

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

Interviewee: William Tarlton
Date: 12 October 2010
Location: Tarlton home, Topeka, Kansas
Interviewer: Deborah Dandridge, Field Archivist

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

DEBORAH DANDRIDGE: Okay, this is October 12, 2010. This is an interview with Mr. William Tarlton at his home in Topeka, Kansas. Thank you, Mr. Tarlton for taking time to do an interview for our project documenting African American World War II veterans in Kansas. We want to begin with just trying to think about some of you—Where did you grow up?

WILLIAM TARLTON: Topeka.

DANDRIDGE: And what was your family—Where did you grow up in Topeka?

TARLTON: In South Topeka, 1325 Monroe.

DANDRIDGE: How many children were in your family? How many brothers and sisters?

TARLTON: Six boys and two girls.

DANDRIDGE: And what did your parents do for a living?

TARLTON: (static) My dad worked for Santa Fe and my mom was a homemaker.

DANDRIDGE: What kinds of things do you remember about growing up in Topeka? What were some of your household chores?

TARLTON: Cutting wood for the heating stove and growing the garden and picking cherries in the backyard and playing in the street. And—

DANDRIDGE: Did you have any—Did you go to church regularly?

TARLTON: St. John. We went to church regularly, St. John, we had to.

DANDRIDGE: Do you want to elaborate on that?

TARLTON: Well, every Sunday my dad would get us together and we'd walk from 1325 Monroe to 7th Street, St. John's Church. We went to Sunday school and then also went to church. I'm trying to remember—

DANDRIDGE: (in background) No rush, no rush.

TARLTON: (continuing) —the Sunday school teacher she—Mrs. Robinson, she was a school teacher in Highland, in Pierce District(??) School. Those are some of the things that I remember. Other than that—

DANDRIDGE: Did you enjoy—What kinds of things did you enjoy growing up? Any particular games or—

TARLTON: Well, baseball, I enjoyed baseball and I enjoyed football. And we also pl—on the Monroe School grounds we used to play soccer and hockey.

DANDRIDGE: What elementary school did you attend?

TARLTON: Monroe Elementary School.

DANDRIDGE: What do you remember about those days? If someone were just to ask you what your memories are, anything?

TARLTON: Well we had very good teachers, far as I know. Evidently some of them are—they're not around anymore, but—They were very strict and at that time we had corporal punishment. And, of course, we all tried to avoid that because that was very embarrassing plus the fact it hurt. (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: Did you have, was this a school that was designated for African Americans?

TARLTON: Yes it was; it was one of the four schools. This is the one that they bused the people from North Topeka clear across town to Monroe School. They had one bus that I know of, that they'd pick 'em up and take 'em back to North Topeka. Where they lived in North Topeka was various locations and I think the Brown's lived there, were one of them that came over.

DANDRIDGE: When you were going to Monroe School, how did you get to school?

TARLTON: I walked, only lived three blocks from it.

DANDRIDGE: Oh, okay, that's right, that's right. So what other, any other things that you remember about Monroe? Did you have any favorite friends there or anything?

TARLTON: Uh—

DANDRIDGE: You remember anybody?

TARLTON: Yes, I had friends like—mostly all neighborhood friends. Like Irving Johnson, there was Thaddeus Ferguson, Bobby Brown, I can remember those and, uh, they were all area kids that lived on Monroe that I knew. And then there was some on Quincy that we knew, like Jesse Coleman and, uh—

DANDRIDGE: What did you guys do?

TARLTON: Well, in the evenings we'd—In the summertime, in the evenings, well we'd be out in the alley shooting marbles or we'd get on Monroe hill with our roller skates or skateboards and come down that hill. And then the other thing that we'd do, when we were allowed out of the yard—they made sure that we were in the yard my folks, all of 'em, wouldn't allow us to be out of the yard after about six o'clock unless they were with us—and we'd go down to Monroe School, after school, play ball on the ball diamond down there and then we'd go back home. Cause a lot of the schools from over Washington we used to come over and play ball with us. Those were the things, some of the things. And, the other thing that we used to have down there that isn't there anymore, used to be a tennis court between the railroad tracks.

DANDRIDGE: Really?

TARLTON: Yes. And we used to go over there. My sister, my oldest sister used to play tennis over there on that tennis court.

DANDRIDGE: Was that near where Cushinberry Park is now?

TARLTON: Yes, it was in Cushinberry Park. And there were two railroad tracks and we used to have to go across one of the railroad tracks and down to this tennis court. It was real nice, it was clay.

DANDRIDGE: Did you know if the city—

TARLTON: Yes. Clay court, yes, city owned.

DANDRIDGE: So did black people, were they allowed to—

TARLTON: That was, that was our park.

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh, oh—

TARLTON: It was called Euclid at that time.

DANDRIDGE: Oh, that was Euclid Park.

TARLTON: That was Euclid Park.

DANDRIDGE: Which is Cushinberry Park—

TARLTON: Cushinberry Park now.

DANDRIDGE: I didn't know that.

TARLTON: Yes it is. That's right.

DANDRIDGE: Was it always that narrow diamond-like—I mean kinda fork-like—

TARLTON: Yeah—

DANDRIDGE: It was always narrow like that?

TARLTON: Yeah, it was narrow like that, but it was wide enough they had two, two or three tennis courts down there.

DANDRIDGE: I wonder if they had widened those streets probably.

TARLTON: No. The Monroe Street, I think, is about—is wider up from—

DANDRIDGE: I was thinking about Fifteenth and Seventeenth.

TARLTON: Oh, well, from Fifteenth to Seventeenth is about the same width, cause that was all ball diamond over where it still is, right across the street where the Monroe—I mean Board of Education, where *Brown v. Board of Education*, that's it.

DANDRIDGE: Okay. Do you know what time period you entered Monroe School?

TARLTON: Monroe School was built in 1926.

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) But when did you—

TARLTON: (continuing) And I—wait a minute now. I was born in '25 so I got there in, should have been '30. I was five years old.

DANDRIDGE: So you went to kindergarten?

TARLTON: I went to kindergarten, Mrs. Eggleston(??).

DANDRIDGE: So you were there at the new school, almost when it had just opened.

TARLTON: It hadn't opened but five or six years before I went.

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh, right, right. That's funny. So after Monroe School, then what did you do?

TARLTON: I went to—we went to Crane Junior High. And then went to—

DANDRIDGE: Did you have any memories about Crane?

TARLTON: Oh, I played football there and that was the one—See Crane we—You graduated, you get out of the eighth grade there at Monroe and then you went to ninth grade at junior high. And then when you get out of junior high you go to tenth grade at Topeka High. And that was it.

DANDRIDGE: Were the teachers—Was the Crane an all-black school?

TARLTON: No, no, no, that's where we got mixed. We didn't—the school became mixed—I mean when you went to there they were mixed white and black, when you went to Crane.

DANDRIDGE: So did they—what was it like having white teachers? Was this the first time you'd had white teachers?

TARLTON: Yes.

DANDRIDGE: What was it like; do you remember anything about it?

TARLTON: I got along with them real well. And there was one thing; one of the teachers that I can remember that introduced me to being a mechanic. In science, in science class he was teaching us how the internal combustion engine worked. And I became interested in that and that's when I became—wanted to be a mechanic.

DANDRIDGE: Wow, so—what about the sports? Were the sports integrated, racially integrated?

TARLTON: Yes. We played all the white schools, Roosevelt, East Topeka. We played—

DANDRIDGE: You played on the football team? And it was a mixed football team?

TARLTON: I was on the football team. Mixed football team.

DANDRIDGE: So then after Crane—Oh, you want to say anything else?

TARLTON: No, go. Well—I enjoyed—

DANDRIDGE: Did you get along with the white teammates?

TARLTON: Oh, yes, yes I did—I had some friends that went to school with me that _____(??) we see each other once in a while. The white friends.

DANDRIDGE: Do you? That's great. So, what'd you do after Crane?

TARLTON: Well, I entered Topeka High School, tenth. And then I quit. I quit school then.

DANDRIDGE: Why'd you quit?

TARLTON: Well, I was—you know my mother had died and dad was raising the family. And then I was kinda—I started getting jobs and started helping a little bit.

DANDRIDGE: So you stopped to work for the family?

TARLTON: Yeah, right.

DANDRIDGE: What kind of jobs were you getting?

TARLTON: Well, I got a variety of jobs. Like, at one time I worked for Flynn(??) Morris Drugstore, I delivered and bused, you know bused dishes up there and cleaned the tables. They used to have on Kansas Avenue. And then I worked for Ed Marling's when it was on Kansas Avenue. I worked for them until I—let's see until I went into the military.

DANDRIDGE: Okay. Let's talk about the military.

TARLTON: Uh-oh. (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: What were you doing before World War I, what were you—right before you—before World War I, before 1941, or right before we got into the war, do you remember what you were doing?

TARLTON: Before World War I?

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, no, before World War II, I mean, right before it.

TARLTON: Well, I was mostly in school and then I—See I got out of the—I went from '39 to '40 and then I went to, I was working at—Let's see I worked at Fred and Morris and then I went to work for Ed Marling's and then I became—In '43 I was eighteen years old, so I had to register for the draft and I got drafted.

DANDRIDGE: So you were working when you got drafted?

TARLTON: I was working when I got drafted. I can't remember whether I was working for Ed Marling's when I got drafted or not. But I think it was about '43. And I remember, yeah I was working for him because they had—see Ed Marling's used to be only an appliance store and then they changed over, started becoming a furniture store and we was the first one that brought, we brought those furniture and put those chairs and things together and worked in the basement. I was with—worked with a guy by the name of Leedy Morris and he'd work for them for years and his wife also worked for them. So—and then I worked there until I was drafted into the service.

DANDRIDGE: So, uh, when you were being drafted, how did you view the war before you were drafted?

TARLTON: (chuckles) Now that's something that I never even thought about. How did I view the war? I never thought about that but—I knew that they had bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941 and I thought that we were having some good problems with things like that. Now I wasn't enthusiastic about going to service, I'll tell you that.

DANDRIDGE: What were your concerns?

TARLTON: Well, I was like anybody else, you might get killed. (chuckles) That was one of the things. Yeah there was a lot of concern, but it turned out that it was probably one of the better things that happened to me.

DANDRIDGE: What did your family and friends think about your joining the military?

TARLTON: I didn't join.

DANDRIDGE: I mean, drafted—

TARLTON: They—I really don't know. I don't know their reaction.

DANDRIDGE: Did you know—How did your dad feel about it?

TARLTON: My dad, he missed me and knew I had to do it. I mean, I couldn't do anything about it. So that's as far as I—we never talked about it too much.

DANDRIDGE: Did any of your other siblings go to war?

TARLTON: Oh, yeah.

DANDRIDGE: I mean go to in World War II.

TARLTON: No, I was the only one that went to World War II in my family. My other brothers they went into service nine days after I got out of service and they were in the Korean War; that was Ed.

DANDRIDGE: Okay and we'll get back to—At the time that you entered World War II, what was race relations like in Topeka at that time? How would you describe it?

TARLTON: Segregated.

DANDRIDGE: Okay. Do you want to elaborate on that?

TARLTON: Well, we had certain areas that we could go in and there were other areas we couldn't go in. And they didn't let us in or they would run us out of. I know that on Monroe Street I lived, we lived at 1325 Monroe Street and on Twelfth Street, from Twelfth Street to town was white people lived there. That was a neighborhood we didn't venture into. And then there were certain areas, uh, even over on Madison Street there were white people that were on Madison Street and I knew some of 'em, we used to go over and play with them, they went to school with us. But we played—

DANDRIDGE: You mean they went to school with you at Crane?

TARLTON: (continuing) At Crane and also at Topeka High. And some of 'em that I know they were real friendly people but we didn't hang in their neighbor, that was their neighborhood, that was only across the tracks from us. And when we did go over across the track there was a—well the Shunganunga Creek used to be up there cause they had a place called Big Bend, that was where I learned how to swim. (chuckles) Over there by the big oil tanks.

DANDRIDGE: That was dangerous Mr. Tarlton.

TARLTON: Well we all swam in there. And they also had the—Oh, there was one other thing I ought to mention about before. There was the, oh hobos used to come down in the neighborhood; they'd come on, get on, jump on the train and come over in our neighborhood. And they were good people, they'd come over to cut wood for you or do anything, any chore just to get some food. And I remember my mother used to feed 'em out in the back, we had a big bench out in the backyard and table, and she would feed them. That was one of the things—they'd get off the train and then they'd do what they had to do and then get on back on the train and they would go someplace else or go over, they called it Hobo Jungle, it was over there on, just off of Madison, in there ____ (??). I still—that place is still there, but they closed that creek in cause I-70 went across there.

DANDRIDGE: When you were playing in the creek, in Shunganunga, were there—did you play with whites or blacks?

TARLTON: Whites and—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) –and blacks. So all of you were playing in that creek.

TARLTON: We played together.

DANDRIDGE: In a dangerous setting. Did you ever remember before you went to the World War II, did you remember any racial conflicts in the town or were you aware of any?

TARLTON: Here?

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, in Topeka.

TARLTON: Yeah, right, they had some riots down there on Fourth Street.

DANDRIDGE: Well explain that to me. I've never heard of this before.

TARLTON: Oh, yeah. Right around Fourth and Kansas Avenue, they had riots down there.

DANDRIDGE: What was it about?

TARLTON: Just about blacks and whites not getting along. The white people were up on Kansas Avenue, black people was on Fourth Street and they come up all on there and they had fights right there on Fourth and Kansas Avenue by the Darvel(??) Hotel and at the—what's the name of that one that burned down? Can't think of it. But, yeah, they had some riots there.

DANDRIDGE: So it was a constant struggle?

TARLTON: Well, after that one, they got it all broken up a little bit, but—It calmed down a little.

DANDRIDGE: Were there any protests, like strikes or anything that were racial or anything?

TARLTON: No, I don't think. I can't remember anything. There wasn't enough blacks around, but I mean, they had their own thing and we were off in the one whole corner. You know we used to meet the whole city of blacks down on Fourth Street on a Saturday night.

DANDRIDGE: What was Fourth Street like on Saturday night?

TARLTON: Well, there was Mack's Tavern and there—people would gather down there. The Ritz Theatre and they had all kinds of little honky-tonk things in there. And that's where the gathering place was, you'd meet everybody. And—

DANDRIDGE: Did you get your hair cut there, barbershops—

TARLTON: They had barbershops there, pool halls, and they had, believe it or not, they had one pool hall was right in the middle of the section that was segregated. (chuckles) Right on the middle of Fourth Street there.

DANDRIDGE: Well describe that to me, what do you mean?

TARLTON: Well, they didn't want anybody—well, it was Mexican owned and the Mexicans _____(??) congregate there. And then, see we had a pool hall that we went to was Jenkins Pool Hall—

DANDRIDGE: Is that somebody that was African American?

TARLTON: Yeah, Jenkins was African American. Then, let's see—Stum Powers(??) he had a liquor, well that come back later, but he—And Charlie Lytle had a drug store down there.

DANDRIDGE: So Lytle's Drug Store was down on Fourth Street?

TARLTON: (at same time) Fourth street. Yeah, Charlie Lytle; he was a detective and—And then, uh, let's see they had a, what is it, a barbeque place, they had barbeque places and they had all kinds of places down the Fourth Street line.

DANDRIDGE: Was the Carver Y there when you were there? It wasn't there yet, was it?

TARLTON: Carver?

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh.

TARLTON: Yeah. Carver Y was there before—I mean along with, that was back in the forties. See a lot of that stuff, down in the forties see I left here in '43 and I missed a lot.

DANDRIDGE: Right.

TARLTON: And see when that urban renewal came through, I was—that was round about, what? Forty—I mean started in the fifties, somewhere—

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, started in the sixties.

TARLTON: Well, anyway, see that was where the Metropolitan Halls where we used to go to have dances upstairs and the American Legion and all that was down there on Fourth Street.

DANDRIDGE: Well what was Donway(??) Studio? Remember Donway Studio, which is off of—Okay, so that didn't have anything to do with—Let's go back to the war thing. When you entered World War II, how did it happen? You got a draft notice?

TARLTON: Yeah.

DANDRIDGE: And then what did you, you remember what you did after that?

TARLTON: Well, when we got drafted it was three of us from Topeka that went—Eldon Burnett and, uh, let's see—

DANDRIDGE: Scott?

TARLTON: Wait a minute, wait a minute. It was three, I remember Eldon—

DANDRIDGE: But there were three of you.

TARLTON: There was three of us that went to Leavenworth.

DANDRIDGE: Oh, that's where you went.

TARLTON: That's where we went, we had to go to Leavenworth, they took us to Leavenworth and that's where we entered service. And then, that's when they took us—they set us in the units we were supposed to be going to.

DANDRIDGE: Do you remember your unit?

TARLTON: Yeah, they sent me to Camp Lee, Virginia. I don't know where Eldon and, uh—Delbert Allen, I don't know where they went.

DANDRIDGE: So what was the name of your unit?

TARLTON: Well, I went—First they trained us, since I was a mechanic, or tried to be, or wanted to be, that's where they sent me to school to be a mechanic at Camp Lee, Virginia. And that was where, that was the training place. When I went—When we got ready to go overseas I thought I was going to go overseas as a mechanic. Well, the first thing what happened after we left Camp Lee, Virginia, they sent us to Newport News, Virginia where we got on the boat to go overseas.

DANDRIDGE: Was this unit all black or was it mixed?

TARLTON: It was all—All of us—Nothing mixed in back then. They had white officers but nothing mixed.

DANDRIDGE: So what unit were you in? What was the name of it? Three hundred seventy something or what?

TARLTON: No, it was just a training squadron, unit. Training at Virginia, that's where I got my basic training. And I don't remember what company they had company A, B, C, D, and—

DANDRIDGE: Whatever.

TARLTON: Yeah, but anyway. But when I got ready to go overseas they sent to Newport News, Virginia and that was a bad place to go.

DANDRIDGE: Why do you say that?

TARLTON: Oh we had—they had riot down there, I was down there in that riot.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, what was that like?

TARLTON: As far as white and black, whites were fighting blacks and blacks were fighting whites.

DANDRIDGE: Were these soldiers fighting each other?

TARLTON: Sailors and soldiers. (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: Was it in the town?

TARLTON: In the town. And there were some civilians in there too.

DANDRIDGE: What were you all fighting about?

TARLTON: I don't know. It was just hard to say cause it just started. I think it started by somebody calling somebody a name or saying something derogatory about somebody or maybe—it just, but anyway it started up, it just started up, and when it did it just grew, grew, grew.

DANDRIDGE: Well, did the military police come and—

TARLTON: Yes, they broke us up and they took us all back to the base, the naval base. Took us all back there and the next day they put us on boat.

DANDRIDGE: Put your whole company on the boat?

TARLTON: They put all—Not the company, see cause wasn't in(??) by company cause we were replacement people. And they put us on a boat and put us three miles out to water and stayed there—we stayed out on the water for three—

DANDRIDGE: Okay now so—

TARLTON: (continuing) –So we couldn't get back into town.

DANDRIDGE: So were all of the people in that whole group were all black?

TARLTON: Yeah. That I was with, yes.

DANDRIDGE: So that boat that you were put on, that boat was all black?

TARLTON: Yeah, all except for the sailors.

DANDRIDGE: The sailors were white.

TARLTON: They were white and then they had Marine guards that was white on there.

DANDRIDGE: So they were guarding you all?

TARLTON: Well they had Marines on all of the boats.

DANDRIDGE: Okay. But you were in the Army?

TARLTON: I was in the Army.

DANDRIDGE: So, what did you do after that?

TARLTON: Well, we got on the boat and landed in—

DANDRIDGE: So when did you leave the States? Do you remember?

TARLTON: Well it was in 1943. We landed in Owren(??). I don't remember exactly—but I was overseas for twenty-six months and I didn't get back to the—hm, I got back to the States—Oh dear.

DANDRIDGE: That's okay. But you were there for twenty-six months. Where did you go overseas?

TARLTON: Well, I ended up in the 92nd Division, 371st Infantry, 92nd Division, headquarters. Now I remember that, I was in headquarters—

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, cause they fought in World War I, didn't they?

TARLTON: They were ____ (??) Ninety-second Division was—Ninety-second, Ninety-third, they were all black.

DANDRIDGE: And they were all—yeah.

TARLTON: Well I was in the Ninety-second. And then, of course, they had another black outfit over there, which was the 365th and that was—They had a, Colonel Queens was a black Colonel, that was the only one. But now in Ninety-second Division we had mostly all white officers, in fact the noncommissioned officers, some of them were white even. And some of them black. Now I just happened to have a black, I remember him. And—

DANDRIDGE: What do you remember about him?

TARLTON: He was just a—Well a Southern boy. (chuckles) See now most of the members of the Ninety-second Division were, they were from the South and—

DANDRIDGE: Did you have any rivalry because you weren't from the South?

TARLTON: No, no, we didn't have anything like that. During training, you get trained to endure lots of situations and—But when we went to—And then we went into combat. Course I was, they sent us to Caserta to the, what they called, we called a Replacement Depot and we called it Repo Depot. And we saw—well they showed us, they said, That's where you're going. We saw 'em firing—we saw fire, artillery fire going over the hills and they said, That's where you're going in a few days. And we stayed there until we got them and then we was replaced. See, the Ninety-second Division lost quite a few people.

DANDRIDGE: How did they lose them?

TARLTON: Fighting. Killed during war.

DANDRIDGE: Where were they fighting?

TARLTON: The Rome Arno(??). They fought all the way from, um, well I went in—let's see I went in at, we were at Caserta and then I was in the group that went clear down to, almost to Massa and then they put the—and then the Tenth Mountain Division, which is Bob Dole, you know our ex-Senator, his outfit got wiped out. They pulled us out, out of there, and sent us over into the Po Valley, that's where they were wiped out.

DANDRIDGE: And, so, had you been, had this, had your group been trained to fight?

TARLTON: Yes.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, okay.

TARLTON: Oh, yeah. We were—they were well trained. They were—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) So you replaced Bob Dole's unit?

TARLTON: Oh, well, our unit did.

DANDRIDGE: Your unit.

TARLTON: Yeah, the 371st Infantry Division and we moved around through Po Valley and went all the way to Genoa. And so.

DANDRIDGE: Well, were you—So you were participating in this fighting?

TARLTON: Oh yes.

DANDRIDGE: So what was—What was it like? What do you remember about it? Fighting in itself(??)?

TARLTON: It's sort of scary.

DANDRIDGE: What'd you have to do?

TARLTON: Well, you had to—we had to take on the Germans and we had to fight 'em. And we didn't—now I actually didn't get, well exactly what I'd say is where I could see where I shot somebody, you know. I mean cause if a chicken jumped up out there somebody started, they'd start shooting. (chuckles) That was one of the things that was kinda fun because we were in those mountains when the mountains, anything that moved at night the whole, cause the group would probably start shooting into that area, see, we might have shot 'em, I might have, I don't know.

DANDRIDGE: Did you get in any firefights? Did you all start shooting—

TARLTON: Well, yeah. And, yeah we got in a few. But see since I was in headquarters I didn't have to be up there all the time. I was a cipher and decipher machine operator. See I deciphered codes and stuff ____ (??) for the camp(??) and I had to do guard duty. I had to go up in the bridges after a siege, come out of the mountains they'd ____ (??) people came out of the mountains they'd come over the bridge coming into town and so—That's one of the things, one of the few things that I ____ (??) and could remember. And I remember all the carnage that happened over there. I mean we—It was wrecked, I mean our artillery tore those places up. You wouldn't believe. They say a tornado come through, well those places were torn down just like that. I mean most of it was stone buildings and stuff like that.

DANDRIDGE: Um-hm, been up there for centuries.

TARLTON: Yeah.

DANDRIDGE: Well, did you lose anybody in your group?

TARLTON: Oh yeah, we lost, uh—I only remember three, I don't even remember three that we lost. Do you know the funny thing about being in front _____ (??) gets shot, if this guy goes down, the medics or someone they cover him up, they covered the body up then you would just go on by. You don't want to think about it, you say, I'm sorry it's him but I'm glad it wasn't me. That's the way we felt about it.

DANDRIDGE: Well(??) that's an attitude you had to have.

TARLTON: Yeah. Sorry it was him, but glad it wasn't me.

DANDRIDGE: So, you didn't lose anybody that you were friends with?

TARLTON: Oh, no, no, no, no. Only people—You know that was the other thing, too. We really didn't try to make friends.

DANDRIDGE: Why was that?

TARLTON: Oh, you'd get attached to somebody and they get killed that would just break your heart, you know? We just didn't—I didn't know—I didn't get close to anybody, and nobody got close to me, so that was the way it was.

DANDRIDGE: Did you have any, you said you had white officers, did you have any conflict with them or did you ever—

TARLTON: Uh, no we had the sense to obey them.

DANDRIDGE: Were they ever harsh to you or—

TARLTON: No, after we got overseas they weren't. They were pretty nice people.

DANDRIDGE: So there was a difference when you were in the States as opposed to when you were over fighting?

TARLTON: That's right. (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: What—Do you remember anything in particular about there being a difference?

TARLTON: Well, we used to, when I—if we had chicken in the mess hall and I got a piece of chicken and put it in my pocket, and come up there they'd eat that chicken out of my pocket, I'd give it to 'em, you know like that. So those were some of the things, but I mean we never got real close to them either

cause we—And we never, we had only one officer that I knew, the only black, one second lieutenant I knew, but he got killed. I know that that was one of the three that I know got killed.

DANDRIDGE: How did he get killed?

TARLTON: Was shot.

DANDRIDGE: Was he in a fire-fight?

TARLTON: Fire-fight. Yeah, he was—Well, it was artillery and stuff, it just took the top of his head off, I can just remember that.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, do you remember what your—what did you do, when you were overseas, what were some of your daily routine? What kinds of things did you—

TARLTON: Well, over—They'd—You know we lived in tents.

DANDRIDGE: Okay.

TARLTON: And, of course, the daily routine, if you were out there before you go on your duty up to the line or anything, well you'd have to police your area, just routine Army work.

DANDRIDGE: Well what is routine Army work?

TARLTON: I don't even—Drilling, marching, drilling, training, and instruction, they're giving you instructions about different things, telling you what you might have to run into, and things like that.

DANDRIDGE: Now when they were giving you the instructions, were there black officers or white officers?

TARLTON: The non—The NCOs were, the non-commissioned officers were some of the talking people and then the captains and first lieutenants were white.

DANDRIDGE: But the actual training, non-commissioned officers were African American?

TARLTON: Well they were out there with us—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) They were African Americans.

TARLTON: Yeah they were _____(??), some of 'em. Now they had some white non-commissioned officers.

DANDRIDGE: (at same time) Non-commissioned officers, who were also training you in combat.

TARLTON: Right, right.

DANDRIDGE: So when you were training in combat, what sort of things, do you remember, you had to learn how to do?

TARLTON: Keep your head down. (chuckles) Dig a fox hole. Get in that fox hole or stay on the ground. Yeah.

DANDRIDGE: Did you ever have to do that?

TARLTON: I certainly did. Yes I did. The other one thing that I remember vividly is the fact that I was in, it was a bridge that we went across, that goes across a little creek. And we were—me and another guy, one was on one side of the bridge and one was on the other side, I was right there, and three of the artillery shells that fell hit that bridge and they never(??) went off and fell right off into the water. I remember they hit. And see that was, see that German eighty-eight millimeter gun was—you'd hear a, Boo, and next thing it's on you. You know? Yeah, those are the things that—And that was about, that was one of the, some of the scariest things, especially at night. I mean it's all dark over there and then—Oh, the other thing that I remember, I was, when I got shrapnel wounds in my arm and back we was getting close to the end of the war and we were up there to a, in a British Signal Corps outfit and we went up in there and they shelled that outfit. And we were going to get some breakfast that morning. Way off in the field and somehow or other they zeroed in on that thing and ____(??) sounded like a pile of lumber falling down.

DANDRIDGE: So you didn't get your breakfast?

TARLTON: We got it, eventually, after it got all clear. Those British soldiers are resilient people, they're crazy some of 'em.

DANDRIDGE: So did you ever, so did you eat with 'em? Did you eat with the British?

TARLTON: (overlapping) Oh yeah, yeah we ate—I did. And, me and several of us that was on patrol and we ____(??) there. Yeah, we did that. And they were very nice. And they were—So one of the things that I can remember that they were, of course I'm young, but the British, they always had some Scotch Whiskey. (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: And so you all were sharing, is that what you'd say?

TARLTON: They shared a little bit with us.

DANDRIDGE: Well that's good. Did you all—How did you all, were you able to have any recreational activities, just to while away the time or anything? While you were—

TARLTON: Oh we always played something out on the company streets; we played a little ball out there in the street, big wide area. Or played bat balls around. And then those that—After we cleared a town where it was safe enough for us to go into town, some of 'em would go into town and get some vino. We'd drink all kinds of vino and whiskey and what we could find cause, um, what the beer and stuff that they gave us, the American, what we were given was three-two beer and it was always hot. We haven't(??), we ____(??) refrigerating it. We drank it hot. And then we had our rations and stuff, C rationing and K rations.

DANDRIDGE: How were they?

TARLTON: Well, the K ration, I like 'em. That was that canned, they were in box. And then the canned rations, certain ones that you could get would be all right, you know, they'd have just like canned meat and stuff that you'd get here.

DANDRIDGE: So the food wasn't bad?

TARLTON: Well, some cases it was and some cases it wasn't. I know, at one time there, I got to a place where I wouldn't eat chicken 'cause it tasted like wood, it had wood in it, of course that was refrigerated stuff that they sent over. The rations wasn't that great during ____(??).

DANDRIDGE: When you went to the towns in Italy that you all had secured, did you go to any restaurants?

TARLTON: Oh, I went to one and they had, they had pasta and stuff, they had real good—they were good cooks. And then when I went to, we went to—let's see I was in ____(??) and we went to, I visited, I went into some of the cathedrals that they had, they were beautiful. Some of 'em didn't get hurt bad. And then I got to see—and then Pisa, got up there close cause we went right through there.

DANDRIDGE: In terms of—What other aspects of the war—So you were over there, did you just stay in Italy or how did—Did you go anywhere else? (static)

TARLTON: No, we just went from—we went from Northern, Southern Italy to Northern Italy; we went all the way up the coast. (static) Down from Naples, I was in Naples at one time. And from Naples all the way up. And there were so many towns and the little villages in there that—

DANDRIDGE: So how did, did you talk to some of the people who lived there?

TARLTON: Oh yeah, I talked to, I talked—I remember one lady that I talked to that she said she'd been wanting to speak English, she had lived in the United States at one time and she hadn't spoken English for a long time and she wanted to—and we, she gave us a—she had an ice cream stand and I got some ice cream from her. And then—Of course in the Po Valley, that's where the wine, all the companies and the rich people lived for the Italians and they were fancy houses and—

DANDRIDGE: Did you ever go inside any?

TARLTON: Yeah, their big old wine cellars, I went in there (chuckles) and we sit down ____ (??). They had them huge vats where they were curing that wine, we drank those. Yeah we—

DANDRIDGE: So this was when you were on recreation? This is when you weren't on duty?

TARLTON: When we wasn't on duty, yeah. Yeah we went in some of them and they were—they would have been, those that weren't damaged, would have been pretty nice, but you know—

DANDRIDGE: So when you were over there, how did you—Did you remain over there for the duration of the war?

TARLTON: I remained over there for the—until the, when the Germans surrendered, when the Germans surrendered and we brought 'em out of the mountains. Escorted 'em out of the mountains down through, to the point where, for prison, to imprison 'em.

DANDRIDGE: Where did you imprison them?

TARLTON: They had—they built stockades and fenced in areas and stuff like that. We went down—they sent two of us, too, being up in the hills. They had already radioed up there and the Germans had already surrendered so we weren't afraid of anything. Went up and got 'em and we reported to this Colonel and he was from, he had been trained, I mean he went to school at Boston University. He was a Colonel in the Nazi Army. He was a nice guy.

DANDRIDGE: So this was the prisoner and you—

TARLTON: He was a prisoner.

DANDRIDGE: (continuing) —and you sort of—He knew how to speak English.

TARLTON: He knew—He spoke English better than me or some of us—He was very fluent.

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh.

Tape 1, side 1 ends; side 2 begins.

DANDRIDGE: Okay Mr. Tarlton, you were talking about—what were we talking about?

TARLTON: We were talking about that colonel.

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, so how—So where did he go, I mean—(static; unintelligible).

TARLTON: Well, see now they, for the, when you put the regular—The officers were with, they put them in different compounds. And they, the regular soldiers they had over in another compound. Now the thing that happened, after they brought 'em down out of the hills, we brought—we stopped at our headquarters, turned 'em loose, and that's the last time we saw 'em.

DANDRIDGE: So what do you think happened?

TARLTON: Why I imagine after the war was over _____ (??) busted them out just like everything else, you know. Yeah. That's one of the parts that I don't know about. We were guarding the stockades and then when we'd move out somebody else would move in. We don't know—at least I don't know what happened to 'em. Some of the other people do probably. But, no, that—That was one of the things. Then, of course, going into Po Valley, that was another thing—I'm backtracking again—When we was going into the Po Valley, the one thing that I saw that was a sad thing were our artillery. See the Germans had started running out of fuel and they started pulling their artillery guns and things by horses. They had big, beautiful Belgian horses and we slaughtered 'em. They were lying all on the side of the road. Well, I mean, that was war. And then that just, that was one of the worst, that was one of the scenes that I saw—I don't know whether I'd call it worst, because it didn't bother me, but I just, we just went on by it. Big old horses lying off to the side of the road, dead and, uh, that was—And then we went on into Genoa. I got, we got, I got—my unit got to Genoa one day after they hung Mussolini. His own people did it in Garibaldi Square, in Genoa. And, so, uh—Actually I didn't get to see him because—I guess somebody told me that they were going to burn his body and everything else, they probably did, I don't know. But we didn't see that, the town, they just all, all the civilians, they flocked around us, glad to see us, and all that other stuff and that was it. That didn't last very long, you know, cause they moved us out. And then I went to, they sent us to a—for R & R, they sent us to on up, I was forty miles from Nice, France, course see you go right across there—And we stayed there for five days in a place called Alassio(??) and it was on the Mediterranean and we enjoyed it very much.

DANDRIDGE: I bet it was beautiful.

TARLTON: It was. Yeah. And then from then on—And then from then, after that, they started bringing us all back. And we went back to—we left from, uh, we come, went all the way to Naples and we got on the boat in Naples and was heading for Japan. And they dropped the atomic bomb while I was, we was on the boat and they just rerouted us right on back into New Jersey. So I didn't get to go to Southeast Asia. I didn't want to, either. I thought, I thought maybe I could—And then I ended up at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and then they sent me from Fort Dix, New Jersey down to Fort Benning, Georgia and we was training down there again, cause you know you go right back _____ (??) never stop training.

DANDRIDGE: What were they training you for?

TARLTON: It was just—For Korea. (chuckles) At the time the conflict hadn't started, but in 19—and I ended up in Fort Warren, Wyoming, that's where I got discharged. October—well, it was this month, the third, it was the third of this month, 1948. I got discharged.

DANDRIDGE: So you stayed in five years?

TARLTON: Five years, two months, and thirteen days.

DANDRIDGE: Was that by choice?

TARLTON: Two or three years was. I volunteered—I reenlisted for three years so I thought I was going, they told me I could go home, you know. We was going to get back out(??), so I took three years more to get out of Italy and that didn't happen.

DANDRIDGE: So that—So that was the deal they offered?

TARLTON: That was the—

DANDRIDGE: (continuing) And this was while you were in Italy?

TARLTON: Yeah, they did it while I was in Italy. I was with the—See they built the black, they built us all up, they wouldn't send the whole unit back together. They broke that unit up.

DANDRIDGE: The unit that—

TARLTON: The Ninety-second Division, they broke it up, they broke us up and put us in different outfits. Like, I ended up in 3093rd Gasoline Supply with the 99th Pursuit Squadron. And that's where I reenlisted.

DANDRIDGE: And so they broke everybody up once they got into the United States?

TARLTON: No, they broke everybody up before we—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) I mean once they were overseas.

TARLTON: Overseas. And then we were on our way—They broke us up when we got on the boat.

DANDRIDGE: So when you were over there did—Anything else you remember about the fighting or anything of the other—

TARLTON: You know something, that's something that I don't remember too much about it. I mean just being sporadic. Cause you know during the fighting we were moving fast or had been cleared to use, the

area had been cleared and we'd move in and keep going and keep going and they were pulling out at this time, they was evacuating the areas. And when we'd pull in there, we'd all cleared—some of us, cause the forward troops was—course I was kinda back—they'd secure the area and then we'd set up our headquarters. They moved us so fast, I don't know. It was a fast moving thing near the end of the war because the Germans started surrendering.

DANDRIDGE: So did you ever have the opportunity to practice your mechanics?

TARLTON: No, not while I was in the military. Not while I was overseas. When I came back to the States and went to Fort Warren, Wyoming I got to do it. I got to practice. I took care of the staff cars and all that other stuff.

DANDRIDGE: But they had given you training for that sort of—

TARLTON: Oh yeah, I'd been trained. I'd had—At Fort Lee, Virginia, they trained you in about every aspect of automobile, I mean car industry.

DANDRIDGE: So when you were—What did you—When you came out of the military, at the time, what did you think was the most enjoyable thing about it? When you left the war, in '48.

TARLTON: Well, I can't think of nothing that was enjoyable. I can't think of nothing that was enjoyable.

DANDRIDGE: What do you think was the least—was the worst experience or the least thing you appreciated serving in the war?

TARLTON: Um, well, being segregated, one of the things. Cause we used to go to the—even on the bases they had theatres, theatres were segregated, you had a rope down the aisle, stuff like that.

DANDRIDGE: Really?

TARLTON: Yes, right out at Forbes they did it. And _____(??) main post we had theatres in our area, but if you wanted to have the good show, you wanted to see what was up on the main post, you had to go up there and you had to sit in a segregated area.

DANDRIDGE: Now was that true when you were overseas?

TARLTON: Well we didn't have anything like that overseas. We didn't have any theatres, _____(??).

DANDRIDGE: You didn't have USOs or anything?

TARLTON: They had USO shows, but I never did get to see one. I never did get to see a USO—

DANDRIDGE: How come you never got to see one?

TARLTON: Well you had to go back so far—We was in a forward area and where—

DANDRIDGE: (overlapping) So they wouldn't let 'em come.

TARLTON: (continuing) _____(??) the USO shows wasn't going to come up where we were. See—back to the real bad combat—I'm getting back, going back, I thought about I never told you about the—When we pulled out of Massa, the Japanese 442nd—You probably heard about that—Oh you didn't, well they were famous, they were the Japanese people that volunteered—

DANDRIDGE: Oh for the U.S.?

TARLTON: Yeah.

DANDRIDGE: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

TARLTON: They were real—And then the other guys fought _____(??), they—when they pushed that Massa, when they pushed the Germans out of there, (clears throat) they got so many of them people killed they dug a big hole with bulldozers and put, and took their dog tags off of 'em and buried 'em.

DANDRIDGE: And these are the—They took that off the Germans?

TARLTON: No, they took 'em off of the Americans. See they buried Americans. Our GRO, Grave Registration people, they'd take the dog tag off of 'em and it was so many of 'em killed, those that didn't get hauled out of there, they'd come out in the truckloads. I don't know how—They lost a lot of people and that's where we were supposed to go, and we were so glad that we didn't have to do that fighting. But we moved into other places _____(??). We—You know I've got a whole book of the three—Ninety-second Division, I've got—A lady from up at the National Guard gave it to me. I'll let you see it when I take this thing off.

DANDRIDGE: So, when you came back to the states what was it like? What was your discharge like?

TARLTON: Well, we were still—We were still in segregated army when I went, in 19—when we got back to the States, we were still segregated. And then we went to Cheyenne, Wyoming and that was where—I can't remember. I got that on discharge, can't remember—But, anyway, that was Fort Warren, and it was all, it was segregated out there. They had the white troops over on one side and we was on, we was down on Randall(??) Avenue in nice buildings, nice quarters. And I went to the motor pool and they gave me quarters over there where I started work on those cars, I was along with another couple of soldiers.

DANDRIDGE: Were they white or black?

TARLTON: Oh, two of us—yeah, ____ (??) was white. We—We started getting along real good together because we was in the different area and we all—

DANDRIDGE: So you all socialized together?

TARLTON: Yeah, socialized together and—

DANDRIDGE: Did you ever go out in town?

TARLTON: Not together. That was one of the things that we didn't do until—See in 1947, when they desegregated the Army, that was 1947 and I was out there when that happened.

DANDRIDGE: What was that like?

TARLTON: Well it was—The only thing, this old white boy come up to me and says—put your clothes down on(??) ____ (??), says “Guess I'm going to bunk beside you.” I said, “Okay.” (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: He didn't say anything else?

TARLTON: No, we didn't have—Then found out he was from Sheridan, Wyoming and he was a nice guy. And then, see, they put me in the—Oh, that was the other thing, when I was in the Military Police for a while. And I used to take prisoners from, that deserted, and they brought 'em out to, take 'em to Leavenworth. I used to come cross Kansas to Leavenworth and take 'em up there and then I'd go and pick 'em up on the reservations, Indians and things that had deserted. Of course, when we got ready to pick 'em up we'd have to, when we got ready to pick 'em up we'd have to go down and get the sheriff to go up there 'cause we couldn't go up on the reservations. That would have been a no no, that would have been a no no. You're dad's out here Nadia. (WOMAN indistinguishable in background)

DANDRIDGE: So when you were coming back to the States, did you just decide to discharge on your own?

TARLTON: I decide to discharge on my own?

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, did you do that on your own or how did you happen to be discharged?

TARLTON: Cause I didn't want to be in the—I wanted on my own, I wanted to get discharge.

DANDRIDGE: Why did you want to do that?

TARLTON: Well, they was getting ready to have the Korean War and I didn't want—I wanted to get out of there.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, all right.

TARLTON: I got out in 1948 and that thing was getting hot over there and we had rumors that they was going to fight. We didn't know it, but it didn't start until 1951.

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh, but you heard about—

TARLTON: We heard about it and we just knew that it was something hot and two wars would have been too much for me. I might not have made it.

DANDRIDGE: So what was the discharge like? Do you remember what you had to do or do you remember anything about it?

TARLTON: When your time came for discharge, they notified you.

DANDRIDGE: But you had to request yours?

TARLTON: Yeah. You either reenlisted or got discharged.

DANDRIDGE: So when you, when you did that—So were you discharged from Wyoming?

TARLTON: I was discharged in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

DANDRIDGE: So then where'd you go from there?

TARLTON: Come home.

DANDRIDGE: How'd you get home?

TARLTON: On a train. They—got on a train and came here, come back to Topeka and settle down here.

DANDRIDGE: How were you received by your family?

TARLTON: Oh, they were glad to see me. I mean, there wasn't no big fanfare, but I mean—(chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: I bet they were glad to see you. Was your dad still living?

TARLTON: Yeah. Yeah. My dad died in, let's see, in 19—he died in 1959.

DANDRIDGE: So he was still living. Was everybody, were the rest of your siblings were adults by that time and—

TARLTON: Yeah ____ (??).

DANDRIDGE: Were any living at home at the time? When you got out?

TARLTON: Yeah, yeah two—the two, the ones—And they went into service nine days after I got out.

DANDRIDGE: And who were they?

TARLTON: That was Ed and Ben.

DANDRIDGE: Okay.

TARLTON: And then they caught up with my brother who was in Alaska and he went in and he stayed—he said, well, he said he tried to volunteer and they wouldn't take him because he had flat feet and so they drafted him and got in and he said well that's what he wanted. He said maybe he wasn't going to get out. So he stayed twenty-seven years.

DANDRIDGE: So he made it a career?

TARLTON: He made it a career. Both—Ed and Ben, they both made a career out of that. One twenty-one, the other in twenty. Ed is here and he stayed twenty-one. And Ben stayed twenty years and he's in New Jersey.

DANDRIDGE: And they went in during the Korean War?

TARLTON: They went in in 1948. I got out on October 3, 1948 and they went in, I think it was the ninth or tenth, something like that. They volunteered.

DANDRIDGE: What was Topeka like when you came back home?

TARLTON: Well it hadn't changed very much. It was still segregated.

DANDRIDGE: Was the neighborhood the same?

TARLTON: The neighborhood was pretty much the same, all those that didn't die, hadn't died.

DANDRIDGE: Right, right.

TARLTON: There was so many—well, see, there was so many people in the neighborhood that died. Like, let's see, I really can't—and then most of 'em—The other thing is that a lot of 'em left town, you know, got jobs other places. Like Irving Johnson, he went to California. And, uh—See in the neighborhood, see Joyce Finney used to live in there, down there by Monroe School.

DANDRIDGE: So what kind of job—Did you look for a job when you came back home?

TARLTON: Yeah, I looked for jobs. I went on unemployment for, at fifty-two, twenty. Twenty dollars a week, let's see, fifty-two weeks for twenty bucks a week, I guess. And then I went to work over at Fred Carson got me to help him do janitorial work, he was taking care of ____ (??) jewelry stores and things like that and I was cleaning them places up. And then I did that, my unemployment ran out. They made—I never reported it, so then they took the money. (chuckles) I never thought I'd have to report that, but they did. IRS, they got to me for that.

DANDRIDGE: So then what else did you do when you got back to Topeka?

TARLTON: Well, in 1950 I went to work for Supply Depot. And then I stayed—

DANDRIDGE: What was the Supply Depot? What was that?

TARLTON: That was Air Force, out here, Forbes. Forbes and then—

DANDRIDGE: What were you doing there?

TARLTON: I went to work in the warehouse there.

DANDRIDGE: Was it hard applying for that job or getting the job or anything?

TARLTON: Well, I don't know how hard it was. I got to work for that for, I got that job pretty easy, I think. Cause I went to—I applied for that job and then I was working someplace else, where was I working? I gave them notice that I had another job. So they said, Great, and I went to work for Forbes, for them, at Supply Depot; I worked out there from 1950 to '57 and then I transferred to the air base and I stayed over there at the air base until, from '57 to '76, I retired, I had thirty-three years.

DANDRIDGE: Wow. So you stayed, you really were with the military.

TARLTON: I stayed with the military mostly and that's the way I retired. Well, mostly. Well I had military around me all the time.

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, you stayed in there—So when did you get married?

TARLTON: Well the first time in 1954, which lasted nine months. And when I married Pam it was 1965.

DANDRIDGE: How did you meet her?

TARLTON: Uh, through friends.

DANDRIDGE: In Topeka?

TARLTON: Yeah. They were out at the base with me, they were _____(??) guys out at the base. Yep.

DANDRIDGE: And so when did you all get married?

TARLTON: In '65. She was here(??)—It was two years after she, I met her two years after, she was here when Kennedy got killed in 1963 and then we went together for two years. And then got married and been married ever sense.

DANDRIDGE: Was she from the United States?

TARLTON: No.

DANDRIDGE: Where's she from?

TARLTON: England.

DANDRIDGE: How did she happen to be—

TARLTON: She _____(??) England. There was guys that were married to English that came, brought her, she came with 'em.

DANDRIDGE: How many children did you all have? Two children?

TARLTON: Two. I have two myself and, of course, I've got three grandkids.

DANDRIDGE: That's great. When you came back from the war, did you join any veteran's organizations?

TARLTON: I joined the American Legion and I also, I'm a life member of the VFW 1650.

DANDRIDGE: What is that?

TARLTON: Out on—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Why did you join the American Legion?

TARLTON: I don't know. Tell you the truth, a person, they came up and said that there's a veteran's organization and they help military people, or ex-military people and that's one of the reasons why I joined 'em.

DANDRIDGE: Okay. And, so, what about the Jordan Patterson?

TARLTON: Well that's the post that I joined.

DANDRIDGE: And that's the post number—

TARLTON: That was 319.

DANDRIDGE: That was 319. So what was, describe the Jordan Patterson Post to me.

TARLTON: There was an all-black post, they were all-black.

DANDRIDGE: When did they begin? After World War I?

TARLTON: After World War I, in 19—I think they opened that post in 1918, 1918 or 1921 or something like that. I don't know, something like that.

DANDRIDGE: Where did they—Where was the post first?

TARLTON: Well when I joined it was down on Fourth Street; it was on upstairs by the Metropolitan Hall upstairs.

DANDRIDGE: So what did you guys do there?

TARLTON: Oh they just had their meetings and they planned a lot of community things they wanted to do like giving Easter eggs, putting Easter egg hunts, putting those things on. They tried to do that. They tried to be a community-minded outfit. Of course, now I didn't participate in all that stuff.

DANDRIDGE: So these were veterans of foreign wars?

TARLTON: Yes. No, not American Legion, they were veterans of every—they were just veterans.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, and that's what Jordan Patterson was, American Legion?

TARLTON: American Legion, that was just veterans. American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars different things, you can't—If you haven't been overseas, you don't belong, if you haven't been overseas you can't be a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

DANDRIDGE: But you were a member of both of these, both them?

TARLTON: Yes, both of them. I was—Post 1650 is out on MacVicker? No—

DANDRIDGE: Now is that post integrated?

TARLTON: Yeah.

DANDRIDGE: Was it always integrated?

TARLTON: No. No, it was Phil Billard Post 1650, no it wasn't. None of 'em was integrated for a long time. They just recent, they integrated them things back in the—I don't remember, I think they started integrating them when the army integrated.

DANDRIDGE: So what else, in the Jordan Patterson, who were some of the people who were members? Longtime members, do you remember? Do you remember any?

TARLTON: Um, well, see my brother Ed is a longtime member. And some of 'em that—The commander he was stationed out here at Forbes, so he just joined; he didn't join until after, I guess, he retired from out of the force and I don't know how long that was. But see there's some—I don't know—we were some of the oldest members. The real old ones done died; like Fred Carson, Tom Murrow, Mr. Todd, Coleman, all those old, those old World War I guys, they're gone. I think the last one just died, he was a hundred and something years old.

DANDRIDGE: Right, I saw that in the paper.

TARLTON: Yeah, yeah. And he was member of Jordan—but he was up in Chicago, they left town, went up to Chicago.

DANDRIDGE: So when you came back, what other kinds of things, after joining the veteran's organizations, what other stuff did you do? You got married and—

TARLTON: I didn't get married for a long time.

DANDRIDGE: I mean, but, you know, eventually after you returned. So, when did you begin to see—did you have any expectations when you came back home that race relations would have improved?

TARLTON: Oh I saw—

DANDRIDGE: Or did you have any expectations?

TARLTON: Well, not really. I didn't have any—Well, I expected things to change, because people—you know, people started changing and then, as you started talking to people or seeing 'em, they started changing—I don't know how, whether it was from their heart or what. But they seemed to act a little differently.

DANDRIDGE: So, tell me, if you were—How do you think military experiences influenced your life? In what ways do you think it has?

TARLTON: Lot of ways, lot of ways. It, uh, I got to see things that I wouldn't have ordinarily. I got to do things that I wouldn't have ordinarily. And I was pretty well educated from being in the military. And—just a lot of things that helped me, helped me see the world as it changed. And I learned how to operate in ____ (??).

DANDRIDGE: What of—you know you never mentioned your sisters, when you came home where were they?

TARLTON: Oh, Sarah she's still alive and my older sister died.

DANDRIDGE: Yes, but where was she when you came home from the war? Where were they?

TARLTON: Sarah was here at home in Topeka.

DANDRIDGE: She was in the home.

TARLTON: Yeah, she was the youngest, she was the youngest girl.

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh. What was she doing then? Was she in school?

TARLTON: She was in school, yeah, I believe she was. She was in school. And then she went to work—she worked out at Forbes, out at the Supply Depot too for a while and then her husband told her he didn't want her to work anymore, so. After she got married she quit that job and then she went to work for the state.

DANDRIDGE: What about your other sister?

TARLTON: Well, now my other sister, my other sister lives in New Jersey.

DANDRIDGE: How did she happen to live in New Jersey?

TARLTON: She went up there with Menninger's family. She worked for Menninger's and they wanted her to go up there as a, what do you call? Maid or whatever they are. And then she went with them and she just lived there and she met her husband up there. She just came back here in '85.

DANDRIDGE: And her name?

TARLTON: Her name was Goldie Gray. Well, that's her husband's, maiden name—not maiden name, married name. Right.

DANDRIDGE: Um, when you came back home from the war was there any reaction, did you notice—How did the African American community receive you? And I know the war had been over for a long time by that time, but—

TARLTON: I really didn't make any difference, didn't bother me, I mean just one of those things. "Hi John," hi this, and dealt with it like that.

DANDRIDGE: What are some of the other guys who had come out of World War II? Were they in town? Did you know some of those other guys?

TARLTON: Only one or two that I knew that came, they were _____(??) Phillips was one of 'em and he was over, I met him. I also saw him overseas. He was the only one from Topeka that I ever got to see. And, uh, I guess we were just so scattered out I never did—

DANDRIDGE: See. Now, Charles Scott went to—But he was a little bit younger, I assume.

TARLTON: Charles Scott?

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh.

TARLTON: Younger than me?

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh.

TARLTON: No, I think Charles Scott is older than me. I think all them Scott's is older than I am.

DANDRIDGE: Okay. (laughs)

TARLTON: I think so. I don't know 'cause—I remember when Charles Scott was going to, was Junior(??) and going to law school out here and the, uh, the judge, what's his name? Parks.

DANDRIDGE: Parks, yeah.

TARLTON: The Parks', I knew all of them. Sherman and Sheridan(??). And Sherman Parks worked out at the Depot also, at one time, while he was going to school. And his brother—what was his brother's name?

DANDRIDGE: Sheridan? Or—

TARLTON: No, I'm talking about the oldest one.

DANDRIDGE: Oh, okay, I forget what the oldest one—

TARLTON: (continued) He was married to Julietta.

DANDRIDGE: Oh yeah, um, James.

TARLTON: James Park. He was, he already got his edu—he was a pharmacist. And he—Now when I used to go down to his place to pick up the drugs from the drug store, so I know about him, he ran that place down there.

DANDRIDGE: Well when you came back home were, were there certain jobs you still couldn't apply for because you were African American? Or—

TARLTON: Well, see, my dad worked for Santa Fe. I could have got a job at Santa Fe.

DANDRIDGE: So why didn't you?

TARLTON: Just—I wasn't going to go out there and work. I thought—

DANDRIDGE: Where did your dad work for the Santa Fe?

TARLTON: He was down the car shed. He worked—

DANDRIDGE: Did he work with Orlando Dandridge in the car shed?

TARLTON: He probably did. He worked with Bill Redman and all them down there. Yeah, he was down, they were all together down there. Of Course the Dandridge's—well you know I think they came here when they, during the strike, _____ (??) my dad.

DANDRIDGE: Um-hm, right. Yeah right, and your dad was in that same group?

TARLTON: In that same group.

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, cause they were scab workers initially.

TARLTON: Nineteen twenty-one, I think. And they used to have to carry guns with 'em to go to work.

DANDRIDGE: That's right. Daddy said he always carried his pistol with him.

TARLTON: He had a big ole forty-five. Yeah, they had to fight their way in there and fight their way out.

DANDRIDGE: But they ended up both being in the union cause it turned out to be a union shop.

TARLTON: Yeah, right. They ended up—then they had that, uh—they had an Iron Horseman’s Club or something like that.

DANDRIDGE: Right, right, now that was the car, those were the attendants in the car.

TARLTON: Oh yeah, okay.

DANDRIDGE: Yeah cause those—they were in the private cars.

TARLTON: Yeah, private cars, like Tom Mural and—

DANDRIDGE: (overlapping) Right, right, Tom Mural or—

TARLTON: (continuing) But the thing is they—I don’t know what kind of union, freight car union is, I know they had Johnny Purcell and all them ole guys were foremen and stuff down there. Well, anyway—

DANDRIDGE: So you didn’t choose—

TARLTON: I wasn’t going for that. Cause I—I ‘ll tell you what I did. I was trained, I welded; I was a welder, training for a welder. And I went to, I went to the Santa Fe and I told them, they wanted me to go in as an apprentice. And I said, “Well, I’m already trained.” They said, Well that’s the way we do things down here. High pressure worker, welding high pressure boiler work. I said no. And then I messed around, I was going to go on the police force and my dad said no; he said, “Why don’t you find something else to do?” He said, “You may, you’ll have enemies before you do anything to anybody.” _____(??) Bill Jackson and I went down there to apply at the same time. You remember Bill Jackson?

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, but he joined the force.

TARLTON: Yeah, he did that and he was a foot soldier; he walked a beat down there on Fourth Street. And, so, anyway, that was the time that I applied for it. And my dad talked me out of that. So he said, “Why don’t you find something, you can find something son.” That’s when I went and got the job back with the government. See I didn’t do anything that was meaningful right after I got out, anything substantial—

DANDRIDGE: But you always earned a living.

TARLTON: Oh, yeah, yeah. I established(??) a home, too. But I had a job, I worked, I worked doing something all the time. After I got out of the service, that’s the only time I drew any, drew any unemployment.

DANDRIDGE: Not ever since that.

TARLTON: I've never drawn any unemployment since.

DANDRIDGE: So when you retired, then what did you do? When you retired from the base, what did you do?

TARLTON: Well, of course, I had this, I'd already got this automobile business. You know I had my—

DANDRIDGE: Well did you have that automobile business while you were working?

TARLTON: Yes. Yeah I worked at the base in the daytime and come back at night and work the rest of the evening on cars or selling cars. I sold cars and things like that. I had a car dealership; I dealt, I was a car dealer.

DANDRIDGE: In Topeka?

TARLTON: In Topeka.

DANDRIDGE: Did you have a name for the place?

TARLTON: Yeah, BT Motors. I changed it—it was Airport Sales and then—See I was with a white guy _____ (??) and then we busted up and bought him out and went on my own.

DANDRIDGE: When did you close BT Motors?

TARLTON: Nineteen—No, 2005 or something like that. That's when I hurt myself.

DANDRIDGE: Did you like having your own business?

TARLTON: Oh yeah, I kinda liked it but wasn't making me a whole lot of—it wasn't making me any money.

DANDRIDGE: What did you like about it?

TARLTON: Well, it was a challenge. Sometimes you make money, sometimes you didn't.

DANDRIDGE: Is there anything else you would like to add, particularly about your military experience and World War II? What role does World War II play in your life, do you think? How do you perceive it or share it with others or that sort of thing?

TARLTON: You know I never talked about it.

DANDRIDGE: Really.

TARLTON: Never, never, never hardly talked about it.

DANDRIDGE: You didn't talk about it at the Jordan Patterson Post?

TARLTON: No, they—Most of their guys had their own way and they were saying their own thing and I sat back and listened, that's all. I never talked too much about what happened—they never talked about—at the Jordan Patterson Post they just gathered, took you as you were.

DANDRIDGE: So you had—who—You never shared your story with people?

TARLTON: I never shared it ____ (??). I never told—I talked with my family sometimes, we get to joking around, with Ed then we get to talking about what happened—

DANDRIDGE: So what do you all say what happened?

TARLTON: Well (chuckles) like it's just a joke or—we acted like it was a joke or something. I remember the time that I had to drive into a trench of mess, you know, mud and stuff, an old mud hole, crawling through the snow and things. We just talked about things like that, just some things that was kinda halfway funny.

DANDRIDGE: So do you think you had a worse time in World War II or do you think they had a worse time in Korea?

TARLTON: I think both of 'em was bad. Korea was cold and we was cold too, we was in the mountains also. But we did have a better area to come back to then they did. I think Korean War was bad, I think the Vietnam War was worse. I think all those wars was worse now. We lost more people, but—We lost more people because they, that was a world war. I mean we were fighting a big, bad machine and we was fighting the Italians and we was fighting the Germans and then the people that Hitler captured, like the Polish, he put them in the Army made them fight. They fought us, but it wasn't because they wanted to because when he invaded Poland and took over the country, he took over the people.

DANDRIDGE: Well what do you—How important do you think World War II is in race relations? Do you think there's any link between the two?

TARLTON: Yeah. Yeah. They found out that we weren't what they, what they'd, they was saying we were. They were saying we weren't very good soldiers, they didn't think we were going to be any good soldiers. But I don't know why they did that because the Ninth Cal—the Ninth and Tenth Calvary, they fought in the Indian Wars and things like that. And then a lot of—we've been in every war—I don't know why they felt that way, but that was one of the feelings they had, that we weren't very—

DANDRIDGE: Did you ever meet any Tuskegee Airmen during this time or even after?

TARLTON: Yeah, yeah. I met the big man, the colonel, Davis.

DANDRIDGE: Oh really?

TARLTON: Yeah he came over there for—we were having—He came over and inspected our camp, where we were.

DANDRIDGE: Where was that?

TARLTON: In Italy.

DANDRIDGE: Really?

TARLTON: Yeah. He—

DANDRIDGE: What was that like?

TARLTON: Oh we were happy to see a big man. (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: And he was big.

TARLTON: He was a big man.

DANDRIDGE: Literally big.

TARLTON: Literally and, uh—big, intelligent guy. And then we had, there was—there was other black colonels, there was a black colonel that we knew, Colonel Man, but he wasn't with us he was the one that mediated against that fight that we had down there in Newport News, Virginia. He was a pretty nice fellow. And, uh—And then I, when I got my combat infantry badge, why, Thurgood Marshall came over. That was when they were telling 'em we was melting under fire and he came over to see.

DANDRIDGE: So it was untrue.

TARLTON: Yeah, well, it was untrue. Let's see—we were perceived as cowards. But that wasn't true.

DANDRIDGE: What was true?

TARLTON: We fought. That was true, that was one of the things that was true, that we fought.

DANDRIDGE: Did you feel like you had to defend yourself when you came back to the States, because of that public image?

TARLTON: (overlapping) You're on the defensive.

DANDRIDGE: So that wasn't new?

TARLTON: No, that wasn't new. No you're always—Your expectations were ____ (??) a little bit different. I mean you didn't expect to be, to come back to something like we had before we left and we did. We came back to the same thing. But as far as changing—

DANDRIDGE: When whites knew that you had served in World War II here, what would—would they treat you differently or would they perceive you differently?

TARLTON: I don't know. I never—You know that was something that I never—I guess a lot of people knew it, but I never did, maybe, flaunt it, you know. I was just—I just came back and I felt like ____ (??) I was just regular as anybody else. I never did go and try to use that for some exploitation or something like that.

DANDRIDGE: What are you going to tell your grandchildren about your experience in World War II?

TARLTON: I don't know, probably nothing. (chuckles) Probably nothing.

DANDRIDGE: Would you recommend the military for others?

TARLTON: My daughter went, I didn't recommend it, but she went.

DANDRIDGE: How—When did she go?

TARLTON: In 199—uh, she went in 1992.

DANDRIDGE: Did she ever have to serve overseas?

TARLTON: She went to Korea, but that was a blessing because if other than that she'd have went to the first Iraqi War. But she didn't, she got overseas(??). She went to Korea.

DANDRIDGE: Did your son go in the military?

TARLTON: No. No he didn't go, he's a minister.

DANDRIDGE: And you didn't encourage him, huh?

TARLTON: Well—I didn't discourage—

Tape 1 ends.
End of interview.

University of Kansas

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

Interviewee: William Tarlton
Date: 18 May 2011
Location: Unidentified
Interviewer: Deborah Dandridge, Field Archivist

TARLTON INTERVIEW NO. 2
Tape 2, side 1 begins.

DEBORAH DANDRIDGE: May 18, 2011 my name is Deborah Dandridge and this is the second interview with Mr. William Tarlton. And we're continuing to discuss his experiences during World War II. And we last were talking about your, the various things you saw and did while you were in Europe during World War II. Do you remember some of the things that you did and that you saw while you were in Europe?

WILLIAM TARLTON: (clears throat) I—(coughs) Yes, I remember some of the things I did.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, can you share—

TARLTON: (continuing) Not very many, but—

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, but can you share with us what you do recall?

TARLTON: Well, I saw a lot of destruction of buildings. I saw, well we had an encampment at, let's see what was it? Viareggio and then I—From there—No I came down from Caserta to Viareggio and that was close to the—(lots of mic noise)

Pause in recording.

DANDRIDGE: This is another test, one, two, three to see how this is going to playback.

Pause in recording.

DANDRIDGE: _____ (??) Mr. Tarlton that you were in England—I mean you were in Italy and you were entering this town—

TARLTON: Genoa?

DANDRIDGE: Yes, I guess.

TARLTON: Yeah, Genoa. Yeah and then we stayed in there—we stayed in Genoa for—some time, I'll just say some time and then we went—They allowed me, they allowed us to go on R & R and they let us go

to a resort town. (clears throat) About—I can't think of the name of the town, but it was on the Mediterranean. And for R & R was, you know, was rest and rec—

DANDRIDGE: So why were you going to Genoa?

TARLTON: Well we were pushing—We were supposed to be pushing the Germans on out(??). That was a fight; we were pushing them clear out of the country.

DANDRIDGE: So when you went in there, were you fighting? Were you just marching? Tell us—

TARLTON: They were leaving and we didn't have to do anything. We didn't do any fighting because they'd already, they'd started giving up. They'd started giving up and we was just pushed into, to occupy the town, and that was it.

DANDRIDGE: How did the people in the town receive you?

TARLTON: Oh, they were—they thought we were some of the greatest things that ever happened. We got in there and they was glad to see us and—Now, the thing about it, they didn't allow us—after we went on this R & R and then came back, let's see what was the name of that place—

DANDRIDGE: (in background) Doesn't make any—

TARLTON: (continuing) —but it was forty miles from Nice, France and see, you're right on the, you know, the Italian border goes right on across, you could travel, we went right on through there. Well we—I didn't go into France, but, uh—Then after we came back we didn't spend much time, much more time in Genoa and they load us on a truck and brought us back, went all the way back down to Naples, Naples, Italy. Then they—we got into port and they'd load us onto boats at Naples. And we was—the war was finished in Europe. And we were on—they'd load us on the boat and we were on the boat getting ready to go to Japan. And at that time they dropped the atomic bomb and they just turned us around at sea and sent us back home to New Jersey. Back from New Jersey of course they had to figure out where they was going to send us when we got back to the States so I ended up back down at Fort Benning, Georgia, retraining at Fort Benning. And, uh—I was with the Twenty-fifth Infantry Combat Team on Sand Hill, at Fort Benning, Georgia. Now, we're back in the States.

DANDRIDGE: Um-hm. So, I remember you telling me some of the things that you saw while you were marching in Europe. What kinds of things did you see when you were marching through the towns to your destination?

TARLTON: Well, we saw a lot of devastation and then we saw—people that were, well we saw killing, you know, a lot of people got killed when they—Of course we—you know, uh, the field artillery blew those towns apart and those people just—And I don't see how any of 'em lived through some of the stuff that we saw over there, but they—after we moved in, the people started coming out, we saw them and—Of

course we didn't spend much time with them. Of course they didn't allow us to, I guess, fraternization is that what they call it? They didn't want us fraternizing with them.

DANDRIDGE: Who's they?

TARLTON: Well our commanding officers, American.

DANDRIDGE: Were they white or black?

TARLTON: White, officers white officers, they had—It didn't stop some of the guys from visiting with them, you know, but—

DANDRIDGE: How did you know they didn't want you to fraternize with the—

TARLTON: We was told, we was told that, you know, Don't bother with those people. They didn't just come out and say that you don't want—(clears throat) They did come out and say that you don't fraternize with the people in the town. From that we gathered that they didn't want us to go out and—

DANDRIDGE: So, did they tell that to the other—do you know whether they—Was that just a general rule or did that only apply to African American troops?

TARLTON: I don't know. I don't know that. I just thought that was just one of the rules of the game; cause me not knowing anything like that.

DANDRIDGE: Was your unit African American or was it mixed?

TARLTON: Oh no, it was all African American. The only thing we had was white officers. And Ninety-second Division was the black division and we had a white general and my—I can remember my—And I was in headquarters and my, the commanding officer of my regiment was Colonel Noelstein(??). And the officer that I worked with was, what was he—his name was Major Romide(??). I remember those cause I was closer to them than any of 'em. And then over—I didn't, I don't know whether I told you that they were, they had some kind of complaint, I don't know how it was back in the United States, that we was melting under fire. And they sent Thurgood Marshall over there because they thought that we were getting ready to rebel or something I guess, I don't know. But anyway, he came over to see, that was done by Harry Truman, he sent him over. And _____(??) Thurgood Marshall was the one that pinned my, the CIB on me, that's the Combat Infantry Badge. But, uh—

DANDRIDGE: When you say he came over there, what did he do when—

TARLTON: Well he came over to question and to see what the problem was between us—I mean between our, I guess between our officers and how the unit was functioning. But they was claiming that we were

melting under fire, we were afraid to fight or something like that. And that was all back here in the States, said back here in the States. I don't know what they thought, but a lot of us guys died over there.

DANDRIDGE: So tell me about some of the war that you did get engaged in, some of the fighting that you did engage in?

TARLTON: I was up—we—I went up to the mountains there, far as the mountains there, but I—it wasn't something like you probably see on TV where you saw those guys running into towns and fighting cause most of our stuff it was at a distance. That's the way I put it to you. The Air Force was—they was bombing 'em, the 332nd Fighter Group, that was an all-black Ninety-nine Pursuit Squadron under(??) B. O. Davis, they was over running down there and bombing and see(??) they had those railroad guns that, they had railroad guns in the mountains and run 'em out and fire on us and then they would pull 'em back and we didn't know where they were, then we—There was (clears throat) battleships out in the Mediterranean, they were shelling in(??) from the shore, we used to watch the fire going over. So—

DANDRIDGE: So from what position did you shoot?

TARLTON: Oh, shucks—

DANDRIDGE: What's wrong? Ma'am—

TARLTON: I just got dizzy.

DANDRIDGE: Why don't we—you want me to stop? Let me just stop, then, that's okay.

Tape 2 ends.

End of interview.

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