

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

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Arkansas Memories

Foster C. "Jock" Davis
Interviewed by John C. Davis
June 25, 2024
Russellville, 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 and video files, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <https://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 ten 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 ten 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 17th 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.
- 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; and
 - annotations for clarification and identification.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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John C. Davis interviewed Foster C. "Jock" Davis on June 25, 2024, at Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

John Davis: Today is Tuesday, June 25, 2024. I'm John Davis conducting this interview on behalf of the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History. I'm interviewing Mr. Foster C. "Jock" Davis. Uh—Mr. Davis and I are recording this interview on the campus of Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, Arkansas. Mr. Davis, on behalf of the Pryor Center, I wanna thank you for sitting down with me today.

JD: My pleasure.

JCD: Before we begin, do you give the Pryor Center permission to record this interview and add it to the Center's oral history collection?

JD: Would you repeat that question again?

JCD: Yes, sir. Before we begin, do you give the Pryor Center permission to record this interview and add it to the Center's oral history collection?

JD: I do.

JCD: Thank you, sir. Mr. Davis, we'll start from the very beginning. Uh—when were you born?

[00:00:51] JD: October 12, 1924.

JCD: And were you born in Arkansas?

JD: Born in Malvern, Arkansas.

JCD: If you would, please tell me a little bit about your parents.

JD: My parents?

JCD: Yes, sir.

[00:01:08] JD: My dad—uh—was an insurance salesman, and we ree—lived in several small cities in Arkansas. And we—uh—ended up in Prescott, Arkansas, down by Hope, you know. And—uh—he—he was in World War I and was wounded in the Battle of the Argonne Forest, came home, and died at the young age of thirty-three. So we four boys have taken up his job.

JCD: What was his name?

JD: Roy C. Davis.

JCD: Roy C. Davis. And what was your mother's name?

JD: Uh—Mary Cecil Cox, C-O-X.

JCD: Did your mother—uh—work outside of the home, or did she . . .

JD: No. Mom . . .

JCD: Havin' four boys, she was busy.

JD: . . . Mom was a—a boy's mom. She didn't work outside.

[00:02:04] JCD: You mentioned you have—you have—had brothers.

Uh—could you tell me about your—your siblings?

JD: Well, my three brothers—uh—Roy, Edward, Edsel, and myself all lived together and had a loving—uh—relationship. Never had a cross word—I—that I remember, and—uh—always embraced when we met. And—uh—they had a younger life because of smokin' cigarettes. They died at an early age. But we sure did love each other and loved everybody in the family.

[00:02:44] JCD: So did you have an extended family nearby? Since you moved, it sounds like, some as a young child, was it mainly just y—the core group in the household?

JD: Just the core group in the household.

JCD: Mh-hmm. How close together were you all in age?

JD: Uh—well, I'd say—uh—apart—we were probably—uh—six or seven years.

JCD: Mh-hmm. So pretty close together . . .

JD: Yeah.

JCD: . . . in age . . .

JD: Yeah.

JCD: . . . as well.

JD: We were.

[00:03:13] JCD: So you talked about living—and you lived in Prescott for most of your—your childhood years?

JD: Yes.

JCD: And you went to Prescott schools?

JD: Yes. I graduated from Prescott High School.

JCD: If you could think back to that time, what would be one of your—
your earliest memories?

[00:03:33] JD: Well—uh—course—uh—I didn't know that Pearl Harbor was gonna happen. And—uh—the big thing back then was gettin' a date with a pretty girl in high school. And—uh—back in those days—uh—if—everybody remembers the Depression. And in my book I mention Depression, and I had a lot of kids up and down the line in high school has—in the library all the way from—from north Arkansas to Little Rock. And the big question is, "What was a Depression?" And if they'd've gone through it—we had very little to eat. Uh—I've seen my mother offer cornbread and milk for supper at night 'cause we had a cow. It was that bad.

JCD: Mh-hmm.

JD: And if you could get a rabbit or a—people—if you's able to raise a pig to a hog where you could kill that—uh—that were prime meat. But it was tough during the Depression.

[00:04:42] JCD: As a child during that era, did you appreciate that that was unusually difficult? Or was it until you got older when you—you realized how bad it was?

JD: It—it was as I got older I realized. 'Cause back then—uh—you know, I played football and basketball in high school, and—and even though we didn't have money and fancy clothing to go out on a date, you did the best you could.

JCD: Mh-hmm.

JD: And—uh—to have a girlfriend was a big deal back then, and if you played basketball, football, you probably could make your mark there.

[00:05:19] JCD: [*Laughs*] What do you remember from those school days? You—you played sports. Were there any other—any other hobbies, anything you enjoyed doin' growin' up?

JD: Well, not really in the high school, no. Uh—we got home as soon as we could to help Mom do some chores around the house.

JCD: Did y'all keep a garden at home?

JD: Uh—yes. My mother raised a great garden every year. And—uh—of course, like I say, we had a cow we had to milk, and—uh—every once in a while, if we got lucky, Dad would buy a few bananas. Well, you can imagine how far they went with four boys.

[00:06:02] JCD: [*Laughs*] Would you tell me a little bit more about Prescott school growin' up, high school and maybe even a little before? Your earliest memories of school. What—did you have

favorite subjects, favorite teachers?

JD: Well, course—uh—my favorite subject was typing. And—uh—I might see a little bit when—when I came to Tech and—we used the old Underwood typewriter, which had a methodical music to it when you typed. And I loved it. And I was in business administration at Tech, and they were havin' a state contest in Little Rock. So—uh—I went and won the thing at 105 words a minute without an error and came back, and my teacher was real proud of me.

JCD: [*Laughs*] And you enjoyed typing class even before—even before college.

JD: Absolutely. I always loved typing.

[00:06:57] JCD: Oh, that's fun. That's great. What do you recall—you've talked a little bit about the—the Great Depression, the struggles of that, of course. What do you recall about Prescott? What was—explain Prescott to somebody today—uh—who—who wouldn't've been able to experience the same time that you did.

JD: Well, you know, normally young boys, especially, love the town they lived in. And—uh—our—our big, odd city was Hope in football and basketball. But—uh—we—I loved Prescott back then. And I understand there's not much there today, but—but I loved my—and I remember at night, we'd sit out on a rail across

from the bakery. And this guy knew one of our buddies, and he'd give us some hot bread to eat around eleven or twelve o'clock at night, and that was a big deal.

[00:07:56] JCD: So were the Prescott—were y'all the Prescott Curley Wolves when you were there . . .

JD: Prescott Curley Wolves.

JCD: . . . as well? Yeah.

JD: Played the Hope Bobcats.

JCD: The Hope Bobcats. Yes, sir. [00:08:11] When was the last time you've been to Prescott?

JD: Uh—fifty years.

JCD: Okay.

JD: I've been told by my son-in-law and my daughter, that they gonna take me when they get here this year.

JCD: Mh-hmm.

JD: Probably be in the next three months. And I—I'd like to go and go to the cemetery and . . .

JCD: Mh-hmm.

JD: . . . and—uh—see how it looks.

JCD: And like you to see the familiar landmarks.

JD: Yeah.

JCD: Things that've changed, things that haven't. Of course.

JD: Yes, sir.

JCD: Well, we'll discuss later your—your continued involvement in church as an adult 'cause I understand you're active—you've been active in—uh—your First Baptist Church . . .

JD: Yes, sir.

JCD: . . . in Russellville.

JD: Yeah.

[00:08:51] JCD: Growin' up, was church an important part of your family?

JD: It was. Uh—my dad, for some reason, was a Presbyterian. The rest—my mom and—and we four boys were Presbyterian. And—uh—I don't know. My dad grew up a Baptist, and that was just a difference, you know. But it did make a difference. We wanted our dad to go to church with us.

[00:09:18] JCD: Mh-hmm. So you joined the military at a—at a quite young age.

JD: Yes, I did.

JCD: At seventeen, is that correct?

JD: Seventeen.

JCD: So would you tell me what propelled you to join at seventeen?

JD: Well—uh—uh—I came in from school. I'd just graduated. And I went out and told my buddies goodbye, and I came home. And I

said, "Mom, I just—I've got to join the military." And she said, "Well, son, you know you can stay here and take care of me if you want to." But she said, "I understand if you wanna go." And I was seventeen at that time when I joined. And—uh—I was—if—if you wanna know how I entered.

JCD: Mh-hmm.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:10:10] JD: But I went to—I caught a bus, rode it to Little Rock, and went to the place where they're takin' in new recruits, and they gave us a physical. And to show you what type physical they gave you, two doctors would stand and whisper different sounds. That's all they had was whisperin'. And I passed the test, so I went to Camp Robinson, was shipped out for basic training.

JCD: And this is all starting at the age of seventeen after graduating Prescott . . .

JD: Yes.

JCD: . . . High School.

JD: Yes, sir.

JCD: And this is during World War II. Do you remember what year it was?

JD: [Nineteen] forty-three.

JCD: Okay. So we were absolutely in need of more folks to enlist.

[00:11:04] JD: I can't help but remember when I got to Camp Robinson because that's where they were shipping all the recruits out all over the United States. I was gettin' my gear issued to me, and he said, "What shoe you wear?" And I said, "I wear a seven and a half." He says, "Here's a nine. You'll learn to fit it." And that's what I wore. And I learned to fit it. And all your clothing, they give it to you large because you was gonna get muscular and everything. But then we were put on a troop train and wound up in Bend, Oregon, Camp Oregon, which was a combat engineer outfit. And here I am, seventeen years old, and the top age for military men back then was—I believe it was twenty-eight years old. But those old guys had been smokin' cigarettes. And when you had to climb the walls and jump the water, we had to help 'em across and get 'em there. But I enjoyed my time there at Camp Abbot, even though they taught stuff that was kinda—you didn't wanna think about it, but they would take a lot of thongs or brush and tie it together, put your bayonet on your weapon, and charge that thing. And it was hard to pull your rifle back out, and they said it was exactly like you were stabbin' a man. And course, I'm 100 percent disabled in my hearing now because of hand grenades, and combat

engineers were real heavy in blowing bridges, blowin' trees, and obstacles for the enemy. But I loved Camp Abbot. I did.

[00:13:01] JCD: So did you have a choice in whether or not you wanted to be in combat engineering or any other specialization when you joined?

JD: No choice. They said I was best fitted, and I don't know—they just needed heads is the way it was.

JCD: And you called it a troop train. Was it really a railroad train that went . . .

JD: Yeah. Yeah.

JCD: . . . all the way to Bend, Oregon?

JD: Yeah.

JCD: Do you member that trip?

JD: Yeah, I member the trip. I don't member how long it took. It took a long time.

JCD: I would imagine.

JD: But I—the thing I enjoyed most, and then I'll tell you what I disliked most, was the drill calls. Like, "Ain't no use in goin' on, Jody's got your wife and gone." And all stuff like that. And "I know you wants to be home again." Or "Your left. Your left. Do you know your left? Let's hear it." And everbody'd say, "I left." And this went on—you could hear that goin' on at five o'clock in

the morning. And course combat engineers are—we were in combat as well as buildin' bridges and blowin' bridges for the—keep the enemy away. And I remember—and—well, I'll talk about what we—first thing I observed when I—they let me off the ship.

JCD: So is there anything else about basic training or boot camp that you can think of . . .

JD: No, it . . .

JCD: . . . that you'd like to share?

JD: Boy I was in the best shape I've ever been in my life.

[00:14:43] They had a ring made out of big logs with sawdust in it, and they'd fill it up with us with boxin' gloves. And I'd feel a little air go by, and I'd go down. But boy, lemme tell you what, there were some bruisers in there. Seemed like they picked on us little guys, you know.

JCD: So they put several of you in it all at once?

JD: Yeah, every—and see who was left standing.

JCD: The last man standing.

JD: And he was a big man. [*Laughter*]

JCD: Sounds like you may have been the smarter one, though.

JD: Well, I was smart enough when to go down. [*Laughter*]

[00:15:22] JCD: So how long were you in Oregon there in training?

JD: I was there for eight weeks.

JCD: And then after eight weeks, what happens after that?

[00:15:30] JD: Well, let me tell about me leaving. They came to me and said, "Davis, you got two weeks. Go home, hug your mama, come back, and we're gonna ship you overseas." And so I said, "Okay." So time came, and I had to catch a bus and ride about fifteen minutes to a train station to come home to Arkansas. So a bus passed by, and I hailed him, and I knocked on the door. And he opened the door and said, "Come on in." And there was the most beautiful little eighteen-year-old girl sittin' there. And I hadn't become eighteen years old then. And I said, "May I sit by you?" And she, "Please do." I took my cap off. And we visited. And it came to the train station. And I got up and put my cap on, and I said—and the bus was loading. I said, "You all might be interested to know I'm out at Camp Abbot. And I'm goin' home, hug my mama, and I'm goin'—comin' back, and they're gonna send me overseas, and I don't know where I'm goin'. Could I have a kiss?" She laid one on me. I tasted lipstick all the way to Arkansas. *[JCD laughs]*

[00:16:54] But they—but on the other side, homesickness touched all of we boys 'cause most of us were from loving families because of the Depression. And I just—I got so

homesick I was sick. I didn't know you could be that sick. And I'd asked a sargeant, "Sargeant, what can I do about this?" And he, "Talk to the chaplain." Well, chaplain didn't help any. But anyway, they started gettin' us real busy, and I got over that. And we knew that we were goin' to the South Pacific because they gave us camouflage uniforms, and they didn't have any white duds to wear in the snow or anything. So we knew we were goin' to South Pacific.

[00:17:48] JCD: So after several weeks there, then you go home. Do you remember seein' your mother on the two-week leave . . .

JD: Yeah.

JCD: . . . before you ship out?

JD: Yeah, of course. My dad has passed away, and she had given me—I'll never forget—a small New Testament, metal covered on both sides. She said, "Wear that on your breast pocket." And I did. I wore it—I even slept in it. And I came back. But I didn't get close to gettin' shot, either. But it just—it's somethin' you go through that—they keep you pretty busy. [00:18:28] Well, our first drop off was Oro Bay, New Guinea. And the islands are owned by the Australians. And General MacArthur made the statement that out of 1,000 troops that landed in New Guinea, only half of 'em would return from malaria. They'd die from

malaria. Well, our first job was to lay a runway for our P38 air fighters for the Japs. So they had us layin' a mesh, a metal mesh for the P38s, and when that P38 would land, water would shoot twelve feet in the air. That's how moist it was. And there were python snakes. There were all—and there were rats as big as small **?option?** dog. It was just a whole place. And disease ran rampant. [00:19:30] Well, after about six months, I got dengue fever, which is a—I mean, it's tough. So they put me in what they called a field hospital, which is a tent, and some American Red Cross ladies in uniform were seein' to me. And my fever just got out of proportion. So I was still—I had turned eighteen years old by then. A boat pulled up, a ship, put me on it, and I got off in Melbourne, Australia, and they put me in a mili—American military hospital. And I was—when I got to where I could work, I was assigned to a map-making unit in Melbourne. And we made silk maps for our pilots because they could stick 'em in their pocket and pull it out. And we'd know when the next invasion would be. Well, I spent six months there and rejoined my old engineer group, and we headed for New Guinea. And we made the last stop at the last island and wiped out the Japanese. And then we start marchin' on toward—well, I'm tryin' to think of the city now. Well, General MacArthur's

GHQ was there after we had cleared the city. And maybe it'll come to me in a minute, the name of the city but—Philippines. So Manila, when we hit Manila, about a week later, the big bomb was dropped. War was over. [00:21:23] And I'll never forget. One of my fondest memories was—I was—by that time I was a staff sergeant. I was in a three-story building waiting to get a ship to come home. And I thought one morning about seven o'clock I'd go down and get some fresh air. I walked down on the streets on Aguinaldo Boulevard, and looked up. And coming out of his GHQ was General MacArthur with his corncob pipe and three big marines getting in a weapons carrier. And for some reason other, he looked up at me, and I popped him a big salute, and he popped me one back. And for some reason, he died laughin'. And they drove off down the street. But I'll never forget the look on his face. And I—there's all kind of things going through his mind, I know. But I've often, you know—I wasn't—didn't use good judgment. I'd say, "I'm from Arkansas, too." That's what I should have done. 'Cause, you know, he's buried in Little Rock. And but, he was a great general. He was good.

JCD: And you wonder what was going through his head.

JD: Yeah.

JCD: He needed—he—some brevity, maybe, in the moment.

JD: Yeah.

JCD: Or something about that interaction . . .

[00:22:47] JD: Well, he knew I was going home, and I was happy.

And then the only really wonderful thing was 600 troops, and I'll never forget that what—Blacks were on the bottom deck of the ship going over, and I had a Black sleeping above me in a hammock comin' home. It had changed that much. And I could say that there was a unit that treated—retreated. Artillery Blacks at Milne Bay, New Guinea. And we stopped there to refuel, and I said, "Why are you guys not going home?" He said, "Well, we retreated, and General MacArthur said we got to stay a year over here." And they were fuelin' ship tanks and stuff.

[00:23:45] But anyway, we—our troops—we're all happy we were going home, and they blew a big whistle, and we came out, and there was the Golden Gate Bridge. Not a car on it, but just loaded with people. They had music going, "God Bless America," everything. And American flags. You could—bullhorn sayin', "We love you. We're glad you're back." So we stayed at sta— Camp Stoneman, California, is where we were separated. Well, we weren't separated. We were getting ready to ship to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. But they gave us a pound T-bone and a half

a head of lettuce 'cause we hadn't had any lettuce or collard greens or cornbread or anything. But, boy, that was some meal, I'll tell you. [00:24:49] Well, they—we boarded a troop train to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. Took us a ma—a week and a half to get to Fort Chaffee. And we were up there and visitin'. They're doin' a museum there, and they were mightily interested in me because I was separated there. Well, back then the troop train pulled right up into Chaffee, and people in from Fort Smith and families that had driven there to see their loved one just screamin' and hollerin' and cryin' and—but I called my mom and I said, "Mom, I'm coming home tomorrow. I'm gonna catch a train to Texarkana and get a train from there on into Prescott." And I had my duffel bag with me, and I had to walk about a mile. I walked upon the porch and knocked on the door, and she screamed—oh, I'll never forget—"My boy's home." And I handed to her that Testament. I said, "It's because of you, Mama." And she said, "All of us that were stayin' home, we dreaded the day that some gentleman in a suit would step up on the porch and knock on the door and say, 'I'm here to inform you.'" But all four of us came back in good shape.

[00:26:22] JCD: Were your brothers still in active duty when you returned home? Were they—were they stateside at this point?

JD: No, they had been released, too.

JCD: They'd been released.

JD: Yeah, it was after them. Yeah. And my—I had mentioned my brother flew a bomber, and I had another one that was a marine drill sergeant, Texas A&M. Spent the entire time there. And my baby brother joined the Air Corps after the war was over. So that's where they get my book, *Brothers Four*.

JCD: All four of you . . .

JD: Yes.

JCD: . . . felt the need to serve our country.

JD: Yes.

[00:27:05] JCD: Who in the family—was it family? What inspired you? Was it your father's service in World War I that inspired all four of you to want to do that? And we'll talk later about your continued service to our country a little bit.

JD: Well, he—his health was so bad he just didn't talk about his battles and the trenches that they had in those days. And he was labeled as a machine gun mechanic, and he worked on machine guns because that was the only weapon they had in those days. And but Dad—course, he loved all of us boys, but he didn't feel good all the time, and he wasn't able to work and— at the last time, but he was getting some kind of a pension that

he left my mama, which helped a lot. And course, we boys left my mom an allotment to live on while we were gone. But you know, and then I asked Mama—I asked about some of my buddies. Where are they? And they said, "Well, they've gone to a place called Russellville at Arkansas Tech University." So I called one of 'em, and I said, "What's it like up there?" And he said, "Boy, you need to get up here." Said, "They've got big lakes, good fishin'." Said, "They really take care of the veterans. You need to get up here." And I caught a bus the next day, and I got my degree there, and I met my wife and married her. And she died about a year ago, and it's awful sad around my house, you know. But I'll get by.

[00:28:56] JCD: Would you would you share with us how you met your wife at Arkansas Tech? Do you remember when you met her?

JD: Yeah, that's kind of funny. I'd been there a year and a half, and I told a buddy of mine, I said, "You know, school just now startin', the girls are checking in at Caraway Hall, and I need to—we need to go over and pick us out one. And he said, "You're the smartest guy I ever saw." And I said, "Well, I—it's natural born." So we go over there and hidin' behind bushes. And I saw this lady drive up there and a pretty blond get out of

that car. And I said, "I'm carrying her luggage." So she had two bags that weighed 100 pound apiece. No elevator. And when I got through, she flipped me a quarter, and I thought, "Well, this is the last of the big time spenders," you know. But and she was from Scranton, Arkansas. I don't know if you know where that is. But her aunt all the way up there had told her, "Don't have anything to do with those old World War II veterans. They're horrible. They're drunks, every one of 'em." And so I waited about a week. I didn't wanna rush it. And I called over there, and I said to hold—the housemother—I said, "Could I speak to Melba Thompson?" Said yes. She got her there, and I said, "This Jock Davis." She said, "I know you." Clunk. And I thought, "Well, this is gonna be tough." And this went on for—she got her degree, and I got my degree. And then we got married. And we have one daughter. She's married to a military man. She has three son that are all military. Huntsville, Alabama in the space center there. All doin' real well. I've got eight great-grandchildren. And I've just been blessed. God's been good to me.

[00:31:06] JCD: And so you met your future wife at Arkansas Tech.

And then you also—you majored, and you graduated. What was your focus, your academic focus?

JD: Business administration. And I went to work in the poultry industry, and I worked fifty years in the poultry industry with Tyson and OK Foods and different chicken business.

JCD: Did you live in the Russellville area?

JD: Yes.

JCD: From then on.

JD: Yes. And I live in a home by myself. I have a real nice house. And I probably stay in the yard all the time because I get rather lonely, you know. And I do church work. I'm a deacon in my church. And then the—probably the biggest blessing I've had lately is meeting John Edwards. Do you know him?

JCD: I do. I've had the privilege.

[00:32:02] JD: All right. But you know, I call him my agent. And it's kinda funny to me. My daughter and son-in-law—I've been on several cruises. And I tell my son-in-law—I said, "Now, you're my front man. You got to pick me out one I can kinda go with and dance with on the cruises and stuff." And he said, "I don't know if I can do that." I said, "Oh, yeah, you can do it."

[00:33:32] JCD: So did you—you were in the poultry industry you said fifty years?

JD: Yes.

JCD: So what all—said—you men—you said you worked for Tyson.

You worked for OK Foods. What all did you do in that . . .

JD: Well . . .

JCD: . . . over those fifty years?

JD: . . . my main job was recruiting. And I'd go to Mississippi ever
s—land grant school that had poultry or agriculture, poultry
science, I'd go and do a seminar that lasted a week and would
pick out the top kids and then invite up to—and I'd show 'em
around the city and what goes on in the chicken business. And
some of the finest young people I've ever met, ladies and men.
And Mississippi State was my main place. I loved Mississippi
State. But I'd go to Auburn and Alabama and Texas A&M, and
I've recruited all over. And that was one of the best jobs I ever
had. I mean, I loved it.

JCD: How many years did you work as a recruiter?

JD: I'd say that whole fifty years.

JCD: Okay. So were you workin' for one company, or you had the
same job, but . . .

JD: Yeah.

JCD: . . . you were workin' with different companies . . .

JD: Right. Right.

JCD: . . . over those five decades. Okay.

JD: Course, I'm a big golfer, and I'd go down there, and Wallace

Morgan was the chairman then over poultry science. And boy, I got to play a lot of golf. That's part of the job that I really liked.

[*Laughs*] I didn't tell the boss that, though.

JCD: Did they have nice golf courses in Starkville?

JD: Yeah. Right. [*Laughter*]

[00:34:19] JCD: So you said that you and your wife and your daughter all settled down here in Russellville. Your daughter's out of state now but . . .

JD: Yeah, my daughter . . .

JCD: . . . you were up here . . .

JD: . . . and her husband live in geor—in Brooks, Georgia. And course, like I said, all three of their boys in the military. But they're—I gave 'em 120 acres and a house, and they're in the process of movin' here now. And I can't wait till they get here. Course, they're still have to do some work on the little house I gave 'em. But it's a lonely life, I tell you, when your wife leaves you.

JCD: Yeah. I'm so sorry.

JD: And I—our anniversary was last Tuesday, and I always take flowers out on a special occasion there in Russellville. But boy, I miss her.

[00:35:24] JCD: I understand you remain active in your community

here in Russellville, so what all are you involved in?

JD: Well, I do chamber work. In fact, I was president of the Jaycees, which was a chamber—not anymore, but as a president, we won national honors. But I do all kind of stuff, and I'm a member of the Red Coats. When a new business opens, we go out and watch 'em cut the ribbon and stuff. And anything that they need for us to do at the chamber, we do.

JCD: I know that you speak to a lot of ROTC students, a lot of high school students around the area.

JD: Oh, yes.

JCD: What all does that entail?

JD: Well, primarily Len Cotton, to—Senator Cotton's dad and I are real good friends. And he lives in Dardanelle there. And he's the one that got me in Dardanelle to do that. And you oughta see the trophy they gave me after I got through speakin'. But kids are hungry that are really involved in wantin' to be military. And I'd advise—the money's good. I don't know this major general bo—grandson of mine, there's no tellin' how much he makes a year. And then the second boy's son, he travels a lot and works as sidekick for the military through the government. He's makin' \$200,000 a year for that and doin' side jobs. So don't tell me the money's not out there. It's out there.

JCD: So in addition to servin' the country and the GI Bill and other benefits . . .

JD: Yes.

JCD: . . . there's the—there's a career opportunity there for these students.

[00:37:27] JD: And I didn't mention that I learned to fly an airplane at Arkansas Tech University. I got everything the GI Bill'd give you. And it like not to pass, but it did.

JCD: I'd like you to tell me about that. I don't know that people . . .

JD: Well . . .

JCD: . . . will recall how close the GI Bill came to failing.

JD: . . . where I was involved—they started talkin' about when I was in Manila. And I got real excited about it because I couldn't have gone to college. We just didn't have the money. And so I began to check around, see what could find out, and there was very little known about it. Well, the closer I got home it was warmin' up. And then I found out—and boy, I mean, every veteran, boy, praised the Lord when they flew and got that senator and brought him in and he voted. Boy, it was close. 'Cause there was some reason he couldn't come back, but they talked him into it, and he signed the bill, and it passed.

JCD: And he was a senator in Tennessee, is that correct?

JD: Yeah.

JCD: And it came down to his vote . . .

JD: Yep.

JCD: . . . for the GI Bill. Hard to imagine.

[00:38:49] JD: And I do—another thing I'm really involved in is my VA clinic there. You may have not heard they—we've got one in Russellville. In fact we had a veteran's appreciation day, and my friend over here spoke that day. Did a wonderful job. And we have a veteran's park up there. It's real nice, isn't it, John?

John Edwards: It is.

JD: Real nice. And we had the mayor and the county judge, and I spoke, and John spoke, and we just—it was a wonderful thing. And we put up flags. That flag means so much to me. We're comin' up on the Fourth of July, and I've got flags that I put out all over the clinic there outside and inside. But I love that flag. It means so much to me.

[00:39:46] JCD: If you would—what all—when you see the American flag, what feelings does it invoke? Does it—what do you think when you see the flag?

JD: With our country?

JCD: Yes, sir.

JD: Well, I—in my opinion, and evidently it's a lot of other people's

opinion, is—I don't mind tellin' people I'm a Trump man, and I don't like the way the military's gone strictly due to the president we have now. And I just think there's a lot of things that can be done. And I think Trump can do it. I really believe he can.

JCD: So when you see the . . .

JD: In fact, I received a letter as a donor for the senator lives in Dardanelle. And . . .

JCD: Senator Cotton?

JD: Yeah.

JCD: Tom Cotton.

JD: And course, Len's on the Tech board there. Tech, you know. But he's a real good man and a good friend, and Tom is, too.

[00:41:00] JCD: So when you see the flag, you said it means a great deal to you. I wonder what sort of feelings the American flag gives you. It's a symbol to so many of us.

JD: Well, it . . .

JCD: But what does it mean to you?

JD: . . . a lot of memories goes—and anywhere you are in a military institution, the flag's everywhere flyin'. And I just—it just—when that thing passes in a parade, and it's swirlin' and—a lot of memories go through my mind. And I don't know why I didn't

put about MacArthur in my book, but I—and writin' a book, boy, you think of a lot of things that you'd like to put in there, but you better not. But I enjoyed writin' a book.

[00:41:53] JCD: Well, I—if you would, we can—if you could hold that for a moment and maybe talk about the experience of writing it. What encouraged you to write the book? So it's *Brothers Four*.

JD: Well, it—on the back of it, I say, "*Brothers Four, Reliving the Great Depression and World War II* is one man's personal story of growing up during the Great Depression and going off to war with all three of his brothers. And Jock Davis' story epitomizes the grit, determination, and striving for excellence that resonates from our accurately named Greatest Generation." And that's the reason I think everybody needs to go to the World War II Museum. Boy, I'll tell you what, those people treat you like you're a king down there. "Despite years of economic hardship, the horrors of war, and the challenges of getting a college education and a job in postwar Arkansas, Davis climbed the ladder to success in the fledgling poultry industry and left a legacy of military achievement and business success for his family. In this intensely personal story, Davis walks readers through the history of his boyhood home, his career in the National Guard after World War II, and his many civic

achievements and service opportunities. *Brothers Four* will regi—will again remind you why the World War II generation represents the very best of amer—what America has to offer. But for the sake of love, of family and friends during this traumatic time plus patriotism and love of country, victory would not have been possible."

JCD: Well said. Would you tell me about the process of writing the book? So I know we talked about it briefly, but would you share with me that again?

JD: What was that again, now?

[00:44:17] JCD: So how did you go about writing the book? You had discussed that a little bit earlier, but now that we're recording, how did you recall the memories? How did you put it all together?

JD: Well, the big thing I was thinking, I'd already lost all my brothers. And I thought maybe their families and maybe my family, maybe middle—people seeking military, maybe this'll help somebody, and that's why I've written the book. And I understand that Amazon—five is a best seller and I'm a four, so I'm real happy that the book's movin' like it is.

JCD: It resonates with a lot of people . . .

JD: Yes.

JCD: . . . it sounds like. That's wonderful. Well, do we wanna take a break maybe? Might be a good time to take a break?

JD: Yeah.

JCD: Would that be good with you?

[Recording paused]

[00:45:09] JCD: Well, Jock, we took a break for lunch, and before then we learned about your childhood years in Prescott. We learned about your family, your mother, your father, your brothers, your service in World War II, going to Arkansas Tech University, meeting your lovely wife there. And we've talked about your work in the poultry industry and your daughter and your son-in-law and your grandchildren. I wanna go back if we can just a bit because after World War II, you continued your military service in the Arkansas National Guard. If you would, would you tell me about how that came to be? Were you in the National Guard while you were at Arkansas Tech University, or did that happen after?

JD: Yes, those are memorable days that I served. We had a battalion, the 217th engineers. And what—I was a—naturally, I was a combat engineer, so it was natural. On top of that, I could use the money. At that time I was married, and it was time to get some more money. And that's when I rose from the

rank of captain up to major. And I served as the company commander, always tryin' to take the lives of my men under my belt and take care of 'em like they should be taken care of. And I think I was—I hope to believe that I was respected and loved as their company commander. [00:46:59] And there was one time every year that I hated to go on convoy, and that was to Fort Polk, Louisiana. Course we had a lot of fun down there, and that's why we've got all these crazy-lookin' animals runnin' around. They came outta Louisiana to Arkansas. But there were a lot of crazy things happened down there. They caught some soldiers with a trailer. They had stoled—a bunch of troops had stoled a bunch of cattle and put 'em in a trailer and was takin' 'em back to Texas when they caught 'em on the highway. But there were a lot of things happen, but I never did like Fort Polk, Louisiana. And I don't think they particularly liked us because we—in practicing explosives and C2 to take down a tree, we practiced that. Course it affected our ears and everything. 'Cause there's another thing in the war that I never understood, that they didn't give you earplugs. That's why all of us have trouble hearin' today. But anyway, they didn't like us destroyin' their timber because they didn't have the alcohol out of it. And but I loved my job. We had a wonderful battalion commander.

In fact, he was—he worked for Arkansas Tech as a business manager. Bob Young was his name. And I miss him. He was such a great guy. But I tried to take care of my men. I tried to live up to what I expected them to live up to do. [00:48:56]

And the colonel designated me on our convoy all the way from Russellville to Polk to check the traffic drivin' in a Jeep back and forth on the highway. And I noticed one of the Jeeps had a trailer on it, and water was leakin' out of it. And I pulled up alongside and said, "If you don't mind, pull over." He pulled over, and I said, "I wanna check your trailer." He said, "Well, ain't nothin' wrong with that trailer." I said, "Well, I just wanna check it." He had it loaded with beer and ice. [*Laughter*] I said, "Okay, I just wanted to check you." But there were a lot of funny things happen goin' to Fort Polk and leavin' Fort Polk. And I loved my time with the National Guard. I did. In fact, the National Guard of Arkansas had a meeting in Russellville two weeks ago, and the adjutant general—I'd never met him, but he stood up and saluted me as a World War II veteran, and I said, "Sir, that was certainly nice of you to do that." And he said, "Buddy, I know you've been through the grind, and I respect you." And I felt good about that. But I did love the Guard every day I served.

[00:50:33] JCD: Was that—was it your Guard service that led you to service with—in the Korean conflict?

JD: Sir?

JCD: Was it your s—well, is it your—in your time as a National Guard guardsman when the Korean conflict . . .

JD: Yes.

JCD: . . . broke out?

JD: Yeah.

JCD: And you served during that time. Did you serve overseas in that . . .

JD: Yeah.

JCD: . . . that conflict?

JD: Yeah.

JCD: Is there anything you'd like to say about that?

JD: It all went together.

JCD: Yes, sir.

JD: Yep.

JCD: Is there anything that you'd like to share about that time?

JD: Well, it—I needed the money, to start with. And that was the big thing, I guess, was money. But I enjoyed taking care of my men and makin' sure they got their money and everything they were due, and they learned a lot too, I think, under my

command. I hope they did because I taught it. Leadership is a way of life. And I—any man that served under me, I wouldn't be afraid to serve under them. And when you say that, you're proud of your unit.

[00:51:45] JCD: Absolutely. Was there anything about—so how many years were you in the guard?

JD: In the guard?

JCD: Yes, sir.

JD: I would say about twelve years.

JCD: And so did you fight in the Korean conflict, or were you stationed stateside?

JD: Well, the only thing I came close to was when General Walker and the Black population in Little Rock. Because we were called to duty, active duty, we had to go in, make roll call, then go about our business. And we were due if they picked us to come up and serve in Little Rock, we'd go. But I only had one man that was called to go to Little Rock.

JCD: Okay. So are you referring to the Central High . . .

JD: Yeah, Central High Crisis.

JCD: Okay.

JD: Right.

JCD: Okay. Okay. So you were livin' in Russellville.

JD: Right.

JCD: You were sent to—you reported in Little Rock.

JD: Yeah. We'd report out to Tech at the armory, and they have roll call, and then go about our business.

JCD: So you never had to go to the . . .

JD: No.

JCD: . . . the school campus there.

JD: No, I didn't.

[00:53:04] JCD: I know you, you know, you're humble, and you talk about how you had family obligations and financial obligations, and that was partly why you served in the guard, but there had to be more. You believe very strongly in public service, it's clear to me. And I wonder if you wanted to reflect on that, an entire life, really, of service to your country and service to your community.

JD: Well, I think the notification of bein' picked by the—by your battalion commander to be a company commander and—it spoke a lot to see that he thought that I could do the job, and I did the job. And I was proud to do the job. And I was proud to put on that uniform and go to drill. It wasn't a problem. And course the money worked. It was good. And my wife finally—she was goin' to school and wor—had a job keepin' books downtown.

And she was glad to see the money, too.

[00:54:16] JCD: So during this time what—you mentioned your wife was workin' in bookkeeping. So what did she—you were in the poultry business, and you had a daughter. Your wife worked out of the house some, is that correct?

JD: Now we—yeah, but somethin' that I missed that's real important. Right after the war, they moved in hundreds of trailers around Tech for married couples, and there were a lot of veterans. And over there where the Tucker Colosseum is, that was all trailers. That was trailer city one. And we—they were all young couples. Some of 'em had little kids, and we just got along real well. And I think back on the—Colonel Buerkle was the guy that was over the maintenance of the campus, and I got a job with him, and I got paid for that. And I member one day another guy was with me, and we had brought our lunch, and we was layin' under a trailer, and we went to sleep. And I felt a boot kick the bottom of my boot. And I crawled out from there, and it was Colonel Buerkle. He said, "You feel like you need to be paid for today?" And I said, "Well, sir, we just takin' lunch, and I'm sorry. I won't do it again." [*Laughter*] But he was a little guy in statue, but boy, he had a loud voice, and I'll never forget him. [00:56:05] But what—another story about the

trailer city. Back then, you can't believe it now, but the water in the wintertime would back up nearly to the campus. And the geese, white geese, would fly over and land not too far from the campus. Well, my wife had bought me a 12 gauge shotgun, and I kept hearin' these geese fly over, and I said, "I'm gonna—we're gonna have some meat to eat." So I stepped out and fired that shotgun. One came down. And I heated me some water and soaked it, picked it, and you couldn't stick a fork in it. That was the toughest piece of meat I ever ate. [*JCD laughs*] So that was the end of my killin' geese. But everybody in the campus heard about that, and I heard about it, I'll tell you. But there were three camp—three areas of trailers. And see, the other one was over behind what—where—it—I guess it was where the stone buildin' is where the—rock dorm is what they called it. And then there were three trailer cities there. And I forget when they took 'em all to—when they got rid of 'em, they took 'em down to one city in Texas. Some guy bought 'em for some reason or other. But it sure was helpful right after the war 'cause everybody was nearly a veteran.

[00:57:50] JCD: So I understand—we've talked about this a little bit—that you've been really active in the Russellville community. I wonder if you wanted to talk a little bit more about that through

the years. You said you're involved in the chamber today, and then you're involved in your church. And I wonder if you wanted to discuss that a little bit and some of your involvement in the area.

JD: Well, my wife was a Baptist, and I was a Presbyterian. And we were both committed. But she said one night, said, "I think that you oughta either join my church, or I need to join yours." I said, "Well, I cane yours." And during the Korean War, I was ahead of distribution of troops for Korea, and we had to live in Little Rock, so I joined the Baptist church. This old Baptist preacher, he told me—he says—he said, "I know what they gonna say about you. You're gonna quit drinkin' in public." I said, "Well, there won't be any drinkin' in my family. I don't drink." And he said, "Well, I just"—he told that in church, so everybody knew my name. Jock Davis, Baptist. [*Laughter*] So I been a Baptist ever since.

JCD: And we get to your nickname, Jock.

JD: Jock.

[00:59:26] JCD: How did you get the name Jock?

JD: Well, Mama told me how I got my nickname. We had—she had two or three great big ol' rockin' chairs that had big arms on 'em. And I'd get on one, and here I'd go rockin'. She said, "You

know, you look just like a jockey." Said, "I'm gonna call you Jock." And that's how I got my nickname.

JCD: And I imagine most people that know you call you Jock.

JD: They d—nobody's ever asked me before how I got the name Jock, you know. [*JCD laughs*]

[01:00:05] JCD: Not long ago, you served as a gubernatorial appointee to a state commission, is that right?

JD: What—say that.

JCD: A gubernatorial appointee. You were on a state commission? Is that right?

JD: Yeah, motor vehicle.

JCD: Motor vehicle. And that was under Governor Asa Hutchinson?

JD: Right.

JCD: Would you share with us what all that entailed?

JD: Well, we met once ever two weeks here in Little Rock, and it entailed anything that involved a change in auto—motor vehicles. And actually we had control of ever dealership in Arkansas, really. And it was a much more important job than I thought it would be. And nobody ever missed a meeting. And I forget who I—Asa Hutchinson was our man. And I enjoyed the time. I enjoyed seein' the guys because they were from all over Arkansas. And I enjoyed seein' 'em every time we met. But it's

a pretty big job.

[01:01:21] JCD: It sounds like, based on our conversation, that you've lived a very full life, and it's been full of service to your country, your community, and your family. Lookin' back, what are some things that you're most thankful for?

JD: Friendship. I wouldn't take anything for the friends I made. And for some reason or other, I make friends easy because if I meet a guy and I tell him I love him, I mean it. And fellowship is so important to me and has always been my life, and I think it goes back to me and my three brothers because there was so much love in my family. But I just praise God that I have so many friends. And boy, I have people checkin' on me all the time. That bird right there checks on me all the time. [*JCD laughs*]

[01:02:28] JCD: Is there anything else that I should ask or anything that you thought I would ask in the interview that you wanted to share? Anything that I need to know or we need to know for collecting this story?

JD: Well, I hadn't thought about, and probably when I leave here, I'll think of a dozen things. But I just appreciate opportunity to tell my story, especially about World War II because I was so young and at the age where you're dating girls and enjoying life. But I felt the responsibility of goin' to my—coverin' my country. I love

my country. I love that flag.

[01:03:13] JCD: Yes, sir. Before we—I've got one more question for you, but I also wondered if you wanted to share this in the interview, this citation you've earned . . .

JD: I certainly would. And I think John's probably responsible for this, but that day in Little Rock, I just—I'm—and John made it all happen. I just took over the Capitol. And I've got one that looks like this from the—who's the other one from?

JE: Secretary of State.

JCD: Secretary Thurston?

JD: Yeah. Yeah. And I just—when my neighbor met—well, this bottom—at the bottom of the page is my neighbor, and he's the one that presented it. And it just—it really got to me. And I don't know—not because he is my neighbor, but I did campaign hard for him. [*JCD laughs*] But he's a wonderful guy, and I—he goes at his job. And I got to hug the governor that day. And it was just wonderful day that John put together. I mean, I'll never forget it.

JCD: You want me to read . . .

JD: Yeah.

JCD: . . . read it, or would you like . . .

JD: Yeah.

JCD: Do you want to?

JD: I like—some—I wish you would.

JCD: Okay.

JD: 'Cause I'm really proud of that.

[01:04:54] JCD: It says, "Citation. Mr. Foster C. 'Jock' Davis.

Whereas Arkansas is fortunate to have many citizens whose life experiences offer a wealth of wisdom that helps guide and influence our state toward continuous progress, and Mr. Foster C. 'Jock' Davis enlisted in the United States Army in 1943 and served in World War II in the Pacific theater of the war. He was honorably discharged from active duty and then joined the Arkansas National Guard, where he retired in the rank—with the rank of major. And using the GI Bill, Mr. Davis enrolled at Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, Arkansas, where he met Melba Jean Thompson, to whom he was married for seventy-four years. A daughter was born to this union, Jocqueline "Jibbie" Davis Baker. Mr. Davis is a grandfather to three grandsons who all followed in his footsteps and served on active duty in the United States

Army. And Mr. Davis is an active member of the First Baptist Church of Russellville, Arkansas. He has served in several leadership roles and is involved in local civic affairs, including veterans organizations. He enjoys playing golf and taking cruises, and he's still driving. And the House of Representatives in the 94th General Assembly of the State of Arkansas takes great pride in recognizing Mr. Foster C. 'Jock' Davis for his contributions. Now therefore pursuant to the motion of Representative Matt suff—Duffield, the Arkansas House of Representatives directs that this citation be presented on the 23rd day of April, 2024."

JD: That was . . .

JCD: That's an honor.

JD: Yeah. That is an honor.

[01:06:38] JCD: Before we go, at the Pryor Center—and we've ta— you and I have talked about this. We will preserve this story, we'll share this story in the hopes that future generations will learn from what you've shared with us today, Jock. If there's something you could impart upon future generations who might

watch or listen to this story years from now, what is it you would like for them to know about you or maybe advice or wisdom you'd like to share with them today?

JD: There're two things that—in my life and my heart, is God and country. And if we spend a long time thinking about those two things, we'll have a good life because God and country's embedded in me and will always be. I don't know whether this evolves from my father bein' a World War I veteran and a Christian, my mother bein' a Christian, my brothers all bein' Christian. And I just—in my heart, as I say, when Old Glory passes by, I get tears in my eyes because I'm part of it.

[01:07:57] JCD: Well, Jock Davis, on behalf of the Pryor Center, I wanna thank you for sittin' down with us today. You're a true Arkansas treasure, and it is an honor to speak with you today.

JD: You know, I appreciate that, and I appreciate every one of you what you've done through this program because I love to have my story told. And you did a beautiful job today far as I'm concerned, and I got to meet you.

JCD: Thank you, sir. I appreciate it. It's an honor.

JD: Thank you.

[End of interview 01:08:31]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]