

Mississippi Oral History Program

Simpson County Historical and Genealogical
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

George Lewis French

Interviewer: Joe White

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Louis Kyriakoudes, Director
The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage
118 College Drive #5175
The University of Southern Mississippi
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
601-266-4574

An Oral History with George Lewis French, Volume 1217, Part 6

Interviewer: Joe White

Transcriber: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey

Editor: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey

Biography

George Lewis French was born in June 1919 to Edgar Franklin French and Lila Mae Schull French in Maryville, LA. French was one of five children. French's family moved to Mississippi when he was twelve years old. Shortly after, he started his first job at an icehouse operated by his father. French graduated from Mendenhall High School in 1937. After high school, French attended Clarks Commercial College in Jackson, MS. He returned to work at his father's ice plant. In 1938 French was given the responsibility of running the Star Theatre – the movie theatre owned and operated by French's father. French made frequent trips to New Orleans, LA to learn how to book films for the theater, which showed its first feature on November 9, 1938.

George Lewis French married Mary Eleanor Teunisson and had three sons together, the oldest being born before French joined the US Army. He was first stationed in Camp Shelby, MS, and shortly thereafter was transferred to Fort Bragg, NC. At Fort Bragg French was trained to be a battery clerk. After basic training, French was assigned to the Twenty-Eight Infantry Division, the Pennsylvania National Guard Division, and was stationed in Louisiana. French completed amphibious training in Carabelle, FL before being transferred to Camp Pickett, Va. French first saw combat while stationed in Sicily during World War II. He eventually got to mainland Italy, France, and Germany, where he took photographs of Dachau the day after liberation. French's service in the war lasted from June 1943 to August 1945. He returned to the States in September of that year. French resumed his position as head of the Star Theatre, eventually selling it in the 1970s.

French's wife Mary Eleanor died in April 1997. In December 1999 he began his second marriage to Marjorie Elizabeth Wakeman.

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AN ORAL HISTORY
with
GEORGE LEWIS FRENCH

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi Simpson County Project. The interview is with George Lewis French and is taking place on May 3, 2003. The interviewer is Joe White.

White: And when were you born, and where were you born?

French: June the first, 1919, in Maryville, Louisiana.

White: Maryville, Louisiana. What were your parents' names?

French: My father's name was Edgar Franklin French.

White: I think I've heard that name Edgar before, haven't I?

French: Well, yeah, he signed E.F. French. My mother's name was Lila Mae Schull French. That's S-C-H-U-L-L.

White: And they were both from Louisiana originally?

French: No. My father was born up around the, well, past Braxton, there, out from Florence in the community Hoover Lake.

White: Where is that? West of Florence?

French: That would be west of Florence, yes. There is a road leading from Florence, just one left in there. Go around one corner, a one-way, which goes by the side of the (inaudible) Cemetery, which is where a lot of the Frenches are buried. There's another road that goes around on the other side. In other words the cemetery's road adjoins between the two roads. Well, you go on out, and you head out; you're over at Pearl River, and you cross over to Byron.

White: It's what they call the Twin Lakes are now; I think is what they call that.

French: That might be. I don't know about that.

White: It's where there's a lake on each side of the road, the road going from Florence back toward Byron, same area I'm talking about. But he got away from Mississippi and moved down to Louisiana before (inaudible).

French: Well, when he got old enough, he went from there into Jackson, Mississippi. Young men, they want to get out and do something, get away from home, and so (inaudible) stayed in Jackson and worked at a woodworking place there, which is right on the Pearl River. I think the place is still there. And from there he wound up going into Texas, for work. And there, well, Texas is where he met my mother, and they married there, in Volth, Texas. From there he went—it's just a—might say, from Beaumont, Texas. That's where the Schull family, that is the girls, had three aunts there, or my mother and two aunts there and a uncle there. And looking at the map, I can see how he crossed from Beaumont, Texas, into Maryville, Louisiana. I didn't realize it was that close in there, but checking the route, he went there.

White: That's in western Louisiana.

French: It would be western Louisiana, close to DeRidder, Louisiana. There is where he was a steam engineer for a sawmill there, and it (inaudible) one big Corless Steam Engine. Back then, this whole thing was powered by this one steam engine a rope belt, (inaudible) pulley (inaudible).

White: Rope belt?

French: Rope belt. That powered the whole sawmill, and my dad, like I say, he was the engineer and starting and stopping.

White: How—excuse me. Go ahead. I didn't mean to—

French: Well, I mean, he studied. He took correspondence course, and through of course the help of my mother, also, he learned a lot of the figure work on the thing. Now, I have information here to give you more dimensions of that, the way the engine, the flywheel on the thing that powered the whole sawmill, the rope belts, how many it was. Put it like this: the power wheel on that thing, the rope belts was attached to, if you'd figure it out on the ground, do the rpm [revolutions per minute] on the ground, that would be rolling at the speed they run it. It'd be rolling sixty miles an hour.

White: Is that right?

French: That was an enormous, big—now, as a child, I never did see it. I have a picture to show it, though. He ran that thing; he was the operator of it until—old sawmill just like the one in D'Lo, Finkbine, shut down because they cut all the timber.

White: And you were born while they were in Louisiana.

French: Yeah. All of those children was born in Maryville, Louisiana.

White: I knew you had one brother. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

French: Edgar Drew(?) is the oldest, myself, and I had twin sisters, Dorothy and Gracie, and then the younger brother Carol(?), and Carol was born in Logansport, Louisiana. From Maryville, Louisiana, my dad went to Logansport, Louisiana, which is on the Sabine River, on the edge of the big reservoir there. And that's where he operated a ice plant. He and a Mr. Clark went in together there. My dad was the machinist, you might say. He kept the machinery work going. Mr. Clark was the paper maker. So I remember that old diesel, single-piston, diesel engine, upright. I remember how you cranked that thing. You can't realize cranking something like that back then or now, but you crank that thing by one of the ports. You had to put in a stick, a punk stick, wind it up.

White: Punk?

French: Punk, P-U-N-K, I believe it is, punk stick. What's wrong?

Unknown Voice: Sit still. (brief interruption)

French: Engine, diesel fuel, and you put the punk stick in there, and then you'd have to pull it over by hand because you've got to have—you know, used to be, the first diesel engines around here that you heard about, they had to turn the igniter on, which you had element in the thing, but they would start that one by pulling it over.

White: Just start to fire (inaudible).

French: In other words, the heat in there started it to firing. (Inaudible).

White: Did they start it running with diesel fuel, or did they start it with kerosene?

French: Oh, well, I don't know about that now. They might have used a mixture. I don't know.

White: I bet they used some of (inaudible).

French: I remember him putting that punk stick up in there, which fired the thing off, and then—

White: But that was the first icehouse experience.

French: Yes, the first icehouse experience. They operated that until a utility company took it over, bought the plant out. A utility company out of Texas, I believe, bought that ice plant out. So in the meantime, and after that, my dad was checking. He'd been to Missouri, checking different places, and they found out about this ice plant in Mendenhall. (Inaudible)

White: There was already one here?

French: Already one here, so he just bought it out and operated it. It was, first it was powered by electricity.

White: About what year did they move back here? Do you (inaudible)?

French: That was 1931; 1931 was when he started the ice plant here in Mendenhall. And just like television and theaters, by golly, it was here until Uncle Sam, they started—REA [Rural Electrification Administration] came in, put electricity in all the homes, so then the manufacture of ice, sales fell. Well, then it was the old icebox. You never have had a icebox, have you?

White: I sure did. We had one in our house in Pinola.

French: OK.

White: Sure did.

French: All right. Well, Pinola is one place that they had built a icehouse there.

White: But were all you children—

French: Not another icehouse, a storage house.

White: Right. Were all you children born by the time they moved to Mendenhall?

French: Yes, yes.

White: And where did you live then?

French: Do you know where Dr. Davis' house was or is, out on (inaudible) Carolyn Davis, Gary?

White: Yes, yes.

French: OK. Well, that's the house, the first house we lived in, which you might say is on Jackson Avenue. That's the first house we lived in until we were able to get this house next to the ice plant.

White: I remember that house, a green house, I believe it was.

French: Doss Hilton(?) lived on the other side.

White: Yeah.

French: So (inaudible) period of time. That's where, like I say, I was raised with a pair of ice tongs in my hand. (laughter) Because I mean, I was there. I knew what a twelve-hour day was from six to six.

White: How old were you when you started working?

French: Well, I was twelve years old when we moved to Mississippi, so I imagine in a year or so, I got big enough to piddle around. I was put to work. (Inaudible)

White: What was a day at the icehouse like then?

French: Well, one of the days, well, actually we'd be like pulling ice. We had a handmade hoist, big band around it, that we had to just wind up on that thing to pull ice. You started where you'd pull ice, a block of ice in a can. It was all in cans. We made a three-hundred-pound block of ice. And so when it was frozen up, you could tell it was frozen up. You'd have a schedule. You see, you pull four blocks an hour. Every fifteen minutes we'd pull up a hoist, put a block of ice, move it down to where we had a thawing-out tank there, a platform there, and it would set the can down, take the empty can, go around to the filter thing. It had a automatic filter that you could just—in fact the water came from a deep well.

French: On the property there.

White: On the property, filtered water, yeah. They had water that was filtered. You'd fill a can with water. You had your level that you cut it off on, hook into with your hoist, and take it down to the roll that you've taken one out, and then you put this can of water in there. You let it down into the hold. You had to latch it down because you had water pushing against the thing. You had to latch it down. You had to hook up a, what you called a air needle. Now, the needle, in that, you had a compressor to pump air into the can. It was a tube, long tube. In other words, like we called a sewing needle. You had a sewing needle that went down there where that was frozen, but then you let the can down, put your air into the thing, and you hook it up. Now, that had so much time to freeze. You would, it would freeze it up to, what you had, a core. We'd pull that core, and when it got just so small in there, we had a suction tube that sucked all the water out of that. That's what we called pulling the core.

White: That got rid of the impurities?

French: Right, because it was into the—in other words, you freeze a block of ice, [and] you just get a very little, thin streak in the middle of it. So you fill it back with water, and let her go until it's frozen up, but you have a schedule. You would alternate rows, and then go back and start over again. So my job for a long time was—of course you get the other can in place. Then you take, you have, say, like three cans out on the deck there, that, well, it was on the inside. You take one can to the dump, and you pour, run water over that can, and then you lay it down, and the ice will slide out. It goes about, oh, twenty or twenty-five feet. Turn it around; into the

storage room it went, and then you got around to the storage room; you pull it up into the (inaudible). You go, and you pull it into the main storage room, and then you had to head it up. It was a three-hundred-pound block of ice.

White: Did you guys cut the size of the blocks down any, or did y'all send it in three-hundred-pound blocks?

French: Yes, we did. Now, the first express of cutting up a block of ice was done with a crosscut saw, and we, of course, knew how to measure it off into hundred-pound blocks, is what it was. And if you ever pull a crosscut saw with my dad on the other end, you just hung on. (laughter) (Inaudible)

White: He did the pulling.

French: Oh, man. You couldn't stay up with that man. You just couldn't do it. But that was the first (inaudible). Now, you take—you had a ice picker, back in the ice pick days. Every man had a (inaudible), an ice pick in it, that, you know, worked there. And then you'd take the hundred-pound piece, and you'd cut it and lay it down, and you'd cut it in the middle and just peck it out until it just broke in two.

White: Well, did you guys deliver the ice, or did people come pick it up?

French: Both ways, both ways. Now, later on he bought what you call a scoring machine. You block out of the storage to that machine, and it had blades that would cut the score for the hundred-pound block. And then you lay it down and score the other way, and then it was a fifty-pound block. And you pulled it out, and then you take your ice pick and tit, tit, tit, tit, tit.

White: You hit the ice pick where it was scored. The ice would break there then.

French: Yeah. You went to the scored place. Well, you had to do it before then; you just picked it period. You just, say, you want it down one side, and you pick it, and go around the other side and pick it, and a lick would just, it'd separate. (Inaudible) after it was scored, well, it never failed.

White: You remember some of the prices of ice back during the early years? Was it expensive?

French: No. It wasn't expensive. My dad got caught before they set the price of things. You know, during the war, why, they set the price on—before the war, they set the prices on (inaudible). Modern times—

White: That began before the—

French: A hundred-pound block, I think, was—let me get this straight, now—fifty cents down to fifty-pound block, you come down to twenty-five cents. And you come

down to five cents for a twelve-and-one-half-pound hunk of ice. That's what it was. After the prices were frozen, he couldn't go up. He was stuck with it. He didn't apply when he should have, so that was the price. It was sold. He'd take these Model-A pickups and put a bed on them, and they would hold, maybe, six blocks or something or another like that, and then he had men that peddled that to Pinola, Braxton, D'Lo. Of course now, there was a ice plant in D'Lo at that time. In fact they had a ice war. The place in—

White: An ice war. (laughter)

French: —D'Lo was going to force my dad out of business, but he didn't. He stayed with it, and he stayed in business till they shut down.

White: You don't remember who ran the ice plant in D'Lo then, do you?

French: No. I sure don't. All I know: there was a ice war on, and we had to hump it around there, too, (laughter) because I mean, they kept the prices down until you just quit (inaudible).

White: But the delivery people in the A-Model pickups, they probably had a regular route that they covered?

French: Yes. Well, no. We had three big Sullivan men. That's what I had to work with were three big men. I had to stay up with them, now, with their work, and I was just a little, old, scrawny young one then.

White: Well, you worked at the icehouse all through school here?

French: Yeah, all through school.

White: You went to Mendenhall School, and you had gone early—

French: I graduated from Mendenhall High School.

White: You had gone earlier in Louisiana, I would imagine.

French: Oh, yes. I went through—well, it was in eighth grade, I believe, when we came to Mississippi, and that was in the—we went to the first school, and it was in the old schoolhouse. Do you remember it? Do you have pictures of it?

White: Yes.

French: You do?

White: The old, white, wooden school building.

French: The old saying that everybody, “I want to go to the basement.” All the restrooms (laughter) were downstairs in the basement. “I want to go to the basement.” Well, that was it. (laughter)

White: That was a saying in school then.

French: That was it.

White: Who were some of your classmates? What year did you graduate, and who were some of your classmates then?

French: Well, it was 1937 when I graduated from school, and there was Lei West(?), Luther Welch(?). His daddy and mama had the old jail there at one time, where they kept the inmates there. That’s bothering you? (laughter)

White: That chair does squeak a little bit, but I don’t think it’ll bother that tape at all. Don’t worry about it. I don’t—

French: Dixie Knight(?). Do you remember Dr. Knight? Know him?

White: Yes, yes, uh-huh.

French: Dixie was one of the girls. She was my age. Jamie Lee Nash(?). There were some Scarbroughs(?) in there. People (inaudible) Martinville(?) came in there and went to the school there. Like I say, Jamie Lee Nash was one of them, Dixie Knight. She married Inez—(inaudible) last name. She married Ernest Silver(?). I was telling you about the three men that was there. I know I’m getting into that, but are you—

White: Well, I thought you said, “Southern.” You said, “Sullivan.”

French: Sullivan.

White: Three big Sullivan men. OK. Tell me who they were then.

French: Yeah, three big Sullivan. That’s Huey, Dewey, and Ernest.

White: Huey, Dewey, and Ernest?

French: Yeah. (laughter) That’s the ones, and they had routes. They had routes, and they would—

White: And they’d bring the A-Models, load the A-Models up.

French: Yeah. Load the A-Models, and they'd make the routes. Of course they had a lot of people in Mendenhall, would come and pick up ice, or out of town. Fourth of July was the day.

White: Well, I'll tell you what I remember, that I think. I believe the ice house did not just handle ice. Didn't you also handle a few other seasonal things like watermelons?

French: Well, yes. I was leading up to Fourth of July, now. That's what I say.

White: That's (laughter) what I thought. That's what reminded me.

French: Oh, yeah. We would pull ice. We'd pull every block of ice we could get in there, with ice on top of ice in there because if you've got a block of ice, 300 pounds, and then a hundred pounds on top of it.

White: In the storage rooms.

French: Yeah. That's what we had to build up for the Fourth of July. And the people would come in, at that time, a lot of them, to pick up the ice, weekend, (inaudible) town, shopping. They could come buy (inaudible). And the bumpers, you know, were just a band going around on the rear of the thing. And I have loaded a many fifty pounds of ice on the bumper of automobiles, just have it out on the platform; jump off the platform, down on the ground, (inaudible) fifty pounds on the bumper, and they were gone.

White: Set it up on top of the bumper, tie it on.

French: No! They'd just—

White: Just set it on.

French: (Inaudible) itself and just set it on flatways, you might say, a fifty-pound block on there or twenty-five (inaudible).

White: Yeah, that's right. In those days the bumpers stuck out from the cars.

French: Yeah. You just had a, like some of them a double band. They stuck out. He just laid it down on that, and they were gone.

White: Probably didn't drive too fast on the way home, either, though. What all did they do with the ice for the Fourth of July? Make homemade ice cream?

French: Make ice cream, tea, and drinking water.

White: That was the big specialty.

French: And the refrigerator, as far as that goes, yeah. And then watermelons. Oh, man, that's when they kept us humping around there.

White: Well, you guys stored them and sold cold watermelons, if I remember.

French: Watermelons went into the anteroom, the first room in there, which wasn't below freezing.

White: I remember eating those. There was nothing like them ice cold, literally an ice cold watermelon.

French: (Inaudible)

White: Back in the [19]50s here when I was growing—

French: Many a watermelon there.

White: How long was the ice plant in business? I know I'm jumping ahead. It closed when, you said earlier, electricity came in, and everybody went to refrigerators, but it hung on longer than most ice plants.

French: Well, it did that. Of course now, we had at that time the Columbia (inaudible) had the railroad train, Illinois Central. Then we had the—

White: Right behind the ice plant.

French: Well, just not behind it, no. Just towards your main street down there, toward the depot (inaudible). And a many a morning I had to load up a bunch of—they had three section crews that worked out of Mendenhall on the—lots of trains out of the way. Every morning I'd wake up, by golly, with two and three steam engines out there just back of my bedroom, there on the tracks, huffing and a-puffing and getting ready to go.

White: Well, that's what I was talking about when I said behind the ice plant. I meant the railroad (inaudible) behind the ice house.

French: Oh, yeah. Well, that's right.

White: (Inaudible) But you'd send ice out with all those railroad crews?

French: Yeah. Every crew had to have their ice. You know what a croker sack is?

White: Well, I know what it is, but I don't know why it's called a croker sack.

French: I couldn't tell you that, (laughter) but that ice, every croker sack we could get a hand on, that's what the ice, the bag that it went into. We took it down to the depot. A many a morning I took ice down there, each section crew, whatever they asked for. That's what went down there.

White: Well, the passenger trains were still coming through here.

French: Oh, yeah. Yes, sirree.

White: Did any of them ever buy ice or need ice?

French: No. I don't remember. I imagine they got their ice at another point.

White: Probably picked it up in Jackson or something like that.

French: They used to have their water tower right there, for the steam engines.

White: Well, we got you graduated from high school. What did you do next?

French: Well, my dad, he wanted me to go to a commercial college. So from there I went to Jackson, Mississippi, Clarks Commercial, and I thought he wanted me as a bookkeeper and setting everything up. And I got back to the, got graduated and got back, he didn't care about that. (laughter) He just wanted work (inaudible).

White: You went back to the same kind of work then, huh?

French: Same kind of work. It wasn't any bookkeeping (inaudible).

White: What sort of courses did you take at Clarks Commercial College?

French: Yeah, Clarks Commercial. It was what they called the (inaudible) system, typing, some shorthand. I never did take shorthand. (Inaudible) what it'd take to keep books with. That's the main thing, was keeping books, double-entry set of books.

White: But you came right back and went to work at the ice house again.

French: Came back and went right—I had my pencil all sharp, and (inaudible). (laughter) I still pulled ice.

White: A pencil wouldn't chip ice like the ice pick, though, would it? (laughter)

French: Well, my dad changed the plant system, and it might be getting away from that, but it is part of the ice plant. The central core was all electric. (Inaudible) one time, he was working the engine room and so forth, keeping up with that, and some way or another (inaudible) the electricity, the motors, big electric motor, everything

was driven by electric motors and flat belts. Now, back then it was flat belts; that's what it was. They didn't have (inaudible) belts at all. I mean—

White: Same type belts they used on cotton gins, about yea wide.

French: Yeah, flat belt is what it was, and Mr. Grubbs almost met his fate there, but some way or another, the current, that stuff grabbed him and was about to pull him into the drive belt, and of course the motor was here, and the compressor was over here, a (inaudible) compressor, upright compressor, and he managed to knock himself, hit that belt in a way that knocked him off. He got out of there. My dad said, "Well, (inaudible) paying for that power," he just, he'd get him a hundred-horsepower Caterpillar Engine run off of natural gas, and he built his own supply, power supply. Going to turn it? (end of track one, beginning of track two)

White: Tell us about the time Mr. French—we've got you graduated from high school, and you've gone to school, the commercial college, and you're back, working at the ice plant again.

French: All right. We're going to take one step farther. Now, you saw the picture of the theater building. My dad, Ben Slay(?) and Lonnie Burnham(?) built that building, and it was built for the purpose of a theater building.

White: On Main Street.

French: And the theater had opened up there on Main Street, and a man from Prentiss was coming up here and operating the theater then.

White: About what year was that?

French: OK. Well, (inaudible) [19]38. All right. Now, what happened, this is when I changed jobs. The man they had in there, he got run out of town. They just sent him packing, and Dad came to me, and he knowed how to do that, with that long finger, (laughter) said, "You're taking over that picture show." Man, I didn't know the first thing about a picture show. I didn't know how to run a projector or do anything. "You're going to take over that picture show." And (laughter) that's where I got into the picture show, because like I say, he just (inaudible) in the building there. And so I did. I learned how to go in there and strike the lamp on the thing and put on the show; learned how to buy pictures. Had to go to New Orleans, Louisiana. Of course we had film salesmen to come around, say, once a month. And I tried to book at lease two month's picture shows. I made a many a trip to New Orleans to book, buy and book pictures.

White: Did you have any trouble getting pictures, certain kinds of pictures that you wanted?

French: Well, yes and no. Of course you have to deal with a salesman to start off with. Some of them could be hard to deal with. Now, to bring you up to date: November the ninth, 1938, was the first movie that we had there. I've got my date book. That's the only one I kept. That's the way we booked them in here. You and me going to—there was always playing then was (inaudible). Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, bargain night, eleven cents a ticket, then Thursday, Friday, and then Saturday.

White: Eleven cents a ticket on bargain night.

French: Eleven cents on, that was bargain night.

White: What was the regular—

French: That was (inaudible) anybody. Of course I was upstairs in all that.

White: How much was a regular ticket?

French: Oh, we sold tickets for ten and twenty-five cents. I mean, that's what it was. Popcorn, a box of popcorn was ten cents. (laughter)

White: Go ahead. I didn't mean to interrupt you.

French: Well, I mean, that's the way it was. From there, of course, we went into double features. Everything, you know, changed. I had to have a western for Saturdays. That was a must, a western on a Saturday. That's where Roy Rogers and Gene Autry and all the rest of them come into play. That's what it was, first one, *Born to the West*, and the price of the pictures, well, most of them, a lot of them were a flat rate picture, but then they had percentage pictures. That's where you had your trouble. They jacked the—(inaudible) jacked the price. You had to pay a guarantee of so much. You might have to pay them twenty-five dollars, guarantee a thirty-dollar guarantee or fifty-dollar guarantee against the percentage.

White: That was on real popular pictures.

French: Oh, yes, the top of the line, there. But that's the way I started out. So that's the way I got my feet wet, then.

White: How many employees did you have in the theater?

French: Oh, they had the, well, the projectionist, the one who sold the tickets, the janitor, ticket catchers. You had one ticket catcher for upstairs and one for downstairs. Of course your concession-stand person. Just what (inaudible) took. Of course then, it was just popcorn, that old Manley Popcorn Machine.

White: Manley?

French: Manley was the name of it. There was Manley, and then after I sold—I sold out one time. Then I bought a used Star the next time, and that’s what—well, there was popcorn, and then we went to—bought out—of course they had (inaudible). Uncle Sam got in the way, then, about that time.

White: Uncle Sam called you, huh?

French: Selective Service. They drew my name one time; they sent me home because I had flat feet. That didn’t last long. Dr. Blake(?) in Jackson—(inaudible)? Just move out of the way then.

Unknown Voice: There’s a bug.

French: Put it on the other side.

Unknown Voice: There’s a little bug flying in here.

French: Dr. Blake in Jackson, “Oh, no, nothing wrong with him. He just went wearing the wrong size shoes.” Next thing I knew I was in Camp Shelby, Mississippi. Next thing I knew I was in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, taking basic training, which is artillery. That’s where I learned. They put me as a battery clerk. That’s what I was trained to be was a battery clerk, and then—

White: Let me stop you, but what did you do with the theater while you were gone in the service? Did you turn it over to somebody?

French: There was a manager there. And then of course in the meantime, before I left, I got married. And before I left—

White: We probably need to mention marriage here, then, before you left.

French: Well, yeah.

White: Your first wife’s name was?

French: Mary Eleanor Teunisson.

White: And where and when was she born?

French: She was born, I believe it was in October of [19]19. I was just a few months older than her. She was born in Monticello, Mississippi. Now, when I married her, she was living in Pinola, Mississippi. Her mother was a schoolteacher there. Her dad did abstracts and stuff like that, land, what he was—

White: And what was their name?

French: Teunisson, T-E—it was John Henry Teunisson.

White: And her mother's name?

French: Was Ella Reed(?) Teunisson. Ella Reed was what it was.

White: OK. And they lived in Simpson County at that time (inaudible).

French: Yeah. They lived in Pinola. That's where Maynell was living when I just started courting.

White: Maynell?

French: Maynell, Maynell was a nickname. Her name was Mary Eleanor. Not many people know her as Mary Eleanor. Maynell, M-A-Y-N-E-L-L. Even her brother, older brother couldn't tell me how they came by that name. (laughter) But then—

White: Just a nickname.

French: I had the car that a friend had—well, had CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] Camp then. Had a friend that he had a friend in Pinola, lady friend down there. And so it happened I just (inaudible) a date. So for him to get there, (laughter) he wanted to be in the car that I had. (laughter) So that's where I started off courting Maynell.

White: And y'all married when?

French: Married in, (laughter) oh, about—

Unknown Voice: It's right here.

French: Well, yeah, it's all in this right here, but I've got it over there. I've got the marriage license over here.

White: OK. I think I have it written down right here, if I can find it. How's this ring a bell? OK. And did you have any children before you went off to service?

French: One son.

White: And his name?

French: John Edgar French.

White: And he had a nickname, too, because I went to school with him.

French: Jef.

White: Jef.

French: The reason he was called Jef, before he was born, we named him Jef, and Jef, that's with J-E-F. That's it. It's J-E-F. He's been Jef. He's still Jef. (laughter)

White: Now, you had at least one other son later. I want to go ahead and mention him now while we're talking about (inaudible), and—

French: Two sons born after I got home.

White: That's the reason I said at least one. You had two.

French: Right.

White: And can you tell me your children's name? You've told me Jef here.

French: Well, there's John Edgar, Jef, George Franklin, middle son.

White: I remember George.

French: And Lewis Richard.

White: And Lewis Richard. And when were they born? Do you remember the dates on them?

French: I've got it all right—

White: Oh, I'm sorry. I see it right here in front of me. George was born April the nineteenth, 1948, and Lewis Richard was born September the eighth, 1953. And that (inaudible) in order here. I just wanted to mention that for the record.

French: I see she's got my paper that I'm looking for. (laughter)

White: Now, you're going off to service. I just wanted to get the family listed there before you talk about your service days.

French: Well, I was in the—I was assigned, after basic training, I was assigned to the Twenty-Eighth Infantry Division. That's the Pennsylvania National Guard Division, Keystone Division, and was down in Florida, where we were just building up a new camp, Camp (inaudible). Well, no. It was in Louisiana. That's where the Twenty-eighth Infantry was. We was on out in a muddy field, there, edge of (inaudible) Field, building up until the barracks and everything was ready, and the camp there. Somewhere along—you've got the date on the thing—we decided to get married, which was in Natchez, Mississippi, at the Methodist Church there. Got married. We

were shipped to Carabelle, Florida. We was taking amphibious training in Florida. They were teaching us how to load on ships with full gear and get off of ships, you know, walk off the ships with your full-field gear. I got a telephone call from my mama, Jef. Jef was here then.

White: Jef was born.

French: Yeah, Jef was born. I got leave to come home. I got to see him one time, briefly. Back into place, and then I wound up with the Forty-fifth Infantry Division this way. Now, of course we was in, all the clerks was in battalion headquarters. That's able, baker, charlie, and service battery and headquarters battery. And I had headquarters battery, is what I was—I had a hundred and twenty-some-odd men, to keep their records. If they went AWOL [absent without leave] or what, that was my job, to keep the records day-to-day. Down in Florida—I think it was in Florida—they called for what you call cadre for overseas service, and they needed us building up, which was building up the Forty-fifth Division, and they needed clerks. So out of all of us clerks, we had to draw cards. And Nolan(?) was the other one. He was from the big battery was what he was in, and I was in headquarters battery. We drew the low cards. You know what that meant, don't you?

White: I imagine you went overseas.

French: Next thing we—yeah. Next thing we was headed for Camp Pickett, Virginia, and we was overseas.

White: Where'd you serve overseas?

French: From Sicily, first combat was in Sicily. Well, first, after over a month, I believe, getting over there—of course it's all in there—stopped at Oran, Africa for just a trial run to get our sea legs, and at that time, if you'll pardon me for saying this, everybody had the trots, (laughter) so they had to get organized (inaudible).

White: Get back to normal, huh?

French: Get back to normal and get ready. So the next thing, we headed out for Sicily. That's where I first—that shows (inaudible).

White: Where you first saw action.

French: Yeah, first saw. That was a walk-in, that time. That walk-in, that means you went with your full field pack, went off to your landing craft. There's the beachhead. You dropped the ramp. You walked in. Now, I was a battery clerk, trained for a battery clerk. That way, when we got there, hit the beachhead, I didn't have a job except (inaudible) pack. But we had a man, the battery clerk, no, not the battery clerk, the telephone operator, Long John Powell(?) was his name. He didn't make it. He got

sick before they shipped out. So next thing I knew, I had to learn to—I was the radio telephone operator. I had to learn the phonetic alphabet.

White: All of a sudden, you became an operator.

French: I was an operator. I had (inaudible), had to walk in the pack radio and then the other one, travel around with Captain Nick and Jeff Sanders, and if we were on the move, well, (inaudible) traveler, and your captain, and myself on the radio. We hit land, well, then I had a portable radio then. And that was my job. If we still needed like—and of course a lot had transpired before then. This other fellow with me from B Battery, he wound up as a—what do you call it now? Not liaison. Forward observer, forward observer. His job was actually with the infantry up ahead. The artillery outfit supported an infantry (inaudible). We supported the 157th. You got your infantry up here and artillery back here. When they called for fire, this forward observer, he was with infantry. They called; if they wanted fire for different reasons, well, then it went through the radio channels (inaudible).

White: Tell them where to put it, where to direct the fire. You also served, before it was over with, served in France and Germany, too, as well as Italy, didn't you?

French: Yes, Sicily, we went to (inaudible), Italy, and there (inaudible) Italy. We went to—I forget the name of the place there—up to Vinothro(?), and Vinothro we called Cassino Hill. It was a—oh, what do they call those? They have high observation up there. This was a religious group up there. They'd go look right down our throats. I don't care where we were. Take, and fire right over us, and the point I'm leading to, I told you about the forward observer, Nolan(?). I called him Lloyd Nolan. That wasn't his full name, but I can tell you what his full name is. James E. Nolan, Corporal James E. Nolan.

White: Up in the front, huh? That's tough up on the front lines.

French: (Inaudible). We got cut off one time because a little stream, they had to put pontoon boats so we could get across the stream where Menothrolea(?) was, Cassino, where it was.

White: Was that a nickname, Cassino?

French: Cassino was the establishment on the top of the hill up there, was this big, stone place.

White: Fortress-type place where they were (inaudible).

French: That's what they had. There was more ammunition. See, we handled the 105, artillery. Artillery, it was a howitzer. The howitzer gun is the one that shoots over the hill, straight. The longtime shot straight. The Germans had an eighty-eight. I'll tell you about them when we come to Anzio. They shot straight. They didn't go

over the hill. But we had the howitzer. We had to go over the hill. There was more ammunition, shells, was fired there than any other place in the campaign, any place.

White: Is that right?

French: That's right. I mean, they had to. I mean, to shoot to get our men out of there, infantry, what it was. But anyway, those poor soldiers up there, in the trenches, in the dugouts, and so forth, there was a lot of them they had just carried down, by (inaudible), to get them to the hospital. I know I went into the hospital one time just for malaria, and I tell you right now, they just had to take boys and men and lug them on their back to get them into the hospital. But anyway, that was the size of (inaudible). We pulled out. They took us out of the line then, at Menofro. And of course on the Cassino, the bombers just shelled that place because we were some way along the line afterwards, way on up the line, coming backwards, when we'd go to break, you know, gave us a break in the thing; they just shelled them to nothing was what it was. It was Cassino Hill. And then they pulled us out of the line, and then that's when we came—pulled us out of the line. We had the Forty-fifth in the middle. And you heard of the Third Infantry that was over there.

White: Yes.

French: To the left. And the Thirty-sixth was turned right.

White: Big push. How long were you overseas? Felt like forever, I'm sure.

French: Well, we can see it here. June the eighth of [19]43 through July the third, August of [19]45.

White: August of [19]45.

French: Yeah. August of [19]45. Got back to the States in September [19]45.

White: I don't mean to cut your service short, now. I just wondered what time you served.

French: Well, we left the States on June the eighth of [19]43, and then left over there in August of [19]45, so we spent almost two years over there.

White: That's a long time of service you have.

French: I spent almost a total of four years in the service, is what it was.

White: And you basically served in Italy, France, and Germany for most of it.

French: Italy. We wound up, made a run from a rural part of Italy up to Anzio, and Anzio, that was a stalemate there. We were dug in there, sure enough dug in. Of

course we had the artillery pieces on Anzio. They could shoot right straight at us as far as that goes, so we had to take and put timbers across the thing. They would cut and put across the thing, sandbag it and all because we got some direct hits in Anzio.

White: I think the cold and the wet is what I've heard most people speak about (inaudible).

French: Well, there was places for that. It was cold there. We had frost on the ground a good bit. A day on Anzio would start off late in the afternoon, and they'd send a plane over, and they'd drop out flares. And then they'd drop out (inaudible) bomb, (inaudible) bombs, which would explode over the person. If you was above ground, you'd better hunt a hole. And then after that, well, then the eighty-eights would turn a loose. You could hear them coming in, pow! I mean, they'd just cover the whole place. There were times that we'd get caught. We was on wire then; I mean, radio. We had a switchboard in the dugout there, and that's where all the messes was taken.

White: You were in communications, still then, too?

French: By wire, yeah. All the batteries, we was connected by wire. Headquarters, their crew run the line to the outfit. Then it was up to us to watch that because every time they would shell, there was a ammunition dump, oh, just a few miles down the road from us, and you'd get to the dump, and then you'd get our wires. And then there wasn't but one thing to do when you had a wire go dead. You'd have to start taking your wire, and you followed by hand, or (inaudible) overhead or what have you. Sometimes you'd get a wire, by golly; you'd be standing in water, and somebody'd crank it up. That's what they'd use in the (inaudible), old magneter deal where they'd crank it up. You'd turn it a loose in a hurry.

White: I bet you would.

French: So that's what we had to do to stay on the wire. Of course we still had a radio there, but we was on the wire. The night we pulled out of that place on Anzio, I was out looking for a dead wire then and got around there, and then I heard this—we could hear the planes overhead. We knew what was starting. It was dark. I was running the wire by hand, and I heard a plane come over, and it wasn't one thing, and that was to find a hole to get into. And I wound up in a dugout with some Canadians, thank goodness, because they got me out in the open. And when that shelling was over with, well, then we headed back, and by golly, the outfit, when I got back—I never did find the dead wire. Got back to the outfit, and they was pulling out, to head for Rome. That's (inaudible) we'd been there a while.

White: And you went to Rome next after that?

French: Went to Rome from there.

White: What was Rome like during the war?

French: We saw the casino there. I believe it was. Didn't they call that the casino there in Rome?

White: I think so.

French: Well, it was all right. Another town, another place, big place, but then they pulled us out of the line and sent us down the coast there, and then we got ready for France, went in Southern France there. Southern France, and then from there on, the thing moved pretty fast, on through France, across the Rhine into Lauf and Bundaberg(?), Germany and made a turn and wound up in Munich.

White: Well, did you feel like that there was a possibility that the war may end any time soon after you got into Germany? Was it—

French: Well, we got into Munich. The Forty-fifth Division took over Munich; they policed Munich, and that was our job. And I had enough points, why, they sent me home.

White: You were in Munich when you headed back for home.

French: Yeah. I was in Munich. Now, to bring up the photographer business, of course, I had already tried some photography there in the theater building. It was just a box camera. I mean, you could take a box and put a plate of glass over it, and you could develop a print. (Inaudible)

White: Before you left the States.

French: Just enough to get my appetite whetted. Then as I started saying about Captain Nick and, no, it wasn't Captain Nick. He was gone. He was a BC, a good BC now, but in Rome, Italy, he fell out of a mess truck and broke a leg, and they shipped him back to the States, and Captain Hayes(?) took over, and he did a good job.

White: But did you do any photography over there?

French: No. In Munich, Germany, when we were in the camp, to stand still (inaudible) the BC, and Jeff took off, and they took a whole photography lab. I mean, the development equipment, the enlarger, everything (inaudible). And they had a basement in an old school building, just a basement. Just pictures that I had taken, I had pictures. We had liberated Dachau at that time. You ever hear of Dachau?

White: Yes, I have.

French: OK. I saw that the next morning. The 157th Infantry liberated them, but anyway I made pictures, developed pictures, made prints. I made sets of pictures, gave them out to people.

White: This was part of the military? I mean—

French: I was in the service. This—

White: But I mean, you just handed the pictures out. They were not military pictures. That's the reason I'm asking.

French: Oh, no, no.

White: These are just personal (inaudible).

French: It wasn't military. I had the pictures of Dachau that I took. I went there in a Jeep, and it looked like—well, I could show you. I took the pictures I made. I've got a book of them over there if you ever want to look at them, but—

White: No, no. The reason I was asking was I just wondered when you said you gave the pictures out, I wondered if they were military pictures, or if you were just passing them out to people who were interested in them.

French: Well, to the battery commander, friends there. They all got, her husband got, I think, a set of those pictures. So gosh, no, I had a German camera, and like 120 film. Made two pictures out of that. Good lens in the thing, (inaudible) camera. So I took pictures from then on through. Went to London, England, and just took pictures there. Took them back, and I just had rolls of pictures that I took, all the way back to the—I had a lot of film that hadn't been developed back to the States (inaudible).

White: You brought back with you when you came. Where did you—I don't know the military term. Where did you (laughter) get out of the military?

French: Shelby.

White: Where'd you come back to?

French: Went to Shelby.

White: Came back to Camp Shelby in Mississippi.

French: Yeah. Now, of course, way I got back, now, the Forty-fifth was kept in service because they went to South Korea. The Forty-fifth went to South Korea, but they took the people who had the time—they had the points—they took them out, and they shipped them home, but I was transferred to the Fourteenth Army Division. That's the way I was out because, see, they didn't send me out (inaudible) the Forty-

fifth was still active. But I went to the Fourteenth Army Division, what I was in when they shipped us back to the States.

White: And everything was by boat, then, wasn't it? You didn't fly back, did you?

French: No. Well, they, (laughter) if you'll pardon me for saying this, they started what they called a latrine rumor. (laughter) And man, that's where you wanted to get rid of everything. I had a nice P-38 pistol; I wanted to keep, but you started to unload it. "Oh, they going to fly you back." (laughter) And so you unloaded some of it. Somebody got my P-38.

White: The chief, (laughter) huh?

French: The chief, yeah, man, just as I was getting by.

White: And then you came back on the boat, huh?

French: Came back on the boat. Came back for a big steak dinner in New York. I've got pictures of the Statue of Liberty that I took, a reel from New York to Camp Shelby. (end of track one; beginning of track two)

White: —the United States at Camp Shelby, and when did you come back into Mendenhall after the war? Remember when it was?

French: Well, it was right after the date I was separated in service there.

White: Did somebody drive down that way and pick you up?

French: Oh, I have to tell you that one. I believe (inaudible) give me transportation home from there, by bus. That wasn't what I wanted. My wife had, Maynell had a little Plymouth coupe. I mean it was a coupe. So what she did, I mean, I got into town, and I got on [Highway] 49, and I was walking toward Mendenhall and saw a little (inaudible) and here come that Plymouth coupe to pick me up. She picked me up.

White: Oh, you'd already left Camp Shelby. You were walking up [Highway] 49.

French: I was walking. Yeah, I walked [Highway] 49. I was going, well, it would have been west. Of course it would actually be north as far as directions, on [Highway] 49 north. It wasn't south. I was walking. I had my duffel bag and everything I was bringing home, by golly, and so there she came, and she picked me up. Went around and came to Mendenhall.

White: And what was it like going back to work? Better than war (laughter) I can imagine.

French: Well, no. It's just simply a matter of the picture show. Of course, my wife, she managed the show, then, in my absence, and had trouble with these young bucks around there. They'd misbehave, and hard to keep control of them.

White: You were still having trouble with those young bucks in the [19]60s, I think, when I worked down at the theater. (laughter)

French: Yeah. They just full of themselves.

White: Did you ever go back and work at the icehouse any, or did you just—

French: No. Why, that was a full-time job. Of course, got my brother out of service. When my dad was sixty years old, we decided it was time for him to get out. Well, Dad was (inaudible) nobody to help him there. They took my younger brother, put him in the service. He was overseas when my mother passed away. Had to get word to him and get him shipped back to the States. But we just talked him into getting out of the ice plant, so I think some Clarks, I believe it was, wanted to buy the plant, and he sold it to them. He was sixty years old then. I could figure it out, but he was sixty years old then.

White: Well, how did you get into other businesses, other than the theater?

French: All right. In the theater, of course, I operated that until my dad wanted my younger brother, Carol—you know him?

White: Yeah.

French: You know him?

White: I know who he is.

French: OK. Well, Dad wanted to do something for him, so he bought the Western Auto, sent Carol and his wife to St. Louis to take training and put him in the Western Auto business. Didn't work out.

White: That was down the street from the theater at the time?

French: Right across the street from the theater.

White: Right across the street.

French: Across the street, yeah. But Carol and his wife just couldn't make it. They just didn't have what it takes to run the business, so again, my dad comes to me. "You are going to take over that Western Auto."

White: Pointing that finger, again.

French: Yes, sirree. (laughter) The next thing I knew, Maynell and I headed for St. Louis, Missouri. We had to be indoctrinated into their way of doing business, if you know what I mean. Trying to train us to do that, so we came back, and that was around [19]52, [19]53. I just built this house; had a new [19]53 Dodge Ram, engine in it that had the horns up and one thing and the other thing, so built a house here, and I just got my feet wet into a different business. I closed one up and opened another one up. Of course, I did have managing the theater, which we always had a time, a problem. Television didn't hurt much to start off with. We only had channel twenty-five, but when they got the (inaudible) UHF (ultrahigh frequency) signal, like sixteen and twelve, stuff like that. (Inaudible) Jackson.

White: Jackson television station.

French: All outside antennas. I put up a many a antenna when I was in Western Auto, and that did something to the business. Children, the moms stayed at home; the children were turned loose in the picture show.

White: There weren't any more families going (inaudible).

French: No, unh-uh. That's what started off with this book I had here, this right here. It was family. They came to town on Saturdays; they met. The family sat together, or the children would go down on the front. It was just a day. The streets, I mean, Main Street on Saturday would be filled up on Saturdays, oh, ten, eleven o'clock at night because people, they was all getting together and talking. But then when television came in, all that disappeared.

White: When did you close up the theater? What year? Do you remember?

French: Well, 1960 I leased it out. No, I leased it before then. I leased it to Ron Collins(?) and his wife. I leased it to them for one year.

White: I remember that.

French: And then they bought it. In 1980 is when I actually (inaudible) sold it out, and I'd have to go to my records to find that date, but 1980 was when I was completely out of it.

White: Sold the building and everything at that time.

French: No, I didn't sell the building.

White: Just the business?

French: Just the business. I just sold him, just the theater business, yes.

White: Do you still own the building, or have you sold it since?

French: No, I don't. What happened, the reason it's the way it is now, he borrowed the money, Ronnie did, and his wife, from People's Bank, and then he just went kaplunk, and the People's Bank had to foreclose on him, so then the People's Bank had it then. And in turn Sid Jr.—

White: Sid Davis(?)?

French: —always was fascinated by it, so he bought it for whatever the bank sold it to him for.

White: And then the last use as a theater, that I remember, was when they filmed part of Willie Morris's book *My Dog Skip* down there.

French: Yeah. The show was closed then.

White: Yeah, right, but I—

French: This was (inaudible).

White: I think they actually showed a movie in there that night, didn't they? Or part of it.

French: They have showed *My Dog Skip* in there, but it wasn't over the projectors because the projectors no—

White: (Inaudible)

French: The projector is not operating at all. They had some way or another of taking their film and projecting it on the screen.

White: Some new type system.

French: Because it's dim.

White: Did you save any of the old movie posters or anything?

French: No, sir. I didn't. I didn't realize they'd be worth that much, but—

White: Some of those have become very collectable.

French: We rented or leased the print. We turned in orders for, say, a month's show, and they'd send you pictures out. But you usually sent them back to get credit on that stuff. You just paid the rent on it.

White: And you, while you were raising your family and everything and before your first wife died, y'all were running the Western Auto on Main Street. When did you close it, or sell it out?

French: The Western Auto was sold out to Donnie Kaufmann(?). What was the year on that?

White: Is that when you retired?

French: Well, if you want to call it that, yeah.

White: If you want to call it retirement.

French: Whatever you want to call it. I forgot what the year was on that thing, now. (laughter) I sure have. It was [19]79; [19]79 is when I sold that to Donnie Kaufman.

White: Do you still own some buildings on Main Street or around?

French: No, sir, I don't.

White: Well, that's probably good because some of them are closed now.

French: I got to the point I didn't want anything that I had to be responsible for except myself and my family.

White: Well, when did your first wife die?

French: That was in [19]79. It's right in here.

White: It's hard to remember the year on something unless—

French: It was [19]79, and it was—(inaudible) first marriage.

Unknown Voice: Ninety-seven.

French: Oh, I didn't mean [1979]. I don't know why I said [19]79. I just reversed it.

White: Had some years transposed there.

French: Yeah, I did. I did that.

White: It was in [19]97.

French: It was the twenty-ninth of April of [19]97.

White: Ninety-seven, and you have since married again, and your—I started to say new wife, but it's not a new wife, now. Your current wife is, her name is Marjorie. She was Marjorie—

French: Marjorie Elizabeth, she was a Wakeman then.

White: Wakeman.

French: W-A-K-E.

White: Right. I'm sorry. I didn't hear you wrong. I'm just not a very good reader. I had that written down. And you two were married. You met in somewhat of an unusual way, I understand, that ties a lot of your history—

French: At a reunion, service reunion, service battery reunion, which I'd been attending on and off for years. She had lost her husband. Of course Maynell was gone. (Inaudible)

Marjorie Wakeman French: I may make corrections. (laughter)

French: OK. Well, second marriage the thirtieth of December, 1999, in Kingfisher, Oklahoma, to Marjorie Elizabeth Wakeman.

White: And that's in Oklahoma you've been having the military reunions.

French: Yes, that's right.

White: I believe you mentioned to me earlier when we were talking that some of the photos that you had printed of Dachau and other things back during the service and everything, that her then-husband had served in the same military unit and actually had some of those photos that you had given him some.

French: Yes, I had given him a set of those, and just the men that wanted them. Why, I remember I was still doing work. Along when that was done, we was right at a POW [prisoner of war] camp, just all German prisoners there, and that's where I disbursed a lot of that film. They moved us from a place in Munich to this POW camp, well, yeah, prisoner-of-war camp. They were there until they was moved on to where they was supposed to go to.

White: You still going to the—excuse me. Go ahead. I didn't mean to interrupt you.

French: Go ahead. What was you going to say?

White: I was going to ask you if you were still going to the reunions out in Oklahoma.

French: Yes, we do. We got another one coming up September of every year. I think our last one, coming up this September is going to be the last we go to because they all taking their name off the roster. I mean, they're dying. Last year I didn't think—we had about six men there last year.

White: Six.

French: They just—and they having a hell of a—well, now, you take Gordon Moore, his daughter had to drive him there. And another fellow, he couldn't come because his wife was doing all the driving for him. He couldn't see, and her eyes were going bad. Jeff Sanders(?) is not getting any younger. He's the one that we were together a lot there, overseas.

White: Is there one particular man who lives in Oklahoma that this sort of centers around, who sort of starts it every year? How did you guys end up in Oklahoma?

French: Well, of course, they'd had some reunions there. All the reunions have been in Oklahoma. How? The Forty-fifth Division is the Oklahoma National Guard outfit. That's the reason—

White: That's where they're home-based.

French: That's the home base, yeah, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Lawton, Oklahoma. It's centered around that. All the troops on the train at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, but just the reunions, they started off in Oklahoma City and in some other places. It wound up, and William Powellson(?) one year, we spent one reunion in Arkansas at Jeff Sanders' place, and they rented a whole, all the cabins in this little lodge place there in Arkansas. And of course, they had it two years, and then William Powellson took it off in (inaudible) City, Oklahoma. He and his wife did all the correspondence, setting up all the details, placing the reservations and stuff like that.

White: Well, that's hope this year won't be the last year. Maybe you can host one in the future. You're not—

French: No, no. Those people in North Carolina (inaudible) and people in California, all around. They're just not able to.

White: Don't you think those people need to know about Mendenhall, Mississippi? It might be time to invite them down here, Mr. French.

French: How we going to get them here? (laughter)

Mrs. Marjorie French: And where you going to put them?

White: That could be a problem.

French: No. It's just not reasonable because they, all of them, George Bartlett, he's had heart surgery lately. William Powellson, he had bypasses, and he lost his wife this year, and it's just not feasible.

White: Well, where are your children now? Let's bring that up to date. I know Jef.

French: Jef is in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

White: And George?

French: George is in Silver Hill, Alabama.

White: And your youngest son?

French: He's in Tupelo, Mississippi, Lewis Richard(?).

White: Tupelo, Mississippi.

French: He's in Tupelo.

White: He's a little bit close to home.

French: A little bit. We still (inaudible) (laughter) (inaudible). Of course George is trucking for Ace Hardware.

White: Is that right? Staying in the hardware business, then, like (inaudible) for a long time.

French: Yeah. He was my number one son to help me out when I was in Western Auto.

White: Well, can you think of anything else that we haven't talked about that we need to discuss, that you'd like to have discussed on this tape? Your current life, what kind of daily activities and what kind of trips do you and Ms. Marjorie have planned, now?

French: Well, I promised her a trip down to New Orleans and the French Quarter, so I'm going to have to get that out of the way.

White: There's nothing—

French: Hot weather or something or another has stopped that. She won't admit it. And I promised to take her to Niagara Falls. She's been there once, and she wants—

Mrs. Marjorie French: Mm-mm.

French: You haven't been to Niagara Falls?

Mrs. Marjorie French: Mm-mm.

White: It's time you went then.

French: I'm going to make a trip up the East Coast, go around that way to New York and then come back, maybe come through Pennsylvania, take her through some of the (inaudible) country up there.

White: That will be nice.

French: And I've got to take her to Fish and Wildlife Museum there in Jackson. What do they call that now? Isn't that what it is? Fish and Wildlife? Up in Jackson.

White: Gosh, I don't know. Is that the Natural History Museum?

French: Natural history, yeah, there, and I've got to take her to Vicksburg to the military park, over there. We passed by it several times. I've just got to make that trip.

White: You just been too busy to stop?

French: Well, the weather's so bad. This hot weather's (inaudible) now. It is hard to catch the right time.

White: It must be a little warmer in Mississippi than it was in Oklahoma.

French: Well, I think so. Of course they're having hot weather there, but we just haven't hit it right, but you know, there's a time to go to New Orleans, and a time not to go to New Orleans. You're going to catch it early, or you're going to catch it late.

White: What kind of changes have you seen in Mendenhall over the years that have stuck with you?

French: Well, things just going along according to the will of the people.

White: Still a pretty good life, huh?

French: It's still the small-town life. It's still a place that you can run down the street to the grocery store, or go to your doctor or what have you, or run down the street to the drugstore. They even have rest homes here in Mendenhall, as far as that goes, when you reach that point.

White: We just don't have a movie theater, do we?

French: You don't have a movie theater, and I don't imagine you ever will. I shouldn't say it on that, though.

White: Well, I do appreciate you talking to us. Thank you very much.

(end of interview)