

Interview #3—Notes from interview with*(Veteran of WWII) Frederick Littlejohn conducted June 10 with Tiffany Anderson and David Jones)**

Background/Growing up in Asheville and in Segregation

Frederick Joseph Littlejohn (Bill) was born in 1925 in Asheville at home with a midwife and a doctor -Dr. Holt— to Fred Littlejohn and Bessie Bradshaw Littlejohn.

He had 5 sisters and 3 brothers and he was the fourth child. "I was generally treated well and had a roof over my head and came from a big family."

Segregation was his least favorite memory. He disliked having to go to the backdoor of restaurants and movies and early in life decided to leave the South. The older he got, the more he understood what was going on. There was a drugstore in Biltmore; if you wanted anything, you had to go in the backdoor. There was a restaurant where the Hot Shot is now. It had great hot dogs, but you had to get tern from the back door."

Went to the movies for entertainment -the Paramount on North Market St. -had to go upstairs and sit in the balcony. At the Plaza, you entered from the back and went to the balcony. Tickets were \$.15 at night and \$.10 for the matinee. The Eagle Theatre was the Black theatre--\$.06 for a movie. Saw all the Black westerns there.

Remembers the Depression: "My father had a big garden so we never went hungry. We tried to keep a roof over our heads and something to eat."

"A man in the community named Dave Israel (he lived to be 100 and used to say about himself "I'm the oldest rat in the barn.") would come by the house and say to my mother, "Daughter, I want some bread." And she would give him hoe cake, milk (we had a cow) and vegetables."

"I had an uncle; he used to carry me around everywhere. He took me to the joints— people drank corn liquor and home made wine." People "tranquillized" themselves.

"People didn't lock anything up because they didn't have anything of value to take."

Education

Shiloh Elementary to 7th grade
Stephens Lee High School (dropped out in 1941)

"Miss Wilfong was my second grade teacher. my She used to stay on me in school. She was favorite second and third grade teacher ."

Work

As a young person, he worked as an orderly at the Old Orthopedic Home (now Thoms)

Went to Detroit to work in the Defense Plants (Briggs Manufacturing Co.)(1943) --started off at \$.82 per hour vs. \$.25 per hour for work in Asheville —raised to \$1.02 per hour after the first month —worked in the stock room

WWII Experience

Drafted at 18

Pfc. in Army; Basic training at Ft. Warren in Cheyenne, Wyoming(Nov. for 3 weeks)

White Sergeant

1943 quartermaster (supply)

training in ordinance (ammunition)

Uncle and brother had been drafted earlier and were in a tank battalion

Went overseas in May 1944; came back 1946

First landed in Scotland; in Bournemouth, England for 3weeks.

When D-Day (June 6) happened, was in the mid-Atlantic. Landed on Normandy Beach in July; frontline was still on the beach (supposed to be three miles in). Really frightening at night because it was dark. You couldn't see where attacks might come from.

One night, sharing a two-man pup tent with James Whitehead, after 11pm, planes were going overhead and heard ammunition exploding. Whitehead said, "Let's go Littlejohn."

"Where are we going?"

"I don't know, but somewhere away from here." They actually went to a nearby canal and climbed in (with others) to be safer.

Went all the way through France, then to Belgium (8 months) connected to third army. Liege, Belgium

—Scary. V-2 rockets every night; if it was cloudy, you couldn't see the rockets. —There was a hill; everything was torn up. Stayed (with unit) in a Catholic school (St. Louis College). One of the students said, "You don't have to worry about the rockets hitting the school because the priest's prayers are guarding it (divinely protected). As long as they were there, rockets never did hit the school. The student gave Littlejohn a St. Christopher medal for protection.

Christmas, 1944

"We were there during the Battle of the Bulge. They were moving all the outfits back, but we were kept there. We guarded the supplies—rations dump 8 miles long. No shelters for civilians.

Got their information from the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper. Only read about the Holocaust—wasn't in the areas near the camps.

Their work was guarding supplies.

Took a freight train from Belgium to Verdun, France. Missed going to Paris with his buddies. He had a headache and went to the infirmary for some medicine; they kept him because he had pneumonia. 1st Sergeant came and got him from the hospital then he went to Luxembourg.

War ended while he was in hospital at Verdun (missed all the celebrations).

Left Belgium and went to Nuremberg, Germany. Used to go right by the prisons where they were holding those tried for war crimes. But not much discussion among his friends and colleagues about the holocaust or the trials. Believed only about half of what he read in the papers. Learned that sometimes stories were altered or reported differently from how they happened. For example Louis Moore (mailman in their unit) lost hearing due to listening to bombs; got the Purple Heart

Post-war—Segregation in the South—Migrating North

No benefits from being a veteran. "I got laid off from my job. I didn't know that if I had returned to the Detroit factory from which I was drafted within three months of my return, I could have gotten my old job back."

Never planned to come back to Asheville, but had to be released from army from the place in which you were drafted. In 1946, having returned to NC, couldn't get a seat on the bus. Had to sit in the back. Bus driver, "I can't start this bus till you move to the back. (Whites to the front)." One man (Black soldier travelling with him) had to stand from Fayetteville to Greensboro. "Young people today take for granted the opportunities they have." Sick of NC; stayed only long enough to get money to leave (Jan.-Aug.)

Migration

Went to Detroit.

Went back to Briggs Manufacturing Co., back to building cars (during the war, the company had stopped building cars and switched to war-time production).

First lived with relatives and then on his own with a room-mate. Worked, played golf (Riker's), went to movies—the Warfield Theatre ("I like musicals, like *Moulin Rouge*— the first one)

Left Detroit in 1950 or '51 and went to NY because he had more relatives there.
"I saw Sarah Vaughn, Sonya Henning. I lived in Harlem; I could walk to the Apollo.
(Saw Sammy Davis, Jr. Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Jordan)

Returning to the South

Never had wanted to return to the South to live, but continued to visit family here. When they retired, his wife wanted to move to Asheville. It's been all right.

Reflections/Advice

People's finances—no jobs—causes problems with family.

"Sorry I didn't get more education than I got. I was busy working and didn't seek it.

Advice "Treat people like you want to be treated."