

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

Interviewee: Leroy Rolfe
Date: 13 September 2011
Location: Rolfe residence, Wichita, Kansas
Interviewer: Deborah Dandridge, Field Archivist

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

DEBORAH DANDRIDGE: —much—

ROLFE: Is this on?

DANDRIDGE: Yes sir. Thank you very much, Mr. Rolfe for taking your time, for taking this interview. This is September 13, 2011 in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Rolfe in Wichita, Kansas, beautiful home—

ROLFE: (interjecting) Thank you.

DANDRIDGE: (continuing) And we, again, thank the both of you for taking your time to participate in our project and record your memories.

ROLFE: Thank you, thank you.

DANDRIDGE: So, what we're going to talk about is the first question, was, before you joined the military during World War II, where were you living and what were you doing?

ROLFE: I was—my—living in Arkansas, in Western Arkansas and I was a farmer. I was a kid working for my father on their farm.

DANDRIDGE: And where was this in Arkansas?

ROLFE: Well, I was born in Western Arkansas, place called Ashdown, that's in southwest Arkansas, close to a town called Texarkana, maybe you've heard of that, Texarkana. About thirty miles from Hope, Arkansas, that's a famous little town in Arkansas, and I was born there. Later on I moved to Eastern Arkansas, down around West Memphis.

DANDRIDGE: Um-hm. Now did your father own his farm?

ROLFE: No he was a renter, what you call a renter, third and fourth.

DANDRIDGE: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

ROLFE: Oh yeah; eight brothers and four sisters.

DANDRIDGE: Oh that's great. So you were working on the farm at the time World War II broke out?

ROLFE: Yes, I sure was.

DANDRIDGE: Had you had an opportunity to go to school in the area?

ROLFE: Well, yes, I went to school in Western Arkansas. Fact I may say, schooling was very limited; fact it was 1932 before the county I was born in had a high school there that I could go to. In 1932 when I was, I was just kinda beginning to go to school at that, I think I started school when I was about seven. My school time was very limited, but anyway I started when I was seven years old.

DANDRIDGE: Did you have to work on the farm most of the time?

ROLFE: Well, I was signed(??)—I signed(??) on working when I was very young; I really started working when I was five years old.

DANDRIDGE: Oh my. What were you doing at five and six?

ROLFE: Oh I was fielding(??) corn (chuckles) and getting out, what you call chopping a little cotton. Whatever we did on the farm, I was kind of in there—

DANDRIDGE: You were doing everything.

ROLFE: (continuing) —in my place. _____ (??).

DANDRIDGE: Well that's good. How did you view the war?

ROLFE: Oh I viewed the war as a—I viewed it as set to get in there. I wanted to get in the war. I mean I was excited when, uh, after I was—believe I was about eighteen, after I was about eighteen and I got a—received a questionnaire, I think it's calling for eighteen to forty-four at that time, and I was eighteen probably going on nineteen. And I was just excited to—I kept my questionnaire right in my pocket until the date I went in. And I told a friend that I got my questionnaire, that they need me in the war.

DANDRIDGE: So, did they draft you?

ROLFE: Oh yes, they drafted me. Drafted, drafted.

DANDRIDGE: Well what did your parents say?

ROLFE: Oh they was kind of very much worried. It was a worried situation, _____ (??) situation to them. We just had, shortly had the notice that Pearl Harbor had been bombed and, I believe, President Roosevelt was making a speech nightly. And it was kind of worrisome to think about their boys would probably have to go to war.

DANDRIDGE: Did any of your other brothers, were they drafted at the same time?

ROLFE: Yeah. From a period of September in '42 until about February '43 it was about five of us and that, at the time, September 1942 until about February 1943, it was five of us got drafted. In fact I went in November '42.

DANDRIDGE: So when you went in, what was your first step when you were going in?

ROLFE: Well, the first thing I had to be called into the induction, you know examination station. And I was supposed to go, our station was at Little Rock, but unfortunately Little Rock had a fire and so we had to go down to Shreveport, Louisiana. And I was down there about three days going through the process, being examined and all things that went through the examiners. I guess they measured me and all just went through the routine of things; from time to time we had to talk over different things, about allotments and so forth. And after about three days and two nights, we was all finished. It's quite a field(??) down there, people from Arkansas drafted on that date and then the Louisiana people, we was all down together and after about three days and nights we were ready to—When it was all over, we went back home for fifteen days and I had probably a situation over, when I—after it was over, I may say that we—It was two busloads of us from Arkansas there and all those who had passed the test were asked to get on one bus and those who didn't pass the examination was on another bus. But I would like to say that I—and one little friend, I didn't know him though, he was just one of the guys, we kinda, what you call race, I called it raced for a seat and the seat was just _____ (??) from the driver, bus you step behind this seat and the driver, this seat was to your right and the driver's seat was there. And we raced for that seat and so he, he beat me to it; he was faster than I was. But honey, got—we got about seventy-five miles between Shreveport and Texarkana, the bus was wrecked, had a wreck and he got killed.

DANDRIDGE: Oh no. In the seat that he rushed—

ROLFE: The one he beat me to; he got killed. See the first bus—the bus was trailing the first, the leading bus. And as this leading bus ran up to, I think, a railroad crossing; he had to stop, it was a law that they stop and before—he couldn't stop, but he tried to pull from(??) around him. And it just crushed him in. And I—Afterwards, first I was very thankful then, that was the first thought. Several later that I thought probably could have happen when I get to war.

DANDRIDGE: Right, right, right. What was race relations in the community you were in? Just give me a sense of it.

ROLFE: I don't know, got a little name for it. But it was a definite separation, discrimination, and any other word that you find that, in that category it was just there. You know, you—Anyway, _____(??) my dad(?) always kept me in some little farm or place that we didn't come in contact with too much daily action in this kind of, in race. But out in the little towns, you know, it was on(??) it every, on(??) them. And you all such as you passed 'em, step aside and let the ladies pass and all, I mean you name it. There's no—we had our little place that we go to.

DANDRIDGE: What was the name of the place?

ROLFE: I mean such as restaurants.

DANDRIDGE: Do you remember any of the names of the restaurants?

ROLFE: One of them was called the Streetcar Restaurant. Another place, I remember, we just called it Buck's. May Sheg's(??) Place (chuckles) and just little spots there. But this little town, located in, people would come all the way from Memphis and everywhere every weekend, the town was so crowded you couldn't walk on the street, it's just push, push. Where I left from Western Arkansas it was kinda real gentle(??), Christian and I'll tell you the truth _____(??) place white and people—'cause I ate at a—many—I used to kind of slip off to a white gentleman's house and get in, sit in the middle of his children and we would eat there. But down in Eastern Arkansas, it was all different because, you know, I had grown up, I didn't want the—But, anyway people was coming to Hughes from everywhere, but it was kind of a—I thought it was a _____(??) when I first got there. I was not only afraid of—I was more afraid of the crowd and the people and the condition there among, really among all the people that was any other place. It was just—They had—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) What was the name of the town?

ROLFE: It was named Hughes, H-U-G-H-E-S, Hughes, Arkansas. And, literally gambling was there and this kind of thing and I don't think the state people come in very often. But—I don't think it's really legal but the official of that time, you know, guard everything until they heard the state people's coming in then they would close down different deal. So I just thought it was, I was just afraid to be on the street at night there.

DANDRIDGE: When you were growing up, what church did you go to?

ROLFE: I went to a Baptist church.

DANDRIDGE: Was it near—

ROLFE: (overlapping) And the name, the name—

DANDRIDGE: continuing) Was it near where your farm was?

ROLFE: Yes it was; it was just across the lake. It was walking distance; I didn't have a car at that time.

DANDRIDGE: Right. Were there other black families around?

ROLFE: Oh yes, yes, that was majority.

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh.

ROLFE: Around there the majority were black. In fact that whole county, almost, the majority was black, African American—

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, black, African American, we can do whatever we want to. So were you anxious to participate in World War II?

ROLFE: Oh, yeah, I was.

DANDRIDGE: Why? Why?

ROLFE: I don't know; it was just a matter of I always wanted to go, you know leave around home and go. And as I said I was really excited when I got my questionnaire and I carried it around and told my friends. Told them that I had my questionnaire and they needed me in the war.

DANDRIDGE: So after you got inducted and went through all of that, and after the bus tragedy, where were you going for your military training?

ROLFE: Oh I went to Camp Robinson, that's a camp just out of the limit, city limits of Little Rock. That's where I take my basic training.

DANDRIDGE: What was this—Was this training camp all African American or was it integrated?

ROLFE: The camp was not all African American, just a section, we had a section. It wasn't integrated, no, it wasn't integrated. African American's had they portion of the camp; white had they portion. We had our PX, you know place where we would go and get out _____(??), or a little article. We had our PX, we had our recreation place, but we were separated, definitely separated. In fact we did a type of a—different type of our training orders, I think, was different; I believed it was because we never did enter over in their section, they never did enter our section. Only on our—I believe they had one ran—training, rifle range where we shoot live ammunition, but we didn't—we wasn't out there together, they had a time and we had a time.

DANDRIDGE: Now were your—were the leaders of this, of your particular unit, were they white or were they black?

ROLFE: The higher rank was white; our captain, company commander he was white, the battalion and the regiment commander they was all white, but we had, I believe, most that was in my company when I was in—when I entered my company, the highest ranking black officer was a—I believe he was a first lieutenant. But I'm sure that most of them was second lieutenants; that was the lowest rank of a lieutenant. Second lieutenant is just a first officer, lieutenant officer and a—Anyway, first lieutenant is the highest you going in lieutenant and from that you go to a captain, major, and colonel, up and up.

DANDRIDGE: What was your daily routine like in that—

ROLFE: (interjecting, overlapping) Training, it was training.

DANDRIDGE: Well, what do you mean?

ROLFE: (laughs) Well some of the things that kind of interested me(??). Shortly after we got there Sunday, first thing they did, well first thing was we was told keep up the area, we had to keep that policed, clean up, that's what he called clean up, policed. And it probably one—So many things were just, you know, so surprising. Sometimes that whistle would blow at one o'clock in the morning, get up, get up, get dressed. Get up, fall in. Fall in was get, you know fall in your position, get dressed up, in other words when you stand, line up.

DANDRIDGE: What was the purpose of that?

ROLFE: Oh, just, purpose of, how to learn how to get up and get ready in a shortly time. Other words, we had two minutes to get up; practicing on getting up at two minutes, getting in formation, getting dressed, getting in order. See, each company had three platoons, first, second, and third. And we'd have to fall out and get in order and the last two guys to get out, they was automatic late, they's going to be put on—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Were you ever late?

ROLFE: Uh yeah. (laugh)

DANDRIDGE: Oh you were, okay. (DANDRIDGE and ROLFE laugh)

ROLFE: Was put on exit duty on the weekend when—When we first went there, they'd give us weekends off, Saturday evening through Sunday. So they put you on exit duty for that. Then going out, we started the going out on our—you know, going out in the wilderness around there. And mostly they'd pick a rainy night and they say it doesn't rain in the Army, it rains on the Army, that was the word on that. And they allowed us to make little brush heap fires when we first went out, but I know—first I went out, they

told us all to go out there and get some brush and throw it in the fire ____ (??), again, I was just so ____ (??). I told 'em I didn't get brush for my own fire. I really wasn't aware of who I was talking to, but it was an officer that I was talking to. And he commanded me to get up close to the fire and I got really hot. I mean that fire was so hot, but he told me stand there while he told me to—he relieved me, told me to get back. And those were some of the kind of things that I—And when I first got the uniform when we got there, I was standing aside a friend I'd been with all the time, after I got in that uniform I didn't know who he was. He was standing aside of me. Of course they demand you to always stand correct, try to make us stand correct, look forward, don't be looking around and so forth. And it was kind of—look over there—I didn't recognize him in that uniform because it was just something in those days we didn't have too many coats and trousers matched and shirts. (laughs) So, it was quite an experience and we were doing all those kinds of things. And I remember—

DANDRIDGE: When you say you go out, what do you mean you go out?

ROLFE: Oh sometimes we'd go out in the wilderness; it's like the woods out there from the training field. And we'd go out in the woods, out in the fields, and do different exercises out there. Like, you know it's like ____ (??) and similar that you would be in the war zone fighting. But when we first started, I looked at it and said—they kinda let us build little forests because it's raining all the time, we'd be out all night sometimes, sometimes a couple of nights and days.

DANDRIDGE: Now when they were training you with the guns, you said it was live ammunition?

ROLFE: Yeah, we trained—on some occasions we trained with live ammunition, oh yeah. Like the, go through the field of—Well we'd taken the exercise, actually target the training, they had, you know, go through that target training, shooting live ammunition, and you'd see how to mark your scope by hitting the bulls-eye. It'd be a bulls-eye on that ____ (??) and you come close to it and there'd be a guy down in the hole, every time you'd shoot, he would mark it, where you hit the bull.

DANDRIDGE: Were you pretty good at it?

ROLFE: Oh I got to be a sharp shooter.

DANDRIDGE: Really?

ROLFE: I never got to be an expert. I got to be a sharp shooter, I could—I was pretty good on shooting a rifle although I'd become (??) machine gun and all this kind of thing. I tried to learn everything they put before me, and I did, I did a good job on learning. I'm not ____ (??) myself, but everything they put before me, I learned it. And that field—you used to go through some training of—One thing I never did like that we had to go through in basic training, crossing a lake, a lake almost the size of these rooms, living room, larger than—all such as a, on ropes, you know, got 'em fixed up there, you kicked one rope and swang to another and swing to another and if you don't get across swinging, you're going to fall in the water. And we'd always do that in the winter time, mostly winter time and then we'd go through

that field of, concentration of field of fire, we'd have to crawl with all our packs on our shoulder, we'd have to crawl ____ (??). Now they shoot over you with that machine gun shooting a level about four feet high, they said we'd be lower than that, but you couldn't get up cause it's real, it's real and you go across a field about two hundred feet or more, you'd have to crawl through that. And then, big bold, you'd have to climb that wall. That kind of exercising went through in basic training. And some time after you get out of basic training, we left Little Rock and Camp Robinson, after our basic training is over, which about three months, we went to Fort Huachuca, Arizona. That's where I'd(??) take an advanced training and out there—Well anyway, you still talk about what I like(??) anyway I guess. Out there in advanced training you really go through advanced training like you're really in the war. You have a team against you, but you don't use your ammunition on that, but, still, on occasion we used ammunition and, also we used artillery, all of that.

DANDRIDGE: Now was this training, was this advanced training camp—

ROLFE: That's advanced training; of course I just jumped on advanced training.

DANDRIDGE: No, that's fine.

ROLFE: Where we used artillery in our training and we all such(??) as a direction on a compass, you set your compass set so many(??) direction. Maybe a set of stake here and sitting one over on Rock Road, maybe one halfway from here to Newton(??) and you take your compass and get your direction and you go to each point, find each point. You know, you do compass read—You do everything, compass reading—

DANDRIDGE: Did you like it?

ROLFE: Yeah, it was interesting. Learning how to do all that, learning how to handle all kinds of weapons, even we're taking a training on artillery guns. That was a heavier weapon than—Of course(??) in our companies we only use rifles or machine guns and mortars. Mortars are small artillery, its small artillery, has a shell about this big around, something like that long. But the big artillery guns have shells about that long something like that, you know. But it's a unit that, it's an artillery unit; each division has its artillery units. But I was in the rifle and machine and mortar company and so—Other words in advanced training, each—I was in the 371st Regiment. Each regiment they have is different situation just like ours. We was a riflemen, machine guns, and mortar men. Okay we had our artillery attachment; we had our medical attachment; we had transportation attachment. See that's all in attachment of a regiment. But it was a division. We had three regiments; we had 370, 365th, and 370 and all of us got together in Arizona and that was a camp made especially for African American soldiers.

DANDRIDGE: Why do you say that?

ROLFE: Because it was. I mean Mrs. Roosevelt, I understand, suggested that they would build that camp for us. But other than that camp we was kind of in, as I said, like in basic training, we was in a section of a camp, maybe we were over in this corner, this end; white was over on that corner, that end.

DANDRIDGE: Right, but this was a camp solely to African Americans?

ROLFE: (overlapping) Devoted, African Americans, Fort Huachuca. It was solely devoted; wasn't nothing out there but African Americans. We had a few high ranking white officers and from time to time they would, they'd have African American officer would get rank—rated and they would move up. The captains and majors and so forth—Now our commander—Did you want that now?

DANDRIDGE: Yes sir, go right ahead.

ROLFE: Our commander, of the Ninety-second Division was General Ed—he had some more in his name—but General Almond and I just called him General Almond all the time. And he wasn't very nice to African—although he was over us, but he wasn't very nice to—

DANDRIDGE: Why do you say that?

ROLFE: Well he was so prejudiced.

DANDRIDGE: Why do you say that?

ROLFE: Well his actions showed it. He didn't hide it.

DANDRIDGE: What kind of actions did he show?

ROLFE: Well firstly he never was, he never did mix. All the time he would be in the, in a spotlight with his division. Sometimes he would call a general meeting and his comments in these general meetings wasn't anything cheering, it was just threatening some black guy. I remember, once, we all met in the park, the athletic park that they build for the—out there in the camp after we got there. And one of this gentleman's speeches was he told us about those red-top barracks, we lived in barracks then, a barracks, a house is a place where fifteen or twenty of us would be in there. And he'd say, "You see those barracks? They are not your home. They're just station for your equipment." Said, "Your home's going to be out on the field training." Some days we would be out day and night of the three days and they would have guys come by and check you to see if you're sleepy or try to take a little nod or nap. We had to stay awake and we had to stay alert and we had to stay in position. Anytime they'd check us and so on. We'd often do that and—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Who—Do you remember did you—Did you have any close buddies?

ROLFE: Oh yeah I had some—I mean everybody was in the company, they was buddy buddies cause we was real close and prime(??) group of people.

DANDRIDGE: Did some of these people come from other places?

ROLFE: Well most of the guys in our outfit, yeah they were from different places; most of us soldiers was from Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, and there's a few guys in there was from Ohio. I had a real friend and a guy I liked to—he was kind of my id—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Mod—ideal—idol, sort of.

ROLFE: He was kind of my idol, we'll call it. His name was James Tavert(?) from Cincinnati, Ohio. He's a very friendly guy and he's a very educated guy. And, again, when I got out I tried to catch a tip from guys who knew something as most of my schooling was from guys who knew something. But I did go to the eighth grade, I went through it. But James Tavert was really a good—He just ready for you, he was dying with you, he was up with you, you know. He just—out with you, however. And then I had another, a good friend, Edward Brooke, son of the Brooke of Massachusetts. I was in the company with him.

DANDRIDGE: Really?

ROLFE: Yeah, but he wasn't in the, he wasn't with us at Arizona. I don't want to take too much of your time but maybe I'll get to how we got together. But, anyway—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) You can take any time you want, you can take as much time as you wish.

ROLFE: General Almond, back to him, he was—I don't know, I guess that's why they put him over this division, I guess that's why he's the executive officer over the division because, you know, in that time—I know you don't know that, probably read about how discrimination was boiling over, it was at its limit. And African American or black people as you might say didn't really get any credit for anything we ever did right. As I said, the county I was born in, schooling was limited. The county I was born in the first high school in Little River County—not Little River County, yes Little Riv—Red River, used to be Red River County and they called it Little River County, I believe after that. The first high school they built there was in '32. Only one high school, in '38(??) they acclimated two high schools and I—At that time from the sixth grade through the twelfth would go to school at the same place. And we went on a—we had one bus picked up half of the county and I would ride that bus too and we almost had to push the back there were so many of us on there. But, anyway, I went to this school and—But I, you know, I was pretty old, it wasn't nothing to see seventeen and eighteen year old kids going even to local school 'cause the ____(??) school there was in a church building, something like that. But, anyway, when I left I really tried to hang with people who had, who, you know, had some—Now Tavert and them had some degrees, but somehow another they were sent down that outfit, they might've did something, but they were sent down to that outfit. And they were really smart people. Then Brooke, Brooke he was a very intelligent guy.

DANDRIDGE: Where was Brooke? Was Brooke in Arizona or was he at—

ROLFE: No, Brooke didn't go to Arizona.

DANDRIDGE: How did you meet him, then?

ROLFE: Okay. When we'd taken our, finished our training in Arizona as Ninety-second Infantry(??) Buffalo Division. Before—When we were packing up and getting ready—But Brooke trained in the regiment 366th, you may jot that down, you may read something about the 366th. And this was all—let me use the word black, that's all right?

DANDRIDGE: Right, uh-huh.

ROLFE: (continuing) All black unit. From their top executive officer was a colonel, a full colonel and the assistant was colonel and he was a lieutenant colonel, _____(??) was as lieutenant colonel. Colonel Queen and Colonel Chase. Okay 366th was fixing to go over, needed to go overseas, they're ready to go overseas and they didn't have their full number of men, they had to have their full number of—that a regiment carries before they could go. So they, all the men already had finished training—(phone rings)

Pause in recording.

DANDRIDGE: What were you telling about filling the 366th, trying to fill up the number?

ROLFE: Oh, yes. Okay, they had to take a number a full to go over, they couldn't go over without their full number of men. And so they ordered enough men out of Buffalo Division to join them and go over because they're ready to go over, they were going to send them over then and the 92nd party from Huachuca went down to Louisiana on maneuvers and they hadn't been through their maneuver and so I went, I was one of those who was choose—they chose to go to 366th, so I went overseas with the 366th regiment.

DANDRIDGE: You did?

ROLFE: Yeah. So we went by the way of—I may say before we got over we went through Virginia, Newport News, that's where we caught a ship. Went down at Newport News, okay, we couldn't put money in the clerk's hands, they wouldn't take money out of our hands. We'd go to buy something—we wasn't there but about three days—we'd buy something, go down to the PX and buy something, they say, Lay the money down, and some of the fellows refused to lay it down, they walked out with it. So that started a stir, it likely started a riot there. But, anyway, they got us out; I think they shortened our time, sent us out of there in two days.

DANDRIDGE: So tell me why do you think those men refused to go by the code of behavior? Why did they refuse to do that?

ROLFE: Talking about the city—talking about the—

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, the men in the regiment; why did they refuse to lay down their money?

ROLFE: Because they just said, If you can't take it out of my hand, then you don't get it. They just knew it was—they felt it was discrimination. Prejudice.

DANDRIDGE: Did they have their military uniform on?

ROLFE: Well it was in a military faculty, the PX on the post belonged to the United States Military. And they were working for the military. I don't know whether they were in the service or not, but they—

DANDRIDGE: But it was on the post?

ROLFE: Oh yeah, it was military, on the post, and they refu—and so they got us out of there. They put us on the ship and sent us on over. We went to Casablanca, stopped there about two days and night and then went on down a little further like—

DANDRIDGE: What was the ship like?

ROLFE: Oh the ship was—It was a new ship, it'd hold about eleven thousand troops. It wasn't the biggest ship, but it was good sized. It was a fast ship. It couldn't run in no convoy, had to run by itself. And it was about eleven thousand on that ship as we was going over. And we stopped in Casablanca—(phone rings)

Pause in recording.

DANDRIDGE: Talking about the ship that you were on; were the sailors black or white, the people who were running this ship?

ROLFE: Uh, I hardly—you hardly ever seen those ship, but I think it was mixed because you going(??) on those ships blacks and whites. I know the captains and all those guys that were white, but it's a lot to help those ship, those guys on those ships carry lots of help with them. A big ship like that.

DANDRIDGE: Did you have trouble on the boat?

ROLFE: No, I—

DANDRIDGE: I mean just getting acclimated to it?

ROLFE: I—I had my trouble on the boat was getting sick. I—every day I would feel bad on that ship; I would go down and get on the little bunk and I'd feel better and then I'd lay there and get to feeling bad and I would go out on the deck. You had access to go anywhere you want, you know, up or down on the boat. And on serving meals, they had three shifts. I think we'd go by colors, I mean color of our tags. (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: Right.

ROLFE: And we would—they would serve all day long by the time this color got through, another got—would be falling in, over and over and by the time they got all around, it'd be time for us to go back again. It'd be two, two meals a day. And, finally, I helped work on the ship; I would help working in the kitchen on the ship. I don't know, but I think I—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) How long, do you remember how long you were on this ship?

ROLFE: Eleven days, going over. Going over was eleven days, but it was much more than that coming back though. But, anyway—

DANDRIDGE: So what was Casablanca like?

ROLFE: Well we wasn't in Casablanca about three days. I remember we got there on Easter; we were in there on Easter Sunday, 1944, no 1943, 1944—wait a minute, yeah '44, we was there on Easter Sunday. And we didn't get a chance to see much of, did no(??) going around, we just had to stay in our area. And it was a hovel(??) there; other words we ate outside in our mess kit and before you get through eating, your mess kit was almost half full of sand, it was dusty, sandy there. So we got out, left Casablanca and went down to a place called Oran(??), Africa, I believe, Oran, Africa. And then down on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea dipped into the Atlantic Ocean, it was right there in that corner, this town was. We stayed there about a week before we journeyed on up north, up in Africa—I mean Italy, we journeyed and got off at Naples, in Italy. And then we went over, down in kinda Southern, South-Central I think, not too far but we _____ (??) some of the cities there in Italy. Cause I think there's another little town down there called something else, but we didn't go all the way. But we was down there until the 92nd, the rest of them came over. And I may say because they would have, they couldn't send us to the front at that time because the Ninety-second big body wasn't there and we were down at a place called—I forget that little town's name. I'll tell you who was down there; Fifteenth Air Forces and the Tuskegee Fliers were down there and we watched over those ships, over their airplanes while they flew their missions until the body of the Ninety-second got there. Now when the Ninety-second arrived, when they arrived then we all moved up north of Rome, towards the line. And Colonel Queen, the commander of the 366th asked the higher command to let the 366th kinda rehash(??) a little and so they refused so they sent him back to the United States. And it was—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Why'd they send him back?

ROLFE: Because, I guess, one ____ (??) if he hadn't ____ (??) they probably would have had to let him be the leader of the 366th, of that regiment, although the division, the regiment was signed over to the division because when you get on the line, you know, you're going to lose casualties, you're going to lose people. And, so they've got to be replaced and there was no one to replace—They had to use, I guess, African Americans to replace African Americans because white didn't fight with us. We was on the Adriatic Coast; our side was on the Adriatic coast and we drove, in the 92nd Division, including the 366th with the—on their flank was Japanese, American Japs. America had a regiment of Japanese—see, Japanese got caught over here when Pearl Harbor was hit. And so, I understand, at that time, I think they put those guys in prison, Japanese people in prison, American Japs they put 'em in prison. But they had, they did relieve 'em and train 'em for the—you know, they'd become citizens and they'd train 'em and so it was a battalion of them and they flanked us.

DANDRIDGE: They flanked you? And this is while you were in Europe?

ROLFE: Yeah, this is while I was on the line, in Italy.

DANDRIDGE: In Italy?

ROLFE: (overlapping) Yeah we were south—

DANDRIDGE: (continuing) So you were flanked by the Japanese who were—

ROLFE: Yep. And on that, they were flanked by British troops and the British troops were flanked by American whites. And they were on the Mediterranean Coast and we, our outfit was on the Adriatic Coast. Adriatic—Italy is flanked, West Italy is on the Adriatic, East Italy is on the Mediterranean; the country Italy. I mean—yeah I'm right. The country of Italy; east flank is on the Mediterranean, the west is on the Adriatic. So, uh, as I say that's where we were held up until they ____ (??). Now in this division, the Ninety-second Division main body what stayed together, you know, they didn't—After they had sent us to the 366th, but we had to rejoin 'cause they need, 'cause there was no replacement after people get killed or hurt. But from there they had to send enough African Americans over there so they could get those replacements. And at one—General Almond, he made some, oh he made some awful statements about the outfit he trained—

Tape 1, side 1 ends; side 2 begins.

DANDRIDGE: Did you ever—While you were over there, did you ever hear him making those comments?

ROLFE: No. It's just like you, the visible—his visibility was just like President, uh—

DANDRIDGE: Roosevelt?

ROLFE: Well, is just like President Obama now.

DANDRIDGE: Oh I see your story.

ROLFE (continuing) Cause, you know, I mean he just, he stayed, he just—all you know these orders(??) he'd send back. He wasn't a visible man with his group like some of the generals or some of the leaders.

Pause in recording.

ROLFE: But, uh, they—when they, in this last—During the winter of, winter of '43 and '44, okay that's when we went up in '43—I mean, we went up in '44, in November, I believe, November '44, when we went to the front. And, I—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) What did you think about going to the front?

ROLFE: Oh, it was kinda, kinda ____ (??) closer I got; cause they don't ____ (??) us directly to the front. But three days before we went up, we was in an area back off the line, way back, and you could see fire, you know, streaking through the air, fire power(??) streaking through air and hear the roaring of the big guns. And we looked at that at night and next day. But, anyway, the next day or two we went on up, getting ready to go on up and we went so far on trucks. And that morning, I don't know whether it was Sunday morning or what, I don't think it was Sunday morning, but it was one morning, the chaplain had service with us. And I remember him speaking that morning to us; he told us that we was well trained and we had the best weaponry in the nation, we was trained good as any nation, had the best weaponry as anybody, and said we was going up the location of Eighty-eight(??) Highway, Purple Heart Valley. And he said, "Some of you will come back, but I'm sorry but some of you won't come back." He said, "Well anyway, God be with you and we're going to keep you in prayer." And from that point that evening, after sun goes down, we boarded trucks and go so far and we met guides(??), guides met us and told us to unload and move fast and quickly to get in our position. And that's—we moved on and got in position real quick. He said, "Because they're going to be raiding here any time." So that's what they were just—but unfortunately the Italian line was holding. What I mean by holding, they wasn't going forward at that time; they were just holding and keeping their position. And—Because we were just south of the Alps(??) mountain and on that mountain there's snow and ice so deep until we couldn't cross, we didn't have nothing to cross with but cross and we couldn't cross it. So—I counted that to be a blessing because the first two days I was very nervous. I don't believe I could have pulled that rifle trigger the first two days out of that. But, unfortunately I didn't have to; I was just watching, but them guys would be shining lights out there, it looked like, a few hundred yards from you. But, evidently, a little further than that because out in front of us almost hundred yards was a canal and you couldn't cross that canal, it was over your head if you tried to cross it. But they told—our orders was don't shoot unless you have to. Said these guys are going to be spotting you with lights and everything to make you shoot at 'em and if we did, ____ (??) to shoot at, then their men would drop artillery back on us, they'd find out where we're located and they'd drop artillery on us. So we just, for that month and January, we just patrolled every night we'd send out patrol from our company, send 'em out. And one night when I got hit, first time I got hit, I was on a patrol. And I went up the beach of the Adriatic Sea and where the Cinquatta(??)

Canal dips into the sea our orders was detour around it. If I'd done that, we could get around it by almost waist deep water, but if we had to try and go straight across the canal it would have been over our head. But I was about the third man out in the—third man from the squad leader and I noticed, first thing(??) they went to shooting a flare. The Germans had a flare when they shoot it up, it will open up a parachute and the light come on that open up a parachute and then the parachute down, easy, and it's through—it would shine bright as almost day, it's a radium from here probably across the street over the next house, though, they could see everything there. But, fortunate, this parachute didn't open up, it just flooded, and I said, "Oh my gosh, these guys see us." And I was trying to decide whether to get down, because I was wading almost waist deep—

DANDRIDGE: Right.

ROLFE: (continuing) I was just trying to decide whether to get down or just stand there and take a chance, but, I don't know, something told me to get down. And I guess the other guys did too, I know I got down; by the time I got down, bullets is hitting all around. Pta, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta, they was just tearing up that water. But—

DANDRIDGE: But you escaped it by being in the water?

ROLFE: (overlapping) But every once, every once in a while—Beg pardon?

DANDRIDGE: You escaped it by ducking into the water, right?

ROLFE: Well, yeah. Yes, I guess. I don't know, yeah I imagine I did. But what happened, every once in a while I had to raise my head up; thank God the bullets was stopped. But this was just a pistol, they had a pistol; they said this pistol had a velocity of about eight hundred rounds a minute. And it just didn't shoot accurate, you could see blazes, it showed a blaze, you could see the bullets streaking through the air. But every time I raised my head up, I had to raise my head up, they'd stop. Finally a shell fell out to the side of me and it busted and particles hit me in the leg and that got me warm; it hurt, but it got me warm. And, again, they kept on searching; dropping shells and some more particles hit me in the head. By that time that hurt, that really hurt. And I had—water had been washing me out and I was crawling back and washing me out toward the thing(??), I was crawling back. So by the time I got hit in the head, our leader come crawling back saying, "Is everybody all right? Let's go back, we can't go no further." And by that—At the same time our fellows back on the ground was dropping shells on them and that taking all the tension off of us, and we had a chance to escape down the water and I got so far down, far down, I noticed a medical team was out there with jeeps and I tried to go for the bank but I couldn't balance myself. And I pulled off my—I had already lost my rifle and pulled off my belt cause it had grenades hanging on it and threw it away and tried to get up but I couldn't, still couldn't balance myself. And I had a big field jacket on, it was all full of water; I pulled it off and by that time I hollered to the jeep and when I got in the jeep, they'd taken off, when they got loaded, they'd taken off but the jeeps don't have no top to 'em, wintertime, snow, wind blowing, and I had to go about four or five miles and when I got to the company headquarters, I was nothing but ice. Next day I wrapped up—I didn't have no change of

clothes either. And I changed—I wrapped up in blankets, they had blankets down there and I wrapped up in them and the next day they cut my hair—I went to another medical stop and they cut my hair off up there, all up there. Then the next day, same day about twenty-four hours, because it was about nine o'clock, ten that night when I got hit; about nine, ten o'clock next night I got to a field hospital. They had big hospital, tent hospital way back, lines(??) way back and I got to them, all I know, they were (??) and I was asleep. And next morning they put me by a big potbellied heater. Next morning the Red Cross lady came in and asked me where did I want to send my Purple Heart or did I want to keep it? I said, "No I don't want to keep (??)," you know, couldn't keep it.

DANDRIDGE: Why couldn't you keep it?

ROLFE: Oh, I had, you know, I just knew I was going to go back someday. I wasn't in the hospital about twenty-something days and I had to go back up there. Now, you know, you could—you just—You know you didn't keep nothing like that in your pocket because you didn't have no protection for it, 'cause, you know, wet, raining, in the water, you come out you don't have no clothes or if I hadn't got hit, I'd have had to go back to my dig(??), my hole and try to—

DANDRIDGE: So who kept the Purple Heart?

ROLFE: They sent it home.

DANDRIDGE: Oh they sent it home, okay.

ROLFE: Yeah. I have it somewhere. I have that somewhere, I may show it to you. I have my record here in my pocket.

DANDRIDGE: Right, that's fine, that's fine.

ROLFE: Anyway, in the spring—(woman, unintelligible in background)—In the spring when, after the drive(??) started out, they begin to get ready for this all out drive, which ended the war in Europe. Okay, our outfit, as I said, was on the Adriatic and so forth. But before that happened orders came down that the Russians were moving so fast from east, on Germany, until they thought they was pulling the troops off the south, out of Italy, the Stapha(??). And so therefore they told a—what do you call, a fake drive, a fake movement on the—made out like they were going to drive, the Italian front was going to move, you know, move in fighting. Stop holding and move out of their position. But they didn't send nobody up there but African American soldiers. And I understand, and I know we didn't get—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Why did they—Why?

ROLFE: Well they, uh—the idea that they really wasn't going to move the line, they wasn't ready to move it because they wanted to hold on until Russia got closer. And, now, they're going—

DANDRIDGE: (overlapping) So they were using you as _____(??)?

ROLFE: (continuing, overlapping) They used us—Yeah, use us as a, whatever you may call it. But we was the oldest(??) one went _____(??) saying that, this our front was going to move. In the meantime we heard that our leader, he wouldn't give us no airport, you know wouldn't let the bomber drop bombs out in front of us. And I understand that he told 'em, told hierarchy, the higher authorities that his men didn't need no airport, they learned, "They're trained to take those mountains, take those mountains without _____(??)."

DANDRIDGE: Who was saying this? Someone white or black?

ROLFE: General Almond?

DANDRIDGE: Oh, he was white. Okay.

ROLFE: Yeah. (chuckles) Our leader. He's the leader. But in the meantime, he left there before the war was over; he left, but I don't know why he left. But he made statements about that black soldiers inferior—I believe that's the word, inferior to white. And he asked the authorities not to put black soldiers in the army anymore. He said that they was a—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Yet you survived this encounter, is that right?

ROLFE: Yeah, and he was our trainer and leader. But, still, he wasn't—I mean the only time he was visible in training in the States, he was in an airplane, looking down on us. And our whole outfit, until they kind of cleared it up, until our fellows moved up in rank, the blacks moved up in rank, most of those guys were very prejudiced. Cause I remember once in basic training we was out and our captain asked one soldier—no he asked, this soldier asked, said something to him, he said, "Were you talking to me?" And he told him, "I'm not talking to your momma." And we had a black officer from Ohio, Armstrong his name was, he came and he and this captain went around in words and so in a(??) few days he was out of there, he was transferred. I don't know where Lieutenant Armstrong went, but they sent him somewhere. But I mean we weren't on some(??) bad conditions but the Ninety-second Division was very proud of _____(??) and they're a very proud outfit, and they stayed together. And, personally, in my opinion, we did a good job. But the records was, we wasn't fit to fight—You see some of these comments on the _____(??)—

DANDRIDGE: When you got hit and you were injured and you were at the Red Cross, then what happened?

ROLFE: When the Red Cross lady came by?

DANDRIDGE: Right, uh-huh; did you go back to the front?

ROLFE: After about twenty-something days I went back.

DANDRIDGE: You went back to the front?

ROLFE: Oh, yes, went back. I was back before it was over.

DANDRIDGE: And so you began fighting again?

ROLFE: Oh yeah, yeah. You went back to the front and—

DANDRIDGE: What was it like, going back?

ROLFE: Oh, I was kind of a little leery, a little nervous. But as I say, I really didn't get back in that nervous(??) racket after I came out of it 'cause I knew—You know, you don't realize anything, fact(??) our creed was "Die that others may live." And others, before we could get a pass, from when we went in the army, I think it was something like, "Walk—Keep—Walk in the military manner," keeping always on the alert, observing everything that takes place within sight of ____(??). Called a couple of the God(??) in any case that not covered by instruction. Quit your post only when ____(??) need. So those are some creeds that we had to go by when we, you know, in your training.

DANDRIDGE: Did you lose any friends in this battle?

ROLFE: Oh yeah, yeah. I lost—I mean I was aware of three close friends. Of course you take up there, you really just don't, made(??) something at the ____(??) hundred feet over there, you just don't know exactly what's happening. You know what's going on, but you don't know exactly what happened. But I was aware that I lost Thomas—one of 'em was two Thomas, I called one of 'em 6810 and one 68-something, C or something—and both of them got killed; William from DC, he got killed. He got killed first night 'cause—before he was really ____(??), he got killed. And several guys in—When I went back to the line, all my outfit almost new. I don't know which way they went. I haven't touched base with those guys, only the guy from my hometown; I remember getting back with him after I got back. But it was a big, heavy loss; I know when this drive, this fake drive was, after about three days we were returned to our positions and you could come by and you could see holes on that coast big enough to put this house in. And there's these guys, they noticed the guys hadn't have a scratch on 'em, but they's dead; see those big shells will blow you, it'll take all your breath out quickly. But, anyway, out of all we never did get a good—(clears throat) no good record or anything.

DANDRIDGE: But a lot of you died?

ROLFE: Oh yeah, yeah. And as I said, when I got back, I don't know how many when I got back, out of my—you know, out of just a company, it's about a 120 men or more, I mean be there right on the line out a company besides the others. But I—it was just a few of those guys that I was with when I got back from the hospital. Yeah, as I said, one guy I always think about, as I said I mentioned a while ago, Edward

Brooke, Senator Brooke of Massachusetts. He and I was in the same platoon and I would hang out with Brooke a lot because Brooke was just a real down to earth guy, you know. Whatever level you was on, he was on it. He was as smart guy too.

DANDRIDGE: So you met him up in Europe?

ROLFE: On the line.

DANDRIDGE: On the line in Europe.

ROLFE: Yeah. Actually I got with him when I was transferred over to his outfit; as I told you they transferred some of us out, 92nd was ready to go over with the 366 and make out their numbers. He and I was in the same company.

DANDRIDGE: So, after the battle, after these battles, then what happened?

ROLFE After the battle? We went back, was pulled back in a reserve camp, what you called ____ (??) camp out in the desert, and waited on orders. We thought we were going to have to go to the Pacific and I was supposed to go, my name was on the list to go to the Pacific, but fortunate I was in Rome when the load was made up. But my name was on it, when I got, came back from Rome off of vacation, off a three-day vacation, the ship had made it, had got the load, had closed 'em down, you know, there wasn't no going out or going in at that time. They told me my name was on there but—But it was one guy, one of the guys was on there, he—his wife died and they, evidently, the letter had come before the ship left, but he didn't get the letter until six weeks later and the trip was six weeks from Europe to Manila, somewhere over there, somewhere over in the Pacific. But on their way over there, the war had fell over there; they'd dropped the bomb over there and the war was over so they didn't have to do any fighting. But we kind of went on a few passes on the weekends. Other than that we just kind of trained, did athletic—played ball or something until—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Did you ever mix with the people who lived in those areas?

ROLFE: Yeah, they were very nice, very nice people.

DANDRIDGE: Did you eat in restaurants with them? Go into the bars with them?

ROLFE: Yeah, yeah. They're—Every time I was out, I'd go to ____ (??) restaurant and they had some very nice, Italian food was real nice. I liked it. (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: There wasn't any segregation there.

ROLFE: No, those who were back, I don't know how, about them, they never did catch up when we went ____ (??). They sure very friendly all while we was there. I know often time I'd go down to their

barbershop, get a haircut. I know, sometime some of 'em would kind of have large families, and in their barbers, mirrors all around and I'd see their children staring at me—

DANDRIDGE: Looking at you.

ROLFE: Looking. And they'd try to comb my hair with their little combs. And that comb would drop out of his hand or break or something. (laughs) I'd see 'em kind of whisper to one another and he ____ (??, mic noise), " ____ (??) *paisan*, good *paisan*. Good hair, good hair." (ROLFE and DANDRIDGE laugh) I never—I said, "Thank you." But, anyway, it was enjoyable. But I remember talking to a lady in a restaurant in North Italy. And we had a habit of telling people we were from New York City or Philadelphia; I told her I was from Philadelphia and unfortunate—or fortunate, she had lived in this United States in Philadelphia. (DANDRIDGE laughs) She went to asking me questions, I told her I just kind of, you know, I hadn't been there long; when I start they called me in the army or something. Cause I didn't know nothing about no Philadelphia. Cause I knew she knew that, she could tell that quickly. But it was—But we finally—at that time, after then, after war ceased everywhere, the other job was getting back home. And the union had the ships on strike; ships wasn't moving.

DANDRIDGE: Now was that—That was in Italy or in France or—

ROLFE: United States ships was on strike and we couldn't get back home hardly. I think the British were running, they'd pick up so many troops, so forth, for us I think. But, anyway, fortunate, it was in November, late, ____ (??) November '45, that orders came down that they needed 127 guys out of our company, get ready to go home. But if these so many guys hadn't have been in town, I wouldn't have got a chance to catch that ship because you had to, the one who had the most points had to prof— anyway, they could go back first. And I didn't have but, I think, 107 points.

DANDRIDGE: How did you get the points?

ROLFE: Oh you get points by being married, children, time in the service.

DANDRIDGE: Oh, okay.

ROLFE: (Continuing) That was the three things, I think, you get the points from. I didn't have but three years; and I didn't have no wife, but I was supposed to get one soon as I got back. (laughs)

DANDRIDGE: (overlapping) But you did get on the boat?

ROLFE: (overlapping) And I had an opportunity to get on that load. Before we got back to Boston—it'd taken us twenty-one days from—I forget that port name in Italy, but it's up there right ____ (??).

DANDRIDGE: (overlapping) What took you so long?

ROLFE: What take us so long?

DANDRIDGE: Yeah. Well, it wasn't that much longer than the other.

ROLFE: You talking about after the, after warfare?

DANDRIDGE: Yes sir.

ROLFE: Oh, it just—Well, you see, the Pacific hadn't _____(??) and they—I forget what month they—little while after that, and then after that we didn't have no way to get back. And the ships wasn't available. And this ship I came back on was a British ship, too. And they had room for 127, they came back and picked us up.

DANDRIDGE: Were all of you African American?

ROLFE: In my outfit?

DANDRIDGE: Yeah—All 126.

ROLFE: Oh yeah, all of them were. They was all—Before we got back, it took us twenty-one days, I say, we got the news a storm was approaching us, a hurricane and they finally turned around and tried to run from the hurricane, but it caught up with us. And that's an awful sight being in a hurricane out there on that Atlantic.

DANDRIDGE: I should imagine.

ROLFE: Oh it's awful. But, finally, we made it to Boston. And after I got to Boston, everybody's nice and talking, asking a person about home and so forth. But after we all loaded up, I don't know, we got in probably Chicago or something and I saw they separated us. They separated everybody.

DANDRIDGE: Separated who?

ROLFE: They separated colored from the white; African American from the white.

DANDRIDGE: So when you were in Boston you were in an integrated—

ROLFE: No, no, it wasn't integrated; we was all under there(??) just camped together. And, so—And I thought they was going another way, but we all ended up at Fort Bragg, Missouri. I think I'm getting in some _____(??). But, anyway, we all ended up in—

DANDRIDGE: Fort Bragg?

ROLFE: No, not Fort Bragg. What's this camp name in Missouri? Out there from St. Louis? Is that Bragg? Anyway—

DANDRIDGE: So you ended up in Missouri?

ROLFE: Yeah. That's where I got my discharge. I signed a complaint about, you know, where I got hurt and everything. They told me to go on home and said I would hear from 'em later. But, anyway, later they wrote me a letter and told me, you know, nothing come of it; they didn't do anything about it. Later on I got to complain even after I got here.

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Got complaining about what in particular?

ROLFE: I filed a claim and they didn't do nothing about it.

DANDRIDGE: What was your claim?

ROLFE: I got hit, I got wounded.

DANDRIDGE: Oh, okay, okay.

ROLFE: I got fragments, you know, fragments. And, even, they claimed they had got all the fragments and everything; but even I have trouble when I go through airports now. They turn me around—

DANDRIDGE: So they never acknowledged that?

ROLFE: They acknowledged saying that they'd gotten everything out of me.

DANDRIDGE: But they never did—

ROLFE: Yeah, yeah—I mean finally Congressman—anyway, this congress—Stevenson, came and I had the opportunity to talk to him. But every doctor, even doctors I go to here, Well, I don't see nothing. And, see, that—where I got hit there, it used to be a big scar, but it grew over, it kind of grew out, I was kind of young then, it grew over. But this knot is still in my head but it went down; used to be a great big knot up there. But, anyway, the fact that I got hurt, got the Purple Heart and everything. But they never did acknowledge—Congressman Stevenson got on the case and I went out to Wesley and they looked at me. They gave me 10 percent, but since then, I got up to, I believe, 40 percent. But I just started that a few years ago.

DANDRIDGE: Now you're talking about Adlai Stevenson?

ROLFE: Adlai Stevenson, yeah. In his lifetime he came here and I had the opportunity to talk to him about it. And he told me he was going see—and his wife was a nurse and she called back and told Wesley to

receive me and check me out. But, anyway, once you need to stay with—you got a case you got to stay with it until it's finished. When I walked off taking their word, Well we'll see about you going home, and I was anxious to go home. So after that, you know, they kind of forgot about that.

DANDRIDGE: Well when you got home—when you got discharged, then what did you do?

ROLFE: I went back to the farm one day; I helped my dad work one day—one year, I'm sorry, and in the process I got married, when I got back.

DANDRIDGE: Who did you marry?

ROLFE: Where did I?

DANDRIDGE: Yeah—

ROLFE: Who did I?

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh.

ROLFE: Leodis. A lady with ____ (??) there.

DANDRIDGE: Oh did you?

ROLFE: Sixty-four—

DANDRIDGE: (overlapping) Was she your childhood sweetheart?

ROLFE: Well she was just real good friend of mine while I was in the army, she was a really good friend. And, really, what happened, being my friend—I was going to ____ (??) (laughing)—

DANDRIDGE: I can't hear you.

ROLFE: I'm sorry.

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, all of a sudden you're grumbling here. (laugh)

ROLFE: (laughing) She was a real good friend and after I got back, got back out of the service, she had left and gone to Chicago. And I went back and met her sister and asked her where was she. And she told me she was in Chicago; and I told her tell her, I said come home. About, I don't know, a few weeks, I was in service one morning and I looked around and saw her sitting right next seat behind me. And, so, we— from then on we did some planning.

DANDRIDGE: So that was in the Baptist church near your home, in your home town?

ROLFE: Right, Baptist church. She used to be an usher at church, when she was there; when I left she was the usher. And she would always give me a nice fan; we didn't have no air conditioning in the church. She'd always bring me a nice fan. And every once in a while they would have a, what you have ____ (??), Feed for Faster Fanning(??), she'd sew one of them to give me when I come to church; the rest of 'em had some kind of cardboard fan. But, anyway, after she came on from Chicago, we was planning on going back there but we didn't go; we made our home in Memphis. We moved to Memphis. After which—I stayed there seven years and our oldest three children were born. And we left Memphis and came here. I was on my way to California when I came here, though; stopped here and my brother talked me into going to work at Boeing and a few places. Haven't been to the west side yet. (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: Well tell me, what was it like coming back home, trying to get a job, and resettle back into—

ROLFE: Well jobs were very, very, very—just almost bad as it was before we went to the war. Actually before I went to war, there wasn't any job, the farm was the job; there was no jobs. So, I remember working for a guy had a contract of cutting paper, paper timber, well he was cutting timber for paper and I worked for him for ten cents an hour.

DANDRIDGE: This was after you came out of the—

ROLFE: No, before. But I had worked for about seventy-five cents an hour after I came out of the war. And then I went to Memphis and got on work at Sears. Started going to school, taking a course on mechanic body(??), ____(??)—

DANDRIDGE: Did the GI Bill help you go back to school?

ROLFE: Yes, the GI Bill did. They sent us to school and we'd get 103 dollars a month, I believe, for going to school. I'd taken three different courses in school and that was all right. I decided, after I quit working for Sears—I had a fairly good job for Sears—

DANDRIDGE: What were you doing?

ROLFE: I was filling orders in automobile tires. And I made some mistakes when I first got there on orders; I gave away some big truck tires—There's some smart customers, but I knew I had sent 'em, but I failed to check the slip. They said they didn't get 'em, but anyway—____(??). After then I came here, went to work at Beech—not at Beech at Boeing. And I quit—

DANDRIDGE: Did you have—when you applied there did you have trouble getting on line or anything?

ROLFE: No, I didn't have no trouble. They had a—this was a guy here used to go out there and ____(??) for help from Beech. And all you had to get in touch with him and he'd get you right in. I guess for

Beech—I mean Boeing, I guess Boeing or someone was paying him 'cause I didn't pay him nothing I just got, he got me in.

DANDRIDGE: So what were you doing? What was one of your first jobs?

ROLFE: (overlapping) I worked down at—Well, it was janitor work when I first started for Boeing. But—Boeing was very prejudiced at that time. I guess now, too, I don't know. (laughs) But they were very prejudiced.

DANDRIDGE: Was it a good paying job?

ROLFE: No, I mean it was one of the, third rate in the city. I think the packing company was the highest and I believe Boeing was the next. After a while I think Cessna probably got a better rating than Boeing, in hiring and the pay rate. But I wasn't getting about two dollars and something at Boeing.

DANDRIDGE: Did you stay at Boeing?

ROLFE: I stay—I quit Boeing. I stayed there about a year, I think. I quit Boeing because I could make more money working for a Ford automobile dealer, but I had to work longer hours 'cause I kind of needed some money. So I left there and I don't know—I worked for lots of different people here in Wichita.

DANDRIDGE: But did you like Wichita?

ROLFE: Yeah, I—Wichita's been fairly, been nicer than any of place I know of, as far as, you know, working conditions and so forth. I've never been without a job since I've been here. But they've never been—they wasn't no top jobs, but I was working.

DANDRIDGE: In looking back, how do you view your participation in the war?

ROLFE: I view it as a proud soldier. I view it as I did my job and I know I helped my nation because we—the report said, from our commander said we—by being(??) our commander said he lost opportunities, but it wasn't so 'cause my experience we did a great job. We went for whatever was to do. We didn't run from nothing. Course we—they reported that we faltered(??) and I—But I was proud of what I did. I learned everything, from—I learned how to shoot any kind of gun that was in our hands to use; learned how to shoot pistol, rifle, machine guns, and the artillery—small artillery, and on orders I went forwards. I never refused an order; any time I got an order to do something I did it. And, so, I did a good job. But I learned one thing, regardless what anybody think about me or about anything, that doesn't worry me a whole lot anymore. I got pretty disgusted when I heard some of the reports that our commander said, but I think we did a good job. But unfortunate—

DANDRIDGE: You got a Purple Heart, so apparently you did.

ROLFE: Yeah. _____(??) unfortunate—no you(??) really came back to the state about what the black soldier did. No news(??) came back. Tell Junior to find my deal, Rebecca; where did she go?

DANDRIDGE: She found it.

ROLFE: Find the record; I'll let you look at it.

DANDRIDGE: (overlapping) Did you join any veteran's organizations or _____(??)?

ROLFE: (overlapping) Yeah, I joined the American Legion. I went to the VFW.

DANDRIDGE: Now were these integrated units, racially integrated units or were they black and white units?

ROLFE: Integrated. American—

DANDRIDGE: Legion.

ROLFE: (continuing) —Legion was integrated, but the VFW I just went to then, did some signing up and try to subscribe for better benefits.

DANDRIDGE: Now was there any black organization in Wichita?

ROLFE: Well, American Legion, you know they operated—

DANDRIDGE: There wasn't any all-black—

ROLFE: I haven't been in any all-black—

DANDRIDGE: There's not been any all-black.

ROLFE: But there is a few—unfortunately I can't really identify their names right now, but I think it is a few small auxiliaries supposed to be really doing a few things, which, unfortunate, I haven't been a great of. I usually help on the different organizations, whatever, but I haven't been a part of it very much.

DANDRIDGE: If you were—and again this is looking back, if you—You know, events in people's lives influence them in a variety of ways; what role do you think your World War II experience played in your life?

ROLFE: Well I think it played—I think the role it played in my life that, I went through some very tough tasks, and I learned one thing: whatever you want, go for it. And if you—if you lose, if you don't go for it, you're going to be a loser. So I've learned the—whatever it is, go for it. Doesn't matter how hard the

task is, try to hold on and move forward. And I learned—I wished, I mean I learned people ought to get an education, that's so important because I've seen so many disappointments by not knowing. And I can—some you can't get lots of help from everybody. I—as simple as little things, you need to learn how to manage, save your money, and do things and if you do that, it will help a little money. But I was—In Arizona, I was so inexperienced I wasn't keeping my own money; I would let another gentleman from Ohio, he was a squad leader of mine, he'd keep my money because whenever I'd get a vacation, I would have my fare. I t wasn't but eighty dollars from out about Tucson, a little place we'd catch the train from Tucson to Memphis eighty dollars. And I let my—one of the platoon guys keep my fare. But the next two days they called my name to go on vacation and I didn't have anything, my money's all gone to Ohio somewhere. And I asked a friend, he was a platoon sergeant if he would lend me eighty dollars; he promised he would. And after, next morning I'd gotten ready to go up and catch the train and I asked, told him to give me the money so I could go, and he cussed and said, "I don't have no money." I said, "Oh man," I said, "I thought you were going to let me have the money." "No, man." I think he had lost his money, I think, or something. But I had another friend there, finally had another gentleman there from Louisiana. He said, "Okay Rolfe, I'll let you have the money." But, you know, those kinds of things learn you the—you know to get ready, to try to do the things to get ready for situation, not depend on people. And different—I have asked people and they have turned out so disagreeable and short, you know, I said, "It's good"—it learned you that you need to know things. Need an education. You need to be in church. You need an education, those two things you need. You need to be smart to try and work; do what you learned to do. So I've seen disappointment everything else in the service. I've seen lots of good friends to help you, too. But I guess that's kind of around the question you asked me.

DANDRIDGE: Yes, sir. I appreciate that. Is there anything you want to add about your World War I experience?

ROLFE: Well, I guess the, many things I could think I guess are not really, really important. But that's (??) out front(??) in lots of activity in the army. And I was a ranger once; that's a group that learned how to do the things beyond the calling, I mean they trained rugged, there was about fifteen of us in the outfit trained for a ranger. And I was a pretty good basketball player; played a little baseball and every time the team, our company would get together they'd always find me to play basketball because I was very good about, I thought I was one of the best rebounders my company had. (chuckles) I was fairly good on shooting too. But, I mean, there was lots of things that was very good in the army. But I never did regret it, even on the line, I didn't regret it; I didn't look back and say, "I wish I had not ever come here." I kept my morale up and our guys—as I said, a few guys like Edward Brooke—

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

DANDRIDGE: --interview with Mr. Leroy Rolfe. Okay, you were saying Mr. Rolfe?

ROLFE: Oh. Yeah, I was just about to say that it's things like that, I never did really hate, all the time I was there, even on the front. It gets ordinary; believe it or not, it gets ordinary even though you're in the position you may get killed any second, any time. But I never did really just hate—so many things(??). I

hated the condition I was in, cold weather, wet weather and not getting dried, wet shoes, and I also had the trench feet—my feet got so, after—I couldn't hardly walk, after—for a long time after I got home. But I had trench feet and all this kind of thing. I mean the condition is really bad in some areas. In Europe it was snow, winters were rough as it is here, and the snow and mountains everything else. But other than that, out of all of that I didn't really, I enjoyed being in Rome, I had opportunity to sit in the stadium there at, you see it(??) there that they said Apostle Paul, that same stadium that he sit in and wrote a letter to the Corinthian church about running race, everybody running to win, I forget exactly what scripture that is, but it's in Corinthians. And the Leaning Tower of Pisa, I had pictures taken there; I've taken pictures of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, which, I think is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. And it just—I went in churches there, synagogues there, when you go out of the side door, one of them back side doors you're in a tunnel, they say seven minds(??) are there that gave us count(??) said, Keep 'em lit, stay together, you get lost you may not get out of here. And those kind of things, you know I'd heard about them, and I was just glad to have the opportunity to see 'em. And we just—in our different times in Italy, I liked, it was very beautiful. And the people—I learned how to speak a little Italian, of course I kind of forget it all.

DANDRIDGE: Sounds like you really liked Italy, though.

ROLFE: Off—if I had eyesight I would have gone back there. Cause I would have liked to carry my people to Italy; my oldest son he loves—all my kids love to travel, far as concerned. And my wife she just loves to go somewhere she hasn't been. I wish I could carry there. But since I don't see, I don't care from visiting. I'd like to go to L.A., now I wouldn't care for going to L.A. now cause I can't see what it's like. And I just—But it was wonderful and I look at the different traditions that the Italians had. Usually the ladies work and the men (chuckles) kind of take it easy; that was a tradition that they had over there at that time. Thinking about when I—while I was over there I would think about even my wife here, she would send me boxes every holiday, she would send me—I could count on her box. And I'd get boxes from other people; I'd give some of the boxes to other guys, but I'd always keep her—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) You didn't give her box away did you? (Laughs)

ROLFE: No, I'd always keep that; lock that one up in my trunk until I got rid of it. Yeah—One day I'd eaten on it so long, they had an inspection while we was out—They could inspect everything you had, they'd open up your trunk, they had keys to open up your trunk and look at it. They pulled my food out and all this kind of stuff. Course I couldn't do nothing about it; I said that's all right. But anyway—Le was the one stuck by me while I was gone; when I came back we got married and we—I had a little job, she had a little job, we made it. So, it was quite an after war experience. Yeah, we made it. Rented a little apartment in Memphis; I rented that little apartment, I had to crawl—she always liked to sleep on the outside of the bed, I had to crawl over to get into bed cause there wasn't no room on the other side. But we enjoyed it. Factors weren't too well around there and the landlady wanted to cut to start a fire and I think she told me that she wasn't going to cut wood for me, I think she told me she wasn't going to cut no wood, sorry. She told me she was going to start it with kerosene. I came in, I moved on that account, moved to another—

DANDRIDGE: Well, can I just get some basic demographic information from you? What—when were you born? Do you mind?

ROLFE: Nineteen twenty-two, March seventh. And I married, November 10, 1946.

DANDRIDGE: That was a year—that was a day after my birthday.

ROLFE: Oh really?

DANDRIDGE: I came into the world, yeah.

ROLFE: Oh.

DANDRIDGE: And your wife's name is?

ROLFE: Leodis. L-e-o-d-i-s, Leodis. I used to call her Le David(??) and she called me Le, Leroy.

DANDRIDGE: What was your family name Mrs. Rolfe?

LEODIS ROLFE: (??).

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, your last name.

ROLFE: (at same time) Washington. Oh.

LEODIS ROLFE: Coleman(??).

DANDRIDGE: Now where you born?

LEODIS ROLFE: In Arkansas.

ROLFE: Eastern Arkansas, she was born around West Memphis; that's where I found her.

DANDRIDGE: And you were born in Arkansas, too, right?

ROLFE: I was born in Western Arkansas.

DANDRIDGE: Oh, okay.

LEODIS ROLFE: It's all in Arkansas. (ROLFE chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: What were your parents' names, Mr. Rolfe?

ROLFE: My father was named Fred, Fred D. Fred Douglas. My mother's name Ozilla.

DANDRIDGE: And you said you had how many brothers and sisters?

ROLFE: I had eight brothers and four sisters.

DANDRIDGE: And how many children do you and Mrs. Rolfe have?

ROLFE: Five.

DANDRIDGE: Five children?

ROLFE: Yes ma'am.

DANDRIDGE: And you've done a variety of kinds of work, is that it?

ROLFE: Oh quite a few varieties. In fact I worked for about everybody in Wichita.

DANDRIDGE: So you came to Wichita right after the war? Or was it in the fifties?

ROLFE: No, in the '50s, '53. I lived in Memphis about six years; I came in Memphis '53, 1953. Was on the way to LA but I stopped here; always wanted to go to LA, I—

DANDRIDGE: Okay, what church have you been active in?

ROLFE: Baptist at progressive. I mean progressive ever since I been here. I used to belong a—I left a progressive in Memphis; I was in the progressive in Memphis. Progressive Baptist Church.

DANDRIDGE: Do you hold any positions in the church?

ROLFE: Deacon.

DANDRIDGE: Does Mrs. Rolfe—Do you have any positions in the church?

ROLFE: She's a deaconette.

DANDRIDGE: What kind of other social activities—belong to any clubs, in the past, not that you would now? Did you belong to any clubs or anything of that sort?

ROLFE: Well I used to be active in the Masonic _____ (??) quite a bit. Second—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Prince Hall? Prince Hall Masons?

ROLFE: Yes, Prince Hall. And I used to, I used to be a pretty good little singer when I got out of the service, too. Yeah, I used to sing. I had a pretty good quartet and I had to—I don't know, it carried(??) _____(??) and it was causing a little noise in my family, she wanted—

DANDRIDGE: What was the name of your quartet?

ROLFE: Friendly Five.

DANDRIDGE: You have any pictures of it?

ROLFE: Yes, I don't know where they are.

CAROL BURNS: --photo album.

ROLFE: You do?

BURNS: Yes, your son showed me a photo—

ROLFE: Oh, he—I thought that was somebody outside, I thought that was my daughter had tiptoed in here.

DANDRIDGE: So do you have any hobbies?

ROLFE: Beg pardon?

DANDRIDGE: You have any hobbies?

ROLFE: Hobbies?

DANDRIDGE: Yes sir.

ROLFE: Well, you know, I stay so busy until I kinda—

DANDRIDGE: Well where are you working now?

ROLFE: A place called Envision. That's a lot of—

DANDRIDGE: Right, we buy products from them.

ROLFE: Is that right? Yeah, Envision. I was a—One year I was the Employee of the Year.

DANDRIDGE: Yes, that's what I see there.

BURNS: The State of Kansas Older Worker Award.

ROLFE: Oh yeah, well yeah sure was the oldest male employee in a—you know, corporation.

DANDRIDGE: So what, you go to work every day now?

ROLFE: Yeah, I do, sure do. I think going to work helps me to stay active.

DANDRIDGE: So you're going to be ninety in March.

ROLFE: (at same time) In March.

DANDRIDGE: You could—My uncle was in World War II and he was born in 1922, he was born in March 26, that's why you're going to be ninety, I didn't have to add up.

ROLFE: Oh, yeah.

DANDRIDGE: Well I thank you so much for all of your participation, thank you very much.

ROLFE: Well I appreciate you all coming.

Tape 2 ends.

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