

William J. Reed Oral History Interview

April 16, 2012

Interviewed by Sherri Kiefner
Edited & Transcribed by Aaron Pylinski

Kiefner: Today is April 16, 2012. My name is Sherri Kiefner. I am at the Pritzker Military Library with William Reed and I would like to talk to him today about his life and his career in the military. Mr. Reed I would like to start out with asking you when and where you were born.

Reed: In Mississippi, Crystal Springs, Mississippi.

Kiefner: What year were you born?

Reed: 1918.

Kiefner: Did you grow up in Mississippi?

Reed: I was there until I was around 19 or 20 years old, before I came to Chicago.

Kiefner: Tell me a little about your family, your mother and father.

Reed: Well that's the thing I don't know too many – My mother died when I was four years old. I didn't know where my father was at, at that particular time. He had left her and myself in Mississippi and came up here, but they had lost track of each other. He said he came back down there a couple of times. She had moved and nobody knew where she was at.

Kiefner: Who raised you then?

Reed: My grandfather and his wife, which was my step-grandmother.

Kiefner: Tell me a little about them.

Reed: I don't know whether you are too young to know about this—they were living on a plantation where the white people had the land and the black people would be sharecropping, what they called it, if you ever heard of such a thing.

Kiefner: Yes.

Reed: They raised cotton and corn. But we didn't own [anything]. The white man owned everything. We just there working for him and we plant cotton and corn and we got something out of the cotton and a little bit out of the corn, and I don't know, but I know one thing, we didn't have much of nothing as far as I was concerned, back in those days. And going, let me just say this, going to school -- now I hate to say this a lot of the time – I never saw a school bus for a black person in my life until I got up here. I went to school in a church. You go to school from the time that we'd be getting through with the crops in the fall of the year – you'd then finish up picking all your cotton around last of October, first of November. Now you go to school from then until around last of March or April—then school is out, and most of the schools was churches where I went. Now, if you went to school regular, enough, you was in the third or fourth grade, if you went regular enough, the next semester you went in the next grade. Now I thought I was smart going in grades, but since I've got grown I've thought about something. I didn't know anything was in the one I just out come out of, because I didn't go about four months. (Laughs) But my attendance was giving me the credit for the next grade.

Kiefner: Right.

Reed: Then that's the way I was brought up. And I've thought of a thing that I have

grown, and I say, no wonder I didn't have [any] sense, because I didn't know what was in them--what I got out of, (Laughs), which is another one. A lot of kids down in that part of the country didn't even – they didn't even go to school a little while, they just quit altogether. They didn't go at all, you know, but I always went, cause, what little bit I know.

Kiefner: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Reed: No, not then. I've heard of some I had from my father, up here but I don't even know where they are now. That reminds me Terry (son, Terry, in room); you ever try to find Lou Reed.

Terry: Yes, I looked. I wasn't able to find anything though.

Reed: You weren't... Well, What about Julia, what was her name, Jack's daughter you know anything about her?

Terry: No I don't know [anything] about none of them.

Kiefner: I was going to ask you then; did you help your grandfather on the farm then . . . as a child?

Reed: Yes, I worked on the farm; yes I had to have a little job, until I ran away from home three times when I was younger. (Laughs)

Kiefner: How old were you when you started helping?

Reed: Last time I left home I was sixteen years old and I walked about – I guess about six or seven miles. I never forget, all of a sudden you're barefooted on a railroad. (Laughs) And if you can take it by god and if you are in danger and she says she ain't never forgot that day I left home. That was my last time I left home, barefooted and I didn't have on no shoes and no nothing else, just the clothes I

had on my back and that's all.

Terry: What town did you leave from? And where did you go?

Reed: We weren't in a town, we were out in the country from Drew, Mississippi, and I walked all the way to Cleveland, Mississippi. We [drove] fifty-some miles or sixty-some miles. And, I had ran away from home previous to that, but on this man's plantation, my grandfather, he found me and brought me back home, I think I was fourteen or fifteen or some years. Somewhere, cause the last time I was sixteen when I left, and this time when I left that Sunday morning. It's kind of a long story. My step-grandmother raised me; she was really good. She was just as good to me. And my grandfather was kind of a player, like, he had a girlfriend that lived in the town and we had gotten fresh bales of cotton and when you get to bale fresh bales of cotton, you get a better kind, you get the seed money, what they call it back in those days. It wasn't much back then, like ten or fifteen dollars. I was in Drew, walking on down the street and I saw my grandfather with this woman who he had been going with. She bought – I don't know today what the name of what she bought was. She bought something and he reached in his pocket and paid for it. He ain't giving me any money and hadn't given my grandma anything. I would have [run] home and told her about it. Then some woman she called and I was in the back yard and asked me about it. He never denied it; he just kept asking her, "Who told you?" "Who's been in my business?" She said, "Never mind." She wouldn't go to tell him that I told on him that's sure. And I was so mad, I told him, I said, "I told it, cause I seen you."
(Laughs) He wasn't about to start talking back to me. Now he's gonna get on me

for talking. They got into an argument, my grandma. She said, “You been down for an errand and I was back [here] and while they was up arguing, I was barefooted, I just run across the field walking. (Laughs) T, you know grandma? She says she have never forgotten that, boy. I walked out that field walking and I walked all the way to Cleveland. And I got there around ten o'clock that night; I didn't have on any shoes. (Laughs) My ass was dragging and everything, and that's where I stayed, and I never went back home after that. Never did.

Kiefner: Tell me a little about the place that you grew up, in Mississippi.

Reed: That's where I'm telling you about now.

Kiefner: What was the town like? How large was your town?

Reed: Just a little one horse town, one street going down the street there and, I don't know it's a small place there in Drew Mississippi. And that's where most of the fellas and things, we'd meet on the Saturday and things. You'd go to down, walking down the street and that's all. That was your recreation, going to town.

Kiefner: Can you remember anything in particular that you did for fun as a child, did you have other friends in the neighborhood growing up?

Reed: Yes we had a lot of them, kids was running and all we'd do was play a little ball, we'd make a ball out of some rags or something and get down on your knees shooting marbles and things of that nature. But the only thing we had for recreation, we didn't have none of the electricity you have today, nothing like that existed. We didn't even have electric lights in those days; we just had lamp lights, kerosene and all that. We didn't even have anything special for food because we raised most of what we needed, raised hogs and chickens and cows and all that

kind of stuff. You didn't, like now, you didn't go to the store to get nothing during the winter time like buying fresh me and all that kind of stuff because frankly you didn't have the money to buy it with. So whatever you accumulated to live off of you raised it. You had to, you were stuck with last year's, the first of March this white man plantation that we're living on, you go to the corners, and that's another thing that's been bothering me as I been grown, you go to the corner, see, and you get your food for a month. Every month, first of the month, you go get the food that he had for you. Now what was, you know when you're little coming into that environment it doesn't bother you, when you get grown up for your brains to work, I often thought, how could he determine how much it takes for three of us to eat? You know what I mean? But it had to last because you're not getting anything until the first of the next month. So every first you go to the corner see and get your little pile of groceries, get some salt pork and some lettuce, some syrup and some flours and milk and sugar and something like that. Now you run out you just in bad luck, you don't run out no matter what you do. [You] had your own cows and dairy, people are living more closely in those days because everybody had their own cow they're getting milk and butter right there. If I have a cow it would go dry you get some from Sister Sally or Sister Joan, and vice-versa when theirs went dry, you know, that's just the way we got along, you know what I mean? So you never suffered for something like that because your neighbor was so neighborly that we'd help each other out. Then you got plenty of chickens on the yard, you get all the eggs and on the things like that that you wanted. And raise your own hogs and things.

Kiefner: As you got older into like, your teens, you mentioned running away at 15 or 16, did you leave for good at that point or when did you come to Chicago?

Reed: No I left some town down there, I went to some people and I knew my grandfather in law, the man's plantation they were living on, they found me. One time I went to another little town called Carbondale where my pastor Reverend Williams lived there and I went to him and he was going to find me a place to live because he had four churches and some of these members, I didn't know who, but they needed what they called houseboys and things, they have them wait around the farm to do around the house and he was going to give me, he and I was walking down the street and Grandpa and his mad friend drove right outside and caught me there and brought me back home! So I didn't get a chance to do nothing. Another time I was in another town I got a little job waiting for some people, some white people there and I don't know how he got the message where I was, I was going down the street and here he drove beside me and caught me there, but this last time he didn't know who I was, that last time I ran upon him he didn't know. Now my step grandmother, my grandfather he couldn't read and write if his name was in letters as big as bark collars on the wall he wouldn't know what it was, my step grandma she could read and write some and every time I leave home I would always write to her and let her know where I was at. That morning, that Sunday morning, I didn't have no clothes at all I was barefoot, didn't have nothing and I went to Cleveland and there's some people there that was named "Red" and I wrote and told her where I was and all that and somehow, I don't know, she was down the road visiting some neighbors and my grandfather

came in that night from town and where our house was sitting it looked like when you turned toward the house, I guess the light from the window, some had showed up from the car lights, he went down to the door with my grandma and I was back home, but he didn't come in the house. Well she got up, but he went on back to town, right now she's dead now, she said she think he was scared to come in, he was scared I was in there because they always had guns on the other side the wall you know? And she comes in look at me and couldn't, she call me she said and called and she said this child is not in here. Well her brain snapped right away, she got them few rags I did had and packed them and carried them back down to this ladies house until she got a chance to bring them to me. I had already wrote and told her where I was at, so she carried them down and kept them and when she got a chance she brought me my few little rags I had because I didn't have no clothes at all, but I had bought me a few things because back in those days they would, the people that had big farms out in the country part, they would come to town to pick up people to pick cotton and stuff like that they would go to the country. I was on that truck a couple times; I had been picking cotton out there. And this lady that I was living with at that time, one of her girlfriends, came around there and she was expecting a child pretty soon and she's telling this woman that she's going to leave the job because she was cooking for some white people, she said, "I'm going to leave the job because I want to be off I'm going to have a kid." So I asked, "Do you think the woman would hire me?" She said, "I don't know who she hires you go at the house and I won't be there." I said, "God, I couldn't boil water without burning it!"

Kiefner: That's interesting.

Reed: She hired me! She hired me to cook! Back in, you don't know about this, but back in those days they had what they had a servant house, it was up over the garage. The woman hired me and I got my own place I thought I was in heaven, I got electric lights, I got an old raggedy radio somebody gave me and you don't have to pay. I only cook two meals a day, in the morning breakfast and the dinnertime and after I get that through I'm on my own you know. I go back over to where I used to live and the schoolyard, in the evening kids would play ball in around the school yard and all of that. I stayed there almost a year, I don't know how long I stayed, but I know this woman after she had her kid she would come back and visit this white lady she was working for and bring her little baby with and they would sit very close. I had a brainstorm this come back she's going to get her job back I could almost see that, but nobody told me nothing like that now. I had a cousin in another town I wrote to him and told him I wanted to come over there and he said you know he wrote back too and said, "I just left home." She asked me where I live I said, "Well I'm going to a cousin." I had in my mind she's going to take this woman back for the job. I went there and started jobs at restaurants and hotels and things, I worked there. My grandmother and I, the one I was left from you know? I always write her letters to know where I was and she wrote and told me a couple of times my grandfather leave town on Friday evening and he don't get back until Monday morning. Now we exchanged things through mail, I wrote back and ask her, "You want me to come get you?" She writes back, "Yeah!" And I write back and tell her what day I'm going to come [and] get

her, but here's the thing that a lot of people don't believe in religion, but I was raised up in church quite a bit. I don't know how this worked out, I got a room for my grandmother I was going to go get her, I got a room for the ladies house, the woman don't know who I'm talking about when I talk about my mother. I went and got my grandmother and sure enough she was sitting on top of a big trunk on the porch waiting on me. My grandfather, this woman he was going with, you had to go a rough road and this house was kind of off the road a little bit, on the way back she says, "Hey your grandmother and see him sitting together on the porch there." I carried on back there, but I went to this place where I got the room, this I the most interesting thing, I walked in there and the woman, I had a room, the woman looked and saw my grandma, they went to school together! And now here they're kissing and hugging and, "God where you been?" My grandma and I had a room, but I had a little cot alongside the wall and my grandmother had the bead, I think we paid something like 50 cents a week. But as I said that's the way life was, she was so happy my grandmother was alive because she hadn't run into anybody she knew and anyway she got her a job cooking for some white people and all that. And then somebody had an old raggedy house and they rented the house, it had three rooms because you come in off the porch, the front room and the kitchen, then you curve it had a room back there, so we got that, I think you paid a dollar seventy-five a week for that so we got that house and we rented a room to a lady for I think 50 cents and then rented the other backroom back there to a guy I think for 50 cents and we only paid a dollar seventy-five a week for it. And my father, I didn't know where he was then, but my grandfather he had some

nieces in another town called Christy Springs, they liked my step grandmother that was my grandfather's nieces. And they had come to Drew to see him and wanted to see her and me and he told them where we were and they came through down there to visit us out there. I just happened to ask one of them because she was coming to Chicago back and forth and I asked one of them I said, "You ever see my dad up there in Chicago?" One of them said, "Yeah I see him up there once in a while, I don't know where he lives but you've got an auntie lives on Halstead." She said, "Your auntie lives 1415 or either 1514." I set down and wrote a letter and I just luckily had the right address. My father didn't even answer the letter, he jumped in the car and drove straight on down the highway to the restaurant in the little town I lived in, before you go to my house you go right by that restaurant and it was hot we didn't have no air conditioning back in this days, I was what they called a cook helper you know I was helping out, but the sidewalk would go right by the back door there and I went outside there and I saw this green ford parked and I saw it had an Illinois license plate on it, "Who, who is that?" And where I lived they had those stairs right by my house and I stood out there and watched him for a long time, he stopped and I saw the guys come out in the street and was talking to him and pointing everywhere you know, I said now that has got to be somebody new. So I told the cook, Joe, I'll never forget I said, "Joe I'll be back in a minute." I went on down and there's my father. First time I'd seen him since I was six years old or so, well he go the letter he jumped in the car and drove straight on down and looked for me. So that's when I got with him and we left and I come on back with him.

Kiefner: Now did you grandmother stay in that area?

Reed: Yes she stayed, yeah she stayed there, she finally moved to Memphis because she had a son and her son and his wife and the kids had moved to Memphis and they wanted her to come, she'd write and tell me everything, they wanted to come to Memphis to help watch their kids, of course they had four kids, so she went to Memphis that's where she, she died in Memphis in 70'.

Kiefner: So you came back to Chicago with your father after being reunited and you're about how old at this time?

Reed: I was 21 or 22 or something like that at that time. I come back up here and back then jobs were kind of scarce, I was living with my auntie because my father was kind of a playboy back in those days.

Kiefner: Where were you living in the city with your aunt?

Reed: I lived down on Halstead Street too.

Kiefner: On Halstead, the aunt that you had written to?

Reed: Yes, but he come by and get me every day because he's working at the park district, he'd come and get me most every day and carry me around and introduce me to people and he was a proud dad and "My son." And all the sudden I look at the darn old paper one day and I saw a dishwashing job for \$12, it was on Jackson downtown somewhere. Back in those days you had people you, the unemployment, but they would just find a job but you had to pay them before they done the job, you know what I mean? So he got me the job, 3904 Broadway, I never forgot that, 3904 Broadway the job only played \$12 a week but I had to pay him \$10 for the job, which I didn't have no, I told him I ain't got no \$10! He says,

“When you go to work you have to pay me my money.” He told me how to get out there, you get there and get off at Grey Street I think, Grey Street going out on that L out that way somewhere. You get out there and then I go to Broadway and would find it, and I’m so dumb when I was on the L when it got there I got up, but I’m so nice when that door open the people just crowd me in and I’m standing back and the door close, and I can’t get off! I went to the next stop, I’m standing at this door, [and] the doors open behind me! Oh man! I talked to some guy he laughed at me, “That’s one dumb guy!” He said, “When you go back to Grey Street.” No he told me, “This next stop, you get on walk across get the L going back, when you get to Grey Street you stand at the door and you get off there.” I did like he told me to do and I got to Grey Street I got off and I had to go walk over to Broadway, 3904, I was late on my first day. I told the man what happened, the man looked at me kind of funny like, “Boy this is one fool young fellow.” He hired me and I told him I had to pay the man \$10, I knew this guy his name was Cook, and I told him what I had to do and his words were, he said “Screw this guy, don’t pay the son of a bitch nothing.” When I got my check I didn’t pay him. I was going to pay him, but I thought it a month I had to pay him, so I didn’t pay him nothing so I worked there, And it was one of them restaurants you have all your, it was a shout order restaurant, you had your hams and your roast beef all sitting up in the window because the street urn there, all sitting up in the window, the grills and all that, you fixed all this beautiful meat form that thing. But anyway my job was to wipe dishes and keep them clean, but I got tired of eating the ham and beef sandwich and all that, I would go to the store sometimes and I

would buy me a chicken leg or some pork chop and sometimes Mr. Cook he'd come back and eat with me, what I had you know. Him and his wife went to Wisconsin, that's a heck of a thing the tell, they went to Wisconsin to the summer resort, the people up there didn't have no cook, so he come back he told me "The lake up there they can't cook and they ain't got no cook and the food is so bad." He said, "I told them about you, you a pretty good cook, you want to go try." I think they paid something like \$100 a month back then in those days. My reply was, to him, "Well that's one way to get rid of me!" He said, "No I'm not getting rid of you! You go and work, it's only a couple of months, you know what I mean, at the summer resort, and you come on back and get your job back." I don't know it looked like luck was with me some kind of way, so I went up there and work them couple of months, a little over a couple of months, you know and got paid and got a little money and I was sure enough rich when I got them big checks from there. I come back and got my job back and went to work, and I don't know for some reason, back in those days I fought in the war you could sign up for the army if you wanted to go in the service. But there wasn't no war going on then and that wasn't the easiest job to do you had to be pretty good to even get in the army back in those days, you had to go through examination and all that stuff and you had to test you brain, take orders and give orders and all that kind of stuff. So I take me a test an examination for that and pretty soon they called me and I left there and I went in the service. So I went in the service and we didn't have [any] time before the war broke out.

Kiefner: When you went to, you went to basic training then to Fort Custer Michigan?

Reed: Yes that's where I was, Fort Custer.

Kiefner: When you got to Fort Custer was it what you expected?

Reed: I guess so. I didn't expect [anything] I didn't know.

Kiefner: You were completely open-minded?

Reed: Yes whatever come up I was glad to be there I guess, and I think they was paying us \$21 a month back then. But you ain't got any rent to pay; you got nothing you got no doctor bills, no light bills, nothing to pay. They pay you \$21 a month when you're a private, now when you make a rank then it comes out a little bit; you get a little bit more money. Because I started working there in the kitchen and cooking, I ended up being the mess Sergeant, so now I'm shored up in payment now, I got three stripes up and one down...

Kiefner: Yes, you're good!

Reed: Oh yes I'm up in the clouds now!

Kiefner: How long did it take you to become Sergeant?

Reed: I would say about less than a year, about 10 months or something like that, maybe.

Kiefner: While you were still at Fort Custer, Michigan?

Reed: Yes, so I got to be the mess sergeant, I got to be the boss of the kitchen men. Somehow, I don't know the cook they had in the mess in there they gummed up the food so bad, I got to cooking right everybody liked it the way I was preparing food and all that. After I was in there for a while you see the officers, they had what they called officer's mess of their own, they wanted to take me from this place and put me in their mess and the guys got to kicking them, "Oh no! This

ain't going to happen!" So I stayed where I was but I was the mess sergeant and I do all the cooking too. One of my commanders come by one day, I had a big old pot like that I was making some rolls and I was down there working with it, but I'm a mess sergeant, he thinks I shouldn't be doing the cooking he said, "You don't do it, you get somebody else to do it." But when he left I kept on doing it, I would do a lot of cooking on my own. But I was there working my dough, see the dough rises up after so long a time you have to work the air out of it, but he didn't want me to do nothing like that, so I didn't pay him no attention I kept on doing it anyway. I did that, I tried to have a good meal, I don't know but the guys, it must have been good because, now here's another thing that happened, some guys came, well a lot of the guys were from Chicago, he came back over and my daddy, back in those days people was proud that they had somebody in the service, and my father saw some soldiers and he had thought, "Well I got a son in the army." He stopped some guys one day that I tell him about from the company that I was in; my daddy came home with them. They enjoyed that so they used to talk about my dad a lot, "Man I met your old man he was something else, he had some wine he had some of this and all kinds of stuff".

Kiefner: Where did you learn to cook, where would you say you learned the most because you knew to cook already it sounds like, when you arrived.

Reed: Well my step grandma did raise me she was kind of sick, a lot of times she would have those sick spells and she would sit in the kitchen on that old bench and would tell me how to fix some, well you know some bread and greens, she would tell me how much to put in there and how to make it and stir it up and how to

cook up cake or something, I want to cook some cake or whatever all that stuff to put in it. It was just, I never went to any schools I wouldn't graduate from no cooking schools or nothing, [and] it's just plain what I learned at home. That's where I learned the most of it, from being at home and after I worked at restaurants and things of that nature with people that did cook, being cook helpers I picked up a lot of things there from them, you know what I mean? I learned a lot of things, so that's the way my life was. Sometimes I look, I think about this more, looked like every time I go to look for somewhere to get a job I always got it. I mean I come out of the service, well during the service we're in North Carolina and that's where we went overseas from there, I spent the rest of my time at...

Kiefner: Camp Buckner?

Reed: Yes Camp Buckner, North Carolina, [and] then we left there and went overseas that where I went to England, first.

Kiefner: Tell me a little bit about when you were at Fort Custer and Camp Buckner when you weren't working cooking, how did you spend some of your free time?

Reed: Maybe you get a pass and go down town to Battle Creek, something like that, and they had, well they had recreation like a pool table, you shoot pool and play cards and play checkers, you know, what they called the recreation room, on the campus. So that's where you entertained yourself around there.

Kiefner: You mostly stayed on base, you didn't leave base?

Reed: Yes I stayed on base; well we'd go into town on the weekends or something like that, because the first time I got drunk, I have never been drunk before in my life.

See you get with some guys and you go to town or you go out to eat, but what we decided we'd do, we give one guy five dollars and the one guy would pay the bills. Now one time they bought a bottle of rum, I don't know about drinking no rum, its soda time, I drink some of that rum I got so sick I didn't know what to do. So I told the guy's I'm going back to the camp, I went over there to a bus station and sat down, I got sick when I was back at the bus, back on the ground somewhere I was sick and I laid down right there and I woke up the next morning! Oh I been the lowest I could be, so I got a bus and come on back to the camp, see when you drink rum you're supposed to drink coke with it or something, I drank the rum with nothing with nothing but itself. I was so sick I didn't know what to do, but I had to get my money's worth, whatever you had I drank it. I was so sick I didn't know what to do, the guys said, "What happened to you?" I said, "Man I was out behind that club drunk and sick." I didn't know what I was, didn't know whether I was going or coming. The next day I was back in the camp and I was sick as a dog.

Kiefner: How was Camp Buckner different from Michigan?

Reed: Fort Custer?

Kiefner: Fort Custer, thank you.

Reed: It was about the same, wherever you were you got your same rules and regulations to a certain extent you know what I mean, and there's not that much recreation you had to find that yourself the guys would make their way out to the towns and you'd meet somebody down in the little towns you'd go to, I'd go to here or to there in North Carolina, but that was the town of Camp Buckner. And

you'd go there for your recreation, you'd meet somebody, make yourself acquainted with somebody there and you'd have someone to go back downtown for. You can't be much of a stranger when you're serving, you have to make your own place for recreation, meet somebody and make your own home besides the one home you've got there on the campus.

Kiefner: What were your thoughts when war broke out?

Reed: I didn't have too many, they put the fear in you, when the war broke out say said, "You can't," see when we lived at this place we could get our uniforms and things, but you could dress in civilian clothes and come back home on the weekend. You can't have that no more. You had to give them all those civilian clothes, there couldn't be nothing in that locker of yours but army stuff, so you packed that up you had to send it home or throw it away or something, but I brought mine back home, you know my dress clothes I brought back home. But you could have no civilian stuff at all, everything had to be army stuff when the war broke out, that's the way it was you wasn't allowed have nothing else. So when war broke out I brought my junk home and you had to have everything. See they had what they called inspections a lot of the time, the general would come around inspecting you and the clothes and look, "I ain't got nothing in there, nothing but army stuff!" Your shoes had to be shined and under your bed and all of that, everything had to be in its place. Beds had to be made up so [well], if it wasn't made up good then the old sergeants come and snatch all the covers off the bed and throw it on the floor, "Now you make it up right this time!" I guess what they called discipline, you had to learn discipline, a Colonel said you going to

wash the wall and everything, he might jump up that bookcase there if he could reach the top, he might jump up there with some white gloves and wipe up there, now he wipe some dirt off on those gloves you in trouble now, can't nobody go nowhere that day you stay there cleaning that out. There are spots you ain't even thought about, like that picture, see that picture on that wall? He might come on inspection and he can just rub his hand across there with them white gloves, see if there's dirt up there, all that kind of junk. Everything had to be spotless when they come around, and they tell you that as big as the camp is, they said the General is in the area, they don't know where he's going to stop at, but you've got to get everything spotless because he's in the area. Now he probably won't even get to me and a lot of times he didn't, but you had to have things spotless in case he did, had to have everything be clean.

Kiefner: Did they train you for other duties at that time or were you strictly still cooking?

Reed: I had been in what they called communications when I got to Fort Custer. This is a thing where you lay down wires and things where you set up a little headquarters, they're training you like you would be in combat service. I was in communications, I liked that pretty good, what I did might surprise you, out there in the bush there was a snake that come across me, scared me so bad I had asked the first sergeant could I be a KP, a KP is a dishwasher. He said, "What you want?" I said, "No, I don't want to go back out there no more." That's how I got in the kitchen.

Kiefner: That was back in Fort Custer that happened, in Michigan?

Reed: Yes, he said, "If you want to be that's okay with me you want to be." That snake

scared me so bad I almost had a heart attack. I got in the, I just started out as a KP washing dishes and washing pots and things around there, and helping the kitchen work out, and I went from that to a regular mess sergeant you know, I got to cook there.

Kiefner: You could say that that snake was a turning point in your career at that point?

Reed: It was! (Laughs) I was through out there in those bushes. I thought, "No, I don't want to go back out there." I got to be a KP and the cook helper and I went from there. They found I could cook I got to be a regular mess sergeant, I got to be the boss of the kitchen.

Kiefner: Right. You moved on to Camp Buckner, North Carolina you're still a mess sergeant, you've just got new people there?

Reed: Just got new people there that are all.

Kiefner: And how soon was it that they started getting the POWs in to Camp Buckner?

Reed: Prisoners of war?

Kiefner: The prisoners of war coming in from Germany to Camp Buckner, did you have anything?

Reed: I didn't have [any] of them here; I had them when I got overseas. I'm glad you come to that point, but when I got overseas they had a lot of German prisoners who looked like they would like you to have food, and the garbage, we had what they called garbage pits, all your waste you threw in the garbage hole. Now me, as dumb as I was, I didn't know at that time, I didn't know anything about nationality or not, if you was white I thought all white people stuck together, I don't know nothing about Germans, Jews or Russians or nothing else. The

German prisoners would come on in and pick some food out of that garbage hole. I, when I found that out, I started to save it for them. I would have it on a nice piece of cardboard or some kind of, wrap it up in some paper and give it to them when they come around. My company commander seen me doing it one day and he told me not to do and I'm going to give him an argument about it, I said, "We're going to throw it away." He said, "No don't give it." But here's what I didn't understand, my company commander was Jewish, he was a Jewish guy, and I didn't know nothing about the Jewish and the Germans didn't like each other, I didn't know nothing about this! And he told me if he saw me doing it again he's going to bust me down to a private. I'm trying to argue with him that there wasn't [anything] wrong with me giving the German prisoners food if we're going to throw it away anyway. But he showed me a picture, he said, "They've got some of our men over there as prisoners, the German's they're not feeding them." He showed me one picture of a guy, the guy was kind of skinny, but I had to fire back at him I said, "Maybe this man don't want to eat what they've got." Because some of the Germans, I said, you see what we make coffee, in a big old pot we'd have coffee grounds in a rag tied up, when you get through you throw that thing in the garbage, and the German prisoners come on and pick it up and make them some coffee when we're through with it. And I'm trying to show him the point that maybe these German people didn't have what this man wanted, I said, "He's only one guy you see like that that's skinny." But I didn't win the argument.

Kiefner: No! I'm not surprised!

Reed: But still, I'm betting those German people had nothing else to eat, and I just couldn't figure that out for a long time. And then some of the guys enlightened me to what's going on, that the Germans had burned up a lot of Jewish people or something, I learned about Hitler, I learned about all of that. But I thought that was so cruel of him, wouldn't let me give the garbage, what we're throwing away. And then here's something else, we had chicken there, some guy picked up the chicken entrails out of that garbage and go down to that tent and had a little pot cooking them some kind of way. Now that's how bad it was. You know, I thought I was bad on the farm down in Mississippi, but they was in worse shape than I was in a way of speaking and that man, he's going to bust me to a private if he catches me giving them stuff! It's ok for me to throw it in the garbage and they pick it up, but I couldn't give it to them. I thought that was terrible, that's one thing I ran into there. I didn't understand it, I'm telling you.

Kiefner: Let me go back a little bit in time to when you found out you were going to Europe from Camp Buckner and your departure, you said you went to England first?

Reed: Yes we went to England first.

Kiefner: Tell me about going from Camp Butner to England.

Reed: Well we had a ship, and that's another thing I was crazy and dumb about, they had ships sitting out there in the ocean from New York, we went to New York, and you have your, soldiers have a backpack or something you put a lot of your stuff in there and put it on your back, they've got a little old thing I've got on this thing and it was puffed up and I crossed that ocean there and I'm saying to

myself, “This thing is killing me! You mean I’ve got to go to Europe with this thing on my back?” Well what happened, the ship was so big it couldn’t come up to the dock, this thing had to take, what they call that thing, a barge or something, take me out there in that water to where the ship was and we had to get off they’ve got some ropes or something...

Kiefner: Right, a net?

Reed: Yeah, you’ve got to climb up on them things to get on the ship. I thought this darn thing that I was sitting on was going to go all the way to Europe! How in the world am I going to go to Europe with this thing on my backpack?

Kiefner: It’s going to be a long trip!

Reed: You talk about dumb; this thing up here was empty!

Kiefner: Everything was new, everything was new.

Reed: We went, from there, we went from New York to England, we got off in England, in London I think or pretty close to London, but I know we got off a place there and we had a place that was there for soldiers. But the thing about it, the guy comes on there and he threw some bale of hay in there for us.

Kiefner: He threw some what was that?

Reed: Hay. You’re going to put this in your mattress. I heard the word years ago, I think I’ll hit the hay, but now this come to reality. That’s what they put in; you’re going to sleep on this, so we stayed there for quite some time. Then we went over across the English Channel, over in France. So we got over in France we had some racks and things for us. Well no here’s another thing that really happened, when we got in Germany, they woke us up one night and told us we was going from France we

was going to Germany. Now I'm scared to death because I'm thinking, I don't know whether you've heard those buzz bombs, you might have heard about them. You're too young to know anything about them. [Those] things leave the limbs folded and blown off at night when they would be dropping them. And we would go over in Germany, now I thinking this here, now I'm really getting nervous now because going over there because that's where the war is really hot. So, we got over into Germany. Here's another thing that I didn't understand, when we were in England and France we didn't live as good, we had pitched tents. When we went to Germany, they were letting all the houses on the street; we had a convoy of trucks and things. You go in and take those people's place. I lived like a king in Germany. Those people had the finest stuff if you wanted. We commandeered their beds.

Kiefner: Where were you living? In Germany you were living in homes?

Reed: We were taking those people's homes. That's what we were [doing]. Taking those people's homes, those people had to get out and find somewhere else to stay because we came in there like kings (Laughing). Those were the best days I had ever lived when I was over there in Germany. The best days I've lived being in those people's houses. I don't know how that worked out for those people. I know that it was nice for me.

Kiefner: Were you still cooking?

Reed: Yes, we had a mess for most of the guys. They all had their own rooms and things. Yes, we were living like kings over there in Germany that was the best plan in the world.

Kiefner: When you were back in England and France living in the tents, what were the facilities like for you to cook with then? Did you have a big kitchen tent?

Reed: We kept our cooking utensils and our stoves. There is something else I will tell you about, too because I had everything over here. Our stoves were developed for field business and they had a lot of aluminum pans. When I was in the states, a lot of times I had iron pots and pans and I had a bonfire. You could take them and throw them in that fire and burn them and you could burn all that crust off. These things that we got for combat were aluminum and I tried to clean them, I thought it was the craziest thing. I built a fire and threw them in there and I tell you what the fire was coming up through the pans (Laughing). Then I done burned the pans up, I thought the frying pans you could throw in there and burn all the stuff off.

Kiefner: It didn't clean them up at all.

Reed: Yes. It just burned the pans up I couldn't even cook with them (Laughing). I told the man that I didn't know, all we could do was just laugh about it, it was kind of funny. They got us some more cooking utensils from somewhere but I thought it was going to clean [those] things up good and burn all that grease off of them until the fire came up through the things, oh my God.

Kiefner: Were you pretty well supplied?

Reed: Yes. We were supplied pretty [well]. They would bring us food from somewhere. They had some kind of warehouse set up and they would even bring us cigarettes and all that kind of stuff. I was smoking back in those days and I ran out of cigarettes. A lot of youngsters in the Army, 18 or 19 years old, and a lot of them didn't even smoke and they thought I was the Mess Sergeant I could have

cigarettes. Those kids brought me cigarettes from everywhere. I had more cigarettes than I knew what to do with. They give them to you whether you smoke them or not and they just had them in their duffle bags they had them even though a lot of them didn't smoke. I had cigarettes from everywhere when they'd find out I didn't have none, everybody brought me cigarettes.

Kiefner: That's really interesting.

Reed: Like I said, when I couldn't give somebody food out of the garbage, I thought that was about the saddest part I ever ran in to. I didn't know history that well, I didn't know that the Germans, like I said, the Germans and the Jewish people and all that. I thought that if they were white they all were friends. I didn't know that the Germans, and they are white, and the Jewish people didn't get along. I didn't know that because I didn't know that much about history. They said the German people burned up the Jewish people. Some of them got burned up in a fire thing or something like that. You've read about it, you know about it, you read about the history. I didn't know anything about it because I didn't have any history down there in the cotton patch. I didn't know.

Kiefner: Exactly. They really didn't brief you much in the army before going?

Reed: No, they didn't brief me on that. I was expecting nothing like that. Somebody in need of something like that, and something they are going to throw it away and you're going to give it to somebody, I didn't see any harm in that. I didn't steal anything. It's going into the garbage cans; you'd rather throw it in the garbage? I saved it and when they came along there and they'd see and they'd be glad and wave at me. I'm not mad with the Germans, I'm not mad with the Jewish either.

I'm not mad at nobody. I'm just over there. They had one German kid, back in those days; he had seen his father killed in the war. The last time he had seen his mother she was running from a road block guard. He used to hang around with us and he would help me in the kitchen, wash the pans and wash the dishes and put the pots away. We would move quite frequently and I left that kid. I went back there a couple of times, I drove back there but I never did seem him. If I could have brought some cheer, back in those days you weren't allowed to bring no body [anywhere]. I would have brought that kid home with me if I could have. He's an old man now; don't even know if he's living but everywhere we'd go, he'd move around with us. We moved so often. See, here's another thing, we were in a combat zone, but we weren't on the front lines you could hear them guns all night long and see the flashes going Boom! Boom! All night long. Well, we would move up because what they would do you would move some up and whoever was on the front lines, you would bring them back. These fellas would come back and we were back there but going up and saw them coming back. I was in the zone, but I think I got my discharge papers while I was in the zone of the combat. By being close enough to see the guns and hearing them all night but I wasn't actually on the front lines. After a while, when the war ended we started coming back, all of them started coming back little by little. Getting back and getting your stuff in a place where you could live and come back to the states. They were coming back little by little, that's the way that part was.

Kiefner: That young German kid that you were talking about, he was an orphan? He lost both of his parents?

Reed: Yes, he lost both of his parents. I don't know what happened to that kid. Like I said, we had to move so often. Every week or so, we were moving. Like I said, the people on the front lines, they would carry some there and bring some back. I guess we were so far back; it was taking us some time to get there and the war ended before we even got on the front lines. We all started coming back after that.

Kiefner: This whole time in the military, the troops are segregated; the blacks from the whites. Are you primarily cooking for only the black troops?

Reed: Yes, I really was. They would have some come along sometimes from other companies but we were in different companies. We weren't involved in the same companies together.

Kiefner: The men coming off the front, you were always seeing the men who had just come from combat coming back in and then another group rotating out.

Reed: Sometimes I don't know where they went to, but I know that's what the moving up was for. There would be less of them because some of them got killed, too. Every day, and the news, they would mention how many soldiers were killed. Somebody laughed one time. I said, "You know one thing if I got killed that wouldn't make any news happen." (Laughing) This one guy got killed, but we don't have anything to talk about. That's the way it seemed to me. But it was amazing every day how many got killed.

Kiefner: Did you hear much of what was going on in combat on the front lines from the men who were returning that you were seeing through the mess?

Reed: You would run into some that would tell you about what was happening. There's nothing, just duffel bags and all that kind of stuff. I don't know if you've ever

heard of the Rhine River in Germany but the Rhine River, I was in a Combat Engineer [unit]. You ever hear of the Rhine River?

Kiefner: Yes.

Reed: My wife has a friend and she knew all about what we did. That Rhine River, when we went across that river that water runs so fast I wasn't coming back any time. I wasn't going to stand out there, it's a good thing I was a Mess Sergeant. They put that bridge down and on the last trip; we wound up taking the bridge up. We were going to carry the bridge on with us. When those trucks are on there, it'll be swinging back and forth. That's what that thing would be doing when those trucks are going across to the other side. That last truck, as it's coming across, it's taking the whole bridge up. Those Engineers, I don't know how they would do that, but that's what they would do.

Kiefner: They took the bridge up? They didn't blow it up, they took it up?

Reed: They took it up. They put it down to cross it.

Kiefner: Then the last one took it up on the way through?

Reed: The last one coming off, he's taking it up. That's what the Combat Engineers are supposed to do, they understood their job.

Kiefner: That was part of what the other men in your unit were doing also?

Reed: My first time, I was in a Field Artillery [unit] with the big guns. You had to pull a trigger to fire those things. The guns would be rattling down and they would be so big. I was in Field Artillery at first and then I changed to Combat Engineer.

Kiefner: That's when you were learning some of the communications before you went back to the kitchen.

Reed: When I first went in there, that's what I was doing. [I was in] 1-84 Field Artillery. That's when I went out there and ran across that big snake out there. Where I live at now, I got out there and found some snakes (Laughing). I remember I went out there and found a snake and said, "Oh my God!" It scared me so bad. I was tearing down some trees, I don't know I guess, didn't seem like it was hot that summer but I guess... was it hot out there Terry? What was wrong out there? I know there were some snakes out there.

Terry: I thought there were some snakes, [and] that's all.

Reed: I don't see any now. Tony, one of my grandsons was telling me about snakes, "Grandpa, that ain't nothing but a little Garter Snake." I said, "I didn't know anything about that." (Laughing) That's enough for me. I haven't seen as many alive as when I first moved out there. As far as I know, the place right there in front of us there was a whole lot of weeds and thistles and water spots. All the whites live out there anyways. I was in my yard and a white guy comes out and starts asking me, "Did that spot over there get a whole lot of water?" I said, "No, not a whole lot of water. [If there] comes a big rain there might be a bit out there for a while." They have a big, beautiful house built there now. I don't know if he was the one who did it or not but after that I know he started to build a house there. I guess that ran away a lot of snakes. I did see a lot of snakes and a lot of people build house around there, somewhere out there and it got rid of the snakes, I guess. I don't see any anymore, I know that.

Kiefner: Back then, when you were in Europe, would you say you felt safe most of the time? Were there times where you feared the closeness of the combat to where

you were?

Reed: Yes I did. I felt pretty good; I didn't feel too scared because the Engineers would be out on the road a lot of times. Being a Mess Sergeant, I had to take the food out to them. One thing I did tell them, I went out there and said, "Now look, I know I'm bring you all this food but if you get in too bad of a situation, don't tell me where you are going because if the General catches me, I don't want to tell him where you are at." You're not supposed to do that. I felt pretty comfortable being out there for some reason. There were a lot of poor people there. I don't know what those people were. If I had some food left, some guys I'd stop there and give it to them. They looked like they were in need of food or something. That was in France, now that I think about it. They were French people. That was another thing they told us about, "Be careful." You weren't allowed to talk to the Germans. They called it fraternizing and you could be court-martialed for it. The French people were alright because they were neutral. The French people just liked anybody that would help them. They were neutral (Laughing). They go either way; it doesn't make any difference to them. I had some food; I was talking to a guy; some people, on the way back from carrying some food for the guys working on the bridge I had some left and I gave it to them. They could have it and eat. A lot of people were in bad shape over there at that particular time. I heard one time, I don't know how true this is, [and] the trucks had five-gallon tanks of gas sitting on the side of the truck fenders. A French person asked the guy, "Whose truck is this?" The guy said, "Why?" [The French man] said, "I want to buy it." The [French] guy said, "How much do you want for it?" The guy told

him something and the French man gave this guy some money or something and got in trouble. He took the gas cans off, jumped in the truck and then drove off in the truck. I don't know what ever happened to the guy (Laughing). The guy with the truck was just sitting there (Laughing). He sold it to somebody else, I didn't care. I wasn't around to see what had happened, but that's what I heard. I don't know if that is true or not, but I guess some terrible things did happen over there. You'd be surprised what we didn't do because some guy went down, we move some in trucks and half of us would be on trains, was sitting up in the train and he was out there sitting on top of the train and the train went under the viaduct and knocked him [off] (Laughing). I don't know how true that was. Instead of sitting in the train, he's sitting on top of the thing. You know how some of us have to do something different than everybody else? It liked to have knocked his brains out. (Laughing)

Kiefner: You traveled by trains sometimes, too?

Reed: Some would go by train. There were a few times when we went on trucks and some would go on trains and we were supposed to meet at a certain destination. When you would do that and you were on a truck and you would stop overnight somewhere? If you stopped to bivouac you better not light a cigarette or anything they said a plane could see you even if you lit a cigarette or anything. The lights on the truck couldn't be on; you had to travel in the dark. That's the way you traveled a lot of the times. We didn't have lights on because they would be looking for you if they see anything they'd drop a bomb down there on you.

Kiefner: What about when you were in Europe and England and France and Germany,

what sort of entertainment, was there any down time where you got a few days off to leave base?

Reed: No. I don't remember us... because it looked like we were out there loose anyway. You weren't going too far without [having] somebody with you. You didn't know who your enemy was too much. No, we didn't have too much recreation. We had most of it in England and we did a little bit in France but as we got over into German, Holland, Belgium and all those countries we didn't have anything like that. You had to stick to each other. You didn't stray off the way. There were certain areas that you were in, I know where we stayed we got there and unloaded everything in a field. You weren't allowed in that particular area because they had so many mines. One day I was at a distance I saw a jeep run over one of those mines [and] that thing went up in the air. I don't know what happened. I was at a distance; I don't know what happened to the guy out there. You didn't stray off too much. You had to stick together. I don't know where we were; I think we were in Germany or somewhere. They would have outdoor theaters sometimes where you would go and look... That might not have been in Germany, it must have been over in England or Holland or somewhere. They had the screen up there and we were looking at it. We were lying down on the ground and had little pillows and things. Have you ever seen a turned wind, a twister? One time it started raining, someone stepped on someone's mouth and broke their teeth out. They didn't know what that thing was; it was called a "whirlwind".

Kiefner: While you were in Europe, did you have any duties other than you're a Staff Sergeant in the mess hall?

Reed: That's the only duty I ever had.

Kiefner: Did you write home while you were gone?

Reed: Yes, I wrote home all of the time.

Kiefner: Who were most of your letters to?

Reed: My father because when I left I liked cigarettes and I told him I needed a whole mess of cigarettes. Cigarettes were scarce over there, too back in those days. He wanted to send me some cigarettes.

Kiefner: Did you write to your stepmother or step-grandmother, too?

Reed: Yes, I wrote to her, too. I only wrote to her sometimes. She's the one who I had written and had told her that my grandfather had passed away. She didn't know because she was living in Memphis.

Kiefner: When did you find out you were coming home, coming back to the States?

Reed: We came back to the States and we all had 30 days furlough. We were supposed to report; they would notify us when we had to come back to the camp and where we were going to be. Somebody said we were supposed to go to Louisiana somewhere but here was the thing, you got out on points. Somehow, I didn't know how the points worked. During the time we were on vacation, on furlough, the points system dropped some. It dropped enough for me to have enough points to get out. I never went back into the service. I went up to Fort Sheridan or somewhere, got my discharge and got out. You could get out if you wanted to, or you could re-enlist, whatever you wanted to do. So I got out, that's why I was on vacation when I came home.

Kiefner: Did you know you wanted to return to Chicago? Was that your plan?

Reed: I was on vacation in Chicago.

Kiefner: But you were planning on staying after returning from the military?

Reed: Yes. I didn't know I was going to get out. They said we were going to go somewhere; they had a camp for us but I heard it was somewhere in Louisiana. While they were getting this whole thing together, they were going to notify us to meet at somewhere when they got the camp. They were going to take us down to Louisiana, but the point system dropped to a certain extent and it hit me, I was in that certain category and I could get out and be discharged. I got my discharge and got out. I wanted to get out and I wondered some guys wanted to stay. Some guys did 20 years in there. I think at 20 years you can retire. For some reason, I just wanted to get out. You feel you've been locked up and you miss something like when you are overseas and a guy is sitting there talking to me and [he] tells me, "Oh man, my mind is way back home, [from] overseas, back in the old country over there." I told one of them one time, "You better keep your mind over here because one of these days it's going to get back to you." Everyone wanted to get back home, at least for a while anyway.

Kiefner: What did you do back in Chicago?

Reed: When I got back to Chicago, I spent the money I had saved and enjoyed life. [I was] taking girlfriends out at night and then I got a job. What was the first job I had when I got back? The first thing (job) I got when I got back was, they were giving soldiers jobs for Christmas at the Post Office. It was what they called "temporary help". I knew I'd be there for a while. After I left there, what the hell did I do? I was over at Sears; I started working at Sears for a few years. Then I

took the exam for clerks and I took the exam for mail handlers. The clerks, I had my papers and things but I was in there subbing. I took so long they asked me if I wanted to be a mail handler you can be a mail handler and you make a raise. When you are subbing they tell you that you aren't guaranteed eight hours. You might get four hours, six hours, two hours but when you are ready you get these four hours. I left the clerk business [and] I went into the mail handling department. I'd rather have eight hours a day. After that I got married and had two children. I knew I didn't want to work half a day here and half a day there. I worked at Sears before that time. I was working at Sears and I was talking all those tests and they would send me letters to come in for a test. I told my wife, "I think I'm going to go down here and try to get in on this Post Office thing." At the time Eisenhower was running for President. I didn't know who was going to get in for President but it might be tougher and I was last on the list at Sears and if they tighten up, I would be the first one to go. I went back to the Post Office and worked there. That's where I ended up for all my time, 41 years and 11 months.

Kiefner: How did you meet your wife?

Reed: My wife had an auntie who was running a cleaner back where we lived in the city down on Wabash Street. I would take my clothes in there and they would kid me all the time about not being married. She would say, "I've got a whole lot of nieces down there in Louisiana. [We should] get you married." My wife finally came here; I went down and got my clothes and met her. I got a television; television was something we didn't have back in the day. I would say, "Let's go look at the television." They were staying in my father's building; my father had a

six-flat building on Sawyer. They were staying in his building at that time. I met Irene there and we made a date to go out to a show or something and that's where it started from then on. We've been spitting fire ever since. (Laughter)

Kiefner: She came all the way up from Louisiana to meet you?

Reed: That wasn't the plan to come here, she just came there. She said her brother raised her and they weren't getting along or something or another and she came up to live with her auntie. Her father died when she was little. There were a whole lot of them, my wife; I think there were about nine [children] altogether. Her father had married twice and he got a different set [of children]. The first set was four and the second set was four. The second set was Bernice, Irene, Roland and Lewis. That wife died [and] he married again and he only had one child by her and that was Marcellus, and then he (the father) died. The older one was taking care of the younger ones and my wife was raised by her older brother. [She] and her brother were raised by their older brother and her sister was raised by an older sister. They were scattered up there. She came to [her aunties] to stay for a while to work and help her do something and she's been here ever since.

Kiefner: Did you stay in contact with any of your fellow soldiers that you served with after returning?

Reed: That's a thing that I always hated, I had one or two that I stayed in contact with and he died. Without us getting back together as a Company, I lost track of them. I really hated that, I thought about that a lot of times. A lot of those I guys I would have liked to know where they were and what happened to them. I had one or two [friends], one lived in North Carolina and one lived in Springfield. The one in

North Carolina he died and we used to write each other all the time. His mother wrote me, this was a long time ago, and told me that Dickson had passed away. He died; I don't know what happened to the guy in Springfield. I know a couple of guys on the South Side, I knew them. Both of them are dead, everybody's dead except for me, I think. Fonzo, Joe Goode, all of them are dead.

Kiefner: Did you notice any changes taking place while you were away in the army all those years? Was Chicago much different when you returned than before the war when you left?

Reed: No, it wasn't much different from when I came out. I'll tell you one thing, the world changed and got a whole lot different now than it was back in those days. Like I tell people, a lady stopped me here not too long ago, a police woman, and she said, "You don't have your seatbelt on." [I said], "I did have my seatbelt on; you must not be able to see." I asked her, "I know you work here for a living, but let me ask you something." She said, "What?" I said, "How in the world are you all riding down the street and looking to see if someone has their seatbelt on or not but I when I get home and I turn my television on the first thing I see is somebody got shot, how come you aren't looking in these cars and looking for guns?" (Laughing) The woman asked me for my license and insurance and goes back to her car. She comes back and says, "I'll give you the benefit of the doubt." I don't know if that struck her some kind of way or what but she said, "You don't have any record or anything so I'll let you go." You looked in there to see if I had no seatbelt on but you didn't look to see if I had a gun, that's what you ought to be seeing. What I'm getting at, that's the change. Years ago, they didn't have all this

kind of business. Me and my wife, even before we were married I'd go down to the lake and be there in the summer time with a radio and a blanket and lay out there on the lake and it's hot. Now, I'm scared to drive through there because... That's what I mean with change but when I came back it wasn't like that. On the South Side they had a black cop down there, you might have heard of him, they called him "Two-gun Pete". He ruled that South Side, they didn't have any problems down there because he'd see guys on the corner and he'd tell them, "Look, when I come back [through here], I want this corner clean." They didn't have the problems down there. You could walk the streets at any time and go door to door. They didn't have [anything] like that going on back in those days. The change comes since I've been out, that's where the change comes in at. It made a big change, too the way it is nowadays.

Kiefner: Did you and your wife settle in the city after you married?

Reed: Yes, we lived in the city. We lived on the West Side up near Walnut Street. Then we bought a home further out west on Kedvale, out where they called "K-town". We bought a home there, and then we bought another one in the Austin area right between Washington and Weldon. They said that house was owned by the Martin Salt Company. That was a great big place, it was a three-flat and each room had a long hallway down through it and all the rooms on each side had a long hallway. When one family moved out, I made a hotel out of it. Some friends of mine did carpentry and I started to rent it out into rooms. Some guy killed his girlfriend [there] and it scared the wife so bad we had to move from there. I don't know what happened to that man that killed that woman there. Somehow he came out

that on a Friday or something, I was at work, I was working at the Post Office then, Irene called me one night and told me Mr. Smith - whatever his name [was]- was laying behind his bed and he was sick. What happened was he didn't pay his rent and my wife didn't have any money so she went up there and she couldn't find the neighbor. Saturday night he didn't pay it and Sunday night she went up there [and] he had a blue light on there and when you turn the light on it's a blue light so you could hardly see in there and she thought it was him lying over there on the floor between the bed and the wall. She called me at work, I came home and the police are there... Terry you were there weren't you?

Terry: Yes.

Reed: There were police up there and there was a woman lying over there behind the bed dead. The man went over there and looked at her and said to my wife, "You said this was Mr. Smith." The woman was lying there on a mattress and she was tall and skinny and my wife thought it was a man but it was a woman lying buck-naked behind the bed; she was dead. He came down there Friday and said he didn't see anybody. They said some woman came there that Friday in a cab. I had her brainstorm in the first place, I told Irene, I said, "Now, I'm going to make some cards, anyone you rent the room out to, you have them fill out this card." In case somebody [was] to have a heart attack and die, we would know who to call. [It was a] good thing we did do it. We had all of that and they called the job and everything. The man he worked until five in the morning and he said that someone had passed away in Mississippi or something like that and he wanted them to mail his check and I guess that's when they got him, at his home. When

people are putting two and two together and remembering little things [and] that's when they saw him get out of the cab and brought a woman in to the house. I guess he killed her and left. I don't know, but I know we never heard from him, that man, I don't know what happened to him.

Kiefner: You guys raised your children in the city then?

Reed: Yes. My daughter was married at that time, she lived on Kedzie. Terry was still living with me. My wife was so scared she wouldn't stay in the house so we went out looking for a place out in the suburbs. We found a couple of places.

Kiefner: How many children did you have?

Reed: We had two. My daughter passed away in '06.

Kiefner: I'm sorry. How would you say your military experiences affected your life?

Reed: You want me to tell the truth? I think it was very educational in a general way of speaking. I learned a lot [that] I don't think I would have been...

Terry: Industrious...

Reed: Something. I wouldn't have been up to date on a lot of things. I learned a lot in the Army because I was in the fields in Mississippi and then I came here and went into the Army right after that. When I gave that German those scraps, I didn't know the German's didn't like the Jews. I thought as long as they were white they all like each other. I had that same idea, that's the truth. I didn't know anything like that. I got an education up to a certain extent that I learned in the Army.

Kiefner: What have been some of your most rewarding experiences in your life?

Reed: I guess these two bad kids (laughter). My wife isn't bad, she's a good woman. She would put my socks on for me. I laugh because I tell my kids to put their socks on

and then put their shoes on and every time they put them on the wrong foot. I don't know why that comes back to me. Every time I put [our shoes on] we laugh about it now. I think about my kids putting their socks on and tell them to put their shoes on and they put them on the wrong foot, I think, "Oh boy." There [are] a lot of experiences that I've had, I've enjoyed it and I enjoy the kids and all that. My wife's sister stayed with us when we lived on Kedvale and she had two children at that time, she might have had three before it was over. When I was at the Post Office I had a place on the side of an Italian restaurant and I used to clean it up before I would go to work in the morning and on Saturdays and Sundays I would clean it up. On Saturdays, my wife's sister's kids would go with me on Saturday mornings and hang posters on the wall and where people would sit in the booths, they'd find pennies and dimes and nickels and quarters and they'd go there and find a few pennies and the candy would be flying off the shelf that evening.

Kiefner: How are you keeping yourself busy these days?

Reed: For a long time I'd be working down doing guard duty. Now, I don't do anything but eat and sleep but I have a big garden out there that I weed in the summer time. I'll soon be starting that, the rest of the time I'm eating and sleeping now. I've been doing guard duty since I retired, too. I get a lot of that. I didn't sit down too long; I just kept moving around in the later years. In fact, when my daughter got sick, we spent a lot of time with her and then when my wife got sick, sometimes I'd take her to the doctor three times a week. She had to have a walker; she had that walker you could push yourself around with.

Kiefner: Mr. Reed it has been a pleasure visiting with you today.

Reed: I've enjoyed it, too.

Kiefner: Thank you.

Reed: Bringing back memories.

Kiefner: Thank you for sharing your experiences and thank you for your service to our country.

Reed: I belong to the Veterans of Foreign Wars now. We have a meeting next month; the second Tuesday in every month. I belong to them, too. I help them get together every week, I mean every month.

Kiefner: Most of the people in there are not specifically anybody that you've served with. You haven't run into any that you've served with?

Reed: No.

Kiefner: Are there quite a bit of WWII Veterans there still?

Reed: No. I don't think there is anybody older than me, I think.

Kiefner: You were older when you went in, older than most of them coming in.

(Laughter - tape ends)