

[0:00:00]

Moderator: That's what happened in Mississippi?

Harold Lee: Yeah.

Moderator: Did you consider yourself rebellious at all?

Harold Lee: Uh-uh. I didn't consider myself rebellious. I figured that I had a responsibility to look after myself and be sure that...

[0:00:35]

...I wasn't misused. That's all. I didn't fool around with a stick on my shoulder either. I wasn't looking for people to be misused. I have always decided that, about 15 years old, I decided I was through fighting. I wasn't going to use violence to try to affect any objective.

[0:01:05]

There would be more intelligent ways of approaching a problem than that. And I never saw where violence affecting solution of problems very often.

Moderator: So wait a minute. You were in college. You were at Lincoln University. You came out. You went to the military. Then you started graduate school.

Harold Lee: I went to graduate school before I went to military.

Moderator: Oh, okay.

[0:01:31]

Harold Lee: I came out of Lincoln University in '39. I got a job.

Moderator: You said job. What kind of job? You said you got a job right after...

Harold Lee: I got a job. Went to WPA as a recreation supervisor.

Moderator: WPA is what now?

Harold Lee: Work to Progress Administration. That was one of the make-work programs that Roosevelt initiated during the Depression.

[0:02:00]

Moderator: What it equivalent to the public service position?

Harold Lee: No. The public service positions now are jobs which people claim needs to be done. But they don't have the funds to do them, so the government says you

can hire some of these people who aren't employed to do what has to be done, and we'll pay.

[0:02:31]

And they're supposedly doing meaningful work. All of them don't, but WPA was just [unintelligible].

Moderator: What were you doing?

Harold Lee: I was a recreational supervisor.

Moderator: To whom?

Harold Lee: The playgrounds. We didn't have any recreational programming in the city at the time.

Moderator: Playground where?

Harold Lee: In the city.

Moderator: No specific one?

Harold Lee: I forget. Where was I? I think I was on [unintelligible] - yeah, I was. I was on [Unintelligible]. About the only one [unintelligible].

[0:03:05]

I wasn't there very long. [Unintelligible]. Shortly after I got that job, I got a job in the welfare department. Wasn't called that then. It was called something else. I forget. It was a relief agency. I was there for 11 months.

Moderator: Is this the same place that you worked while you were a student?

Harold Lee: Uh-uh.

[0:03:30]

No. When I was doing school, I was going to school; I just worked for - when I was doing the school, I did various little chores. The one that I held the longest was for a dear lady who owned a hat shop on High street. Main Street in Jefferson City. She lived on Marshall.

[0:04:01]

And my job was to report in the morning and prepare breakfast for her, which didn't consist of anything much. Cereal and a piece of toast, coffee.

Moderator: White woman.

Harold Lee: Yeah. And then we'd run up to the dress shop and clean it up, wash the windows and make the deposit for the day before.

[0:04:34]

And then I ran back to school. I put in six hours a day on that job. I did the same thing in the evening.

Moderator: When'd you go into law school?

Harold Lee: I was at Lincoln University from '35 to '39. I worked for the department of welfare from '39 to '40 as [unintelligible].

[0:05:02]

And then I went to the University of Michigan '40, '41. Then I worked for the department of employment security, '41, '42. And then I went into the army in '42, then the army to '45. Came out of the army in '45, November, and went back to the employee security and stayed there about six months, I think.

[0:05:32]

And then I went to the veterans' administration. I stayed there five years.

Moderator: What were you doing at the veterans' administration?

Harold Lee: I was called a contact representative. And I left the veterans administration and went to the office of [unintelligible]. Stayed there a year. And I resigned that position. And went to practice law in 1952.

[0:06:00]

[Unintelligible] while I was at the veterans administration.

Moderator: You became the father of two children.

Harold Lee: They were born while I was in service. They were born in 1943. My wife and I married in May of '42, May 31st. I was inducted September 26.

[0:06:35]

I was inducted in September 26. And [Doc] was born in October of '43. He was born in October of '43. Harold was conceived, and I was on my way to OCS. I came through Kansas City.

[0:07:00]

Moderator: OCS where?

Harold Lee: That's Officers Candidate School.

Moderator: Where?

Harold Lee: In Fort Belvoir, Virginia. I came from Mississippi to go to OCS in February. I was in Mississippi from October of '42 to February of '43.

Moderator: Did you finish OCS?

Harold Lee: And I went to OCS. Came, stopped through home. And my wife said...

[0:07:30]

...they tell me that as soon as you finish OCS they ship you overseas. And you might get killed. I ought to have something to remember you by. And I said, "I'll leave you something."

Moderator: Is that right?

Harold Lee: And I went on to OCS. I didn't go overseas immediately. We embarked for Europe.

[0:08:02]

The ETO is what it was called. European Theater of Operations.

Moderator: Wait. You finished Officers Candidate School?

Harold Lee: Yeah, in November of '43. I finished Officers Candidate School in May of '43.

Moderator: You're a commissioned officer now.

Harold Lee: Yeah. And then I went to Fort Wood first.

[0:08:29]

And then we went down to Missouri, from there to Texas, and from there to Kentucky.

Moderator: How did the climate change in the military down there? Your first experience, being shipped to Mississippi.

Harold Lee: In Mississippi, military-wise, as far as military was concerned, I didn't have any complaint, because everybody was treating me like I was a son of a bitch, which I guess I was to them.

[0:09:02]

I have two degrees, you know. And I never drew the same paycheck twice while I was in Mississippi. I got a promotion. I was a carpenter in eight days after being inducted. Never went through basic training. They sent me into the office.

Moderator: You had it made.

Harold Lee: And when I left, I was staff sergeant.

[0:09:33]

And I left and I went down there in October. And I left in February. And I was staff sergeant. And I really left that outfit. My outfit that I was with, 356 engineers, was the first outfit I was with. And they left Mississippi in January. And I stayed there on detached service for a month...

[0:10:02]

...waiting for my orders to go to OCS. They left to go to California. And they said that I had been accepted into OCS and it would be a matter of time until I got my artist to go. So they said they wouldn't take me to California with them, that I'd just stay there in Mississippi on [unintelligible] service. I wasn't doing anything in particular.

Moderator: How did that sound to you at that particular time?

Harold Lee: What?

[0:10:30]

Moderator: Staying in Mississippi.

Harold Lee: Oh, it didn't.

Moderator: Didn't affect you one way or the other?

Harold Lee: Really, you stay out of white folks' way. You make it all right. And I had ran into this damn gal at Jackson College up there in Jackson. And I was out of sight. God damn. I wonder what that gal's name is. Whew.

Moderator: You wanted to leave Mississippi.

Harold Lee: I was satisfied.

[0:11:01]

I jumped on the bus and run on up to Jackson.

Moderator: Have a good time. What was your first impression that Europe gave you?

Harold Lee: When I got to be an officer, everything changed.

[0:11:28]

We were sort of competing with the white folks now. Before, I was making white folks look good. They were the officers and I was doing the work during the nights. And they were looking good. And they did everything possible to keep me with them, including offering to make me a warrant officer, which I deeply regret I didn't accept...

[0:12:01]

...because being an officer didn't mean a damn thing but a lot of damn headaches. And they wanted to make me a warrant officer. And a warrant officer is not a commissioned officer, but he wears the same uniform, so he looks the same and you get the same pay. You understand? The pay scale, as a matter of fact, a senior great warrant officer at that time was equivalent to a captain. And a warrant officer junior grade was equivalent to a second lieutenant.

[0:12:30]

And if you got one promotion, you'd be equivalent to a captain instead of - you never would get to be a captain hardly in the army as a commissioned officer, because they didn't let niggers captain, I mean, Black boys captain in those days. I don't know if I saw almost a dozen captains by the time I was leaving.

Moderator: How was it as far as a port of entry was concerned for Black people at that particular time?

Harold Lee: What point of entry?

[0:13:00]

Moderator: I'm talking about here you are in Europe.

Harold Lee: Oh, Europe. The first thing you do, let me tell you. We left out of New York, came back through Miles [unintelligible]. We left out of New York. Then we landed in Liverpool.

[0:13:28]

And before you get off, when you come up to the port, before you get off, the British officers come onboard to give you some orientation with regard to the UK. And the first thing they tell you is that there is no discrimination in the UK. That's the United Kingdom. And they emphasized that over and over. And of course, the army, the United States army, the American army, put all kinds of - trying to tell everybody there wasn't any discrimination in the UK and blacks and whites come through the same places.

[0:14:05]

All that stuff. But an American white boy couldn't accept that.

Moderator: Those are the ones.

Harold Lee: And we were in England eight months. And it was a constant hassle...

[0:14:29]

...trying to keep our boys from going to the penitentiary or being hanged because of the agitation of white American soldiers. That was a terrible dissention among Black and white soldiers in England.

[0:15:00]

[Unintelligible]. They had [unintelligible]. The white boys could not at that time tolerate or accept -- or would not, I guess I should say would not -- the fraternization of Black men and white women. And of course, I don't think I saw a Black girl in the UK the whole time I was there. I was there eight months. I was in England longer than I was anywhere else overseas.

[0:15:31]

I don't think I saw a Black girl in the UK. And we were going to bed with gals at the time [unintelligible]. We didn't go to bed, we would post. Like they say, go to town. We went to bed with a gal. So they had to be white.

Moderator: Wasn't nothing else around.

Harold Lee: Nothing else around. And they didn't have no objection to it. Matter of fact, they seemed [unintelligible].

[0:16:04]

But that's where I started having trouble. I really started having trouble when I was in Fort Knox, Kentucky. We went to Fort Knox, Kentucky...

Moderator: No. Wait a minute. Before you get there, where you were you D Day?

Harold Lee: D Day I was in Le Mans, France.

[0:16:29]

I had been in Bonn, Germany. They were in negotiations. The war was over, actually, but the formality of it had not been announced, the war in Europe, I mean, which we didn't know, of course. But they had already begun their termination of the redisposition of troops to fight the war in the Pacific.

[0:17:05]

And my outfit was one of those outfits that they determined should be try and ship to the Pacific. So we were pulled out of Bonn, which is the present capitol of Western Germany.

[0:17:27]

We were pulled out of Bonn and brought back to - I say La Mans. That wasn't. That was Rouen.

Moderator: Look, you've had it pretty easy so far as far as the military is concerned. You've walked right through the whole thing almost. How did this affect you knowing that you might be going to a front, like in the Pacific, for instance? How does that affect you?

Harold Lee: Horace, to say that I had it pretty easy in the military isn't quite the correct way to express it I don't think.

[0:18:05]

Harold Lee: I had a hell of a time getting out of the military with honorable discharge. And I never understood why, except that, I don't know, I was - here's what happened.

[0:18:30]

The outfit I went overseas with, I was in the C Company, and my captain was an Italian out of Chicago named Pacifico. And I thought Pacifico was the fairest white man I had run across while we were in Louisville. Not Fort Knox's, in Louisville, right outside Louisville.

Moderator: Fort Knox, Kentucky.

[0:19:01]

Harold Lee: Louisville was the nicest place I was in while I was on this side.

Moderator: You had some good times, man. Pacifico was very considerate about men and their vices, and didn't punish them too hard for their vices, such as drinking too much and getting drunk and having a fight in town...

[0:19:35]

...and getting drunk and running across some gal and not being able to leave her or have reverie and stay there for a day or two. Stuff like that. He wouldn't worry about them. They'd be back. And I know what's going on. They'll be back. They'd come in, give it a day or two or something like that.

[0:20:05]

When we got overseas, Pacifico wouldn't let any of these guys have leave. We were in England now. And he wouldn't give them leave. The whole battalion would go on leave except Seed Company. And the men began to complain to me.

[0:20:34]

I didn't quite realize that I was in the shape that I was in at the time. I know I had already gotten a name from being a trouble maker, because what had happened was I was about to say we went to Fort Knox, and when we got there, there were only 12 Black officers on the post. Fort Knox's a big post that had thousands of officers on it.

[0:21:01]

And tens of thousands of men. And there was only 12 or 13 Black officers. So there is a saying they call an officer's club, which is a recreation center for officers. And there's always a question when Black officers come on post is what are going to be their privileges in the officer club at that time.

[0:21:30]

And the general idea was the keep the blacks out of the officers' club. This is the second post I'm on in Fort Knox. The first post I was on was in Texas, and it had gangs of Black officers on it, including an entire Black battalion, commanded by Colonel [Theopolis Mann] of Chicago.

[0:22:02]

Big lawyer in Chicago at that time, about whom I had heard and was familiar with his reputation. For some reason or another, I didn't feel that I should come in on the post and upset what they had done. And they had already accepted Black officers' club when we got there.

Moderator: Two clubs.

Harold Lee: Yeah. They had a white officers' club and a Black officers' club.

[0:22:29]

And the blacks were going along with it. And there were officers there of higher rank than I was. Gates was there. Charles Gates. You know Colonel Gates?

Moderator: Uh-uh.

Harold Lee: From Kansas City.

Moderator: So it was accepted.

Harold Lee: When we got to Knox, they didn't have a Black officers' club because they only had 12 Black officers, which weren't enough to establish a Black officers' club. Well, 12 or 13 more came in.

[0:23:00]

That gave it 25, 26 officers. And then they decided they will have a Black officers' club. The reason why what they had done with the Black officers, the 12 they had, was they gave them an entire building. Used to call it BOQs. That Building Officers' Quarters. The officers stayed separate from the men. The men stayed in some barracks, and then they'd have BOQs for officers.

[0:23:32]

And of course, BOQs are a little bit better, have a little better services in them than the regular.

Moderator: Probably bathrooms.

Harold Lee: And you have separate rooms. Everybody in there has a room. Regular barracks, everybody sleeps in a room. It's one red, big room and you have a whole team of men in there, of 45, 50 men in one room. And they have a common shower and everything else. In BOQs, you has separate rooms, and you didn't have separate baths for each room, but you had several baths in the room so that all officers didn't have to go in the same bathroom together.

[0:24:05]

The 12 officers who were old officers around there, they had made a deal with the post commander that if they could have their friends spend time with them in the BOQ, lady friends, they wouldn't argue about the officers' club, which was a damn good deal, incidentally.

[0:24:34]

Moderator: That was a good one.

Harold Lee: Oh, yeah. They had a deal. When the rest of us came in there, we just about took up the BOQ. We just about [unintelligible] the BOQ. The BOQ was only maybe about 30 officers. And there was about 25, 26 of us. And so the post authorities decided that if all these officers had these gals ripping and running out of that damn place, it would be just a little bit too much of a nuisance.

[0:25:01]

So they revoked that privilege. And boy, these guys had been living before we got there. God damn. Didn't have to leave the post.

Moderator: Everything was there.

Harold Lee: Just wait for the gals to come. They had their liquor, their refrigerators. They'd have a party. Everybody would party. And everybody'd go off to their room. They were really...

Moderator: Having a good time.

[0:25:30]

These are officers. They're having a good time.

Harold Lee: Mm-hm. But they're all doing it in the BOQ, so most men don't know about it. And there was Blacks on the post too. First post I was on was with Blacks. Can't get a gal from out of town, pick up one of those Blacks. And officers were also forgiving.

[0:26:03]

They were held at a very high regard. Wasn't very many of us.

Moderator: I can imagine.

Harold Lee: We went to New York to go to Europe. We went to Small's Paradise. Small's Paradise at that time was the finest nightclub in Harlem.

Moderator: What's the name of it?

[0:26:30]

Harold Lee: Small's Paradise. Everybody my age knows about Small's Paradise. It was the finest nightclub in Harlem. And it was so nice until - they catered primarily to whites. That's where the whites came to see Harlem in action, nightclub life and all that stuff. And you couldn't get a ringside seat, a Black person in Small's Paradise, unless you were an offer to being shot. You understand, the ringside seats and the ringside seats is right there where the gal's right here and you're sitting right here.

[0:27:03]

Moderator: Right down front.

Harold Lee: Oh, yeah. Right down front. When that gal makes that summersault and twists herself, you're almost hit, man. We went to Small's Paradise, he said we were the first officers he'd ever seen, Black. And he gave us, on the house, ringside seats. That's how rare - in great, big New York City.

[0:27:31]

Moderator: And then the people probably were...

Harold Lee: Yeah. The people, everybody would give you a deference. You asked for some pussy. Hell yes.

Moderator: That's right. And you were an officer [unintelligible].

Harold Lee: Oh, yeah. And I was playing it to the hills, too. It was some fine in Harlem. It really was. It was fun. When I went to Knox, they decided to set up this officers' club.

[0:28:01]

I told the colonel that I wasn't going to participate in it. He said, "Tell you what I'm going to do, Holliday. I'm going to make you the officers' club officer." And I told him, "It's all right if you want to do that, but I won't function. I don't think I have to." And of course we got a group of us together.

[0:28:30]

I think all but about three agreed to boycott the officers' club. And they had to close it down because it was an absolutely failure. Nobody in it. It stood empty all the time.

Moderator: What was the impact of Blacks' boycott?

Harold Lee: Just closed the officers' club down. And we had some negotiations going about using the...

[0:29:00]

...regular officers' club going. That's what he said we were going to do. And before anything came of those negotiations, we were shipped out. Apparently, the colonel had taken offense at my part in stopping his officers' club for Black officers. So when I got overseas, I had a name of being a troublemaker, which I didn't know until I got my 201 file when I got discharged.

[0:29:33]

That's where I found out it all started.

Moderator: What goes around comes around.

Harold Lee: I went to the captain. I was telling him he wouldn't let these men out. And the men came to me, and so I went to the captain and asked him what the hell is the reason.

Moderator: How long had it been?

Harold Lee: I guess a month.

Moderator: Month in Europe?

[0:30:01]

Harold Lee: Yeah. Right there in England with all the pussy around. Pussy was everywhere in England.

Moderator: It was really hanging around.

Harold Lee: Oh, yeah. Everybody's husband was gone. The government drafted everybody for something. The war factory or something. Any woman. She ain't got no husband, you know. God damn.

[0:30:30]

Oh, that's a hell of a lot, especially white women, they're kind of used to it. [Unintelligible] give it to them wholesale.

Moderator: Yes, I know about this. Go ahead. So what did you do?

Harold Lee: I ended up cussing him out.

[0:31:01]

And I pushed him into a corner. I don't mean physically. My argument was you haven't got any reason except you're afraid these men are going to get some white pussy, and that ain't fair. And he kept coming up with other reasons and all that shit. Finally, he had to admit that was no excuse, so he decided he'd [unintelligible].

[0:31:26]

Moderator: Come home until your discharge time? You didn't come home until you were discharged?

Harold Lee: After I went overseas, no. I came home. I was overseas from November '43 to July '45.

[0:32:01]

August of '45. And during that time...

Moderator: Did it ever cross your mind to stay in France?

Harold Lee: Yeah. I thought about it. Not permanently, perhaps.

Moderator: Did you make any money while you were in the military?

Harold Lee: No. I had plenty of opportunity, but I was too honest, too damn [unintelligible].

[0:32:30]

Moderator: Is that what it is?

Harold Lee: I was on it. I took everything seriously, Horace. Always have. Take my oath and all that. I'm serious about it. [Unintelligible]. And I'm supposed to be officer, so I conducted myself as such. And we had trouble with - I was running to the men. We were in Belgium and we were living in this great big mansion.

[0:33:05]

And it was a Black gal, showed up. Mixed gal.

Moderator: She wasn't Black.

Harold Lee: Exactly Black but she was mixed with Black. My first sergeant decided to be her pimp.

Moderator: Oh, yeah?

Harold Lee: Damn right. He had all of my men lined up to fuck her every night there.

[0:33:29]

And I found out about it. I broke it up.

Moderator: Came on in and broke it up.

Harold Lee: I broke it up and threatened to break the first sergeant if I ever caught that again. Of course, all I had to do was cut myself in. And they were lined up, Horace. They were lining up every night.

Moderator: Making cash money.

Harold Lee: Then of course, gasoline was selling...

[0:34:04]

...for \$100 a five-gallon can. And all you had to do to get gasoline at a [unintelligible] is run past the [unintelligible]. If you run across a [unintelligible] where there's some gasoline, all you had to do was turn in a five-gallon can, and they would give you a filled one for every empty one you turned in.

[0:34:31]

Moderator: [Unintelligible].

Harold Lee: We followed, we were right behind the combat units. And they didn't do anything but throw stuff away. And we had truckloads of cans and cans.

Moderator: Y'all was taking - but you didn't need it.

Harold Lee: No. I would make them turn those cans in every night. But everyone I saw, I kept it under guard and turned it into the [unintelligible] with just a can.

[0:35:05]

Moderator: What did white men think about this? What did the white officers think about this? Because they were making money.

Harold Lee: I don't know. I doubt it [unintelligible]. I was the only Black officer in the outfit, in the company. We had a battalion of A, B, C, D, E, F. Six customs.

[0:35:35]

We mostly operated as a company. The battalion never did, very seldom, operated all six companies from one command. We always had a project here, a project - one company would have a project here, another company'd have a project over there. And we did roadwork, bridgework, that kind of stuff. Build hospitals. Things like that.

Moderator: [Unintelligible]?

Harold Lee: It was in the [unintelligible].

[0:36:02]

Moderator: Do you know of any Black officers that were in the service when you were there that's there now?

Harold Lee: I don't reckon.

Moderator: Career men, maybe.

Harold Lee: I had a friend, yeah, who was - he came by to see me many years ago, about five years after the war was over. And he was a major at that time.

Moderator: Did you know [Fineo]?

Harold Lee: No. I've known [Fineo] all my life, but I didn't know him in the service.

[0:36:30]

I've known Mr. [Bailey]. He and I went to kindergarten together. He was one year behind me or something like that.

Moderator: At Dunbar?

Harold Lee: Yeah.

Moderator: Neighborhood part.

Harold Lee: Mm-hm. Unique part.

Moderator: Brother?

Harold Lee: Brother.

Moderator: Did you come home on the boat?

Harold Lee: Yeah. I came home on the boat. Went over on the boat, got home on the boat. Flying home [unintelligible], they did under emergency circumstances. They'd fly you home [unintelligible]...

[0:37:00]

...you can't handle the big crowds.

Moderator: What was the impact of Pearl Harbor on you?

Harold Lee: I was anti-war prior to Pearl Harbor. I thought that was the one great mistake that Roosevelt had made. He was the great white father. He was the first president to say maybe Black people are people.

[0:37:34]

Maybe. Herbert Hoover was his predecessor. Never admitted a Black person to the front row of the White House.

Moderator: Is that right?

Harold Lee: That's right.

Moderator: What president can you live with up to that particular period? What president had you watched and felt some type of association with?

[0:38:03]

Harold Lee: Let me say, Roosevelt was the first president I voted for. And he was the president before I could vote. He became president in 1932. I wasn't old enough. I was a freshman in high school when he became president of the United States. This is when, from my...

[0:38:31]

...course in civics, which is a freshman course in high school, is where my political wariness began, was my civic course. And I have been an observer, a student of politics ever since. The Depression and that sort of thing didn't have any impact on me when it first started. It never did particularly, because my condition...

[0:39:02]

...like we were just about to say, we were poor to begin with. We were poor when it was over. And we were poor while it was going on. So the impact, we ate. During the Depression, we didn't eat as well as we did before, for some period of time. My ma worked, people would let her go.

[0:39:30]

She had a rash. And people were discontinuing laundry service because they didn't have money to do so. And she would be out of work for some days during the week. But in time, she would get another place. And generally, she managed to keep her work up to about five days a week, five - sometimes - at one time, she worked six one week and five another.

[0:40:02]

Every other week she had worked six days. And she kept that up pretty much during the Depression. People cut her. She was making three dollars a day. She tried to maintain that three dollars a day, because she thought her work was a superior quality. She started refusing at first to accept a cut. And people would get somebody else.

[0:40:28]

But they would sometimes call her back too with three dollars because they weren't satisfied with the other person. You're talking about maybe 50 cents a week. We had hard times. My last year in in college, my mother broke her leg and couldn't work for a period of time. And we had to apply for relief. We were on relief for maybe three or four months during my senior year in college.

[0:41:04]

Moderator: Pearl Harbor shocked you though, really?

Harold Lee: Pearl Harbor just changed my mind about the war. I figured that we were justified in defending ourselves and all, so making certain that at such an infamous act did not occur in the future. I felt as patriotic as the next person, I presume.

[0:41:33]

Moderator: What did you think of General MacArthur?

Harold Lee: I always think MacArthur was a racist Napoleonic, complex sort of a person who wanted to rule the world. And he thought he was the one that should do it.

Moderator: He was ruling the world for a minute.

Harold Lee: Right.

[0:42:00]

I was leftist in my thinking. When I was at Lincoln University, I was the most radical thing on the campus from a sociopolitical point of view. We didn't have any communists. I was the leftist thing on there, and I wasn't anywhere close to being a communist.

[0:42:30]

I thought socialism was a good idea as opposed to capitalism, is to have government ownership of basic means of production, and have production operate in the interest of the people, and profit received therefrom would go toward the benefit of people.

[0:42:59]

We gave some thought to the single tax theory of George. I was in an economic major. We had to study all these economic systems. And I was a poliscience minor, so I had to study all the forms of political organizations, including the minority, socialism, and of course, National Socialism, the Nazi system and fascism out of Italy...

[0:43:33]

...were in the picture at that time, which we had to study. And I made an evaluation of people. And we classified people as radical, starting from the left. We called them radicals, liberals, conservatives, or reactionary.

[0:44:01]

And Douglas MacArthur was always a reactionary, as far as I was concerned.

Moderator: Did you ever see him?

Harold Lee: Not in person. Never have.

Moderator: Did you know Ilus Davis at all at that time?

Harold Lee: Oh, no.

Moderator: Ilus Davis was on the staff at that time.

Harold Lee: No, I didn't. I never did get to the Pacific. He was in the Pacific the whole time. [Dick Bowling] was [unintelligible] personally. And MacArthur was top aid.

[0:44:30]

I'm sure he would be, whatever Bowling takes. He's very efficient at it. And I'm sure he's a very outstanding officer. Leads me to tell you another story. First time I met Dick Bowling was in 1946. And there was a reactionary preacher around the country called Gerald L.K. Smith, who taught strict segregation.

[0:45:02]

Blacks were descendants of Cain, and God had put the mark on them, and we shouldn't try to remote it. They said we would always be the lowest form of social order, and that's where the order stays. And Gerald L. K. set up a [unintelligible] on [Unintelligible] and had a revival preaching that poison.

[0:45:30]

And a group of us among whom were my friend [Erwin Optenberg], a lawyer here in town -- I don't know whether he's [unintelligible] or not -- decided that we were [unintelligible]. And also, my friend Lyman Field was in that group. He was a lawyer around town. And we went out to picketing one night.

[0:45:59]

And in the pickets, I noticed a light colonel with his uniform on. Lieutenant Colonel with his uniform on. And that was Dick Bowling. He was still in uniform. And he was out there with us picketing, Gerald L. K. Smith.

Moderator:

From what [unintelligible] is, he began US congressman purely by accident, almost.

[0:46:27]

Was he involved in the community at that particular time or what?

Harold Lee:

No. Not really. Dick, as I understand it, married Barbara, who lived here during the war. He ran across Barbara somewhere and they got married. Dick comes from a very distinguished family, incidentally. He's got congressmen and judges and all that stuff, avenues I guess and all that kind of family on both sides.

[0:47:05]

His mother was a Walker. He's a [Bowling]. And there are Walkers' and Bowling's' names that appear in various important positions in the history of this country and of various states. I think Virginia is the state where his family has most distinguished itself, but I'm not sure about that. Could be Alabama.

[0:47:29]

His roots are southern. And he was raised primarily in the south, he middle south. I understand that he came here because Barbara lived here. And she had two or three children at the time when he married her. And he came here and became the veterans' advisor at the University of Kansas City, as it was called.

[0:48:05]

Meantime, there was a veterans' organization started around here called the American Veterans Committee, AVC for short. And it attracted a number of fairly substantial liberal whites, and I joined.

[0:48:35]

That is where Bowling exercised some leadership, so far as I know. He became the president of the local chapter of AVC, and I was vice president. I was the only Black who was a member of it, incidentally. I had other Blacks to attend one or two meetings, but the meetings were very political.

[0:49:05]

We talked about political issues and things like that. We'd have dances and get drunk and have poker party and afterwards and all that shit. We'd talk about political questions and...

Moderator: Politics. Right?

Harold Lee: And after we were through with that, we went home or we'd go to somebody else's home to talk about it some more. Used to have it over at my house many times. We'd sit around and eat popcorn and drink beer on the floor.

[0:49:31]

Didn't have chairs. Didn't have enough chairs. We'd sit on the floor and eat popcorn, day drink a little bit and sit down until about two or three o'clock in the morning, probably. Anything in the world. Very interesting, too. One of the real educational periods of my life. Dick then became the regional organizer...

Moderator: So Dick was one of these people in...

Harold Lee: Yeah. Right.

[0:50:01]

He became the regional organizer for ADA, Americans for Democratic Action, and filed for congress. Various members of AVC from around the country were filing for congress. At that time, it appeared that AVC might supersede Legion as the principle political advocate of veterans in the country.

[0:50:35]

They got smeared with a communist brush and got discredited under the MacArthur era and disintegrated. Everybody got scared to join because MacArthur said we were - you don't remember MacArthur, but MacArthur said was a communist front organization. And so everybody with any substance disclaimed it. It still survived, but only very little [unintelligible].

[0:51:00]

They don't have any movement here at all. [Saunders], who was a member - Sunday, going to the football game. [Pat Saunders]. Haven't seen Pat in years and years. There was a fellow in town named Binaggio.

[0:51:31]

In the Pendergast era, that is the TG Pendergast era...

Moderator: That's the first Pendergast. That's the old man.

Harold Lee: Yeah. The North End Organization was a very important segment of the Pendergast movement.

[0:52:03]

And a fellow named Johnny Lazia was, for many years, the big North End boss, until he got bumped off. Then the North End element was more or less dormant and just followed the Pendergast leadership with no big stick.

[0:52:32]

Binaggio came here apparently with authority to assert domination of the democratic party of North End group. And he came in here with a very big stick. Literally. Binaggio decided that the year...

[0:53:02]

...'48 was the year to put the Pendergast faction out of business. Pendergast faction was still going, but its influence was substantially diminished. But still, the largest, controlled the largest block of votes in the county. Although, not a majority.

[0:53:29]

But still the largest block. And the largest block tends to cause others to gravitate to it. So the Pendergast was still more or less in control, although it was not the single man control. He had to bargain now. He had to deal with other people in order to get his slate in. He had to give positions on the ticket to other groups of people in order to have a coalition that could win.

[0:54:03]

And he was a good - Binaggio in 1948 decided that he would confront the Pendergast power and take over the leadership.

Moderator: Was this a part of the Citizens Association at that point?

Harold Lee: No.

Moderator: No good. This is the North End faction, period.

Harold Lee: They were playing democratic politics. These issues are decided in the democratic primary. Still are.

[0:54:34]

Two years before, the Pendergast crowd had made an effort at the request of Harry Truman, who was then president, to defeat the congressman from the fifth district, whose name was Slaughter. Slaughter was a Dixiecrat democrat...

[0:55:05]

...who was creating a substantial amount of problems for Truman, Truman being a Missourian and without any reputation as a liberal on the race question, although Truman had voted right as a senator on questions affecting Blacks.

[0:55:35]

And about the only question that used to come up at that time was the anti-lynching question. We tried for many years to make lynching a federal offense. They used to lynch thousands of Negroes a year around this country. And the first great effort of the NAACP to influence...

[0:56:05]

...legislation was to enact an anti-lynching law, which was the rallying call of Blacks all across the country. Although the law was never enacted, the propaganda and the agitation for it reduced lynching tremendously.

[0:56:27]

And of course, it's an unknown incident at the present time. It has been for some years. However, the last lynching occurred in the state of Missouri at 1943. By 1942, the last lynching occurred in the state of Missouri. Missouri was a lynching state. They lynched niggers. When we did something wrong, they just took you and tied you to the damn post and set it on fire and let you burn with it.

[0:57:02]

We never had a lynching in Kansas City in my memory. We had them in St. Joe, right up the street. Had it in Columbia, the site of the university. Had one in Maryville and had one in Sikeston. That's where the last one was. That's in southeast Missouri.

Moderator: Tell me about Eisenhower.

[0:57:35]

Harold Lee: Ike did nothing as an ETO commander to stop the racism displayed by white troops and officers in England. And the Blacks always got the worst end of it.

[0:58:03]

Always got the worst end of it. And I almost got - lost my commission over it.

Moderator: What about as president?

Harold Lee: Ike wasn't worth a damn one way or another, except on the soldiers. He knew how to fight a war and he had full commanders around him.

Moderator: What about Adlai Stevenson?

Harold Lee: And plenty of stuff...

[0:58:30]

Adlai never got to function as such, so we don't know what he would be. But he sounded like a very fine man. My opinion was that he would probably make the greatest president we ever had.

Moderator: What about Kennedy?

Harold Lee: Kennedy was a good man. Didn't get to serve long enough to really make a real good assessment. He left a tremendous reputation behind him.

[0:59:03]

As such, has become the rallying assemble - the name has become a rallying assemble for progressive action on the conduct, on the arena of what was done. Lyndon did more to move Blacks ahead than any president we've ever had, although he was a liar and a cheat and a thief.

[0:59:31]

Moderator: Did you appreciate LBJ?

Harold Lee: Absolutely. I would have voted for LBJ regardless. And I would have gone to the convention at my own expense. That's the only time I felt deeply about something. LBJ did so much for Black people, if we turned against him and then niggers sitting up here as they did during that year and say they weren't going to vote at all or curse both the houses...

[1:00:01]

...boy, that was just out of sight. LBJ did it all. He brought the Civil Rights Act, man. He brought the Voting Rights Act. He brought EEOC. He did it. Oh hell, these are issues - A. Phillip Randolph started EEOC back in 1940. 1964, when we got it. Roosevelt was president when we started talking about it.

[1:00:31]

But it took LBJ to put it out.

Moderator: What'd you think about [Unintelligible] then?

Harold Lee: He was [unintelligible].