WORLD WAR II ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS SPENCER RESEARCH LIBRARY, KANSAS COLLECTION

Interviewee: Harry Gumby
Date: 6 December 2011
Location: Gumby residence, Grandview, Missouri
Interviewer: Deborah Dandridge, Field Archivist

GUMBY INTERVIEW NO. 1
Tape 1, side 1 begins.

DEBORAH DANDRIDGE: Thank you, Mr. Harry Gumby for coming here to have an interview with us. We appreciate it a great deal. This is December 6, 2011; this interview is taking place in Mr. Gumby's home in Grandview, Missouri. Mr. Gumby let's just start out with some basic questions and asking some of your background. Where did you grow up?

HARRY GUMBY: I grew up in Mount Holly Springs, Pennsylvania. That's a small town, oh maybe eleven hundred, twelve hundred people in the whole town where I grew up. It was a rural area between Harrisburg, the capital, and Gettysburg, which, of course, was famous for its Civil War years; and ninety miles from Washington, DC.

DANDRIDGE: Did you—What schools did you go to? In that area?

GUMBY: Yeah, in that area. I went to the Mount Holly Springs School, which was nine grades. Now back in those days, when you finished the ninth grade that was all the schooling that you got unless you went to another town six miles away called Carlisle. But there was no bus transportation or anything; you either had to hitchhike or walk or live with a relative in there. But when you finished the ninth grade you were finished schooling in that town and the requirement was that you didn't have to go to any more school. So I did that and I completed high school while I was in the military.

DANDRIDGE: While you were at this school, was it racially integrated?

GUMBY: Oh yes, yes, yes. It had been racially integrated about—let's see my older sister who was twelve years older than me, uh, so she was the first or second black to go to that school, to go to the integrated part. Up until then they had a small school that they called the colored school in the town and that's where black people went to school. So I would imagine—let's see she's twelve years older than me, so—

DANDRIDGE: (injecting) Yeah, so it was probably the first part of the century they began—

GUMBY: Yeah, yeah, first part of the century. Yeah, it would have to be.

DANDRIDGE: What kind of work did your parents do when you were growing up?

GUMBY: (overlapping) Okay. Yeah, yeah. My daddy was a farmer; a huckster. We had a big garden and we planted vegetables and everything like that in the summer and sold 'em and that was part of our income. And then he worked as a boiler man at a paper mill. Mount Holly Springs had two paper mills and they were located there because of the pure water. Everybody drank mountain water, ran right out from under the mountain and all that—So they caught this water and they made this paper. So he was a boiler man there and what he did was stoked up the boilers that ran the plant. And then—he did that for, oh, a long time. And then later on, I guess when I was somewhere around twelve, fifteen years old, he got a job at the state capital in Harrisburg as a janitor and he kinda worked there until retirement.

DANDRIDGE: Did your mother work outside the home?

GUMBY: Yeah, Momma worked, did day work outside the home. And then she also took in washing and ironing—all the ladies did around there, that was a way of income. And then she—We had the job of cleaning the Mount Holly Spring Library and I was one of the one's—When I go by that place now, I tell the children, I said, "I don't even want to look in there, I dusted so many of them books and—." (chuckles) And it was my job to keep the books dusted and so Momma got paid for cleaning up the library and us boys—I had five brothers—we all, off and on, worked in there and so we helped her. But, she was a domestic and a wonderful person and really the educator of the family. Momma went to school with the Jim Thorpe people, way back there, so she had a pretty good education.

DANDRIDGE: When you say she went to school with the Jim Thorpe people, what do you mean?

GUMBY: Well, yeah, Jim Thorpe was a Native American who lived in Carlisle, Pennsylvania and went to the Indian, the Native American school on there. So when Momma came along, that's where they went to school, too.

DANDRIDGE: Was your mother also Native American?

GUMBY: No, she was black. No, no, no. She wasn't a Native American.

DANDRIDGE: So Native Americans and blacks were attending this same school?

GUMBY: Same school, uh-huh. Yeah. And that school is still there, incidentally, the building is still there.

DANDRIDGE: Is that right? What church did you—

GUMBY: We went to church—well, went two churches, went to churches all day. In the morning—Dad was a Methodist and Mom was a Baptist. So in the morning we took off to the Methodist church and then we ended up that night at the Baptist church. So we were in church just about all day. Well that was your recreation back in those days, you know you didn't—you know you're either classified as a good boy or not. So you were good if you went to church, did what your parents did, stayed out of trouble that sort of thing. And, of course, we did that. Now my brother and I—The church is still staying.

I was up home last, in October and the stove that I used to stoke as a boy, eleven, twelve years old. is still in that church. The church is closed now because all of the people—I would imagine, well when I grew up in the town there may have been 150 blacks but it's down now to, well just mostly my family there now, uh-huh. And so they go to church in Carlisle, which is six miles away, and the church building still standing there. And I was telling my sister, when I got back home, she was saying that somebody wanted to rent the building and do something with it; I said, "Well you should have told me that while I was there," so they're going to get me in touch with this guy and we're going to see if we can turn this over to him if I can get him to, you know, it needs a lot of fixing up and things like that.

DANDRIDGE: What was the name of the church?

GUMBY: It was called the Mount Tabor AME Zion Church. Mount Tabor was one of the great mountains in the *Bible* and Mount of Olives, Mount Moriah, Mount Tabor, they're all in the Old Testament. And so that's where our churches was named after, especially African American churches. Always carried that name.

DANDRIDGE: And this is Mount—AME Zion?

GUMBY: Uh-huh, AME Zion. Yeah. Now the difference between—See the—and I found this out later, the blacks had three different Methodist churches: the AME Zion, which was the mother church, the ME, and the CME. Okay? And the—And I found out later, by traveling through the South, about the ME and the CME. I didn't know about those when I was growing up in Pennsylvania; it was all AME. And we had our own presiding elder, our own bishop, and all that sort of thing.

DANDRIDGE: What was the name of the Baptist church?

GUMBY: The Baptist church was Shiloh, which was partially built by my grandfather, my mother's daddy.

DANDRIDGE: Really?

GUMBY: Yes sir. And he was quite a veteran(??) and Roz has got some history on him too. He was a soldier way back there and fought Quantrill and those guys way back there. And came to Pennsylvania and settled up there, was a mason, and his name is really on the wall in the church. Yeah, his name was Parker, and Roz has a pretty good history of him. So we went to Shiloh in the afternoon, Shiloh Baptist Church. It's still standing, it's still flourishing. Oh it's got to be years old, you know, cause my mother went there and Momma lived to be eighty-six or something like that.

DANDRIDGE: When you were—Anything you remember about going to school? Did you enjoy anything in particular?

GUMBY: Oh yeah, I enjoyed school. Let me tell you this, the—and I found this out—Okay I went in the Army with a ninth grade education and I was better equipped than fellows I met who had completed

high school. And some of them were a couple of years of college. We learned something in those nine grades, in those years that we went from one to nine. And we had—My worst subject, my hardest subject, and I still don't like it, was algebra. But I had two brothers who were so good at math, algebra, geometry, trig and all that stuff that they were tutors while they were students going to school. Isn't that amazing? And one finally became a chemist, he had a PhD. He's still living; he's in Rochester. And the other became a school administrator in New Jersey. And both of these guys, I'm telling you, they were wizards at this stuff.

DANDRIDGE: Let—Can you give—Who were your siblings? Who were your brothers and sisters?

GUMBY: Okay. I had—My oldest brother—We were all in one family; all had the same mother and same daddy. Momma and Daddy was married sixty-five years before Momma passed; she passed first. And—now my oldest sister, she finished the ninth grade and then she went to high school in this little town called Carlisle and she went to live with a relative cause they had aspirations and some of the other people had gone to become teachers and nurses. And back in those days they had a school called a normal school and I don't know what it meant, but they called it—Shippensburg(??) Normal was a teaching school I think it was. So they went to the school and she come out of this normal school and became a nurse and whatever professional you were considered to be in tall cotton with the short hose they used to say. (DANDRIDGE laughs) Its way up there, know what I mean. And so my sister, Mary Evelyn(??), she went through all of this; smart as a whip. And then, uh, she hit twelfth grade. Raymond, the next oldest, only went through the ninth and he did well when he got out of school. Somehow or other he missed the service, I don't know how he missed it; but he became sheriff of one of the counties there, did well. Then I had a brother George, who was next, he was a—he could run. Back there in those days, years ago, they had a fellow named, black guy named Jesse Owens and if you know the history of Jesse Owens he stood before—he beat the Germans in the relay and Hitler never forgot that; so from that he didn't like black soldiers. So that traced itself into the Army and so when the black soldiers went to Germany, you know, they gave the Germans a tough time because of the Jesse Owens thing. You know one of those things where, you know, somebody tells a tale and it carries on and on and on and gets into the culture and never gets out. And, so, but George was a runner; oh he could move, I tell you true. I saw him myself. Back in those days during the Fourth of July, we used to light firecrackers; it was fun. And we had a firecracker like four or five inches long, and they'd light that firecracker and George would see how far he could run before that thing went off. And I'm telling you they clocked him as being way away from that thing; he could get down and move. Well, we think that the running and—he died young and we think that the running's what killed. And then my brother John, he went in the army year or so before I did. Did well, but he came back out and went to government and worked for forty-three years for the government and he retired. And then my other Ed was the one with the educator in New Jersey. And then William, who is an industrial chemist, worked for an outfit called Bausch & Lomb in New York and he was in on the, he was on the very first—what do you call those little rings you used to put in your eyes?

DANDRIDGE: Right—I know what you're—

GUMBY: Yeah, yeah, with that. Yeah, he was one of the guys that helped make the first ones of those things. Now I'm telling you that's really getting down.

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, contacts.

GUMBY: Yeah, yeah, contact lens. And then Bausch & Lomb made a lot of other stuff, laboratory stuff and high tech equipment and all that kind of mess. And so he worked for them for years. And then—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Where did he go to school?

GUMBY: Oh, yeah. He went to school at Penn State.

DANDRIDGE: Really?

GUMBY: Yes sir. He went to two schools. He finished the Mount Holly School—three schools, then he went to Carlisle to go to high school. Now by the time William came along, they had transportation to go from my little town over to Carlisle, which was five or six miles, so he had a way in and out back home. So he went to school there. Then he went to a college called Dickinson College, which was in Carlisle, old time well-known law school. He graduated from there and then he went to Penn State up in State College. Incidentally my—I have a grandson up there going to State College now; he's going after his doctorate.

DANDRIDGE: At Penn State?

GUMBY: Yeah. He's—

DANDRIDGE: What field is he in?

GUMBY: Uh—he's a clinical guy, clinical psychology; I call him a headshrinker, you know. (DANDRIDGE laughs) And I tease him a lot. And he says, "Gramps, now you know I'm really not." I said, "Well--," I told him one day, said, "We used to take all the clinical psychologists, the headshrinkers," and I said, "We'd put them in the front line when we were in the Army." (DANDRIDGE laughs) He said, "Now Gramps, what'd you do that for?" He says, "You telling me the truth?" I said, "Yeah," and I said, "Well, because we ain't got no time for him to put us through a clinician course when our enemy's shooting at us. So we put him up here to make sure we knew where he was." (laughs) So we get a big charge out of that. But—I don't really think that was done; some of the guys said it was, but I don't think it was done. But, anyhow, William worked there and then he got tired of that and you know what that guy's doing now? He's left all that and he just kinda walked away. I guess he got a pension and all that from it. But he runs a big—he runs a senior citizens housing place.

DANDRIDGE: Great.

GUMBY: Isn't that something?

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, that's great.

GUMBY: And I said, "Well, now William, how can you—." He said, "Oh," he said, "I'm having a ball."

DANDRIDGE: Oh that's great, that's good. He knows what they need.

GUMBY: Yeah and he works religiously at that thing, too. But anyhow, that's the side of the boys; the girls did well, too. Several of them were teachers and worked in the government, things like that. And the war, when it came, World War II, you know, I guess made a lot of us, took us away from the domestic scene and the drudgery of working in somebody's kitchen or on somebody's farm and we got to get out and get into industry and do some things and see some things that, otherwise, probably wouldn't have happened. Uh—

DANDRIDGE: Now how did your—You said your father earned a living from being a huckster, did he maintain the farm throughout his life or—

GUMBY: Let's see, we stopped farming—let's see when we really stopped farming—I guess when the war broke out, because all through the Depression we raised vegetables and sold 'em. And, up to about 1941 or so, along in there, I guess we kinda kept things rolling. And then from then on, you know, we got rid of the—had a mule and a horse and so Dad, somebody talked him into raising guinea pigs, for laboratory research, so he took off doing that. So—(laughs) which was an awful thing, you know, and we'd get on him when we went home. We said, Man what are you doing fooling them mice? They're rodents. He said, "Oh the government needs 'em." So he was raising 'em and they were hauling them off somewhere selling them. So he did that, but he still, by that time he had been working, I think, in Harrisburg and he worked—oh, he worked up until he was, like, eighty-five, all this kind of stuff. He just couldn't quit working. But that's kinda the way he ____(??).

DANDRIDGE: So, did you all sell the farm or—

GUMBY: No, we still own it.

DANDRIDGE: You still own it. Are they still working it with vegetables—

GUMBY: (overlapping) Nope, no it's all in grass and woods.

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh and is the house is gone?

GUMBY: The house is gone. Yeah, we ____(??) (mic or recording noise obscure some words) house ____(??) the house, covered with ____(??) and then later we covered ____(??). And we found all kinds of things when we tore(??)—the house has been down now about five years. The city said we either had

to restore it, of course there was nobody there to live in it, we had built a new home and that's where my sister's live now, they live in the new house. But we still own the land and everything, yeah.

DANDRIDGE: So when you said World War II came, um—Tell me what is the first time you, first memory, earliest memory you have about the war, hearing about the war.

GUMBY: The first time I paid attention to the war was on December seventh, which is tomorrow, and I was at my little girlfriend's house and they said Pearl Harbor's been bombed. And I said what in the world is Pearl Harbor and where is that? I'd never heard about no Pearl Harbor. Oh I knew about Hawaii and that sort of thing and I was pretty good at geography and that sort of stuff and I knew that the war was raging and all of that, but it hadn't really touched us. Very few people, of the people around the little town where I was had gone to war until, to the Army until, of course, we were attacked by the Japanese and then it broke wide open. So then—It was on a Sunday, never will forget, Sunday, I was chasing this little lady. I had known her for some time and all this sort of thing. They said, Well Pearl Harbor—She said, "Well I guess you're going to have to go to the Army." I said, "Oh no," I said, "What would I do in the Army? I'm not a soldier, I'm a farmer." Well, that lasted two years. Let's see '41 they attacked us and '43 I was in. And I was in the service and I tell you what had happened. I had finished school and everything and I had gone to work down at the—the Navy was building a great big depot down there, and they said, If you worked at this depot you were supposed to be, you were war something—you know, you were doing—no, you were defense prone(??). You know, that was your job and long as you stayed there—So, cocky, you know, young, cocky, mouthy fellow, the boss and I, we had a little row and I told him, "I don't have to work here, I can do this, do that, and the other." He said, "Well," he said, "no, you have to stay right here." He said, "If you leave here, I'm going to turn your name in," he said, "they're going to draft you." And I said, "Well, we'll see about that." And one word led to another—you know how boys can be cocky and mouthy, but, sure enough he did; I left and went to another job and two weeks later my notice came and I was drafted. (chuckles) Left home and went back a couple of times—Well, the first time when I got out of the service, I went back home and everybody else was getting out, so all the jobs was taken up and everything like that. I didn't think about going to school. I said, Well I think I'll go back in. And I had gotten a little bit of rank by that time, I was a staff sergeant. I had four stripes. So somebody said, Well you come on back in, and study and all this and everything, and maybe we can get you a commission and get you reenlistment bonus. All that kinda stuff they do when they want to entice you do something, you know, so you kind of fall for that. So I did and all that. And in the meantime, when I was in there, they sent me down to Texas and I met Mrs. Gumby, she was going to school. Well it so happened down there that the soldiers, a bunch of soldiers, just before we got there had come in there, a month or so before that, and went downtown and tore up the town. So people in uniform weren't very well liked around there. Well, I was always the fellow that kinda hung around the church and all this sort of thing. So I said, Well, I gotta go to church; I can't deal with no chapel, so I'll go to church in town. So I always used to be a pretty good singer back then. So I got together four or five fellows and we formed what we called a quartet. There were really five of us. And I was the manager, so we took this group of fellows five around town and we'd go to singing in these churches. Well the word got out, you know, said, Hey them boys must be all right. They go to church and they sing and the crowd follows 'em. And—So we'd just get them in there. It so happened

that Mrs. Gumby, the little lady that I was chasing, I tell the children this all the time, I kinda had an eye for her so being in charge, we sang at her church more than any place. So her daddy loved that, he was the minister. So he kinda fronted for me and he saw really that I was all right, just like anybody else I was in uniform. We all were, man they had so many people in uniform back then, it was just something else. And one thing led to another and led to another and then they sent on off the college, you know. She went to a black college up in Marshall called Bishop College; I don't even think it exists anymore. She had two years of college and all that and so—They tried to get me to go to school, I said, "I'm in the Army, I'm a soldier. I can't be doing no schooling and stuff like that." I said, "I'll just piddle along like I'm going now." And did that. And low and behold, in her second year up there, we jumped up and we get married and we were married fifty-eight(??) years before I lost her. She's all the ___(??) that I had and she had and I was—she was the only wife that I had.

DANDRIDGE: That's good. Tell me, how would you describe, in Mount Holyoake—Mount Holly Springs, how would you describe race relations in the community when you were growing up?

GUMBY: Oh, we were separated. Let me tell you about that, and I tell people this all the time. We lived across the tracks, we lived on the east side of town; most of the blacks lived on the east side of town. There was maybe two or three families that lived on the west side of town, but they had been there so long that, you know, everybody knew 'em. They were just ____(??) now. And—But over where we lived—And I was telling Roz the other day that, and she still can't get actually what happened. The street leaving the main part of Mount Holly, coming over to where I lived, where we lived, was Prime Street and then when it got, when it turned and came down to where we lived, they renamed the street Mountain Street, but they called it Smokey Knoll. She said, "Well, dad why'd they do that?" I said, "Well I don't know, it was long before I was born it was done." And, so—But later on they renamed the streets and, of course, it then became Mountain Street all the way down. Well now, over where we lived on the east side, when I left home to go to the Army, we did not have electricity, we did not have telephones, we did not have gas, natural gas, we did not have water, none of those things, none of those things did we have. The water came to the end of Pine Street and stopped. And from then on, where the black people lived ____(??). So while we were in the service, we started fighting for what we felt we should have. And we went to the state health department, we jumped over the city, the county, and everybody else, and said, We need water on our street, we need electric, we need everything else everybody else got. Okay? And—as a boy, we'd used to get our water from these springs and we'd haul it in big cans called milk cans or large cans and then we had a cistern where the water ran off the roof into the cistern and we used that to wash clothes in, but we didn't drink it or use it for consumption, we used this other water. So that was kinda a form of segregation. The other was, we were—we went through economic segregation. Whenever they wanted somebody to do menial tasks, they'd come over in our street and get 'em. Dig ditches, clean toilets, anything like that. The town was primarily Republican, they voted(??) Republican and there was one or two people around there that ran everything. Uh—This is an interesting thing, this is going to slay you. You could not get a loan, a black person when I grew up you could not get a loan from a bank in Mount Holly Springs unless it was signed for by a white person, okay? Even though we were property owners; I guess our property wasn't worth much or probably that nobody would buy it, I don't know. We owned our land where we lived, we actually owned it. We had

three acres, three and a half acres, we owned it; had title to it, had deed to it, everything. Couldn't borrow no money. So, um, listen to this. We were—Momma was such a friendly person that I don't know anybody in town that did not like her, at least if they didn't I never heard about it. And they would come and consult her on different things that happened in the community and things like that and she would sit and talk to 'em, all this kind of thing. And, when any of the other black boys in town got in trouble or something like that, they would come over and Mrs. Gumby would say, "Well so and so and so and so," and she'd say, "Well, he's all right, he's just like any other boy, he's mischievous, he gets into this and into that, long as he hasn't done anything illegal, let him go." "Okay, Mrs.--." All right, in the town there was a family, there was a pharmacist named Jay Raymond Snyder and his wife's name was Edna Snyder. My oldest brother was named for him, his name was Jay Raymond Snyder, see the connection? One of my sister's was named Edna Snyder. In other words, when Momma had these babies, these ladies, these people—you know, she named them after these people, she admired them and they admired her. Okay. (chuckles) Mr. Jay Edward, if we needed a loan—I don't remember my Daddy ever borrowing any money, but if he had, if he did, Jay Edward would sign off on it. That's real I don't know what you call it.

DANDRIDGE: Mm-hm, and did your mother work in their home?

GUMBY: Yes, she worked for them. And they—Not only that but they always kept her in a job, she always had the job, bless her heart, she did, she was good at doing iron, washing and ironing. All the prominent people, men, brought their shirts over there, ladies brought the shirts for Momma to do up. So she was good at that. Didn't get nothing for it. I guess a shirt back in them days, she got a quarter, maybe, for doing.

DANDRIDGE: That was still a lot of money.

GUMBY: A lot of money back then. But that's how we kinda grew up. So we were—Momma always taught us that, you know, better days would come and that this thing would equal out and that we would have to endure some hardships, and she used the *Bible*, different things, you know, Paul(??) for example, she was a colored(??) ____(??), Paul would do great hardships and went through a whole lot of stuff. And so we were taught, don't go around with a chip on your shoulder, things will change, people will change. And the other thing she taught us, when we do get in a position where we can do like we've been done, then don't do that 'cause you know how it feels. Well that kind of stayed our—I tried to teach my children that and I noticed my children tried to teach theirs that. It's kinda gotten away from some of the grandchildren, you know, they're—it's entirely new day and they're influenced by the culture around them, you know how it is, and the____(??)—

DANDRIDGE: So you did not—Although you went to this school that was integrated, did you have any classmates who were white that were your friends?

GUMBY: (overlapping) Oh yes. Yes, yes, yes. Let me tell you what happened. They were friendly until it came to the point where they had a party and I wasn't invited it. Okay? And you could see that that was

the parents. Even though they—And later in years, you know, when I went home I was a highly decorated veteran and when I finally went home I'd go to see some of my classmates and people like that. And they'd say, "Oh, ____(??)," they called me by my nickname, they said, "Oh boy, " said—every one of them would even feel sorry, said, "That's all(??) man." I said, "The apostle Paul said, look forward don't look back. Don't look back, those days are gone, it's a new day, make certain that you treat these people that you're dealing with now in the way that you want 'em would like to have ____(??)." But it—We had one family there that really, later on, became really good friends of my sisters. They were teachers and they had come up from Florida in the early forties, late thirties or early forties. Sue and I were in the same grade and everything like that. And she used to look off of my paper and get answers, everything like that, but when they had birthday parties and things like that—even at recess we all played together, but it was just where the boy and girl, the white boy and the black boy, it just didn't gel(??).

DANDRIDGE: When you were growing up, did you ever hear anything about race riots or civil rights protests?

GUMBY: Oh yeah, yeah. We knew about that and I'll tell you how we knew about it. The Philadelphia paper came out every week and it was called *The Philadelphia Afro-American*, it was a black newspaper. The two of 'em, had one that came out of Philadelphia and one that come out of Pittsburgh, and of course they pretty much kept up with the story so we knew about it. But we didn't really—you know it's like, you know you hear about the wind and all that kind of stuff but you never know about the wind until you feel it. You see what I mean. So it was farfetched and we used to laugh. In other words, I was cautioned when I went to the Army. They said, Now listen, when you get out in Virginia, remember now you can't pass a white person on the sidewalk. Said, If you go on the sidewalk there and a white comes up following, you get off and walk in the street. I never had to do that. You know? And I never seen anybody that did down there. I got down into Maryland and Virginia and different places and went on about my business, but it was kind of a—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) So you learned your things from the *Pittsburgh Courier* and *The Philadelphia Afro American*.

GUMBY: Yeah, yeah, the *Philadelphia Afro-American*.

DANDRIDGE: So let's talk about—What were the circumstances surrounding your entry into World War II?

GUMBY: The what?

DANDRIDGE: What were the circumstances? You already said that (chuckles) you got dismissed from the job and got the draft. What did your parents think when you got that draft?

GUMBY: Well, they never wanted us to go to war; they never wanted any of us boys to go into the Army. They felt it was a white man's war and that we had no business fighting. And we didn't have the great

stress, you know, like President Obama puts on God Bless America and we're all Americans and yeah this is America even though we ain't got it like it should be, it's still America and we're still the best. We'll we didn't, we weren't—we didn't look at it that way. We looked at it as being two Americas. Even in the army it was like that. So they said, Okay when you get in there—They just thought the army was a dreadful thing and my dad just never really did get over it because of—he didn't say much, you know, to me about it, when I went in other than—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Were you the first son to go to war?

GUMBY: No, I was the second one to go in, the second one, one(??) went in before me. And dad used to say, "Just remember your training." And he said, "You know you have sort of a temper, you can't—you've got to control that now." I said, "Yeah, dad, I will," and all this kind of thing. And he said, "Don't ever do anything that would make us ashamed of you," and I remembered that.

DANDRIDGE: When you went off to war, did they have, I don't know, some kind of sendoff gatherings or parties?

GUMBY: No, no, no. My mother and my niece who was seven years old at the time, we walked to the bus, over to the middle of town, got on the bus, hugged and kissed and said goodbye, and I was off the war. I rode into Carlisle. I went from Carlisle to Harrisburg to the induction station and from there to Fort George G. Meade, Maryland; this was all in one day, I got there about nine o'clock at night on this troop train, we packed up in there. And the first thing I heard was, "Fall out over here," I didn't know what that meant. "Get out over here," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

DANDRIDGE: So were you with men who were black and white or were they all—

GUMBY: Well, let me tell you what happened. I left with—____(??) There was a family that lived up over(??) the mountain named the Neils(??), and the Neils were white, they were white, but they were raised black. Now this is a funny phenomenon that I'm telling you about, but it does happen sometimes. And there was black in their family, but this Neil boy was pure white, pure white, he could pass for white anywhere. And, so, we landed in Fort Meade together and we knew one another and then when we left there to go to basic, which was a little old place down in the mountains, called Camp Pickett, Virginia, we got in there that night and the next morning I looked over and Neils' bed was empty and he was gone. And I said to the guy that came in here, we had a—We lived in a little ole shack they called it the hutments(??) and you was in there with eight guys and a corporal, a two striper. So I said, "Where's my friend Neil?" Said, "Oh he ain't here," said, "he was transferred." I said, "What do you mean transferred?" I said, "We came here together." He said, "Yeah, but you're going to stay here." He said, "Neil went over to the white people." I said, "You've got to be kidding." He said, "Well he was white, wasn't he?" I said, "Well, yeah I guess he was." That's all I said, there wasn't no need for me trying to—'cause he was, he had blond hair and—but he was raised colored. I never saw that boy again. I don't know what happened to him; I don't know whether—Later on a bunch of 'em, the same guys I went with were the first batch to go overseas and I missed out on that because they picked me as part of the

cadre(??) and I don't know why they did that, I guess it was doing—I always said it was the Lord's doing. And they were gone. But back in Mount Holly this, they were going as colored and he grew up colored, but he was—That's what happened to him.

DANDRIDGE: When you were—when you responded to your draft notice, you went to where now?

GUMBY: Yeah, I went into Carlisle that was the place we all got on this big bus and we went to the induction station, which was in Harrisburg.

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh and what was that like? What did you have to do?

GUMBY: Oh that was a mess; that was a mess. We went down there and that's where they took all your civilian clothes from you, wrapped them up, said, Send these back home, and they put you in a uniform. Back in them days you had to wear your uniform. And then they sent, they sent us, they put us all on the train then, like a bunch of cattle, and sent us down to this place, Fort George G. Meade, Maryland.

DANDRIDGE: When you were in that, when you were in the induction process were there African Americans there telling you what to do, you know those who were guiding you through packing up your clothes and doing that?

GUMBY: No, they were all white people.

DANDRIDGE: All white.

GUMBY: All white. Yeah. I didn't meet—I didn't contact black people in charge until I got into basic training; that's when I finally me them.

DANDRIDGE: When you put your uniform on, what did you—do you remember how you felt about it? Do you remember—

GUMBY: (overlapping) Well, you know, we had a lot of fun.

DANDRIDGE: When you first put it one what did you think?

GUMBY: Well, I thought, My goodness I'm going to have to wear this wooly, wooly stuff for the rest of my life. (chuckles) You know, that's what you thought. And then—You didn't think too much about home. One of the things, we were raised up to, up until I was nineteen, you know, I had never really been out of the state of Pennsylvania, it was that kind of thing, we was just home people, we all stayed around close to home because—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) How old were you when you got that draft notice?

GUMBY: I was nineteen. I was nineteen. But there was just a bunch of us guys around there. But they did—When we went to the induction station there was both black and white and, of course, then—

Tape 1, side 1 ends; side 2 begins.

DANDRIDGE: Okay Mr. Gumby, we were talking about how did you know, when you were separated from all the soldiers, how did you know where to go from—

GUMBY: Okay.

DANDRIDGE: Yeah.

GUMBY: When—At the, I'm trying to think where we filled out these papers. Oh that was at the induction station where that happened. When they filled out your service record, they had—were they using colored or negro?

DANDRIDGE: It doesn't make any difference, one of the two.

GUMBY: They were using one of 'em, yeah they were. They had white, colored, Native American, and Puerto Rican. Now the interesting thing about a lot of the Puerto Ricans were black, just like me but they were called Puerto Ricans, not Negros, or not colored people and I don't, I never did—maybe it's because they spoke Spanish, I don't know. But I'm still trying to figure that one out. Yeah. But they had a Puerto Rican and then they picked some more races like Hawaiian, Asiatic, you know that took it all—

DANDRIDGE: So that's how—When you filled that out, then that determined where you would go?

GUMBY: (overlapping) Where you would go, that's right. All of the blacks, all of the coloreds went one way to be trained and the whites went to another portion to be trained.

DANDRIDGE: And, so where did you receive your training?

GUMBY: I received my training in Camp Pickett, Virginia. Camp Pickett, Virginia. And I was trained by—in the company I was trained in was white officers and black noncommissioned officers. Now that was an interesting thing. You really had to watch out there, you had to be careful there because the officers were mostly from the South and they treated us just like they had treated the Southern people that they grew up to. The culture was they were in charge and they were here and we were there. The only difference was that between the white officer and us was a noncommissioned officer, who was black. So, right then and there, I guess, almost the first day that I got there, first week that I got in there, I said to myself, Now you know if I'm going to make it in this thing at all, I'm going to have to become a noncom. We called it noncommissioned officer; we called 'em noncoms. And, so what I did was, I did a lot of studying. They put you, back in those days they put you through what they called the school of a soldier, just like going to regular school. Started the first grade, graduated in the eighth and ninth, and

all during them grades you learn certain things. By the time I had finished basic training—Now this was how much I learned about the Army, they had a book of instructions there called the ARD, the Army Regulation Directives, I knew half of that book and could recite it. Well that impressed somebody because during—we had nine weeks of training. When about, oh, during the sixth or seventh week, they said to me, this officer did, said, "Well," he couldn't talk very well, he pronounced my name like it had an "a" in it. "Gamby," instead of Gumby it was Gamby, "Gamby," and I said, "Yes, sir?" You know you had to say sir to 'em and all that kind of mess. And he said, "I've been watching," and I started to tell him, "I've been watching you, too," but I didn't. And, so he said, "You'd make a good noncom." I said, "Thank you sir." And he said—So about two weeks after that, (laughs) let me tell you what they did, they made me an acting noncom, an acting corporal. Now what they did—(laughs) I laugh about that to this day. They had this, these two stripes on a van(??) and of course they get busted or bring you up or down, and so, Lord, you put this on, put this thing on with two stripes on, you had authority. You were higher than the other fellows, okay? And there was no question that that was it. So, I said, "Okay"—well, it was the longest time before I was able to really sew 'em on my clothes and, or get paid for 'em, I just acted as a noncom under these other noncommissioned officers and these white officers. Well it so happened that the noncommissioned officers were fellows who had come out of the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry and they were the Buffalo Soldiers, Ninth and Tenth. They ate and slept and walked soldiery, it was a vocation just like you were a teacher or whatever you are, that's what these—They were just dyed in the wool soldiers. And they were impressed that I was able to learn the Army Regulations so fast, that I took the time to do it. But what they didn't know, I'm trying all I can to get away from the humdrum, you know?, and, so—Never will forget there was a guy, there was three fellows and they all came out of the Twenty-fifth Infantry, the Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiment, which was an all-black unit with some black officers, but mostly the highest ranking officers were white. Now I didn't serve in any of the infantry units, but I served under people who came out of that and I'm telling you they were dandies. So, had this guy named Willie Williams, never will forget him, and Willie kinda took a liking to me. And he said, "Boy you're smart," said, "you—."

And another thing I used to do—and I'll get back to my main story—it was a lot of those guys in there that couldn't read or write and the saddest thing that you ever want to see is when they have mail call and a guy gets a letter and he can't read it or can't answer it. So I found several of those fellows, and these were guys that knew something about the Army, too, that I could learn from. And I would write letters for 'em and then letters come, I'd read for 'em and everything. They could write their name and that was all. They had learned to write their name, some of 'em used an X but most of 'em could write their name, but they were good soldiers, they were top notch and knew the book and all this kinda—Had one guy from Mississippi, the delta, oh I lost track of everyone, I'm so sorry about that, his name was DeLoach, Ollie DeLoach. DeLoach was a great big six foot guy, strong, fierce-looking warrior and if he told you to shut up, you'd better because the next thingy you know he was going to shut you up. And I got him on my side, but he couldn't write and he couldn't read but he liked to get a lot of mail and stuff like that. And so I'd write for him and we'd get these letters and so when they called out the mail they called out, Sergeant Ollie DeLoach, he says, "Yeah," never did say here, "year," he'd say, like it was y-e-a-r. And boy was he getting the mail then. So he'd get the mail and we'd go around behind the barracks or someplace and I'd read it to him. So you don't look nigh(??), he finally, matter of fact. There was

another guy and I'm trying to think of his name, he was out of Florida and he was really smart, he'd gone to Florida A&M. Together we were teaching Ollie how to read, basic reading. Now that's, I had forgot about how to read and you learn like we learned in the first grade with the first grade book and all that and he was just so amazed—What in the world was that guy's name? But this guy had gone to Florida A&M and we were teaching Ollie how to read and all that sort of thing and he could write his name. But soldier he could do it. And they used to give him, they used to have him to call the roll for reveille. Now I'm going to tell you what this guy could do. He apparently just didn't have the opportunity to learn; he could have probably been one of the smartest guys in the world. And he would stand up there on that hill and call out every soldier's name and never miss a one and you couldn't fool him. And when they called at reveille, ____(??), John Smith! Yeah! He just said here or present, someone would say "yeah," and then one time they got up there and they tried to fool old Ollie and they said, and he called out a name and another guy called for him. He said, "Who was that fellow called that last name?" Says, "It wasn't the name I called." He said, "I want him to step out here right now," and he stopped everything until that guy came out there. He put him right out in front and so he told him, he said, "When I call your name, you answer. Don't you answer for nobody for you," said, "Don't you know your own name?" This guy couldn't read, just amazing memory and so we ran into a lot of that. But a lot of these guys had been in the old Army, so to speak, and, uh—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) When you said you wanted to pursue this to get away from the humdrum, what was the humdrum?

GUMBY: Well the humdrum was you had to do, you had specific duties that every soldier did. One was kitchen duty, KP; the other was yardbird duty, you had to do the yard; the other was work the garbage truck, soldiers did all that. The other was any time they broke up camp and moved over to another camp they had a whole bunch of detail guys. Well if you were a noncommissioned officer, you didn't have to do none of that; you saw that it was done, but you didn't have to do it.

DANDRIDGE: So that was your motive.

GUMBY: Yeah, yeah that was my motive. And the other was, I knew that eventually we would be going to some kind of technical school and that if I had pretty good marks on what I was doing here, that I'd be able to get into one(??). And, sure enough I did. What—I mean this whole process landed me in the Medical Corps. And when you got in the Medical Corps then they sent me off to a school to become a first aid man. And they taught us anatomy, physiology, how to fix wounds, give shots, carry morphine. Man I'm telling you I had more(??) ____(??) morphine ____(??) and things like that, and real morphine even, everything like that. And how to, when a guy was going into shock how to—and that's, I mean you give him the morphine before, to keep him from going into the shock 'cause the pain is what shocked them up. So we learned about that. And then you also had some hospital training. You had to go in there and do corps duty, corpsman duty, empty bedpans and all this kind of stuff and while I was in there I learned to give shots and I learned about the dermal, endodermal, muscular, endomuscular(??), and then intravenous and all this kind of stuff. And I could probably still do it, I haven't done it in years but I know how to do it. So I learned all that and just kept, just gradually progressing. Well whichever,

whatever thing that you learn, you step, you know you move up and you move up and you move up and up and up. To make a long story short, by the time I left the service, I was the highest enlisted man that there was. I was a chief master sergeant; I had eight stripes. I was never commissioned because I really never wanted one; I don't know why but I just, the noncommissioned officer was enough for me. I just never wanted to be an officer, I don't know, well it just never occurred to me.

DANDRIDGE: When you were doing this basic training, where did you complete your basic training?

GUMBY: I completed it in Pickett, Camp Pickett, Virginia.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, what was that—Was that camp nice? Did you know what the white camps looked like?

GUMBY: Oh yeah, yeah. It was separated.

DANDRIDGE: Was the white camp nearby?

GUMBY: Yeah, it was across the street.

DANDRIDGE: Oh, okay.

GUMBY: Had a big fight there one night. What happened was, we had our own Exchange over here, PX you know that's a ____(??) store. We had our own over there and we had own little recreation house, service club house. They had theirs over there. So some smart aleck, it was a white boy came over to ours one day, I don't know what he—I guess to buy cigarettes and things like that or whatever he came over there for but—Bunch of 'em ran him out of there. So he went back across the street and told his buddies, he said, "I went over there to the PX and them guys over there chased me out, said they was going to whoop," that was the kind of story. So then a fight broke out and it was a racial thing. So they didn't know that we had two units on our side that had guns—See by this time I was in the medical unit but they had some engineering guys, some combat engineers, these were black boys. Now the combat engineer group, not only did they dig ditches and make bridges and tear 'em down and all of that, but they also had guns. They had rifles just like in—they had, what did they call the other little guns they had?

DANDRIDGE: Machine guns?

GUMBY: Yeah, machine gun thing like, they had those and all that. And of course the other side over there was really armed. And you know them soldiers started shooting across at one another? So word got to the general on the post that the riot—of course he went down there to see if he could, you know, he was going to stop it and everything. When they came down there, they shot over his car, I don't think—but it was a mess. (laughs)

DANDRIDGE: So what was the penalty paid for that misbehavior?

GUMBY: Well what happened was about three days later they took all the white boys and shipped them out, sent 'em overseas. It was—I think they called 'em the Dirty Damned, there was the DD Division, and the guys had named 'em the Dirty Damned Division. You know how soldiers give things names and how they put these guys and they shipped 'em all out. And of course that took care of that. But we always had the worse part of the camp. Now for example over where the other fellows were in that division was—Is that a dog down getting there or is that a possum? See him?

DANDRIDGE: That's a dog.

GUMBY: That's a dog, yeah. Now and then I have possums come through there—

DANDRIDGE: No, no, that's a dog. Don't shoot him.

GUMBY: I have raccoons come through here and all kinds of stuff. (chuckles) So, uh, they shipped these guys on out—Oh, what I was about to say is that where we were back over here, we were living in tents, I'm talking about regular tents, canvas tents. No latrine facilities or anything and over on the other side they were living in wooden barracks. So, what are you going to do?

DANDRIDGE: So when those guys got shipped out, where did that leave—what did you guys keep doing?

GUMBY: Well they shipped us out about three weeks later; we left and went to Texas. They closed that camp. Yeah they closed that and they opened up, well they had opened up a bigger one down in Texas, a place called Camp Barkeley. That's where I met Mrs. Gumby down there in Abilene. We had terrible quarters down there, too, just strictly bad.

DANDRIDGE: Were they worse than the ones in, what, where you were, Virginia? Or were they about the same?

GUMBY: Well they—let me tell you what they were. Years ago the government had started camps called CC Camps. The CC Camps turned into army camps, so, uh—Conservation Corps or something like that I think it was called, so we stayed in the old CC barracks and you could look out through 'em just like that, only this has got glass there, look out through the sides and look out through the rain. It rained on us and everything. So what happened was, General Davis, Senior, General Davis, Senior was the only black general we had for a long time and he came down there on a tour. I don't know whether—Well I think what happened, one of the black newspapers got a hold of it, or the NAACP or somebody and they wrote this up how bad we were living down there so they sent him down there to see this place where we were living. And he's a big general of course. About a week or two before we got there, they found out he was coming, they moved us over into the white area, into the good barracks.

DANDRIDGE: Where were the white guys?

GUMBY: They had moved out.

DANDRIDGE: Oh they had moved out.

GUMBY: Yeah, these places were empty all the time. As a matter of fact it was the school where they had had the officer candidate down there, So they moved us into these—oh it was just like going from someplace to the Crown Center, the Hyatt. We had running water, we had showers on the inside, we had bathrooms and stools and everything, and we had kitchen privileges, lovely(??) mess hall and all this kind of stuff. Oh we just didn't know what to do with ourselves. (laughs) But it happened. When this general came down there, all he did was just kinda ride through, like. They had us all standing out at attention the day he come, all that kind of stuff. They didn't play the "Stars and Stripes" but I imagine they would have done that I guess if somebody woulda asked them to. They did all of this just because this guy showed up. But the real change didn't come until Harry Truman got in office and I remember the day that the order came down to where there would be no more segregated services. And Truman was the guy that did it. And he said, "We're going to do this and we mean it and anybody that causes any trouble, from the highest to lowest, I'm going to fire 'em." Well, we had some little problems, but it didn't last long. But from then on things really got—Now this must have been about 19—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Forty-nine.

GUMBY: Forty-eight or forty-nine along in there somewhere.

DANDRIDGE: Before—Let's go back, let's not—If you can hold that thought, and I don't mean to interrupt you, but let's go just during your experiences during the time of World War II. After this camp, did you stay at this camp throughout World War II?

GUMBY: No. I stayed at that camp in Texas, let me see, I was down there—let me get my thoughts together. I was in Texas twice. The first time I went down there, you know I was stationed in Texas three times? The first time I went down there we were in, what was the name of that Fort down there?

DANDRIDGE: But this was the Fort where you had, were living in the CC camp?

GUMBY: Right, right, uh-huh. We were living in the CC Camp, right, that's right. Yeah. And then we left and then the next time I went we were in the, over at the big general hospital, Fort Sam Houston.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, but where did you go during World War II?

GUMBY: Mostly during the war—See, I didn't get overseas. The first time I got overseas—I didn't get overseas until the fifties.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, but let's go back to World War II. Did you serve out all of World War II in Texas at that camp?

GUMBY: No, no. Most of World War II was done in—some in Texas, some in Missouri—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Where were you in Missouri, do you remember?

GUMBY: Down here at Neosho.

DANDRIDGE: Okay.

GUMBY: Up in the mountains.

DANDRIDGE: Was that also a segregated camp?

GUMBY: Oh my goodness yes, yeah. (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: What was it like? Do you remember anything about it?

GUMBY: (overlapping) Awful. It was terrible. We was way up there in them hills and we were like, I don't know, maybe twelve, thirteen miles from Neosho. About twenty-five miles I guess from Joplin and we used to, on weekends, we used to go when we'd get weekend passes, we'd go to Joplin—or was that Neosho?—and we'd catch a train called the Katy, MK&T, came down from Missouri through Kansas into Tulsa. And we'd go over there to see the girls, of course, recreation and you had to go back that weekend and go on back to—So the majority of that was spent in WW2 in—Yes, because yeah that's where I was when I went back. To Texas, to Fort Sam. So that had to be about—____(??) '47, long in there somewhere; yeah about '47, along in there.

DANDRIDGE: So you were in Missouri. Any other places did you serve before the time, before '46?

GUMBY: Yes, I served in Pickett, and I served in Texas. And I went from Texas to Missouri and I went back to Texas. When I went back to Texas the third time I was in the Air Force then.

DANDRIDGE: Mm-hm. Well tell me, during World War II, why—when they kept moving you, before '46 they kept moving you around, why did they keep moving you around?

GUMBY: Well, what they were doing they were—You know they had opened up so many bases and they had begun to close them. And as they would close these bases they would move the soldiers to other stations and I got caught in several of these. See they had what they called temporary places, temporary camps and then they had permanent camps. The temporary camps, and they called 'em Camp So-and-so-and-so-and-so. The permanent places they called 'em Fort So-and-so-and-so-and-so. So, like Fort Sam Houston, that was a permanent place of course and Fort Meade was a permanent place. Pickett that time they had closed it up. And then they were about to close this base down here at, in Neosho. It was called, it was a temporary camp called Camp Crowder.

DANDRIDGE: So did you ever think you were going to be sent overseas during World War II?

GUMBY: Oh yes, yeah, yeah, yeah, you had to be ready. We had our bags packed for minutes' notice to go overseas. We had one barracks bag which when it was full it was about this high and it had everything in it that you owned and that you would need, including your mess gear and your mask thing that you put on for gas. Your gas mask, which was the only thing that you strapped over your shoulder. And so when you picked this bag up, put on your hat and coat, you were ready to head for any place that the government was going to send you.

DANDRIDGE: Did you all ever get wind of, that they were going to send you overseas directly or—

GUMBY: Oh yeah, we had it all the time. We—During the time we were down here in Missouri, President Truman was in that. They had a big strike or something in St. Louis and they loaded us all up in trucks and things like that and we were going to go to St. Louis and guard the rains. Well we got, just at the last minute before we pulled out we got word that the strikers behaved themselves, settled down, we didn't have to go up there. And I was sure glad of that because I didn't want to get into that.

DANDRIDGE: Well when World War II ended where were you?

GUMBY: When it actually ended I was in Lockbourne, Ohio. Lockbourne Air Force Base, Ohio, that's right at Columbus.

DANDRIDGE: How did you jump from the army to the air force base?

GUMBY: Well let me tell you what happened. The third time—the second time I went to Texas, I was in what they called—what'd they call that? Well, anyway, it was a great big pool of men, just a whole bunch of us—I've got to look at one of my pots can I—

DANDRIDGE: Sure, sure, I'll stop it right here.

Pause in recording.

GUMBY: I was living in Columbus, Ohio.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, I think we're going to have to repeat this. When you were in—So you never went beyond, you stayed Stateside during World War II?

GUMBY: Stateside during World War II, never got into conflict

DANDRIDGE: Although you were trained as a—

GUMBY: Trained to do it.

DANDRIDGE: Trained as combat.

GUMBY: I was trained as a combat medic. And I could do all those things I told you before. I was a corpsman. I could—I went to school and they had taught me a lot of anatomy and physiology and I knew about stresses and strains and all that kind of stuff. And I knew about soldiers who were ____(??) is what we called it, but these were guys who were in depression and they had lost their minds; how to treat them. Uh—

DANDRIDGE: Would you write letters home?

GUMBY: No.

DANDRIDGE: Did you ever write home?

GUMBY: No—well, yeah I've written a few letters home to guys that I knew.

DANDRIDGE: Did you write home to your parents?

GUMBY: Oh all the time. Oh, geez, I wrote Momma and them every week. Uh-huh. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I kept the ____(??) going up there.

DANDRIDGE: Did you—did they send you letters?

GUMBY: Oh my goodness, yes. I've got some of 'em around here somewhere. I think Roz has been—gobbled them up. She's putting together a thing for the family, too, you know. Yeah, oh yeah, I wrote, wrote, wrote. Then when I went overseas, finally got overseas, I wrote Mrs. Gumby, my wife every day.

DANDRIDGE: So you married her before—Did you marry her before World War II?

GUMBY: I sure did, yes sir.

DANDRIDGE: What was that courtship like? I mean, you had told me that you were in the singing in the thing—

GUMBY: Well I met her in '43 and that's when we formed this group. And her father was a minister there in Abilene, so we would sing at her church and all over town. And we drew some pretty good crowds up there; the offerings, collections were pretty good. So they got so they kinda liked me. We married in July 18, 1946, that's when we got married.

DANDRIDGE: What made you decide to get married?

GUMBY: Well I felt like I kinda wanted her, you know.

DANDRIDGE: Was this after the war or can you remember?

GUMBY: I don't know whether the war had ended—The war ended in '46 and we got married in July of '46. Our first child was born in April '47. And it was either that or I had somebody back home supposedly waiting on me. (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: Well, in terms of—So after the war what did you do?

GUMBY: Well after the war I went home and then I couldn't find no job so I reenlisted and went back in.

DANDRIDGE: And you brought your wife back home with you?

GUMBY: Oh, yeah, brought a wife back home.

DANDRIDGE: And when you say you couldn't find any jobs, what kind of experiences did you have?

GUMBY: What I did, I went back to Pennsylvania to get my old job back, working with the Navy. But they was all filled up. You know I forget how many millions of men we had out of arms under World War II and the minute the war was over the flood gate was opened. And by the time I got out men had just bout taken up all the jobs, the good jobs. (chuckles) I probably could have went on a farm but I—I thought I was bigger than that. But they—I had worked up pretty good—No, I wasn't no staff sergeant, I was a technical sergeant then, I sure was when I got out. And I reenlisted and—

DANDRIDGE: How long did it take you to decide to reenlist, do you remember?

GUMBY: Not very doggone long. Uh, I didn't stay out but about two weeks. Uh-huh. My break in service was about two weeks, in all them twenty-seven years.

DANDRIDGE: So you made up your mind right away to go right back?

GUMBY: Right away. To go right back.

DANDRIDGE: And so did you go back into the Army?

GUMBY: Went in the Air Force.

DANDRIDGE: What made you shift military units?

GUMBY: Well, by that time I was what they call scar wharf(??). You see the Air Force, the Air Force—Truman did this too. The Air Force had separated and became a separate service, just like the Army, that's why we've got the four, Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. Back when I first got in, it was the Army Air Force. So the Air Force got so big they wanted to be by themselves. So it was better, since they were newer and everything, I figured that I could move up faster in that, since they didn't have anybody doing what I was doing. Okay? So when I joined them, I just read up in—Well I was scar wall(??) then I transferred over to the Air Force permanently and I went over in what they called in grade, using the same serial number, only thing I changed it from RA—Regular Army—to Air Force, AF; 50233885, that was my serial number.

DANDRIDGE: And you remember.

GUMBY: Oh you never forget that kind of stuff. See you were taught in the military that when the enemy got you there was only one—two things that you could repeat, your name and your serial number. Never anything else. If you gave them any other information you could be accused of high treason. Your name, my name is Harry Lester(??) Gumby, my serial number is AF305882.

DANDRIDGE: When you reenlisted, where did you do this?

GUMBY: Did it right there on the base, yeah.

DANDRIDGE: In Philadelphia—in Pennsylvania?

GUMBY: No I was in Columbus, Ohio.

DANDRIDGE: Columbus, Ohio.

GUMBY: Yes sir, did it right there. Held up one hand—Well you get out one day and then you go back the next. See the same day that you're out, you can't go back in the same day. But I had a two week break so I just went on in there, held it up, then they gave me my reenlistment bonus. Said , "Oh boy"; I was in pretty sure shape. (DANDRIDGE chuckles) Yeah, I had a pocketful of money and everything like that. Nice little wife, baby on the way, I said, "Hey I'm set here." And I had worked up to the rank where, you know when you're a certain rank they give you place to live on the base and all that kind of stuff. Oh Lord I'll tell you it was royal. The service was a good place to be, as long as there was no fighting going on.

DANDRIDGE: When you were—When you reenlisted—Where was the base that was in Ohio?

GUMBY: Uh-huh.

DANDRIDGE: Was it a seg—were you in segregated quarters?

GUMBY: Let me tell you what happened. No sir, the whole base was black. Let me tell you what happened, oh this is the interesting thing. The Kentucky Airmen, the 99th—they were the 99th and the 301st Wing, Bomb Wing. They had been in Italy and over there they were known as the Red Tails. The Red Tails were black airmen who flew P-51s and I don't know how many missions they flew, escorting the bombers in and out over the territory and never lost a one. Never lost a one and never lost an airplane; them suckers were good. Now when they brought 'em back from overseas—To show you that we had really not got this thing together, in America yet, now these were American people, born and reared here, educated here, all that kind of good stuff, and fighting for this country, for our flag. They brought 'em back to the States and sent 'em down to Godman Field, Kentucky, right outside of Louisville. And the white folks down there said, We don't want them colored fellows down here in Kentucky. We don't want 'em, get 'em out of here. You've got to get the whole shebang out. So they had this base in Ohio called Lockbourne Air Force Base, which was seventeen miles south of Columbus; they moved them all from Godman Field up to Lockbourne.

DANDRIDGE: And that's where you were?

GUMBY: That's where I got with 'em.

DANDRIDGE: Oh you got with them, you weren't there originally.

GUMBY: (overlapping) Yeah. No, no, I wasn't there when they got there, I came there later. I came there later. But I tell you that was the finest—Oh I learned something. Listen. (chuckles) They didn't know that when they did that, buddy, they just gave us the best chance to really prove that we could do anything that anybody else could do in the world. Let me tell you what happened. We were integrated there. General Cuzara(??), Mexican general, came down; he was segregated against(??) too, never made four stars. He came down from the Ninth Air Force, which was in Virginia and he said, "We're doing this all wrong, but its orders from the President." Said, "We should integrate the whites into you guys instead of breaking you up and sending you over here," said, "They need to come to this base and get some expertise on how a base is run." Said, "This is great over here," said, "you guys got the best thing going for you—." And they got together and they said, But we, we got to break it up. So they did. Now my first station, never will forget this, in1949 I guess it was, '8 or '9, after I left Lockbourne was in Cleveland. Now Cleveland was up north, everything's supposed to be great up there. Went to Cleveland, Ohio, little ole town called Berea—first place we went up there and we couldn't find no place to live. So we went way out in some old barracks that they had built during World War II and they had some industry workers working in 'em and they had turned 'em into homes, so that's where I found out—a place for me and my wife, and by that time I had two children, to live in. But, anyway, when we went to Berea, Ohio, to the Air Force Base, they wouldn't give the black fellows no jobs. Now we were schooled in the military and I'm telling you, child, we were good. I was—By that time I had worked up to a master sergeant. I thought I was tough. Really I did; I mean I thought I was something else, you know, I thought that I could do anything needed to be done. And so, let me tell you what happened. They had this Air Force Reserve Wing, that's when they started this active reserve business and it's carried on to this day, and I didn't like it then and I don't like it now because they start putting the women in there and they

send 'em—I had a niece here, just got out of there about three months ago, had been in Afghanistan, Iran, and them twice from this active reserve stuff. Well it's all right if you stick it out and there ain't no war, but it's—Women and war just don't work, and I just don't like it. It's not a thing for women to get into, war is for men and that's the reason I—But anyhow, what happened was they had this Reserve Air Wing, with the pilots and all, there was nine hundred of these people, and we called 'em Weekend Warriors, every week a certain number of 'em came out for training and we were there to train 'em. But they wouldn't give us no job. I was supposed to be running the infirmary; that was my job. They had a six bed infirmary there; I'm supposed to be bossing that. You know they had a guy who was two ranks lower than me in charge? White boy. I didn't say nothing. See in the military, whether you work or whether you sleep all the time, you still get a check at the end of the month. So, why should I—you know, I knew what I was sent there to do. I knew what I could do. And, uh, I was getting paid every month. So why should I kick the buck ____(??)? Because I knew that it was going to come to a head one day, and it did. The Inspector General, just before the Korean War broke out, the Inspector General came down there to check the unit, to see if they were ready to go to war, to active duty. Totally white unit, there was eight of us blacks in it, all came from Lockbourne, from the black air base, all went to Cleveland, none of us had a job—

Tape 1, side 2 ends; Tape 2, side 1 begins.

DANDRIDGE: You were talking about the Inspector General came, just before Korea, in Ohio.

GUMBY: (overlapping) Right, right, right. The Inspector General, the IG came in and—to inspect the forces there, to see if they were ready to go on active duty. And they failed the inspection. So the first thing this big colonel did was got all the officers and all the noncoms together and he chewed us up one side, across our head, and down the other side. And called us everything but ____(??) and said, "How could you let this happen?" So for some reason or another they always tried to pick me as the spokesman, I don't know, but the guys looked over at me, on the head, so we had, you know, our quiet communicative ways of getting around. So I held up my hand and I said, "Colonel," I said, "can I speak?" And he said, "Sergeant, I'll be glad to hear what you've got to say." And, I said, "Well first of all," I said, "that's the best chewing out I've ever got. I've been in this military since '43 and," I said, "I've never had a butt chewing like you laid on us today." And I said, "But you gave it to the wrong people." I said, "We don't even have a job here." I said, "We've never had an assignment here." And the jugular stood out in his vein, vein stood out in his neck that big, and his face turned as red as a beet. He almost had a stroke. And he said, "Sarge, what are you talking about?" I said, "Well, let me give you an example, sir." I said, "I work for a staff sergeant." (laughs) He hit the floor. He said, "You're not in charge down where you are, Sarge?" Said, "I work for a staff sergeant." I said, "He's a pretty nice little fellow and all," I said, "but he's in charge, I'm not." He said, "Well," he said, "Who's commander of that unit over there?" That captain—if a hole could have opened up and swallowed him, he would've been gone. He was so embarrassed, put out. And he says, "Well you're in charge now, Sarge." I said, "Well, Colonel, I tell you, you send your team,"—this was on Friday—I said, "You send your team back down there at eight o'clock Monday morning and," I said, "we'll go through the procedures again." I said, "Send 'em down." He said, "We'll do that Sarge." He said, "Anybody else in there?" So I(??) rushed up and I said, "We don't have a job

either, Sergeant." Oh man—He fired them commanders right on the spot. Oh, listen, them guys almost—I don't know whether they got court-martialled or not because shortly after that we left, but I say shortly after that—The wing failed and we all got new assignments. (mic noises/feedback) They sent me to New York, sent me to Mitchel Field, way out on Long Island, if you've ever been to New York, but that's where they sent me. But that's what happened, you know? And, listen, we got busy. And so when I went back down to the unit, you know the word had gotten down there. I said, "Well, fellows, I guess I'm in charge." And I said, "Now you guys know me and I know you. The only difference is I give instructions," I didn't say orders and I said, "Now anybody don't want to work for me, there's the door." Nobody left; nurses stayed, doctors stayed. They said, Sergeant, we've been waiting for this. Well the old first sergeant who was really a prejudiced dude, I saw him about an hour after that, so he started saying thing(??). "Listen man," I said, "I don't want to even talk to you." Said, "I don't want to say nothing to you and don't you say anything to me," I said, "because you knew what happened." And I said, "You were embarrassed because you made the embarrassment." Said, "Don't say anything," and I said, "You better not say anything—."(mic noise/static obscures interview) Said, "Because I told them and gave them a chance to leave and they said, 'Sarge, we're staying,'" I said, "So you know what that means, they're going to do what they need to do." Monday morning we were ready. Oh, ____(??) say, but you know it happened and I knew the unit was a mess when we got there, but you can't do a thing—when people in charge, just like anything else, they have a say so, the authority, with that is supposed to go responsibility. But that's what happened with that big thing. But the other thing, what I wanted ____(??) I said(??), all the while I was in the service, maybe with the exception—well, it even happened there, I was thinking about my Hawaiian tour, it seems as though I always had to prove myself. I don't know. But it didn't worry me because I always thought I was ahead of the job and that by being ahead of the job then you knew what to do to get the job done and so you just stayed ready for it.

DANDRIDGE: So, let's just go through your career in the military. So, after '49, then where did you—you said you went to New York?

GUMBY: Yeah, I went to New York after I left Ohio. I went to New York, out to Richmond Field(??), Long Island. And—I was supposed to be working in a hospital up there and when I got up there they had a mix-up in assignments, I don't know how this happened. But there was a guy in the position that I was supposed to be in there. He didn't even know I was coming. And, so, I said, "That's okay, man," and I happened to outrank him, he was a white fellow and I happened to outrank him. I said, "Man, don't you worry about this thing," I said, "I don't like it up here anyhow." And he said, "You don't?" I said no. And he said, "Whatcha gonna do?" I said, "Well, tomorrow morning, I'm going to call the Pentagon and just tell 'em what happened." And, so, they had an assignment section down there and everything and, so, he said, "Well, where you think they might send you?" Said, "You don't want to go back overseas." I said, "No, I don't want to go overseas." I said, "I want a ____(??)," I said, "I'd like to go to Texas, if I could." I said, "But if ____(??), wherever they've got a space." So, they sent me down to Trenton, New Jersey, place called McGuire Air Force Base down there. They had a unit down there so they sent me down there and I went on down there. Same thing happened. When I got there and they had a guy who was one rank under me who was in charge. Well, normally, the highest ranker, you know, takes over. So I told him, "Oh man, don't worry about me, I'm used to this kind of thing." I said, "Just remember that

when, you know, you've found the nitty gritty that you're in charge." I just told him so. Even though they know I'm here. It was really embarrassing for him, it really was. And, so, two or three times he, when something had to go out of the unit or something like, he'd ask me to sign it. I'd say, "Well, you know, I'm really not supposed to do that," I said, "'cause I'm not in charge over here." I said, "What I'm doing is certifying that this is me and it's like it's supposed to be and everything's okay." I said, "Even though you—," I said, "You're doing a good job." So I stayed there for, I don't know, maybe—I must have hung around there for at least two years. And then one day a guy called me and he said, "You know, we've got this assignment up in Pepperrell Air Force Base." I said, "Where in the world is that, man?" He said, "St. John's, Newfoundland." I said, "Oh, that ain't too bad." Newfoundland's, what?, maybe nine hundred miles north of New York City, just the other side of Canada. And he said, "I've been up there," and he said, "It's a pretty good base." He said, "They need a sergeant major up there." I said, "Really?" He said yeah. (laughs) I said, "Okay, go ahead and write up the orders and we'll go up." And he said, "You can take your family up there with you." I said, "No, I'm not taking my family up there to no place until I check it out and see what's going on." I said, "They're going to stay right back here in the States." So I sent 'em on to Pennsylvania—and I'm glad I did because that gave my folks a chance to see their grandchildren and that sort of thing.

So I went on up to St. John. Got up there, girl, and what happened was (chuckles) they had another fellow in the job that I was supposed to be in. I said, "How in the world do they get these assignments mixed up?" And so we laughed about it and he said, "Oh, Harry," he said, "We can both do this job. We're getting paid same thing." And I said, "Yeah," I said, "but it just doesn't seem like it's the way it's supposed to be." And he said, "Well, I'll tell you what," he said, "They got a hospital in VW-1." Well, VW-1 was in Greenland, the Sasawack(??) Air Force Base up in Greenland. He said, "You ever been up there?" And I said, "No, I've never been to Greenland." He said, "Well," he said, "the tour is shorter up there." I said, "Really?" He said yeah. And I said, "Well, I don't mind," said, "since I'm over here and Greenland's only another six, seven miles further north, I just might as well go up there and take a look at them Eskimoes and see what's going on up there." So we got the assignments and everything together, so I went to Greenland; I stayed up there two years, had a wonderful time. I didn't take my family up there. Greenland, you know is—(mic noise/static obscures interview) Midnight(??) sun? And also, you also have total darkness too for about three of the months, but it worked just well with what I was doing because we had a lot of the guys there that could take the day light but they couldn't take the night and it was all psychological. And they did the worst thing in the world. Whiskey was cheap up there and they'd get to drinking and that's a no no. You know, when you get to drinking and you get the dbs(??) and then you get to seeing things, then you get hallucinating and all kind of things happen to you. So I didn't drink, never have drank—When I was a boy growing up we weren't allowed to drink or smoke and I kinda kept that through all the years. And so I was able to kinda help a lot of guys get through. Had two or three guys who went off on the deep and we brought 'em back in a box or that sort of thing. You know, they just couldn't handle it. And so—

But it was, we did our duty up there. I was in the Air Force for the time(??) and we used—Greenland was—you know we were having all that Cold War problem with Russian during that time, you remember? And they figured that if the Russians ever hit the United States they would come over Thule,

Greenland on into VW-A, which was Sondrestrom, into one, which—And I was on the south tip. I was like a hundred and twenty nautical miles from where the Titanic went down; that's where I was up there. (chuckles) And so we had different radar sites. Then, you know, they didn't have Doppler and all this other fancy stuff that they got, you know all that, they don't need that now. But that's the way—We were a force to protect the United States from attack—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) And what did you do in particular?

GUMBY: I was a medic. I ran the hospital. I stayed as a medic, ran the hospital. I was sergeant major, ran the hospital. We had a thirty—thirty-six bed hospital up there and nurses and everything. The Danish, at that time, I guess belonged—Denmark owned Greenland, I guess, and we were just kinda renting over there, that kind of thing.

DANDRIDGE: Right. How did they accept you as African American? How—

GUMBY: (overlapping) Oh my goodness. By that time things had smoothed out. There was very little prejudice. The only—once in a while, the only incident I had up there was with a guy named Wes Moreland(??). Wes was a white guy and he was our veterinarian, he was our meat inspector guy. And every time he got paid, he would get drunk; and every time he'd get drunk, he would start a fight. That's the worst time for a man to fight, when he's drunk, 'cause he's easy to get hit and all this kind of stuff. So what happened one time he had sent off to his—well somebody had sent him some grits and so he went down to the dining hall and was going to cook these grits and all this kind of stuff. And the mess sergeant down there told him, "No, you can't do that. We don't eat no grits here and we ain't going to let you cook them." And he didn't like grits and all that kind of stuff. So, one thing led to another, so they got in a fight. So they called me and I went down and saw what the problem was. And so I had my own little thing out there. I said, "Wes, you take them grits and you go on to my place," I said, "I've got a hot plate and everything down there, you can cook 'em down there." He said, "I don't see why I can't--," he said, "I can't—." I said, "Well, some guys just don't eat grits." I think the mess sergeant—you know it's like everybody thinks blacks like watermelon. Well they don't and some who do, they don't like people knowing that they like it. And I'm sure that Swaggert, that was his name, that Swaggert ate grits but he just wasn't going to let this guy cook 'em in his dining hall. So I left Wes Moore(??) cook the grits down there. I said, "Every time you get some grits, you come down here," I said, "We'll cook 'em up; you and I will eat 'em." And that's all it takes sometimes, that kind of thing.

DANDRIDGE: So was your family still in—

GUMBY: (interjecting) No, they came to Texas, while I was overseas. Yeah, every time I went overseas they went—

DANDRIDGE: You wouldn't take 'em out?

GUMBY: Oh no, no.

DANDRIDGE: Why?

GUMBY: Well, first place it was too much fooling, moving around. And I wanted—I never wanted my children to grow up on a military installation because the culture is different. And—Now they got into the movement and I still think, sometimes, they get a little restless. But this was the longest place that we ever stayed right here, when I brought 'em here. And they—the children finished school here, they finished college here—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) When you say here, here where?

GUMBY: Right here in Grandview.

DANDRIDGE: When did you get to Grandview?

GUMBY: Come here in '64.

DANDRIDGE: So how long were you in Newfoundland and Greenland?

GUMBY: Oh, my goodness, I was up there four or five years, in both places and then I came back to the States for quite a while. And, back again, back to Texas. And then I went to Hawaii and I spent a little over four years over there. And I came from Hawaiian Islands here.

DANDRIDGE: Oh okay. What were you doing in Hawaii?

GUMBY: In Hawaii I ran an Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, Air Evac we called it. And what it was, we had a group of airplanes, this time we'd gone to the jet airplanes, and on the back of these airplanes we had a big red tail. And we used to go into the war zone and pick up the injured service people and their families too, if they lived over there and got sick. And we'd bring 'em first to Hawaii and then back to the States. And I flew 'em back and forth across there and we had this whole squadron of people. Now in this squadron, in this Air Evac Squadron, I had corpsmen, I had nurses, and one doctor. And the nurses were what they called flight nurses, they wore a flight uniform, nursing uniform, and they treated the sick on the airplane. And, of course, the doctor he was there for any number of different kinds of things. And my job was strictly administrative; I made sure that they had the right equipment, that they had the right people, and the crew was part of the, what we called the aeromedical crew and they were assigned to a plane and they went all over seas. Then, periodically, I used to do, I used to take flights over and I'd go over, we'd call 'em Round-Robin Check Rides. And I would go every place that they went, to Japan, to the Philippines, down into the Aleutians, wherever they were at, just kinda see how the guys would do. And then spent a great deal of time in the Philippines and all down in there; never did get into Vietnam, but we hauled a lot of people out of there.

DANDRIDGE: Before Vietnam, how was Korea? When we had that conflict, rather than war, what was it like serving in the military during that time period?

GUMBY: They had me ready to go to Korea two or three times. (clears throat) And I don't know how in the world I ever got out of it. But it was a—You know we've still got a bunch of a people over there now; oh yeah, I imagine maybe forty-, fifty-thousand. And we leave there, them boys from North Korea are going to march down on them.

DANDRIDGE: But you never had to go to Korea?

GUMBY: Never, never, never went to Korea, never went to Vietnam.

DANDRIDGE: So when Vietnam started, did you—Where were you during the Vietnam War?

GUMBY: I was slated for Vietnam when I got out. See when you get in the military, the longer you stay the more people you meet. And, so when I came back from Hawaii in '64, I came out here to Richards-Gebaur. And in '69, five years later, they came out with a policy that said if you had twenty years in and you'd been overseas "x" number of times, you didn't have to go back no more. Well, I didn't believe that, for that time, no I didn't believe it 'cause the military changes so. And, so, I found out who was—by that time, for the Air Force assignees(??) they had changed the assignments to Randolph Air Force Base in Texas. And I called down there one day to check on my record, on a record check and all this kind of stuff, and somewhere or other my name got bandied around down there and this guy called me. He was a guy that I'd served with. In the service they use your nickname, well this guy called me Gum, like g-u-m. "Gum," he said, "Man, listen, I didn't even know where you were, what had happened to you." I said, "Well, I'm up here in Missouri," and I said—He said, "Well you're at Dickie Goober(??)," that's the nickname they'd given this base, I don't know where they got that from. I said, "yeah, I'm at Dickie Goober." And he said, "Well," he said, "you know what?" He said, "Ain't you about ready for an overseas assignment?" I said, "No, I'm not." And he said, "Well, I'll be watching out for you." Well, I said, "Good." So, I guess a month later, this guy called me and he said, "Gum," he said, "you know what?" He said, "You ready to get out and retire?" I said, "Yeah, I'm about ready to go." He said, "I want to go to thirty." I said, "Well if they'd let me alone I'd go to thirty." He said, "Well I think your name will be up in the next three or four weeks." I said, "You kidding me?" I said, "Where?" He said, "Cam Ranh Bay." I said, "You've got to be kidding," I said, "I'm protected by the last instruction that come out." He said, "No, you're not." He said, "All us old soldiers," he said, "I'm going to have to go myself if I stay." And I said, "Well okay." He said, "Well you know what to do." I went that afternoon and put in my retirement papers.

DANDRIDGE: You weren't going to Vietnam.

GUMBY: Wasn't going. I went and put 'em in and had the clerk type 'em out and put em in and everything. Three weeks later I walked into the hospital one morning—Well after I did this I just kinda, you know—Well I had talked to an old friend and Roz and all and they said, Well Dad we think you've done enough. They said, You've pledged your allegiance, said, We don't want you to go nowhere but out

of there. And said, You can come on out here and get you a job. Said, if you don't get no job, go on back to school, finish your education. I said, "Okay guys." Three weeks later I went to the hospital one morning, I went in there and everybody was sad and droll(??) and wasn't' nobody saying nothing. And so Carol Ball(??), never will forget, bless her heart, white girl who worked for me, she was a secretary and receptionist in Wallhurst(??) and good. That's over here in Lee's Summit. And she started to cry, I said, "What's going on around here? Did somebody die?" They said, No, they said, Your assignment's in. I said yeah. And they said, "You're scheduled to go to Cam Ranh Bay." I said, "Really?" They said yeah. I said, "Oh boy," I said, "I don't think I want to go over there." They said, Well how're you going to get out of it? Well I said, "Well I just think I'll retire." (chuckles) I'm playing with 'em now, you know, a little bit. So after they all settled down that afternoon, they—Well I kinda, you know you learn to be a mischievous too—A lot of times we'd all eat in the dining room together and the workers could eat in there to, they had to pay. So I waited until they all got in the dining room, so I said, "Well guys," I said, "I got about another three more weeks here before I can eat in your nice dining hall here," and I said, "Then when I come out to eat in here, I'll have to eat in here as a civilian." They said, What's going on? I said, "Well, I'm retiring in three weeks." They said, You're retiring? Said, It's all over the hospital that you're going to Vietnam. Said, "Well, no, I decided not to go." They said, Well you can't get out of that. So I reached in my pocket and I passed this thing all around, it was a copy that I'd made, I said, "Here, send this around. Let these folks read it." They said, Well, you've been carrying this around for three weeks? I said, "I have." (both laugh) I said, "Listen, I haven't been in this place for no twenty-seven years and not know what the ropes are and how they go." I said, "You learn a little bit of something that puts you, that gives you an advantage." They said, Well, so you're getting out. I said, "Yep." Well, the commander called me—matter of fact he passed here just a few months ago, nice guy, colonel—he called me over and he said, "Oh, Sarge," said, "you let us down." So I listened to him, very respectful, but, listen, I was in the service when that guy was still in college and, so I listened to what he had to say and all that. I told him, I said, "Well, I'll consider it," but I had already considered what I would—(laughs) That was a terrible war and it—we lost a lot of guys over there, a lot of our(??) friends went over there and never came back. And now, I understand, we're friends with all of Vietnam and it's just like it never happened. We got trade things going with 'em and all that. And that's what war does. Now this thing in Korea, I don't know how in the world we'll ever get that. And I don't hope that Iran and Afghanistan don't turn into the same thing. I was glad to see them bring all those guys home the other day. And the vice president's son, I think, was among the first ones to come back. It's just a terrible thing. War is awful. And even though we can prepare for it, you're never ready for it.

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, I—

GUMBY: (continuing) It's just terrible.

DANDRIDGE: So when you got out of the military, then what did you do?

GUMBY: The day I got out I had a job. They had these health centers all around over the country, health clinics and they had them in impoverished areas. And they had one down here called Wayne Minor Health Clinic or Health Center. It was at Ninth and Euclid. And I had sent my resume down there and

they called me down there and Joe Harkin—Never will forget, Joe was a—from a little town out here in Kansas, graduate of the University of Kansas, and a great guy, good administrative fellow, he was from—You know when you go down 35, just before you go down the prairie(??), what is that down there? I can't think of it right now, but you go down I-35 through Kansas and then just before you get to the turnpike, you break through that little town down there and that's where he was from. So he read my resume and he said, "My goodness gracious," says, "This is what we need down here." Said, "Oh my goodness." So he told Arthur—we had a guy, black guy named Dr. Rogers, who was the center director—and he said, "Doc, you better get this guy before he gets away from you." And, so, they called me and asked me to come down, so I went down. Doc said, "Well, Joe has read your resume, I haven't read it yet, but he's telling me that we better get you before you get away." He said, "When are you getting out of the service?" I said, "Well, I'm getting out in a day or two," I said, "But I'm going back home, take my family back there, and I'll be gone a month." And he said, "Where's back home?" I said, "Pennsylvania, then I'm going to Texas, too," all this kind of stuff. So they said, "Okay." So they hired me and I worked down there, off and on, for over twenty years and ran the center, I was the administrator. And in the meantime I went back to school, I graduated from Park, and I have a major in psychology—I mean in sociology and minor in administration. And, I just did that for record purposes, really. So—

DANDRIDGE: You enjoy learning.

GUMBY: Oh, loved it, loved it, loved it, loved it. And—

DANDRIDGE: In terms of your experience as a soldier, since you've made the military your career, what have you enjoyed the most about it, that experience?

GUMBY: Well, I would say that I met a lot of nice people. And not only that but, uh, I learned to—I learned some things, tactics we like to call 'em in the military, in the military that helped me in management situations out here. For example, uh, I was having some problems down at the center with some of them managers who—well, they had a problem with me because I had the management experience but didn't have a degree. I wasn't thinking about that. In the military, if you're in charge and you have the responsibility, you are just that no matter whether you've got ten degrees or none at all. They're looking for you to do that particular job, be responsible for that job, and for it to meet the levels of efficiency that the job requires. Okay? And, so, I guess I'd been there about three years and I told Doc one day, said, "You know, I'm going to leave here." I said, "These people ain't never going to learn." So he said a very simple thing to me, he said, "Well, Harry," he said, "you know why that is?" I said, "Well why is that?" He said, "You're trained and they're not." And that clicked in my head and I thought about that. And I said, "Yeah, I am trained to do what I do."

DANDRIDGE: Right, and that makes all the world of difference.

GUMBY: Makes a difference.

DANDRIDGE: And with experience.

GUMBY: With experience. So that means that I had to train them. And once I got that going, everything just kinda leveled out. And I've spent a—Well, I'm going to tell you what happened. (chuckles) Not too long ago—well, let's see, this is '04, '05, back about '05 they got into real trouble down there and they called the—they went through two directors down there. So somebody on the board said, Well why don't we call Mr. Gumby and ask him to come back down here and straighten this place up? And, so, they did and I went down. And I told them, "Well you know, I'm not looking for any kind of job." And I said, "My wife's sick and I'm trying to take care of her and all that." And they said, Oh Mr. Gumby, said, We need you down here, said, We'll pay you. So I—You know, I rely on Roz and Brenda and them; they've been through the mill now and they're retiring and that sort of thing. I said, "Guys what do you think?" They said, Don't you go down near that place. They said, The first place it acts like it's getting ready to fold up, and they said, If you're there when it happens, your name will be over this town. They said, We wouldn't be able to take it. Well I'd never thought of it like that, because I really hadn't thought about if I went down there that it would fail, and that was me thinking. What they were thinking, just—So I had to lean towards that, so I told 'em no. But I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do," I said, "I'll come down here and show you what to do to get things straight. And I won't charge you anything." I said, "Now how do you like that?" Oh, they said, We want you there, we want you to come. I said, "No, I'm not going to hire on," I had enough of that and I don't want any more headaches like that. I said, "But I—you give me a person that you think can understand what it is that we need to do here and can get it done and I'll take 'em through the ropes, show 'em how to do it, lead them through. Carry their hand, if you want me to." So they said, Well okay. So I went down and—In the meantime I had a lady who was pretty smart that had worked for me before down there and she ran into some health problems but, anyhow she got squared away. I ran into her one day and I told her, "You know what?" I said, "I can get you a job down there as a director of a place and all, if you want to take it." I said, "I'll help you," I said, "I don't want to be paid," I said, "I just don't want—." I said, "Now when you go in there, everything that we did when I was there before, they did away with that," I said, "that's why they're in trouble. I said, "They don't have any directives, no management directives, they don't even have an organizational chart." I don't know how they were running it. And, I said, "All of that's gone." And I said, "Now if you're willing to deal with that and to kind of work that back up again—." So she went in there and, I think, she stayed around there a couple of years until they got a director and they were paying pretty close to a hundred thousand dollars. But it's not always the money that you need. I still have a good spot in my heart and my mind for the place because it's the first place that I went to work after I got out of the military. And I had to relearn a lot of things about civilian life that I had forgotten about and that place taught 'em to me.

DANDRIDGE: And your family, by this time, was living right here?

GUMBY: Oh, yeah, they were all living right here. I had two girls graduated from KU. I had—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Okay, and may I have—their names, please?

GUMBY: Yeah. Rosalyn—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Yeah, Rosalyn, she gave me her graduation—

GUMBY: Right. And the other one was Arveta—her name is now Arveta Gumby Prewitt. She graduated from KU.

DANDRIDGE: Was she—About what years? Do you remember the years?

GUMBY: Oh let me see—

DANDRIDGE: Is she older or younger than Roz?

GUMBY: She's younger than Roz.

DANDRIDGE: Okay.

GUMBY: So, she was—she graduated after Roz did. Uh-huh. I think Roz has got her master's from over there too, didn't she? Yeah, uh-huh. She's pretty smart.

DANDRIDGE: So—And, uh, did your wife ever work outside the home?

GUMBY: Oh, yes, my wife was a school teacher. Uh-huh.

DANDRIDGE: Where did she teach?

GUMBY: She finished ____(??) and she taught in the Kansas City School District, downtown here. She taught the elementary. Oh my goodness yeah. She was a music teacher too, that's why we've got them instruments there.

DANDRIDGE: Right, oh she did music as well.

GUMBY: Yeah, she did music too.

DANDRIDGE: Did you ever join any veteran's organizations or activities after the military or during the military?

GUMBY: The only one I belonged to is the DAV, Disabled American Veterans, 'cause as far as I'm concerned it's the best one.

DANDRIDGE: Why do you say that?

GUMBY: Well they give more help to veteran's than anybody. Oh they just—

DANDRIDGE: Okay. But you, yourself are not disabled are you?

GUMBY: No, no I'm fine.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, and so—Those are the ones that you're dedicated to.

GUMBY: Yeah, every year I give 'em a monetary donation. Anybody I find that gets in any kind of difficulty, the headquarters' in St. Louis, I give 'em the number and tell them who to call. Tell them if they have some problems to get back with me. And they've never failed to get the kind of help that they need. As a matter of fact I'm helping a widow now whose husband was a friend of mine who lived in Cleveland. As a matter of fact I've got to call her right back after I finish talking to you and give her some information. But it's a good organization.

DANDRIDGE: How do you think the military experience has influenced your life?

GUMBY: Well, uh, I think that one of the great things that I learned, I guess, from the military has sort of a culture all of its own and what I mean by that is they have a form of buddy system in the military where they help people who seem to be in need of help, financial help, whatever kind of help they can. And they rush together, surround that person, group of 'em and help them. In other words, it's like, we take care of our own. We need more of that everywhere out here. The other thing is, I learned that unless you're really committed to getting something done, that you're not—you know, with the commitment has to also go the dedication and with that, of course, goes ____(??) the results, which is normally good. So you learn to prop this kind of stance, that if it's worth doing, it's worth giving your best, it's worth giving your best. You also learn, number one, that we all might talk the same, soldiers might look the same, but all don't think and do the same things. And, so, you learn a tolerance for that, you learn a patience for that. And there are some people who work hard at things, as hard as they can, and never seem to get anywhere and so with just a word here or one word here or just a little movement here, it just sets 'em up so they can go get that done without any more difficulty. And all—Then I guess one of the great things I think I learned from the military was to be patient. I learned the act of being patient because patience, according to the scripture, does it's pursory(??) work when you are patient and don't rush to conclusions. Stop and take a look at the—and maybe what that person's doing, they don't know what else to do, or they don't know how to do it any better or efficiently(??) and, so, you learn to have some tolerance. And it works, it works. A lot of politics in the military, a lot of politics every and, so, you deal with them as you meet 'em, whatever comes up, with 'em sometimes there's always some—politics, I always say, are always relative. They—It's who's playing 'em and why he's going that way or why she's going that way or what aims they're going to get out of it and maybe you might get a little something out of it or maybe you might not. And it's one of the things that I think has gotten us sorta into the bind that we're in now because there are certain groups of people who might have lots of wealth and lots of money who want things to go the way they want 'em to go even though we know that that might have an impact on somebody else further down the road, and usually do. (coughs)

DANDRIDGE: Well, I thank you very much for your time.

GUMBY: Oh I enjoyed it.

DANDRIDGE: For sharing and we'll probably have to talk again.

GUMBY: All right. Be glad to.

DANDRIDGE: So thank you very much, appreciate it.

Tape 2 ends.
End of interview.