

# Christopher Navarre

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**Question:** Please give your first and last name and the correct spelling.

**Answer:** My name is Christopher P. Navarre, Sr.

**Question:** Now is that a Cajun name?

**Answer:** Navarre is French. The e on the end of Navarre makes it French in our circles over there. I was born in Latvia, Louisiana, 15, January, 1920, and attended St. Paul High School, a segregated Catholic school. Later I was accepted at St. Augustus Seminary in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, a segregated Catholic seminary instituted by German missionaries for the priesthood. I recall during my school years in Lafayette, Louisiana, we non-whites were not permitted to drink at any public water fountains unless it was posted colored or enter any white café or go into any white tavern, but we were allowed to attend the movie by going into a side door leading up to the small balcony in the rear of the theatre. We were allowed to go to the white Catholic church, but remain in the rear and only sit in the rear seats if they were not occupied by whites. And most of all we were allowed to be buried in a small catholic graveyard in a small plot in the rear section adjacent to the coolies. The coolies are simply synonymous with the wetlands of the northwest. These are some of the things I try to forget. In 1940, prior to Pearl Harbor, I entered the United States Army under segregated condition and was assigned to the 25<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment Fort Huachuca Arizona. The unit was composed of white officers, real native Indian scouts and all colored black enlisted men.

**Question:** How old were you?

**Answer:** Twenty-three. We also had some dogs, mules, and horses. With official ranks the same as the black soldiers, enlisted ranks, private, corporals and buck sergeants were the ranks in the animals. That was prior to Pearl Harbor.

During my assignment with the 25<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment Pearl Harbor was bombed and the entire United States army began mobilizing and one of my battalion unit was dispatched on maneuvers to Fort Polk, Louisiana, by motor convoy. We were scheduled for a two-night bivouac in Brownwood, Texas. Upon arriving there we were welcomed by hostile demonstration by the town's white people. On the first night of our bivouac some of the colored soldiers, black, were attacked and beaten by some of the radical racist whites, which resulted in a riot. That was my first riot. The stay was cut short and we departed the next day on to Fort Polk, Louisiana. Upon arriving at Fort Pork Louisiana, part of my unit was assigned cadre duty, that is a training type of duty, to train the activated units. And we went on to Vandorn, Mississippi. Within two months after our arrival in Vandorn, Mississippi, friction and the lack of harmonious communication between the colored black soldiers and the white soldiers a riot irrupted again. My second riot. We managed to complete our training assignments and began maneuver in preparation for overseas, in which we were dispatched by ship convoy to England under segregated condition. My unit was stationed in (Plocrapool?) Wales.

While waiting for our combat assignments we encountered a new experience. The white soldiers from the adjacent town were putting out stories that the colored soldiers were abnormal in physical features but the town people knew better. I was a member of the 590-ambulance company of the 429<sup>th</sup> medical ambulance battalion. The 590-ambulance company landed on D-Day plus 6, 6 days after the official D-Day because of that we had to land on pontoons, we had to wait for the tide to come in so we could take the ambulances off and the rest of the stuff we had. The World War II front line from the day of invasion was on the offensive moving continuously through France, Luxembourg, Belgium, until the Battle of the Bulge. When we were surrounded by the enemy, during the Battle of the Bulge, I recall while accompanying some of my ambulances I was in, we were fired upon and on several occasions. We had to camouflage our ambulances and remain on the front line with the front line units

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until the cover of darkness in order to safely evacuate the wounded that we had gone up for. During this waiting period my ambulance driver and I assisted the unit aid men and the administering first aid to the front line unit troops. At that time during the advance after the invasion was a continual advancing of the attack units so consequently we were never in the rear we were always with the advancing unit. After many months of being subjected to the same hazard and hardship as the troop in the combat ground units who had weapons and stuff like that especially when my ambulance I was in being fired on and I could not return the fire. On every occasion we had to remain with the front combat unit until the cover of darkness in order to complete our evacuation mission. During many months of not being able to fire back at the enemy who were firing at us with the red cross emblem on our ambulances vehicles and having no other way to defend ourselves other than to dismount our ambulance and run for cover of safety I became so frustrated and requested a transfer to a combat unit so I could fight the enemy who fired on me and my red cross ambulance. Vehicles that were helpless during this period. I received my transfer prior to Taskforce Ryan Offensive having no vacancy for my grade in a black combat unit I had to relinquish my first sergeant grade to be a member of the 761 battalion. That was the only unit at the time that had vacancy as the combat unit other than the service unit on the front line. The first black tank unit activated in World War II and I remained on the front line as a tank gunner until the end of the war. Black soldiers have served with distinction in every war since the American Revolution, still at the beginning of World War II black soldiers had to once again prove their courage. Over half a million of these brave men served overseas in all black combat units such as the 761<sup>st</sup> tank battalion which I was in under Patton.

Patton welcomed us with a typical superiority attitude pointing out that all America had their eyes on us and that was a joke, and he said don't let them down and then he said damn you, don't let me down. General Patton told us as long as you kill those, and he named the name, German's I don't care what color you are.

So he left us, the black unit in a quandary. Here we were with a white commanding officer, Commander Bates, and most of the officers were white with the exception of my company commander, Captain Gates. And he left us in a quandary, and we had a terrific group of white officers working as our commanders, but here we had to speak about what it was he was talking about as long as we killed the Germans, how could we tell who was a German if we are going to be spearheading. I'm saying this and laughing about it but this is what the conversation about us and we couldn't tell our white commanding officers other than we say, please don't go in the lead tank, but that was a joke, that was a joke. That was one of the things we laugh about but it was a bad omen because Patton said take whatever you want and he said I want to see every town you go through burning, he gave us every latitude we wanted and I hate to report that we took some of those latitudes when we passed through towns and stuff like that. Many towns we went through they had sniper fires coming from white flags and that only meant that some of the Germans were in the building sniping at the troops we were spearheading. So consequently they didn't realize what they were doing but trying to shoot the tank commanders and stuff like that when we got all this heavy artillery. So we actually would find where the snipers were coming from one tank to another tank and it would be white flag and we would have to when we distinctly knew that they were shooting from that distance we would have to shoot. And so what we normally did, I was the gunner, so I told the loader what type of ammunition to put in and we had already discussed this we would shoot armor Piercing Shell into the house the first time so in case anything was explosive in the house it would blow up and then if nothing would happen then we'd shoot HG, high explosive and the building would crumble down because the first shell had already knocked all the props and stuff down. So consequently, I never realized the impact of what I was doing until this November 11<sup>th</sup>, when those Arabs went into those buildings and the plane with all this fuel and explosion and what the depth these fellows got who died in this and many of my German friends, who are in the Knights of Columbus with me, and many of my Italian friends, who are in the Knights of Columbus with me, their wives relating they were

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from that country and they had married fellows from the United States, some were Germans some were Italian, but they were saying we're having troubles. And you begin to relate this here I pray at night and asked to forgive me and forgive those who have done anything wrong to me, here I began to realize, I've never asked God.. hey.. forgive me for killing all those people in those buildings. I never realized the horrible death they went through with my high explosive shell generated when it went into that little compact building and here, all this happening on November 11<sup>th</sup> brought not solace but a sort of remorse and a guilt you know, but that was war you know and we were subjected to that. I said that now because it coming back to me again that same feeling that I had talking to these women that hey I know what you're talking about because we shot up your buildings, we dropped the bombs on you, on your places, and here I'm in instrument of that devastating blow and devastating death they may have had, and so consequently I thought about that.

**Question:** Is it different though that you were on the defensive, I mean, here they have surrender flags hanging out, Geneva Convention, but yet they are cheating so to speak. They are firing at you. You didn't do this, I assume.

**Answer:** This is normal with the American army too. I mean when they went to Viet Nam when we were cornered or captured we pulled the same thing. So in other words the old adage you're saying is love and war, but that's not true. We are still human beings and these things come back to us at different times, when we see different things that we didn't realize. Like in my case I just didn't realize the type of death that they died and what I was really doing is hey that is another one mark it up. Now the pillboxes were different because those were fortified pillboxes that the German's had and (inaudible) ammunition to shoot down on the advancing unit and tanks and other units. And so I said 183 days later fighting all the way through six European countries and distinguishing ourselves as volunteers in the Battle of the Bulge the men of 761<sup>st</sup> lived up to the expectation of their tough and popular general. They knocked out more than 300 enemy machine gun nests, occupied 7 enemy towns, knocked out radio stations at Salz inflicted nearly 130 casualties of the enemy and won 391 decorations for heroism in combat. The 761<sup>st</sup> gallant service was cited by four major generals and under the secretary of war, but the price we paid was high. The battalion suffered a 50% casualty rate. The battalion personnel had proved their loyalty and bravery with their blood and life yet there exists racism and segregation in the military. During World War II black soldiers were forced to fight on two fronts at the same time, one against the United States government Jim Crow system, and the other against the enemy of our country. It was to our credit that we were able to win both battles. The 761<sup>st</sup> tank battalion was present at the calculation of the German army at the Inn River in Austria. Many of us survived to see President Truman sign the executive order 9987 declaring there shall be quality and opportunities for persons in the armed services without regard to race, religion or national origin. In 1978 after 33 years delay, the 761<sup>st</sup> tank battalion got recognition it deserved. The black soldiers who fought bravely during World War II few remained to see their unit rewarded for effectiveness under fire from President Jimmy Carter. The 761<sup>st</sup> armored tank battalion was the first black combat army unit in World War II to be awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. October 1945 I returned to the United States after fighting to restore the human rights and dignity of the Jews and other European countries to find the only change when I came back was that I was no longer colored. My race as a nation was changed to Negro and in 1959 when I took the warrant officers course my race was changed to Negroid, and during 1950-1954, while serving in Korea and Japan I began to witness the integration of troops and units and I returned to the United States and found my race was changed to Black. And a few years later my race was changed to Afro-American and now my race designation has changed to African-American. Now that sounds, that sounds ridiculous but my observation of all of these things in my 82 years was. I have observed in the past and in the present that the majority of our white politicians and few of our so called black leaders of America methodically

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kept us whites and black citizens confused by establishing our race designation primarily to maintain white political control and engender inferiority among the nonwhites. Now I'm a year older and I can see this clearly through my eyes and not being familiar with the extensive vocabulary today I could have written this differently but this is the truth I've written here. I firmly believe that racism and bigotry will continue to deteriorate our democratic society until we face up to reality and recognize that we Americans, are first Americans, and after that whatever our ancestors may have been. And then like I said to the college students at Pierce College and they asked the question since you were not instrumental in creating this race designation what is Jim Crow? Consequently I was caught off guard but after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed then they had to find some way to maintain the superiority and control of the United States

Under white control so the logical thing was to enact laws that were Jim Crow. For an example in my home town, Lafayette, Louisiana, it was a predominantly Catholic community. And the people there were called Cajuns, Creoles, Blacks, Whites, they were all called these things and we all lived in this one place. And the Jews that migrated to the city they were isolated but they maintained all the haberdasheries and the Italians that migrated to the city maintained all the taverns and the saloons and stuff and the Catholics there who mix.. the Creoles and the Cajun s like my father was a Cajun and my mother was a Creole so they constitute the Cajuns or the whites that migrated there during the British and the French war and so consequently that's how it was that we understood all of our places but they enact laws and one of the law was that you might be familiar with, says that any person with one drop of non-white blood is black or something else, but not white.

And so my father said, he was white my father said every human beings blood is red and when you die it turns black. So he married a Creole so he was an outcast so my father was. But in any case I took this positive feeling my father gave us. Go out into the world and maintain a status of credibility, and then you can demand respect and that is what me and my brothers did and I came from a family of ten. It was six boys and four girls and my mother was the one that maintained control of the family and the way she maintain that she says I'm going to do the spanking because your father will kill you if he spank you. So consequently she was a little French descendent woman and she spanked us every Saturday the boys all six of us, we did something wrong, went to a Catholic school. She never spanked the girls that we know of, and when we got to be grown men we said to her one of my brothers said, now I know why you spanked us, you were taking calisthenics, she said I don't want to hear the big words and she slapped him, and he was in his thirties at that time. I said all that to say I had a good home life and I advocate that same system with my own children. People said how could you live down there when they have Jim Crew law, picking you up at random and putting you in jail and the Klansmen are ransacking your area, how did you manage not to go to jail your father and his family. I said well he was one of those radical Cajuns although he knew there were Cajuns Ku Klux Klan. They'd have to deal with him, but I don't know that is true, but he was that way. He said ok I have to make a choice be with my family and be ostracized or.. but anyhow he maintained that status. In other words don't let your friends pick you only, be sure you pick your friends as well as let your friends pick you and so consequently not one of my brothers or my sisters we have never had any confrontation with the law or during our coming up years. And me and my family, my immediate, my sons and, I left with that same thing and none of my sons have had no confrontation with the law. I says don't let me hear about it. I told them the thing my father said, you'd better tell me before they, you better tell me before. So if you have any questions you had better ask me.

**Question:** Did, I mean it's interesting, where you grew up and the time and everything like that and part of the fact that there was bigotry in the service has been left out of the history books because a lot of the history you read says Pearl Harbor happened and the whole country came together.

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**Answer:** That is correct.

**Question:** But what you tell me is, yes we came together but we aren't going to give you the rank, we aren't going to give you the medals, we're going to put you in this black troop over here and you're going to be attached to all of these things and they are so.

**Question:** Defeating there was, we were already indoctrinated. As I was telling you, we lived under this status so consequently we were indoctrinated, this was all around us. We didn't understand why our father could vote but we couldn't, for a long time. We didn't understand the denominational precepts of the Catholic Church, when they profess to be equality and engender harmonious treatment among all. And in my case, I went to the seminary and my teachers were all Germans. It was a German missionary that came to the United States of America, to establish the first nonwhite seminary. So consequently it was in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi that the seminary was, and the majority of the students were from British Honduras, and they were over.. they had the teachers who came from British Honduras they put into the Catholic Schools in America but the seminary was all white. My prefect, the teachers all were white, and brilliant people, oh terrific, disciplinarians, the army was a snap because I didn't have freedom when I was in the seminary. 30 minutes in the morning with a free time to speak and they'd stop me before I could speak. And we never chose the type of sports we play, we never chose the subjects, we never got our own mail until the prefect has read them, we never got our packages, so we were, in my case, disciplined. We had this discipline that was much higher than the one that we had at home. At home we were disciplined in a different way. We knew how to play the games with the policemen and the (inaudible). The policemen's in my hometown were white, they were Cajun, but they were politically controlled. Most of them couldn't write, couldn't read. When they arrest you, they had their badges, and their horses, and their guns and everything. When they arrest you they make you sign your name and write your stuff down so they never knew. And when you start having cars to come through our little town, that used to be a joke you know. They would stop the cars for no reason whatsoever and they'd go up there and they'd, hey black fellow coming through riding through.. hey boy come over here write your name put your license plate down and it was a joke with us because we'd never do that we'd give them some other kind of information and we was having fun. But the people coming through didn't understand it and they had guns and they had their guns. But this was fun in those days, like I said we were disciplined under those circumstances and it was very easy. Like I spoke to a couple of people who were in the concentration camps and they said we knew where we were when we got there we had only one choice, to be cooked or to survive a little longer, all we had to do was cooperate. So I was listen to them tell me that and I said, you know I was in the same shoes only under different circumstances. I could walk down the street but I had to get off the sidewalk if they were coming there with me. If I wanted a drink and the fountain where I'm supposed to drink is not working and all of them where we drank at wasn't worth two cents. And I said as far as a restroom that was almost out of the question. If you did find one, it didn't work, but in any case, you ask the question and I'm trying to answer the question as logically as I could because when you asked the question, knowing that you are interviewing me, I know that you know most of the answers but you want my answer.

**Question:** Well, I know some but some that I don't, because I think, I would think the fact that ok when called into the service and yes there was racism and bigotry and everything like that but now we're all coming together as one team but its like yeah we all want to go fight for the country except well I thought that some of that might have become invisible during World War II or did.

**Answer:** Well you see, you are using World War II but you see before World War II black soldiers fought in he war then and they fought under the same condition, the buffalo soldiers

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and the rest of them. Same condition. People wonder why, why they could get them to go out there and fight. That is something that I wanted. I wanted to be like everybody else. I wanted to be more loyal, more patriotic, a better fighter than those who downgraded me, made me a second class citizen. So that's the feelings that went through when you say how did they come together. They call this the greatest generation and when you look at it you say, after the war, let's use for example, I'll tell you how it changed. I come back and see all this change so I come back after the war here I, after the war I come back and I find all these conditions. My brothers, they all working, they got jobs, supervisor of the janitors in telephone company, the Bell telephone, things progressing after the war. And my second brother supervisor, no in charge of the cigarette department of Dalford's Cigar and Cigarette Company because him and the colonel was in combat together but they worked together before they went in combat, but the colonel took a different view when he come back, not a different view, he just that company, that's his father and mother's company, but they run it now. So he comes back and says ok good, (inaudible) you on the top floor, you in charge. Can't make you supervisor, but you're in charge, because if I make you supervisor then all the white's here is going to be against me. And I'm in judge in this town and we are politically inclined in this town. So in other words they done that in a different form. But people like me, not my brothers, I said no way, I'm going to vote, so I campaigned to vote, but who did I campaign to, whistling in the dark. I got about five people to. I got some reputable people, a fellow who went to school with me, his father, he was at seminary with me, but I got his father to get on the campaign to vote with me, they wouldn't campaign, they just said ok, I'll go, I'll go, I'll go. And just before the date for voting they said, well Chris we won't be able to make it because this happened, another, well Chris, we won't be able to make it because this happened. So that went on for all four of them so my father came home and said son you go ahead and vote if you want to vote and I'll stay here with your children and stuff like that and I had one son and my wife. And I went on, so happened the precinct was about a block and a half from my house I went down there and when I walked up to the precinct thing. I already had established a reputation in the town for being radical you know, they'd talk to my brother and say hey uh. So I walked in and they shuffled their feet and they were sitting in the place it was kind of cold that morning and I turned around and looked at the fellows running the poll and said according to your rules and laws what are you doing letting those people in here those bums in here, they shuffled. And so I said, you don't want me to cause you an incident, he said OK you don't keep quiet or you have to go out. And a, but anyhow, I had the challenge, and this had been my life, to challenge. And then right after that I said this is not a place for me. This is good for my home town, this is good for my brothers, good for my sisters, good for my, well all my sisters left they went on to Texas, but that was just as bad. But anyhow it is very few of us that had the courage, or the tenacity to stand up to them and a. So consequently and at that time when I did this I was working at the telephone company and they had a German fellow by the name of Steiner, he was the supervisor and he was over all of their logistics and they had all these, these fellows the linemen and they gave them these good salaries and stuff and I said I want to be a lineman. I'm more educated than they are, and I went to war, and I did this. Steiner said I want you with me and you're going to be in charge and I'm going to give you an office. But they were making Mr. Steiner do this to keep me quiet.

**Question:** They put you over here and they said let's make Chris happy and

**Answer:** I was challenging the fellows when they come in, when they come in with their truck I said don't be bringing that truck in here, you haven't cleaned it, you haven't done this, and I was challenging them which I wasn't supposed to do. I said OK I am working with Steiner on this and he is the supervisor and he says these trucks have to come in clean and you have to have your list for requisitions and those fellows didn't know more than the man in the moon, they say just fix it up, but anyhow, Steiner was.. he says we're going to raise your

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salary, we're going to double your salary, nothing on paper, he gave me a little office, and my little office was a latrine, for the janitor. Now he says we're going to fire the janitor, and you're going to be the janitor. I say oh no, he says we're going to fire the janitor and let you work at night waxing the floors and have the janitor clean it up and then we're going to give you additional money. So here I got an office with a toilet stool and all these racks for these fellows to hang their clothes in so that was terrific, I said, ok good. Mr. Steiner was sincere but he had the problem to deal with me, they didn't want to deal with me, and they couldn't fire me because I had a brother that was working at the main office, over all of the brothers, and my other brother was working for the judge at the cigar company. So I had some clout if they would try to just railroad me. I said I'm a hero you know, but in any case here I'm working and I began to.. no you can't come in at this hour, you're not supposed to be here, you're supposed to be out there washing that truck, you're supposed to come in at 4 o'clock, and put in your report at 5.. you can't come in here, you can't use the latrine. We want to get to our locker, you can't even get to your locker. So they were telling my brother, you know your brother is shell shocked and this went on but anyhow. I'm telling you it is very few that take the initiative to fight so immediately after that happened about the voting I told my wife I have to go back into the service and go overseas or someplace I said, because I can get more rights. So consequently I applied to go back in the service. And I couldn't get my first sergeant rank they gave me all kinds of static you know on purpose. I said no problem, I came into the service and I went on through all my experience I was promoted every three months until I got to sergeant major, and when I got to sergeant major then the colonel asked me to take a warrant officer's test. And the reason why I had to take a warrant officer's test is that I was a sergeant major in the battalion, it was an artillery battalion, and the captain in one of the batteries, since I was in charge of all the staff, the battalion staff and noncommissioned officers, when they lost a round in artillery I'd have to see that the S-2's go out and survey the grounds and see where they are at and everything else. So.. but I never did this unless it was a duty day I was called. And one of the battery commanders didn't like me because I had challenged him for calling me out of my name and I told him I was the spokesman for all the enlisted men. I was in charge of all the first sergeants and all that stuff like the battalion commander is in charge of all your officers. So he pressed charges against me, he said I had struck him. I didn't strike him, I charged him and he fell over on his back getting away and he was the only officer that they didn't like because he carried a gun on duty all the time. But anyhow, I had this court marshal and I fought my own case and beat the case but I never would be able to be a commissioned officer so but the colonel came in from Hawaii and he was brigadier general and he was broken down to a colonel and he came into our outfit and he said, I want you to be my adjutant. And he told me to go onto school and he sent me to the school for the warrant officers course and he came back and I said colonel I can't be adjutant and he said you're my sergeant major now and you're going to be my adjutant when you graduate and so being a brigadier general before he hadn't actually lost his rank because he got it when he retired. So he got them I got my warrant officer course and he came back to duty and he made me the battalion adjutant so I was a WOJG warrant officer junior grade at the battalion adjutant and I act fool all the while I was adjutant. I was the colonel's boy. I was the adjutant. All the reports that go into the colonel's office have to come to me, so you can imagine what I did with the S-2, S-3, S-1.

**Question:** Now you were wounded?

**Answer:** Huh.

**Question:** You were wounded

**Answer:** I was wounded in the hand and in the leg. But I refused to be evacuated knowing that most of my men were fighting under strength, and we had no trained

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replacements coming in, we were already being slaughtered. So I refused to be evacuated and I mounted that tank, jumped right back up on it and manned that gun with my foot and my hand. See you could shoot that 76 millimeter gun, you could shoot it with your foot and you can shoot it with your hand, and you have to traverse the rotate your turret and you do that with your hand good hand or bad hand and with just turning the knob and the elevation and the pressure of the gun. But I could shoot the gun with the hand or the feet so I would play that game with the gun, dah dah dah dah.. shoot it with the left foot the machine gun. I had a machinegun and a big gun, and then I'd holler, on the way so the loader don't get behind the gun and shoot the big stuff out.

**Question:** Did you take shrapnel or how did you get wounded?

**Answer:** I got wounded getting out of the tank. We had our tracks sort of stuck in the mud and I got wounded there. See the Germans had the 88 gun and the 88 gun had flash hiders on them and they had flash hiders on the engine and it was a powerful gun. But that gun didn't traverse 360 degrees so what happened was that gun would only turn 180 degrees so we got them on the run they couldn't shoot back at us. And they had wire tracks on their tank and they would beat us to the forest because they knew where all the wooded areas was and they would beat us to the forest. And to get there we had to go through marsh land and stuff like that and they knew we would get stuck in the mud if we were to keep going with smaller tracks. That wasn't the point. The point is was when they got in the woods they would turn that tank around and they could shoot us and we couldn't tell where they were shooting us from. Us we had no flash hiders, although the armored tank unit we were supporting had all these wonderful things. They just playing it cool and going straight on and we taking the opposition on the offensive. When we light up our guns.. our tank in the morning, the German's could see us for miles away. When we shot our gun they could see us for miles away. It was a matter of us getting them on the run where we could shoot backwards and forwards if we were retreating or attacking or sideways. And so I refused to be evacuated and I remained on the front line until the end of the war. And we were at the Inn River, waiting for the Russians that was the cut off. And we waited there until the Russians and Patton and the rest of them came on by and we were never mentioned in his book, never mentioned in his book. So you see I didn't believe nothing.. to start with I mean I've been around, I don't believe anything.

**Question:** So you were an invisible force to some extent?

**Answer:** Sacrificial lamb.

**Question:** So you couldn't climb the rank, and the reason I ask about you being wounded is because you like you didn't receive a medal at that time, now I'm not saying medals are not important to you, but you didn't receive a medal at that time.

**Answer:** Oh yeah, medals were important and I thought I had a copy of this to give you, yeah, about the medals I didn't get my, I have it broken down to the dates and time and I can do this much better if I

**Question:** You keep looking for that I've got a piece of paper here

**Answer:** Oh I dropped that.

**Question:** Yeah.

**Answer:** Oh, it's my fault.



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**Question:** No, it's my fault.

**Answer:** I received my Purple Heart when we was in support the 411 infantry. I accomplished that in 1944-1945. And then I was recognized in June, 1963, 18 years later. My presidential unit citation I accomplished that in 1944-1945 and I was recognized in January 1978, 33 years later. My service silver star for gallantry I did this in 1944-45 and I received recognition in 1997, 52 years later. My combat medical badge for 590 ambulance company has been before the evaluation board for quite a few years and the only thing they come back with, they gave me a statement saying that due to your administrative rank.. first sergeant, you performed administrative duty with the battalion and that's a lie I never was with the battalion, I was just assigned to the battalion and I was attached. Now I'm talking about the ambulance company, just like I was in the army, I was attached to the advancing elements. They didn't want me back there with the battalion to start with. But the people at the Pentagon is using that basis that you're not qualified because of your. So my only defense was that I'm proud to be an American that I was privileged to fight for my country and I'm not bitter for all the delayed recognition. I am aware that the department of army is responsible, is the responsible custodian of the military combat records and personnel participation. So don't ask me to prove this to you when you've got my record and so they came back and said well there was a fire in the Pentagon and in the army record department and we haven't been able to consolidate the records in those department. So consequently that's how they use that thing to me and I wrote this to them.

The following information reflects some of my delay recognition accomplishment and frustration that I endure since World War II. I am now 79 and a half years of age, I landed in France, D-day plus 6, and I fought in the European War campaign during 44 and 45, I remained in the front line combat units 'til World II ended when we met the Russians and Ukrainian Russian Army at the Inn River in Sty, Austria. I also fought in the Korean Combat Campaign, three of them, during the Korean conflict. Most Americans pretend that segregation did not exist in the United States Army during World War II. American born blacks fought for the freedom of others, while we black soldiers were segregated and treated as second class citizens throughout the war and during the war. Now you can have this it gives you the dates and the time.

Now I am also eligible for the CIB, the combat infantry badge. And that's the people we was attached to, and they say you were not assigned to them. I could not be assigned because nonwhites were not eligible to be assigned to white unit and synonymous to assigned is attached. Furthermore my white commanding officers, who we were attached to were there just with the infantry regiment and they got combat infantry and here we suffered the same hardship, lived the same life and you deny me that. And so we look to the regulation and it did say you must be assigned, but that is not true because they have issued it to all the attached units.. to combat units on the front line. But its like. So what I did, I turned all my stuff over to Senator Patty Murray, Senator Cantrell, Congressman Smith, and I have a few other people that endorsed their recommendations.

My citation reads like this: Private Christopher P. Navarre armored, Company C, 761<sup>st</sup> tank battalion, for gallantry in action during the period of 15-23 March and advance from France to Germany, Private Navarre, tank gunner, displayed outstanding devotion to duty and closely supporting attacking elements of the 411 infantry regiment. And that's why they changed the words to supporting instead of attached. Although wounded in the hand and leg while being attacked, Private Navarre knew his tank unit was fighting under strength with no tank crew or trained tank gunners replacement available. He refused to be evacuated making it possible for his crew to continue the attack with uninterrupted maximum tank gunfire in accomplishing the attack mission. Continuing the attack his tank gun fire assisted in neutralizing twenty-three pill boxes and he assisted in evacuating casualties in the face of enemy artillery. And the key word there is my tank gun got only recognition for "assisting" to knock out the outfit.

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They had no other tanks up there, but, anyhow, destroying twenty-three and he assisted in evacuating in the face of. I got off of my tank when we had some of these people cornered and evacuated them out of harms way, not the tankers, the tankers would never get off the tank. I think the tank commander enjoyed me getting off the tank because it gave him a chance to shoot my gun. Private Navarre skilled in battle, materially assisted in clearing automatic weapons sniper position and effectively cover combat position. Private Navarre's disregard for his own safety under fire displayed an inspiring, courageous, and sincere devotion to duty. His action exemplified the highest tradition of his service and reflects the highest credit for himself and the armed forces of the outfit. And all these awards comes with specific title, keywords. Bronze Star, valor, if you didn't have valor valorous.. valor in it, no matter how you'd be superior in whatever you are doing you weren't qualified. If you didn't have the word gallantry for the Silver Star, no matter what you did, so what I did in the past year I wrote to the Department of Defense and requested information since you refused to give me the CIB and my CMB and they said you can't get both, but you aren't going to get any. Since you refuse to give it to me I would like to have a copy of all the Medal of Honor Winners, a copy of all the DSC, Distinguished Service Cross winners because you are responsible for my record and these are supposed to be available and consequently some clerk snafued and sent me the information. So I've got a listing of all the Distinguished Service Cross Awards during my period and all of the Medal of Honor during my period. And in that book that I gave you, *The Good War*, that little.. of my commanding officer he said after he was out and was at the national guard in Kansas he said on an interview when they wrote the work, he said every silver star should be a medal of honor so I didn't do that. I took this thing and I evaluated all that their actions and what they did according to what I did and I said I want to go the impossible way and I requested that my silver star be reevaluated for the DSC which is the Distinguished Service Cross, which is the one next to mine. Good God Almighty and I got Patty Murray, and I got (inaudible) and I wrote up the whole thing so I wrote this up this thing different with more terminology that pertain to over and above. Now you may have recalled just recently this fella who received the medal of honor for flying his helicopter or small plane through all this combat fire to pick up supplies and to come back and they gave him this tremendous.. just about a month ago tremendous award oh valorous and they gave him all those key words and here a man didn't even kill a person, he didn't even have to go through what he went through he was like a jockey flying to his fire and they wrote this thing up like he has saved the world. And President Bush presented him his Medal of Honor . So the terminology, at that time those awards were supposed to be written by the division S-1 and S-2. That's their job to do that and forward it on and you just tell them what happened and they put it in the right terminology, that's why no nonwhite received the medal of honor or a distinguished service cross during the world war until way afterwards. Well that's unique for me. Go ahead.

**Question:** Is there a progression, because again you talk about that we've had black soldiers in the civil war. Black soldiers have been there forever and they've done their duty for their country and I guess the things in the world that always bother me, a friend and I were talking, all I care is that things are fair. If this person can do this then I should be able to do that, but when I look and it is unfair I mean, I'm a hot-blooded German I go nutso. So here's what the rules are and the game is and you went on and you did it and you served your country and risked your life and like you said you worked to be higher and above approach and you did everything and they look and said thank you very much and here is a medal for somebody over here who got a little cut jumping out of an airplane and they scraped their buns on something.

**Answer:** I think he did something great, but he was an ass to do that, if you read the.. He done this on his own when he wasn't even authorized to do that. They had all the sophisticated weapons and things like that. When General Crocker gave me my silver star he

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said I have tears in my eyes. I'm the age of your sons, and after he gave me my outfit he said you are a hero, you are a VIP. And I said can I quote you general, I am your VIP because I'm in this area. He said yes, you will be invited to every function that I have, but I made him say it again. Then I went to the personnel and said now, now we aren't going to have any static on this, I want a letter, an invitation and all the trimmings every time you have a function over here. But I had to go and challenge him because the first two functions went on the Mayor of DuPont is invited, said gee whiz hey, I'm the hero he just talked about, you talk about results, I left right from them and went to the general's office and the aide said you can't go in like this how did you get so far, I said because I'm a VIP. And so anyway, they held me there you know. He walks in with a cowboy hat you know and comes all the way down to the general's office, past the (inaudible) so anyhow he said send him in. I went in and said general you forgot one thing, he said what. You forgot to give me written respect, you did not.. you spoke but you did not follow it up with any written documentation. I said now I've received recognition from the senate assembly, recognition from the county council, now I spoke to all these places and the only speaking I did to you was when you called me up and presented but you never gave me nothing. The aide was there. I had all my stuff with me for the governor and I said I've got things from people who don't know nothing about me and so he had the aide go in and take care of it. I'm saying this, because this is my particular attitude when I came out of the war and before when I went to the war, but after the war I became more confident. When I came out of the seminary I did the same thing to the priest. I was a seminarian so I know the words. I'd go to the rectory and they'd call me and wanted to use me to baptize children out in the swamps and stuff like that. and they would play cards with me. And I would challenge them and say how could you in good conscience be a priest and advocating segregation. The church you got here is not segregated because they are all black, they all Creoles. I said but here the cathedral is over there and you're not telling them.. well you see, Chris, we are trained. I said don't tell me I've been to seminary and I do this stuff with them and that's been my life, but I'm not a bitter person. I take the bull by the horn and I accept the consequences. My kids, on my 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, my son came to me, my 51 year old son, he said and he made a beautiful speech, and he said about all his success and everything that he had accomplished is because of his environment and his mother and his father and stuff like that. And I said God Almighty I had to wait 50 years to get this, 50 years to get this. Well he says Pop, I'm not 50 years old, you were married before. He said this you know, but that's the way I was. And we had problems when I got my warrant they had no black officers, and here I'm the adjutant, I'm responsible for the reports that go to the general and everything and when we have the function I'm the adjutant. So look if you want to play ball I'll play the same game you're playing. your reports won't get in. I did this and suffered the consequences. But my children in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, that's where this was, they have a lot of Indians there, couldn't go to the Catholic school. I mean I thought I was a wheel and here I'm not even a. Spoke so my wife went over and talked to the priest, I said you go talk to him first, she said I can't talk to him because I get out of control. I said go ahead and get out of control. And she said my husband he was on the front line and... and he said, well, these are the parish policies, then she challenged with, I'll let my husband come talk to you. And I did the same thing with Knights of Columbus. I couldn't be a Knights of Columbus in Lafayette, Louisiana,. I was a.. had to join.. we had to organize a knights of Peter Claver in order to have the same status of Knights of Columbus. But that didn't stop me. I came here to the Northwest and what I did, I joined the Knights of Columbus and then I began to denounce them. Where is all of the Mexican and the Indians and all the other, you have more Catholics in all those groups than you have here. Well Chris you see, you are on the degree team. I said, yeah, kick me off. So I write the supreme and I tell the supreme you have in this Catholic denominational structure, prejudice, and I went right on and named those suckers name, so I went right through the ranks. I was a grand Knight, and I fired every sucker I knew who was advocating racism and prejudice and they were doing it to. And I did the same thing, I went on to district deputy and same way. Right here in Washington. In

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Washington we haven't had one member who is in the chairs for the Knights of Columbus for the State of Washington that were (inaudible).

I ran about seven years ago and God Almighty, I ran and they said I wasn't a team member but when I got through with them, I wrote the archbishop and everybody else and they gave me all kinds of outfit, then I wrote the supreme and he gave me his name was, he was a German. Ancestors German, but his parents were directly from Germany. He wrote me and said ok you are appointed as a delegate to the Washington State. I went down there and said you played games with me. Listen I had those German priest in my place, I put a number on them, you know, and they advocate Christianity to the top level. They gave millions of dollars to the pope and all that stuff. But like I said, I got to district deputy and I seen I was fighting the outfit but I did get rid of all the fellows that did advocate and unfit. And this has been the story of my life and the same way with getting my unit into the Fort Lewis, Fort Knox, Fort Reilly to get in there, into the museum. When this fellow says I'm going to do this artistic thing, and he says if I could get you to help, and I said you got no problem. I said I'll take care of Fort Lewis and that is what I did.

**Question:** You seem to come about things with a very positive.

**Answer:** Well yes, I don't hold grudges now. When I got through with those fellows I wasn't an enemy. I'm your friend. You're still a Knights of Columbus, you are still Catholic, I know who you are but I'm not going to change you because that is your forte but we know one another. We all were raised that way but many of us took different approaches, went in hiding. And then for this thing for the Fort Lewis Museum. I went to the curator and I says gee whiz you don't have nobody but whites in this thing here. I said you have General Crock over here and I'm the one that got the award not him. So consequently, I pulled some strings with the inspectors that were going to come over here, and I walk in on him and I broke the whole thing up and so he thought he was going to have trouble he went to the general. And then I wrote a letter to the general and first thing you know he said ok good. They put him in the outfit. I said no you are not going to put him anyplace. Then I wrote the general a letter and told him he had newly installed hall of famers in his outfit now and I would respectfully request he come and see what is in his museum and outfit. And that fellow that drew these pictures and stuff, his name is King and he was at Fort Reilly and they were giving him the heave ho because he is an artist and he is doing all this stuff and he is a sergeant first class and like a primadona they didn't like him. But they was giving him a hard time. So I just wrote a letter to his commanding officer and the commanding general and I just switch the story around. To him I said respectfully we have these pictures, these hall of famers to go into your museum and I said all that, and the person responsible for all this is a member of your organization and I want to commend the colonel of his unit of that regiment for allowing him, and said all that stuff and I was lying because he was having trouble with that colonel. But you know what happened? That colonel was called in and commended by the general and this fella here and I should have brought some of the letters, he said gee whiz you don't know what happened. I've got it made now and I can do more for them now as well as the work I'm doing. He has a business called King's Image and so.

**Question:** Feather in the colonel's cap (inaudible).

**Answer:** He's a bird colonel, and the general calls him in and commends him for. And I told the general and I told him all the other places it was in and so I never got no response from the general neither here nor there but I just recommended him. I recommend that you.... Respectfully....I am a Silver Star Recipient and I named General Crocker who presented me my silver star. But anyway I do that and that's some of the, like my sons say, you have to use your ingenuity sometimes to get the job done and he says dad you don't have that. He

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said you go directly and then you have to end up challenging them. You win but he says you win by default, so anyhow.

**Question:** I have one last question.

**Answer:** You can ask me any one you want.

**Question:** A lot of times when we started this project oh I guess about two years ago there were a lot of educators and all that said you're going to go out and talk to these veterans and you're just going to glorify the war because all these veterans think war is wonderful and that's the way things should be. And you talked about some things and many of the other vets I've talked to

**Answer:** They don't want to talk about it. Like you have a black Tuskegee airman in your outfit. He is a Knight of Columbus. He is just a member. He is a very active member of McChord Airforce Base. I'm a member of the officer's club over there too. I'm a member of the Fort Lewis Club; I'm a member of the navy one over here. I got to be a member of all these places so my wife can go play bingo, but here I see him all the time because I go to the club. And he is a Knight of Columbus, so I am interacting with him in many cases. He speaks big, but they elude or they evade to say, well they don't want to be cornered. Let me see how to say that. They still have that ingrained attitude they were brought up with, play dumb if you are on top, just like the black leaders. You'll see, King, and all the rest of these fellows who are self made, they profess they are the leader and they go ahead and take the initiative. They are really not our elected leaders. They are really not our leaders they, just like that little thing the skit I read you. The so called who speaks for everyone and speaks for no one. Like Jackson speaks for the Rainbow Coalition, and he, now, it appears I'm speaking bad about him but I'm not I'm speaking. He is using all of his wit for his benefit, in other words, he says OK I'm for all people, for all people. He is not one person for all people he's, so he and a few others are primarily responsible for our race designation. Like the kids in Pierce College say to me, Mr. Navarre you got to have race. Yes I studied ancient history when I was in the seminary, I understand what you are saying, you have to have (inaudible) but I said I want to tell you something before I explain to you what you ask. So, I go down to get my pistol permit, and on my pistol permit it says Black. So I said I'm not Black, this is recent you know, I'm not Black, I'm just doing this on purpose and the fellow said, I don't care what you are sir, you just tell me what you want. I have only two things on the computer I can put on, two codes, you are either white or you are Black. I'm laughing about that. This is a fact, right here at Pierce County. I said ok good, flip a coin and give me which ever one you want. He said no you tell me, whatever one you want. I said no I'm not going to tell you. So he says your last one is Black so he put Black. I didn't say nothing. But I was saying that to say that when this kid asked me, I said what I have learned in my education and those German priests were some of the most brilliant people because they were trained and they were trained and they were terrifically brilliant. They knew their subject. They knew their theology. It was no such thing as reading out of a book like I'm doing for memory getting old, they knew it all.

So I said to them, I said I've researched this thing and the only thing I can come up with and all the encyclopedia says, wherever you were born, where ever you were born, no matter what color, what country you come from, if you go to another country and you have a child and the child born there that nationality becomes that country. If you are born in England you are an Englishman. If you are born in America you are an American so in other words all these other attributes you give out I'm European-Dutch, I'm European-English, you give all those things means nothing at all because it only applies to ancestors. Now maybe your parents is lying to you. Now I have some adults in the audience, I say maybe, and I had some children too that was there on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November when I spoke at, maybe they are

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lying to you, they are telling you something that is not true but that is your parent's responsibility. But I said, if you are a white person and you call yourself white and you go to Japan and you have a child over there, that child was born in that country, and that child is a native of that country, that child is that nationality. So I didn't get much rebuttal. I think because I challenged the parents in the audience, when I said your parents are lying to you if they tell you anything different. Now you can go and research it and if you find anything different let me know.

But that has been the story of my life and I moved to DuPont, I was the assignment and termination officer for Fort Lewis quarters at Fort Lewis. All the assignment for all the quarters at Fort Lewis I was the assignment and termination officer. And my wife wanted to go to DuPont, so she said if you go overseas, I want to go to DuPont, and so consequently I said honey that is a little plant town. She says yes, but where do you want me to go. I said you are on post now, you have no problem, you live in Beachwood what else do you want. But she said yes but if you go overseas I'll have to leave. So then I looked up and checked all the stuff. They had a Mrs. Olsen that lived in Tillicum and she was in charge of all the rental houses for and she was primarily had blacks in certain areas and so she had rental houses for DuPont when you went over seas. So I told her I said Mrs. Olsen I'm having problems with some of the blacks that you have going into your area over here at Tillicum, but I think we can rectify that. You know why my wife want to live, my wife wants to live in Dupont. Now if you get a vacancy over there, she said oh no we can't do that. She didn't know who I was. She just talked to me on the phone, to get a vacancy on. I said look whenever you get a vacancy you can call me and let me know so I could better tell the people who wants to go to DuPont and how to get there. So she says, OK, being the assignment officer she thought it a big thing, we went to DuPont and she said now this house here is going to be up for rent because he is going over seas and dah dah dah. I said now that is the kind of house I'd like. So she started talking to me and she kind of figured I wasn't white so I noticed that too. She said you've got an accent to me and I said qui madam je parle francais. Oh you're French oh yeah... And I went on and I said some god things.. Tres Jolie, I said all kinds of wonderful things. She said what does that mean? I said you're a terrific lady, you're a beautiful, and I kept her talking like that because she was beginning to talk to me. She says you know those Mexicans are dirty in the outfit and you know those Blacks in the outfit that's why we don't want them in town and she didn't realize who she was talking to so consequently we went through this whole thing. I said now look I want to move in now that you've told me these people are gone. You been having it for two weeks I want to move in tomorrow. So she said you can move in tonight if you want. I said better then. I moved my, I went and called transportation, my stuff was already in storage, they moved my stuff over because I was living in quarters so I leave the quarters. The next morning, the realization in that town, look who moved in town. That was rambling but..

**Question:** So you one of the first Black families in DuPont?

**Answer:** Yeah. They had a Japanese family which I didn't know, but he was very quiet. So I just went through the whole gamut, I began to run for office I began to do all that stuff and I got to be the school board director, and I never could get to be mayor, I ran 2 or 3 times. The first time I ran was against a major that moved in after me, Italian, and his name is Alfredi, and we were friends in the service and while I was on assignment commission officer we were real close friends. And I was a civilian before him and he's come to me about getting to town because they check the records and anyhow he moved in to town, and after he was in town he came to me he said that fellow that runs the grocery store he's got the post office in it and he has all that stuff but we are going to take that. I said what we?. He says you get me \$5,000 and I'll get the Mafia, the associated grocers to go in give us all the stuff and I'm going to get that fella because he hasn't gone to school and he is just a political appointee. He said you and I are going to take the postmasters test. We went to Olympia to

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the postmaster's test. He flunked, I got it. He said oh no you can't apply for it yet because I'm going to be the postmaster and you're going to be in charge of the grocery store.

**Question:** So here it goes again.

**Answer:** Yea. You're going to be in charge of the grocery store and I'm going to be in charge of the meat market and the post office. But anyhow, but he was Italian, and his wife was white, so I went on and I decided Fred I'm running for mayor against you. He ran for mayor and we got him in just like that, because the town was asleep. We got in like that, so consequently he wanted to let the town expand and I said no let the village stay like it is. DuPont power plant is paying all the expenses. We are in the historical archives. We get free sewer, free this, free that, underground, pavement. So anyhow I said.. but we were friends and I got the post office with him. Got that fellow out of the post office, bought the grocery store and everything else and he never paid me my money back, but anyhow we were friends until he died. But I ran against him and you know what he did, he said at the church, the little church, all denominations, he said well you know the Mafiosi is on my side, associated grocers, and you don't want me to call them in. I said I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll play you a game. I'll call in the Black Muslim and I'll tell them I want them to burn the first house in DuPont and that's yours and they'll do that just for fun. He said no, we're not going to do that. You see, we're not going to talk about it, but anyhow, I laugh about it because it is all over and by my going back into the service and staying on the west coast made it possible for my kids to be educated in the military when they didn't feel.. Like my son told me this, he told me this about three weeks ago, he said Pop when I found out I wasn't white that was a devastating blow. I said how could you figure anything else. He said you never talk about it, you never did this you never did that you know. But he is a grown man and he is now feeling with the people he deal, in the conversation that they talk to him about the race that he belongs to. I said well you are walking around with a permit for a pistol and it says white on it, he says, well pick whatever one I want. But anyhow, they thanked me for that, because my son left from here and went on down to and Ellensburg was tough places.

**Question:** Yeah.

**Answer:** Oh gee whiz, tough places to be.

**Question:** Yeah, the old redneck days.

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** Do you, if you were to, I don't know if you have any grandchildren or not, but to leave them a message to understand World War II.

**Answer:** They have no secrets, it's all out. But it just so happened my son is married to a Swedish lady, ancestors are Swedes and they live up there in Maryland and he is an executive so his children are white. My great daughter is white and my youngest son his wife is white and his son is white so in other words I'm just whistling in the dark when I say look. And it just so happens that my son who is in Maryland, this is his third home he bought. As he went through the ladder it seems a lot of the key people are Germans and Jews, I mean like they got like thirteen vice president's. And so his friends are all, like his closest friend is a uhm, German-Jewish, but Russian, and his wife is a school teacher. So in other words, and he's got some brilliant kids, so those kids, I wonder how they go at it. Their mother is Russian and their father is German-Jew. And but look they, they like me because they get a good argument out of me.

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**Question:** Look how different it is for your grandchildren, because if they had grown up in Louisiana

**Answer:** You mean my brother's kids?

**Question:** No you your son's children. You have grandchildren, right?

**Answer:** Yeah, two of them, but they didn't come up in Louisiana.

**Question:** Yeah, but if they did?

**Answer:** They go visit but that's it. They think the people are crazy over there.

**Question:** But you said they are white right now, but if they grew up when you were, like you said, if you had just one little bit

**Answer:** It's in the books still in Louisiana, if you had just one drop of, how can you determine, like my father said you can't determine German blood, Jewish blood, Black blood, White blood.

**Question:** All Black till you die.

**Answer:** Now when I was in an ambulance outfit we'd pick up people on the front line. American troops, and they'd tell me some of them don't let that black boy or that nigger or words to that, and I said hey you not going to get no morphine if you keep talking like that. He wasn't talking to me, he was talking to me, but he was talking about my driver, and this is no time for me to say, who do you think you're talking to. My job was to take care of them get them in outfit. That was like my office, I'd pick a different ambulance to ride with and I carried my morning report in my pocket because (inaudible) so we never went way in the back, we just dropped them people at a drop off point and stuff like that from the front line. They kept moving.

**Question:** They delineated even enough to say you've got a red cross on and you're black and that's ok for you to touch me but the driver he is black don't have him touch me.

**Answer:** No, they didn't classify me as black.

**Question:** Oh, they didn't classify you as black? Oh.

**Answer:** I'm talking about the wounded. Looking over there, he says, hey, I'm white. Well that is what he is talking to me like, but all the fellows were not my complexion. So consequently it was just a matter, because you got some dark people in the white race, not black but dark. But all of my fellow workers in the ambulance company, they were all black, there was no brown skinned outfit and all that stuff at that time. The mobilization of the arms that was World War II. You didn't have many mixed races going on having children like in my case, my father connected with Cajun and a Creole, no you didn't have too much of that.