

Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series
Reuben Griffin Interview
Conducted by James Newberry
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Transcribed by Michael Putlak

Born in rural southwest Georgia in 1923, Reuben Griffin was initially deferred by his local draft board because he was considered more useful as a farmer than a soldier. By 1944 the need for soldiers was so great that Griffin had to leave his farm behind. He completed training at Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia, and spent a year as part of an occupational force in Japan. He worked in insurance sales after the war and settled in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He recorded his oral history interview at Kennesaw State University in April 2016.

Full Transcript

Interviewer: This is James Newberry and I'm here with Reuben Griffin at the Sturges Library at Kennesaw state university on Friday April 29th 2016. And Mr. Griffin do you agree to this interview?

Griffin: I sure do

Interviewer: Thank you. Alright well, we'll start at the very beginning. Could you please state your full name?

Griffin: John Reuben Griffin.

Interviewer: And when and where were you born?

Griffin: In South Georgia august the 2nd 1923.

Interviewer: Alright so tell me about your family.

Griffin: Well...when you mention my family, we could talk all day about them because I have a large family. Actually, going back before my parents - there were eleven brothers and sisters in my dad's family and there were seven brothers and sisters in my mother's family so we have a very large family. Some forty five, I think, first cousins in the family so I had a wonderful early life

Interviewer: And what were your parents' names?

Griffin: Bera actually she called herself Bera B. Bobbie Beatrice Lanier Griffin.

Interviewer: But her actual name was Bera Griffin.

Interviewer: And your father's name?

Griffin: John Eldridge Griffin.

Interviewer: And describe their personalities.

Griffin: My personal or my parents?

Interviewer: Your parents' personalities.

Griffin: Well to say they were great would be an understatement. They would [pause] I guess they were parents that anybody would love to have because my mother was a barrel of fun. And as far as my dad was concerned, I was his little man and you know how that made me feel growing up. Yeah it was wonderful

Interviewer: And you were the only boy right?

Griffin: I was the only boy yes. There were four girls eventually and I was the only son

Interviewer: Did they reserve special treatment at all for you at all because you were the only boy?

Griffin: Well all the girls claimed they did and I guess in a way I was something special to them with just having girls all around.

Interviewer: And what did your parents do for a living?

Griffin: Farming. Farmers. They - they were part of an inheritance of a large plot of land that their great granddaddy had lived on long enough that the government gave him the land. And so they - we had thirty acres and a mule when we started. And so my people were farmers. Just plain old dirt farmers and really happy at it.

Interviewer: Well tell me about moving to Florida.

Griffin: Well when I was about two years old it was just the beginning of what was to be a great big depression. And you know what that means. So my daddy found out that he can make ten dollars a day if we can move to Sarasota, Florida. And so that's what he did. He rented the thirty acres out to a friend of his and we moved to Sarasota and he started making ten dollars a day and my mother - we would rent out rooms. We had a large house they had rented and we would rent out rooms and each day she would make lunch for all the men that were living in the house. And so it was a - it was a real good time and I can remember it as that little two year old. My dad being a carpenter each day would bring nails home. And the doorsteps we had in that house must of had a million nails in 'em. That as a little boy I'd stand and pound those nails you know day after day and - [chuckles]. It really become a part of my lifestyle to hit nails. And so I enjoyed it.

Interviewer: And besides hammering those nails what are some of your other earliest memories?

Griffin: Well now some of my people say that I don't remember this. But I simply do remember when we moved to Sarasota being two years old I would - the Ringling brothers circus each year would come in and winter that is they'd bring all the stuff in there in Sarasota. And the first memory that I actually have they carried me to a little circus (actually it wasn't a real circus) but they went around two or three blocks and showed all the elephants and animals and so forth. And I remember a little car coming by and I was sitting on my dad's shoulder and I looked in that car. And there was a monkey driving that car [gestures a steering wheel] and I will never forget that. Now I'm sure they had - you know now I'm sure they must have had a man down somewhere down in that motor. But a little monkey was driving that car and it was a real fond memory of mine and I enjoyed it very much.

Interviewer: Did you have any friends? Childhood friends?

Griffin: Well, I guess if I at that age I had a buddy. And my buddy's name was Harold Dillenger. He was a cripple that had to ride around and push himself in a cart. And the two of us became real close friends and my I guessed I could say I loved him because he was helpless and yet I could help him I could run around and do things for him. So Hal and I just had a wonderful time together. That was my main buddy. Now the renters in the house I'd guess I'd have to say they were next because when they would come home each day from work. Boy each one of them was my buddy so I had a big time with all of the people who were renting, renting from my mother.

Interviewer: What kind of job were those renters doing?

Griffin: It was mostly construction jobs at that time or working on ships and things of that nature. I was not close to that fam but I know that's what they were doing because see we lived there for three years so I got to know pretty well what they would be doing. And they would either be working in the ship industry or boat industry or building industry. And that's basically what they were doing.

Interviewer: Tell me about Martha Coil?

Griffin: Martha Cole. I guess I could talk a long time about Martha. We loved Martha. Back then if somebody had a child that they either didn't want or didn't care for we would just take 'em in. Now today you'd call adopting them and going through all the papers back in that time we would just take 'em in and Martha Cole was such a person. Her daddy had left her mother and her mother was trying to eke out a living and didn't have the facilities to take care of her or the money or anything so Martha became a part of our family and so even up until her death almost 75 or 80 years later she remained a part of our family. And we would have any reunion or any get together or anything like that. She would be present and we loved her right till her death.

Interviewer: So you returned to Georgia and why did you return to Georgia?

Griffin: [clears throat] Excuse me. We returned to Georgia about - we went down I was about two we returned to Georgia when I was about five years old. Now the depression you might say was getting in full swing. And that ten dollar a day job that my daddy had vanished. Well we still had this

farm that we had held on to while we were in Florida, so we moved back to Georgia back on that farm and that's where we lived for most of my early life was back on the farm in Georgia.

Interviewer: Tell me about the community of Patmos¹.

Griffin: Well, I tell you about the community of Patmos I can talk about it for an hour or I can just tell you briefly. Within a mile of Patmos they were practically all of my relatives. So it was a real happy time. There was one little store. And my aunt Arly ran that store. And we would go down each week with whatever monies that we had. Most of the time we would have to put it on the book. Now you probably don't know what putting it on the book means. She would have a big book there and when you bought something she would write it down on this little book and hopefully she could get her money that fall when the crop was sold. Now I'm afraid to say sometimes some of us failed to make those payments. But Aunt Arly was just a great person there. And she ran the store it was the only little store we had and it was right next to a small church and as I said I had eleven brothers and sisters (my father had eleven brothers and sisters and my mother had seven brothers and sisters) and they all made up this big community in that area there.

Interviewer: Describe the house that you lived in there in Patmos.

Griffin: Well I could have I'd have to describe the house about three different times because as children would come along we'd have to add to it. And I wound up on a little sleeping porch on one side of the house because - we became crowd there. And this house was built by my dad. Now when I say built by my dad he would take each plank and - [sliding motion with hands] he would smooth one side of that plank in the hopes splinters and things of that nature would not you know interfere with the kids running through and things of that nature. He would what we call plain whole plain and I can see him out plaining each board and one he'd get the board plaining it with going shape. So the house became a house with shingles on it that - James what they would do is rive² shingles you probably are not familiar with that word are you? They would have a round block and they would have an axe and they would take those axe and they would chop straight down and it would shave off a shingle maybe about an inch thick. Now that became the roof of the house. So the planks came from the pine trees and a little ole saw mill that was around there. And the roof became these rived shingles and they were placed on one and a time and most times they were pretty good as far as keeping the house from leaking and so forth.

Interviewer: How many rooms?

Griffin: Well we started out let's see one two three. Three rooms to start with. Now as time went by we had to add two more rooms to the back of the house and then when I came along we had to add a little sleeping porch off the side of the house. That really wasn't closed it just had a screen around it and in the winter time if I got too cold in the early years I'd run in there and get one of my warm sisters in her bed or something like that and so it really had six rooms altogether. And it had a pump outside

¹ <https://southwestgeorgiainphotographs.wordpress.com/category/baker-county/patmos/>

² For an article about Riving Shingles, see: <https://thelibrary.org/lochist/periodicals/bittersweet/fa81c.htm>

the house. There was no bathroom fixtures in the house out about I guess fifty yards from the house that was our famous two holer with the Sears Roebuck catalog and we enjoyed that. So you could go there and get away from everything and that was our bathroom at that time.

Interviewer: Did you have pots in the house?

Griffin: I wasn't hoping you was going to ask me that question. [chuckles] Yes I'm just gonna use the word we used for them back then. We referred to them as slop jars. Each, under each bed maybe not every bed there would be a pot or a slop jar and at night that was the facility that you had to use and so in the mornings when those had been used overnight there it became part of my job to take those slop jars and carry them down in the back of the barn because that's where our garden was and that was very very good fertilizer. Very good fertilizer [chuckles]

Interviewer: So was the home electrified?

Griffin: Originally no. There was just oil lamps. And these oil lamps, at night, had a little burner on them and that's all we had. Now as times progressed and things got a little better my dad came home one day with what he referred to at that time as an "Aladdin lamp." This lamp had a wick on it just about two or three inches tall [gestures height] about not quite as big as your first and that Aladdin lamp made about twice or three times as much light as a regular little oil lamp but unfortunately the wick would burn out but that was our lamp. Now after - I guess when Roosevelt became president, I think I got my timing right, about that time REA, Rural Electrification boy I think I'm remembering that right. It came in and you had one cord in the middle of the house it would hang down with a bulb on it so each room had one light hanging down from the roof, from the ceiling. So, we thought that was a great thing because otherwise we either had to read or study books by the light of the heater or the something other facility your wooden stove or something that had some light to it. And you would - this electricity helped us a lot.

Interviewer: How many acres did your father own?

Griffin: Originally thirty. Now I think I mentioned earlier in the comments there that his great great granddaddy had lived on this land long enough for the government allowed him to own the land. And then when he had eleven brothers and sisters each one of them when they married, their daddy would give them thirty acres and a mule. And so consequently they had take their thirty acres and take their mule and make their living on that thirty acres and a mule. So originally thirty acres. Now as the years went by my dad bought some of the land from the other brothers and sisters so our farm grew a little larger than that I'd say maybe fifty sixty or seventy acres as time went by.

Interviewer: What crops did you grow?

Griffin: Mostly peanuts and cotton. Now of course we had corn there mainly to feed the horses and mules and stock and so forth. That was mostly what we did.

Interviewer: How much time did you spend doing work in the field?

Griffin: [Looks down to think] Well as I said from the time, I was just after I came back from Florida I was daddy's little man. And so as years went by now I'm up and like eight and nine and ten years old and like any other kid you wanted to learn what your daddy did. And so my daddy taught me how to plow a mule. When I was six and seven years old - eight years old. Now I'd have to plough and hold the handle up this way [displays with arms]. Most people now I wasn't tall enough to hold them that way now I would plough and hole the handles up there. As far as the time unless school was in I was in there all the time. I spend all my time either farming or carrying water to the men that was out their farming or doing something on the farm connected with the farm. Now admittedly I played a lot too [chuckles]. I had a lot of fun playing with my buddies. Yeah.

Interviewer: So you were talking about taking water to the men out there? Did you father hire people to help? In both outside and inside the house?

Griffin: My - inside the house yes. We had one lady. We paid her a dollar a week plus snuff. Now that was her salary and she lived in a little small bungalow across the road from us. And we loved RT that was her name And RT did all the house that she did [muttering] and she was a part of our soul and she was very very helpful and helped my mother especially in washing and things of that nature RT. Now we had about three or four people that lived on little spots that had we just build a little house like ten or fifteen feet and then fifteen feet fifteen by fifteen put a roof on it and that'd be a house and then these people would help. They would they would what you call share-croppers³ with my daddy. They would have a certain plot of land and if they farmed it then my daddy would get a share of it and they would get the rest of it. They were referred to as share-croppers so that basically made up my early life there on the farm.

Interviewer: Tell me about curb market.

Griffin: Curb market. I guess in a way I can say that saved us during the depression. The farmers market that we attended it's a place in Albany that was about thirty miles from where we lived. And by this time the depression was getting on over and we were doing a little bit better and we had a large - we developed a large large place that developed vegetables and all types of vegetables and so forth. Now during the day we would go out and gather corn and we would develop peas and butter beans and all the things that went with crops that people would eat. And also we would add to that incidentally we would add a lot of chickens because I had at this time gotten big enough to drive a car. Eleven twelve years old and I was driving when I was eleven and twelve years old. I would go around and buy chickens form people and bring those chickens back home and dress em and the next day we'd carry them to farmers market with us. Well getting back to that question. Each morning at about three thirty we would get up after shelling the peas or gathering the corn or doing this and that we would get up and drive this thirty - thirty five miles to Albany, Georgia, and there they had an area there that the farmers bringing in this fresh produce could display it. And we would put it take it out and display our

³ <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/sharecropping>

produce and people would come by and would come by and buy it. And so we were able to first thing you know we were bought a new car and we carried this produce up there. And we would clear thirty and forty dollars a day sometimes and that was as unheard of back in that time, and it was good, so it started we did that and first thing you know my daddy's brother started doing the same thing and my daddy's other brother started doing the same thing and it kinda got us through the depression and so forth.

Interviewer: Well was there a point at which you recognized at there were people with more money or less money than your family?

Griffin: [pause] Not really. We were all poor. We were all poor. We were all poor but we were all happy and we just other than those women in Albany thirty miles away that would come in their cars and they buy stuff and pay us the something for it. We just all the community that I lived in we were all poor and we were all happy and we if we had something extra we would share it. So it was just really a happy life.

Interviewer: So tell me about the church.

Griffin: The church [pause]. Well, I can tell you how I fit in. The church was right here. 100 yards from that church was my house. My job as a youngster coming up when the church when it was summer time it was my job each Sunday morning to go down to the church and open up those wooden windows. Now they didn't have glass windows back then. Just open those wooden windows so the air would circulate through that church. And people would be a little cooler when they got there. Now in the wintertime that church. Now I would have to go down and this is probably not a word in your vocabulary but a potbelly stove was in that church. And I had to go down and put wood in that potbelly stove and put it on fire, set it afire so you know people would be warm by the time got there. Course close the windows and light the pot belly stove and by the time people began to gather for church ten or ten thirty something like that. It was wonderful. And I'll have to say this. Greatest difference I guess between church then and church now was when the sermon was over or the preacher was through preaching incidentally he just came once a month. And we still had church here Sunday but just had a preacher once a month. When that was over people would stand around outside and talk for hours and of course all the kids we would run and play and have a ball and Sunday to us was a good day. We loved that little church, Patmos church. And it stands today incidentally, and I was there just a year or two ago. It was a wonderful church.

Interviewer: So tell me where you went to school.

Griffin: I went to school straight across the street from where we lived. Straight across the street. When I say street now remember there were no paved roads. There wasn't a paved road in the whole county that we lived. So straight across the dirty road there was a small three room church. Now I mean small three room school, And the unusual part of that school was that we would go to that three room school during the day and at nighttime the doors and all were left open and the goats would all come and spend the night in the school at night. Course the first thing next morning was sweep out time

before we started school. And those three room schooled and Miss Lightly B. Smith who was my teacher back in those early times. She was she was kinda hard on me. I thought. But anyway we did not have any restrooms in the school at that time. And so anybody had to be excused themselves they would go one - would go girls would go this way and the boys would go this way [gestures left and right] in the woods in the back of the school. So that was our restrooms and we didn't think about it that's just the way it was.

Griffin: What kind of student were you?

Griffin: I wasn't the best. I loved to play I was kind of a player. I wasn't the best now I passed my grades and all and I - I did a little bluffing along I guess but I was able to make my grades. We just had a time. Owe Thompson my main buddy and I. We regretfully got in a lot of little trouble but we would get in trouble a little once and a while.

Interviewer: And where did you graduate from high school?

Griffin: I graduated twelve miles from where I just described. A little town called Arlington, Georgia.⁴ That's where I graduated there. Actually during the last two years of my grade school up there. I drove a school bus. When I say I drove a school butts what it was a pick up truck with a body made over it. That I would go buy and pick up about seven or eight people that were all going to that school in Arlington. I would drive about eight miles up the road to a certain spot. The bus could come to that spot and we I would leave my little truck there and we would get on the bus then we would go on to Arlington spend the day come back bus would drop us off and we'd get back on the little buss and I'd carry them all around to houses around my house. They would usually pay us about two dollars a month something like for you know transportation. They would take care of gas and that was about all we were interested in.

Interviewer: So what year did you graduate from high school?

Griffin: I graduated from high school when I was sixteen years old. Now you've got to keep in mind that I came back from Florida. And I started school when I was just after I was five years old and then I graduated when I was sixteen because we had only eleven grades back in that time. So when I was sixteen I graduated from high school. I don't know how I did it I was not valedictorian I was salutatorian. And I think I kinda looked dumb on that really.

Interviewer: How many students were in the graduating class?

Griffin: I believe there was about twenty five. About twenty five. I can see us right now about in

⁴ Map showing distance from Arlington to Patmos:

<https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Patmos,+GA/Arlington,+GA+39813/@31.4130394,-84.7151368,12z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x88ed67aaa5c687f3:0x698038a573fa4a82!2m2!1d-84.5649143!2d31.376011!1m5!1m1!1s0x88ed59242c89767b:0x5825a349034e2d42!2m2!1d-84.7249188!2d31.4398976!3e0>

that circle

Interviewer: Now at that time what were your hopes for the future? What were your plans?

Griffin: Now at that time I was simply planning on being a farmer. That's all I knew that's all my daddy done, that's all my family had done. And I planned to be a farmer the rest of my life. Now here I am sixteen years old what do you do? Now my mother fortunately was school teacher in her younger years so she was rather insistent we furthered our education. So I did go to some college after that if you're interested in that. I went to Abraham Baldwin agricultural college which is the college about farming. Teaching you how to farm better so I went to there to - to that school for two years and I fully intended to - you know go ahead and get further education. But unfortunately, unfortunately. Something came along. I fell in love with a little girl that was talking in a hall one day. And well you didn't ask that so I'll tell you later but anyway we got married when I was just 19 years old so after the two years I had gone to college then we got married and then I'm nineteen years old what I do now? Any question?

Interviewer: Ok so I want to ask quickly now, did you have a sense war was on the horizon?

Griffin: Yes I did, Yes I did. I was going to mention that. [pause] I was a little underage at the time war first started, but now for that reason I was - I waded out I didn't go in immediately. But when war started - 1945. When war started we all rushed to join. There was a number of us and I guess as luck would have it that were not accepted because we were on the farm and back then they needed the food worse than they needed the manpower to feed the soldiers up to the war started. So I thought a time there - I felt like there would not be a problem about me going in service or it wouldn't start on things. I went and bought a - now just 19 years old, I went and bought me a Ford tractor, I rented sixty acres of land and bought some seed peanuts and Sarah and I got married. And I was going to be a big farmer but Uncle Sam had something different in mind for me. I moved from one county to another country. This county that I moved to was having trouble meeting its allotment for men to go into the service so instead of me being deferred there. I don't know if you've ever seen them, You remember the sign you probably seen it "the country needs you" [points] this man pointing I can see it right now and so I was drafted in the new county.

Interviewer: Ok lets pause for one second. Do you want to pull those up so that you can put your feet on the floor?

Griffin: I think that would be...

Interviewer: Let's do that.

Griffin: I think it will be a little bit better.

Interviewer: Do you want to take a sip of water?

Griffin: No I'm fine.

Interviewer: Ok. Alright so I want to just go back quickly and sort of get a direct response on Pearl Harbor.

Griffin: Ok.

Interviewer: Is that a distinct memory for you?

Griffin: Oh yes

Interviewer: Well tell me about hearing the news

Griffin: Well, I heard the news I was it happened so I was hitchhiking and a man picked me up and told me about it because back then people if they wanted to go anywhere and didn't have a car they just get up you know and thumb a ride somewhere. And so I heard about it but it didn't it somewhere other since I had been told that I was going to I had to farm. I didn't think that it would necessarily affect me. Now it was a horrible thing living in the country away from a city away from a lot of hullabaloo and everything. I guess I wouldn't of been affected quite as much as some of those who were more draft age a year or two older than I was and so forth but I remember it and I can remember Roosevelt on the old radio talking about I can't recall the full speech but I can remember his voice as he came on there the world will remember in infamy and the use of big words like that you know the things like that will happen. So it was it was quite a...

Interviewer: So how did your family feel about President Roosevelt?

Griffin: Oh they thought he was God. They thought he was God at that time because he had put through he had basically bought us out of the Depression by creating the -. Back then there was people going around digging ditches all over to keep mosquitos from going around [stammers] giving you malaria and things like that certain building things like that so they really thought he was God. Roosevelt was well thought of.

Interviewer: So who told you or how did you learn you wouldn't be drafted or you wouldn't have to enlist because you were a farmer?

Griffin: Well there in a little town of Newton Georgia. See that's the country that I lived in and so they informed me that I would not and so I just accepted it as such. And that's the reason I bought the track through and peanuts and rented some land. And I was gonna farm and feed but instead when I moved to a different country, Dougherty county that's when they decided they needed me worse in the war than they needed me to raise peanuts for them.

Interviewer: So if you had stayed in Baker country?

Griffin: Yes.

Interviewer: Would you have not been drafted do you think?

Griffin: I think I would have. I think I would have probably a little later in the war I would have been drafted. And I had gone there a time or two hoping that we could cause we back then I wasn't an exception all of us wanted to go we just we wanted to go but since I had married that changed a little of my thinking and so I thought I sure won't have to go. That wasn't the case

Interviewer: Let's talk about meeting your wife.

Griffin: Ok.

Interviewer: Tell me about her how did you meet her?

Griffin: Like most boys fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years old, the new school year comes along and I like most of them was standing in where you enter the classroom watching the girls go by. And there was a new school that had been added to our school and so the pupils from that school were having to come to our school so that was a new set of girls so I had to see how they looked. And so [chuckles] as they came by I there I never will forget my wife she came by and had on a little old skirt that was red and white stripped. And I just thought well "I want to marry that girl." And that was - I can't say I fell in love but I was infatuated.

Interviewer: So this was still in high school?

Griffin: Yes, still in high school

Interviewer: So she was from the area?

Griffin: Yup, yeah she was from just about four miles from there.

Interviewer: And what was her name?

Griffin: Sarah

Interviewer: And what was her last name?

Griffin: Emanuel [says then spells it out].

Interviewer: So how long did you court?

Griffin: Well we - see I went on to college after I met her. I went on those two years college that I mentioned to you a while ago and then after college and thinking I was going in service immediately we made a decision basically - it was on Saturday lets go get married and we went and got married and we were going to keep it a secret but the next week the Baker country news came out and it was in the

paper so we couldn't do anything about that secret and we couldn't do anything about that secret and so anyway we went and that's when we got married.

Interviewer: And and do you remember the date of your wedding?

Griffin: I believe it was November - you got it?

Interviewer: It was 42'.

Griffin: Forty yeah two. I know the year of it. Oh, ok I believe it was November or something I'm just not certain. See I've got a new wife now [points at interviewer] so I've been thinking about my new wife.

Interviewer: We'll get to her We'll get to her

Griffin: Ok ok

Interviewer: Ok so you got married and tell me about getting that small farm still in Baker country.

Griffin: Alright as I told you I had rented a tractor. I had that small farm one year I farmed which is what I was supposed to do to stay on that list before I was drafted then when I moved to a different country then they said you got to be drafted and I lost the farm. I lost my tractor, I lost the seed peanuts, I lost the rent, I lost everything. So at that point in time I was drafted.

Interviewer: Ok tell me about moving to Albany.

Griffin: Well my parents moved to Albany. Originally, I told you that was about thirty miles from where I had lived all my life. They rented a large colonial home and this colonial home had rooms five or six or seven rooms in this house so they rented us two of the rooms and Sarah and I moved into these two rooms and that's where we lived and that's where I left her when I went in service.

Interviewer: Do you remember what street that was on?

Griffin: Yes. It was on Slappey Drive. South Slappey Drive. It didn't have a bit of pavement on it was just bump bump bump [gestures]. Yes it was Slappey Drive.

Interviewer: So what did you do for a living in Albany?

Griffin: Well once I farmed then I went into the service. Now I had not gone into anything other than the farming there so I didn't - if you were talking about by career. My career didn't start really till I got back from the service.

Interviewer: So you hadn't rented another tract of land when you got to Albany?

Griffin: No no no. I lost my tract of land and everything and I was when they drafted me I went to Fort Knox Kentucky for my original training there.

Interviewer: So when you were still in home in Albany before you were drafted did you get a ration card at that time?

Griffin: No no.

Interviewer: Did you buy any war bonds?

Griffin: Nope. I didn't have any money. [chuckles] I couldn't buy any war bonds.

Interviewer: Were you keeping up with news from the war at that time?

Griffin: Oh yeah oh yeah. Yes I was very interested in the war at that time.

Interviewer: How did you get your news?

Griffin: My daddy and mother took the paper and I'd read their paper in the morning when they get through with theirs.

Interviewer: And did you expect to fight did you expect to get drafted when you were still there in Albany?

Griffin: I didn't concern myself too much but I was aware that the draft was needing men and that I was of the age nineteen going on twenty and I was of age and going on twenty and what would I do with my wife you were concerned about things like that. And so I was concerned and sure enough I got that notice.

Interviewer: How did you receive the notice?

Griffin: You received it from the draft board. Draft board drafted me and says we need you and want you to report to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for your training. So anyway I got on a bus there in Albany well actually it wasn't Albany it was Newton. The bus left from Newton and we headed to Fort Knox, Kentucky. And I left my wife there with ole piece of car and incidentally you haven't mentioned anything about my baby but anyway we'll get to that.

Interviewer: So tell me about leaving your wife what was that parting like?

Griffin: Well [pause] that was a sad thing for me. When I left my wife at that time. I'm not sure which leaving you are talking about because when I went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, she went with me. Now leaving my wife later on is the sad thing that I was fixin' to mention to you.

Interviewer: Ok so you go to Fort Knox once you have been called.

Griffin: Yes

Interviewer: And she goes with you?

Griffin: And she goes with me.

Interviewer: Why did she go with you?

Griffin: She goes with me and she works in a PX there to help us pay off the money that I had lost on that land and the tractor and so forth because I had lost every bit of that. So she worked in a PX and I was making a 100 dollars a month in service there. Now remember I was just a PFC at that time so you don't make much money there.

Interviewer: And where did you live there at Fort Knox?

Griffin: Well the person that was running the PX. Had an extra room and my wife rented that room from him. And that's where she lived. Of course I lived I was in the barracks with all the other enlisted men.

Interviewer: Ok, so tell me about boot camp, tell me about your arrival at boot camp.

Griffin: Well I'm not sure except boy one of the interesting things that happened the first night I got there. Freezing cold and somebody stole my blanket and I got up and tried to steal somebody's else's blanket and we had a big time there. She was there at Fort Knox and by that time we would just settle in the end I have to go barracks every afternoon and she goes to her one room apartment over there.

Interviewer: What kind of training did you undergo?

Griffin: Fort Knox Kentucky is a - They train you there how to tank, that's what. I said this time they had made the right decision. I had a tractor had had a tractor. Now I'm going into a tank outfit and so I thought so well boy they have really hit the nail on the head but unfortunately I stayed there and took my basic training the whole time and I never got inside of a tank. I was a radio operator on a personnel carrier. Now I don't know if you're a personnel carrier is kinda like a tank people are on the end and you're you have to learn how to - the Morse code and so I was taught that and that's what I did there. Now remember you're only in basic training for 90 days so that's the 90 days that we spent there.

Interviewer: So how were you assigned to a branch of the military?

Griffin: When I was finishing basic training They sent you around some type of form I can see it now but I can't remember all the questions on it. And you answered all the questions on it including your school, your past history, what you did blah blah blah. And for some reason I was selected for

officer's training. So after basic training in Fort Knox, Kentucky I was selected for officer's training so that's good.

Interviewer: How did you feel about it?

Griffin: I was happy because I was going to get a big raise in pay if I went to training. I think I'd get about ten dollars more a month. So, I had a decision to make I either can stay at Fort Knox and become a tank outfit or I can go to Aberdeen, Maryland, and that's firearms training or I can go to Fort Benning and that's where the infantry trained. So what do I do? Well while you haven't mentioned it Sarah now is pregnant with our first baby and so we go home we get a week's leave before you go to that training so anyway I selected Camp Blanding because its just 90 miles from Albany where my wife would be staying.

Interviewer: You talking about Fort Benning?

Griffin: Fort Benning excuse me. Fort Benning

Interviewer: Ok.

Griffin: Fort Benning I selected Fort Benning because its just 90 miles from Albany. So, going on home we thought she just had the flu but when we got thrilled there we found out that she was pregnant with the baby. Anyway the next assignment I get is Fort Benning for officer's training. But now before I went to fort Benning there again 90 days. Now about this time it's getting near the time that V in Europe is getting close to that time but not quite yet. So anyway, we I went to Fort Benning, went through officer's training, and I found out that you could get an extra hundred dollars a month if you could join the paratroopers. So you talk about needing the money I really needed the money bad. So I got on a bus one day and they carried me up to Fort Benning I mean the headquarters. And when I got to the headquarters they carry you up to a thing as it looked like to me it was half way to the sky. I got up there and I looked back down and I was supposed to catch this rope and slide down somewhere or other and I'm not sure cause I never did do it. I turned around and said as bad as I need money I don't need this hundred dollars a month that bad. So I came back to Fort Benning, finished my officer's training and at that point in time I became a 2nd Lieutenant.

Interviewer: So tell me about Fort Benning what did it look like in those days?

Griffin: [pause] Soldiers, soldiers, soldiers, training, training, training, night training, day training, morning training, training of every kind every where you could look was nothing but soldiers soldiers, soldiers because that was before just before VE day in Europe. Everybody was training for the final invasion hopefully and winding that war up because they didn't know at that point in time Europe would give up. It was totally 100% soldiers.

Interviewer: Did you have a sense of how important Fort Benning was in training certain units?

Griffin: Yes I did. It was. You were trained in weaponry, you had to do a lot of night training, you had to train with all types of weapons. I could take a weapon and just use it and... I can't think of all the guns I was trying to think of there. But all types of weaponry you were trained for in combat there.

Interviewer: What did your barracks look like there?

Griffin: I can tell you exactly what it looked like. It was twenty by fifty. Twenty feet wide, fifty feet long. Now the reason I know that I later bought one so I know the size of that barracks. You walked in the barracks there was nothing but bed - cots not beds, on both sides down and a few of the barracks had second floors in them. It was nothing but soldiers and spreads and a brown blankets on top of the cot. So this was my life at that time.

Interviewer: What time did you get up in the morning?

Griffin: About three, four and five o'clock.

Interviewer: And where was the latrine?

Griffin: It was in the end of the barracks.

Interviewer: What about the mess hall, the cafeteria?

Griffin: By the time you got to cafeteria was about five thirty or six o'clock. It was separate it was not a part of the barracks it was a sperate place where you went to.

Interviewer: What was the food like?

Griffin: Well if you were in the service you called it slop [laughs]. But basically, we were all healthy from it so I guess it was alright there but it was just a bunch of slop is what we were concerned at that time?

Interviewer: Where there any women working on the base? Did you see any women?

Griffin: Very few. Very few, there would be the secretarial jobs and things of that nature and nurses and things of that nature but there wasn't women in service as such like we were at that point in time.

Interviewer: Ok so did you have time to visit your wife while you were at Fort Benning?

Griffin: No she was back in Albany by this time when we came back from Fort Knox, Kentucky. She was in Albany. And I may have gone home one weekend out of the thirteen weeks I believe I mentioned that training there was thirteen weeks. And I may have hitchhiked home and hitchhiked

back one weekend cause that's what you did at the time. And most people would pick you up back then.

Interviewer: Did she visit Fort Benning?

Griffin: She did when I graduated from Fort Benning with my 2nd Lieutenant boys. She came up with my dad and mother and came up to Fort Benning for my graduation.

Interviewer: Ok so where were you transferred from Fort Benning?

Griffin: This is kinda a quick thing and I think I can get it straight. When I graduated from Fort Benning they sent us to Camp Blanding⁵ Florida. Now I while did not know it at that time but looking back I know what it was. They were preparing us for the invasion of Japan. For the invasion of Japan. So anyway when we went to Camp Blanding, Florida and stayed there about two months and then we were given a one week's leave. And the one week's leave course looking back now they knew we were heading for the invasion of Japan. Now I'm sure you remember that Germany or VE day they gave up about two months before Japanese surrendered but we were making all our facilities available for the invasion of Japan. We went to Camp Blanding and when I - Incidentally our baby was born when I was in Camp Blanding

Interviewer: Tell me that whole story?

Griffin: Alright. I told you Sarah was pregnant when we left original basic training there. The night we were out on what we referred to as bivouac. I don't know if you were aware of that terminology. You go out like you are in battle and you carry you tent with you and you get in the tent and you sleep and you do whatever you have to that night. So we were out on bivouac and I being as tall as I am course my feet are sticking out the end of the tent there and its cold weather but anyway. About eleven or twelve o'clock I suddenly for some reason I don't know why. I knew there was something I had to do something. So, I got up and I felt that my baby was going to be born that night. Now here I am in Camp Blanding, Florida, about 250 miles from Albany. And my wife is in Albany, I'm in Camp Blanding on bivouac. I went to the commanding officer, now remember at this time I'm just a 2nd Lieutenant I'm not the commanding officer. And I said, "I have got to go to Albany." He said, "LT you can't do that we are on bivouac." And I said "Sir I have got to go to Albany." I'm going tonight somewhere or another if I have to be arrested I'll be going. So he realized that I was serious about it so he got one of the jeeps carried me to the bus station there in Jacksonville. See Camp Blanding is just out there from Jacksonville. He lead me to the bus station I got on the bus and rode that bus all night long and about daylight I got to Albany. And I got to the hospital and the baby was born about two hours before I got there. And that was the part - Yeah I was glad to see my new baby at that time, Cheryl. I think you know Cheryl, she's a precious daughter at that time little ole fat thing.

Interviewer: How long could you stay with them?

⁵ <https://fl.ng.mil/commands/Pages/Camp-Blanding-Joint-Training-Center.aspx>

Griffin: Now that's the sad part. I call back from there after I had been there a day and I asked the -

Interviewer: Let's pause there for a second.

[intermission]

Interviewer: This is James Newberry I'm still here with Rueben Griffin and I wanted to ask how long did you have to stay with your new baby?

Griffin: One week. One week. That was all they would give us knowing that we had to at that point in time that it was definitely planned at that time an overseas situation. We stayed there one week and there was a little scene there I guess I'll never forget you know how there are some things you never forget. This airplane that I was on my mother and Sarah and the baby came out to the airport to see me off. God knows where. And so I got on the plane and I'll have to admit with tears in my eyes. The plane circled. Circled. Never will forget that plane taking off and I don't know where it was in its flight plan or what but anyway when it got off the ground and of course my wife with the baby in her arms and my mother standing there - we waved at them as we rode by you know and so the plane as it got in the air it made a perfect circle and came right back over where they were standing. And I can see that scene today just as clear as I can, my wife standing there with the baby and my wife holding up that little baby's arm. It was a love scene right there it sure was. I'll never forget it.

Interviewer: So you went on to California?

Griffin: I went on to California there and really it was just in transit. We stayed there in some location. Camp Roberts California. Think we stayed there for about two weeks and then we went on from Camp Roberts California. We went on to San Francisco. At this point that we are talking about right now, VE day had occurred in Europe but VJ day had not occurred. They were determined to still fight on. So what was happening at that time. I didn't know it at the time it was happening but what was happening at that time was the troops were being assembled in all the islands around Japan that were there and we were coming from the states there. So we got on a troop ship but it wasn't actually a troop ship but it was being used as a troopship to haul as many people as they could for the purpose of the invasion of Japan. So we I got on the General [unintelligible]⁶ that was the name of the ship. James, here's another scene that I'll never forget. Here's I guess maybe four or five thousand men around the ship there. We were maybe fifty feet above the deck down here. They had a little orchestra there to wave us goodbye and it was about six or seven men and they were all waving there. All thousands of us or however many thousand of us it was standing there crying. I mean literally shedding tears. When we were going at that point in time. And this little orchestra of all things, guess what song they selected to sing? "Gonna Take a Sentimental Journey." [chuckles] So at that time there were never will forget that. And incidentally there was something there that at that time that you wouldn't think to mean but later

⁶ Maybe: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_General_R._L._Howze_\(AP-134\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_General_R._L._Howze_(AP-134))

on I found out one of the singers there was Frank Sinatra in that little orchestra just starting out. He was not famous at that time.

Interviewer: Saw him in the band...

Griffin: With that little orchestra- So this is about August the 2nd, something like that, August 2nd or 3rd. We take off sad faced, we know where we're going. This time. We don't know that we are rendezvousing with all the troops on the islands. We wouldn't know that but anyway we take off and as we leave everything is somber, everything is sad, we just waiting till the time when we land in Japan for the invasion. And I don't know if you are familiar with Japan itself but it's basically Harju and Hokkaido. Two big islands laying there makes up Japan. The population of Japan are basically between – [Gestures to two sides] Here's the ocean, here's the ocean. The land comes up like this and here's the people living down in the center of this. You are going in there for an invasion of Japan would have been a terrible terrible thing because you'd be going up mountains trying to get down to where the people where. But anyway, we took off, we had been at sea I guess four five or six days at that time about August the 6th or 7th about that. A little later in August maybe, [pause]. Anyway, all of the sudden one night it seemed like to me everything on that ship lighted up blowing holing splowing, everything. We did not know at that point in time what it was but the Enola Gay had been dropped on Japan and we didn't know it at that time so that's the reason when you hear me tell that story I am the luckiest person that ever be. Because I got there two or three days after the Enola Gay was dropped and the other one the second time. I got there two or three days after it dropped instead of two or three days before it was dropped. Anyways we went on to [unintelligible] because we thought at that time we were just gonna turn around and com back home. But that wasn't the way it was. They had to have someone there to for the invasion of Japan and to what you call it "occupy" the island. So we went on and landed in Yokohoma two or three days after the atomic bombs were dropped. That was an experience. We were there in Japan and we are all assigned certain most of us who were already officers most of us were given officers. Japanese officers former headquarters. We were given small houses and things like that where they had formerly.

Interviewer: So you were on a Japanese military base?

Griffin: Yes, we were on Japanese Yokohoma, they carried us to a Japanese military base we were housed in former Japanese officer's quarters.

Interviewer: What did your quarters look like?

Griffin: Well not too unlike ours but most everything was messed up for obvious reason because they were disappointed in having surrendered. Because you know by this time they had surrendered two or three days after that. And so it wasn't a whole lot of difference there. It was all cheap, everything there was cheap, it was all bamboo things of that nature it was what they used there for building supplies.

Interviewer: What were your duties?

Griffin: To make a long story short let me intend it this way. When we got there you were assigned anything that was available and to make a long story short for about five or six months of my time there I was trial jury advocate. And was investigating two Black men who had killed someone.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Griffin: One of them was named Heart and one of them was named Hoise. I just never will forget those two names. As far as I was concerned Heart was the one that killed the person. See I don't know all about this because I wasn't in all of it but I was in this initial investigation. But Hoise was the one that eventually served time for having done something. So these - it was my duty at that time to go out and investigate and I wasn't an investigator I was just a soldier now. And I went out and I investigated where the murder took place and who I felt was guilty and I came back and made my recommendation that a Heart?

Interviewer: So Heart and Hoise were Black soldiers?

Griffin: [nods] Two Black soldiers that had been committed a murder.

Interviewer: And who had been murdered?

Griffin: I don't know at this time. I don't really know because I was taken off the case you can see why cause I - I'm not really but I don't remember who the murder was committed on.

Griffin: So you don't know if it was another soldier or if it was a Japanese?

Griffin: No it was a local soldier, it was a local soldier and I do not, I can't recall that soldier's name.

Interviewer: And how did you get this assignment for being this advocate.

Griffin: Well I was just there. I had I don't say that I had the education for it but I had more than a lot of the people there who were doing that and so I was just assigned that duty. That's the reason I say when we got there the occupation forces you just did what was available. Six months after that I was a supply officer that's the way it was.

Interviewer: How did you go about investigating?

Griffin: Well I took men with me which was I had never been a buckeye yet and I took certain men with me to get fingerprints and things of that nature carried it in the information I got and it only took me about three days to do what I did.

Interviewer: Was it a court martial?

Griffin: Later on it was. It was after I left there it was a court martial.

Interviewer: And why were you taken off it?

Griffin: Well I moved on up the islands there up to Hatura.

Interviewer: And where you on another Japanese military base there?

Griffin: Yes.

Interviewer: And what was your assignment there?

Griffin: I was a supply officer. You tell me the old story about that. It was a very unusual thing. I always felt a little guilty about this. I was a supply officer there and one day my commanding officer received a message that there was an uprising of some Japanese at a certain location about fifteen miles from where we were. And he asked me to take a tank and take the tank go to the men and supplies and try to locate where this uprising was because you know that early after giving up there was a lot of this going on around in different places with the men they were not satisfied with having surrendered. So we took off with the tank and about fifteen miles up the road and the snow was about that thick at the time that deep I mean [gestures]. About fifteen miles up from there we came to a location where we thought our information had indicated where the problem was. And when we stopped the platoon to investigate, I couldn't locate anything but there was a small train station over here on one side. And I thought maybe I can go over here and talk to the girl and she can get and I want to call back to my headquarters to see what to do next to see what I needed to do. And I got over there and I couldn't communicate with that girl. I tried every way in the world I knew to make her try to understand that I needed some information. Cause she was Japanese and I was American and we could not communicate so I stood there for ten or fifteen minutes arguing with her. Well not really arguing but trying to communicate. And my tank I had left them out I guess a hundred yards because the snow was so thick and all. That it wasn't perfect to bring the tank down there. And so I turned around and when I turned around to go back out where my tank was this was the only time that I know I was really scared. There were about I would say ten or fifteen Japanese surrounding me. They had just got right behind me. I hadn't even noticed cause I was here talking to the girl and I hadn't noticed that. Well what do you do? What do you do? Cause my tank I can't notify them they're out there. I can't get any help so I did the only thing that you could do and it was part of training I had over the last couple of years. I had two .45s on the hip one one each side. And I just reached down and flipped, unsnapped that thing. I didn't take them out I just held my hand there and turned and started walking toward that tank. And as I walked slowly, let me say that, slowly, they slowly parted [gestures]. Now you get the funniest feeling in your back you ever get when you walk through that. So I walked on through there and nothing really ever happened. So anyway that was - So anyway I never did find anybody was trying to do anything and so apparently it was just somebody call'd in or something.

Interviewer: What was the name of the town again where you were posted when you were in supply

unit?

Griffin: Sesindia [says then spells it] I believe is the way you spell it.

Interviewer: Tell me about becoming a typist.

Griffin: [looks down and laughs] I should of never told you.

Interviewer: I want the full story.

Griffin: Well as you know Douglass MacArthur was main general here. He had a general by the name of Eichelberger⁷. If you read your history look at that General Eichelberger he was one of MacArthur's men. Eichelberger was my immediate commanding officer. And so General Eichelberger needed some typing done. Well when I had finished school I used to type. I got up to where I could type a [unintelligible]. I could type sixty words a minute. I was doing a little typing for him. Well I had been in Japan exactly one year at that point in time so back at that time when you are - if you been on duty and you have severed and you got everything qualified you are eligible for promotion. So I was a 2nd Lieutenant you remember I told you at Camp Benning - Fort Benning. I got my 2nd Lieutenant. Anyway, I was eligible and it came through this laying on the desk and I was eligible for being promoted to 1st Lieutenant, which was about fifty dollars a month pay raise. So I took it up and you had a stack of stuff you had to sign about that big [gestured] and I took it and stuck it in the middle of that stack of things. And that night I was 1st Lieutenant [laughs]. So I qualified 1st Lieutenant and I cheated a little bit anyway and it all worked out alright. In fact, the general and I laughed about a time or two after that.

Interviewer: So how long total were you in Japan.

Griffin: About sixteen months.

Interviewer: And did you have any communication with folks at home at that time?

Griffin: Oh yeah, we'd be getting letters all of the time. See now Japan gave up after the atomic bombs were dropped so it was just like you were somewhere else.

Interviewer: And what kind of news were you getting from home

Griffin: Well they were wanting, hoping that we would be able to come home at some point in time and that it was looking like - I don't know if you're familiar with this or not but they had - you were assigned certain number of points. If you were in the service and then so many double that amount if you were overseas. And so, my time came. I had enough points having severed over there to come home.

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-L-Eichelberger>

Interviewer: Did you also get points because you had a wife and child?

Griffin: Yes I got points because I had a wife and child and you got points because you were overseas and a bunch of little small things.

Interviewer: And how were you alerted? Were you following along on getting more points or did you suddenly hear you were eligible to go home?

Griffin: No, you kept up with your points. You kept up with those points and you were pretty familiar when exactly the time would come there.

Interviewer: Was there anything to do for fun when you were in Japan.

Griffin: Oh yeah, we had a good time. Actually, we had a pretty good life over there. Lieutenant Freeman and I had a cabin of a house. A former Japanese officer's home. And we had Tomoko [spells it out] she was our maid. And she kept that place perfect and did all - of course we ate at the company mess hall but she kept everything fine so we had a good life.

Interviewer: So you did have some interactions then with the Japanese.

Griffin: Yeah. Some we did and we became obviously we became friends with them after a period of time there you know.

Interviewer: That's my question. It seems like that would have been a period of adjustment you've been fighting these people who were viewed as never going to surrender type fighters and you're living along side them.

Griffin: Yes and no because the people that we were with mostly there were not the fighters. They were just the mammas and daddy's and sisters and brothers and things like that. They were not the people that there were exceptions to that statement but normally they were just everyday people.

Interviewer: So tell me about departing? Where did you ship out from and tell me about that and in that time?

Griffin: Ok when the time came you notified it was your time to come home and you got enough points now you were to meet at a certain location, certain day, and when you get that in my case we came home on a small - Now I don't know if you're familiar with this but they made lot of ships back at that time. They called them victory ships. Webster Victory. I'll never forget I was on the Webster victory ship. And we loaded up got on got everything in there and incidentally during this time - different things you accumulate money from different things there. And so I left a large wad of money to Tomoko so she's probably queen over there now. The different things I sold, rifles, I sent a rifle on to my wife. Actually, I sent three rifles home before I came and so anyway we get on Webster Victory

ship, we head out for San Francisco.

Interviewer: Tell me about life aboard ship. This is not only for this trip but the trip over. What was life like on board these ships.

Griffin: Well if you've ever eaten on a few hard boiled eggs that's about the only thing that would keep you from getting real real sick. And you are only sleeping mainly on what was transport things or on a not a cot but a swing. (something it's called) You're just crammed up. But it's a happy time.

Interviewer: Was there a commissary? Some place to buy things?

Griffin: No, no I don't remember any commissary. I didn't ever go to one there. All I'd go to was a mess hall, get sick, throw up, go back to my thing and lay down [chuckles]. Of coming home there. There was an interesting little thing that happened after I got off the Webster Victory in San Francisco. We got on a troop train headed to Sam Houston Texas where we were to be discharged. When we got on this troop train, they made me in charge of there. Well I swelled up a little bit I thought that was some real real recommendation. I was being recognized. But you don't want to ever want that job [shakes head]. I didn't know what I was thinking there. Every time that train would stop somewhere. Now here you are with a train full of soldiers. Let's say you got a couple thousand on that train. They haven't had a beer they haven't had a drink they haven't seen a girl. Every time that train stops you lose about twenty-five or thirty of them. They get off and take off and you don't know where they are. It's a sight. To make a long story short and I realize I'm stretching it out here. To make a long story short when I finally got the troop train back to Sam Houston Texas I was scared to death because I had lost about a hundred and thirty people from the time I left San Francisco to Sam Houston Texas and I knew I was going to be court marshaled. I got in to sign the thing and the captain in there, "Congratulations Lieutenant. Griffin this is the best we've had in a long time." [laughing]. I couldn't believe it but I never forgot. I was really scared about that I was afraid there they were going to court marshal me for losing all those troops.

Interviewer: Was it the sort of thing where you were going out trying to find people?

Griffin: Well you try to but the train had to take off it was on schedule. It had to take off. And on top of that you'd maybe come in dragging them in sometimes in wheelbarrows. They'd got off got drunk. It was not an assignment you'd want.

Interviewer: So where did you finally get off the train and what base?

Griffin: Sam Houston Texas, I got off and turned my sign in and got a release on that. I caught a plane from Sam Houston Texas to Albany. I landed in Albany about four o'clock in the morning. Unbeknowing to me my wife had taught my girl who was now, I had seen her one week, now she's not quite a year old. And she was the fattest little thing I had ever seen, Cheryl. She was the fattest little thing there and she had taught her how to walk. And I'll never forget coming around that house and

looked in there and there was my baby girl, Cheryl. The only thing that I can say about my whole experience especially in war time is that I hope that the good lord will never never expose us to that type of war when ever he calls me home I'll look back down and say thank you, what you took care of me. Sure will.

Interviewer: I got a couple more questions. You were discharged in Texas? Or did your discharge come later?

Griffin: Oh, it came later. It came later, it came about I say it took about thirty days. Best I remember.

Interviewer: Did you immediately go and look for work?

Griffin: Oh yes. Oh yes.

Interviewer: Tell me about going to apply for jobs?

Griffin: The next, well in fact I still had on the uniform the next day I was down looking for jobs. Now I had originally had some experience with Life and Cashler insurance company. And I said we'll I'll go to Life and Cashler. Well I went upstairs there in an office in Albany to Life and Cashler. They offered me a job, thirty-five dollars a week. I turned around and started back down those steps that I had just gone up to and my uncle happened to see me cause he worked in an insurance company over here. He asked me "hey boy when you'd get home?" Well I just got home yesterday. He said, "Well come on and go to work with us." I said, "well I just signed up with Life and Cashler over here." He said, "what'd they pay you?" I said, "thirty-five dollars a week." He said, "well pay you fifty." I said, "well I'd love fifteen dollars a week extra." After all I fully intended to go back and get my college education finished since I had it already paid for by Uncle Sam. So I said whoever I'm going to work for I'm gonna be keeping them a little bit so I'd rather keep them fifteen dollars than thirty five dollars so I turned around and went and told the man over there that I changed my mind and went to work for Interstate Life and Insurance Company.

Interviewer: And what kind of policies were you doing at that point?

Griffin: At that point I was selling little nickle and dime policies to the lower income clientele. It was the job itself you drove about a hundred and twenty-five miles a week. You would go by and I would send you a policy and you'd pay twenty-five cents for it and every week I'd go by and you'd give me a quarter or fifty cents or something small. So that was the type of insurance that I was selling at that time.

Interviewer: You mentioned that these were mostly people in the Black communities?

Griffin: Yes mostly.

Interviewer: So were these people who had just not had life insurance policies before?

Griffin: Most of them had not had life insurance and it was mostly burial type of insurance.

Interviewer: Tell me how your career progressed from there?

Griffin: [mutters] I always tell my wife and I tell Karmen now I've always had what I refer to as a lucky career. I was on that route, we call it a debt when you go around and collect from people. I was on that for one year. Almost to the day. I was promoted to sales manager. Well, sales manager that means that I had five men under me. Almost a year to the day the manager asked me to be his assistant. Our district was so big had so many men so instead of supervising five men I'm co-supervising twenty-five men. About a year and a half from then, now I've been there for four or five years, about a year and a half from then the home office called me and asked me if I would be what we referred to as a field trainer. A field trainer was meant that you traveled where ever you were needed within the company's operation, which was thirteen states. They gave me an automobile and if we had a real bad trouble spot in Montgomery, Alabama, I'd be in Montgomery Monday morning. If he had a trouble spot in Panama City I'd be in Panama City the next Monday morning. Trouble spots. So I was what they referred to as a field trainer. This is a little side story that I don't think I've ever told you, but I went to Montgomery, Alabama, and this agent by the name of Farmer, he had quit. And so Mr. Farmer had to go around what they call "making their final." Check the books and all you go around with him. So his father had died and so I told him just give me his book and I had never been to Montgomery, Alabama, in my life at that point in time. I said just give me the book. And you drop me off at the first place. They did, they gave me the book. The manager's name was Brown. He dropped me off at the first place in the morning at about six thirty. I said you pick me up tonight at this last address. The book had the address on it. So he did. That particular day, I was solo. [Unintelligible, 1:44:22] I was just walking from house to house. Collecting up all the premiums that were back. So that night when I came in at about ten o'clock, this agent Farmer who had resigned came and sat down with me to go through the books to see how we did. And when he saw what we did that day he changed his mind. He said, "listen will you accept my reinstatement?" I said, "yeah" and he stayed with us for years and years and did a great great job after that. Now that particular week, that particular thing happened and as a result of it this is where I say the luck comes in. The next week the manager in Pensacola Florida resigned. The manager there. He resigned and was gonna come to Macon, Georgia, and they needed someone in Pensacola who could run a complete district. So I went to Pensacola, Florida, and was promoted to district manager in Pensacola, Florida, and I stayed there for a year and a half and we won every award throughout the entire country. This was recognized that was about three thousand agents at that time.

Interviewer: And you ascended to vice president?

Griffin: No, at that point in time I'm in Pensacola Florida. Now then during that year we won the award throughout the entire territory. So Vice President we had built a new home were gonna stay there forever. New big home right on the water where you could get your boat and go out into the ocean. And my wife Sarah at that time we were just so happy. And that Sunday before moving into that house on Monday a plane came down from Chattanooga. "Griff we need you down in Chattanooga, home

office.” Yes ole’ lucky Griff again. Being in the right place at the right time. So they flew me to Chattanooga there and at that time I became regional vice president. Of course, as luck would have it about two years I was vice president.

Interviewer: What year was that? That you moved to Chattanooga?

Griffin: Let’s see, [looks down].

Interviewer: The approximate time? 1955?

Griffin: I guess that would be about right.

Interviewer: And you’ve been there ever since?

Griffin: Ah yes, no I’ve been there had a little couple of promotions at the time till senior vice president. Now the last five years, you may not be aware of this, but I spent in Jacksonville Florida. When the companies merged it was either go to Jacksonville or retire at age about fifty something at that point in time. So I didn’t want to retire; I wasn’t ready to retire. I went to Jacksonville. I was to go to Jacksonville and run Interstate Life and Action Insurance Company. That was my assignment. The man down there in Jacksonville, he was to run the Gulf Life end of the insurance business. So I flew to Jacksonville today and the next morning I walked in the office. The man that was going to run the Gulf Life insurance company had resigned. “Griff can you run both companies?” And I said yes and so that’s where I retired.

Interviewer: Do you remember the year you retired?

Griffin: Yes, I retired in 1985.

Interviewer: And you retired to Chattanooga?

Griffin: Chattanooga uh huh [affirmative] 1985.

Interviewer: So I’m just going to ask you two more questions. One, I want to ask you about your mother her last years.

Griffin: Ok

Interviewer: Talk to me a little bit about visiting her and her sort of legacy.

Griffin: [pause] My mother was probably one of the greatest women I’ve ever known. She was fun all the time. Fun all the time. She was an excellent businesswoman. She was I just don’t know how you can describe a mother being more of a mother than you could my mother because she was. See my daddy just had a fourth-grade education. Now she was a schoolteacher even though she didn’t ever go

to college. Back when she was teaching you could just get some type of certificate and they would let you teach. She was just [stammers] I don't know how to tell you how great she was. She lived to be a hundred and (mutters just a few months short of being 100). The last time I saw my mother she was standing in the door of a little block house that she had lived in for a long long time. She wouldn't go anywhere else. My sister lived next to her and they were together and so she was happy there. I saw her standing in that doorway waving me as bye bye as I traveled by on a business trip. And so, she was great. She kept up with all the finances, she worked day and night, she was a champion teacher. She could do it all.

Interviewer: Do you plan to live as long as she did?

Griffin: Well I try. And if Karmen will be good to me [looks off screen and chuckles] I might try to make it.

Interviewer: And when did you meet your wife Karmen?

Griffin: That would be a little over four years ago. I was sitting in the house - Karmen I should of both points [looks off screen]

Karmen: I wish you had

Griffin: I was sitting at the house, Sarah had been dead now for two and a half years about not quite that long. By yourself in a big house I said I think I'm going to go right down to the "center." I had heard of the senior center. I didn't know what the senior center was I just knew it was the old people that got together and had a good time. I went down to the senior center. By this time my problem with my back had developed. But I could still get around pretty good. I went down to the senior center. She was a line dancer. Now are you familiar with line dancing?

Interviewer: A little bit.

Griffin: A little bit ok. Well she was a line dancer and I noticed how she did it a bit better than the others did as far as I was concerned. So, I sat there and watched it and when it was over we all walked out in the hall together and she happened to be walking beside me there. We talked said hello and I didn't know her name. We walked along and to make a long long story short the first thing you know I asked her, "Lets go eat at IHOP, eat lunch at IHOP" We went over and we ate lunch at IHOP and from there till now its been a real real great life. Sure has.

Interviewer: Well is there anything else you'd like to add?

Griffin: No except that she has gotten a family. A daughter in particular and a son in law that I have become very very attached to. And as far as I am concerned right now I am a father of four daughters. And I love every one of them.

Interviewer: Wonderful, well thank you Reuben Griffin for agreeing to this interview and we will end it here.