, and I didn’t know what I was going to do. There I was out there by myself in Paris. I didn’t know what was going on. I start walking down the street, just take a chance. I walk as far as I can go, and two MPs in a truck pull up. One jumped out in front and one in back, and stopped me. Said,

“Lemme see your orders.” They thought I was AWOL or something. I showed him my orders, and he looked at that, and he looked at me, and he said, “Why are you going home?” And I said, “I had a brother killed.” He said, “I had a brother killed!” I said, “You don’t have to serve any longer.” He said, “Where are you going?” I said, “I’m trying to get to the train station.” He said, “Get in. We’ll take you.” So they took me to the train station, and I caught the train to Le Havre, and then stayed there a few days, and then [from] Le Havre, I came home.... Now I’m back home again. And then ... when I get home, they try to get me to stay in.

PIEHLER: The Reserves?

GENTRY: Mm hmm. They really did. They really picked on me too, because he said, “Sergeant, why don’t you be first and set an example for the rest of them?” And he said, “Well, come out in the hall and let me talk to you.” And I went out there and he said, “If you’re not going to do it, don’t come back in there.” (Laughter) I said, “I’m not going to do it.”

PIEHLER: What kind of line did they give you?

GENTRY: They were talking about how you’d ... move up in rank, and you’d get all these benefits. Which is right, but I would have been in Korea if I had done that.

PIEHLER: You thought that—you’ve had enough of the Army.

GENTRY: I had enough.... It wasn’t so much—I liked the Army in a way, and I still do. I think it’s good for a man. But I love home more. It’s not just disliking them. I loved to be home, and I was going home. (Laughs) So they sent us home on the Liberty ship. And I didn’t get sick! I came across. I saw A Bell for Adano maybe twenty-five times. I could recite you every word in the movie. That’s the only thing that they had. A Bell for Adano. We landed in New York, and ate ham sandwiches and milk for the first time in two years, and then ... went to Camp Kilmer, from Camp Kilmer to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. And there, they said, “You can make a phone call.” They ... gave me a choice. I said, “I want to go to Camp Campbell.” They call it mustering out. They can’t ... muster you out fast enough. So I said, “Well, I’ll take Camp Campbell.” You can only make phone calls if it’s an emergency, and I go to the telephone, pick up the phone—had a whole lot of them. The operator says, “It is an emergency?” I say, “It’s an emergency for me,” and she laughed.... She said, “You just getting home?” I said, “Yeah.” She said, “Go on and call.” So I called and told them I’d be in Clarksville, Tennessee, that night about midnight. They met me in Clarksville, so I thought, “Oh, that’s it.” (Laughs) “I’m back home again.” I stayed up there a little while, not long, until they got us ready, and—we didn’t do anything. Just pulled a little extra ... duty every once in a while.

PIEHLER: When did you arrive, finally, ... back home to Franklin?

GENTRY: Seemed like it was in March.

PIEHLER: March of ‘46?

GENTRY: ‘46.

PIEHLER: I have a bunch of follow-up questions. I didn't want to cut you off ...

GENTRY: Oh, believe it or not, I skipped over half of it.

PIEHLER: ... I want to get some of ... the half you skipped over. I guess, one question, particularly on Dachau. What did you know of the [Germans]? Had you had any sense of these atrocities?

GENTRY: No. Absolutely not. Everybody asks that. "Did you know anything about it?" I didn't know the word "concentration camp."

PIEHLER: You had never heard of concentration camps?

GENTRY: Never heard of them.

PIEHLER: Did you have any sense that Hitler wasn't good for the Jews? I mean, did you have that sense?

GENTRY: No. I just ... knew that my brother had been killed, and I knew that he wasn't good for anybody.

PIEHLER: Yeah. But you had no sense ...

GENTRY: No inkling at all. No inkling at all. The Poznak family lived in Franklin—was Jewish—and Mr. Thorner. They was the only two that I knew of. No, no. One more, excuse me, the Bryans. There were three families. I forgot about him. The Poznaks came in later. So, that's the only Jews I knew, and I didn't know anybody felt like that towards the Jews. All around here, they had little jokes that tell about how tight they were, and things like that. But, that's about all I knew about it.

PIEHLER: But the three Jewish families, in many ways, they were part of the community?

GENTRY: Sure.... Both of them worked in dry good stores. Two of them did. And one of them ran that place where you bought furs, and nuts, and things like that. So, I didn't know anything about it. And, as far as Dachau, I'd never heard of it and didn't know until that morning that we walked in there. And then didn't know what I saw.

PIEHLER: ... Who said they were Jews? Do you remember?

GENTRY: Yeah, I remember. Very well. Yeah. Charlie Theisen, my friend. He said, "They're Jews!" Well, as it turns out, I read later, the ones we liberated were not Jews. Those in the boxcars were. But they were determined not—they couldn't let us have them. 'Cause ... some of them were still warm. They hadn't been dead over an hour or so. They couldn't let us have them. They weren't going to let us have them. The rest of them, I don't know what all they

were. Misfits, and gypsies, and political prisoners, and everything in the world is in the rest of them.

PIEHLER: When did you have a full sense ... what had happened? You saw all of this concentration camp, but when did you have a full sense of what all this was?

GENTRY: It was quite a while later. When I came home—first of all, when I came home, I saw that thing, Dachau. I began to think, you know, “[Seeing the camps] couldn’t have happened to me. Why me? That might have happened to somebody that lived in California or somewhere else, but it couldn’t have happened to me.” So, luckily, I had written my mother a letter describing this, best I could. So, when I got home, I ... went over to her house and ... I said—I didn’t word it correctly. I said, “Have you got a letter from me that I wrote about a camp?” She said, “No.” And I thought, “Oh Lord, I’ve ... dreamed all of this up. It’s just a bad dream.” “But your sister-in-law has it.” So I go to her, and she did have the letter. I read my own letter back, that I did see it. But still, I hadn’t put everything together yet, and when the war first ended like that, people had seen so much, I suppose, of death and killing and all that, it was not in anybody’s mind much. You didn’t want to hear anymore. The war was over. “Let’s forget it.” That was the attitude that I got. So, I didn’t talk about that, except they’d say, “Well, tell us a war story.” Well, that’s sort of an insult to ask somebody to tell them a war story, ‘cause it insinuates you’re making up some sort of story. And so I just didn’t talk about it, until about fifteen years later, or twenty years later. I don’t remember just how long it had been. I received a telephone call from a lady in Nashville, and she started out by saying, “Is this ... James C. Gentry?” And, I thought, “Well, she doesn’t even know me,” again, given the “James C.” But she had more information than I thought she had. I said, “Yes, ma’am.” And she said, “Well, did you serve in the Army during World War II?” I said, “Yes ma’am.” “Did you serve in the 42nd Infantry Division?” “Yes, ma’am.” And I thought, “Well, it’s some lady that wants to know about their—somebody they’d known during the war, and had gotten killed, or something.” And she said, “Were you E Company?” And that’s getting ... on down. The 232nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Battalion. She had something she was reading. I thought, “Uh oh. She knows too much.” And then finally, she ... asked the key question: “Were you at Dachau?” I wanted to say “No,” ‘cause I didn’t want her to know it. ‘Cause I couldn’t. I had to say, “Yes, ma’am.” She said, “Well, We’d like to get you to come and talk.” I said, “I won’t do it.” I wouldn’t. I didn’t do it.

PIEHLER: ... Where did she want you to talk?

GENTRY: She wanted me to come to the Jewish Community Center in Nashville and talk. And I said, “No. I just won’t do it.” She respected—she said, “Okay.” The next day, she calls back and said, “I understand that. I respect that you don’t want to do that, but would you record it ... for archives?” And I said, “Well, that sounds alright. I don’t have to face people then.” And so we did. We recorded it, at Brentwood Academy, as a matter of fact. And that was the end of it, I thought. Then about a week or ten days later, I got another phone call. This time, it’s not a lady. It’s a man, and I could tell from his dialect who he was. He was one of the survivors. And he introduced himself over the phone, and he said, “I understood you don’t want to talk about it....” I said, “That’s right.” He said, “Well, I understand.... But, all I want to do is come out and shake your hand.” Well, you can’t turn a man down from wanting to shake your hand. So, I said, “Yeah.” So he came out, and we were practicing ball down at that old baseball field where

they're building the new school, by the way, now, and I saw him pull up. And when I walked up to meet him, and we both embraced one another, and both of us cried. I often—after that, I think about, “Why did both of us cry?” But we both knew the same thing. He knew that I knew, and I knew he knew. So, we sat there and talked, and finally he convinced me that I should talk about it by saying, “You know, when you die, you're going to take all of this with you.” Then it made me think of my mother, who died at the age of ninety-three, or ninety-four. She used to tell little stories [about] when she was a little girl, and I loved those stories. I still remember those stories. And if she hadn't done that, I wouldn't have known it. So I said, “Okay.” Then I tried to, but I would get emotional every time, until I finally figured out [that] what was causing me to get emotional was those faces of people when I'm talking to an audience, and the faces through that barbed wire fence. And now, I can either look up or close my eyes, and I can go through it. So I hated to—I still evade them and try to get away, but I went on, and did it and now I can do it alright. But at that time, I didn't do very well. But anyway, that's the tail end of it. It wasn't until I started talking about it, fifteen or twenty years ago, that I began to realize, and read these books and so on, and putting everything together. It was that long after the war, that I really found out what was going on. I didn't have any understanding about it. So I hope that answers your question.

PIEHLER: No. It does. It does. How long did it take you? You said it was very hard. How many speeches did you have to do before you finally ...

GENTRY: Oh, Lord. I didn't learn how to do this until about a year ago. Maybe a hundred times.

PIEHLER: A hundred times?

GENTRY: Yeah. I've been to the Rotary Club I don't know how many times. They have two different Rotary Clubs in Franklin, and I've been to Rotary Clubs in Nashville, and ... Lions Clubs in Nashville, churches, universities.... All the high schools, and now junior highs, and just lots of them. But I can do it now, by not looking at the people. I found that out. It took me all that time to realize, “Why do you break up when you get to that one place?” I can tell all the rest of it, but that one spot I couldn't tell. (Laughs) That's how I conquered it.

PIEHLER: What about other people in your unit? Do they ever talk to people about it?

GENTRY: I don't know. I really don't know. See, I suppose that I might have ... an advantage over them, being a teacher, and talking to people, and telling stories. I can tell stories. There are lots of stories about this farm, and things like that. I told you one ... a little while ago, sometime this morning. (Laughs) Anyway, maybe that's the reason. And two, I don't think they do.

PIEHLER: Do you think they ... can't talk about it?

GENTRY: I don't think they can. My friend, Charlie Theisen. He was my closest friend. He's in Long Island. And we didn't communicate until about a year ago, when we found each other again. So I don't think he would do it.

PIEHLER: You said he's your closest friend?

GENTRY: Yeah. He was my closest one. We were foxhole buddies, and we could hit off pretty good, and understood one another. He had a good sense of humor, so we made it through.

PIEHLER: But he was—I mean, given your world, he was very distant. I mean, he was a New Yorker ...

GENTRY: Oh, yeah. He was a New Yorker. He talked funny. He didn't talk like us. (Laughter) ... I appreciated him, and I guess he appreciated me, being from the South. See, my ... speech comes back from Aunt Hattie, that old woman.... In my formative years, I was talking with her, and she was talking to me, and so that's where I get my drawl.... We used to be in antiques, and we'd go to Ohio, Indiana, or Iowa somewhere, and going in I'd say, "You have room for two people in the motel?" They don't answer me. They say, "Where are you from?" (Laughter) Finally, I said, "It must be something I'm wearing. They think I'm down from ... South Alabama, or Mississippi, or something." In fact, when I came home from Camp Atterbury, Indiana, home that night on the train, there were two ladies sitting in front of us on the train.... And we were just talking, and finally one of the ladies turned around to me and said, "Where are you from?" And I said, "I'm from Tennessee." And she turns and said, "I told you." The other one said, "No, he can't be from Tennessee." She said, "Yeah, he's from Middle Tennessee." And I said, "Yeah, I'm from Middle Tennessee." She said, "I told you!" They'd been arguing as to where I was from, because of my ...

PIEHLER: And you trace that to Aunt Hattie, growing up with her?

GENTRY: Growing up with her. Mm hmm. She made me talk a little slower, and pick up words, and that sort of thing.

PIEHLER: Now, in asking this question, because the student who said, you know, "You got a free trip to France," and ...

GENTRY: Yeah. I got to see France and all those other countries.

PIEHLER: But on the other hand, you hadn't traveled very much, and it's ... not necessarily ... the best way to see it, but you did see—I mean, even Florida, it shattered some illusions you had of Florida. (Laughs) What did you think of all these places you were going to? Particularly before people were shooting at you. I mean, then that's different.

GENTRY: Well, I didn't go very many places before they were shooting at me. See, as I say, when we landed, when we went to England, it was just a matter of getting off the ship and on the train, and then by the middle of the day we were on the LST and gone. So I didn't see hardly anything of England. I remember that it was cold that day, and little boys would run out to the track and wave like this, and I thought, "They wave strange in this country!" They weren't waving. They were saying, "Throw me something!" That's what it was.... So, I didn't get a chance to see much of that.

PIEHLER: You were put in the line pretty quickly.

GENTRY: Quickly. I mean, we didn't mess around.... We landed in Le Havre, and in about two to three days we were in the line. They knew the Bulge was there. They needed the foot soldiers. And Northwind—I think they would have moved us up, had Northwind not happened. Then when they struck down there, they just left us down there. The Germans were hoping—maybe that's one of the things. They hoped we wouldn't put more up there. Anyway, that's—so I didn't get to see much of that. Now, I have done this, though. I have been back to Europe, in 1987. I got a sabbatical from school, and they gave me a little money to help me out, and we flew back over there, and I wanted to see it. I didn't want to remember Europe, Germany particularly, in black and white and smelling bad.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm.

GENTRY: So I knew it had to be a pretty country, and I wanted to go back, so we flew over. Didn't stay in France. We flew to Frankfurt, and we had an automobile, and we drove as near as we could to where I had walked, and went back to those places, and—unbelievable. You didn't know there was a war. They had put it back together. You wouldn't know it.... But I'll tell you an interesting story here in a few minutes about going back. So, we go to Wurzburg, and I drove right in. I said, "There's a bridge there.... We'll go across this bridge. And there's another bridge...." I went right around the Berliner Circle ... to the Amburger Hotel or Motel, whatever it was, and pulled right up to it. (Laughs) And the last time I was there was '45, and we was fighting! But anyway, we'd go back through all of it. We'd go down to Austria, and we were driving between Kitzbuhel and Innsbruck, and just driving along, and I said to my wife, said, "I'd like to go to Stumm...." She said, "What's that?" I said, "It's just a little village down there in the Tyrolian Alps." She said, "Why?" I said, "Well, there was a little boy who lived down there when I was there, in occupation, and wouldn't it be neat if he still lives there?" It was just a little place. She said, "Well, let's go, 'cause we won't ever get to do this again." Which she's right.

And so we drove down there, and when I got there, my memories really—once I see something, I know pretty much what it is the rest of my life. It didn't look right. I said, "This doesn't look right." Well, what had happened, they had built some new houses, and it obscured my view of the little village that I wanted to see. So I go them, and there it is. Just a little church, a graveyard, a small castle, and two houses. That's all ... Stumm was at that time. So, I go down and park, and I go to the door where I—"Schlafen Sie hier." [Sleep Here.] I go over there, and knock on the door, and a lady comes to the door. She does not speak any English, not even a hint of English. All German. And, I thought, "Oh, lordy." Well, I stumbled around and finally, "*Ich war ein Amerikanish [Soldat], und [bleibte] hier.*" [I was an American soldier, and I stayed here.] I knew a few key words. And she—"Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja!" And I finally got down the place that *kleine bup*, which means a little boy. You probably know German. I don't. (Laughs) "*Kleine bup? Bleiben Sie hier?*" [Literally, "Do you live hear," but intended to mean, "Did he live here?"] "Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja!" I asked "*Wo ist?*" [Where is he?] And she said, "*Nicht hier.*" "He doesn't live here." And I thought, "Well, that's what I was expecting." But when she said that, she backed up a little bit and pointed, and said, "There is he is, standing in the yard right up there." He built a guest house, a new house. Well, there he is! So we go up there, and I'm

excited, 'cause I'm going to get to see this little boy. He is a grown man, as big as I am now. Go up to him, he speaks English. He's so glad to see me, but I can tell he doesn't remember me. He was too young. I could remember him, but he didn't remember me.

While I was talking to him, I was facing the door of a house, a Dutch door, and the bottom door was closed, and the top was open. The big mountains all around, and snow caps all around you. A beautiful place. And all of a sudden I see this old lady, and I say it respectfully. She is coming. She's got red hair, and she's in a dead run. She's not walking. She hit that door and then flies over it, coming right straight to me. Didn't put on brakes or anything. Just came straight to me. Right at my face. About this tall. She looked up at me and said, "*Was ist deine Name?*" "What's your name?" And I thought, "What difference is it what my name is? Nobody knows me over here." So I said, "My name is Jimmy." And she grabbed me around the neck and ... said, "Jimmy Gentry!" Since 1945, she knew my name! And I don't know who it is. And she's jumping up and down and crying and laughing, all at the same time. People in the village see us, ... and they come up to see what's going on. Then, as quickly as she came out, she goes back in. I asked the boy, I said, "Who was that?" He said, "That's my mother, Maria." Oh, I began to say, "Uh oh, that's his mother." I never saw his mother, but I saw him every day as a little boy. And that's where she got my name, from him.

Anyway, she comes back out in a little while, and she's fumbling around with her belt. She has put on her best dress. She wants to have a party. (Laughs) And they bring out schnapps. Well, I don't drink, but my wife said [that] she'd be real sociable. I tried to get her [to know] that I don't do it, and she [took a drink], and she almost burned her lips right then. She put it down right quick. Anyway, they said, "Come on in." They had pies and cakes, and just having the best time. And she jumps up from the table and goes to the telephone, and I hear my name again, and I said, "Who's she talking to?" And he said, "She's talking to Tony." Well, I remembered Tony. I remembered the name, but not who it goes with. "Tony. Oh yeah, I remember Tony. Who's Tony? I can't remember that."

Wasn't too long after that, about fifteen or twenty minutes, here comes Tony. He's about my age, and we'd get up, and we hug and pat one another on the back, and one of us doesn't know why he's hugging the other one. He doesn't speak much English, either. Anyway, we stay there and have the best time, and they want us to stay, and stay. I said, "No. We got reservations in Innsbruck, and we're going to have to move on, blah, blah, blah." Well, anyway, when we left, ... my wife said, "You know, if we got on the plane and flew back home now, it would be worth the trip over here just for that." Well, I had something curious about it, though. Why did she remember my name after all those years, never even communicating in any way? I had no idea who she was. I didn't even know she knew my name. So, I write a letter back, and ask her why she remembered my name after all those years. She wrote the nicest letter back. Number one, she said, "You were kind to my boy. You gave us food when we were hungry." Well, we gave everybody food. It wasn't just me. "And you saved my Tony." Well, it turned out Tony is her brother, that served as an Austrian in the German army, and they had been fed this propaganda that "If the Americans get you, they're going to kill you." Anyway, they were hiding out, and he was one of those—that's why we were down there, by the way, to pick up Nazis and war criminals. If we'd find a Wehrmacht soldier, we just said, "Go home. The war's over." Well, he was one of them. So we brought him down, and the officer that was interrogating him said he

was a Nazi, and was going to put him in the camp. And I said, “He’s not a Nazi. I’ve been with him all day.” It took us all day to come down. We’d talk, you know, and I could tell he was not a Nazi. He was not arrogant or anything. So, finally, he said, “Well, if you say so, Sergeant, I’m going to let him go.” I said, “Well, let him go, ‘cause he’s not.” And that’s how I saved Tony. Well, Tony was coming down at night, and all this food we were giving him—I thought, “They sure are eating a lot of food, that little boy is,” They were feeding Tony and another soldier out the back door at night, is what they were doing. Then he’d hide and go back up in the mountain and hide during the day. So we communicated, and everybody that has ever gone to Austria that I know, they go by to see Maria. I don’t know whether she is living now. I’m ashamed to say I haven’t written her, haven’t heard from her, and I haven’t written now in about a year.... She wanted to come over here, but she’d write and say, “I’m too old to come.” Then the next letter, she’d say, “Well, maybe if so-and-so will come with me,” or “You and your wife come back over here.” And we always communicated back and forth. But, I don’t know where she is now. Some of the teachers ... from Brentwood Academy have been over there.

HAMMOND: Really?

GENTRY: They go to see Maria. Julie Andrews. Julie’s older than you, though. Where’s Julie? Which one of the Andrews went to school with you? One of them? Julie, or—anyway, they go to see her, and spend the days with her.

HAMMOND: I wish I’d known.

GENTRY: Oh yeah. Robert Pruitt went over there, and spent the night with her. It’s nice. Anyway, that was the occupation after the war.

PIEHLER: I want to go back to something you said, that—this is ... the end of the war, and you’re trying to find, particularly, war criminals, and hardened SS [soldiers]. So how many of these did you find? I mean, or had suspected ...

GENTRY: ... I was not involved in this, but ... my outfit there, in that community, found Leni Riefenstahl. She was there.... She was there, up in a mountain cabin somewhere. And she was the one, you know, responsible for The Triumph of the Will. Have you ever seen that thing? It’s long, but its worth seeing. I tell you, if you see that—a lot of the films you see come from that movie. We found her and found another one. I don’t remember what his name was. He was a high-ranking Nazi, though.

PIEHLER: But you did find people.

GENTRY: Oh yeah. Yes. Yes. In fact, we—I didn’t tell you all of it. Like I said, we’re just hitting some of it. We kept a war criminals’ stockade in Hallein, Austria. And they were all war criminals, or Nazis, or both.... And you could do things to them that you didn’t do to the regular POWs. POWs, we didn’t keep them very long, and were nice to them. Let them go after a while. But these people, they had to stay there. And then you did a lot of other things. There was that one, then, let’s see, where else? We had another place there. But that’s the main one, in Hallein, called Camp Marcus Orr, and I couldn’t figure out how they got that name, Marcus Orr.

He was an American soldier that had been wounded right out of Dachau, [when] a German plane came down and strafed him, and he was driving an officer, and he got shot in the back, and it paralyzed him. He became a professor at Memphis State University. That's how I got over there. They called me to come over there, and I didn't want to go. They said, "Well, Marcus Orr is over here." And I said, "Who?" Said, "Marcus Orr." I said, "Is that the Marcus Orr?" and they said, "That's the one." So I said, "I'll come," so I went over there and met him, and we talked, and matched notes, and that sort of thing. So anyway, we did. We found a good many of them there, or somebody did, and put them in that camp. That's where we kept them.

PIEHLER: ... How much contact did you have with these prisoners?

GENTRY: Very little. Very little.... The only real job I had there was to take some prisoners—we had select prisoners, though. Hallein is only about twelve or fifteen miles out of Salzburg, so we'd take them in the morning. I'd take—I don't know—five or six or eight of them, I don't know what it was, in a couple of trucks, and a couple more guards. And we'd go into Salzburg and go to get bread, cheese. I remember, the bread, they don't have in a wrapper, like Bunny Bread, or Tasty, or Colonial. Their breads had hard crusts, you know, and they'd bring it out and put it in there while it's warm, and walk on top of it! And put the next layer, and they'd sit up on top of them on a cold morning and get warm from the bread. Those guys would get on in there and roll out hunks cheese as big as an automobile tire and put them in there. And then we'd go over to the *Fleisch*. Get the meat. The butchers. Watch them make that.... The prisoners would help them do that. That was my main job. Now, I had some contact with them.... Can you turn that off just a second?

(Tape paused)

HAMMOND: ... Wow!

GENTRY: This is of my brother.

PIEHLER: Okay. This is of brother who was killed.

GENTRY: Yeah. The one that was killed. That's him right there. I had a little snapshot in my billfold, and one of the prisoners says [that] for two packs of cigarettes, he could do that. He did that for me. And another one did this. I think I might have given him three packs of cigarettes.

HAMMOND: That is so neat!

PIEHLER: Because that was a lot of money. Three packs. Yeah.

GENTRY: Yeah. Back then. And, this is from the brother that got killed. What does it say? "How are you? Are you taking good care of my little girl? Take good care of her. Hope you are fine. Dave Gentry." By the way, the letters that we wrote back then—and he wrote all his letters—were V-mail, and I wrote V-mail. At first, I didn't understand them, why they did that. He never called me Jim. In his letters it was always Jim. My brother Bobby, he never called him Bob, but it was Bob. Everything short. Made everything short. So that's the reason ... he's

got Dave on here. He didn't go by Dave. It was David. And everything was short. That's all done by pocketknife, and hand.

HAMMOND: That's neat. Wow!

GENTRY: Anyway, that's ... some of the contact I had with the prisoners right there.

PIEHLER: They made you things for cigarette pay?

HAMMOND: That's neat!

PIEHLER: Yeah. This is a very nice box.

GENTRY: Yeah. It's got a little lock, and you have to know how to get it open, and you can lock it.

PIEHLER: And it says on the back, "Handmade Austria 1945, Camp Marcus Orr."

GENTRY: Mm hmm.

PIEHLER: I'm curious ...

GENTRY: Anyway, you can turn it back on.

PIEHLER: In fact, I did have it on. I'm curious. I mean, you had a lot of contact with civilians when you were in [the] Army of Occupation.

GENTRY: With civilians?

PIEHLER: Yeah.... A lot of soldiers who were in Army of Occupation ... have reminisced with me—not just me; other people. They said it always amazed them that there were no Nazis. In fact ...

GENTRY: Oh yeah.

PIEHLER: ... You know, it was sort of this remarkable—and you had encountered a lot of Hitler Youth in some of your units. So you knew there were ...

GENTRY: Oh yeah. They're not telling the truth. (Laughs) You can't find anybody responsible for anything. The first real experience I had with it was right after Dachau. See, the little village of Dachau is right there. It's in it! It's just across the street! We'd ask some people—some of the first German that I learned other than "*Haben Sie Dachau gesehen?*" [Have you seen Dachau?] "*Nichts haben!*" [I have seen nothing.] They don't know anything about it, and they live across the street. I couldn't believe that.

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

PIEHLER: ... This continues an interview with Jimmy Gentry in ... Franklin, Tennessee on ... July 22, 2000 with Kurt Piehler and ...

HAMMOND: Kelly Hammond.

PIEHLER: You said to remind you that you had a funny story about occupation, because you were talking about how the residents of Dachau ... pretended they didn't know anything ...

GENTRY: They didn't know anything about. The only thing I could get most of them—I learned another word quickly, "*Alle ist kaput.*" All is gone. Everything's destroyed. And they didn't say Hitler caused it. "It's all gone." But that's—in the background, you could tell they didn't like it, because their country was destroyed. It didn't matter when they was destroying all of London and Liverpool and those cities. But, "*Alle ist kaput.*" I remember them saying it. Every one of these, that was there. Then they would shy down and look at the sky and say, "*Der Flieger! Der Flieger!*" [The Fliers!] The bombing is was what they were afraid of, too. And that sort of thing. I don't know. I didn't have a whole lot of contact with them. See, we were in Austria after the war most of the time, and I didn't go back into Germany much. But, uh, in Austria—of course, they have an excuse there that they were forced in, and I'm sure that some of them were not forced in, that they spoke German, and they were really basically German. But I didn't have a whole lot of contact with them after that.

There was one interesting story that doesn't ... directly relate to what you're saying now, but when we went back over there in 1987—I remembered a little village called Feldkirchen, which is on the Liechtenstein/Austrian border. The prettiest little thing. And for some reason, I was selected along with a few others of us to be exchange soldiers, just like exchange students are today. I was an exchange soldier with the French army. They took about six or eight of us, and took us and put us in the French army and then took the French and put [them] in our place. And so we were sent to Feldkirchen, Austria. That was in the French zone. I really liked the little village where it was. It had a little mountain stream that ran down through the center, and ... to go across from one side of the street to the other, you had to go over little footbridges over the stream. It was high up. It was just ... perched up on the side of the mountain on both sides. It was beautiful. But anyway, when we went back in 1987, I told my wife, I said, "I'm going to show you one of the prettiest little places you've ever seen." And we went to Feldkirchen. I couldn't believe my eye. I couldn't find it. [There] was not any stream. New buildings, a motel, hotels. And I said, "Something's going on here.... I know I'm not losing my mind." She was shopping. I said, "You ... stay in this store, or if you do go away, come back to this store. I'm going to find out. So, I go down the corner, and this traffic light, and I see a group of people, ready to come across, waiting for the light to change. And I said, "Now, I'm going to be smart. I won't pick out a young one. I want somebody that's old, 'cause he's been around here awhile." One gentleman in there, I picked him out. He was just about what I hoped to see. He had a little briefcase. He came across, and I stopped him. I said—this is the conversation we had. "Do you speak English?" He, in return, said, "Where are you from?" In English better than I was speaking! (Laughter) And I started to say Nashville, 'cause see, Franklin's not big enough. But I said, "I'm from Franklin, Tennessee." He said, "That's the best place in the whole world." And I said, "What?" He said, "Franklin is the best place in the whole world to

live! I'd love to live in Franklin!" I said, "Wait a minute. What do you know about Franklin?" He was taken a prisoner in North Africa, sent to Camp Campbell. Each morning, they would bring them out of Camp Campbell by truck to Franklin, down on the square. He told me about all the buildings around the square, and the farmers would come in. He said, "They'd come in and pick us up in the morning. We'd go out and cut tobacco, pick up hay, whatever needed to be done, and go back to Camp Campbell at night." He said, "I loved it. I wanted to stay over there, and they wouldn't let me stay." And Rebecca worked up in the second story building on the square during the war, and she said they'd see those Germans come in, and they were scared of them. (Laughs) But he said, "We wanted to stay over there!" Of all the people for me to pick out! And then, finally, I almost forgot why I had stopped him.... Finally, he said, "Well, what did you want to know?" (Laughter) I said, "There used to be a little stream here. What's happened?" He said, "Oh, they just built over the top of it. The stream's underneath the town now." They ruined it. I mean, it was beautiful. So, of all the people for me to stop, I stopped that guy. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: I'm curious on the prisoners. So, the prisoners came after you were overseas?

GENTRY: Yeah. Yeah.

PIEHLER: You never saw them?

GENTRY: No. I never saw that part. That came later.

PIEHLER: But for your wife, that's a very vivid memory.

GENTRY: Yeah. Oh, yeah. She said she'd see them every day. A truck would pull in there, and ... one guy threatened to pour gasoline over in the truck with them and set it on fire while they were parked there. (Laughs) But anyway, that happened after the war.

PIEHLER: How much fraternization went on between the Germans and Austrians, and then your unit?

GENTRY: Okay. I can answer that for you. Very little to begin with. Now, they had the non-fraternization law.

PIEHLER: Yes. That ...

GENTRY: And being in the infantry—see, I can't speak for everybody, because infantry is different. We don't have vehicles to ride around in. We're not up in the center of the cities.... We're in these little villages out around, and we pretty much stayed to ourself pretty well. Then, my best friend, Charlie Theisen, that I was telling you about in Long Island, met a girl in Salzburg. And one day, he said, "Come on and go with me to eat." We were stationed in Salzburg for ... a couple of weeks or something. And ... this girl met him there. I don't know how they met. He was the first one in Austria, to my knowledge, to marry after the non-fraternization law was lifted. He married Amy. That's all I knew, Amy. Well, when I came home, you know, eight or ten years after the war, I got his number, and I called in New York,

and Amy answered the phone. I could tell it was her from her dialect. I said, "Amy?" She said, "Who is this?" And I said, "This is Jimmy Gentry." She said, "Charlie, you're pulling my leg," or something like that. I said, "No. This is Jimmy Gentry." Now, she's realized it was. She started screaming! I don't know what she was saying. (Laughs) Anyway, that was the first communication. I didn't get to talk to Charlie, though. Somehow, they moved or something happened, and we didn't get to talk until just last—I've just got a letter in there right now from him. I just got it the other day. He said that Amy is doing fine. He's got children now. One of them lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, and that sort of thing. So, he said, "I'm going to come to see you, next time we come to Charlotte. I've lost a little sight in one eye. But it's 300 miles from Charlotte to Franklin, Tennessee, and I'm going to try to drive over there to see you when I come back." But anyway, that's Amy, and she has been back to Austria several times to visit her people. She lived in Salzburg. So, as far as non-fraternization law, it was pretty effective where we were. But, now, we were not in the cities. We were in small villages. The biggest town we went in was Salzburg, only for a short time. It's not real big.

PIEHLER: No. Not compared to ... Vienna or Munich.

GENTRY: No. It's a ... beautiful place, though. You can walk everywhere. Have you ever been around Salzburg? If you ever go, go there, 'cause you can walk everywhere. You just park, and that's it. You can walk all over the place, and see everything. But anyway, I didn't see a lot of it. There was some, ... but I didn't see much of it.

PIEHLER: And you sold your liquor.... You sold your cigarettes. You didn't smoke. You didn't drink.

GENTRY: No. And I'm glad I didn't.

PIEHLER: How did you—without naming names of people in your unit, what about the rest of the unit?

GENTRY: Oh, they did.... I was unusual, I guess. Let me tell you how different it is. When the war ended and we were in ... Austria, occasionally the company commander would call me in. Now, he's the ... company commander. He is a ... captain or a first lieutenant. Usually, it's a captain. And he'd say, "Sergeant, you're in charge tonight. We're having a company party." I'm in charge of the whole company! He's supposed to be in charge of the whole company! Well, I knew what he meant. They'd just gotten a truckload of whiskey shipped in from somewhere. Italy or somewhere. And he said "Well, get—" I've forgotten what the boy's name was—"to help you." He was the chaplain's aide. They'd have a little portable organ they'd bring around, you know, and play a little music. By the way, I can go back to that, too, the religion part of it.... Anyway, he said, "Get him to help you," and I said "okay." I ... have to obey him and salute him and go. And then they'd have their party. Well, every one of them would be drunk. Out of the whole company were two of us who weren't drunk, and we were in charge. So, he said, "What are we going to do? What are we going to do?" He was a little tiny fellow. I said, "We'll play pinochle. We'll play cards." He said, "No. We've got to be in charge." I said, "Just do what I say. We'll play cards, and then pass the time of day and give them time to get soaked good. Don't want 'em half drunk. We want them good and drunk."

(Laughter) The one I remember was in Bischofshofen, Austria. There was a big room upstairs. They had one single—I don't know why they did that.... The stairs ... don't change direction. They just go way on up. It was high up there. And sure enough, I said, "Well, it's about time to go." And we'd have a truck, and we'd back the truck up at the foot of the steps, open the tailgate, and go up there, and ... now they're so drunk they're laying on the floor, on the table, they've thrown up on one another. They're all over the place. And we sort of helped them a little bit to get to the head of the steps, and then let them go. And they'd "boom, boom, boom, boom, boom" all the way to the floor, all the way down to the truck. And we'd go down there and they'd crawl a little bit, and we'd tell them to crawl, and they'd get up and crawl up into the truck. (Laughter) And we'd unload them out in the snow, as near as we could get them to their—I think some of them nearly froze to death before they got in the house. But, that's answering your question, I suppose. That was about ninety-eight percent of them.

PIEHLER: Well, particularly when the company commander says, "You're in charge, because I'm going to join them."

GENTRY: I was in charge! I had the authority then. He said, "You're in charge." He did that about three times while I was in the occupation there. (Laughs) They had gambling. They'd gamble. I wouldn't gamble. We played some cards one time. I won everything, and gave it back to them. They got mad at me. (Laughter) "Yeah, but you won!" I said, "I don't want it. I just wanted to show you that I can play, too." (Laughter) I had a good time without doing all that. I grew up that way, and ... I didn't want to change it.

PIEHLER: You brought up the chaplain's assistant. And that's one of the questions. How much contact did you have with the chaplain?

GENTRY: Very little. But what they would do—I didn't know who he was. I didn't know whether he was Baptist, or Church of Christ, or Episcopalian, or what. I didn't know what he was. But when he'd come around, they'd say, "The chaplain's here," or something. He'd have a jeep, and have this little driver with him, and they'd get out and have a little ceremony, you know, and go to a little church service, and I'd always go to it. Some of the same ones would go, about like it is now. Then I remember going to church once in Salzburg, that I—I haven't figured it out yet. You probably will. Being from the Church of Christ, you know, the guy, what do they call it? The bishop? I don't know what he was. Preacher.

HAMMOND: Yeah ...

GENTRY: Anyway, he'd come around, and he gives you the communion, and he'd hold it, and then he'd raise it to your lip, and then you'd have a little cloth. I didn't know what I was doing! See, we passed it around. So I had communication with some of them like that, and they said, "Well, that's Episcopalian," or "That's this," or "That's that," and I didn't know what it was. But I did appreciate it, and when they had a service, I was always there if I was close to it. During combat, occasionally ... you'd find them. They'd come around close to you, and they knew what they were doing.... Communications or intelligence would say, "Well you can go to this village today. I wouldn't go to this one over here, though," or something like that. If they felt like it was secure, then they'd come up and you'd stop for a few minutes.... This is

completely out of the line from what you're talking about, but they came to us when we were dug in the mountains during all the shelling, the artillery shelling. We were getting shelled heavily, and we stayed in those holes, stayed in those holes, and finally they came and said, "We're going to let you go on R&R." Rest and Relax. I said, "Hey, boy, this is nice! I ain't ever been on one of those things!" And I thought, "Well, that'd really be nice." So ... here's how you do it. You'd climb out of that hole while it's still dark, about four o'clock in the morning. You can't go out in the day. But we'd climb out and get up over on the other side of the mountain. Then you're safe, if you want to stand up and walk. And we walk and we walk and we walk. This is rest. (Laughter) Walk, and we'd get way back, about five miles back, to a little house, a little farm house. It had a little shed outside it, and in between the shed and the house, they had some barrels of water that they heated. Hot water. Said, "Take a bath." And it was about four degrees, and snow everywhere, so what you'd do, you'd take off your top and bathe the top, and you put it back on. Then you'd take the bottom off and bathe the bottom, and put it back on, and then if you go over to this little house and you could find a clean shirt, you could have it, if it fits. They'd had all these shirts washed, and they'd throw them in there. And then when we got threw with that, "Let's go back..." (Laughter) That's our R&R. Walked ten miles and took a bath. That's the only bath I had during the whole combat.

PIEHLER: So you never had a shower truck?

GENTRY: Oh, no. Well, I didn't know what a shower was. We didn't even have showers in Franklin.

PIEHLER: So the next time you really got new uniforms ... was because of Dachau?

GENTRY: Yeah. And that wasn't new. That was just clean.

PIEHLER: Yeah. They'd cleaned. Yeah.

GENTRY: They'd bring those used uniforms there, and wash them and clean them, and put them out there. Didn't sleep in a bed until—I'm trying to think. I think it's Kitzbuhel, Austria, after the war, before I slept in a bed. The rest of the time—that's another interesting story, about how you sleep. How you eat, and how you sleep. You sleep wherever you can find a place to sleep. If you get to sleep. And if you happen to be out in the open—and I remember once, at—what was the name of that place? Ludwigswinkel. We got up on top of this mountain, and you could see ... the Germans down in the valley below us, but they didn't know we were up there, and they said, "We're gonna wait until morning to attack. So we were going to spend the night up there. Well, the ground was frozen. You can't dig in, and you can't build a fire, so we just piled on one another until we had a big pile, about twenty or twenty-five of us laying on top of each other. Well, the man on the top, one side is cold and one is warm. The one on the bottom, he's ... and been mashed, and he's warm, and the ones in the middle are pretty good. So you'd work like maggots. You'd finally work your way around, and you'd sleep a little while. So, we got through the night by sleeping on top of one another like this. I finally found an Army blanket, and took a knife and cut it in half, and rolled it up and found me a piece of twine to tie around it, and I carried that with me, and that was a life saver for me. But you'd just sleep

anywhere you could find. Usually you'd sit down and lean up against a wall, was where you'd sleep. Didn't lay down. And eat K rations all the time. We had nothing but K rations.

PIEHLER: No hot meals were ever ...

GENTRY: No. No hot meals. K rations. K rations. K rations. All the time. And then we'd supplement that by findings eggs in the houses, or sometimes fruit. And kept our spoon in our combat boot, and we'd always try to find some spoon in one of the houses. We'd get in there and [find] a different—maybe a silver spoon, and put it in there, and then we'd swap spoons. "I like your spoon better." (Laughter) Eat anything you could.... Now, I'm not going to embarrass you, Kelly, but if you had to go to the bathroom and you are moving, in a war you don't call "Time out." You don't say, "I don't feel good. You guys go ahead, and I'll come tomorrow." You don't do that. You are responsible for yourself, and you go whether you feel good, bad or otherwise. You are going. Well, you stay five yards apart when you're moving, [so] one shell wouldn't kill too many. If you'd get clustered up, it would. And if you have to go to the bathroom, you don't stop. The only way you can do that is run as fast as you can up ahead, and try to time it. Get up toward the head of the column, maybe, and go to the bathroom, and be ready to get back in your place when it comes by. That's how you go. That's the only way you can do it. Now, and in the mountains there, you just get outside of the hole at night and go to the bathroom, and stick a stick up and call it a flag. So, when we left, there must have been a thousand flags on the side of the mountain. (Laughter) So, all of those sorts of things. It was just an interesting life, really, to do that.

PIEHLER: You mentioned, when we started the interview, that you spent a lot of time outdoors. Did that make it any easier?

GENTRY: Yeah. It sure did. Sure did. I ... knew some things that some of them didn't know. The things that I craved for, other than a letter from home, was a toothbrush. We didn't have a toothbrush. You didn't stop. You didn't brush your teeth. You didn't do anything like that. But my mother had told me that when she was a little girl, that they didn't have toothbrushes, but they'd take a cherry branch, a little twig off a tree, and chew the end of it, and it would get soft, and then you'd use that to brush your teeth with. Well, every once in awhile, I'd see a twig and I'd break that thing off and chew it up. One of the guys would say, "What are you doing?" I said, "Brushing my teeth!" He just laughed at me. But it works. So, I found out things like that growing up. (Laughs) And keep your feet from freezing. Take your socks and put them inside your shirt at night, and then put the dry socks on. I never spent a night without my boots on.... I had them on all the time. You never took them off. You sleep right where you are, with your boots on, and try to keep your socks dry, though. That's the main thing. Keep trench foot, frostbite—we lost some from frost bite, you know. Fingers, toes. Especially toes. You'd hear them all night doing like this (stomping) trying to keep their feet from freezing. Beating their feet together. I did, too. I'd beat mine, too.

PIEHLER: 'Cause you—I mean, we get a little snow, but this winter must have hit you pretty hard.

GENTRY: The first inkling I had of being from the South was when we went from Camp Blanding, to—we stopped at Fort Dix, New Jersey. We got out there, and I thought, “Where am I?” It was cold, and the ground was frozen and there was snow. I said, “This must be Alaska.” (Laughter) And then when I got over there, and all that snow, I thought, “Oh, Lord.” I didn’t realize that the latitude there—they are a little bit farther north than we are. (Laughs) So, it made a whole lot of difference. Pretty, though. Sometimes, it was pretty. Snow after the war was pretty. It wasn’t so pretty during the war, though.... (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Did you ever go hunting when you over in ...

GENTRY: No. I didn’t get to. They took our ammunition away from us, and sometimes they—I understand some of them got permits to do it. You had to have a—I call him a Game Warden, or Wildlife man, from that community, to go with you when you were over there. ‘Cause we’d see lots of deer, and some of the guys would try to slip a hand grenade, and dynamite fish with them, and things like that. But I never got to while I was over there. I enjoyed the stay there, except all the time I wanted to go home. I wanted to go home.

PIEHLER: I’m curious about some of the types of fighting that you did. You did a lot of street fighting. Was most of your fighting street fighting?

GENTRY: All of it in Wurzburg was. That was the worst part.... Closest, and the worst situation that I found myself in, and my company or platoon.

PIEHLER: I’m curious [of] your reaction. What was it like to go back to that park?

GENTRY: Oh, I went back. Right to the tree. I’ve been back.

PIEHLER: ... How did you react to it at the time?

GENTRY: Well, ... my wife took a picture of me standing right by the tree, and I said, “I’m glad I’m standing here.” There wasn’t much reaction, really. Not much. They had taken that iron fence down that was around the park.... But the park is still right where it was.

PIEHLER: I’m curious. Your basic was shortened, and you never did any advanced. You were sent as a replacement.

GENTRY: Four weeks short.

PIEHLER: ... Did anyone tell you what to do in street fighting? I mean, how much ...

GENTRY: Well, we had had some training, yeah. We had some training.

PIEHLER: In the field, about what to do. What did they tell you what to do?

GENTRY: Well, ... I remember this. They didn’t have to tell you much. (Laughs) When they’re firing at you, you sprint into a staircase, or something, like you get around behind

something, and get behind it, and wait until you feel like they may have moved on to some other spot, and then sprint again. And that's what you were doing most of the time. There's some funny things that can happen in street fighting. They would get in basements.... See, most of the buildings there were bombed away anyway, and they'd get in those basements, about the only thing they had left. And some guy ... tried to get a phosphorous grenade, if he could, and get up there to where the basement was, where you suspected, and pull that pin, and throw it in there, and it burns, and smoked like crazy. It'll burn you. You throw it in there, and if there is anybody in there, they're going to come out. Now, the concussion grenade, the one that we used most of the time, they gotta be in there, and explode, with the ... pieces of shrapnel. But those phosphorous grenades were what we used most of the time to get them out of a basement. If you ever get up where you could get it into the basement with them, they were going to come out. So, what happened to the—see, we began to outnumber them pretty good. In other words, if we were fighting on this street, there was another group on the other side. And they were trying to go back and forth, and finally they got caught in between. But anyway, the only thing that we had going through, in training, was climbing through ... wooden windows and—but that wasn't really much help, because we were darting from ... stone building to stone building, through rubble most of the time.

PIEHLER: Yeah. You mentioned sometimes being on one side of the wall [and the Germans were on the other].... Did you ever try to take a building, or did you know of any in your immediate area who would blow a wall to get to Germans?

GENTRY: No.

PIEHLER: No. You ...

GENTRY: No.... At night, you'd try to be as quiet as you could, and let them move. Don't you move. That's good advice, too. Just don't move at night. Let them. 'Cause you have an advantage by being still. And they're at a disadvantage if [they] move. If you start moving, then they see you, so you hunker down and wait there. Now, if they had come around the wall, on our side, then we were right to shoot them, because we were protecting the rest of them that were trying to sleep right up above us. They were in the upstairs, one story up. And there was a wall ran out. I would get in, and we'd jump up and ... pull ourselves up on the wall. That was dangerous, too. We'd get up on that wall, and then walk into the building through a window. So, what we'd do, we'd come out there and get to the wall, and then drop down to the street right away. And we'd ... drop down on the side, where the fire was the brightest, so we could see all around. If you'd drop down the other side, it was too dark on the other side. You couldn't see what was around there. So, I don't know. You just have to—I guess, do what's you think is best at the time sometimes. Just run for your life, and try to get from one end to the other. You don't put this in there. You can delete this, because I don't feel like ... I really deserve it. But Charlie Theisen and I, my friend, we both were awarded the Bronze Star, for doing what you just asked. For sprinting through the streets of Wurzburg to get more—we ran out of ammunition. That sort of evened the score up, so we had to get more ammunition, and we volunteered to go back and get the ammunition. And they knew that we were low, evidently, 'cause ... both of us got back and never got hit a single time.

PIEHLER: ... That also sounds like it was a close call, if they gave you ...

GENTRY: Yeah. Those were close calls. 'Cause you could hear them. They'd ricochet off the wall of the building, and that'd make you run faster, too. I think you'd set a record of sprinting. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Were there people in your unit who didn't—you obviously learned a lot of lessons, and it sounds like you learned them pretty quickly, as you're recounting them, or were lucky enough to have learned them.

GENTRY: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Were there people in your unit that just didn't learn the lessons of combat?

GENTRY: No. I think everybody did.

PIEHLER: You had people ...

GENTRY: See, when your life is at stake, you can learn quickly. I mean, it's just something that—you're not going to ... take a big chance, or anything like that. We only had one episode that I felt bad about. We had one guy who was with us, and he was from New York also, I believe. New York City. I'll use his name. It really doesn't make any difference, does it? Irvin Myowitch. And we called him "Itch," 'cause of "witch" at the end of it. Irvin Myowitch. And he found—one night when we crossed the Danube River, we had to cross and carry *x* amount of mortar ammunition with us. Had to have a certain amount, and each soldier had to take a certain [amount] to make sure that we had enough when we got across. Well, somehow Irvin didn't make it into the pontoon with us, into that boat, the raft, when we went across the river. And he just sort of disappeared for a few days. And when he finally got back with us, he said he got lost. We don't think he got lost. We think he just didn't want to go across that river that night with that ammunition, 'cause if we'd gotten hit with all that ammunition—see, those mortar shells are heavy. And ... each person had six, three in the front and three in the back. Had a case you put over you to haul them with. No way you could swim. You'd go right down. It was just an anchor. You'd have to get out of that thing as quick as you could, and your steel helmet, and your rifle, and everything. So, I think he got scared and just didn't go. That's the only bitterness I feel at all, if that's a bitterness, for Irvin. Except that he had—his feet smelled awful. My friend that wrote me a letter the other day, he said, "You remember—" we used to put—after the war, we used to put Irvin's boots outside the window, or outside the door, to keep from smelling them. (Laughs) So, we had a good time reminiscing about it by mail and by telephone.

PIEHLER: Did you ever have any cases of battle fatigue?

GENTRY: No. I really don't. I really don't. I guess it happened. See, that's another thing that we—the reason that they want soldiers—I say they—we knew soldiers that are eighteen years old, is that I wouldn't do some things now that I did then. When you're eighteen years old—

eighteen, nineteen, twenty is what I'm talking about—you didn't realize what life really meant. You didn't have a family that you were responsible for. You'd just do pretty much what you were trained to do, follow instructions and rules and so on. So ... the only thing that I have a problem with is, like I said, Dachau, those faces. I see those every once in awhile. Especially when I'm talking to people. I see the faces. And it just flashes me back to those faces that I saw through the barbed wire. See, I can talk to individuals pretty good. But when I get a bunch of faces, that's a different story. But, to answer your question, I really don't have any problems with it.

PIEHLER: Now you ... took casualties. How did replacements ...

GENTRY: ... We had replacements that came from the 66th Division, I believe. That's the best I remember. The ships they were on got torpedoed, and they lost a lot of their unit. There wasn't enough to even have a decent division, or something, and so we got some from the 66th Division. And they just fit right in, too. In the replacements. Like I say, I was only over there in combat for about five and a half months or something like that, but you can be killed just as dead in five and a half months as you can in a year. And you're just as dead as the one that had been dead for a while. So, I was just lucky, really.

HAMMOND: Did you carry any kind of lucky charm with you?

GENTRY: Lucky what?

HAMMOND: Like a lucky charm?

GENTRY: Oh, yeah. I got one upstairs. I got my little—go back to graduation. Remember when I said ... [about] before you go in the service? And that night, everybody knew we were going, and a lady came up to me, a friend of the family's, and had a little—I told this at Granny White [Road] the other night, 'cause they wanted a God-Country relationship. She came up to me and had a little white package wrapped with a red ribbon. And handed it to me and said, "Here. Take this with you." 'Cause she knew I was going in the Army. I opened it, and it was a little Bible, a little New Testament, just a little one.... And I took it with me. On one side, it was just a regular little leather-like, cardboard-like backing, but on the other side, there is a metal shield, "Trust in God," and you put it right over your heart. Of course, your heart is right here, but you'd put it right here, on the left side. I kept that Bible with me the whole time. For two years, it never left me. I got it, and it's upstairs right now. I took it with me to Granny White [Road] the other night to let the people see it, because I wanted to tie that in with it. And you asked about the lucky charm, and in my Bible I've got two things, more than two things, for that matter. But in that little New Testament, there is a part of a letter written by my mother, that didn't have an education, but she could write, and ... I tore that part out and kept that. And then, I have a four-leaf clover, because when we were at Arnstein, pinned down there, and couldn't get out for a while, I looked down there, and there was a four-leaf clover. I got it and put it in my—it's still up there. Still got it. So I guess that's the best one I've got. (Laughs)

So, that's all I kept that I can remember. I wished I'd kept a lot of other things, but they're gone away, you know.... When I finally got home, I was able to bring some things home with me. Memorabilia, you know. But they've gone through it by now, and I don't know what's left, if anything. I have a really nice ... pistol upstairs. I talk low about this. It belonged to the commandant of Dachau. It was in his office. I remember it had that glass door, ... but it was locked, and I said, "Uh oh." We just broke the glass, 'cause we were not too timid about going in without knocking, you know. (Laughs) I went in, and there wasn't anything in there. There was a closet right here on the left, and I opened the closet, there was a couple of his uniforms hanging in there. And for some reason, I looked up and I saw the corner of something up on the shelf, and I reached up and pulled it down, and it was his personal pistol. So, I've got it upstairs. I kept it.

HAMMOND: When you went back in '87, why didn't you go back to Dachau?

GENTRY: I just didn't want to. I didn't want to bring back memories. I saw it, and I don't want to see it again. I just felt better about it. No need digging up old wounds. I'd like for other people to go, though, and see it. My son and his wife have been. Both her mother and father, and brothers and sisters, have all been, and they come back and tell me about it. Different people go, and they'll come back and tell me about it, that they've been. Coach Dalton, he didn't go to Dachau, but he's been over in Europe, in France. He stayed in France the whole time. He went to Normandy. He just got back about a week ago, so they'll come tell me about it when they come back. They went to Le Havre. He said, ... "I remember you telling me about Le Havre." I saw my first Frenchman there, you know. I thought, "Hey! He doesn't look any different than anybody else!" (Laughs)

PIEHLER: What did you expect them to look like?

GENTRY: I don't know. I thought the French were supposed to look different, you know. (Laughs) He had on a black coat and a little black hat. I remember that. He was trying to finagle some cigarettes out of some G.I. that was already there before we got there. So that was a big thing. The cigarettes were a big thing. They wanted those cigarettes. They'd do anything for cigarettes. Some of the soldiers mistreated them about the cigarettes, though. Especially where ... the Army had a place for a movie. The soldiers would go in, and they couldn't smoke in there, so they'd be smoking ... right to the door, and they'd throw them down. Well those guys who were businessmen, ... those German businessmen, and Austrians, would pick up the cigarette butts. All of them had a little box, and they'd pinch them out and get the tobacco, was what they were after. And sometimes those guys would throw it, ... so they'd run over here and then chase each other back to see which one gets it. And then one guy, I remember him, he enjoyed himself taking a piece of thread and a full-sized cigarette and laying it down on the floor, out on the sidewalk. And then this guy come along, and he'd reach for it, and he'd pull it back. A few little things like that. They'd hang them out from upstairs windows, you know, where the guy couldn't quite reach it, and he'd be jumping, trying to get that cigarette. Oh, that wasn't very nice. I don't know. We could go on and on. (Laugh)

PIEHLER: What about—Kelly asked you about good luck charms. What about rumors?

GENTRY: Rumors? Right off—see, when you say something like that, the first thing that comes to my mind—and when I say that, I may think of something else. But when we first went to Dachau, there was this awful smell, and there was a rumor that the Germans were using gas for the first time, to salvage the war that late. Of course, it was dumb for us to think that, because I don't think they could have salvaged it with gas then. But that was a rumor. And then there would be rumors like—and ... this turned out not to be a rumor, they had jet-propelled fliers. I didn't know what a jet was. But they did. They had them. On the Danube River, I remember that. They knocked out some pontoon bridges. Those jets would come down there and hit those bridges, and our P-38's and all couldn't catch them.... A different sound. I thought, "What in the world?" That wasn't a rumor. That turned out to be true. We'd heard that. That's about it. And then the rumors, of course, after the war—it wasn't a rumor either, which was that we were going to Japan. And we started training. So, I'm glad that the atomic bomb [was dropped]. So, some people say, "Well, that's awful to kill all those people," and I understand that, but I'd rather have them than me. So, I was for the atomic bomb. They asked for it. I'll put it that way. (Laughs) Anyway, it was an interesting period in our history. And I go back to ... when we first started out talking. I wish that the mothers could know how much we appreciated what they all of them did. I'm sure. And then those people who fought in Italy, what they went through. They really went through it.

PIEHLER: Going back to Franklin, a little—Kelly did you have any questions about the military? You ... never again went away from Franklin as long, did you?

GENTRY: ... No, that was it. I went ... to college. I have an interesting thing there. When I came back—and you might add this in, also, in your information.... I'm not a big one on the Federal Government telling me everything to do, and furnishing everything for me. I think I should earn it and work for it. But, the G.I. Bill was probably the best thing that this government has ever done for the veterans that came back.... In the first place, I was not able financially to go to college. That did put me in college and get me through college. And then later on, I went to the National Science Foundation Program, which is sponsored by the government. So, I really appreciate the college education that I got from being a G.I. And, again, I think, probably, we all deserved it.... The government after that, I don't know if I agree with a lot of things. But, that's pretty much it. I don't know. I've lost my train of thought. I've forgotten what you asked me now.

PIEHLER: Actually, I hadn't ... finished the question, so that's fine. But you never again would be away from Franklin so long, but you were away from Franklin for ... two years. In those two years, what had changed? Because, sometimes when you're away, you can ...

GENTRY: Well, really, when I came back to Franklin after two years, there hadn't [been] a whole of change. More automobiles.

PIEHLER: So there were more ...

GENTRY: ... Right after [the war], it changed ...

PIEHLER: So you could notice it? Because by '46, the war had been over for a few months.

GENTRY: Yeah. See, and they had already made a lot of people—and the biggest change was not in Franklin. The biggest change was ... around building the lakes, and the interstates, and all that around us. People began to make money, and they had money. I don't know, I thought I had a lot of money. I had saved every penny that I had made while I was in the Army, and I sent it to my mother, and she put it in a bank account in Franklin. Even had an old boy from Anniston, Alabama. Ira Whaley was his name. Ira was a gambler, and a drunk, too. But Ira wouldn't keep up with his money. He'd lose it all. But I'd say, "Ira, I'll give you \$100 if you'll send my mother \$100. In other words, send your mother \$200." I couldn't do it. See, my ... control wouldn't let me do it. But, he didn't have any money. He'd spend all he could get. And he would send it to his mother in Anniston, Alabama, and she, in turn, would send my mother \$100.... My mother then wondered why she was getting it from Anniston, Alabama. (Laughter) The reason that I'm telling you that, I'll think that I accumulated about \$3,000, all the time I was in there. That was a lot of money.

PIEHLER: That's a lot of money then. I mean, that's still a good sum of money today, but that's a lot.

GENTRY: And not only they didn't have money; they owed money! So I had about \$3,000 when I came out. That I had accumulated. See, when I first went in, I think I made fifty-six dollars a month, all expenses paid. (Laughs) Oh, me. So, no. Franklin didn't change all that much in that two years.

PIEHLER: When did Franklin really start to change?

GENTRY: I think it started changing when the interstate came through.

PIEHLER: When was that?

GENTRY: That was in the ... late '40s, early '50s.

PIEHLER: ... Was that the state [system]?

GENTRY: I-65. That was the big change. See, Franklin downtown was still Franklin downtown. And then ... when I was growing up here—and it stayed that way after the war for a while—the only ... grocery stores that we had—there were six grocery stores, and they were all on Main Street. If you went to the groceries, you'd go to Main Street. They delivered. They still delivered by horse and wagon in some cases. Buggies. You called and said, "Bring me such and such food," and they'd bring it to your house. And it was just a great place to live. Now, it's just historic downtown Franklin. Not anything like it [was]. Everything is out at the interstate. They moved that. Boy, that changed the whole town. And then, of course, lately, Cool Springs, you're not familiar with that, but it's big time. That's a city in itself. I think this is now the fastest growing county, and has been for years, in the state. There's a lot of wealthy people that live around here. So, it's doing well. But Franklin hadn't changed that much in those two years that I was gone.... But once it started, boy, it changed fast. So, the town was still just like it was, but everybody else had moved out, outside of town. So, it's spread out, pretty much.

HAMMOND: How long after you got back before you and Rebecca got married?

GENTRY: I got back—I think it was March or April. Say April. We married August 28 that year. Sure did. And that's the reason that I say that World War II was romantic, sad, and exciting. We had said, "If I get home, we'll marry." Of course, I made it. (Laughs) And that's what happened. We married at the First Presbyterian Church down right where we used to sit on that rock fence, to go off to the service. That's where we ...

PIEHLER: So you were pretty serious before you went off?

GENTRY: Yeah. But see, as I said, she was the only girl I ever dated, and the first girl I'd ever dated, and we started Junior [year] in high school, so we had been going together then. Junior [in] high school, and then Senior. And then I went off to camp, and she came with my mother and sister down to see me once. And then that's the last time I saw them.... It was two years later before I'd see them again. So, that was the romantic part of it. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: But you wrote to her?

GENTRY: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: And she wrote back?

GENTRY: Oh, she wrote.

PIEHLER: Did she save your letters?

GENTRY: Well, I don't know. She says she did, but she can't find them now. But, we've moved a few times. I couldn't save hers.

PIEHLER: ... College. What college did you go to?

GENTRY: Well, when I started—and this is Dr. Guffee again—when I came back and got out of the service, he wanted me to go to Vanderbilt on a scholarship. Football. So, I did. But I didn't think about something. I'd walked all over Europe. My legs then were about this big. I'd lost a lot of weight, and he was thinking about me when I was a Senior in high school! And I went to Vanderbilt, and Red Sanders was the coach down there. And I could tell. I'd say, "Heck, I don't think I'm going to make it!" And he was a smart man. He called me one day and he said, "You know, ... do you want to go to school somewhere else?" And I said, "I believe I do." (Laughs) He said, "I have a friend up at Tennessee Tech, a coach up there, and I'll call him and tell him about you." And he did, and we'd already married, by the way. Just married. And we went up to Tennessee Tech, and stayed up there my Freshman year. And I played football my Freshman year and my Sophomore year, and then the job at Franklin opened up, and I wanted to be a coach. I came home one weekend just to visit my old coach, and old friends at the school. [The coach] said, "What you gonna do when you get out of school?" I said, "I want to be a coach." He said, "Well we just lost our coach." I said, "Oh, you did?" He said, "Go up

and see Mr. Thompson.” That was the principal, and he was my principal. And I go up to see him, and told him. He said, “Do you want to be a coach?” And I said, “Yeah.” He said, “Can you start next week?” (Laughter) I transferred down to Peabody College, which at that time was Peabody College for Teachers, and I’d go to school in the morning, come out here and ... have a class or two, and coach in the afternoon. I did that for two years and graduated, and that’s how I got into it. I was coaching and teaching when I was a Sophomore in college. So, that’s how it happened. And I finally graduated from Peabody, and then I went back to Middle Tennessee for the National Science Foundation Program.

PIEHLER: ... When was that? In the 1950s or ’60s?

GENTRY: ‘47. I started teaching in ‘47. That was my first year at the high school, 1947. And I’ve been in three schools in all these fifty-four years, or fifty-five years now. Franklin High School, fifteen, and BGA for fifteen, and all the rest of it, whatever that comes out, at Brentwood Academy.

PIEHLER: Why did you change schools?

GENTRY: Well, that’s rather unique, to be that long in the same schools. For example, Franklin High School, since I was the coach there, I stayed there fifteen years, and then in the next fifteen years they’ve had eight coaches. They change about every other year or every year, so I stayed there fifteen years, and I got a better offer at BGA, so I go up there, and I stay there fifteen years. Then I thought, “Well, I’m just—I’m gonna get out.” I got sort of tired, but Coach Flatt was one of my assistants. You don’t know him now. He had moved to Brentwood Academy. He said, “Are you going to get out up there?” And I said, “Yeah.” He said, “Well, why don’t you come down there and help us?” And we talked about it, and I thought, “Well, okay,” so I ended up going down there. I had actually retired, and then became the Athletic Director, and he talked me into coming down there, and I got back into it. (Laughs) And then this last year is the first year I haven’t coached in fifty-four years.

PIEHLER: This last year.

GENTRY: Mm hmm. And I’m doing alright now. (Laughs) So, anyway, then, the whole family is living right here on the farm. Everybody’s here. My children, my boys, and their grandchildren. I don’t know if she is still in there or not, but the little one, she was in here a while ago. They are all here on the farm.

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

PIEHLER: So you’ve been on this farm for about ...

GENTRY: I think twenty-six, or seven, or eight years. I don’t remember exactly.... When we first came here, ... the family had moved out in 1902 and abandoned this house. And it was only used by some tenants, and they used these two rooms where you are right now for a barn. This is where they stored wheat, and corn, and potatoes, and everything.

PIEHLER: Because you can't see this on the tape, because it's just an audiotape, but it's beautiful here. I mean, it's a beautiful house. It sounds like you had a lot of work to ...

GENTRY: My wife wanted it, and my mother-in-law knew it.... There's just two of them. And the other sister wanted to sell it, and she didn't want to. So my mother-in-law, thank goodness, separated it and gave the other daughter a house in town and some property that she owned, and then we got this over here, and we're holding on to it. Were sweating out our President Clinton. 'Cause, see, ... Senate just passed the estate tax, and doing away with it by 2010. That's what we're sweating out, because if he doesn't sign it, and we have to continue to pay estate taxes, we'll probably lose the farm. And see, he's talking about the upper one percent of everybody, and these rich people, and all that. And he's going to take the farm away from us, and give it to the rest of the people, because we can't pay the taxes. Our children won't be able to pay the taxes. The taxes would be about two million dollars for this farm. The estate taxes, which we have already paid once! We paid property taxes and federal taxes and everything, and now, after you die, they tax you fifty-five percent. And so, if he'll sign that and let us have it, then we'll be alright and the children can keep the farm. No one else has ever lived here. That little girl that you saw in here, she's about the ninth or tenth generation. [The girl] that was in here a while ago. And there are ... five more of them around here somewhere. They're scattered around now.

PIEHLER: What do you grow on the farm right now?

GENTRY: Well, we found out this about the farm. You can't make any money ... "farming" any longer, because the equipment costs you so much. And, so we lease out the big crop, like corn or soybeans or that sort of thing, and wheat, to a fellow that has all the equipment. Then we make our money, if we make any money, from strawberries. We have about five acres of strawberries in the spring, and we'll have two or three hundred people come in and pick strawberries every day when they're in. Oh, they're great. (Laughs) Those at Kroger's—these are strawberries! We get some from Kroger every once in awhile, and put enough sugar on them so you can taste them. But these, you don't have to put sugar on them. Anyway, the strawberries—and then we have two day camps here, about sixty kids, in the summer, for a month. And we keep that going. Then the big thing comes in October. In October will be the Fall Festival or Fall Harvest here, and there will be 15,000 people come out here to pick up pumpkins and go on hay rides, play games, do everything. So, that's how we make ends meet here, is with the strawberries, the camps, and the pumpkins. And that's how we try to keep it. Then we just get a share of the rest of the crops, but we don't have to buy the big equipment. So it's a great place. We have a river, a stream, a lake. We've got a great place here.

PIEHLER: Well, Kelly, in fact, when we were driving up, talked about coming here, and how much she enjoyed it.

GENTRY: Yeah. You came, didn't you?

HAMMOND: Yeah. Two years.

GENTRY: Yeah. We still do that. We still do that. Did you go to the Hiawassee River with us? Were we doing it back then? Do you remember?

HAMMOND: I think you were doing it, but I don't think I got to go.

GENTRY: Uh huh. You might have gone with the early part.... The second session, yeah. We still do that. In fact, we just got back last week from the Hiawassee River.

PIEHLER: When did you join the 42nd Rainbow Division?

GENTRY: As soon as I got over there. I was ...

PIEHLER: No, no, no, I mean in terms of the Foundation, the Veterans' Organization.

GENTRY: Since it's beginning. I don't know when it was. As soon as I got back home. As soon as they organized it. I don't really remember.

PIEHLER: But what about—did you ever join something like the Legion, or VFW?

GENTRY: No, I don't. I stay so busy doing—in other words, doing my thing here, I don't have time to do all those things. And like I say, she—I help her as much as I can. She had this surgery on her knee. That's just recently. She is getting over it real fast. But with the family here and everything, we have to keep this farm. It's almost like a business here, and I don't go very far away anymore. I wish I could travel some more, and do some more things, and I wanted to, and still want to, but I can't get her to agree to go, and leave things here. She won't do it. Very often, anyway. So, no, I don't belong to any of those organizations. Of course, I think I would enjoy it. But I stayed so busy in schoolwork, didn't have time to do any of those things. And see, when you're coaching football—we'd start in August and go clear on through. At Brentwood Academy, you'd go all the way to Christmas, because we won the State Championship nine times. And you just play as far as you can go. And so that would take up all of that time. And then we'd go right back to work again. (Laughs) So, I don't belong to any of them. Don't have anything against them. I don't mean that. I just don't belong to them.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Yeah. You mentioned it was hard for you to talk about your experiences at Dachau. What about talking about the war in general? You said at first ...

GENTRY: I like to talk about how we ate, how we slept. As I told you—I didn't tell you everything, and I don't want to tell you everything. Usually, when you go to—especially to junior highs, the first question they ask when you go, they said, "Did you kill anybody?" That's the first thing. They want to hear something morbid. "How many people did you shoot?" All that sort of thing? So ... I just don't do that. I don't think many people do. I wouldn't feel comfortable. So far as I know, I didn't shoot anybody. But I shot. Maybe I was a bad shot. So, you just don't talk about those things. But, I enjoy talking about how we slept, how we ate, where we slept, seeing this, seeing that. I reminisce often, and recall some of those things. (Laughs) So that is sort of fun. I don't know what you're going to do with all this. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: What about war movies? Do you ever go to war movies?

GENTRY: I've seen them. I don't—they're so unrealistic. I see one every day. If I see one, he's got a pack on his back, they're in some village, and there's some girls there, and there's some sort of love story going on. That wasn't the way it was where we were. It was not it at all.

PIEHLER: Is there any movie that comes close?

GENTRY: Uh, they tell me that the beginning of Saving Private Ryan was.

PIEHLER: But you haven't seen it.

GENTRY: I haven't seen it. Several people have told me about it. There's two things that they can't put in a movie. One of them is they can't put in the smell. That's one thing. And the other one, they can't put in the exhaustion of the human body. You're sitting there in a seat watching the movie, and you just can't imagine what it was like to be exhausted and still have to go, and the smell. I can still smell gunpowder right now. I can smell it just as easy as anything. I know what it is. I can smell—when we were at Dachau, I can still smell that. But you can't put that in a movie. But, so they tell me that that's a realistic—those people that have seen it. I don't really know. Most of the ones that I have seen are not very realistic. If you want a real, realistic situation, we'll go back to Wurzburg before we went in. They firebombed it all night long. And then artillery would fire over the top of us, until we got within a mile or so, wherever they'd keep the short rounds from coming in. It was practically destroyed. Whoever survived that, he wasn't very strong after that. And then we came in, and they were pretty strong resistance. I understand that they made a special effort at Wurzburg, from what I've read about it, and that some officers had gotten there, and they moved all the treasures they could out of the city, and stored them in caves. They knew there was going to be a real fight there. And by the time we get in there, those people there, I don't see how they survived, that was there. We go through, and we'd lose some men, and they lose a lot of men. So, that's the way it's fought. Then you're out, gone again. The only thing I had on my cartridge belt, in the back, was a raincoat. I see them now with packs on them, and all. That sort of thing. And wearing these—that's not the way it was. Not with us. But we were moving all the time. We were moving all the time. After we got out of those mountains, and during the Northwind, or the Bulge, or whatever, both, then we moved fast.

PIEHLER: How many miles ... would you walk in a day?

GENTRY: Oh, Lord. I don't know. I don't know how far away we were from Wurzburg. Whatever it takes to walk day and night, non-stop. (Laughs) Must have been twenty-five, thirty miles, at least, that we walked. You can walk faster than you think you can, really. When you walk just non-stop—we could head out to Columbia. It's about twenty-five miles. We could be at Spring Hill in a little while. I'd say we could make it to a Columbia in maybe a little more than a day, about a day's time. So, we probably walked fifty miles, there, getting to Wurzburg, or thereabout. I don't have any idea, really, how far it was.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that you were not a great student in a lot of ways before the war.

GENTRY: That's right.

PIEHLER: You liked athletics a lot.

GENTRY: Yeah, I liked that a lot.

PIEHLER: But, what changed? I mean, not only did you become ... a good student, but you taught.

GENTRY: Well, I became what I would consider an average student that loved to teach, that loved to be with people. That was more important to me, I think, than the education. I just liked to be with people, and wanted to be with people, especially young people. And, uh, I think it may have started with that little boy over in Stumm, Austria. He was just a little fellow. He was just three or four or five years old, maybe a little older than that. And I just remember enjoying talking to him and playing with him. I was playing with him some, I guess. I took him fishing, and things like that. So I got interested in it, and then when I came back, and I knew I wanted to teach and coach, then I got a little bit more serious then. I look back and I say, "You should have studied more when you were younger." But I felt like I could handle the biology, really, because I'd dealt with animals and plants all my life. So I didn't have a whole lot of trouble with that.

PIEHLER: I can also imagine you and dissection being ...

GENTRY: Yeah. That's no problem. Some people, they tell me—I don't know if this is true, but they tell me, "You should have been a surgeon," because I have a touch with the art, and then I know about animals, and I've skinned those animals without tearing them. So, maybe they're right. Maybe they're wrong. I don't know. But whichever, it doesn't make any difference. I'm not a surgeon. (Laughter) But, they say, "You should have been a surgeon."

PIEHLER: I guess, in terms in Franklin, I guess, one general question about Franklin. I mean, the interstate's obviously changed Franklin a great deal. What about the Civil Rights movement in Franklin? How did that change Franklin? I know very little about Franklin, so ...

GENTRY: I think Franklin was probably about typical of any southern town. There was segregation here. They had a separate high school. It was not near up to standards. Not anything like the whites, where we went, had. The blacks were not allowed to come into the movie house where we were. They had to sit in the balcony. They were not allowed to drink from the same fountain. So it was pretty typical of a southern town, and then when the ... integration came, I didn't see a lot of change in it. Really, I didn't. And, then, of course, by then, I was in a private school.

PIEHLER: So when desegregation occurred, you were ...

GENTRY: I was already in a private school when it occurred. And then we began to get blacks in the private school. And I didn't see any difference in them, or anything like that. I never have had any problems with it myself since that time.

PIEHLER: ... Was it the first private school you were at, at ...

GENTRY: Brentwood Academy, before there were blacks. You didn't have any at BGA at that time.... But when I went to Brentwood Academy, about 1970 ... or something like that. First blacks. Uh huh.

PIEHLER: I'm also curious about Franklin because ... even in Kelly's life, she's seen her neighborhood change dramatically. Even the past few months.

GENTRY: Well, if you want do to this, now, I can do this easily.... It was a gradual change, I suppose. But the Franklin that I knew, I really miss. When I walked down Main Street, I could speak to everybody by name, every merchant by name, knew everybody, and so on. Now, I can go down Main Street, and if I see one person that I know—it would be quite unusual to see a person I know. And I probably would know more than anybody else, because I've been in teaching so long.

PIEHLER: And you've lived here all your life.

GENTRY: Yeah. All my life. And so I was in Green Hills in Nashville Friday, 'cause she couldn't drive. I took her to do her hair, and I was going down the escalator in the mall. The other escalator was going up, and there was a lady over there hollering, "Hey! Hey! Wait a minute!" I'm going this way and she's going that way. I said, "What does she want?" Well, it was Lauren Robinson. I had her in school, and she wanted to tell me what she was doing, and she's going to get married, and all that. She is the only person I saw out of all the hundreds of people in that area. It used to be [that] I would have known half of them. But in Franklin, I knew ninety-five percent of them. Now, I don't know two percent! I can go out to any of these malls, and I don't know who these people are. When we have our strawberries, they'll call and say, "When are the strawberries ready?" That's in July, and we have them in May. I'll say, "Are you from Ohio or Michigan?" They'll say, "Oh, we moved here from Michigan." They pick them up there later. So, most of the people now are from the North. Like old Dave Garner used to say, you never heard of anybody retiring and moving north. (Laughter) They all move down here! So I don't know who they are. It's hard to find them. And then I see one of the old ones—and they're dying off, too! We're dying off! My whole family—my brothers are still here. One sister is ... ninety-one, and the other one will soon be ninety. And then I've got eighty-seven, and eighty-six, and coming on down. And so, we're going go die off.

PIEHLER: Do you think there is any resentment from some of the old timers to the newcomers?

GENTRY: Yeah. I think so. I think so. I mean, I don't exactly resent them. I just miss my old Franklin. I miss seeing my friends, and knowing everybody. And they come in.... I used to go into the bank, for example. You'd go into the bank, and they'd say, "Hey, Jimmy, how you doing?" And so-and-so's talking about something, and you know them. Go in the bank now, they don't even look up! It's everything with a computer. They don't want to talk to you. They're doing everything with a computer in the back. So, you don't know anybody. And now I know a couple of people, and I always go to them. And the same thing up at Moody's tire place. Do you know where that is?

HAMMOND: Yeah.

GENTRY: Oh, Gosh. The greatest place to get your tires repaired. They know everybody and everything, and now they've gotten some young people, and I go in there, and they don't know me, and I tell the guy that I know that owns it. He said, "I heard you the other day, saying you

didn't know anybody!" I said, "I told them to pay attention to you and your company!"
(Laughter) He's the only one I know now. So that's the big change.

PIEHLER: That's the big change? That small town ...

GENTRY: The small town is gone, and now that people have moved in. And also, there's a lot of people that have just grown up here that I didn't know. Children of people that I knew, maybe. Now I don't know them. So, that's the problem that we're having with living around here now.

PIEHLER: ... Did any of your friends move away after the war?

GENTRY: Oh, yeah. Sure. Lots of them. I heard of one the other day. Some lady died that had moved from here to Dallas, Texas. In reading ... her obituary, her nephew, Ben Waller, was there, and he lives in Dallas now. He used to live here. And another one died in Columbia, not too far down, that used to live here. So, they're scattered all over. One in Utah, just recently, he died. He used to live here. So, we find out about them after they die, from the obituary, where they are. So I try to find out as many as I can, where they're located. But they've moved away. And the war did a lot of it. Some of it goes back to my era. A lot of those people, when they came home, they went to live in Washington State, or Florida, or Texas or somewhere else. A lot of them did. But most of them came back and settled back around here.

PIEHLER: Of your friends, how many used the G.I. Bill to go back to school?

GENTRY: ... Not a whole lot. Not a whole lot. No. Myself. Not a whole lot of them. A lot of them went to work, and doing some other things, but I went into education. Some of them did, but didn't a lot of them do that. They went right back to work, or something like that.

PIEHLER: Did you buy a house with the G.I. Bill?

GENTRY: No. Luckily, my mother-in-law owned a little house in town here, and when we finally came back here, after going off to school—I was living in the Army barracks at school, by the way. They moved them to campus. And that's where we lived. For the married couples, they had a little hut-like thing. I don't know what you'd call it. Apartment. But, finally, when I did come back to Franklin, my mother-in-law owned a house in town that she let us have, so we did that, and then we stayed there until finally we did buy a house outside—on the other side of town, which is now in Franklin. So I always tell people I've lived in Franklin, out of Franklin that is now in Franklin, and now back out of Franklin, that is about to be in Franklin again. (Laughter) So, I was in and out. In and out. And they're thinking about moving the city limits out here, past us, and take [in] this farm here.... I think that'd be several years on. But they're talking about it, going out to old Hillsboro. So I've been in and out of Franklin all along. (Laughs) We're going to have to have some cookies pretty soon. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... One of my last questions. You've been very patient, and giving us some really great stories. Have you ever been back to a reunion? I know you've talked to people, and written to people.

GENTRY: No. See what happens to the—the 42nd Infantry has a reunion every year. Guess when it comes? Right when I have my camp. Right in the middle of it. I can't go. I have not been able to go to any of them. Had one in Knoxville not long ago. About four, five, six years ago, they had one in Knoxville, right up the road here.

PIEHLER: Yeah, literally.

GENTRY: Yeah. And here I am, but I've got sixty kids here. I can't leave. So, I've never been able to. But I still stay ... an active member, and get the literature from them, and all that. (Laughs) So I haven't been able to do that much. I can't think of anything else. We've covered a lot of history here, in a short period of time. I'll probably think of something else, though.... I'll say, "I wish I had told them that." But I can't think of any right now. I'll only mention this, ... that you didn't get sick during the war.

PIEHLER: I forgot ask you about medics, actually.

GENTRY: I don't know. The medics is only when somebody got wounded or hurt. That's the only thing I know about it. But if you were sick, you just throw up and go on. You don't say, "I'm sick. I can't go." I guess if you got to the place where you just couldn't go, they'd do something with you, but I never experienced it, or never saw it, either. We just kept on going.

PIEHLER: Oh, I know. One lighter question. Did you ever get to see a USO show?

GENTRY: Yes. After the war.... Not during the war. Heavens no. But after the war, Bob Hope and Jerry Calona and all of them came to Salzburg, and he was great.

PIEHLER: So you did see a Bob Hope show?

GENTRY: Yeah. Bob Hope. Yeah. I mean, people don't understand it now. You don't understand it. But he ... was it. His jokes now don't go over, I'm sure. But one I liked, that I remember him saying, the only thing you know for sure when a woman's driving a car, when she puts her hand out the window—you used to signal with your hand. He said the only thing you'd know for sure was that the window was down. Anyway, he was great. All he had to do was just come out, and everybody started cheering, and laughing, and he hadn't said anything yet. I saw that, and then I saw the Rockettes once. They let us go in and see that. We had to wear Class A uniforms to go to those things. In the infantry, we wore ... caps with a blue braid, and then when we really get dressed up, we'd put a blue scarf around—didn't wear a tie. A blue scarf. And here we go. Shine your boots. Go to see a USO show.

That's about the only two that I can think of right off. I can't think of any more exciting happenings. We went up the Alps Mountains in Innsbruck after the war. That was quite an experience. They had these cable cars.... I thought, "I'm going to go up there." Go up there, and that's not it! Then you go on again, and that's not it! And then all of a sudden, you look down and you can't see the city any longer, and finally they put you in these little cable cars, which only about four people can ride in it. And now you're up in the snow, and this in June or

July, and you see people skiing. You go up to the top, and I remember that—it was really a good feeling, though.... Finally got out ... near the summit, and the clouds were right up here, and you walk in the clouds. You see the man in front of you, he'd disappear. It's just his feet. And I go in and I can't see, and the first thing I know I'm coming out above the clouds, and they had a little stone building right on top, I guess for emergencies.... You could just ... hear that sound. Oh, looking out across those mountains. A whistling sound. But in that building, everybody had autographs, put their name in there. Ceilings, walls, and some people—it's gotten so many you'd have to write your name inside the letters of another person's name. There was that many on that wall. That made an impression to me, going up above those clouds. And in The Triumph of the Will, if you remember, they start off by a whistling sound and then finally see the tip of an airplane wing, and Hitler's coming down to this cheering crowd. It's like that, in that movie. It made me think of that when I saw that.

PIEHLER: I think this will be my last question. You mentioned Ernie Pyle and Brave Men.... The University of Nebraska Press is going to republish it, and they asked me to write the introduction. What do you think of Ernie Pyle's writing?

GENTRY: I liked him, of course.

PIEHLER: How accurate to you think he was?

GENTRY: I think he was very accurate.

PIEHLER: Because ... I get the sense that—people have written that he was very popular with the G.I.'s.

GENTRY: He was very popular, because he came there with you. He was there where the fighting was. And one story that I remember reading, of all of his stories, and he's at a little stone house down in the valley, near the road. And of course, it was nothing but mountains all down in the boot and in the valley, down by the sea.... He said that this little stone house was used for wounded and the dead. They'd bring them down by mule. Tie them over the back of the mule and bring them down. And he said it was at night, and he could see the mules come down. They'd unload a body, and lay it down on the side of the little stone house. But he saw this one silhouette coming down. It was not a mule. It was a man carrying another one. And he was bringing him down, and he puts him down real gentle like, and gets down on his knees and lays him down, and takes his helmet off and says a little prayer, and says, "I'm sorry captain. I'm sorry." He gets up and puts his helmet back on, and he goes back up to continue fighting. He described it like that. It makes you feel proud that somebody would do that. So I thought he did a good job. Now, Tom Brokaw's book [The Greatest Generation], he just takes stories like I've given you, you know, and puts them together, which I enjoy. And then he's got letters in response. But I enjoyed Stephen Ambrose's book, Citizen Soldiers, I believe, more than any of them.

PIEHLER: He's giving a talk at "Celebrate Freedom" on the 9th.

GENTRY: It was good. His book is good.

PIEHLER: I think ... personally, of his World War II books, that's probably the best. I like it better than ...

GENTRY: I never had read any before.... The reason I liked it, he—I could associate with a whole lot of things. And then when he started talking about the guys in Wurzburg, during the bombing, and when he started talking about Northwind, and that sort of thing, I could say, “Hey, that’s where we were.” So, I enjoyed his book. One story he tells in there, that I think is interesting, about the Polish officer that bring all these prisoners in, and tries to turn them over to an American officer. And he said, “I don’t want them.” He said, “No. You’ve got to take them.” And they kept arguing back and forth, “You keep them.” “No, I won’t...” He said—I’m going to make this up, because I don’t remember the number—“I thought you were supposed to have 20,000 of them.” He said, “You only have 10,000.” He said, “Well, we shot 10,000 of them.” He said, “Well, take the rest of them and shoot them!” He ... says, “We can’t! We’re out of ammunition!” (Laughs) That was a Polish officer. Okay, Kelly ...

PIEHLER: Well, thank you very much. We really appreciate it.

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

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