

## Billig, Joe 8-2-88

[Speaker 2]

One, two, three, test. Turn this on. One of the things that I'd like to do to start off is to find out what people's lives were like before they went into the service, so I can work against that.

Are you from Knoxville originally?

[Speaker 1]

We moved here in February 1931 from Columbia, South Carolina. I was born in Columbia. And we had a big grocery store there, and the Depression got us and got in too.

You get a lot of people. So we came up here. My uncle, who owned Max Friedman Jewelers, brought us the whole family up here.

And ever since, outside of those 39 months, I was gone.

[Speaker 2]

So how old were you when you came here in 31?

[Speaker 1]

When I came here, let's see, I'll be 69 in December, so let's back up here. 31, I don't know. 57, 31, that's about 12 years old.

[Speaker 2]

And so you went to school here and then went to UT?

[Speaker 1]

No, I went to school here, played football at Knox High, had a scholarship to play football at Citadel in Charleston. And my dad lost a leg from diabetes, and the doctor told us it happened about two months after I got the offer for a scholarship. And the doctor told us then that he'd have to amputate the other leg within a year, and it was a year to the date that he amputated the other leg.

Although I had two other brothers and everything, we all had to work back in those days, in the early 30s and the late 30s. And so I just, instead of going to school, I went to work. My first job was, in the fall of 38, I went to work at a pawn shop, which was owned by my uncle Max Friedman, at the corner of Gate and Depot, across the street from Regas's.

It is a pawn shop there, but that wasn't ours. We had one on the corner, which was the hotel there. And we were in the lobby of the hotel.

And I worked there until that started early in, well, when I graduated, went to work immediately. And then in the fall of 39, we opened up Max Friedman Jewelers. I'm sure you've seen the building downtown.

It's still got the facade on it and everything, just the way it was when we opened up. No, it wasn't. When we opened up, it was different, because when I was in the Army, they had one big fire that didn't burn it down.

But when I got back about a year after I went back to work there, we had another fire during the night. And that's when we changed the whole building, had to rebuild the whole thing. It was about a five-story building, which coincided with all the buildings on that block now.

And everything collapsed into the basement, all the floors and everything. In fact, in that building there's a bank vault. At one time back, I guess in the early 20s before all the banks went broke, there was a bank in there.

And so the original bank vault was there, which saved us a hell of a lot, because at night we put up everything, the diamonds and everything went in there. Although we left the watches out, they floated down the street. The water was terrible.

[Speaker 2]

Well, this was the big fire after the war?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, that was one after the war, yeah. In fact, we had a sporting goods department in the basement run by a well-known sports fellow that played basketball. A fellow by the name of Tab Sturkey, he played basketball over at U.C. And he ran our sporting goods department. And the fireman knocked down the back door and tried to let some of that water out. We lost basketball. Everything that floated, floated out the back door.

And people were picking it up all over. I got a call about 2 o'clock in the morning from the ADP people, and they said, if you've got a small fire, I think you ought to come downtown. Magnolia was torn up.

We lived west, east Knoxville, out on Magnolia. And we couldn't come up Magnolia. It was all torn up.

They were widening at the time, so we had to come up 5th Avenue. And when we hit Knoxville Hole, Knoxville High, over on 5th, you could see the flames going straight up there.

[Speaker 2]

A little flare.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, right. It was something.

[Speaker 2]

Did your other brothers go in the service, too?

[Speaker 1]

No, neither one of them. Both were turned down. Both were turned down.

My oldest brother, you get what his problem was, and my next oldest brother, we was only 12. There was 5 kids in the family, 3 of us still living. My sister and Louisville, who was the oldest one.

And I was the youngest boy. We had a younger sister who was 5. But they never went.

They got as far as Fort Overton, Georgia. But they were turned for it. When I went in, I think I told you on the phone, they turned me down for over a year, about a year and a half.

For dumb legs, dumb feet, and football.

[Speaker 2]

Did you try to get into the Army or Navy or Air Force?

[Speaker 1]

No, I just tried until they called me. One doctor that I went to see, well the board sent me to see, one doctor who turned me down. And I asked him what I could do about these bad feet of mine.

He said, well, he said, you want to really know, I said, sure, but I didn't want to know, I said. And so he said, well, we can take your foot and split it from the toe all the way to the heel and return the knees on this side and bring some muscles down and time on this side to build your feet back up and give you some arches. I said, how long will that take?

He said, well, it didn't take seven months, nine months, a year. I said, that's enough. How fast?

How fast? So at that time, I was with Max Friedman-Jewelers. We opened the store in 39 until I, when they finally took me, pulled over to North Georgia.

They were asking me, you know, what I thought I could do, what I told them what my experience had been in retail selling. I mean, in retail selling, dollar down, dollar a week at that time. That's the way it used to be many years ago.

We had things that we sold for quarter down, quarter a week, \$50,000 on us. And so I told them all what I had done down through the years, where it worked and everything. He said, well, we could use you somewhere.

I said, fine. That's when I wound up in the infantry. When we left Fort Overholt, Georgia.

What year was that? Was that 46? No, not 46.

I was here somewhere when I was in Dutch. Damn princess, you know. Hey.

I know what time it is now. I saw it the other day. It didn't remind me.

What? 46.

[Speaker 2]

42. 42.

[Speaker 1]

42, right. In fact, I went down on my birthday, December the 6th. 42.

[Speaker 2]

Almost exactly a year after Pearl Harbor. That's right.

[Speaker 1]

They turned me down. That deal was for the bank when I first started the situation. And the first incident, I was riding the damn troop train from Fort Overholt to Camp Phyllis, Kansas.

And they had two people sleeping in the bottom bunk and one in the top. So they had me assigned with one other guy. I told the other fellow, I gave the choice.

I gave either one of you a couple dollars to let me have the upper bunk by myself. Because I'm not used to sleeping with anybody. So they did.

And we got out to Camp Phyllis, Kansas. They gave us an exam. And one of those two had crabs.

They had to shave them both good. So I got lucky there. Because when we came into Philana, Kansas, and then this place was a little hole in the wall.

We were out in the country. And they put us, of course, in Army trucks and took us to camp. And I saw a kid walking down the street.

Knocked me, pigeon-toed, everything. I said, this must be the hell hole of the Army. Of course, it's on everybody.

And in our outfit, we had a guy, big, husky, strong guy, a farmer from Minnesota. And he, when the first week we got there, our hike, so-called hike, was around the barracks. And we got into the barracks and doctors came and checked our feet.

That poor boy's shoes were nothing but solid blood. So they sent him to the, on sick call. And about a week later, he was back, feet were good.

The next hike we took, the next week, every week they took us a grass distance. And we went on a mile hike, came back, his feet were the same. Full of blood, socks, everything.

And this went on finally after we were up to about five miles. And we had the same damn thing. They finally discharged us.

Big, husky, proof. I said, I'm not in hell. Did you work out on a farm?

They said, well, I just took it easy. I said, well, you had to walk. That's a cinch.

It was pitiful. Well, we, I, I stayed in the infantry until, well, I was in there about eight or nine months. And we were, they were getting our unit ready to go.

The division, the whole division was there, 94th Infantry Division. They were getting us ready to go overseas for the sea day. And I woke up one morning, couldn't, snow out on the ground down there and out there, piled all over the place.

And I woke up and couldn't get my shoe on. My foot, one foot is swollen like that. So I walked barefooted to Sick Hall, which was about six blocks away from there.

And the noncom, lifted my foot and handed me two APCs. He said, go back to duty. I said, I can't get my shoe on.

And he says, go on somewhere. So I went back to barracks. And I had a high fever and they took the two APCs.

And the next morning, the other foot caught up with the first foot. And I went back on Sick Hall and that same time, they tried to give me two more APC tablets. I said, hell, I didn't sleep all night with these feet aching.

I got to see the doctor, not you. And they finally let me see the doctor and he put me immediately in the hospital. And at that time, I guess that was the only treatment they had for them.

They had me in a tent, my feet anyway, in a tent. And my feet were wrapped in bandages and about every ten minutes, all over they came in and poured saline solution all over my feet. And the tent had lights in it to make it.

I just couldn't get to work. I couldn't sleep at night. I couldn't use a goddamn bedpan to sleep around there.

So every night when the lights went out, I'd hop from bed to bed to the latrine and back. Thank goodness it was right there in the ward. And while I was there, my division went overseas.

And a little later learned that my company, out of my company, they lost 90% of them at D-Day. So I guess God was smiling on me.

[Speaker 2]

Indeed, sounds like it. Yeah. You wonder how things like that happen, you know, the chances.

[Speaker 1]

Then they, in the ward, finally got to a point where the damn skin was so goddamn tight, they doctored it. So the skin got so damn tight, there wasn't nothing they could do. So right in the ward, right in the ward's bed, they operated on it.

Cut both of them open. I still got scars on top of my feet. And that goop hit the ceiling.

It was so tight. Straight up.

[Speaker 2]

Just an infection that you felt in?

[Speaker 1]

I'll tell you a story that even got better than that was, I never had another case until I got home. And I got married and everything and getting ahead of the story. But anyway, my wife was visiting her folks in Cleveland, Ohio.

And I got sick in the jewelry store. I was going back to work there. And I called my doctor and he says, Come on over, I'll look at it right now.

And I went over there and he slapped me in the hospital immediately. My feet were swelling again. And he gave me some treatments in the hospital.

I wouldn't call my wife. In fact, I got out of the hospital a couple days later before she got home. Never did tell her the first time.

About six months later, the same damn thing happened. And he slapped me right in the hospital. Well, she was home then.

And so I asked him, I said, What's my health? So he explained to me. I had told him about this episode in the Army.

He said, Joe, that type of infection that you had, you could get hit on the arm, shoulder, head, anywhere. And it'd break out in that foot again. Either one of those two feet again.

So he gave me shots. Every day for three months. Then twice a week.

Then once a week for the whole year. And knock on wood, never came back. But he advised me to apply for a pension.

Because it was related in the Army. Well, he called it one thing, medically. And the Veterans Administration called it something else.

And he showed me in the damn medical book. But they never did anything about it. But knock on wood, I never had any problems again.

But when I finally got out of the hospital, my division had gone overseas. So they put me in the quartermaster corps. Right here at Station Compliment.

And I worked there in the warehouses there. Under some civilians. It was so goddamn hot in those damn things.

There was nothing but tar paper warehouses with tin roofs. And that Kansas sun. I'm getting ahead of the story here.

Let's go back some more. On the hikes in the Army, even with my bum legs and bum feet, we'd go on a 35 mile hike. And my company commander had bad legs too.

So we brought up the rear at all hikes. We never did it. We never caught up with them too much.

But that's where we'd make it back eventually. And in Kansas, the barracks, the Army, when I was still in the division, the barracks were about a block away from the latrine. And they were nothing but tar paper shacks.

And during the winter, if it snowed, we had to dig everybody out of the in bumps because the snow sifted in through the doors. And if they had to go to the goddamn bathroom, the

idiots, instead of going through the snow, they'd piss right in the pots that were up on the potbelly stove that heated the darn place. And what a stink.

And during the summer, it was even worse than that out there in Kansas. They used to have the sandstorms. And if we were out on billwag 25, 30 miles out, we could see over the camp the dust storms coming.

But one thing about Kansas, if it went that way one day, it came back this way the other day, but we'd get back from that camp, hike, late in the afternoon after a 35-mile hike, and have to dig out the, we had to take everything completely out of the barracks. That happened six, seven times. Get all the dust out, sweep the barracks down, and bring everything back in the pots and all that, clothes and everything.

There's nothing but piles of dirt. The beds had duds like that on them. It was a mess.

So then when I got into the station complement, it was the goddamn hot end. That's been 120 in those warehouses. And we had offices.

So we came up with the idea we were going to make ourselves a cooler. We built, had the shop build us a container made out of galvanized iron that would hold a 100-pound block of ice. We got an old radiator from the car, and got a fan behind the radiator, and got it pumped.

It pumped the water through the radiator into through the ice and back, just kept circling. The only trouble was the damn 100-pound ice, and that heat would last about 15, 20 minutes. That didn't work.

Good idea, though. Yeah, we had a hell of an idea on that darn thing. And then later on, we got a lot of the German prisoners of war to help us there.

And they'd go on a strike every other day if they felt something they were doing pertained to something that was detrimental to the Germans, you know, like loading ammunition or something like that, although we never had any ammunition there. All we had was tents and things like that. But the company, the camp commander, if they'd go on a strike, no matter what the weather was, rain, snow, sleet, hail, he'd make them stay outside in a bunch out in the thing.

And it wouldn't feed them either. The one time they stayed, oh, hell, it was the second day, so he finally felt sorry for them. So he threw loads of bread around them, and the minute they'd step out to try to reach for the bread, somebody'd shoot it and knock it away.

They finally capitulated and went back to work. But I, being Jewish, Jewish language or Hebrew is very, very close to German, a lot of the stuff. And they'd be over in the corner talking, and I'd go over and tell them what they were talking about, a lot of the stuff.

They couldn't understand how in German to say it. I never did tell them. We outfitted after they, after the 94th, because I don't remember the other two divisions, if I remember where they were, but we outfitted two more to send them overseas.

And one day we got a order down from the company headquarters. The first division we sent over, we had to strip them completely of everything they owned and everything they had, except their personal stuff. All the clothing, everything they had like that.

We wound up with one tremendous warehouse with nothing but towels from hotels all over the country. So we didn't know what the hell to do with them damn things. And finally we got an order down from Washington to separate all those damn things into different hotels and ship them back to whatever hotels we could figure out.

Everybody had a little mess. And then after we outfitted those two divisions, word came down to close Camp Phillips completely. So we had to take everything out of the damn barracks, all the barracks throughout the whole camp and store them in those warehouses.

[Speaker 2]

It was a tremendous job.

[Speaker 1]

It took us several months to do all that. We had to store the beds in one warehouse and the mattresses in another and everything else. And then we had to go through all the day rooms from all those outfits that had left.

And everything that wasn't GI issued, all the hair bunch split up. I sent home all the machines, bike riders, golf clubs, everything that was there that they couldn't take with them. If we'd left it, it'd have been dead anyway.

So we took three years in all, had a good time shipping stuff home. And after we did all that, then they decided that we were fit, all a bunch of, hell, I hope I'm crippled, couldn't see, couldn't do nothing. We were going overseas to Dorian and they were going to ship us to Fort Warren, Wyoming.

So they, first they were going to disarm us before we left. So one of my buddies got up in there and the first thing they asked was to do the eye test. Just like this, red is perfect.

So the kid that was doing the testing said, 20, 20, 20, 20. And this guy took out his glass eye and put it in front of him and said, how can I be 20, 20 with a glass eye? How you got in the damn army in the first place?

I don't know. Crazy. So we went to Fort Warren from there.

By that time I was a whole lot faster than a sergeant. And when we got to Fort Warren, I think I told you, I was standing in line being examined again. They had just got through the exam inist the week before, the exam inist again.

And the captain came by that I had known at Fort Warren and he says, he asked me, he says, what are you doing? And I said, I'm getting ready to go overseas. I have a little training here.

I'm going to the war. And he says, okay, I'll see you. at one time, a plane of my name came over the loudspeaker and he said, he said, report to this captain, which I did.

When I walked in, he said, you really want to go overseas? I said, well, stay here with me. I said, fine, I'm ready.

So he got me and I was transferred out of that bunch into his bunch. And I stayed there with him the rest of the time until I got out of the army. And eventually I was his right-hand man.

I was made master sergeant and I was the non-com in charge of the warehouses and he was the officer in charge of the warehouses. We had about eight big warehouses. We had to take inventory every week.

Everything, everything. We'd take inventory once a week. If any items in the inventory were over our stated quota that we were supposed to have, we had to report it to Kansas City Depot.

By the time they went to the Kansas City Depot and came back to us with their requisition, the requisition of everything that we were over on, we were below what we were supposed to have but we still had a shift where they requested. So the next week we had to turn around and reorder the same damn thing. I always said I'd love to have had the money that was spent on transportation to the depot and back and forth.

The same damn stuff going back and forth. It was a mess. And I've got a lot of other notes.

[Speaker 2]

One of the things that you mentioned raised a question in my mind. In the military, did you find much evidence of anti-Semitism? No.

Very good.

[Speaker 1]

When I was still in the 94th Infantry Division, the worst smell we ever had was in tuft tents out in 115 degree weather. The Italian boy and I, he was from New York, same day out in the field and all that heat, he received a long Italian salami from home and I got a big Hebrew Jewish salami. Smelled at the whole goddamn place, area for a long time.

But it really didn't have much because I was, a friend of mine was Catholic and he asked me to be a hush at his wedding right on the base which I was. Another friend, Baptist, I was a hush at his wedding and things like that so it really didn't have much. Some areas I understand it did but where I was at it didn't have.

And other things, I think it was quite a few things I know that went on that I didn't, I didn't have. didn't to say about didn't much to say about about it. I didn't much to say didn't have much to say it.

But when I got when after B day and later on when I got came down because they had so many months in service you could apply for discharge if you were not in an essential position. So, my desk was right next to the captain's, so I wrote my own discharge papers and put them over there. I'm assuming it's a basket on his desk.

We didn't talk to each other about a week till he found us out. Then I had friends and they wanted to send me from Cheyenne back to Chinook, somewhere around Chinook Field up in

Illinois, somewhere to be discharged. But I had good friends in the discharge file, so I said, hell, I want the travel pay from down here in Colorado, so I got out in Colorado and then had travel pay from Colorado back home.

[Speaker 2]

Did you ever think about going regular and staying in the service?

[Speaker 1]

No. That was long enough. I did apply for OCS and then after they'd approved it, I decided to stay where I was.

I had more fun than they were and going through all that stuff. Whenever in those divisions we went overseas, even the officers would have to turn in all their old stuff or leave it there or ship it home and buy everything brand new from the post. They had to pay for all their clothing and everything, but they had to buy everything brand new to go with it.

We took turns at Fort One, we took turns meeting troop trains, either going to the west coast and going to the orient or coming this, going the other way. And we'd have to meet them no matter what time it was, no matter how deep the snow was or how cold it was, we'd have to meet them during the night and supply them with the stuff they needed on the train, food and stuff like that. All the non-constant turns doing that, we had to go down to the motor pool and get a jeep loaded up and go down.

But it was much better at Fort One because we were in the old original barracks which was brick. I woke up one day, the windows were up high, I woke up one day, July the 4th, I was right outside till 5 o'clock in the morning, looked out there, 10 inches of snow, July the 4th, Fort One.

[Speaker 2]

South Carolina, Tennessee, boy you'd hardly believe it, it snowed on the 4th of July.

[Speaker 1]

Being in the quartermaster corps like that, we had a lot of fun, I played on the camp basketball team back then, back then 6-1 I stood tall compared to what they are today, I wouldn't have been in a good guard back then. We were talking today at the city salesman club, I'm treasurer of the city salesman club, and we were talking about the old basketball game we used to play, this was before the war, the war went in in the late 30's. And we used to go all the way west to Johnson Bible College to play basketball, they had a gym that was heated by a pot belly stove at each end, the size of the gym you could see the snow out on the ground right through the sides of the building, and we'd have to dress a block away and walk through the snow to the gym.

That's a good old day to go. No I just went higher when I played, I was on the football team over there, the track team, not running, throwing shots, because I weighed more then than I do now, right now I weigh about 250, when I played football in high school I weighed about 250. You were real big for those days.

But I was the second fastest man on the line, when I went in the army, when I left here, that December 6th when they weighed me in, at Fort Oglethorpe, I weighed 258 strips, 13 weeks

later when I came home from basic training I weighed 192 in 13 weeks, but I'd met Hot Son and all the things we went through. I joined, I was in the, what the hell they didn't call it, the National Guard outfit here, some kind of outfit we had here, that Ed Chavance from Chavance Lumber Company was the company commander, and we met twice a week. We marched, our company headquarters was in the, let's see, about the 800 block of Gate Street upstairs, and we had uniforms there, we marched maybe a mile out and a mile back, that was back then.

[Speaker 2]

But you had more experience then some who came here.

[Speaker 1]

Fort Warren, I forget the first time I ever rode an airplane, at Fort Warren they had an airbase right next to us, and I went out there one morning, I was going home on furlough and I bummed a ride. Well they put me on an army transport, they were supposed to go from Cheyenne to Chanute Field in order, and I knew I could go from Chanute right into Chicago and catch a train to Knoxville, and the only thing in those airplanes at that time, down each side long row was bucket seats, well in the middle they had a pile that was duffel bags full of stuff they were transporting supposedly to Chanute Field, and we wound up in Topeka, Kansas.

I got off the goddamn, got off that plane and hit the runway and fell flat on my ass, it was nothing but a sheet of ice, and had to go from Topeka, Kansas to get home. From Topeka, Kansas, to Kansas City, had to stand up in a baggage car, all the way to Kansas City, from Kansas City I caught a train from Kansas City to St. Louis, from St. Louis I caught a train to Nashville, and then to Chattanooga, and caught a bus from Chattanooga back to Knoxville.

[Speaker 2]

It's a long ways home.

[Speaker 1]

And those trains in those days, the air conditioning, we didn't have no bad air conditioning, damn things were hot down in the summertime, and you'd raise the windows and all you got was, the soot was coming through, by the time you got to the next stop you had to shower and clean up all the things you did.

[Speaker 2]

I imagine in the service you, one of the things they say about World War II is that people met a lot of different kinds of folks that they hadn't run across before.

[Speaker 1]

Definitely, yeah, our outfit was from all over the country. Like I said, the kids from Minnesota was bad, New York, we had them from New York, we had them from all over. Very few from Knoxville went with me, off and toward Overthrow, I think there must have been about 50 of us, all that went to Kansas.

The only thing I ever figured out, things must have been looking pretty bad if they put me into the infantry. We, let's see, where is it? Fair and Vancouver, was it two years ago?

World Fair in Vancouver? Three maybe. Three years.

We, my wife and I left here and drove to Dallas, Texas where my daughter and my two granddaughters live. Let's see, one of them is 12, 13, she's 12 or 13 and the youngest one is four years younger. We picked them up in Dallas and drove all the way up to Houston, Texas, San Antonio, Texas, El Paso, Texas, visiting friends and relatives.

Then we cut out to the west coast and went to California to visit relatives and we worked our way up the coast to visit. We stopped in Portland, Oregon and I called him, I looked in the phone book, hadn't seen the guy since we were discharged at Fort Warren, Wyoming. Called him on the phone, he came running over to the motel and picked us up.

His family owned a big department store in Portland when he was in the Army, he inherited the whole thing. But by this time he'd already sold out and was working for the government doing, traveling overseas doing things for them. But we spent that night with him, not, well, that evening, let's put it that way because we had already checked in the motel.

But he recognized me the minute I walked in the lobby of the motel and I recognized him. And I used to spend every Sunday with, Saturday and Sunday, with he and his wife and son. He was wealthy then, he probably owned a department store, didn't he?

So he had a little house about two blocks out of the gate, the main gate of Fort Warren. And he had a one bedroom house that they bought a cot for me and I spent every weekend with him, every Saturday and Sunday.

[Speaker 2]

Must have been good to get together. How long would it have been between times?

[Speaker 1]

From 1946 to three years ago. In fact, my wife had met him. I hadn't seen him in all that time, but I had a nephew that was working in Portland.

And when I heard that he was living in California and he was moving up to Portland to go to school up there. So I gave him the name of this friend of mine and they took him in like a lost kid. I mean, they took care of him and everything and he decided to get married.

So they gave the rehearsal dinner and everything and all because of me. I've just been good friends with him for years. So my wife flew out to California and then drove from California up to Portland with my brother-in-law and sister-in-law.

It was that son that was, so she met them. That's the time. Thirty minutes before the wedding they decided to call it off after all that trip all the way to California.

So as kids. Anyway, we went from Portland up to Seattle, Washington, then to the World's Fair for a few, about five days. Then coming back we came across Washington, Idaho, Montana, the Yellowstone National Park.

Then from Yellowstone we went down to Cheyenne. I didn't have that with me. They wouldn't let me on the base.

They said still some of the old buildings, some of the old buildings were still there. If I'd have had the discharge papers I'd have been able to go on the base. So they wouldn't let me on the MPs.

They said no, we're sorry.

[Speaker 2]  
That was it.

[Speaker 1]  
On purpose I went to Cheyenne to see what it was like. But it was completely changed because where the rodeo, the annual rodeo out there used to be right outside the gate of the post. Hell, that was interstate now.

So they had moved that a little. Then from there we went down to Colorado Springs and saw the Olympic Village and everything. Then we cut across Kansas.

I wanted to go to Savannah and see what was there. Well, we stopped at a motel then. I asked the desk clerk, I said, can you tell me where Camp Phillips is?

He said, what? I said, I never heard of Camp Phillips. Never could find out where the hell it was at.

After all those years you have no idea. That's right. We used to, we were out of town about, I'd say about 8 or 10 miles outside of Salina.

And we'd go in on weekends and things like that. There were streets with dirt and everything, probably in Salina at that time. Growing up quite a bit.

[Speaker 2]  
Any trouble between soldiers and townies in Salina? No, we never had any problems.

[Speaker 1]  
Got along very well. We used to drive from, if we could get enough gasoline stamps among us, one of the fellows had a car. And we'd drive down to Denver.

It was about 80 miles to Denver, I think, or something like that. So we were in Denver several times during the time I was at Fort Warren. I'd say we had to scrape up enough gas coupons to go.

We didn't stop, we went through Denver coming back. We covered 9,000 miles in about seven years. But yet we never drove, the longest we ever drove was about 400 miles, the shortest was about 200.

Depending on what we were doing. I'm sitting here trying to think of other stuff that happened during the wartime. We had a, you know, towards the end of the war, we had football teams.

Quite a few of the camps had some forts, not the camps, it was strictly the forts. Fort Warren had football teams. They had all university players that I worked out with a couple of times.

But we had one guy that went to the University of Alabama, played three years at Alabama. Then he got drafted, so he played there for two years. When he got out of school, I think he played another two or three years at the University of Wyoming.

[Speaker 2]

You had a career on the plain called Fort Warren?

[Speaker 1]

Almost, right. I can't remember his name. There's some Alabama basketball players out there at Fort Warren.

They had a heck of a ballpark there in basketball too. In fact, one or two of them wound up in the pros. Yeah, we, our base commander at Fort Warren and our head chef, shall I call him, mess sergeant, had been in the Army together for about, oh God, I'd just say about 20 years or more.

So, our commander was a avid huntsman. And they would go out and, well, they'd go up into Montana and they went and shoot deer and buffalo and everything. And everything that came back was put in our mess hall for him to take care of.

So, if the non-coms would come through at night and didn't like what he had on the menu, we'd come back later and he'd fix us medicine, steaks, anything.

[Speaker 2]

Sounds like on balance it wasn't too bad a duty on you.

[Speaker 1]

No, it wasn't. I was just putting in the time. That's about what it amounted to really.

I don't think I left out everything. You know, you try to think of different things that happened.

[Speaker 2]

You'll think of some tonight, I'm sure.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, I'm sure, yeah.

[Speaker 2]

When you came back, you went back to work in the jewelry store? Right away, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

I went back to the jewelry store the week I got back. And that was in 1946. I met my wife-to-be.

Her twin brother was stationed here at UT in naval training or something during the war.

[Speaker 2]

They had a program like this.

[Speaker 1]

That's right. And he married an Oxford girl in June of 1946. His twin sister came down for the wedding.

And we had one date, a blind date. And we were together at the wedding and she left the next morning. And we corresponded on...

That was in June.