

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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Arkansas Memories Project

Floyd Thomas
Interviewed by Tom W. Dillard
May 17, 2006
El Dorado, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Double underscores indicate two people talking at the same time.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing
 - annotations for clarification and identification
 - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.
- All geographic locations mentioned in the transcript are in the state of Arkansas unless otherwise indicated.

Citation Information

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Tom W. Dillard interviewed Floyd Thomas on May 17, 2006, in El Dorado, Arkansas.

[Beginning of Interview 00:00:00]

Tom Dillard: We are with—uh—Mr. Floyd Thomas in El Dorado, Arkansas, and today's date is May the seventeenth—uh—two thousand and six. And I wanna [want to] start off by talking with you about your birth and your family and your very early years. Um—what is your birth date?

Floyd Thomas: My birth date, August 30, 1923.

[00:00:21] TD: Nineteen twenty-three. And where were you born?

FT: Monett, Missouri.

TD: And that's near the boot heel, I'll bet.

FT: No, it's just north of Rogers, Arkansas, in Barry County.

TD: Oh, is it?

FT: Yeah.

TD: It's in—it's in . . .

FT: It's in Barry County . . .

TD: . . . southwest . . .

FT: . . . between . . .

TD: . . . Missouri.

FT: Yeah, between Joplin [Missouri] and Springfield [Missouri].

[00:00:37] TD: Okay. Um—and tell me about your parents.

FT: My parents was Loyd—he spells it with one *L*—said he couldn't afford a pencil lead for two *Ls* [*TD laughs*], so he spelled it Loyd—*L-O-Y-D—J*. Thomas—*T-H-O-M-A-S*. My mother was Goldie Roden—*R-O-D-E-N*.

TD: And her first name was Goldie?

FT: *G-O-L-D-I-E—Goldie*.

TD: Roden. Where were your parents from?

FT: They—my dad was from Monett. He was born and raised in Monett, and my mother was from down in south part of the county, down around Jenkins and Shell Knob and that area down in there along Flat Creek, they called it, at the . . .

TD: Mh-hmm, in the same—in the same general . . .

FT: Same general . . .

TD: . . . vicinity as Monett.

FT: . . . same—same county but . . .

[Tape stopped]

[00:01:24] TD: Were you—uh—the firstborn or where did you fall in the—in the children?

FT: Well, I was the firstborn of—of this marriage, but my mother had been married before.

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: She's married to a man by name of [Charles Estel] Henson—
H-E-N-S-O-N. And she had two children [Clinton and Hortense]
by him. He died before my sister was born. He died in that flu
epidemic in 1918.

TD: Oh, yes.

[00:01:45] FT: And then she went to Monett—went to work at a
cigar factory and an overall factory—met my dad, and—uh—they
got married. Fact, she took those two little ol' kids on a damn
passenger train to Pocatello, Idaho, to—to—to marry him.

[Laughs]

TD: Really? What was he doing out in Idaho?

FT: He's workin' [working] on the railroad out there. He—he was
one of the last of the boomers, you know. He's [*unclear word*] a
boom over there—he'd go to work on the railroad a while and
work for another one. He worked for, I think, about fourteen
railroads . . .

TD: Really?

FT: . . . altogether 'fore [before] he settled down with the Missouri-
Pacific [Railroad] when he's—I guess, about 1924. I's about a
year old when he went down to Alexandria, Louisiana—went to
work and later settled back into McGehee over there. He was a
conductor and a—brakeman/conductor on the railroad.

TD: And which track—which train—which—uh—railroad was this one?

FT: Missouri Pacific.

TD: Missouri Pacific.

FT: Mh-hmm.

TD: Went right through McGehee. And so you spent a goodly number of your growing-up years in McGehee.

FT: Yeah, that's right.

[00:02:42] TD: How old were you when—when you moved there?

FT: Oh, five years old.

TD: Five years old.

FT: Mh-hmm.

TD: So you started to school in McGehee. And did you graduate from high school in McGehee?

FT: I graduated from high school, but I went to several other schools [*laughs*] durin' [during] the [Great] Depression years. Then we moved back to McGehee when Dad got back to work again. And I graduated high school at McGehee in 1941.

[00:03:07] TD: So he had some periods in there where he was unemployed when he was at McGehee, and—and so he would move to other locations?

FT: He would go . . .

TD: Did his job take him to other locations?

FT: Like the—he'd go out to Kansas wheat harvest out there. They had—they'd hire railroad hands out there extra, you know, and he'd go out there and work. And that would go out, and then they would have a—another harvest someplace else. He'd go work on the railroad there. And in east Texas, he hit the oil boom out there, and he went out there and worked for some railroad out there for a while. And then finally the—uh—business picked up for Mo-Pac over there around McGehee, and then he—uh—went back over there then and pretty much stayed.

[00:03:47] TD: And you graduated from high school there. Can you remember any of your teachers in—uh—school that were particularly important to you?

FT: Uh—yeah, I guess the teacher who had the most influence on my schooling and wanted—wanted go—get more schooling was Anita Allbright. That's [*Arkansas Gazette* columnist] Charles Allbright's mother.

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: She was English teacher down at McGehee, and Mr. [Fount] Allbright was a superintendent down there, and then he went to Little Rock—went to work for VA [Veterans Administration], and then they—they moved on. He was up there first; then Mrs. Allbright went up there, I think, after—she was—after we got

outta [out of] high school because she was our class sponsor. I 'member [remember] that. But she was a fine, fine lady.

TD: And she taught English?

FT: Taught English. Uh-huh.

TD: Well, that makes sense, since her son, Clint—uh—[Editor's Note: Charles Allbright]—became a—uh—journalist, and—uh—he was a speechwriter for Governor Rockefeller, too. That's where I first met him is . . .

FT: Yeah.

TD: . . . when he was . . .

FT: Yeah.

TD: . . . working for Winthrop Rockefeller.

[Tape stopped]

[00:04:45] TD: Let's go back to your—uh—to your youth. And—uh—I wanna ask you to think way back. Tell me what is your earliest memory from your life—the very first thing you can remember.

FT: First thing I 'membered in life. [Pause] Uh—I guess was durin' Depression when—uh—my dad was laid off the railroad—that would've been in the—right at 'bout [about] [19]29, I guess it was. We went back to mi—Missouri, and his father was still living. And—and thirteen members of his family—in-laws and outlaws and kids—lived in a seven hundred square-foot house.



[TD laughs] Had three beds. Uh—had—had two chairs similar to those [FT indicates chairs in the room] that came together, and—and every seventh night you got a chance to sleep in a chair. That's the se—there was seven kids involved. [Laughs] And the other nights you slept on the floor. No—no runnin' [running] water. And—uh—they'd fight like cats and dogs around there, and nobody paid any attention to 'em [them], really. I mean, they—they—they'd get in a fist fight—some member of the family—people's goin' [going] 'bout [about] their business—wasn't payin' [paying] attention to it.

[00:06:04] TD: How many of there were you living in that house?

FT: Thirteen.

TD: Thirteen in a seven hundred square-foot house.

FT: Seven hundred square-foot house.

TD: But it was a case of the family adjusting to the realities of the Depression. And you weren't the only families doubled up like that.

FT: That's right. There's a lotta [lot of]—lotta people didn't—same—same way we were. So—some people were worse off we were, i—if it could be that way.

TD: Yeah, at least you had a seven hundred-foot house to—to go to.

FT: It was warm, you know. Had—had our own—burned wood—had

a big ol' wood stove but—uh . . .

TD: Yeah.

FT: One stove and then had a wood—wood cook stove, too. But—uh—and everybody took a bath in the same number three washtub, you know. The—the kids'd get to their bathes last, and—uh—sometime it [*laughs*]*—it'll scrape—scrape the water off the top—throw the [*laughter*]*—throw the cream out in the back yard and get in there and take you a bath.

[00:06:53] TD: Um—do you ever recall during that time not having enough food to eat?

FT: Oh, we always had plenty of food to eat.

TD: Yeah.

FT: I mean, you know, we—we—well, we raised a lot of our food. And then with a little cash—we'd go out in strawberry season up in m—Missouri and pick strawberries—get a quarter of a cent a quart to pick strawberries.

TD: A quarter of a cent?

FT: Quarter of a cent per quart.

TD: Per quart.

FT: To pick strawberries.

TD: So you pick four quarts, and you have a penny.

FT: Yeah, yeah. But you could—but—uh—but, hell, a—a—a nickel

would buy a pound of round steak or a—or a dozen eggs or—or a quart of milk, you know, so didn't—didn't need a lot of money. Walked everywhere you went. Nobody had anything. And—uh . . .

[00:07:40] TD: Did you have a bicycle when you were a kid?

FT: No, I bought my first bicycle with my paper route and—uh—when I's about fourteen years old. First thing I bought my paper route was paid twenty-five cents a week for twenty-two [.22 caliber] rifle.

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: And I'd kill squirrels and rabbits and stuff like that and—and during the wintertime and springtime, you know, to help feed the family. Once in a while, I may catch a quail sittin' [sitting] on the ground—pop it. Paid eighteen dollars—which I still have the gun. And—uh—I—uh—and then I bought me a bicycle. And—uh . . .

[00:08:15] TD: Where'd you get your .22? Did you order it or from a local . . .

FT: I bought it from a man by the name of Kratzer. His wife was my third-grade teacher. And he gave me credit—about eighteen dollars—for a .22 caliber, bolt-action repeating rifle. And . . .

TD: [*Laughs*] And it helped provide food for the family.

FT: Sure did. Sure did.

TD: And, plus—uh—you've had it all these years. It's a nice keepsake from your youth.

FT: In fact, people don't believe this, but there's so many ducks back then that—uh—ducks'd fog the sky—almost get dark. Put on a pair of ol' knee boots, wade out there in the woods, and knock off a duck with those things, shoot twenty-two shorts once in a while. So we also had ducks and squirrels—rabbits.

TD: Were there very many deer around to be hunted in those days?

FT: No, no, wasn't very many deer back—back then.

TD: Yeah.

FT: But deer came on later on, far as I know. It may—may been, but—uh . . .

TD: No, that was the case here. There—uh—there weren't—weren't very many deer here.

FT: 'Course [Of course], that's mostly cotton country down—wasn't anything for deer to eat . . .

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: . . . over—over at McGehee.

[00:09:18] TD: Yeah. Uh—when you were growing up, do you remember—uh—were there Jewish families there in McGehee that you knew?

FT: Oh, all—all—all the merchants were Jewish people.

TD: Did you know any of them personally?

FT: Oh, yeah, I knew—knew—fact, one of my—one of my best friends—uh—over there at—was—uh—?Haskell Wolfe? the ?Wolfe? Clothing Store. Tell you little story about ?Haskell?. ?Haskell? weighed a big ol'—about six feet four—weighed about two hundred and twenty-five, thirty pounds. We're in basic trainin' [training] in the [United States] Army together over in Texas—Camp Howze, Texas. And ol' boy come in there one night. He's talkin' [talking] about the Jews and [*unclear words*] Jews this and Jews that and everything else. The lights were out. He rolled over and said—ol'—ol' ?"Hack"? was sleepin' [sleeping] downstairs [FT Edit: lower bunk]—?Haskell Wolfe?—I was sleepin' above. I said, "?Hack?, what's your religion?" He said, "Hebrew." You never heard—you could hear quiet. I mean it [*laughter*]—everything got so quiet in there, it was almost deafening. But—uh—but that ol' boy—he—he sneaked out of that barracks, and he came back. He's there when we woke up the next morning, but, boy, he really shut his mouth down.

TD: Yeah.

FT: But all the merchants over there—those clothier people—and all of 'em're Jewish people. In fact—fact, one fellow over there I—I

'member married a Jewish girl, and you'd thought, man, he committed mayhem or somethin' [something], you know—people over there—boy, a white man marryin' [marrying] a Jew, you know, and all. I can 'member all that stuff.

TD: Did he convert to Judaism or did his wife convert . . .

FT: Nah.

TD: . . . to Christianity?

FT: I don't think he—either one converted anything. I think they just [*laughs*]*—they just . . .*

TD: They just got married.

FT: Just got married and then raised a family.

[00:10:55] TD: Yeah. Were there Chinese merchants in that area?

FT: Chinese—uh—one Chinese merchant. Uh—that was a . . .

TD: Did you know any or their ki . . .

FT: That—that was a demarcation line—demarcation line between the whites and the blacks—between the whites in northern part of McGehee, and—and the blacks were south. But the Chinaman's store was the—was the—that's the line that the blacks lived south of it, and—and whites lived north of it.

TD: Do you remember the name—uh—of any of those—uh—Chinese merchants? Was there more than one?

FT: Uh—only one as I recall. Name was Sun Wong.

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: Uh—we had another family there was—uh—Syrian. And some fool got drunk one night and put a—had—li—had a grocery store and—uh—and a—and a living quarters—some fool got load up one night and put a dynamite stick underneath the bedroom back there and damaged the kid's head up pretty bad. I remember that. But—uh—just ignorance, you know. Just . . .

[00:12:02] TD: Um—you think that would've been—uh—some of that—uh—Ku Klux Klan of the [19]20s? You know, there was a Klan very active back in the [19]20s—and might—might've . . .

FT: If—if it was . . .

TD: . . . possibly been . . .

FT: . . . I didn't know anything about the Klan then.

TD: Yeah.

FT: I heard people talk 'bout the Klan, you know, and I heard somebody make a remark, "Well, we'll go get the—get the k—brothers—the Klan. We'll go down, and we'll—this guy's not takin' [taking] care of his family. He needs a whippin' [whipping]," and that kind of stuff, just overhear in conversation. But didn't—at that time—didn't mean anything to me.

[00:12:37] TD: Yeah. I can remember my father saying that one of

the things that the Klan was very interested in—and I don't know if my father was a member or not. I—that was—I'm not sure he would've been old enough to be a member. But anything [TD Edit: anyhow]—I—I remember him talking about—uh—one of the things the Klan did—that the main thing they did over in that area of the state where I grew up [in McGehee], which was all white, was—uh—they roughed up people who didn't take care of their families.

FT: Yeah, that—that seemed be their main—main focus.

TD: Yeah.

FT: I tried real hard when I moved down here to verifact—verify whether or not my father was a member the Klan over at McGehee. I'm—I'm—I'm pretty sure he was, but I never could get anybody to tell me whether he was or whether he wasn't. It—you know, he was dead then—wouldn't made any difference, but—but I'm—I'm sure he was.

[00:13:27] TD: Let's go back to the—uh—uh—that—those—uh—ethnic groups there. Did the Chinese cu—uh—family—did they have children and did th—and if they did, did—did their children go to the white schools or the black schools?

FT: Went to white school.

TD: White schools.

FT: Mh-hmm.

[00:13:40] TD: See, at—nearby—uh—down in—uh—down around Dermott, the Chinese—there was one Chinese merchant there, and they would not allow their one child to go to the white schools. So I had always heard that most of the Chinese went to the white schools—uh—but there was at least one case where that was not the—not the situation. Um—if you had gone downtown—if—if we could just transport ourselves back to McGehee in the 1930s—uh—we went downtown—uh—say, to get on the train to go somewhere, what would it have been like?



What would you have seen—uh—at the train station, for example, in McGehee in nineteen thirty- . . .

FT: Well . . .

TD: . . . two.

FT: . . . You'd see a brick building there with a sign up front said "Whites," and then the other side over here said "Colored." Uh—water fountains—the outside water fountains say "White" and "Colored." Train pull in; whites got in one door on one end of a car, the—and the blacks in the other door. But then when you get on the train, lotta times they were sittin' one end and whites the other with a little ol' metal fence up there between 'em, and I don't know what—I don't know what good [*laughs*] that served

anybody. But that would—they were—they were divided. And—uh—and bus stations same way, you know. Blacks went to the back.

[00:15:07] TD: Would you have had—uh—on—on Saturday was a big market day—lotta people would've come to town on Saturday. Would there have been street vendors by any chance selling things out on the street—uh?

FT: Uh [long pause]—yeah, I think there'd been—yeah, I know they did. A man had a wagon and a team over there, and he had a ol' garden patch out on Bayou Bartholomew. And he'd come in on Saturdays and set up down on one end of town down there and then sell stuff from his wagon. Yeah.

[00:15:47] TD: Mh-hmm. Uh—do you remember the days of the—uh—of the ice—uh—delivery—home delivery of ice?

FT: I sure do.

TD: Yeah.

FT: 'Member the h—old horse runnin' away, scatterin' [scattering] the ice all up and down the street. [*Laughs*] Yeah, I sure do.

TD: You saw that, huh?

[00:16:03] FT: And pick up garbage, you know. They had—had tubs—a man come by—pick up garbage to feed his hogs. Hell, I seen his horse run away and scatter garbage all up and down

the street. You know, talkin' 'bout people comin' [coming] town on Saturday night. That's—someone's got the idea, I guess, they wanted to make some money. Not too many months ago, they had a deal on AETN [Arkansas Educational Television Network] one night about the Japanese pri—in—internment camps over there . . .

TD: Uh-huh.

FT: . . . at Rohwer. Uh—they had those people—the TV had 'em treated like prisoners, but those people're more like guests. I mean, they were relocated based on President [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt's order, and he's—he was the sole one that wanted that done. But those people come to town on Saturday night. They would do their shopping, you know, and—and—uh—but the—the—they—they had—had the guard towers, but the reason they had the guard towers to keep dangerous people from gettin' [getting] in there and tryin' [trying] to do somethin' with 'em. I mean, they were—they were protectin' [protecting] the people inside instead of protectin' the—keepin' [keeping] the people outside from gettin' into it—instead of try and keep the people inside inside.

TD: Yeah. So you would see them coming into town . . .

FT: Oh, yeah.

TD: . . . to shop. That's where they . . .

[00:17:11] FT: They'd go to Safeway [Inc.], Krogers [Kroger Grocery and Baking Co.]. They'd go and buy their groceries. And—and—but, you know, I—I don't know how they got to town—whether they walked. It wasn't too far out there. They walked, or I don't know whether they had buses brought 'em in or what. But they were—oh, in the whole town of McGehee there probably two or three hundred families there ever—ever Saturday night doin' [doing]—doin' their shoppin' [shopping].

TD: Do you remember talking to any of them?

FT: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I talked—talked to some of 'em.

TD: And they would've s—uh—they would've had good English skills because most of 'em were born in California.

FT: Yeah. I tell you what, they had a whole lot better than I had later on [*laughter*] far—far as their livin' [living] conditions. [*Laughs*] When—when I's tourin' [touring] Europe over there, they had a whole lot better condition than I had.

TD: Mh-hmm. We're gonna [going to] get to World War II in—in a little bit. [*FT laughs*] Um—can you—uh—uh—tell me a little bit about your school years and your—uh—uh—athletic—uh—interests? Did you—uh—play sports in high school?

FT: Yeah, I played—played football and—uh—and some baseball.

But baseball was more expensive than softball, so we wound up—softball came into being about that time, so we play—started to play that—that fast-pitch softball, what—and—uh—because it was cheaper. Didn't have to have uniforms, you know, and you could just get you a bat and a ball and—and most—most everyone had a glove. But I did play football in high school and—uh—we—uh [pause]—was given a foot—offered a football scholarship—University [of Arkansas, Fayetteville] in my senior year and—uh—accepted it. And—uh—went to Fayetteville and—uh . . .

[00:18:58] TD: Now what year was this that you went to Fayetteville?

FT: I's a freshman in—uh—fall of [19]41.

TD: With the war looming.

FT: Well, war started in—in—uh—. . .

TD: In December.

FT: . . . December 7. I thought maybe Pearl Harbor's some ol' gal, you know, ?during the joint? [TD laughs] down there someplace. I didn't realize it—it's—it's naval—[United States] Navy base—gonna be as serious as it got to be. But—but—uh—then, I guess, it's April, then, of my sophomore year, I was called into service. I was in enlisted reserve corps. They's gonna make

civil engineers out of all of us, so we had basic training—went to Texas A&I [Agricultural and Industrial University, Laredo, Texas] for equivalency of a year and a half at a stepped-up program of engineering. They decided to—people in the infantry wasn't workin' too well, so they [laughs]—they put us all—put us all from—havin' [having] a smooth ride—put us all in the infantry. So we all wound up—I wound—the four-oh-ninth [409th] [Infantry] Regiment, which was part of the hundred and third [103rd Infantry] Division.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:01] TD: So you started off to be an engineer, but ended up in the infantry?

FT: I's—well, I don't like to say infantry. I told Bob Compton—used to be a lawyer here—he said, "What'd you do in the army?" I said, "I's a geologist." Said, "What'd a geologist do?" I said, "Dug holes all over the place." [TD laughs] He said, "For what?" I said, "To get in to keep from gettin' killed." He said, "You's in the infantry." I said, "Yep." But it sounded a lot better to say you're a geologist, but I was a—I was an infantry soldier. Yes, sir.

[00:20:25] TD: So you shipped out for Europe.

FT: Yep.

TD: And you landed where?

FT: Landed in Marseilles, France. We couldn't get up to the dock, so we—oh, I'd say three or four or more yards out close as we could get in. Went on over on the SS [USS] *Monticello*—was an old converted Italian luxury liner. I think they had the whole division on there. But the combat engineers laid a little walkway out there for us to unload on.

TD: I guess the docks had been bombed probably.

FT: Yeah, with ships, you know, sunken . . .

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: . . . and down, but they hadn't been cleaned out. This was in . . .

TD: Yeah, when did you land in Marseilles?

FT: I—first of all, I thought it was August, but I checked my old discharge the other day. It was October the sixth, 1944.

TD: When you got to France.

FT: When I set my foot on . . .

TD: So . . .

FT: . . . on some of the land in Marseilles, France. Yeah.

[00:21:19] TD: Okay. So the drive was already on for—to get to Germany.

FT: Yeah, they went into the—to the channel up there on June the

sixth, but the—July [pause]—I mean Au—let’s see—yeah, latter July and August and September the third, the Thirty-sixth and Forty-fifth [Infantry] Divisions went in down at southern France—went up and joined up with the boys that was comin’ across from ?Delle?. And then when we got there, I didn’t realize until I talked to Roy [Reed] where I never had looked in the maps. I did get a map of France out to see if I could remember some of the places and happenin’s over there. We were on the extreme—in the Seventh Army in the extreme southern end, so we sorta [sort of], oh, followed along the Swiss border until we got to Rhine River, and then we kinda [kind of] spread out a bit—went up north and then we turned back south again down through Munich [Germany] and down through Bavaria and wound up down at Innsbruck, Austria, which controlled the Brenner Pass, and then made ‘em stop fighting down at—made the Germans surrender down in Italy before they did anywhere else in Europe over there ‘cause [because] they . . .

TD: They couldn’t get out.

FT: . . . didn’t have a place to go.

[00:22:32] TD: Yeah. What were some of the major battles that you were involved in?

FT: Oh . . . [*laughs*]

TD: Or some of the towns that were taken.



FT: Well, went through Saint—St. Die and all up through there, and then—but the major battle was—and the one I remember—it wasn't much of a battle, but we got over there in the Vosges Mountains, and we took a left little road way over there that took off across country, and it ain't two or three days—we get up on top of peaks and, boy, we made that. Had to get ahold of roots to stay right up and pull yourselves up. Got up there and, man, that's a good deal and, hell, you look as far down there as it was up, and then you'd look—over there, and we did that about three days. And we'd walk along and see the Germans down in a valley down there building up defenses.

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: And then we could throw rocks on their head down there, see, but they had no idea we were up above 'em up there. And so we got over to a town over there and—but they were so secure that we walked up on the porch of the headquarters over there 'fore they even knew we were any damn place around there.

[00:23:43] TD: So did they put up any resistance when you walked on the porch?

FT: Well, you know, a little bit. But wasn't a whole lot they could do,

you know. It's like bein' caught with your pants down, you know. "I'm caught. So what?" But there was a little bit of firefight. But I think maybe one or two of those guys were killed, but I don't think we lost any men there.

[00:24:04] TD: Did you suffer any wounds?

FT: Yeah, I did, and I refused a Purple Heart [Military Order of the Purple Heart]. I'll tell you why. The first day of combat I had three friends that were killed. And I think about that all the time. And their parents or their wives or whoever's next of kin, they got a Purple Heart for them being killed. And if a little bloodshed and not being deactivated or anything, they'd come to me—the medic'd come to me to fill out the paper Purple Heart on two different occasions, and I said, "I don't want it." They said, "Why?" I said, "Well, if I get it, just send it to McGehee, Arkansas, 'cause I'm not gonna take one of these cheap awards?. And I never would take one. A lotta people did, but I mean, I still feel that way today. If a man walking around say he got the Purple Heart, I kinda change my opinion of 'em 'cause I don't, you know, *[laughs]* I don't think that a man that can breathe deserves the same award that somebody's dead that they send to his people. And I'm just that way, and I wouldn't take one. But I coulda had two.

 [00:25:12] TD: Yeah. Who was the commander of your army?

FT: Commander of my army—started off with—we had a guy by the name of Patch—Alexander Patch, from San Antonio, Texas. Big ol’ long, tall drink o’ water, and he’d come right up on the line and talk to you. He wouldn’t have any insignia or anything. He’d come and talk to you, and then he’d stay with us. And, ‘course, we’re in old [General] George Patton’s army for a while where we were in flat country out there where they could run his tanks around. But we didn’t like those tanks because he wasn’t—wouldn’t be a tank in place if you didn’t have some dogfights around that tank out there, and the Germans knew it, and they’d fire that overhead burst on you. And ol’ George Patton was a big showman. He wasn’t a sol [FT Edit: for the soldier]. He was strictly for George Patton. Whatever he’d get, well, that was fine. And then our army commander—after we went up and helped stopped the [Battle of the] Bulge up there [Belgium] and came back, then [General] Anthony McAuliffe—was commander of the hundred-and-first [101st] Airborne—said, “Nuts to the Germans”—over—he took over our outfit. And we’d been in a—attacked one time for three weeks. And if—movin’ so fast, the outfit finally moved through us. And hadn’t had my shoes off in three weeks. Hadn’t been in—near a buildin’, and

we'd been eating turnips and sugar beets—ever what we could find to eat on.

TD: Mh-hmm.

[00:26:39] FT: Finally got through us—gonna have some R & R. Well, we just about got settled down, and it's gettin' close to dark. And they've sent—went up to company headquarters—said, "Now we're gonna stay here tonight. We'll go around a certain road over here, and then we're going across country." It's twelve or twenty-four miles somethin' through the woods over there. There's two towns over there we're gonna take. And we secured those towns until the army armored can drive down, and the infantry could drive down the roads, or we were gonna have, I think they say, 400,000 troops trapped in there. So we left there and started and—goin' out there, and it was dark. And, hell, next thing I knew, I's in a ditch. I went to sleep walkin' and fell out in a ditch. Well, that woke me up, and then we had to go up a bluff ?that was? pretty high. It was dark—couldn't see how steep it was. We got up on top and we didn't surprise a whole lot 'cause a bunch o' Krauts up there bivouacked. Hell, we [*laughs*] walked right in the middle of 'em—it started stormin'—lightnin'. You never heard lightnin' in your life, and it was lightnin', and you wouldn't know who was

next to you—looked over there, and there'd be a Kraut, you know.

TD: Yeah.

[00:27:46] FT: So that's—we just finally just dumbfounded.

Everybody had to quit fighting—just quit shootin'. [*Laughter*]

Waited till daylight so you could tell who was friend and foe.

And we started off and then didn't go very far and got hit again,

and we fought through that. And we got over there about four o'clock in the afternoon in these two little ol' towns. There was a big, deep ditch, so we could see 'em over there a mile or two.

We went around and jumped the ditch and got over in this town.

Well, we's supposed to gone in—one on, say, on the north end of town and one on the south end of the other town and push 'em

away. Well, we got in on this end of town, and we'd push 'em

this way, stop here. They'd get on the other—opposite end of

town, and they was tryin' to drive 'em out—we was tryin' to

drive these out and drive these back. So we had quite a mess

over there, and finally, at night things kinda settled down. So I

pulled my shoes off, and boy, got in a pile of, you know,

Germans over there—they had these hay—they had the ca—just

a hallway in the barn where they kept their milk cows and was

loose hay and stuff up in the attic or loft. So I pulled my shoes

off. Boy, I got in that hay, and I was really gonna get me a nice sleep. Well, next thing I knew, I heard these—this racket outside, and the hay was on fire. And the damn Germans shot a tracer right up in that hay. They knew that hay was up there, too. Set it on fire. Well, we got the fire out. Well, the kid we had on guard was sittin' outside of there, and when they came up there and started shootin', he got scared, and he run in the house. But we didn't have anybody outside. So put my shoes on, and we got out there. We finally got 'em scattered around and got 'em under control. Then went out and put a little perimeter defense out around this area we had. So [laughs] 'bout ten o'clock the next morning, I's out checkin' with the guys around the holes [FT Edit: foxholes]—see how everything was goin'—my feet started hurtin'. Looked down and, hell, had my shoes on the wrong feet. [Laughter] Looked like snowshoes—snowshoes turned out there. So I put my shoes on the right feet. So you don't get scared, you just get panicked.

[00:29:48] TD: Mh-hmm. What was the highest rank you attained during the war?

FT: Staff sergeant.

TD: Uh-huh.

FT: Platoon sergeant. Yeah, that's [laughs] high enough for me.

But—and then another thing that was over there interesting—I don't—I think I've—I sent up something on that oral thing—but one of my duties after war—this Stalingrad—I think it's some other kinda grad over there now—St. Petersburg maybe or something over there, but in Stalingrad, the Germans had the—Russia surrounded. Well, so Russians then—they deserted the Soviet army and joined up with the German army. Well, they wound up somewhere down in Bavaria in a big ol' PW [prisoner of war] camp down there. I don't know how many people was in it. They decided, "Well, we need to clean 'em out." So G-2—the intelligence for the Russians and America—they went through and interviewed all these people—decide who was friend and who was foe. [00:30:54] Well, they had this raid set for four o'clock in the morning, and I was assigned the officers' barracks, which had the commanding general and his staff in it. So I told 'em—I said, "Now, look, if these guys are anything like the American officers, they're not gonna be in the barracks where you just go in one end and herd 'em out the other like they trained us to do for a couple weeks." I said, "Go out and have 'em—and then check and be sure, now, that it's a solid—not a solid wall on the end—there's a door on each end." Come back and said, "Yeah." I said, "Go check again." So they went and

checked. Still the same way. So we got on the ol' freight train and rode it—rode on out from where we were billeted and at nighttime without any lights on the train and eased up there at this thing [FT Edit: camp]. So it was gettin' pretty late, so I had ten men, or maybe eleven men, including myself—make it twelve. No, I had ten men and me, and so they had pairs of two—five groups. So, anyway, we had to double-time on us to get around there. And we got there about two minutes till four and supposed to go raid all these buildings in this whole camp. And I ran around back of that buildin' in there, man, and that wall is just solid as that wall right there. There wasn't a door in it. So I looked around on the side over there, and there was five cubbyholes—five door things—five apartments there—rooms. So we—I said, "Well, all right." I said—I named the guys off—said, "You two come and go with me." Had one carbine and gave it to a guy from Colorado—said, "Don't put a round in the chamber. Don't fire this thing unless I tell you to." The rest of us had billy clubs. So went in this first room had a letter written in Croatian, and it said something about this is a routine inspection—vacate the premises and so forth and so on, so I . . .

[00:32:47] TD: Now these were Russian allies of the Germans.

FT: Yeah. Well, they joined the German army. See, that's . . .

TD: And . . .

FT: . . . a German soldier, but they were Russian army to start with.

TD: And they had—and they were in camp in Bavaria at this time.

FT: In Bavaria in a prisoner of war camp.

TD: Okay, so you were getting 'em out of a POW camp.

FT: Yes, sir.

TD: Was that POW camp—who had them in a POW camp—the
Germans?

FT: Nah, we and the English and French, I guess, was all Allies.

TD: So these were prisoners that you were moving out.

FT: Pri—our prisoners, yeah.

TD: Yeah, okay, okay.

[00:33:27] FT: And so they had this letter, and then they had this
sheet out there—had names on there—had red lines through
'em, and some didn't have red lines. Well, the ones with red
lines were be loaded on a train and sent back to Russia. Well,
you know what that means. They're just goin' over there and be
executed.

TD: Yeah.

[00:33:45] FT: So went in this first buildin' up there, and I said, "*Wo
bist du kommandant?*" You know, "Where is the commander?"
And these—had a bunk over here and a bunk over here and a

bunk crossways back—seemed like there’s three, maybe four bunks in there—double-deckers. So a guy in this bunk—we pointed up there at the top—this guy raised up in bed and had his hand up. So flip a light on—walked over there and told him—handed a note to him. He says, “*Warum?*” That means “why.” And I said, “*Darum.*” That means “because.” And that sucker reached up to an old rafter up over his bed up there to—and—to get somethin’. And I thought to myself real quick [*jokes*], “He needs some help gettin’ off that bunk.” So out in the floor he went. So I grabbed him, and we went out. And had a little ol’ vestibule built up there out of cardboard, so me and him went through the vestibule out in the snow—him in his long-handle drawers on, so [*laughs*—barefooted. So we got him outta there, and these other guys—and they come out peacefully. And we got ‘em all out. Didn’t get anybody hurt on either side, and so lined ‘em up in a company front. So I got ahold of one guy that could speak English, and I had him to read this note off. So the red lines right around—they went in one group, and the no lines went in the other group. So—and I’ve thought lotsa [*lots of*] times when that general that I took off the top of that bunk realized that he wasn’t in command anymore because I think he thought he was in command up till that time.

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: We took 'em back and got their personal 'longings [belongings]. Let them get their shoes on, but—we loaded 'em in the railroad cars and put two men in each car with 'em. Had little fence built up on either side of the—with the GIs [general enlisted soldiers] in the middle.

TD: To separate them.

[00:35:34] FT: And they—a fellow told me—he said they—after they got 'em over there to Russia, turn 'em over to Russians took 'em off there and put 'em—put four cars that we had into one car. Took big ol' timbers and nailed the doors shut. Highballed outta there they went.

TD: They were probably dead within a matter of a few days.

FT: Oh, yeah, they didn't last very long. They said one ol' boy come up there that goin' across a big trestle—something over there—and he wanted to use the bathroom. So they let him come up there. They had little ol' pots or somethin' back there. I never did see inside the thing but—say he stood there in the doorway and just bailed out of there, boy, like bailing out of an airplane. That—you know, hit just—hit that bottom there and committed suicide.

[00:36:20] TD: Yeah. When did you—when were you discharged

from the army?

FT: Discharged—uh—April the sixth of 1946 in Jefferson Barracks
[Military Post] Missouri.

TD: So you were actually in the mili—in the army for quite a while
after hostilities ceased.

[00:36:46] FT: Well, ol' lucky Floyd. See, I's [*laughs*] on a truck.

The rest of the boys come home into the [United] States and reorganize and then go to Japan. Well, they kept me ov—I's on a truck—I had my duffel bag loaded up and everything, and they come and said, "Thomas?" "Yes, sir." "Get off." So I got off. "Get your duffel bag." I got off and got out there. Said, "You're stayin'." I said, "For what?" They said, "Well, we're gonna—you're gonna be part of a cadre to train some troops to go to Japan through the Suez Canal." Well, you know, hell, that's just committin' suicide. But, anyway, Mr. Truman—[President] Harry Truman dropped that damn bomb on 'em over there. 'Course, a lotta people don't like it, but I thought it was the best thing to happen since high-button shoes 'cause it sure saved a lotta ol' boys like me's lives over there. So, anyway, I's just hangin'—just had my duffel bag there in the street and nobody around but [*laughs*] me, and the convoy took off. We waved goodbye. And after a while, a Jeep come up there—said, "Well," said, "you

goin' to get in the ?vehicle they got? I says, "Where're we goin'?" "We're goin' up there"—we went up there someplace. I don't remember the name of the town. Anyway, so I stayed there a while and then another Jeep come and got me—said, "We're goin' to Ingolstadt, Germany. General sent me down here with a note for you. You're gonna play football for the Ninth Infantry Division." Well, I was gonna play regimental. See, I figured they didn't have much experience there. But, anyway, I went to Ingolstadt, and that's where I met up with Jack Buck, who—next time Jack and I crossed paths after that incident over there was at St. Louis [Missouri]. He came in to broadcast for the Cardinals.

[00:38:18] TD: So you played football in a military team, playing other military teams.

FT: Mh-hmm.

[00:38:28] TD: Did you actually do any training of those soldiers that they told you that you would be in the first place?

FT: [*Laughs*] Yeah, we did. We had, you know, close-order drill. We had a little—teach 'em, you know, the weapons and a little bit of tactics. But they can write all the manuals you want to, but you can't teach anybody how to be a soldier in combat from a book. I mean, it all comes on . . .

TD: Experience.

FT: You have to interpolate, really, [*laughs*] more or less. You have to make up the rules as you go along.

[00:38:59] TD: Yeah. So you got back to the United States and after the war—after your experience with both fighting in the army and playing football in the army. And you came back to the United States, and where did you start your new life?

FT: Well, I went back to Fayetteville. I was—I was damn determined I was gonna get a degree in something somewhere. And so I went back to Fayetteville. It was the last day of spring practice for football up there. So then I went ahead, and I was way fat and overweight and everything. So I stayed up there and worked out and inquired—I met my wife, Beulah Campbell Thomas, before I went in the service over there, and asked about her. And they said, “She’s still livin’ over there at so-and-so’s.” Said “She didn’t get married?” “Nah.” So I called her, and we started datin’ again. And about a year later or so, we got married. And she’s a Fayetteville girl. Actually, her grandmother’s folks lived out at Mount Comfort.

TD: Mh-hmm.

[00:40:07] FT: In fact, her great-grandfather ?or some kind? gave the land that the university farm’s on out there now. If

Fayetteville quit using that university farm, I'm gonna get a part of that [*TD laughs*] ground out there.

TD: Gonna ask for it back.

FT: Yeah. But their name was McCormack [Frank Thomas edit: McCormick] *M-C-C-O-R-M-A-C-K*. But her maiden name was Campbell. So I went ahead and got a bachelor's degree in education. It's a minor, I guess it was, in biological science, and then I had so much time—I'd gotten that time by the schoolin' I got when I was in Texas A&I in the army and transferred it up there, so it didn't take too many hours to end—well, in fact, the last semester I went—in, let's see, [19]48, I guess it was, or [19]47—oh, [pause] about fifteen hours of that was toward a master's [FT Edit: degree]. I went ahead then and finished my master's and got that.

[00:41:05] TD: So you did go directly into a master's program and . . .

FT: Mh-hmm, mh-hmm.

TD: . . . worked that out?

FT: Uh-huh. Had forty-nine months still left on my GI Bill [of Rights]. If I hadn't gone in the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], hell, I'da probably still been goin' to school up [*TD laughs*] there usin' that GI Bill up.

[00:41:19] TD: So did you play football at the university?

FT: Played football university in [19]41 freshman; [19]42 sophomore; [19]46 [John] Barnhill [University of Arkansas head football coach and athletic director, 1946–1949] liked to get me killed playin' tackle 'cause I got back late, and he needed a tackle, and he 'bout got me killed then. Well, I told him, "My senior year I'm gonna play center again." He said, "Well, I got plenty of centers." I said, "Yeah, best one you had, though, liked to got killed last year at tackle." [TD laughs] So—my brother was also a center up there, and he and I wound up my senior year alternatin'. And if—I thought—he went to [University of] Alabama [Tuscaloosa, Alabama] when I was in the service over there. [Paul] Bear Bryant [University of Alabama football coach, 1958–1982] came over to McGehee and got him. And he's runnin' first string over there, and I wrote him a letter—told him—I said, "You get the hell outta Alabama and get to Arkansas. And if I get outta this mess over here, we'll be alternatin' up there one of these days." So he left Alabama, and Alabama went to the Rose Bowl that year, see, and it wouldn'ta made any difference if he'd gone to Alabama and then gone to Arkansas after the war's over with. And then he coulda played—we [the University of Arkansas Razorbacks football team] went

to the Cotton Bowl in [19]47 New Year's Day, and then we went to—[19]48 New Year's Day we played William and Mary [University, Williamsburg, Virginia] at the Dixie Bowl over at Birmingham, Alabama. So that—he coulda gone to three bowls, see, in four years if his older brother hadn't interfered with him. But . . .

TD: Right.

FT: . . . but it worked out all right.

[00:42:33] TD: What did your brother study at the university?

FT: He was—he studied education with a major in biology.

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: And after he graduated, he went to school—went to Springfield, Missouri, as assistant football coach. At Central [High School], he was the head football coach. Billy Ray Thomas was his name. And then ol' Billy was—went back and got, I guess, a master's in biology and taught advanced biology courses up there in the Springfield public school system for—that's the only job he ever had, really, until he retired. And he ran for the school board, and then he died a few years ago—had cancer. He was three years younger than me, but he's been dead now about three or four years.

[00:43:15] TD: So you got married in what year?

FT: We got married 1947—June the twelfth. Be forty—be fifty-nine years next month.

[00:43:34] TD: And tell me about your children.

FT: Well, I went to Paris, Arkansas, and—as a coach.

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: And teaching chemistry, physics, one math class, coachin' all the sports, director of athletics, head of the audiovisual program of the school system. [TD laughs] As a lotta small schools do, I did it all. And I had one—oldest son, Floyd Jr., was born there in Paris. And stayed there, and the principal's—fact, the principal was Austin White, which is Chancellor John White's [University of Arkansas, Fayetteville campus, 1997–2008] daddy.

TD: Yes.

[00:44:22] FT: And Dr. White was just a little ol' redheaded, freckle-faced kid runnin' around there—fat cheek and round face and—"Johnny"—when I was there. So then I's over there—Hal Kinamer was the superintendent. And Hal and Austin were both gone one time, and I was over there in the principal's office fillin' out some eligibility sheets. So Ralph Rollins, FBI agent out of Fort Smith, came in there, and he said, "Floyd," said, "we're hirin'—need a list of girls that had shorthand and typing." He said, "We hiring agents now, so you don't have to be an

accountant or a lawyer. You have to just pass the examination.” I was makin’ twenty-five hundred dollars a year, and he’s—work—doin’ all that work. And I said, “What are you payin’?” He said, “Five thousand dollars a year.” I said, “You got [*laughs*] any applications?” So he said, “Nah.” So he told me write a letter down to Little Rock, so I did. The agent in charge—they sent me an application back, and I went down to be interviewed. And I was in his office being interviewed, and they brought a Teletype in the day that the Puerto Ricans tried to assassinate Harry Truman in the—at the Blair House over there across from the White House [Washington, DC].

TD: Yeah.

[00:45:39] FT: So I went back to Paris and went to—went—was called into the FBI, then, on February the twelfth, 1951. Broke. Didn’t have any money. Borrowed the money from my daddy to ride a day coach from Booneville, Arkansas, to Washington, DC. Sat up all day and all night [*laughs*] and the next day and the next—about midnight the next night. Well, I had a sister [Hortense Henson Auerbach] who was a student Gallaudet College. She had lost her hearing when she was twelve years old. That spinal meningitis epidemic hit south Arkansas. She lost her hearing. So she went to college at Gallaudet in DC and

graduated. So her husband [Leon Auerbach] was a professor of math at Gallaudet also. He was a deaf-mute. So I stayed with them, and while we were in DC, and then, 'course, spent a lot of time down at Quantico [Virginia]. Didn't have to pay any room and board down there. Anyway, I struggled around and got through it and got out. They sent me to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, my first office.

[00:46:39] TD: Let's talk about your training. You trained in the DC area? Did the FBI have its own training academy there?



FT: Oh, had their own—had our—a training—well, we had a classroom in the Justice building there in Washington, DC [United States Department of Justice], where the—across the street from the FBI building is now. And we had our classroom work there but then had our fieldwork and also classwork, and the [United States] Marine Corps gave us a building to use down at Quantico. And our firing range was down at Quantico. So we spent—that time I went through is only a rushed-up deal—went to school several weeks, I think it was, then they turned us loose out in the field—supposed to be FBI agents—all of us just a bunch of confused jugs runnin' around. But some of us at Quantico; some of us down at—in DC.

TD: When was your first—when did you first meet [FBI director] J.

Edgar Hoover?

FT: Met J. Edgar Hoover—that's part of your training session up there. Everybody goes through training academy meets Mr. Hoover. Went over and went through a door and a little ol' short, dark-complected guy standing behind a desk. Well, there was two people back there—he and [associate director of the FBI] Clyde Tolson. You walk up and introduce yourself—shake hands with him—and he'd say a thing or two. You-all exchange a little chitchat, and then you go on your way, just like runnin' a bunch o' cows through a dippin' vat or somethin' or other. But that's my contact with Mr. Hoover. My only personal contact—'course, you look at those scrapbooks, and there was a letter from my wife saying I got about as many letters of censure as I did commendations, so he and I had quite a bit of [*laughs*] contact, correspondencewise, more or less.

[00:48:24] TD: I noticed a letter in there—a letter warning you about your physical appearance. Did they have a strict dress code for their agents?

FT: Mr. Hoover had a little heart problem, and his doctor gave him a chart, "The Ideal Weight." So he said, "Well, if it's—my doctor's gonna make me do this—" I know what he was thinking—he said, "Well, these agents all need to fit this." So you're so high,

you had to weigh so much. You couldn't weigh over a certain amount. And I's about ten pounds overweight and—had 'bout a thirty-four-inch waist. We had guys that was my height had about a forty-eight-inch waist that didn't weigh as much as I did.

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: But I had to struggle, so I liked about two or three pounds of makin' that weight one time, so sent it in, and that's the letter I got back for [*laughs*] not meetin' the physical requirements. Now you see agents now and looks like a—some of these guys playin' hug and hold, what they call football now. We used to call a football—it was block and tackle. Now they call it—I call it hug and hold. They hug each other and hold on, you know, and—for dear life and stomach hangin' over their belt and everything. It's—I don't even go see it anymore. I ain't interested in it.

[00:49:40] TD: And your first assignment was in Pittsburgh.

FT: Pittsburgh. Yes, sir.

TD: Can you recall your very first case that you worked on?

FT: [*Laughs*] Yeah, I can—very vividly.

TD: Really? What was it?

FT: They [*laughs*]—well, they gave me—assign you to an older agent. He takes you around. All this guy did is drive a car

around and drink coffee. I didn't get experience with him. They finally assigned me a case—a army deserter. I worked in the fugitive squad. So I checked me out a car, boy, and got that—went over on north Pittsburgh over there across the river about where the stadium is over there now—baseball stadium. It's kind of a run-down area. So I went around in the alley to this address up over a five-and-dime store. So I went around to this alley up there and down the alley, and it had a name—a number up there. So I walked up a couple flights of stairs—got up to it—knocked on the door, and this guy came to the door, and he didn't have a stitch of clothes on. So I told him who I was, and I showed him my credentials, and he slam—tried to slam the door. And I went in there—we was up those steps and around throughout the other—finally got ahold of him. It's hard to hold a naked man. But, anyway, I finally got him settled down enough [*laughs*] to put some—get some clothes on him. Well, I was proud of myself. Well, I went out there and got him in the car in the handcuffs, and then all of a sudden it dawned on me—nobody showed me where the jail is. I don't know [*TD laughs*] what to do with him now or where to take him. So I started [*laughs*] drivin' around. So I called the office—told 'em—gave 'em my car number—'course, six seven one seven [6717] was

credentials number. And I asked—I said, “Well, where’s the Allegheny County Jail?” “Stand by.” So I stood by, and the next thing a supervisor’s on there. He was talkin’ to me. And then the agent in charge came back there talkin’ to me. They said, “Well, go down to so and certain corner and turn left, and go down to—turn right.” So after a while I realized I was goin’ round and round in a circle past the same buildin’ three or four times. So then they gave us directions. I pulled up in front of the Allegheny County Jail, and five or six agents standin’ out there. *[TD laughs]* And me with this guy. [00:51:44] And I thought I done a good job. So they took him and said, “You need to go see the agent in charge.” So I drove up to the office—go up there and see him. And that ol’ boy chewed on me. Boy, he talked to me like I’s in the third—you know, just flunked a reading test in the third grade or somethin’. And I was kinda proud of myself, and then this guy was chewin’ me out, and all the time I was thinkin’, “Now here I’ve been through the war. I’ve been through all kinds of situations. This guy got in the FBI to stay outta the war. I know he did. He’s over there tryin’ to tell me how to—you know, that ‘No first officer agent makes arrests by himself,’ blah, blah, blah. Well, one just did, you know.” But, anyway, that was my very first assignment—

assigned case of my own that I ever had was that deal. I thought I done good and got bawled out about it.

[00:52:30] TD: Well, what was the culture of the FBI like then? Was there a camaraderie among the agents?

FT: Oh, there always was a camaraderie with all the twenty-three years I was in that. Yeah, they just are very close, you know. They were—you could, you know, be assigned on a case and be a dangerous assignment or somethin'd be some guy you had a FBI credential that you'd never seen before, but you knew you could trust him—wasn't any doubt about it. You're just gonna get a fair shake out of it. So, no, it was always close-knit group.

[00:53:05] TD: Where did you go to from Pittsburgh?

FT: From Pittsburgh, I went to Newark, New Jersey. Worked the waterfronts—worked on security deal in fugitive cases—worked waterfront—work from West New York, New Jersey, down to Bayonne. He knows where that is. And—uh [pause] very interesting. West New York—don't mean West New York—next little ol' town down south of there where Frank Sinatra's from—the little ol' town where they had a big commercial port there.

TD: Hoboken or somewhere like that?

FT: Yeah, it may have been Hoboken. Jersey City. Jersey City. Then—one day at about noon—it was break time. I went down

to a tavern down there that an ol' boy had a room upstairs. And these stevedores start coming off those ships, boy, had these hay hooks in their belt, patches on their eye, scars all over 'em—shirtless, you know. I mean, man, there's some tough cookies down in that deal. And you kinda look around and kinda [laughs]—"Mh-hmm, what kinda deal have I got in?" But they'd all hit that bar over there, and they'd drink their lunch. Just order—oh, first time I ever saw anybody do it—they order 'em a glass of beer and a shot of whiskey and drop glass and all down in that beer. They'd drink it down, and they'd get 'em another.

TD: And that was lunch.

FT: That was lunch.

TD: These were longshoremen . . .

FT: Yeah.

TD: . . . and other . . .

FT: Yeah.

TD: . . . workers in—on the fleet—the commercial fleets?

FT: Yeah.

[00:54:53] TD: Now during this time as a young agent, you're also having children. Where are your children born?

FT: Well, I said Floyd Jr. was born in Paris [clears throat] when I was teaching high school. Frank, who's with Stephens, Inc., up Little

Rock, was born in East Orange, New Jersey [Frank Thomas Edit: Newark, New Jersey]. And Melissa, my daughter, was born in Poplar Bluff, Missouri, after I transferred to St. Louis [Missouri] and then moved down to Poplar Bluff. Floyd has oldest son, Matt. He's Floyd the third but call him Matt. He's practicin' law with his daddy here in town in El Dorado. He has—from his first wife. He has three children, Gregory, Stephanie, and Jessica from his second wife. Gregory'll be in the eleventh grade next year. Stephanie'll be in the—or Jessica, the youngest, will be in the sixth grade. Then Frank—lives in Little Rock—with Stephens, Inc., and he has two children. A daughter, Lauren—she just finished her first year of vet school at Oklahoma State [University, Stillwater, Oklahoma] studying—workin'—specializin' in big animals—horses, mainly, is what she's interested in. His son, John, is a—will be a senior next year in Catholic High [School] in Little Rock. Melissa—she has two boys. She didn't get married till she was about thirty-nine, forty years old. She married a guy by name of Scott Whitfield. Scott's a choral director of one of the Pulaski County schools up there. I've forgot now which one it is. They have two boys. One is Adam. Adam's seven, and Benjamin is "the wrecker," more or less. He's four. So that takes care of 'em. And then Matt, my oldest

grandson, he has three children. So we have . . .

[00:56:47] TD: So you have great . . .

FT: . . . three grandchildren.

TD: You have great-grandchildren.

FT: Have three great-grandchildren. One's in the sixth grade, and then one's just starts school next year—one of the girls. And—but Taylor's the boy, and then the two girls are—Lily is a baby. She's about eight months old, I think, and then the next one is—I can't think of her name now. That—that's terrible. [TD *laughs*] Uh—I don't have Alzheimer's [disease]. I've got "sometimers." Uh—Emma Grace.

TD: Emma Grace.

FT: Emma Grace is the other girl. Yeah.

TD: Yeah, that's a great name.

[Tape stopped]

[00:57:28] TD: You were talking about coming back from all that infantry service, combat service, injury in the war, and then being dressed down by a whippersnapper in the FBI office. Did you find that when you came back from the war that you were a changed person?

FT: Oh, yeah, definitely. Definitely. In fact, I was—in fact, Tom, I was so changed—when you get—you know, you get a situation



over there where you—killin' and bein' killed and seein' people—you know, dead people just don't mean any more to you than a empty soft drink can layin' on the side of the highway—pay any attention to it. When I was an FBI agent, most of the—I made most of my arrests with my gun locked up in the trunk of my car. For the simple reason was I didn't wanna go in, and some guy make a false move, and just reflexes—shoot him and kill him for no reason whatever. And for my protection and the people I was dealin' with—for their protection—I figured best place for that gun was locked up in the trunk of my car. So I left it there. But, yeah, you change your attitude on life, on values. I think you have more respect for your neighbor as a result of that. You know, there's a lotta bad, but a lotta good comes out of it, too, I think, if you want to. Of course, if you wanna be an idiot, I guess you can be an idiot.

TD: Mh-hmm.

[00:59:11] FT: But it takes some concentration to overcome. I mean, you—I wouldn't say get reckless, but you get—just kind of develop an attitude that—you know, it's not a negative attitude. It's not—I don't know how to describe it. Not an attitude, "I don't care." I mean, you care, but you just—hell, I don't know what.

TD: Your perspective is very different.

FT: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

TD: Yeah. Your values have changed . . .

FT: Yeah.

TD: . . . tremendously.

FT: Yeah, yeah.

[00:59:43] TD: Let's talk about your transfer to Arkansas. You were transferred first to the Little Rock office.

FT: No, transferred to St. Louis before I came to . . .

TD: No, I mean in Arkansas.

FT: Oh, yeah, in Arkansas. Yeah. Well, [*laughs*] I passed through Little Rock. I's in Little Rock about two days, and Roy Moore's the agent in charge. He sent me to Hot Springs.

[01:00:06] TD: Hot Springs. How many—let me ask this question. How many cities in Arkansas approximately would've had FBI offices?

FT: Texarkana, Hot Springs, Fort Smith, Fayetteville.

TD: El Dorado.

FT: Blytheville, El Dorado.

TD: Southeast Arkansas? Fort . . .

FT: Pine Bluff.

TD: Pine Bluff.

FT: Pine Bluff and Forrest City.

TD: Mh-hmm. So there were several offices here.

FT: Mh-hmm.

[01:00:38] TD: And you went from—after a couple of days in Little Rock, you were transferred to Hot Springs.

FT: Mh-hmm.

TD: You moved your family there. And how long did you live in Hot Springs?

FT: Lived in Hot Springs—uh—well, the family lived there eighteen months, but I think maybe I's there maybe [pause] twelve [laughs] out of that eighteen months, maybe.

TD: Moving around was very much a part of the FBI culture, I guess.

FT: Well, in some as—some people did; some people didn't. Some people went to—they got out of headquarters and went to what—the first office they called it—just more or less a year down sort of a training program. And then a lotta people'd go to the office—stay there the rest of their life.

TD: Hmm.

[01:01:22] FT: I could've probably stayed in Poplar Bluff, but I had my—I'd put Little Rock down as office of preference the year before, and I thought I'd changed it to St. Louis, but evidently I hadn't. And we came down to visit my wife's mother at

Fayetteville one Thanksgiving, and they called me and said, "You've been transferred to Little Rock." And I said, "Well, if I'm that dumb, I'll just go ahead and take it." So . . .

[01:01:42] TD: Tell me about Hot Springs. What year would you have arrived there?

FT: Phew. [Pause]

TD: Been in the early [19]50s probably.

FT: No, it'd been—'cause I's in Poplar Bluff for almost ten years, so . . .

TD: Oh, okay.

FT: . . . so . . .

TD: Would've been in the early [19]60s.

FT: . . . it'd been in the—see—in probably sixty—maybe February of [19]64 or somethin'—I don't know because I know that's the summer of [19]64, I spent over in Mississippi all summer long.

TD: So, anyhow, you arrived in Hot Springs sometime in the early 1960s, and at that point Hot Springs was a pretty wide-open town.

FT: Very wide open. Very wide open. Everybody—you know, if you were crooked, you know, it was accepted. If you were to do something illegal, I mean, just smile and get up and go over—"Congratulations, buddy," or whatever. I thought a terrible

place to raise a family. I didn't—Hot Springs was a good place to work—lotta good work, but I just did not want to bring my—go home at night, and my kids'd tell about bein' in school. Somebody'd talk about ol' so-and-so, but he's not in any trouble. He knows judge so-and-so, you know. And, you know, in grade school and high—junior high school, that kinda stuff, you know, I just didn't want it rubbin' off on my children—have to go through that deal. And, you know, tryin' to teach 'em right from wrong, and so I didn't care about bein' there.

[01:03:30] TD: The—there is a generally accepted belief that the mob had a hand in Hot Springs. *[FT laughs]* You would subscribe to that theory?

FT: Well, all the mob bosses from New York to California, from Chicago [Illinois] to Miami [Florida] would converge on Hot Springs. I was there two years when this occurred. They'd all come to Hot Springs to allegedly take the baths.

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: We never could find out what else they were doin' there. We know they're havin' some kinda meeting. Don't know whether they're? meeting with? Owney [Owen] Madden—Owney Madden—and we never could prove it. But Clay White [senior agent in the Hot Springs office] and I—when they'd come to

town we'd go interview 'em. We'd interview every one of 'em just to let 'em know we knew they's in town, and we's interested in 'em, you know, and they's, "Ol' friend this," "Ol' friend that." And just, "Would you like a drink?" You know, well, couldn't be nicer to you, you know. And they—'course, we'd—they didn't care anything about us. We'd be more—we just wanted to let 'em know that we knew they were there.

[01:04:33] TD: So when the mob leadership got to town, you'd go interview them.

FT: Yep.

TD: Did you all ever do anything like bug—plant listening devices in their meeting sites and things like that?

FT: [*Laughs*] You're gettin' on hallowed ground now, but everybody more or less knows that we had listening—yeah, we had listening devices.

TD: Yeah.

FT: In fact, we—after we interviewed 'em we'd go back to [*laughs*] the office and listen to what they called a ?buddy or called a buddy or?—now we didn't have telephone taps on 'em, but we did have electronic devices, I'll call it.

[01:05:10] TD: Mh-hmm. There was also a common belief that the gambling interests in Hot Springs provided money—payoff—to

Governor [Orval E.] Faubus [governor of the state of Arkansas, 1955–1967]. This was a very common belief. He always denied it. Did you have any [FT laughs] activity over there that you thought was—would indicate that Faubus was being paid off—to allow the gambling to continue?

FT: Well, I—there was—once weekly a car would pull in behind the Southern Club. That was Owney Madden’s main hangout. He would go to the Southern Club and hang around the café there all day long, whether he owned a part I don’t know—never could prove it.

TD: Owney Madden. *M-A-D-D-E-N*.

FT: *M-A-D-D-E-N*. Owney Madden was exiled from New York to get outta New York.

[01:06:11] TD: The mob sent him to Hot Springs, or he fled the mob and came to . . .

FT: Nah . . .

TD: . . . Hot Springs?



FT: . . . the judge told him to get outta New York because Owney Madden owned the Yellow Cab Company and the Cotton Club. Well, there was a guy by the name of [laughs] Joe Kennedy—had the scotch business—bootlegging scotch—or had the boat anchored outside the three-mile limit, and boat’s go get it and

bring that whiskey to town. Well . . .

[01:06:44] TD: This is Joe Kennedy, who was—Joseph Kennedy, who was the father of [US] President John F. Kennedy [1961–1963], and he was also the former—he became ambassador to Great Britain [1938–1940] just before the war [World War II].

FT: Yeah.

TD: And it is generally known that he was a liquor distributor. But—so he was providing liquor for the interests there in the nightclubs and so on there in New York City.

FT: That's . . .

[01:07:11] TD: Well, how did Madden get into this formula?

FT: Owney Madden owned the Yellow Cab Company. And Yellow Cab—the taxis are a pretty good way to distribute illegal drugs [FT Edit: liquor] and things around the city. And Owney, as I understand—he didn't tell me this—but I understand that he was of the opinion that Joe Kennedy had him on an extortion case. So they got ol' Owney and convicted him of extortion, but instead of sending him the penitentiary, the judge told him to get outta New York and don't come back. So he went to Hot Springs—Owney did—and married a postmaster's daughter. Lived a life—nice lifestyle, and far as I know, never worked.

And—but he did get along, and he did have [*laughs*] his ways.

But I don't have any—that's—all that's hearsa . . .

TD: And he hung out at the Southern Club.

FT: Yes.

TD: And . . .

FT: He'd go there every morning—drive from his house over there on Grand Avenue downtown to the Southern Club—sit there at—in the table by the window. And there's a detective there that I finally got to visit with—got friendly with, more or less. He'd get talkin'—and he wore alligator shoes and . . .

[01:08:29] TD: This is a Hot Springs city police . . .

FT: Hot Springs . . .

TD: . . . detective?

FT: . . . city detective. Wore alligator shoes and alligator belts and alligator billfolds and had . . .

TD: He had an . . .

FT: . . . five hundred dollar . . .

TD: . . . expensive lifestyle.

FT: Yeah, as a police officer. Yeah. But he also drove Owney Madden around. If he wanted to go outta town or somethin', he was Owney's chauffer—Owney's—he'd sit there at the table with Owney a lot at the Southern Club.

TD: So this was a serving police officer in the city of Hot Springs, and he also acted as the driver for, I guess you'd say, the local mob leader. That's a pretty tight connection with the police department.

FT: Well, they had the chief detectives, you know, sent to penitentiary for harboring Alvin Karpis over there back in the [19]30s.

TD: Yeah, Hot Springs has always had a reputation for skirting the law.

FT: That's right. That's the reason I didn't wanna raise my family over there. [*Laughs*] There's greener pastures someplace else, you know, than Hot Springs.

[01:09:35] TD: Well, 'course, and you know, many people said that Orval Faubus would not have been able to build his mansion up in the Ozarks [Huntsville, Arkansas] on a ten-thousand-dollar-a-year governor's salary.

FT: Well, from what I saw, I couldn'ta built that kinda house, and I's making that [*laughs*]'bout as much money probably as he was at that time. But getting back to the money from Hot Springs over there—this car would pull up behind the Southern Club, and this guy'd come out with a box. And it was a state police car—a car that belonged to the Arkansas State Police—unmarked car.



[01:10:15] TD: An unmarked state police vehicle.

FT: And it would go from there to the governor's mansion in Little Rock. Didn't—not—didn't check on it every day, but a lotta times the guys'd leave Hot Springs—the guy at Little Rock'd check it, and it'd go to the governor's mansion. So . . .

TD: And you all had a surveillance, so that you knew this was happening.

FT: Yeah, we knew it was goin' there, but wasn't anything—you know, it's not against the law to drive money down the highway and . . .

TD: Yeah.

FT: And even if there's bribery goin' on, it'd have to be some interstate aspect involved before we'd get involved in it. But he wasn't—Faubus wasn't the only one to be there at the mansion, though. My old friend Bruce Bennett—he'd be there sometimes, too. And I asked Bruce about it after he came back down to El Dorado. He just grinned. He didn't . . .

[01:11:03] TD: Yeah. Bruce Bennett and Orval Faubus were cohorts, if I remember correctly. They were allies, weren't they?

FT: For a while and then they had a little fallin' out, you know. And I think Bruce ran against him once, and then they—it's, you know, it's back-and-forth deals. And then Bruce got . . .

TD: Bruce Bennett was attorney general [of the state of Arkansas, 1957–1960, 1963–1966] . . .

FT: . . . Bruce got in the Arkansas loan and thrift business, you know, and two or three people's convicted, and Bruce never was because he had that throat cancer, and he couldn't act in his own defense or whatever. But . . .

TD: So for medical reasons he was able to avoid prosecution in that loan and thrift scandal [Editor's Note: Arkansas Loan & Thrift Corp. controversy in 1969].

FT: Charges were filed, but it was—but they never did come to court.

[01:11:48] TD: Let's talk about the move to El Dorado. You were in Hot Springs more or less about two years. And then . . .

FT: Somewhere in there, yeah.

TD: . . . and then you were—then you came to El Dorado. What was the most—when you first got here, what was the average case like that you would've worked on? Did you specialize in anything in particular?

FT: Well, the—more or less—had a office in Camden. They—and it was on the verge of a black-and-white war down there in south Arkansas because the Klan was goin' around shootin' through black people's houses, and black people's shootin' through the



houses, you know, and these black fellows—some of 'em comin' home from bein' in Korea and Vietnam, and they wasn't gonna take this crap, so then they started fightin' back. Well, the local police wasn't doin' anything about it. I mean, they were, you know, there was a vote. They didn't wanna—if they's runnin' for office, they didn't wanna get involved in it. So they were lookin' for somebody to come down here in that thing, and I told 'em—I said, "Well, I don't care about livin' in Camden," 'cause Camden at one time was about as bad as Hot Springs. So I said, "Well, but I will go to El Dorado." I said, "That's where the district court is and so forth." They said, "Well," that boss up there—the guy in Little Rock said, "Let me check and see." He checked with Washington [DC], and he come back and didn't wanna have two people that close together. But they decided to send me to El Dorado to open up an office here, so I did. So then they transferred [*laughs*] the guy from Camden down here shortly thereafter. So I handled mainly the Ku Klux Klan when I got down here. I had a few other cases scattered in, but mainly the Klan business.

[01:13:31] TD: Had there been some work done before you got here to help identify the Klan leaders and so on or did you pretty much handle it from scratch?

FT: Well, they—there was—there'd been some work done, but a lot of it was phony [FT Edit: unnecessary] work because Shelton appeared at a drive-in theater south of town there—Robert Shelton, the "grand gizzard" or whatever—the imperial wizard [of the United Klans of America] or whatever he was. [TD *laughs*] And they—oh, agents come down and took a lotta license plates. Well, that turned out to be a lotta people's children, you know, out in the family car ridin' around, and there was all this stuff down—and they wanted to go down, and like, they wanted to see what was goin' on. So their name got listed on there as being a member of the group there. But I more or less came down—identified 'em. After people found out that somebody probably gonna do somethin' with it or about it, then the people who wasn't even interested in the Klan—they'd come to me and say, "Can I help you?" And I'd say, "Yeah." I said, "Why don't you to go to this meeting and join up and be a member?" "You want me to?" "Yeah." So they would. So I wound up, and I had about two members to every klavern—that's what every group was to informants. [*Laughs*] It finally got down to wasn't hardly anybody meetin' but informants meetin' in there. So started it—got 'em identified—started havin' interview programs. You know, anybody that has to hide their

eyes or hide their face from somethin' or other—if you expose 'em, well, then they know they've been exposed, and they're gonna be—gonna straight out—get outta there. But the best tool was if—was the extortion—I mean, the conspiracy statute. There's a statute that if two or more people enter into an agreement, and one person carries out overt act of that agreement, even though one of the original planners decided, "Well, I don't wanna be involved in that," so he gets out of it. You go ahead—one of 'em go ahead and commits an overt act, well, number one's as guilty as number two.

TD: Mh-hmm.

[01:15:42] FT: Well, if you've got twenty-five people at a meeting—say, "We're goin' out here—we're gonna scare ol' so-and-so. We're gonna burn a cross in his driveway." And if the fire gets away and burns his house down and his children, and you're in the meeting when that agreement is made, whether you voted yea or nay, you're equally as guilty as the people who originally planned it. Conspiracy. Yeah. Well, boy, you wouldn't have to worry about them anymore. They started fallin' by the wayside. I've interviewed people that ?left me and? all they say, [*laughs*] "Conspiracy, conspiracy, conspiracy!" you know.

TD: Talk . . .

FT: So, you know, eventually they just started—and I'd find out where they were gonna have a meeting. And I'd drive up and be sittin' there across the street from 'em when it broke up—just wanted to let 'em know that I knew that they was havin' a meeting there. Well, that—but Monticello, Crossett, Hamburg—but—El Dorado. But it [*laughs*—you know, I guess you have to enjoy what you're doin'. I kinda got a kick outta foolin' with those guys. They were kinda like a catfish—all mouth and very little brain to start with. They'd do a whole lotta talkin', but they never gonna act on anything. But . . .

[01:16:57] TD: Well, did you—what—could you describe how you saw the average Klansman? What kind of person was he? What do you think motivated them more than anything else? Talk with me about some of the people you've met who were in the Klan—not by name, but I mean . . .

FT: Those who were really active . . .

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: . . . those who were really active and against integration, against the—well, just against blacks, really, is a matter of economics. They were afraid if these people got an education, got to go to school, got rights, they would be workin' in their jobs, see? And that's exactly . . .

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: . . . what—that's the reason they didn't—that's the reason the Klan didn't like Jewish people either, see. Because the Jews—the Jewish people—he gonna—you don't have—you never have seen a Jew that was poor or very few of 'em. And another—I don't know whether it had anything to do with it or not, but all the Klansmen I had anything to do with, they'd meet over in the Forrest City area, West Memphis, south Arkansas, southeast Arkansas—all of 'em but two was a member of the Baptist faith.

TD: Hmm.

[01:18:13] FT: And what that had to do with it, I don't know. We [*laughs*] had two that was a member of our First United Methodist Church here in El Dorado. One of 'em never did know—he was a businessman. He never did know that I knew he was a member of the Klan. The other guy was a railroad man. I used to deliver his paper. He lived over at McGehee years ago. He passed the collection plate at our church ever Sunday up there. So I decided, "Well, I'm just gonna check his water one day." [*Laughs*] So I went by his house. "Well, hello, Floyd. Good to see you. How's this—remember this when you were a kid [*unclear words*]?" "Yes, sir." And said, "Well, what can I do for you?" I said, "Well," I said, "I wanna know what

y'all been doin' at these Klan meetings." He looked at me, boy, just [*laughs*] like you'd slapped him in the face with a boot or somethin'. And he said, "Well, I won't go anymore." I said, "I think that'd be a pretty good idea." So he wouldn't give you a whole lotta information. None of 'em would [*unclear word*] but your informants would. [01:19:06] And ol' George McNeely over there at McGehee—he and my dad was best of friends. Ol' George was Grand Dragon, I guess, state of Arkansas. And I'd go over to ol' George's house. He'd have his wife fry up catfish, and he'd eat catfish, but George wouldn't tell me anything about the Klan. But I knew one thing George was gonna do—if he's gonna be a member of the Klan, he was gonna lead 'em away from violence. He wasn't in on that violent deal. 'Course, I didn't care what kinda club you belonged to. You can belong to the Klan if you wanted to, but just don't get out here and make a fool outta yourself. [01:19:42] He had me arrested one time because I had information that they were gonna go out to the high school and mess it up and make it look like the blacks did it. So I called a local state trooper—a sergeant—and we got a marked patrol car—went out here on [Highway] 335 out west of town to get license numbers. 'Cause, hell, there come an idiot out there a-carryin' a damn pistol. So I got out on my side of

the car, and he got up there pretty close, and I said—the boy's name was Smith—I said, "Smitty," I said, "take that pistol by the barrel and go back there and give it to the lieutenant. He's sittin' in the back seat of that car." Well, took him down and charged him. [01:20:20] Next thing I knew, the sheriff's office called me one Saturday—said, "You be in court at nine o'clock Monday morning." And I said, "What, the Smith case?" "No, your case." I said [*laughs*], "What do you mean, my case?" Said, "Well, you've been charged with trespassin', disturbin' the peace, makin' loud noises, using abusive language—by the Klan." [*Laughs*] I said—so I went up there and got ahold of the sheriff. I said, "Sheriff, I wanna be fingerprinted and photographed." He said, "We're not gonna do that to you." I said, "Well, hell, I'm as good as they are." He never would do it. But, anyway, they transferred it to federal court, Judge Harris—he—Judge [Oren] Harris [United States District Court for Eastern and Western Districts of Arkansas, 1967–1976] got upset 'cause he was there, and he knew what was goin' on down here and wasn't gettin' a whole lotta help. But, anyway, it transferred to his court, and lo and behold, ol' Robert Shelton showed up over there for my trial. So I got ahold of the United States attorney. I said, "We need to get a marshal over here." I said, "Need to

get a subpoena for Robert Shelton—a subpoena for the defense. And I want him to produce all of his membership records for the state of Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, and”—‘cause he’d just got outta the penitentiary over there, see. So I said, “Let’s have some fun.” I said, “Let’s see how far—how serious they are about his prosecution.” So they went and got the [*laughs*] damn subpoena, gave it to ol’ Shelton, and his face fell down about that far [*raises hand above head and lowers it*]. Got red. And they had a meeting. [01:21:41] Then they came back after the meeting—they got up there—had a special prosecutor outta Camden. He got up, and he said, “Please the court, we’d like to dismiss charges against Mr. Thomas. Drop all charges.” And Judge Harris took the deal—wanted to know if any objections. ‘Course, I wa—I kinda like to gone ahead and had it done, because I didn’t trespass. That’s what the argument was over with ‘cause there was an ol’ concrete thing there that said RW on it, and I had my foot on it. After the—after this ?boy didn't? go back in, a guy came in on crutches out here at this ol’ boy’s house outta town out here. And he’s coming out—he’s mouthin’ off. I said, “You better shut your damn mouth and get back in there and tell the guy that lives here to come out. He’s the one I wanna see.” I said, “I’m gonna kick those crutches out from

under you and make you go back in with a sore foot." So he took off *unclear words*. [TD laughs] He went back in the house. So after a while, I didn't hear—about fifteen–twenty ol' boys—they all come out there. So the guy that lived there—he kept tellin' me, "You're trespassing on my property." I said, "Nah, I got my foot on the right-of-way sign here." Said, "But I own all the way to the middle of the highway." I said, "Well, I'll notify the highway department, and they can quit maintaining that, by golly, and let you take care of it." [TD laughs] So I got pretty mad, and when I get mad my mouth does kinda run away and gets ahead of my brain sometimes, and I'm sure I talked ugly to him and probably loud. But I didn't trespass, so I wasn't gonna plead guilty to any of that mess up there. But, anyway, wound up a long-cut deal. They dismissed the charges, and then they started falling by the wayside. They—I don't think ol' Robert Shelton got it—got [laughs] too active in anything after [*unclear words*]. I didn't hear a whole lot about it anyway.

[01:23:28] TD: Was the Klan down here involved in actual acts of violence or was it more intimidation?



FT: Well, a few acts of violence before I got here. They were shooting through the—mainly black preachers' houses, you know, with a .22 rifle.

[01:23:44] TD: So the black preachers were the primary target at first.

FT: Yeah, yeah, they were primary target because they were, you know, they were active in the black groups and organizations and everything. But there was a black man here in town—a leader—was a businessperson. And he and I worked very closely together. He controlled the blacks from their deal, and I said, “I’ll handle the white deal. You handle the blacks and keep them under control, and I’ll handle this other deal.” So we formed a tandem, and we worked good together. And didn’t have any problems, you know, really on anything. But . . .

[01:24:19] TD: Can you recall his name?

FT: Yeah, he’s dead now. Jake Dorton.

TD: Jake . . .

FT: *J-A-K-E D-O-R-T-O-N.*

TD: Dorton.

FT: He was a union man. He was president of steam—of the cement finishers union or somethin’ or other. Yeah, Jake was a fine friend, and he was very—he was interested in keepin’ the trouble down like I was, and so we worked real well together.

[01:24:47] TD: Mh-hmm. So most of their activity was in the form of intimidation and that sort of thing.

FT: Yeah. [*Laughs*] They—one of the main ringleaders used to call me on the phone every night. I finally recognized his voice. He'd call me and wake me up at nighttime. He'd say [*mimics distress*], "Help! Help! Help!" So I recognized his voice one night. He had a barbershop here in town. So I went down to the barbershop. There wasn't anybody in there. I walked in—I said, "Listen, Bill," I said, "if I get one more of these 'Help! Help!' phone calls at night," I said, "you gonna need some damn help." [*TD laughs*] So that stopped that business. So then later on, he was head of the klavern or whatever they called the thing. But, anyway, a guy came outta Little Rock and went over there and interviewed him. Well, he had a barbershop that faced out to the intersection. It'd been an old service station over on [*Arkansas*] Highway 15 over on the corner of Mosby [*Avenue*] and Hillsboro [*Street*] is where it was. So out there—so we pulled up there, and they had an electric traffic signal there at that time on the street. So we got him out of his barbershop out in front—set him in the passenger seat in the front, and I got in the back. This agent outta Little Rock was on the driver's side. So we's interviewin' ol' Platt, and he wouldn't tell us anything. I knew he wouldn't. After awhile the cars started piling up out there. There got to be four or five of 'em.

Well, all of 'em had his buddies—his Klan members in there. So I had an ol' piece of yellow tablet paper, and I reached in my pocket and grabbed—handed it up to ol' Platt—was all sittin' there stopped looking at us, and he grabbed that paper and stuck it down between his legs like that, see. Well, next thing you know, they're talking about Platt had nigger—cutting' nigger hair, and he was this and that and everything else. Well, they kicked him outta the club. They were his main business for his barbershop, so he had to go outta the barber business. So that kinda took care of his [*laughs*—his operation pretty quickly.

[01:26:50] TD: So there were other ways of dealing with these folks rather than arresting them and throwin' 'em in jail.

FT: Oh, yeah, yeah.

TD: Did you [*FT laughs*—did you coordinate this kind of work with your colleagues in the FBI—your superiors or did you pretty much run things on your own here?

FT: Well, I ran things on my own here, but—'course, within certain—I mean, in—within guidelines . . .

TD: Right.

FT: . . . within the . . .

TD: Yeah.

[01:27:19] FT: . . . law and everything. And then after I started



bein' real successful, then the other officers started adopting—I guess the bureau adopted the whole shootin' match then on interview program. But these ol' boys here, they'd have a meeting—they'd show up, and I'd be a-sittin' out across the street from 'em or had this deal out here on the highway or whatever. So then they decided to go down in the country—build 'em a clubhouse down there. Took an ol' abandoned farmhouse way down here in the—actually, an old pumper's shack or somethin' in the oil field out there, and it was ab—all grown up around it. So woman informant told where it was. And they bought, you know, paneling and went down and fixed it all up real nice and everything. So just 'fore they had their first meeting, I went by the radio service over there—[FT Edit: they] worked on the—our radios and the [*unclear word*] radios. 'Course, they had the insulation—bright red and bright yellow. You could see it for a half mile, you know.

TD: The wiring?

[01:28:13] FT: Yeah, off the wiring. So I collected little pieces of wire. So I get a handful of that, and I go down and just drop it around the front porch. That's a place where they couldn't keep from seein' it. [*Laughs*] So the night they're gonna have their first meeting, I got all backed up in the woods down out of the

way where [*telephone rings*] nobody knew I was backed in it and everything, and they started showing up. [*Telephone rings*] After a while, "That ?bleeping blank? Thomas been down here by—got us bugged. Got us bugged." [*TD laughs*] So it's the insulation on the ground I put out there for 'em as bait. And he [*vocalized noise*] pull the nails out. Man, they tore that thing all to pieces lookin' for a microphone, see. It—that thing pulled [*laughter*] . . .

TD: They tore down their meetinghouse lookin' for it.

FT: Yeah, worked down 'bout a month to get the thing all ready, see. And, oh, they's proud of it. [*TD laughs*] It was pretty nice. I'd been in it, but anyway it was pretty nice. They sure ramracked that thing and tore it all to pieces. Never did have an—never did have a meeting down there. But it wasn't too long again. When I retired they were just about—they were on their—on their last breath, really.

[01:29:16] TD: Yeah. When did you retire?

FT: Retired August 1973.

TD: Seventy-three. And at that point, you took another job.

FT: Yes, sir.

TD: Tell me about that. What did you do?

FT: I guess I'm more or less at heart educator because I'd been a

police instructor for the FBI—started in St. Louis teaching police classes. And, 'course, most of that work was after hours at nighttime, which I was 'generally' glad to do if I could help a, you know, help the community out—police department—I's glad to do it. And we didn't get any overtime. 'Course, if you raised durin' the Depression, you didn't expect any overtime. You worked can't see to can't see. And glad to be able to do it. Hours were eight [o'clock a.m.] to five [o'clock p.m.] or something like that, but that didn't mean anything. [Long pause] Let's see, what's the question now? I forgot what the question was.

[01:30:19] TD: I was talking about your—after you transitioned from the . . .

FT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Then I went up to the police academy up at Camden, and as a on-site director up there, they called it.



And when I got up there, there was—just had a police gathering place for police officers to come down and they'd, you know, feed 'em, and they'd—but had no testing situation to amount to anything. You could make two on the test and get your diploma at graduation.

[01:30:51] TD: This was the Law Enforcement Training Academy?

FT: Arkansas Law Enforcement Training Academy in east Camden.

Yeah. And the firearms—they, you know, they—you didn't even have to have a score on that to be qualified for the firearms. I mean, you had to—that gave you a right to go to school for, I think, two or three weeks at that time—to go out and had a pistol license to fire down the street—kill as many taxpayers as you could. See, you were covered 'cause you were a graduate of the Arkansas Law Enforcement Training Academy. So I put in some deals there—85 percent on firearms; 75 percent, I think, on a mental test; and give—gave organized tests. Each instructor would give in the questions and then put a test together. And try to improve the teaching capabilities. Wound up we's usin' more outside instructors than we were on the Camden people on the state payroll up there. They had one guy up there was runnin' the show 'fore I went up there. He was a high school dropout. I think he finished—quit school in the ninth grade, but he was up there runnin' the police academy.

[01:32:01] And after I quit, then Governor [David] Pryor [1975–1979] fired a bunch up there then. And he wound up [*laughs*]—'bout only thing he had left—made him a director up there for a while till they get a more permanent director. But you couldn't—I couldn't do anything up there because this ol' boy was a dropout—that—set a policy, get together, we'd adopt

somethin' else, you know. They'd—between classes up there 'fore I got up there, if they had two weeks between classes, they'd all just take a two-week vacation up there. All of 'em wore uniform—carried a gun, which they didn't have any authority to do. So I took the uniforms and the guns away from them—gave the guns to the state police. And, 'course, they'd run to see the [Arkansas state] senator up there in Camden. The senator—he'd fuss around about it. He'd get ahold of some of the commissioners or somethin' or other up there, and they didn't like that. So I finally just got tired of foolin' with it.

[01:32:55] TD: That was [Arkansas] Senator [J. A.] "Dooley" Womack [1971–1982] . . .

FT: Yeah.

TD: . . . from Camden?

FT: Yeah.

TD: So you were there about three years?

FT: I was there for three years—yeah, roughly.

TD: And that was during the Pryor administration.

FT: Well, partly [Governor Dale] Bumpers's [1971–1975] . . .

TD: Uh-huh.

FT: . . . administration, too, and then . . .

TD: Yeah, if you went there in [19]73, that would've been . . .

FT: Yeah, yeah. I think the latter . . .

TD: . . . during Bumpers's second term.

FT: Yeah, Bumpers's second term. And then Pryor was governor when I quit. I got several phone calls. They wasn't comin' from him, but I got several phone calls wantin' to know if I'd go back up there. And after I left—well, when—that was another thing I left up there. We had some people up there that would tell 'em—you know, started havin' a lotta ladies come up there to classes. And they would just tell vulgar, nasty jokes up there in class that didn't mean anything. It was embarrassing even to a lotta human—lotta men, much less ladies in the class. So I complained about that. So I wrote that up and sent it in. And then I get the governor's office a notice of information I sent up there, but then these guys kept on workin'. So finally, somebody leaked it out about this goin' on up there.

TD: Mh-hmm.

[01:34:15] FT: And it may have been Bobby Newman up there—
[Arkansas state] representative [1969–1998] up at Smackover. But, anyway, Sen—Governor Pryor got ahold of the information. He ?hailed? up there and fired all of 'em for their conduct. And then I got a call in—wanted to know if I'd come back up there. Not from his office, but some people that I knew that he knew

that I knew. They called me and—worked for the state, and they wanted to know if I'd go back up there. And I—so I just went to work for myself—private investigator—and worked for some law firms and Georgia-Pacific [Corp.], doin' workman's comp cases and different things like that. Somethin' I want to point out here, and maybe—'bout politics and things.



TD: Yeah.

[01:34:57] FT: Just 'fore they sent up there to the Battle of the Bulge up there to—most of that thing during World War II—pulled us back to Worms, Germany—*W-O-R-M-S*—Worms, Germany.

TD: Mh-hmm.

FT: Had a great big plant back there . . .

TD: Cathedral.

FT: . . . that made synthetic oil and gas—I mean, synthetic rubber and gasoline. Well, an ol' boy and I got to roamin' 'round the first day we's there—we're there a day and a night, I think it was—roamin' around—we came across this plant. And I don't believe there's a light bulb broke in the place. And the plaque outside on the front door out there beside the thing—a brass plaque—said I. G. Farben Industries [Intressen-Gemeinschaft Farbenindustrie AG], E. I. DuPont demures [Eleuthère Irénée

DuPont De Nemours] . . .

TD: Hmm.

FT: . . . Dover, Delaware, on it. I don't think politics had been involved in anything like that. [*Laughter*] We's over there gettin' shot at and everything. They had a plant over there that belonged to American interests over there—hell, they hadn't had a bomb anyplace close to it—across the Rhine River.

TD: And they'd been making . . .

FT: And the Rhine had islands out there—big gasoline storage tanks—Standard Oil in Jer—New Jersey written all over 'em. Didn't have a hole in 'em.

[01:36:08] TD: Even though they were available to the Nazis. And [*FT laughs*] so you learned a lot about politics at that point.

FT: Yeah, yeah. Well, ol' Mississippi, you know—they—we had those bodies uncovered over there at three o'clock in the afternoon. We couldn't notify the coroner until six o'clock till President [Lyndon Baines] Johnson [1963–1969] and Governor [Paul B.] Johnson [1964–1968] of Mississippi had a joint press announcement.

[01:36:32] TD: For the three murdered . . .

FT: Civil rights workers.

TD: . . . civil rights workers.

FT: . . . in the dam out there at Philadelphia [Mississippi].

TD: Yeah.

FT: See, I spent three months over there that summer.

[01:36:42] TD: So you were in Mississippi during the great summer of . . .

FT: [Nineteen] sixty-four.

TD: Yeah. And they—that has a name—that summer in Mississippi has a name, and I've forgotten what it is, but it's like the summer of conflict or something like that. [Editor's Note: Freedom Summer or the Mississippi Summer Project] So you were over there during all of that?

FT: Yes, sir.

TD: Did you . . .



FT: Got over there—the—about a day or two—about a day, I'd guess, after those people disappeared because John Proctor was a [FBI] agent [1952–1978] over there in Meridian [Mississippi]. And I got over there one night about—I was in Hot Springs at that time—I got over there one night probably around nine o'clock, and I called the office on the radio. And they sent me out to motel—already had a reservation—went out there and went to bed. Went down to John's office the next day. And he and I went off down to Philadelphia down in there lookin' around,

and we's ridin' down this road, and this guy who Jo—I'm sure John knew him—just come outta nowhere, more or less, and flagged us down. Stopped. He said, "That car's over here in the bushes." So . . .

[01:37:53] TD: That was the car from the murdered . . .

FT: It was the car that was . . .

TD: . . . victims.

FT: . . . rented car—the station wagon these three civil rights were drivin'. So John and I went over there. You couldn't see us from the road. We just drove in the bushes—kinda came back around it. But that car—I never have found what accelerant they used—but the inside of that car was absolutely burned completely out—even the works of the dashboard fell down, and all the upholstery burnt off of it. There's a part of a shoe there—just mainly some shoe nails. Wasn't even scorched on the outside. And the driver's side door was open there about a inch or two inches.

TD: Hmm.

FT: And the right bumper over here had some paint—had some fresh paint scrapin's on it, which we later tied that in with a guy who owned a jukebox business down at—an ol' town down south of Meridian down there.

[01:38:50] TD: What did they do? Did they force 'em off the road?

FT: Well . . .

TD: Is that what explains the paint . . .

FT: Well, what they did is Cecil Price was a—was the deputy sheriff over there. Cecil went to the penitentiary on a civil rights violation, so that's all we had to charge him with—civil rights. But Cecil went to the church that Preacher [Edgar Ray] Killen was the pastor of. 'Course, Killen—he's in the penitentiary over there now, you know, but ol' Price was keepin' Killen advised of what was goin' on. But these people went to town—a little black boy [James Chaney] went down there to show 'em where these places were that these churches these people'd been burnin' up—black churches burned up down there. And he's just ol' sixteen-year-old boy. [Editor's Note: James Chaney was twenty-one years old at the time of his death]. He just went along just to show these two white boys, [Michael] Schwerner and [Andrew] Goodman, where to go. Well, they put 'em in jail, and Killen's instructions were—I found out later—that when they let 'em outta jail and get 'em on the highway out there and just beat the hell out of 'em. Well, that's intent. Well, they got 'em outta the car. One of these idiots hit one of 'em upside the head with a pistol, and when it did, it went off—shot another one.

Well, then the panic set in. And that's when they took 'em down there and killed the other two.

[01:40:16] TD: And buried 'em in a dam.

FT: Buried 'em in a dam. We had access to the navy high-altitude photography deal. They had a school out there. And they'd take pictures every day—every day. Well, we had five hundred sailors—can't use the marine or the army on stuff like that, but we can use the navy. So they had these five hundred sailors and these search party. Agents go with 'em—they'd just go search. They'd drag ponds. They'd check this; check that. And those—these [*laughs*] sailors found out—take a firecracker and throw in these chicken houses, you know, and [*unclear words*] chickens'd panic and go up there and smother each other up there in the chicken house. No tellin' how many chickens Uncle Sam bought over [*unclear words*] mess with those kids. Well, never did find 'em. So it finally got around at a conference one night—somebody's—I don't know, me or somebody suggested, "Well, we got access to these high-altitude photographs. Let's find—" they'd been doin' some highway work out there and different deals. "Let's find out the—what was under construction at that time." 'Cause, you know, we couldn't find any graves. Couldn't find where anybody'd dug anything. So it—logical deal

was they put on some kinda new construction. Well, we [laughs]—one ol' boy I was askin' for photographs said, "How big?" I said, "Five by ten" or "eight by ten." So this guy was sent out there to get it, he called back on the telephone—he said—or the radio—he said, "Hey," he said, "these—I need a truck." Said, "What for?" Said, "This photograph is eight feet by ten feet." So we said—so somebody said, "Well, we meant eight by ten inches." So we didn't take that photograph, 'course. He didn't have—had 'em make on that the—but even at the—even then, though, those things was so detailed you could read [FT Edit: see] the barb—find the barb on a barbed-wire fence.

[01:42:02] Well, and somebody came up with the idea to make a device that—hand arder—auger, you know, to put a drill bit on the end of it to where you could—and twist it—and, 'course, we'd have to be over about nine feet long. The highway's only about eighteen feet long. The body fluids come out, and you could get a little scent with that deal there. 'Cause you could tell 'bout where they were this time of day—this period of time. So finally everything come down to—except this dam out there that had been checked. Well, approx—now I was at the—most—all this time mostly I was the liaison man with the Mississippi Highway Safety Patrol. And then we got word that the Klan was gonna

burn down this black hotel in Philadelphia. That's where the white—COFO workers—the Council of Federated Organizations meeting was. That's where they all stayed—they's gonna burn down. Well, ol' Floyd, see, he was there and he g—so far—and he got the job bein' the night—in charge of night patrol of Philadelphia to keep 'em from burnin' down the deal [FT Edit: hotel]. So that was—so the day they started digging on this dam, I's in the motel asleep—workin' from seven o'clock at night—seven in the mornin'. So I wasn't—I's sleepin' 'bout ten o'clock in the mornin' the phone rang, answered it, and it was Proctor. Said, "We think we got the bodies located." Said, "Go by the lumber company. And I already ordered the lumber to shore the sides up on this place out here." So I went by lu—got dressed, went by the lumber company, got the lumber put on the car, and drove out to where the site was. I's one of the few people that knew where it was 'cause John and I'd been by the day before to serve a search warrant on this ol' boy, see, to search the forty acres where it was. [01:43:45] So just before I got there, I heard 'em say, "Here's a—found a shoe heel." So I got on up there, and about the time it's down pretty close. Well, they had 'em uncovered—had a—went over to Jackson—got a guy on one of these big dirt-moving things and they had that

thing located so accurate, they just went in and dug one big hole 'bout the size of this room probably and dug down and dug right down to 'em. Well, the two white guys were buried on the left—I don't remember what direction—if that it'd been north, south, east, or west. But when I got down in the hole down there with the lumber, this one guy—first thing I noticed, his right hand was closed about that extent [FT demonstrates with his fist] and had dirt in it, which was an indication to me that—that . . .

TD: He was alive.

[01:44:34] FT: . . . that he was alive when they put him down there.

And the other guy was next to him, and he had—he's the one that had the beard, but his beard had slipped down on his chest down there pretty much, but—and the black kid was layin'—they were layin' face down with their hands stretched out front—the white boys were. And the black boy was over here on the—say, if you're facing the way that they were fac—headin'—be on the far right, he was layin' on his back with his head to the west [pause] no his head to the east with his face turned to the south. The white boys over there with their face to the east face down. And somebody told me that was a Ku Klux Klan burial.

[01:45:23] TD: That was a Ku Klux Klan burial?

FT: Burial. That's—that was their . . .

TD: That's how they did it?

FT: That's the way Ku Klux Klan had their ceremonial deals on people they'd killed or whatever, and they put in the—and buried 'em. But that was a Klan burial site—burial deal. So [*laughs*] then—said, well, you know, "Got the bodies." Proctor went over there on the telephone and called the office there in Meridian. They said, "Well, hold on." Next thing, they come back and said, "Well, you can't notify the coroner till six o'clock." This is in August. Twenty-five-foot hole in the ground. And had to set there and wait till the six o'clock news come on that night that President Johnson and Governor Johnson from Mississippi made a joint press announcement that the bodies had been found, and then they notified the coroner. Well, then ol' Floyd, who happened to be around there then—he got the job [*laughs*] of keeping the news media out from photographin' and stompin' the area down and everything. So they—here come a car pulled up there at a cattle gap's all it was—and pulled up there—you could hear it. When the word got out, boy, the news media's—they's real—nobody knew we's out there except us—the people that's out there and the contractor. Hear these cars, boy, squeakin' on the highway about a half mile over there off this ol' dirt road over there on the highway. You could hear those ol'

tires squeakin' and squallin'. So the media come. Boy, they come runnin' up there and started runnin' for that fence. I said, "Whup! Whup! Don't go any farther, fella. You can't come across that fence." "What are you gonna do if I come down there?" I said, "I'll take you and I'm gonna handcuff you to that pine tree over there and let you sit out there and let the mosquitoes have you all night long. So don't come by that." So then a car come up there, and it was the captain—the chief investigator of the Mississippi Highway Safety Patrol, and one other—I think maybe the commander of the highway patrol with him and Cecil Price in the back seat—the deputy. And I started—in fact, New York—I mean, *Birmingham News* had a picture of me next day in the paper—about that wide [uses hands to indicate size], about a fourth of the front page—said, "FBI agent supresses news." And it so happened—had ol' Cecil lookin' up at me, and I'm lookin' at Cecil in that back seat, and I'm tryin' to make up my mind whether even let him in or not. Well, I did. I let him on—go on down. I couldn't hardly keep him out since he's with them. So I went down there, and ol' Cecil helped put those people in the body bags. He knew where they were all the time, and he helped put 'em in the body bags.

[01:48:02] TD: Was he ever ever prosecuted?

FT: He was prosecuted for civil rights violations—spent, oh, I don't know, year or two in the penitentiary—I think over there at Texarkana. And they called me about comin' over there and testifyin' on this murder trial on the state deal. See, the state don't have subpoena power to cross state line, but they called and wanted to know if I'd go. I said, "Sure, I'll be glad to." I just gone on back over there and sit in on that mess when they tried Killen.

TD: Which was not too long ago.

[01:48:30] FT: Yeah. And they called me, and I told 'em, "Yeah, I'll be glad to." And then they called back again, you know, everything's on that deal, and then they called me back—said, "Well, think that they could prove what they're gonna use you for—prove by other means," or somethin' or other. "You ?hadn't got? to go over there then." And I's disappointed, really, 'cause, hell, I wanted to go over there. And so, anyway, I didn't get over there. They convicted ol' Killen finally over the other deal. And Cecil fell out of a—workin'—fact, ol' Cecil was killed—fell off a cherry picker or somethin' or other—hit on his head over there not too long 'fore ol' Killen was arrested. And he was a-workin' for the same guy whose farm the pond was on. So whether it had anything to do with it—where he—I do know right after I got

there, this guy—somebody said, “There’s a man comin’ across the field down there.” And little ol’ sprouts and things, oh, ‘bout waist high. So I figured, “Oh, what’s that ol’ boy doin’ out there?” So I took off down there where I met him ‘bout, oh, quarter mile, I guess, away from the dam. And, ‘course, I saw him and knew who he was. I’d seen him the day before—we served that search warrant on him. He come out there and wanted to know what’s goin’ on. I said, “Well, you’re not—you need to get off this property. It’s under our control.” So I didn’t—he just turned around and didn’t say anything. He went on back and got in his car and left. [01:49:51] But that night after we got ‘em outta there, had two ol’ boys—they wouldn’t help. They wouldn’t help do anything—from up north someplace. [*Laughs*]

[01:49:59] TD: FBI people?

FT: Yeah. And so had to leave somebody on the dam down there, see, to protect it, you know, for crime scene purposes. And the odor wasn’t too good over that way, you know. Anyway, I left them over there at night. So we was over there out on this—where this cattle gap was, and then the state trooper’s over there—about, oh, eleven o’clock, I guess, midnight, and everything’s slowed down. I said, “Man, I’d like to have a cold

beer." The old boy said, "Would you?" "Oh, sure enough." I said, "Yeah." He went and raised that trunk of the patrol car. [Laughs] He had a whole ice chest full of beer iced down. So we started having us a party. We was rared up on the back of those cars there. We drank that beer along, you know, throwin' the empties over the fence [laughs] over there. And he had some salami and cheese, crackers—had all—everything you need in there for a picnic. So I guess about one o'clock in the morning, I heard the damndest commotion you ever heard in your life. Well, I heard some noise over there in the woods, and then I heard somethin' comin' through the woods—sounded like an elephant stampede. Here come these two ol' boys—man, their clothes 'bout half tore off of 'em. Said, "Man, somethin's after us." I said, "Man, have you ever heard of a screech owl?" "No." I said, "Well, that was a screech owl." So I had to go back right with 'em [TD laughs] and put 'em back in the spot over there. So I went back over there then. We went—we finished up workin' on that case of beer. There's four of us over there, I guess it was. So we're gettin' along there, you know, and all of us got to feelin' pretty good. Got our belly full of that salami [laughs] and everything. We'd just been throwing the cans over the fence. I said, "Fellas, you know what?" Said,

"What?" Said, "Hell, we need to pick all this mess up over here. Gonna be some more folks comin' out here come daylight." So we policed up our mess over there. We got back to Meridian the next morning, and we had to pull our clothes off outside the motel and get a guy to take 'em out there and burn 'em.

[01:51:48] TD: Because of the stench. Yeah. But you had seen two FBI agents routed by a screech owl.

FT: I sure did. Boy, I mean [*laughs*], they were clearin' the brush out through there.

TD: They were . . .

FT: They had a car over there, but they didn't get in the car and drive out. They just [*laughs*] took off on foot.

TD: They were city boys.

FT: Yeah. 'Course, you know, I guess ?they? had a little bit of a sense of humor, which I have one, you know. That kinda helps with this kinda [*laughs*] deal sometimes.

[01:52:19] TD: Mh-hmm. Did you ever feel personally endangered during any of that?

FT: Nah, there's some people wanted us to feel personally endangered. See, Mr. Hoover never would let us have air-conditioned cars. He said, "If you had air-conditioned cars, you'd spend all the time in your car and not

out covering leads.” Well, he didn’t have sense enough to know that we had enough sense, by God, to get in the police station someplace [*laughs*] where it was cool if we got too hot. Hell, we’re the ones running around without air—with the windows down. And these ol’ boys—they’d, you know, they’d go over there, and they’d sneak around and hide, and they’d light a fire—package of firecrackers—try to throw ‘em in the car. Well, you hit that brake and that door, boy, it’d open—shoot, you couldn’t caught ‘em with a thirty-aught-six [.30-06] running off down the street. They hit the ground runnin’. But we had some people threatened over there that night, that first night, I guess it was, that I had that crew over there on—let’s see, had [*pause*] three other cars and me over there—two guys to a car and I’s by myself. But we had a van that pulled up over there and threatened ‘em. So I went over there and got the van and got the people outta the van and got their weapons and called ol’ Cecil Price—made him come down and take charge of ‘em. Took ‘em out to the motel. [01:53:17] We had a little ol’ headquarters set up there in Philadelphia. I called—about two o’clock in the morning, I called a guy who was the inspector runnin’ the show down there in Meridian. I said, “Look, you need to come down here. We got these guys threatenin’ these

agents down here.” And I said, “You need to come down here and call the department—get us some prosecution.” I said, “I’m not puttin’ up with that crap.” He called the [United States] Department of Justice in Washington [DC]—their answer was, “Well, we don’t wanna cause any more problems down there.” So I told ‘em—I said, “I tell you what, we’re goin’ back there again tonight.” “Yeah, can’t let ‘em burn that hotel down.” I said, “Well, tell you what, we’ll be out there near that motel. We’re gonna be backed up butt-to-butt like a bunch of quail in the woods. And my instruction to these men gonna be, ‘if anybody comes up there and pulls a gun on you [and] you have to shoot him, shoot him and head for the up—head for Alabama border,’” which wasn’t too far, “and don’t stop till you get home.”” So we went there, and we backed up that night. We stayed there, man. I wasn’t gonna let those people intimidate me and run me out of the city. ‘Course, you might say that was a threat. I guess it was. But I didn’t—I just didn’t have—after what I’d been through before that when I was eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old, you know, you just don’t—you don’t recognize a lotta that stuff.

[Tape stopped]

[01:54:59] TD: I wanted to ask you about bank robberies. That’s

one of the things that traditionally the FBI has dealt with. Did you have any experience with bank robbers?

FT: When I came to St. Louis, bank robbers had been out of style for a while, and I'd been in St. Louis a while—I was workin'—first thing I did in St. Louis was work what was called prosecuting [prosecution] summaries for the Smith Act trials. That was the Communist [Party] functionaries, you know. And prosecuted a bunch—then [United States] Supreme Court ruled that they didn't—you could advocate the violent overthrow of the government as long as you didn't act on it or somethin' or other. So I had prepared those prosecuting [prosecution] summaries, and then we started having bank robberies. So I wound up half of a bank robbery squad. Another guy named [Leander] Muncie and I were the bank robbery squad in St. Louis. And that's all I worked for, I'd say, couple years up there in St. Louis. And I tell you somethin' else. I'm not braggin' or anything—I'm not complainin'—I only had one bank robbery go unsolved. I solved all the rest of the bank robberies—solved half of this one. But I worked bank robberies in St. Louis, and I worked 'em—had several that occurred down in south—southeast Missouri also. But a bank robber—when the bank's usually robbed, say, two to three o'clock in the afternoon—maybe two o'clock. But lots of

times I'd go down to a bank robbery scene, and it'd be a group of detectives—St. Louis detectives on duty, and I worked with them till four o'clock. Then here'd come another bunch. I'd work with them till eleven. And here'd come another bunch—we'd work till seven. Here come the same bunch the day before back on duty again, and we'd work till—I worked the clock around many times. But I'm convinced that the only way to solve a bank robbery is work that thing about twenty-four hours straight to thirty-six hours without a blink of sleep or anything 'cause when it's hot, it's hot. You get all that information down and then you can start sorting it out and then go on from there.

[01:57:07] But I had one guy down in Ar—north Arkansas came and robbed a bank up in Missouri. There's two men involved. And one guy—I'm as convinced as I'm sittin' right here now—was a ci—was a marshal in a town down in north Arkansas was a good friend of this guy. And they came up there and robbed that dadgum bank. Well, I nailed one guy on it—that owned the car. Tried him at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and jury turned him loose. So I got all my stuff together, and I's leavin' the courthouse. The judge [Harper] had been across the street havin' a cup of coffee. He come back over there to—met him halfway. Said, "Well, Floyd, what're you gonna do now?" Said,

"Well, Judge, I guess go out and find a bank robber." Said, "You mean the other one." That jury—later on I'd run into people way over there on the Current River bottoms [in Missouri], way out in those those woods ?rats? people back over in there. And I'd run into 'em, and they'd say, "You're the guy had that bank robbery that we tried over there." I'd say, "Yeah." Said—[*laughs*—said, "I don't know why I voted to turn that guy loose." Said, "The first vote was eleven to one [11 to 1] for conviction." And one guy from Sikeston, Missouri, was a good friend of the defense attorney. And he—that son of a gun swung those other eleven around to his way of thinkin'. And those people—still mad at themselves two [*laughs*] years later, because they turned the guy loose, see. But any time you're on a deal like that, you're only ?half-baked?. If you got two people involved, you on a—the defense attorney got all kinda pickin' to do, you know.

[01:58:43] But bank robbery's a lotta fun. 'Course, we finally—we started makin' 'em over there, and then—and they quit robbin' banks over at St. Louis division and started going over to Illinois. 'Cause those judges over there on the St. Louis side—twenty years was light for—they's anywhere from twenty—twenty-five years. Somebody got hurt, they gave 'em twenty-five years. That's twenty-two and a half, twenty years. You'd

go over to East St. Louis, Illinois, and rob a bank—get the same thing out of it. And if—the judge might give you ten years—might give you five years, see. Well, these thieves—they got the idea—said, “Hell, it’s better [*laughs*] to rob a bank in Illinois than it is in Missouri.

[01:59:19] TD: And that was another FBI jurisdiction.

FT: Yeah.

TD: You did not have to deal with that.

FT: Yeah. They had a bank robbery down at Pevely, Missouri, one time. Three ol’ boys robbed it. And so I was down there, and the whole bank—building and all—you could probably fit in this room right here. Just take it, lock, stock, and barrel. Sit down in here. I think they got ‘bout seventy-five–eighty thousand dollars. Well, we got part of it—made the case but took awhile, and they’d spent most of it. But I went down and talked to ‘em one time—they said, “They missed the big money.” I said, “What do you mean, the big money?” Said, “See those fruit jar boxes under that counter?” Said, “Yeah.” Said, “They all full of money.” Had a [*laughs*—had a big mill over there nearby, and they’d take that money in that ol’ box down there and didn’t—hell, they didn’t have a vault big enough to hold it. So they’d go to St. Louis—one of the banks up there—and bring it down and

leave it in these fruit jar boxes. If they needed money, pick it up there and put it—put money on the pot.

TD: So . . .

[02:00:26] FT: The other way I got word one time—was informant—they're gonna rob a bank at—on Delmar up close to—up on Delmar and Broadway [FT Edit: in St. Louis]. Delmar runs right across the bridge over into Illinois over there. Well, this bank—Broadway runs right along the river, more or less. So chief detective and I went over there. And they had moneybags just stacked up like cordwood behind the teller's deal over there on dollies—these big dollies. And all they had to do was run those dollies out there in a truck out there and take a right—boy, you're over in Illinois. You know, it took us about an hour or so to talk those people into takin' it on the elevator back downstairs and bring it up there as they needed it.

TD: Mh-hmm. And you had, through an informant, learned that they had been targeted for robbery.

[02:01:17] FT: Uh-huh. But after they moved the money—they had an old man in there about a hundred and five years old as a guard. [TD laughs] You know, [laughs] had an ol' gun strapped on. Probably if you fired it, cobwebs'd probably come out the end of it before any lead ever finally found its way out. But he

was their security. He sat over there like this [feigns sleep] most all the time, asleep. But the—boy, people—we had another one over at—bank robbery. And some soldiers outta hundred and first [101st] Airborne [Division] over in [Fort Campbell] Kentucky came over there in southeast Arkansas—southeast Missouri and robbed one. And on the way up there, a state trooper was behind me, and I called him on the radio. I said, “Stop at this restaurant here. See if they got any information.” So before I got to the scene over there, he called me and said, “I wanna see you.” So he come over there and said, “The ol’ boys from Kentucky’s license—tried to put a make on this ol’ gal over there, and she wrote their license number down. She’s gonna go meet ‘em someplace.” We ran a check on it—a hundred and first [101st] Airborne—ol’ boy actually was from Chaffee, Missouri. Went over there at Chaffee that night—searched a chicken house—had old settin’ hen on a nest up there settin’, and by God, we come up with ‘bout seventy-somethin’ thousand dollars out from under that old hen a-settin’ on some eggs. And underneath that they had this money all stacked under there. [02:02:41] Well, in countin’ the money—counted at night, so we got—it’s probably three o’clock in the morning, I guess, ‘fore we got through, and didn’t have any place to put it. He said,

"Why don't you take it home with you, and then you can bring it back over to the bank in the morning" "Okay." So I took it home with me, and 'fore I got home a damn fuse burned out in my headlight, so I went the last ten miles with that seventy-somethin' thousand dollars [*laughs*] in my car, with my flashlight out the window, drivin' the car. So I got home, put it under the bed. Went out to the patrol station next morning. I said, "Let's count this money again." So we counted it—it was four dollars short of what we'd had the night before. So a guy name of Wallis—O. L. Wallis—*W-A-L-L-I-S*—he was a captain over there, and he said, "Oh, hell, ol' Floyd just stopped and got him a case of beer." Said, "Just take it back over there and give it to 'em." So the trooper and I took it over there and gave it to 'em. And the guy said—I said, "We'll go back here and be—let's count this to be sure to get it—'fore you get a receipt."

[02:03:38] TD: This is at the bank.

FT: Yeah. The guy—president of the bank—he said, "Nah," said, "We'll—we'll go back here. We'll count it. Y'all wait up here." He went back there and counted that money. I believe he came—gave us a receipt for—I think we came up with seventy-eight thousand dollars best that I remember, and he gave us a receipt for ninety-four thousand dollars. I said, "That—we didn't

have that much money." "That's what we counted." Well, after a bank robbery, the federal examiners and the state examiners—they come in—they examine the bank. Well, 'course, it's insured, and somebody in that bank had hit that till for 'bout twenty thousand dollars, so that's their way of gettin' their money . . .

TD: Back.

[02:04:16] FT: . . . paid back. Had a high school band director at Jackson, Missouri—robbed three banks up there within—well, in a short distance. And we had—we'd get, you know, get to the bank and get at it—run outta leads—run outta leads. I's talking to ol' marshal—there was a city marshal up there at Jackson. He said, "You know," said, "I don't know whether it's got anything to do with it or not," but he said, "every time had that robbery—hit one bank twice—" said, "every time have that bank robbery down there," he said, "this guy come by and sits in the car and talks to me—he's always out that direction of your bank robbery." So he had a bandstand over on the square at Jackson. So a state trooper—he took one lady, and I took one of mine over on the other side of the square over there, and that ol' boy stepped out to direct that band, and gal with me grabbed my arm—she liked to fainted. Said, "That's him. That's him." The

gal on the other side of the square told the same thing. Well, the last time it was robbed, one of these women had put a little adding machine tape underneath the band on the bills—said, “This stack is one 20 short.” So next mor—so we's arrest that ol' boy that night. Took these gals back to their home or car or wherever—where they was, and we arrest him. Took him down to the [pause] office—trooper's office over there. Interviewed him. 'Course, he denied everything. But ever time I'd ask him a question 'bout money, he'd say “Well, it's—” asked him 'bout something or other, he'd say, “Well, it's probably out at the high—probably out in the band room.” Everything was out in the band room. So I got a search warrant for his house, and I told the troopers—I said, “You all go out there and check his band room. I believe that's where we're gonna find the stuff.

[02:06:02] So I's up in the commissioner's office gettin' the search warrant for his house, and they called—said, “Wanna show you somethin'. Wanna show you somethin'. Stay right where you are.” So I—they brought it up there in the commissioner's office and opened that box—opened a box—hell, there was a stack of money in there. And underneath one stack, a little piece of white paper stickin' out—pulled that paper out—said, “This stack is one \$10 short.” Gave him a polygraph.

Passed the polygraph three times. And they had a brand new polygraph examiner—state police did—and, hell, that ol' boy, he passed those things in flying colors, boy. He's just such a good liar, he passed 'em. [*Laughs*] Ol' Hoover didn't like polygraphs. [02:06:55] Had a kidnappin' in St. Louis one time. You aware of that thing? It's the Greenlease kidnappin'—little [Bobby] Greenlease kid—kidnapped in Kansas City by a woman name of Bonnie Brown Heady and Carl Austin Hall. Heady was from a good family over there—good woman. She got on dope and drugs. And ol' Heady's—I mean, ol' Hall's daddy was a judge, and he got on dope and drugs. So they got this little ol' boy outta school one day, and Heady went up there posed as a nurse and took him outta school, and they took him—put in a station wagon—took him over into north Kansas City [Kansas] and killed him. Ol' Hall hit him in the mouth—just drove his ol' teeth back in his mouth, then shot at him once and missed him, and then sh—bullet hit the dash—came back underneath the front seat. And the next time he shot him in the head—wrapped him up in some oilcloth—we called those things—plastic deal they call it nowadays—put him in back of the deal. Drove him in—back into Kansas City [Missouri]. She lived up at St. Joe [St. Joseph, Missouri]. So went in to get 'em a drink, and she spit on a

Kleenex, wiped the blood off of Hall's face. Blood drippin' out of the back of the station wagon all the time. [02:08:04] So, anyway, they picked him up at—over in St.—picked him up over at St. Louis later on. He was supposed been insurance adjuster—come over there and got him a prostitute. Cab driver got her for him and everything. She was out at the motel on [US] Highway 66 [also know as Route 66]. Coral Motel—C-O-R—Coral [Court] Motel. And it was one of these kinda—come-as-you-are place, you know. Go out there—about fifteen-minute rental deal. And for part of it—part of it was for legitimate traffic. But, anyway, ol' Hall got drunk and passed out. So his prostitute—she looked in—had two metal suitcases—she looked in metal suitcases—full of money. Ten- and twenty-dollar bills. Well, he'd been tellin' this cab driver he's a insurance embezzler. Well, the cab driver called a lieutenant he worked for—called his boss, ol'—a guy name of Joe Costello. Costello called his buddy, Lieutenant [Louis Ira] Shoulders, fourth district police department up there—on St. Louis Police Department. So they took ol'—Carl had—ha—[John Oliver] Hager, the cab driver, take him out to little ol' hotel out in north [pause] west St. Louis. Well, ol'—they were remodelin'. They were—had two room numbers on either room—repaintin', redoin'

the thing. Well, they wound up, ol' Costello had on a bright yellow sport coat. So he went up there to go—gonna take charge on those two metal suitcases this ol' boy had. And people saw him leavin' out there with him in his coat and the guy in handcuffs and two people carryin' suitcases. And then the people where ol' Costello lived heard one scoot across the porch that dusky night in October, you know, and they's sittin' on the porch out there in little ol' cul-de-sac deal. So then they called the agent in charge, and he went down there to the police station. He—and they pulled a stack of bills out—called on the ra—on the telephone and checked 'em, and it's that bank robbery loot. So he checked another—well, then city police department ?everybody in that's down there?, hell, they knew it's bank robbery loot then. [02:10:23] So then the—one of the metal suitcases turned up empty out there at the fourth district. But one of 'em had two hundred—one we finally counted the money on was two hundred and ninety-seven thousand dollars. Well, three hundred and three thousand dollars never was recovered. But we know it got to ol' Costello's house, and Costello had a gas furnace in his basement. He went down and fed that gas furnace for three hundred and three thousand dollars. Well, they had 'em in jail over there, and if we couldn't

make a case on 'em within twenty-four hours or somethin' or other, well, they were goin' to—we'd held 'em as long as we could under investigation—was gonna have to file some charges. Well, the state wanted us to prosecute 'em. Well, they called me—wanted me to have—consent to take a polygraph. We never had done anything with polygraph. So I—best of my limited ability on legalities and everything, I had 'em typed up. So went over there, and ol' Hall—got him to si—he signed—had him sign duplicate. So went to ol' Heady's cell, and she's still—she's, oh, foulmouthed. That woman knew more dirty cuss words than any sailor or Floyd Thomas or anybody else. I mean, boy, she could really lay it out on you. So—to take a polygraph. Well, she said—she just cussed up a storm, down another. But, anyway, Hall said he'd take it. So then called the bureau, and they flew a guy out, and at that time there were two little ol' metal cases about that much [FT holds out hands to indicate size]—the polygraph machine. Well, the St. Louis City Jail sits out by itself. It's a rectangular building with three floors or whatever. There were newspaper people there from all over the world. All kind of still photographs and movies and everything else—TV just come into being not too long before that.

[02:12:12] But, anyway [*laughs*], then they called me in and

said, "Here's—this is so-and-so—agent so-and-so outta Washington [DC]. He's a polygraph man." Said, "Mr. Hoover said to get him in the jail and get him out without bein' photographed." Well, hell, the only way in the place'd be in the front door, and the only way out's through the front door. So I just had some guy drive us where they couldn't see us from the jail there, and I had to carry the stuff about a half a block. I said, "You just follow me." So he followed me. Went in there and "Pardon me." People parted and let us right up to the jail. Went in. Wasn't a flashbulb pop. He went in. Well, in the meantime, ol' Hall's—Heady'd decided she'd take the polygraph. She'd already—and then she admitted to the deal. She said, "I might as well tell the truth or Hall's goin' to. You're gonna find out he's lyin'." So anyways—so this guy got through, and I said, "Well, you go on back over to the office and tell 'em to send a car over here on Market Street and 12th and—or 18th and Market, and I'll meet 'em over there with these suitcases—give 'em polygraph." So I get back to the office—checked in up there, and the switchboard operator said, "Mr. Hostetter,"—ol' boy named Donald Hostetter? was the agent in charge at Newark at that time, and they run him out there to run that show. Well, Hostetter was from over here at Bradley County to start with.

He had a—glasses on—they broke, and he had a damn paper clip [laughs] holdin' his glasses together. So, anyway, walked in—he had a big grin on his face. This agent was sitting there—come outta Washington. Ol' Hostetter, "Thomas," he said, "tell me what happened." I told him. [02:13:40] He said—so I said, "Went in the front door. There's no flash—no flashes." I said, "Hell, you can't slip around and get in a place like that." And I said, "But they didn't get any picture taken." "You didn't?" "No," I said, "hell, we didn't get a picture made, and we comin' out—didn't either." That ol' boy's sittin' there scared to death. Boy, he knew he's gonna get fired. Mr. Hoover's gonna cut him loose from his [laughs]—from his deal. He was a chemist or somethin' back there in the lab. But, anyway, they filed federal charges on 'em. Got a conviction. Put 'em in the gas chamber over there in Jeff City [Jefferson City, Missouri], and the old boy worked over there told me—said that the last thing Hall [FT Edit: Heady] said, "Carl, honey, have they got the blindfold on you?" He said, "No." She says, "Is my dress down?" [Pause] And they put the blindfold on him. Walked out there and put the pill in the deal and there—that's all there was to them.

TD: Hmm.

[02:14:36] FT: But that—they pick that little ol' boy up there, and

they put him in the backyard and buried him in the backyard and put lime on him and dirt on top of him. He's there two weeks, I guess, 'fore ever—another thing on that case—over at Kansas City [Missouri]—set the deal for the payoff—had the money in two duffel bags. And . . .

TD: The kidnapping payoff?

[02:14:59] FT: Payoff in two duffel bags. [Pause] Yeah, I guess two duffel bags. Anyway, ten- and twenty-dollar bills from each Federal Reserve district. Well, they went out there to put the payoff out along the Missouri River. And next they knew got a phone call, "Money's not out there." "Oh, my God, somebody got the money," see. And they sent a crew of agents back out there, and the damn wind had blown those bags over, and they rolled off [*laughs*] down that levee there a little ways and got hung up in the grass somewhere. When there's six hundred thousand dollars layin' out there—man, there's some panic goin' on there for a while. But they—well, they got all straightened out.

[02:15:43] TD: Well, this has been a very interesting discussion, and I would like to end it by asking you something—I would like to ask you to talk about Judge Oren Harris. You mentioned him while ago kind of in passing. And when I was a young man, he

was a congressman. And then later he became a US federal judge. You met him, I guess, when you came down here to El Dorado.

FT: Yeah, yeah.

[02:16:08] TD: What kind of—he died recently. What kind of gentleman was he? What kind of judge was he?

FT: Uh—very strict. Ran a very strict court. He came here about the time I did or maybe shortly after I did. No, before I did because he's the one that let me have that room up there in the post office up there that belonged to the court, really, to—for an office. But when I got to workin' on that Klan, he called me one day—wanted me to meet him down at his office. So I went down to his office. He said, "Floyd," he said, "I'm concerned and some more people concerned in Washington [DC] about this Klan deal. What can you tell me about it?" So I told him what I's doing. So I'd go by every week and tell him, you know, how—"Well, we'd lost so many more *unclear words* when this happened and everything." So that's when he jumped on the chief of police and the sheriff about not gettin' any help from us, see. They finally loosened up a little bit. But all the police [*unclear word*] did, actually, after—for a little while. But they—but I can understand their way in a—their deal in a way, too, I

guess. But it was closer than a lotta people think from open warfare down between the blacks and the whites. [02:17:21] But it—but ol'—Harris was a very strict judge. He was tough on the sentencing deal. I mean, he let people have pretty tight deal. He's a Sunday school teacher. He had a Sunday school [*unclear words*]. He taught every Sunday down here in the theater. But he was a fine man. He really was. Turned out I didn't—you know, I thought maybe—'course, the reason he got to be a judge, you know why that was, don't you? 'Cause he's gonna vote against some of Lyndon Johnson's civil rights deals up there, so Johnson figured, "Well, best way to get rid of him—make him a federal judge." [*Laughs*] So he did. [Editor's Note: nominated by President Johnson to serve on the US District Court, Western District of Arkansas and US District Court, Eastern District of Arkansas; served from 1965 to 1997.]

[02:18:06] TD: And he was succeeded by [US Senator] David Pryor [1979–1997].

FT: Yeah, yeah. I met the senator when he was a—first time I saw him and Barbara [Pryor] walkin' down the hall over there and introduced themselves to me, and I introduced him over at Hamburg, over at ol' B. A. [Bunion Aubrey] Courson, sheriff [1946–1969] over there [Ashley County] at that time was a

survivor of the Bataan Death March. And he and I became real good friends. And [*laughs*] had a guy over there known—his name was [Lt. Otto] “Snake” Griffin. Ol’ Snake was a investigator with the [Arkansas] State Police. And he was—he’d been in some rough times, too, during World War II and—but he and ol’ B. A. Courson hated each other.

TD: He and who?

FT: He and Courson—B. A. Courson, sheriff of Hamburg. I mean, they couldn’t stand each other. We’d have a bank burglary or somethin’ over there where we all had jurisdiction in it. And B. A. would call me—sheriff’d call me on the radio—or come meet him so forth and so on, you know, and we’d have our—whatever our meeting was about. And in a few—wouldn’t be two minutes after he’d left—get a call from Snake. “Meet me at so-and-so” [*speaks in a gruff voice*]. Go over there, and ol’ Snake—“Well, what in hell do you wanna talk about,” you know. And he’d wanna know what B. A. told me, you know. Well, I’d make up somethin’ and tell him. But if Snake called first, then B. A.’d call wondering what Snake was talkin’ about. They wouldn’t go ask each other [*laughs*—wouldn’t cooperate—wouldn’t even speak to each other.

[02:19:28] TD: Now—what’d you say Snake’s last name was?

FT: Griffin. *G-R-I-F-F-I-N*. His first name was Otto. Carried his pad around like a little girl in the second grade carryin' her first tablet, you know, in her . . .

TD: Uh-huh.

FT: . . . arm crimped up like that (clutches his arm to his side). But he was a . . .

TD: Was he . . .

FT: . . . good police officer.

TD: There was a state senator from down there, Richard Earl Griffin [1967–1971].

FT: Yeah.

TD: I wonder if that was a relative . . .

FT: Yeah.

TD: . . . of his.

[02:19:53] FT: No, no, Snake's from up Leachville up there originally.

TD: Oh.

FT: Up in that part of the country.

TD: Oh.

FT: His wife—ol' Snake [*laughs*—his wife—she 'bout as bad as he was, and both of 'em drank a whole lot. And she killed ol' Snake over there at Monticello one night with his own damn pistol

though. She pulled the pis—he's doin' somethin' or other—threatenin' her or somethin'. He used to beat her up all the time. She'd beat him up sometime, too. So I used to see ol' Snake—said his—Mona's his wife's name—said, "Well, Mona, shoot the damn thing." *[FT speaks in a high-pitched voice]* And, by God, she did. *[Laughter]* She told me—said, "Well, he *[unclear words]*," she said, "Well, he told me, 'shoot the damn thing *[FT speaks in a high-pitched voice]*.'" And said, "I did." *[TD laughs]* Killed him dead as a doornail right over there in his living room over there at Monticello.

[02:20:41] TD: Oh, you've had an interesting life. And thank you very much for sharing it with us today.

FT: Well, I don't know whether it's all that interesting or not, but I—you know, to me it just *[laughs]*—it's just routine. I hope it's . . .

TD: It was your work.

FT: . . . interesting to somebody. Somebody get somethin' good out of it but . . .

TD: Yeah.

FT: . . . but I'm glad to do it *[unclear words]*.

TD: I hope you feel—I hope you have a sense of pride in helping break up the Klan. Such an evil institution.

[02:21:09] FT: We had—talkin' 'bout threats while ago—we had a lieutenant on the p—local police department here. One time said [FT speaks in a high-pitched voice], "Floyd,"—he hung out down with the—with a restaurant down there where the real Klan headquarters really—when they wasn't meetin' someplace—said [FT speaks in a high-pitched voice], "Floyd," said, "what would you do if the Klan burned a cross in your driveway?" Name was ?Andrews?. I said, "Andy, I'm gonna tell you what I'd do." I said, "I have a wife and three children out there in that house." I said, "I don't want anybody mess around my wife and kids out there. Now me—find me out here on a road—back road someplace by myself—do anything you think you can. But don't mess around with my family. To answer your question, when Dr. [John Henry] Pinson at that time was the county coroner. When he and—gets—he and Bob Pennington, chief of police [FT Edit: in El Dorado] get through with their investigation—tell me it's all right," I said, "I'll just take a damn garden hose, wash the ash and blood outta my driveway, go back in, and go back to sleep." [TD laughs] [02:22:12] So we didn't have any more of that either. But I, you know, I've had people that, you know, if you're, "He had—next time he comes out in the woods, we gonna do this, do that." 'Course, I'd go out there to see if they

could. But never did. They never did bother me any. These agents now—you can't even find their name in the phone book. If you gonna get ahold of a FBI agent, you gotta [got to] call three or four different numbers 'fore you ever find one.

[02:22:42] TD: Did your informants call you here at the house periodically?

FT: Yeah, they'd call me here at the house. And, 'course, I paid 'em [*unclear word*] money. I paid on COD basis. I didn't say, "I'll give you so much money." If it's worth somethin', I'd pay 'em. I'd meet some of 'em at three—they'd get off work at two o'clock in the mornin'—I'd meet 'em at three out in the woods out here someplace. They had a pseudonym. They'd sign a receipt, and I'd take it and turn it in. But . . .

[02:23:11] TD: What kind of money are you talkin' about?

FT: I think the most I ever paid anybody for his transportation and information—probably a hundred dollars for, you know, a meeting or maybe two meetings. But—well, I—you know, it [*laughs*—I's raised up poor boy. You're gonna have to earn your money if you gonna get anything from me. But—and I got a lotta information for nothin'. They would just volunteer, you know, say, "I'm gonna join so and so." "Well, I'd like to pay you little bit." "No, I don't want anything." Had one guy, though—

hell, he'd go to—you'd say, "Well, they're gonna meet down at so forth down at Baton Rouge [Louisiana]." Shoot, he'd shuck out—he'd go to Baton Rouge. He'd go to meetin', come back, give me report on it. But even though they're informants, you know, that money works funny ways, and that's the reason I wouldn't pay off on—most the time—on one man's information. If I didn't get it verified someplace else, didn't get anything. 'Cause that's our money. [*Laughs*] It's not bein' given away.

[02:24:20] TD: Do you ever run into any of those folks in your retirement? Any of the Klan people?

FT: Oh, yeah, yeah. Run into one every once in a while.

TD: Do they ever wink at you or acknowledge those years gone by? Do you ever talk about it with any of 'em?

FT: Nah, I never talk 'bout any of 'em. Once in a while one of 'em'll kinda acknowledge. I walked in the—I cut this finger off with a chain—with a table saw in my shop out there, and the black orthopedic here was on call that day—he fixed my finger back. And I walked in his office there one day—about seven or eight people in there and 'bout—most of 'em were either wives or daughters or children or [*laughs*] somethin' or other—or Klansmen themselves, sitting around waitin' to see a black doctor.

TD: [*Laughs*] Times have changed.

[02:25:08] FT: There's one question I used to ask all these Klansmen when interview 'em. They'd always say, "Well, there's not any nigger blood in my body." I said, "Let me give you a little question here. Suppose that you or your child or your wife had a disease—had to have a blood transfusion. And you went to the doctor to get it. Only person they could find that had a matching—matched your blood was a black person—would you take it?" And never got an answer.

TD: Yeah.

FT: Never got an answer.

TD: Yeah.

[02:25:42] FT: But you know, I [*laughs*—I'd give as much as I'd take—I mean, as I got. And I'd come home—I'd lay in bed tryin' to figure out somethin' else to do to 'em so to keep 'em off balance.

TD: Keep 'em off balance. Yeah. I'm sure that's a—that was an important technique—making 'em feel uncomfortable.

[02:26:11] FT: One ol' boy over at Forrest City over there one time where we're at—they used to send me over there, and they'd have a—somebody'd dynamite somethin' over there. And they'd send me from over there to help those guys. One ol' boy'd told

one time 'bout I's over there lookin' 'round his yard—'bout how he had a gun pointed my head and all that deal. I said, "Oh?" I found out about it, so I called him on the telephone. I said, "Me and you need to have a little talk." He never would meet me—never would talk about it. But I told him what I wanted to talk about, too, but he—you know, but—I got to thinkin', you know, if I'd a-seen that ol' boy pokin' that gun out that window at me, I'd probably shot him right through the window. Wouldn't even thought anything about it, but then that wouldn't've been nice either. But it wouldn't [*laughs*] been the Christian thing to do ?for this?.

[02:26:57] TD: Well, anything you'd like to add to the interview?

FT: Well, they talk 'bout threaten and everything—ol' Snake and I was—we's workin' together over there at Forrest City one time on a deal. And we's puttin' a lotta heat on a lotta folks over there. We got a call down at the ?resident agents'? over there—the agent in charge was over here and a bunch of folks. So Snake and I—we's off up north of Forrest City, off quite a ways. So—well, they sent two more guys out there. Well, they got started talkin' to these people, and the door opened and about five or six Klansmen come walkin' in out of a room back there—wanted to know where we were.

TD: Wanted to know who you were?

FT: Wanted to know where we were. They thought we would be the ones to go out there. I didn't find out about that till two years after I retired, and I got mad about it then, see. They's afraid ol' Snake and I might go back—which we probably would have. But I'll tell you one thing, if Snake Griffin and I'd've been out there and those guys come in there, and they were—start some crap, there'd been somebody got hurt. [Pause] Somebody got hurt. [Pause] But they wouldn't tell us about it for a long time, see. And the reason they wouldn't—'cause—you know, crazy. I mean, I don't have a whole lotta [*laughs*] sense and never did have a whole lot.

[02:28:16] TD: Did you encounter much political corruption? I know you've mentioned some of it today, but you would've dealt some with county sheriffs. On the whole, what was your opinion of county sheriffs back in those days?

FT: 'Course, they're politicians. You know . . .

TD: Hmm.

TD: . . . they're ?up for? vote, but most of 'em [*clears throat*]—excuse me. I hope I didn't blow a fuse. But most of 'em—I'm—you know—I'm sure they got a little payoff on the local gamblin' deals and a lotta dry count—bootleggers. I'm [*unclear word*]

sure they got a little cut on that. But not that I's ever—I don't th—I never have seen it affect any of 'em—affect my relationship with 'em. 'Course, you—every police officer and FBI agent—you can't operate—treat all policemen and deputy sheriffs the same. All—you have to sell yourself and find out what product they like and have to give 'em that product. Then you get along with 'em. If you don't, they're not gonna cooperate with you. So you got a product you had to sell. You had—whatever they want. If they want pork and beans, give 'em pork and beans. If they want a sirloin steak, give 'em a sirloin steak. But just bein'—be natural—be yourself, by gosh, and you get along with most of 'em.

TD: You've certainly seen a . . .

FT: That damn briar patch out there's [*unclear words*] around my—used to be a flower garden out there. So my wife—I told her, "I'm gonna cut that brush down." "And I don't wanna look at that ol' house out there. I wanna look at that ol'—I like to see green out there." It was her—Mother's Day over Floyd Jr.'s, house, and we're talkin' about it. And my oldest grandson said—she said, "I don't like to look at that ol' tool"—call it "Papa's Playhouse." The grandkids. "I don't like to look at that playhouse out there."

TD: That's your workshop?

[02:30:14] FT: Yeah. So then [*laughs*]*—*so Matt, my oldest grandson, said, "Especially when you sittin' in the swing on the front porch." [*Laughter*] But I appreciate y'all comin' down . . .

TD: Well, thank you.

FT: . . . and goin' to all this trouble . . .

TD: We appreciate you . . .

FT: . . . to gettin' this interview . . .

TD: . . . immensely.

FT: . . . and whatever, and I just hope that somebody gets some benefit out of it. And if I can be of any more assistance to you, let me know.

TD: All right.

[End of Interview 02:30:36]

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