

Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series

Joseph Hudson interview

Conducted by James Newberry

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Transcribed by Isabelle Williams

Born in 1925, Joseph Hudson grew up in his grandfather's home in Virginia. During the Second World War, Hudson worked at the Richmond Army Depot before joining the Army in 1943. He trained at Fort Lee and spent two years in India, where he sorted used materiel en route from the Burma Road. After the war Hudson reenlisted and spent several years in postwar Germany. He recorded his oral history interview at Kennesaw State University in December 2016.

Full Transcript

Interviewer: This is James Newberry and I'm here with Joseph Hudson on Tuesday December 6, 2016 at the Sturgis Library at Kennesaw State University, and Mr. Hudson I wanted to- you agreed to do this interview with me?

Hudson: Yes.

Interviewer: Well thank you very much and could you state your full name?

Hudson: Joseph J Hudson Senior. Now can you hear- am I speaking okay? Because my voice sounds like it's coming through my nose or something - I don't know- I got some kinda allergy.

Interviewer: Is it- do you have a hearing aid in?

Hudson: No it just don't sound right coming from- it doesn't sound like me.

Interviewer: Well it sounds okay to me does it sound good to y'all? [muffled agreeance from background]

Hudson: Okay. Okay.

Interviewer: Yeah it's very clear. So uh, Mr. Hudson what is your birthday?

Hudson: November 27 5- November 27 - November the - the - 27 1925.

Interviewer: Okay. And uh, so you just turned 91?

Hudson: Right.

Interviewer: Okay so uh where were you born?

Hudson: I was born in Jersey City, New Jersey. Raised in Richmond Virginia.

Interviewer: So can you tell me about being born in New Jersey and then being raised in Virginia? Why is that?

Hudson: Well that was due to the time. My mother was working in Jersey City at that time and she couldn't keep me there and she had to send me back to my father - grandfather and he wanted a boy child so here I am. He raised me from about- I think I was about - I think my mother said I was about 6 weeks old or something like that. And uh - and from that time on I was in Virginia- Richmond, Virginia.

Interviewer: Do you have any idea how your mother felt about letting her child go back to Virginia to live with her father?

Hudson: She didn't have nothing to do with it at that time. My grandfather raised me now and uh- there was nothing she could do about it, that were the times - that uh- the lady she was working for - family she was working for couldn't have- didn't have- I don't know the- I don't know the whole story other than that.

Interviewer: So had your mother gone to New Jersey to get a job?

Hudson: Yes. Say during that time- during that time they were - you were- black women had to go north to get uh- good jobs, so to speak, good paying job. And that was called- the nickname for it was "living on lot" and that's what - she was one of those that went north to do that- to live on lot. And they- the people would take care of you and they would then you know they would pay you and all. That's all I can tell you about it.

Interviewer: So what kinda work was she doing then?

Hudson: Housework.

Interviewer: Okay. So tell me about uh- your grandfather's home in Virginia.

Hudson: Well I can't remember too much about it from the beginning but it was a - in a [indecipherable] he lived with his wife and they raised me and uh I stayed with them until I finished high school. And when I finished high school then I joined the army.

Interviewer: Can you describe your-your grandfather's house?

Hudson: Uh that's a story. He was a - he was doing - he was a farmer and in the city and he actually he did anything to get some income. To the best of my knowledge he would push a cart around the street to pick up paper and stuff, you know to help the family out and uh - pick up garbage because he had a couple of hogs out in the city - little town called Bungalow City - a couple of hogs out there and uh- he would pick up garbage and walk out there and uh - feed em

every other day I think it was or something like that till hog killing time. Now I didn't participate with that so I can't tell you nothing about that hog killing. And uh from that on - I was - he had my mother - his wife raise chickens in the town and uh I would help her with the chickens, feed them every day and that was it. And other times I was playing, playing up a storm out in the front yard till grandpa come home, when I come home from school, grandpa caught me out there playing marbles before I'd get out of school - before I come in the house - or he would wear me out. [laughs]

Interviewer: [laughs] So um did he- did he make a good enough living for y'all to get by and not struggle too much or did you feel like y'all were struggling financially?

Hudson: No was he- we- he made enough money between him and his wife - they made enough money to get by. And uh we - well you know as a general rule we not to - I could tell they weren't extravagant - they didn't spend a lot of unnecessary money but we made enough to live off of. And in them days I bought one pair of shoes a year and so we were [indecipherable] all right.

Interviewer: Were you affected by the depression?

Hudson: I don't even know anything about the depression at that time. That's how- because of the way we could live we just don't know about it. It just didn't- wasn't an issue.

Interviewer: So was Bungalow City sort of inside Richmond?

Hudson: No Bungalow City- that's where my mother lived. She lived there, my real mother, when she came back to Virginia she lived there and raised - had some more children and they'd lived out there but that was about 2 or 3 miles outside the city limits of Richmond. And that was more or less like a country they'd live in but where my grandfather lived at was definitely city limits.

Interviewer: So can you tell me about the relations between Black and white people in Richmond at that time?

Hudson: Well it was [indecipherable] a situation where -where you - so to speak you just didn't - everything was set up - things were so set up at that time you knew where you were going, you know where you going there wasn't no white people living near you or you couldn't come in to contact with white people or Blacks come - they come in contact so to speak. Everything you was in your own community and uh so you - it just was a situation that stores and schools and everything was in the Black community and that was it.

Interviewer: So you're saying you had sort of few interactions with white people?

Hudson: Right right.

Interviewer: Were there any bad interactions?

Hudson: No I don't recall any. You said bad reactions?

Interviewer: Right you know anything bad that happened to you.

Hudson: No, no, no. The bad- the worst thing that could've happened was that I can remember Dillinger was captured during that time. And in our community - I just can barely remember Dillinger- I don't know if you-

Interviewer: Yeah you're talking about John Dillinger¹?

Hudson: Yeah yeah. And that's all I can remember about that vaguely. Cuz it was in that- in our- for some reason he was captured in our community I remember that vaguely.

Interviewer: So where did you attend high school?

Hudson: I attended high school- first I went to a school called Maggie L. Walker² and that was on the other side of Richmond and uh once in a while I would walk it. It would seem like to me- I don't know how far it was but I would say it's at least 10 miles but we walked it for a little while but then uh- would just do that for a bunch of us together and walked just for the heck of it but actually we rode the street car. The street car at that time was 7 cents uh and if you bought school tickets it was 5 cents I think. 4 or 5 cents to ride the bus- I mean ride the street car up there and that was it.

Interviewer: And what kind of a student were you?

Hudson: Well I wasn't the best but I wasn't the worst [laughs]. I always tried to maintain an even keel[?] I wanted to pass and get her over with. I uh- but I uh did alright.

Interviewer: Well tell me about meeting your wife.

Hudson: Oh boy that's something else [he laughs and laughs from the background]. I met my wife on a - on a boat and during that time uh I was - they had a boat that run from down the James River on the weekends. Excursion like you know you down come back the same day and uh I met my wife on one of those trips and uh were- she was a good country girl and uh- so uh we met we - and we courted for about a year almost and uh got married. And uh end up being married- she became my first wife and I was married to her for uh- when she passed it was almost 50 years we stayed together when she passed.

Interviewer: What was her name?

¹ <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/john-dillinger>

² <https://teachersinthemovement.com/maggie-walkers-legacy-and-education-in-richmond-virginia-a-students-reflection/>

Hudson: Thelma Hudson. Her maiden name was Thelma Smith.

Interviewer: And you said she was a good country girl what do you mean?

Hudson: Well she loved to cook [laughs] and she that was good- she loved to cook and take care of the- take care of her husband and uh - which is a good thing and we ended up having 4 or 5 children uh they all lived they all- she uh- well uh they all lived and in fact when I went off to war we adopted some more children we ended up adopting uh- the total number of children when I came back from the war- we ended up having about 10 children and uh I took care of them and times weren't exactly hard but we knew how to- I knew how to spend my money and we were- and when I go to- I'm not a spending man spending money- I kept up with the times I had just enough for what I- I tried to keep up with what my income was and that was it. Wasn't nothing extravagant I had no car and that was it.

Interviewer: So can you tell me about y'all's wedding?

Hudson: Uh like what? [laughs]

Interviewer: Well what do you remember of it? Where was it held? Who came?

Hudson: Uh I- all I can remember - she was- she was married at her mother's- her grandmother's house in Richmond Virginia. I remember that. And uh- that was it. In a little town in the part of town called Fulton- uh that town no longer exists now uh- but it was called Fulton and it's a little part of Richmond so- yeah it was a little part of Richmond at that time.³

Interviewer: Do you remember your anniversary, the day you got married?

Hudson: July- I can say this it was July 1943.

Interviewer: So it was in the middle of the war?

Hudson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. And that would've made you about 18?

Hudson: Something like that.

Interviewer: [laughs]

Hudson: [laughs]

³ https://richmond.com/realestate/features/richmond-neighborhoods/greater-fulton-a-cohesive-neighborhood-even-before-it-got-attention/article_6bcdaf32-9a4d-11e7-9f28-cf1e295f2318.html

Interviewer: So uh I'm gonna switch gears here for a second and I'm gonna ask you what your memories of the uh Pearl Harbor attack are. What are - what do you remember of that day?

Hudson: I remember the - that day because I was a kinda like a youngster that was had other kids that would try to make money on the sideline and during that day I had a bunch of kids that would follow around with me and we'd- and the things I used them for was the newspaper would come out and the people that contacted me to get a group together to sell papers we were called extras that day and that was- go and sell extras paper for- that they printed just for that day for Pearl Harbor bombing. And uh I remember that distinctly because I had about 10 kids working for me. And uh uh going selling the paper and that was it- I remember that distinctly.

Interviewer: So you had gotten an extra that was printed later and it said there was an attack on Pearl Harbor?

Hudson: Uh huh alright.

Interviewer: Okay. And then you had delivered that to people's homes?

Hudson: Well no- well no there wasn't a part of the delivery time it was when you go out and sell specially to people. People bought their papers- you know I think they were selling for about a nickel a thing. And uh anybody wanted to [indecipherable] had to buy a paper special it wasn't a home edition at that time. But the next day you would get the home edition with it but for some reason I can't- I don't- I don't quite remember the- something came out about 5 o'clock that evening when I had you know people going out selling papers I don't know what- I don't remember what but I guess it was- they had to have printed that morning uh early I mean something during that day to have a special edition to go on out then but that's where things went during those times - special paper would be printed out when something you know when they had an event to come on like that.

Interviewer: Right. So did uh the older boys at your school- the seniors- did they go sign up to enlist after Pearl Harbor?

Hudson: No. Not that I recall.

Interviewer: So did you notice any change uh at school or in your town after the United States got into the war?

Hudson: I don't- I don't really- not that I can tell other than the- you know I mean the people who - I just can't remember exactly during that time. I just don't remember the sequence I can just remember that that newspaper thing on you know being in school and all and cuz I was still in high school and all at that- during that time.

Interviewer: Okay. So um what did you do after you graduated from high school?

Hudson: Odd job. I got married you see during that time and uh odd job and work - I tried working at a place called Richmond Army Depot which was about 10 miles outside of the city limits of Richmond going toward Fort Lee, Virginia, and uh - but I had to have a transportation and I didn't own a car and if there was somebody going out that way you know that would carry you on a regular basis - I tried that for a while and then I got disgusted and joined the army from that point on.

Interviewer: Why did you get disgusted?

Hudson: Trying to ride with somebody - transportation in other words - transportation problem was it- I just didn't want it the money didn't matter to me I wanted to go in the army then and I was better off financially.

Interviewer: So uh did you - but you did work at the army depot for a period of time?

Hudson: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Interviewer: What did you do there?

Hudson: We packed various parts to be shipped overseas- you now you packed them for shipment on boat which meant it had to have special wrapping and I just- it just wasn't my speed [laughs].

Interviewer: Um so what did the army depot look like?

Hudson: Huh.. a bunch of buildings that were just warehouses- open warehouses primarily- and there weren't much about no heat. But open warehouses and supplies all over -bring them to your particular area, packed them up on one side and finish yours and put them on another side and keep going.

Interviewer: And who- do you remember who your bosses were?

Hudson: No I don't.

Interviewer: What about your coworkers?

Hudson: I don't remember.

Interviewer: Okay so um you said you worked there for a period of time but you couldn't get good transportation.

Hudson: Right.

Interviewer: So is that the time in which you decided to go into the army?

Hudson: Right.

Interviewer: So tell me about enlisting in the military. Why did you choose the army?

Hudson: Well the navy was too segregated the only job you could get in the navy was being a cook or something like a valet for officers or something of that nature and I wasn't interested in being a valet for nobody - if I couldn't work as regular navy person I didn't want it - no parts of it. And the- I never gave the marines a thought- I think very few people that were Black joined the navy at that time- I mean joined the marines I believe and there was no air force like it is now - the air force was a part of the army then in those days. And uh I heard about the- the uh Tuskegee air thing and I tried to get into that but my IQ wasn't high enough so I couldn't - didn't make that. So I just stayed in- I mean I just went on for strictly army.

Interviewer: So where did you have to go after you signed up?

Hudson: Fort Lee, Virginia, which was about 20 miles from home of Richmond and took my basic training there and even after basic training I went to uh what we call second 8 weeks of training- specialized training you know and I decided- well the army actually looked at my IQ so far and they put me in clerical work and I stayed in that field and I just changed it from one type of clerical field of it and that's all I did for the rest of the time that I was in the military.

Interviewer: Well I wanna go back so you said you went to Fort Lee,

Hudson: Right.

Interviewer: And did you go there and leave your family in Richmond?

Hudson: Yes, yes you had to at that time. There wasn't no such thing as taking your family with you because I didn't have the rank.

Interviewer: How did you communicate with your wife?

Hudson: Phone.

Interviewer: By phone?

Hudson: By phone and she could come on base and they had a- every weekend they'd have a dance and at the what they called the service club those days - I don't know what it is now- so the military provided a uh music for you and that was it, and food so we enjoyed it.

Interviewer: So uh the soldiers who were training there they could bring their wives or their girlfriends on into the service club for a dance?

Hudson: Yeah they would have it specially for you - cuz when you said service club - the dance hall would be something different. That would be another place that they would set up just to dance and uh then the club -like in another building adjacent to that - for the, you know the drink and so forth.

Interviewer: And who provided the music?

Hudson: They would always have a band for you - the club - or the military had provided a club - music for you and where they - how'd they'd come up I don't know.

Interviewer: So uh tell me about your basic training?

Hudson: Huh... that was something else [laughs]. Basic wasn't too bad now that I look over it. But uh the usual thing you know, running and going under fire, you and you crawling under barbed wire, they shooting over your head, and that's all the thing you don't know if there's bullets or not you know, all you know is that there - the guns were going off over your head, and uh I remember one incident where I wanted to go home that weekend and so uh I played like I had been hit and uh and so they come and stop everything going took me off, carried me to the place, and they found out I wasn't hit and turned me loose and told me go on back to the barracks and I did that and went AWOL and sent to see my family that weekend, got in trouble. The MPs picked me up in Richmond and I stayed in jail for overnight and they brought me back to the base and uh my company commander at that time he - his punishment- he didn't- he was a youngster he didn't know what to do in a sense of speaking- he said - he had me stand behind a stove [indecipherable]. In those days barracks had potbelly stoves to heat the barracks and uh - where I was anyway - he had me stand behind a stove in the wall and then they started - and after he felt I had been warm enough he brought me out there to talk to me and I told him I thought he was prejudiced and he said "I'm not prejudiced" he says uh I said "Why are you doing this to me?" and uh he told me - and in the course of conversation I said - he said "What do you mean by prejudiced?" I said well- he went on to say it's a racial thing you know - told him on and on I don't consider you being prejudiced that - you know it's a racial thing - I said "Do you know the meaning of prejudiced?" he said "Well what do you mean?" and I said well, and I asked him "Do you know what it means?" and he wanted to know "Well what does it mean?" I told him "Prejudiced means that" uh in my opinion "prejudiced means you just -not that you don't like anybody or anything but you already- your mind is made up on what - on something- and then you just sit on that and that's it and your mind is set to punish me and you don't know what to do" [laughs]. He turned me loose and we just didn't- that's all the punishment I got.

Interviewer: So was he white?

Hudson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay so what-

Hudson: [starts to say something]

Interviewer: Go ahead.

Hudson: We had all white officers, mostly all white officers in the military at that time. Once in a blue moon you might find a Black officer.

Interviewer: So what did you - know you and your fellow soldiers who were going through training think about the fact that there were only white officers?

Hudson: It just didn't bother you. You're already used to white people being at everything you do anyway so it just didn't bother - well it didn't bother me anyway and so I didn't- most of us didn't - you just take it as you go. And that was it.

Interviewer: So um, what you were talking a little bit about the barracks how many soldiers would you know - how large was the barrack?

Hudson: I venture to uh - if I can remember right the barracks was -its a two story building most of the cuz they were built just in World War II just before the war, or just when the war started, the building was a uh it was about - its a 2 story building with about 36 - about 36 people on the first floor and about the same amount on the 2nd floor, and divided up into squads, 4 squads. And uh - NCOs slept on the end - but no officers slept in the building.

Interviewer: So uh what did they serve you in the mess hall?

Hudson: Huh. Potatoes every meal, that was a standard thing - I don't care what meal you was going for you always got potatoes [indecipherable] but uh it was alright - I got used to it - uh eggs, pancakes for breakfast, chicken every Sunday - I don't care where you were at in the army you got chicken every Sunday for dinner. And uh others was whatever you know - it was usual meals - good meals you know.

Interviewer: And you said you were assigned to do clerical work?

Hudson: Yes.

Interviewer: So when did you get that assignment? Was it when you were finished with basic training?

Hudson: Yes.

Interviewer: And where were you sent?

Hudson: I was just lucky enough to get stationed there in Fort Lee, Virginia, my first assignment and uh I was a supply sergeant uh in a supply room - a supply clerk. And uh and - so I stayed within the supply field for a long time.

Interviewer: What were your duties as a clerk?

Hudson: Assistant supply sergeant, which was issued clothing or whatever the troops need and other supplies like taking the laundry you know take it to the place where the sheets were cleaned, down to the laundry. As a whole, as a group [indecipherable] amassed for the whole company at the time - take it to the laundry, get it, take it back, bring another load. And uh that was basically it, and keep up with the arms- what I'm talking about is the weapons that you had, but no ammunition was in the building - and basically that was it.

Interviewer: Did you have any special privileges as a supply sergeant?

Hudson: Yeah you were just - there wasn't- you didn't go through a whole lot of training like the others did - the other soldiers did cuz they had no more than a continuation of basic training and uh they said uh you didn't have to go through all that stuff, unless you were going on maneuvers if you were a - you already know what they're gonna do you know so there's no problem. All you do when you go out on the field, you just issue stuff - what's needed, supplies are needed.

Interviewer: Okay so let's talk about heading out for California, this is when you're gonna ship out?

Hudson: Yeah.

Interviewer: And how did you learn that you'd be going?

Hudson: What do you mean how did you learn?

Interviewer: I mean what did they tell you, like the day before? Or what?

Hudson: No, no they put you on train and - cuz that was war time - they put you on a train and told you you was going out and you was going overseas and that's all you knew. And every- while you were riding the train, every city you go through, if it was night time, you had to pull the shades down and you - it took a, I think it was about 2 or 3 days for you to ride from Virginia to California. Uh and you slept on the train, and uh, and if you weren't used to sleeping beside a man [laughs] you had to do it then because there were more men then there were bunks. So you had two people sleeping up and down on a train in a [indecipherable].

Interviewer: So it would be you'd be sleeping by somebody's feet?

Hudson: Wherever would you lay? [laughs]

Interviewer: So was that sort of uncomfortable?

Hudson: Yeah, oh yeah. But - you make it.

Interviewer: So you said you had to pull the shades?

Hudson: Yeah, on the windows.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Hudson: Well they, they didn't want people to see that there was troops on that train moving. See a lot of little things during war time, for troop movement, it's kept - supposedly kept- a secret. And uh you didn't know where you was going in the first place. All you know was you was going to, you know going, and you ride for a long time and when you uh- but the [indecipherable] that train- just you know to do that - so people didn't know that so many soldiers were going cuz you probably have about 10 trucks- trainloads of people going you see, on a tube train and uh and then you- if you wanted to and it come time they thought you'd been on a train too long, they'd pull off on the side of the road- the side of the- where nobody, you know what I mean, nobody - the population couldn't see who it was and uh you get off and exercise a little bit and then get back on and keep on going.

Interviewer: So you didn't take any like, regular stops and go out into town?

Hudson: Oh no no. They wouldn't- you couldn't do that.

Interviewer: Was it only Black soldiers on this train?

Hudson: Yeah, there were- there wasn't no mixture of troops at that time, it was all Blacks and whites were separated.

Interviewer: So there weren't any train cars with all white soldiers and another train car with all Black soldiers, it was all Black soldiers?

Hudson: In this particular- well I noticed- no it was all Black, at least when I was on - it was all Black.

Interviewer: So what city in California did you ship out from?

Hudson: Uh, that's a hard one, cuz I've been there 2 or 3 times. [laughs] I think this was San Francisco. I think so.

Interviewer: And uh, was there a big send off for the troops or did you just get on the ship and-

Hudson: You get off and - well when you get off the train, they would always - you'd go to a holding area and I'm trying to think where - in Riverside was where this area was that I went to that time and that's where they - people would come and - till they had enough to fill up a train - I mean a boat and about - I think in the vicinity of about 3,000 troops would assemble there at a

time, that's enough to get on the type of ships that we'd be going on - depends on what type of ship you'd be on. And uh until a ship got sufficient, then you load up, that's when you found out where you were going. And they give you a little booklet and this book was a language book, in short, and you were supposed to learn that language in the time took you to get to the other side and I went to India, but we stopped off in Australia, and that was during the time when Roosevelt died, I remember that. And uh, but we weren't allowed to get off of the ship at all - I mean - yeah off the ship, we weren't allowed to get off - we just spent one day in the uh harbor and that was it.

Interviewer: In Australia?

Hudson: Yeah in Australia.

Interviewer: Tell me, tell me how did you learn the news of Roosevelt's death?

Hudson: Well they keep you informed on the ship of the current events. You know, they kept you informed of what was- what they thought was sufficient for you to know.

Interviewer: What was the effect on war?

Hudson: Just somebody else died, you know.

Interviewer: So there was no special significance about Roosevelt?

Hudson: No, no. Not death at that time, cuz we - the reason I say it was like that was because we were practicing the whole time to ship - I think it took 20 something days, I believe it took about 21 days to go from California to India. I think it was about that long because we couldn't go on a straight line we had to go zig zagging, more or less because of the war, I guess they felt like - they'd been sinking ships all along you see and it was- we were just lucky, we never saw a submarine.

Interviewer: You said you had a language book?

Hudson: Yeah.

Interviewer: What was the language?

Hudson: I wanna say Hindu but I don't remember, but anyway they - what it was was a - you had the general language that was spoken, not all the dialects that was involved it was just one and that was what was generally spoken in uh, in India, at that time, that I can remember.

Interviewer: Well what was life like aboard ship?

Hudson: Oh boy [laughs]. Oh, I learned to play whist, I learned to play cards, bridge particularly, and uh I didn't - there's one thing I never learned to do in the army and for some reason I cannot understand why I never had any desire to learn to gamble, and plenty of gambling went on but I never learned to gamble and I just didn't have any desire to gamble. And uh but I wanted to play 2 games only, that was whist and well- 2 games was bridge and whist, that's all I was interested in, and I kept myself on that and kept that going even until after I got out of the army.

Interviewer: What were the sleeping quarters like?

Hudson: Bunk at the floor, more or less, and two bunks - I think it was 2 bunks above that and that's where it was, stacked up at maybe full apart cuz they were stacked [laughs] and that's the way it was.

Interviewer: Was there a commissary or a place to buy snacks or cigarettes?

Hudson: Yes, yes there was something like that on there, but they had cafeterias, the funny thing about - well I wouldn't say funny but - the most interesting thing about eating on the ship in the cafeteria, where they feed you at, you got your food in a tray, you know, and you sit on the stand to the table, like to eat, and when the ship is going down, you know when the ship is going through the water it's reeling and rocking, you know, up or down or whatever, and when you - if you weren't careful or - you had to be careful or when you tray slid on down you just ate out of the next tray. [laughs] or else you held that tray and somebody else come bump on against your tray cuz you couldn't grab your tray but you - that's the way it was. One thing that I did on the ship - we found a bakery and we loved that hot bread when they baked it you know, we found a way to get into that bakery late at night and you get that hot bread [laughs] and he was in the navy see, so he knew about all this [laughs]. But anyway, we loved to get that hot bread, you know cuz you just take a loaf of bread you know and pull it hot out of that oven and it was the best thing that ever happened and uh - but that was just the only thing bad we did [laughs].

Interviewer: [laughs] So you said the trip was about 21 days,

Hudson: Yeah I think it was about 21 days.

Interviewer: And you landed in India, what city did you come into?

Hudson: Calcutta.

Interviewer: Okay and you were sorta offshore at first because the ship was too big?

Hudson: Yeah the ship was - they didn't have docking facilities at that time, you had to get on a raft - they'd load up maybe 10 to 15 people on a raft and you just move on over to the shore and they unloaded us and then trucks waited there for you, so there'd be about a truckload at a time and going on and we went to a camp - the camp that they carried us to was a highway race track so we just - my company stayed together and we just slept at this race track, unless we

were being split up and going elsewhere - you know part of us went to a place called Chowboy[?] and part of us stayed in Calcutta. And uh Calcutta was right in - it was right outside - the city itself you see, but where the camp was was maybe about 20 miles - no about 10 miles outside the city, but for that night we stayed at this race track. You just pitch a tent and slept out there, nice warm climate. [laughs]

Interviewer: Were you able to go into the city of Calcutta and interact with the people.

Hudson: No not there. No, they kept you at the base for about 2 or 3 - a week or 2 before they'd let you go out. That was kinda like you need to be orientated to the weather and all I guess or - but you didn't go on off that base and where we were stationed at was outside of a - there's an airbase right on the outskirts of Calcutta - an army airforce base, but we were on the other side of that and uh - but uh we was in a - it seemed like it was a British camp at one time, and uh but they didn't have housing. They had officers, buildings for officers and that was all but we had to - they had to make up - to make tents, for each tent had - I think it was 4 men to a tent, 4 men to a tent we had, that's where we, you know, lived. Mosquito nets and all that sort of thing.

Interviewer: Do you know why you were sent to India?

Hudson: Yeah our mission was to- was to uh - part of us stayed in Calcutta and part of us was sent up to Chowboy was further up into the northern part of China- i mean India - or Calcutta rather and - outside of the city but anyway we had to take the equipment that was shipped down - airplanes and things that were damaged or vehicles and stuff that was damaged had to go and - what's the best word to say- you'd take out the good parts and use them again and for other parts and the rest of it they junked it and sent it on or back to the states - I don't know whether they took it to the states or they put it on a ship and dump it out in the ocean. [laughs]

Interviewer: So you were sorting things?

Hudson: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay so there were shipments that would come in, where were they coming from?

Hudson: Burma Road, that was a main supply point because they - the airbase supplied the Burma road, you know it flew the Burma road route, and they would go into China, the lower part of China, somewhere up in there. And they - and there was fighting troops that were in Burma, to the best of my knowledge there was no fighting actually in India, there was either in Burma, you know ground troops sometimes would fight, or the air force was flying stuff up on the Burma Road. That was it.

Interviewer: So what kind of stuff did y'all see come through, what kind of material?

Hudson: We didn't see that, other than the supplies that we supplied, but we wouldn't see nothing else, we wouldn't see brand new stuff that might come in from the states, you didn't see

nothing like that stuff. Cuz that would get on the plane - wherever a depot was they would ship it to there and then when a company needed certain things for a plane or a special thing, the request would come to us first because - to see if we had the part that it needed, and then go to a - to the depot and get stuff coming straight from the states, and go on up the road.

Interviewer: So were - you were involved only in that or did you have any other duties?

Hudson: No, that was primarily it.

Interviewer: So what did you think about India?

Hudson: Pretty town [laughs] now at that time Calcutta was a crowded place - even to get on the street car it was - people would hang all on the outside, once you got on the street car, you know, it was always crowded. And uh the transportation, like if you wanna ride a cab - well first of all they had what you call a rickshaw - that's like a scooter with a man pushing it and you riding in that if you wanted to ride around, you know go someplace. But then the cars or taxis - the engine was supplied by charcoal or something like that - like a little furnace was on the back of a - a miniature furnace was on the back of old model cars and you - that's what they used for transportation, you know, in the time, for taxis and so forth. But other than that, that was it.

Interviewer: So did you send any letters home during time? Did you have any contact?

Hudson: Oh yeah, oh yeah. You had- the army made sure, I don't care where you are - that you were on a ship or wherever - they're gonna see to it that you get your mail. Maybe a month later, but you'd get it. [laughs]

Interviewer: And who was sending you letters?

Hudson: Your wife or your family or - you know your family or somebody, whoever would write to you. I ain't gonna say nothing else. [laughs]

Interviewer: [laughs]

Hudson: Whoever would write to you, you'd get it, you know what I mean, that was it.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well was there entertainment for soldiers? What'd you do for fun?

Hudson: Anything you could. [laughs] everything we had - we had everything you had in the states, you had overseas one way - one version or another, you'd have it, you just get used to that music - and you find places where you'd try to play your style of music and they knew enough about - I mean, the Indian people knew enough about you to uh, to accommodate you.

Interviewer: What was your style of music?

Hudson: Well, I wasn't choice here, play anything.

Interviewer: So were there entertainers coming over from the United States to entertain the troops?

Hudson: Yes. Yes we would - of course now where we were we didn't get that much entertainment cuz we were so far out in India, so far away from everything, uh mostly people were in Europe or like in Japan, or the mainland was where the [indecipherable] and all those type of people would come, would come through but mostly small troops would come through or something like that for us.

Interviewer: Well do you remember the end of the war?

Hudson: Vaguely.

Interviewer: Do you remember where you were at the time?

Hudson: India, I was still in India.

Interviewer: So was there a - what was the mood after you heard about the end of the war?

Hudson: Oh it was joyous. It was joyous cuz you wanna go home. You see ours, when we went in the army - when you were drafted those days you were drafted with the understanding that you would be in the army for -til the end of the war, what they call 6 months after the war - due reasoning 6 months, that's what they called it. And then you were, the same way you'd come in the service, they drafted you in, you would go by numbers that would be pulled to see who would go home next and if you were like me I had a large family, I had a lot of points. So I would go home before a guy who had no points, a single man would you see, so I would go home early. And uh, that's the way you left wherever you were and then uh you get to the states the best way you could, it was just a mass thing from then on, till you get back. That's the only time you that you would - if I remember right, that's the only time the troops mixed was when you'd be on a boat coming back to the states and or going or coming - coming back to the states and when uh you'd be on a train coming from the west coast to the - back to the east coast and then when you got to a certain point in the states you'd switch up, Black in one car and whites in another. And uh that's the way it worked, and then that's the way it stayed until that train emptied its load, you know what I mean, cuz it stopped everywhere dropping people off, you see.

Interviewer: So there was a point in which white and Black soldiers were mixing?

Hudson: When you first get on, but they separated when you got to a certain point.

Interviewer: What was that point?

Hudson: Uh where it was considered northern, southern, I don't know, I really don't know.

Interviewer: So it was the train maybe going into like, a southern state with a segregation policy?

Hudson: Yeah, in other words the train would - let's say - I don't remember exactly but - I just don't remember but somewhere along the - around Merlin I believe - depending on where the train, you know, where it was at, and the train - the Blacks had to go in one car and the whites had to go in another. You just had - that's where you went.

Interviewer: So because you had some children and a wife you got more points,

Hudson: Yeah.

Interviewer: So you were able to get a discharge?

Hudson: No, that was for transportation back to the states, and uh, and uh... I don't remember about the discharge part, I don't remember, it may have been hooked up to that too I just don't remember. I just can't remember that part.

Interviewer: And you returned to Richmond

Hudson: Yes.

Interviewer: And can you tell me about the work you did immediately after you got back?

Hudson: Huh... I couldn't find no work, uh well it wasn't work, well yes it was too cuz in Richmond, tobacco factories was the main product there, and you could always get a job in a tobacco factory, and cuz several companies were operating out of Richmond. And uh you always could get a job, it may not be the one that you want particularly because some paid more than the others, but yeah you could get work

Interviewer: What did you do in the tobacco factory?

Hudson: Just common labor, you just clean up, help do anything they tell you to do [laughs]. Nothing particular, you know, unless you - unless you had been working in there for a while, you learned to operate a machine or something like that. But most of time you just maybe clean up or something.

Interviewer: Now, was that - were you making enough money to support your family?

Hudson: Yes. Oh yeah.

Interviewer: So uh, can you tell me about reenlisting in the military?

Hudson: Well I joined reserves before - shortly after - well they put you in the reserves shortly after that, and you could either take active duty reserves or be on - I don't know what you call it there - you'd just be in the reserves but you didn't go on active - you didn't go for any training. But I chose to go on the one where you go for training every weekend I think or something like that. I did that for a little while, cuz I didn't think I was gonna stay out in the street long, and I turned around and come back in the army. I think I was out for about year - I don't know, about 6 months or so, and I came back in.

Interviewer: Why did you choose to come back in?

Hudson: I was more at home, [laughs] I'd been in the army for 3 - I think 3 years then, and I just felt more comfortable. Being home is alright if you can stay home once a month or something like that, it's alright, but you're traveling, you know what I mean, you're mainly with so many different things, people and all, so it was much more pleasant then it was [indecipherable].

Interviewer: So did you - you'd say you liked being in the army?

Hudson: Mhm.

Interviewer: Okay. Um, so I know that you tried to qualify for the officers training course,

Hudson: Yeah.

Interviewer: And tell me - tell me about that.

Hudson: Well hah that's something else. I tried for that - I got the initial examination over with, but when up for the board, I'll never forget that, that was Labor Day 1944, I went before the board, I think it was, to - for interview. And they gave me several commands, and when I say give you command, you know, they tell you to repeat this command, you know, you shout out what you want - whatever the command was, and they told me my voice was too light. And so, I failed the test [laughs] and uh, so that was it. If I had passed that test I would've a second lieutenant, cuz I had passed everything else.

Interviewer: So it was because your voice was too soft?

Hudson: Too - yeah.

Interviewer: So you couldn't give the commands loudly enough?

Hudson: It wasn't distinctly enough or something.

Interviewer: So tell me about Fort Meade in Maryland. How did you end up there?

Hudson: That was when I came back in the army, I uh when I came back into the army I chose to go into the tank corps in Fort - tank training in Fort Knox, cuz I didn't want field training in infantry. And when I finished that training at Fort Knox they sent me to Fort Meade to join a 3rd cavalry. And the cavalry, you know, was all armored, it's not horses. [laughs] And uh, so I joined that and uh, that was the - Black was in one - had a battalion - and one squadron or battalion or something like that. And whites was in the rest of the thing. And uh we were separated by name, we were called the 35th Mechanized Cavalry Squadron, and our job, in case war started, was to to take tanks - we had something like a - something that looked like a tank, but it went on water - amphibious. You would draw fire, and that was your job, to draw fire, and pick out the enemy. But naturally, we never got that, and uh, and so I decided while I was there that I was alright but uh, I'm always looking to see something better. And so, I had musical training to learn in high school to play a trumpet, so I could read music but I couldn't ad lib, so I uh used that to my advantage and uh - so I noticed that while I was there, the colonel would come in every morning and uh, from this quarters, and go to his office you know. So I decided he needed some music, so I talked him into letting me - see well, I had an incident that happened before then, the colonel was orientating all - all of us that had just come in initially from that basic training thing - the basic training was from the specialized training we had received at Fort Knox, and uh - the people back in them days said little things, they didn't think about all racial things, they didn't think matter too much, and uh he started off joking you know, he said, told us, he told us "now just because you're Black don't think these white boys don't carry knives too, now", and uh, so uh he said "they'll cut too, you know" and uh, so one guy was sleeping at his orientation, about a hundred or so in this place, and he said "wake that big Black fellow up over there", well I said "well I don't like - I don't like that", so I didn't know what to say, you know, what to do, or anything. And so I , uh, when he got through I told him, the colonel, I let him know I didn't like that and he "well what you doing here? You the oldest man in here.", cuz I was reenlisted, you see, and so he said - he took that conversation and twisted it around and interviewed me to see what I did on the side, and I uh, I told him - I was telling him I played music, as well as you know, doing those tanks and things, he said "I want you to - can you do anything for a band for me?" I said yeah, so I started a band, and I got to the time that he put me in headquarters, and gave me the authority for anybody who wanted to play music, to come see me, and I was just a PFC at that time. I'd been busted all the way down when I came back in, and uh so he said okay, I started up a band drum and bugle corps, cuz that was the easiest thing to do. No music, you could just - it was bugles you know - trumpets I mean. So I did that and eventually turned it into a band. But now, I didn't know how to play no doggone saxophone, reed instruments and that sort of thing, I had to figure out what I was gonna do, so what I did was took those people that played those instruments, put them off to the side. Each group, what they had, and let them train themselves with music. I could read music, and let them do it that way. And then the people that were just strictly trumpet or something, I could handle that. So anyway, I got this thing going, and when he - when I got it going, I had it so that he would - when he would come to see the band and walk from his barrack to the office in the morning, I'd have a trumpet out there playing for him. See, and he loved that, and so I had the run of the thing when I wanted to, I could do what I wanted to do. When he walked though - when he walked into his office, he'd turn around and look back at us and wave at us, so you know, I eat that up. [laughs] So I used to take the guys out in the woods and practice, or do nothing, let

them practice themselves or something like that - hide, so to speak, until lunch time, then come back and play again for them, you see. And that's all the thing - that worked for about a year or 2 til the war started in uh - Kennedy then challenged the Russians and they broke up - everybody got ready for combat. And they took us and the cavalry and put us in the - on a plane, while they put the - on a boat rather, in Baltimore - from Fort Meade, Maryland, to Baltimore. And uh - that was the first time troops had been in Maryland since the early part of the war - World War II. And uh, and we went on to Germany right away. And uh I went on a plane cuz I was part of the administrative staff, advanced party, and I stayed there till I got some more rank - I got some more rank and then I went on off to where I could get some more rank, and I left the band. I ended up till I could get as far as I could go. And uh, and another outfit, you know, that sort of thing.

Interviewer: Where were you posted in Germany?

Hudson: In - in uh, at one point in my career I was in Mannheim, uh, Halberg, and um, I can't think of the place - where it was - I can't think of the name of it now but it was at the part of Germany where it would rain, snow, from hot summer - from the sun blowing out there to snow flowing all within 20 minutes, you might say. It was in the southern part of Germany, I just can't remember - Munich - it was outside of Munich.

Interviewer: Dachau?

Hudson: No, I was in Dachau too at one time. Dachau is where the prison camp was where they slaughtered - the Germans slaughtered the prisoners. And uh, we were - I remember going to a - they took us around for a tour where the Germans actually took prisoners and had them just stand up, facing you - I mean facing them - when they were gonna shoot them, and they had to fall in a certain way - and they'd fall in a ditch behind them, and they'd shoot them so that they fall in that ditch the blood wouldn't go nowhere but in that ditch. And then they'd kill them in a gas chamber, and all that sort of thing. But we were stationed in one half of that camp and all, but I never went back there no more.

Interviewer: Could you see the effects of war in Germany still?

Hudson: Oh yeah, oh yeah. When I - can't tell you about one part in Mannheim. Mannheim, the part of the city was off limits to us, it was bombed out you know, and ladies of the night would be that area, and you weren't allowed to go in that area but could go to other parts of Germany, you know, and all. But yeah it was - you could still see all that sort of thing.

Interviewer: Well I wanna sort of start to wrap up the interview, but I wanna ask you, can you tell me a little bit about your family today, your children and grandchildren?

Hudson: Boy, hm. Well I - my children - well my girls, 4 girls was my first born - my first group of children, and uh they all went to school in Europe and came back and ended up in Howard University, and uh Howard in Baltimore or wherever that is, school was in Baltimore, I forget

now, the college, but uh then they - 1 daughter ended up in uh, the Pentagon. And I had a son, one of my boys, went to work for a company like uh, it would be - like here it would be a electrical company and he went to Howard simultaneously and they - he got such a high position in there, when it come time for him to graduate, they paid him not to graduate, so he could stay there and keep working. And when it come time for him to retire from that, they didn't want him to retire and he's still working there, at the company, and I don't know what his position is but all I know is that he's got an office there, that's all. And the rest of them is just mediocre, you know what I mean. Finished school and that was all.

Interviewer: So uh how did you end up living in Georgia?

Hudson: One of my - when I got ready to retire, I was - I was already in Georgia then, as my last tour of duty, I was already in Georgia, and the - at that time, and I retired at that - from - that's how I got to Georgia. I was stationed in Fort Meade, Maryland, - not in Fort Meade, yeah - I don't know where I was stationed at - someplace, I come back from overseas, I'd been to Japan and came back and I don't remember - I just can't remember the place where it was then, but anyway I was already stationed in Fort - in uh Fort Benning and I just transferred from one company to another, and that's it.

Interviewer: So uh, Mr Hudson, why do you think it's important to share your experiences from the second World War with me today?

Hudson: Well, one thing is, a lot of little things that I didn't speak of, that to me is important because I wanted to write a book about - not that, not World War II, but I wanted to write a book about the Civil War, and I made a comparison about the Civil War and I narrowed it down to the Blacks that fall on the side of the south as to why and what happened, and seeing and let the public realize that a lot of things going into the military that you really need to learn for discipline purposes. And as a result of that I never did write the - finish the book. But, there's a lot of things that went on in World War II for example, when the Germans was - see, first of all, very few Blacks were allowed to fight, very few. And that's why you see in the pictures - most of the pictures you see, you see all white soldiers, you don't see that many Blacks or nothing. But there were Blacks building the Pacific Coast Highway, but that wasn't war, that's the highway running down from Canada on down to - from Canada down in the south on the western coast of the United States on down to around Mexico. But, when the Germans was whipping up in the Battle of the Bulge, for example, the United States was really - been in hell, so they - there was a shortage of soldiers and readily available were Blacks that weren't allowed to fight. Now I don't know if the right terminology but they weren't allowed to fight. So the war department put out an order that any Blacks that wanted to fight in combat could go if they wanted to give up their rank - I mean if they wanted to go they could go. But there was one general who became famous and uh - in the United States army - Patton - Patton said "no, I will not accept any Blacks that's got any rank, if you got a rank you cannot come and join my outfit, you gotta give up your rank and become (you know what I mean) a private and fight". Well I don't know how all that ended up turning out to be there cuz certain things they don't tell you, you see. And, a lot of people aren't aware of the fact that - we only hear mostly about the beheading of American

soldiers in warfare, you only hear about it lately, so to speak in the war in the far east, or where that tide was, how they beheaded soldiers. But the Japanese did the same darn thing to us in Japan. When those people bombed the uh, made to drop the atomic bomb and couldn't get back to their ship, and they had to fly till their gas run out, and they - wherever they fell at, you know, wherever the plane landed at, was in China - mostly I think, I was understand it was mostly people went to China - the soldiers were killed but they weren't - the pilots weren't killed but they weren't - they were put on and beheaded - a lot of that, you don't hear about that. And same thing went on here in the Civil War -not the Civil War, in the the yeah, the Civil war - when the - when blacks were fighting on the side of the south, we don't hear about that that many, for most people history has been written to say "don't mention that too much". But, believe it or not the south would've won the war if they were allowed to fight, but they would give up their band to fight, it was too late. But I don't what the situation would've been if it had been allowed, according to Burns, if all y'all know about Burns, the guy that wrote the history - most of the history - said that the south would've won the war at that time. But the south actually decorated more Blacks than the northern did in the Civil War, and honored more Blacks than the northern did. And there's another thing that's going on that's right now, Black thinks that they can vote any time, but I don't know what was in the minds of the people who signed the - they whatever it's called now, I can't remember - in 63', the educational bill or whatever it was in 63'. For - but that thing says this, Blacks cannot vote in a federal law - I mean, federal election, now that's still true today. People don't know - most people don't realize that, they cannot vote unless congress says you can vote, and right now, the last time that they said you could vote in the federal elections - they gave them 20 years I think, that's what is now, around about 20 years. But before then there were only - for the - maybe 2 or 3 years at a time. I say people don't know that-

Interviewer: The voting rights act.

Hudson: Huh?

Interviewer: The voting rights act?

Hudson: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: It has to be renewed.

Hudson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Hudson: And right now, see people don't realize that. My kids can't vote in a - you know - white people can say I want to vote, my kids can always vote, I can't say that. But yet I love this country and I'll fight for this country, and that's what's happening with us now, we're fighting for the country, but we've got things in the back of our minds. Why you think we are so patriotic to

fight for the country? And the same as with me, I went - out of my fighting, but they wouldn't allow me to fight when I wanted to fight. That's my story.