

Interviewee: Coleman, William C.
Interviewer: Robin Sellers
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Sellers: Mr. Coleman, are you aware that we are recording this conversation?

Coleman: Yes, ma'am.

Sellers: And we have your permission to do so?

Coleman: Absolutely.

Sellers: Great. Why don't you start by telling me a little bit about where you were born and grew up?

Coleman: Well, I grew up in Orlando, Florida.

Sellers: A native!

Coleman: Well, not exactly. My great grandfather came to Orlando with his brother after the Civil War, and my mother and father lived here ... it was during the Depression and they had just gotten married not too long before they moved here. Because my father was having a difficult time finding work, they lived with my grandparents. My father had been, previously, a professor at a little college up at Tennessee and he and my mother were invited to return for some kind of a celebration. So her being with child, they got on the train and went up to Martin. And while there, she gave birth to me – in a house. I don't know if it was a first or second story, but anyhow, it was an old wooden frame house – I saw it one time. After she had recovered sufficiently, they got on the train and came back to Orlando. So I spent my youth here in Orlando between my parents and my grandparents. Then I started at OHS [Orlando High School] in about 1939, signed up to go to high school, and my dad in the meantime had gotten work in Atlanta and they had moved up there. So he said that the storm clouds of war were apparent and he thought I ought to go to a military school that a couple of my uncles from here had attended in Charleston, South Carolina. Colonel Thrasher [??] was a friend of the families and worked out a scholarship-type of situation for me there. So I went to Charleston at the end of the first quarter and spent four years in military school. When my class graduated, the war was imminent. I graduated in '42; '41 we were in it. Some of my senior classmates were already in the military, each of them having received their commission. Graduating class, my peers all got their commission except me because I had missed a semester of military science and tactics. So I went into basic training in Camp Wheeler, Georgia – in Macon, Georgia. Took basic training there. When I finished that ... I had taken flying lessons in Orlando and had soloed in about 1939, when

I was about fourteen or fifteen, something like that, I don't remember, and I wanted to go in the Air Corps. I was turned down because they said "we'd have to un-learn you before we could teach you the Army way." So then I volunteered for the paratroopers and I was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia. I went through the four stages of paratroop training. I don't know if you've seen the "Band of Brothers" or not?

Sellers: Yes.

Coleman: Well, I haven't but I've heard about it; that pretty well describes the rigors with which we were trained. So finishing that up, I was shipped to ... went to port of embarkation up in New Jersey, I think it was – Camp Shanks, I think. We shipped out of there ... it was in the winter time because it was rough seas ... in a convoy, in an old liberty ship.

Sellers: Do you remember the name of the ship?

Coleman: I can't quite hit ... the one I came back on was, I think, the *Butner*, but that was after the war. Anyhow, it was one of those round-bottom things. I was made an "acting" corporal [chuckles]. I think what they did, everything was moving so fast and we were in transit most of the time, they never did make it a permanent one. Maybe they did – maybe I was made a permanent corporal, because we landed in Ireland ...

Sellers: Did you have any kind of a unit designation at this time, or were you simply going to be going over there and then put into a unit?

Coleman: No, I was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division, to Regimental Headquarters Company. That was where Colonel Sink [??] was our battalion commander – regimental commander. Taylor was the 101st Airborne Division commander and Sink was the Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and I was in the Headquarters Company, which was his company. We were shipped to ... I don't know if it was England or Ireland. I think it was _____ [??], Ireland. We went through maneuvers and practiced jumps there. One of the interesting things about that is that we were in Northern Ireland, because southern Ireland was neutral, and it was always lighted up at night. We'd go up to jump and look out the window and see lights all to the south of us and say, "Those people aren't even in this war." Some of us even hoped that bailing out one time we might get blown there and be interned for the war. But it didn't quite work that way. But we made several practice ... well, maneuver things there ... several jumps in Ireland. Then we were sent over to England and went to Swindon or Chilton Follet. We went through extensive training there, all kinds of maneuvered jumps and war games things of that nature. Then we were shipped to the southern part of England. It was sealed off – it was down in Torquay – Torquay was about the name of the place where we were. They had all of these tents where they had these big sand boxes of replicas of the coast and the areas in which we were to jump.

Sellers: Can you give me a time frame on this?

Coleman: This was in, I think, end of May in '44. They sealed off all the southern part of England, and once you got down there, you couldn't get out. This was in preparation for the invasion. Then we went through some more ... in fact, we made a practice combat encounter for Churchill and Eisenhower at one of those jumps. Funny thing – there was an air raid about the time we were doing that, and they were shooting all around us. We were afraid we were gonna get shot down because they were trying to hit the other things, and they grounded a bunch of the planes, and it was a real screwed up deal. But anyway, it worked out.

Every time we made one of those simulated battle jumps, somebody got hurt. We kept losing guys from broken legs and arms and backs and things like that. We finally ended up getting the notice to suit up on the 5th, and we were out on the ramps getting ready to get on the planes when they postponed it. Then we went back and they got the notice to go on the 6th. In retrospect, we found out a lot of things about a lot of things that were going on at the same time; we had no idea except for our own little part of it.

Sellers: What was the scuttlebutt in your “own little part” about where you were going? Was there any kind of talk or rumors?

Coleman: You mean among ourselves?

Sellers: Yes.

Coleman: Oh, yes. You know, you think about ... we were all eighteen, nineteen-year-old kids, and in the paratroopers, they had brainwashed us that we were invincible. You couldn't get hurt and we could kill anybody and we could beat anybody and we were tough guys. And in a certain respect, I guess I was in the best shape I'd ever been in in my life, and I think everybody else, also. We'd really gone through some very rigorous training, and we'd also had all of the shots that were necessary to protect us from whatever else we might catch – diseases and everything.

Sellers: Nothing to protect you from bullets, though.

Coleman: Oh, no, not at all. So I think when you got right down to it, there was some apprehension, but there was still a lot of *esprit d' corps*, gung ho, “we're going over there and get them!” It was kind of like ... I used to play football – the coach would get up there and get you all riled up and ready to go into the game. They got your adrenalin going and you're ready to get in there and show them who the boss is. That was about the same sort of thing, except it was a little more somber this time. I really believe that this is the first time that they used tranquilizers, because they gave us two pills and they said, “We don't want anybody getting sick”– airsick. Of course, we never had; we'd been doing this all along and I never even thought about that. “Take one of these things as you get onboard, and then about halfway over, take the other one.” I noticed when we finally rendezvoused (and that took several hours to get all the aircraft up in the air and get them ready to go) and I looked out there at all those boats and things down below us, and all the ships and everything that was going on, and I felt like I was back home watching Movietone News. I said, “Look at all this. Boy, isn't this interesting?” And my thoughts were

not at all on the war, but on the mass of gatherings down there. I felt removed from it a little bit. Normally you'd think you'd be jumping up and down and wringing your hands and thinking about "I'm gonna get killed tomorrow" or "in an hour or so." That didn't happen until we got over the Jersey islands. We were jumping into Normandy and we flew over those little islands which were German-occupied and then they opened up on us. Then the reality of it started to sink in. Then as we turned in ... it was at night ... we left at, I guess, about 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon and this was probably 10:30 or 11 o'clock, near midnight, when we probably got into Normandy. Every battery opened up on the whole thing; there was smoke in the air, there was clouds. These pilots were in no ... they had no communication between themselves and were not to have any navigational lights. It was real dangerous, and it proved to be so because some of the planes crashed into one another. There were some that had ammunition strapped on it, and when it was hit, it blew up. So these guys that were piloting us ... we had a signal – we'd get a red light to stand up and hook up and then stand in the door on the yellow one, and then, green, we'd go.

Sellers: How many men were on each one of the flights?

Coleman: We had two sticks on each plane, and I think it was probably eight to ten people in each stick. Probably twenty people to a plane, because I weighed 300 pounds when I got on that airplane ...

Sellers: With your equipment?

Coleman: With everything. It was really crowded because of the bulk of everything we had. We had these little metal seats that we sat on on each side of the aircraft, and we had a cable that ran down the middle of the plane that you hooked your static line up on. When we got over ... these guys were ... (now this is a lot of after thought and other things ... I was making a talk one time and it occurred to me that I was a little bit upset with the Airborne because it turned out that my particular plane had dropped twenty-five miles away from its drop zone. In retrospect, I looked back and was being very critical of the Air Corps. Then I remembered, hell, they were eighteen and nineteen years old! They wanted to get the heck out of there!) So some of them gained altitude, some of them lowered the altitude, some of them broke off and went in other directions, and some did all of that. They were dropping us everywhere. It was kind of "Let me get these guys out and get the hell out of here!!" But it turned out to be pretty fortuitous, because when the *Wehrmacht* would call into their headquarters, they were all saying "paratroopers." Well, heck, they were everywhere, so they didn't know where the principle assault was going to be because of the spread of us all over the place. Then it turns out that because of that, I think the main force of the Airborne was not easily identified by the Germans because there was such a wide disbursement of the droppings. I found out after the war that I was twenty-five miles north of my drop zone.

But the real thing about it was bailing out. When I went out of that airplane, I know ... we usually dropped at about 100 miles an hour – 95 to 100 – and this thing must have been doing 150. Because when I bailed out, my riser (they're buckles on that) came across and hit my helmet so hard, it knocked it off my head. And I had it strapped on so tight, I couldn't even chew gum that I had in my mouth. I had my rifle cradled, and it popped it out of my hands. You

know, you look up to see if your chute opened – well, that opening shock, I knew it was open, but my feet hit the ground before I could look up. So we must have been ...

Sellers: Did you lose your rifle completely?

Coleman: Yeah, yeah. We must have been 500 feet or less when we bailed out. There was absolutely no need for the reserve [chute]; there would have never been an opportunity to pull it. I was oscillating ... I was parallel with the ground when that thing opened. Are you familiar with oscillating – where you swing? I think I was into my first swing when I hit, which was not on my feet.

Sellers: It's amazing you didn't break your back.

Coleman: And a lot of guys got hurt pretty bad on that thing, but I think the stuff that was around us was kind of a buffer for it, too. But it stunned you enough that ... I remember laying, looking up there and seeing all these guys flying by and "look at that." But back then there was no rapid departure from your chute – you had breast buckles to get off and leg buckles, so we all had knives in a boot and you used those to cut your way out. I had done that, cut my way out.

Did you hear about the crickets? We all had those and they said, "Do not fire a shot until you can see the enemy." They gave us signs and countersigns for when you land for three days – we were only supposed to be there for three days because the seaborne troops were supposed to ... we were supposed to capture the causeways to expedite the departure from the beaches. Then we were to be relieved and sent back to prepare for the next assault.

Sellers: Another plan go awry.

Coleman: Yeah – SNAFUED all the time. But I cut out of my chute and was looking around for my rifle and my helmet – here I am, a combat soldier with no helmet and no rifle – and I had an encounter with a German who probably thought I was German, because what other idiot would be out there walking around with no gun and no helmet, and I left my knife in him somewhere and went on my way.

Sellers: Did that bother you at the time?

Coleman: There was too much adrenalin and too much fear. I think all that stuff was just ... what I attribute it to was just the training. It was a spontaneous thing; they had taught us when you use a knife, you use both hands if you can, go to just below the sternum and jump up with it to head to the heart so that you can be sure that you get them out. Well, I think I missed because I couldn't get my knife out – I think I hit the sternum. Anyhow, I got out of there.

Sellers: But you still don't have a helmet or a gun.

Coleman: No, but later there were guys that were dead all over the place ...

Sellers: So you borrowed ...

Coleman: Well, I got a helmet and I got a gun and I ended up with about three or four other guys and we spent a couple of days trying to find out where the hell we were. (I'm making a very long story very short). There were five of us, and we were headed ... I still haven't found the name of that town that we went towards ... but we took off toward where we thought there was ... we'd watched some planes strafing over there, so we knew that there was some enemy in that area. As we got closer, we could hear that there was a battle going on, and we wanted to go in and ... because it had to be paratroopers that were fighting some Germans somewhere, so we were gonna join the troopers that were there. But it turns out that there were five of us and we came in on the wrong side of the village and [the Germans] opened up on us. They killed two of them, wounded ... the lieutenant was in front and the two _____[??] ... I got hit coming down; I didn't even know that for a while because I guess we hadn't slowed down enough to even feel a lot of that stuff. My boots were squishing and it was the blood from my legs where I'd gotten hit. But we ended up getting captured. There were three of us that were still surviving. The lieutenant was seriously wounded. The other guy and I had minor ... compared ... I don't even talk about my wounds because they're so insignificant compared to the real serious ones that a lot of these guys got. (This goes to a long story, but I'll cut it short). We were sitting there and the battle ended up over with and the Germans prevailed. Whoever it was attacking either ran out of ammunition or got killed or moved on or whatever it was. The two of us that were left were taken out and stood up against a wall and thought that was the end of it. I had had a very short encounter with a German officer – I had my back to him and I looked around -- he was pretty close and I kind of in a loud whisper ... I didn't realize the guy was coming toward me ... I thought he had stopped ... and I said, "I wonder where that son of a bitch got that American .45 on his hip?" And when I said it, he was right behind me, and he said in perfect English, "Came down on a B-24." I said, "Oh, you speak perfect English. Where'd you learn that?" He said, "Well, I should, I was educated in one of your northeast universities." I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "I was called to defend my country, as you were, and this is where we are," and walked on. I think that little bit of rapport that was established saved our lives, because we were lined up against the wall. One thing about the Germans, none of them ever did anything without an order from a superior, and this guy was trigger happy – he was a young fellow and he had one of those burp guns. We were standing up against the wall, and I said to my friend, "Al, good knowing you." We were gonna kick it off right there, and this officer stopped and spoke to *Felzable* [German for sergeant], and they came over, and he probably said, "Get them out of here."

So we were moved up to another point where they gathered a bunch of prisoners together and they started us on our trek to Germany, which was disastrous. We were strafed by our own troops in a close formation, killed about 50% of the prisoners that were there.

Sellers: You were walking?

Coleman: Yeah.

Sellers: They didn't put you in 40 and 8s?

Coleman: Oh, yeah, we had those. We were headed to Germany. What it ultimately turned out to be, they wanted a group to be marched through the Champs Elysees in Paris for their newsreels to send back home, to say, "Look, we've captured all these guys." A PR thing. So they ran us through Paris, and boy, some of those French people were really nasty. Particularly the women. They'd been occupied for about a year or so, I guess, and they'd taken up with a lot of the German officers. We slept in an open field, and it was pretty cold. It was June or July, but it was still cold. I remember being awful cold, laying out on that grass. And they had guards all around us. Then we ended up in those 40 and 8s, and we were strafed in those. After every one of these encounters (and there was a lot of other things that went on during this) ... after a while you'd say, "Why not me?" When these guys were being knocked off all around you ...

Sellers: So you had time for reflection?

Coleman: Well, I don't think it was reflection – it was just ... you felt like, "What's going on here? Everybody's losing arms, legs, heads, eyes and ears, and dying, and I've got these little holes in my legs. How come I'm still here?" And it started going on you. I personally had ... I'd personally seen two people that I killed, and that was originally (these were Germans) and it was a devastating thing for me, because one of them ... my younger brother was in the service, and he looked a little bit like my brother when I went up to him. He was just a kid, and I had severed a thing in his neck and he was gurgling and was going through the dying process, and I looked down and thought, "Geez" You can't even describe it; you can't describe your feelings on something like that.

Sellers: But you can certainly relive it.

Coleman: That's the trouble with it. But after that, you got so much exposure to it ... I think the Lord created us to close out a lot of that stuff and to ignore it and go on about other things. So I guess you got to where you can take it a little bit better, but ... and even to this day, here I am, almost eighty years old, and I'm still here. I've been through all this stuff, and where's my mission? What am I here for? It's hard to really ...

Sellers: You have to be kind of fatalistic ...

Coleman: I think so. I think it comes down to that. If you're a believer, then you think maybe there's something I should be doing that I'm not doing, I've been saved for something.

Sellers: Or maybe you're doing something that you're not aware of.

Coleman: Maybe so. But anyhow, I ended up in a prison camp in Germany. I went through two others – [Stalag]12-A and [Stalag]4-B, and then to an *arbeitsdienst* ...

Sellers: You're going to have to spell that one.

Coleman: I don't know. It's German for work party. We were sent to Dresden, and low

and behold, on February 14, 1944, around the clock they started bombing Dresden. And the thing about it was that it'd never been touched during the whole war, and it was a fire bombing and it created a firestorm. It's worse than a tornado – it just sucks everything in because it's trying to get the oxygen to sustain itself and it creates such velocity that it pulls anything that's around right into it. Then it feeds on that and it makes it bigger and faster, and it's like a great big combination hurricane-cyclone deal. We survived that, and they took us down and stacked the bodies in biers and set them on fire, loaded others on the back of trucks. Then the guy that was running the camp said, "Let's get them out of here," and they took our group of guys down to Sudetenland into a mining camp between Austria and Germany. I don't know where it was exactly. We were in there and the Russians were coming very close. This was a little bit west of where Dresden was – south and west – and the Russians were really coming in strong on that western front. They had some of our airplanes, but they didn't do their battle like our troops did. Ours, they would follow one another, would go in a circle and then dive down one after the other to keep from running into each other. But these Russians were taking targets of opportunity, flying around like mosquitos. So the commandant of the camp ... the people were evacuating the cities that were down below this thing, and they had a road to go around which was being strafed all over the place, so he allowed them to cut through the camp and had the guards stand along the roadway that was in this camp. It was an old mining camp that already had the fences around it and the gates and everything. A guy that was ... he and I were standing outside alongside this road that went through the camp (and he was a strange guy, too – his name was Harvey Knapp. He'd been let out of prison from death row because he had killed his wife's lover and was about to kill her when they got him – with a knife. He had green eyes and two gold teeth in the front, and blond hair. He was a funny looking guy, but he turned out to be a pretty good guy – a good one to be in combat with, anyhow). He and I were standing there and there was what we considered at that time an old lady (she was probably about thirty), had a wooden cart and was dragging all of her stuff, really struggling with it -- the snow and ice was melting and it was muddy. So we just stepped out there and helped her push this cart. We were about to starve to death – we were surviving on a bowl of soup and I don't know how many grams of bread a day – two slices of bread and some lousy soup for a day. You don't have much strength. In fact, every time we'd stand up we'd almost pass out; we'd have to stand up real slow. We were leaning on this thing and pushing it and wearing ourselves out. It took two of us to push this cart. And he said, "Coleman, we're outside the gate." So that was our great escape. We ended up pulling off the road and getting into a house that had been half bombed out – in the basement. We were eating these sugar beets. They put them in these mounds ... the farmers did ... they would put them in these dirt mounds. We'd go out to dig sugar beets up and we'd go back in the cellar of that house. We had a little slit that we could look out. We really had no plans, didn't know what the heck to do.

Sellers: Did that make you sick, all of a sudden putting more food into your system?

Coleman: Oh, it wasn't much. It was just enough to sustain us. I guess it was mid-morning, heard some vehicles; looked out and it was a jeep full of soldiers. I said to Tom, "Those are Americans." He said, "No, they're not. They're Germans. You know they've got our jeeps and they're wearing our uniforms." I said, "I think they're American, because I think they speak

English.” He said, “Well, they spoke English, you idiot!” I said, “Look, I don’t care. I’m tired of this thing. I’m going, one way or the other.” So I went out there, put my hands up and walked over toward them, and they all drew down on me with their rifles. I said, “Oh, God, here it is.” Turns out that they were four guys looking for souvenirs, and they said, “What are you doing here?” We said we were prisoners of war. “Well, why didn’t you come into camp?” I said, “What camp?” They said, “The war’s been over a week. Where the heck you guys been?” Been hiding out there and didn’t even know it.

Sellers: So this is the middle of May of ‘45?

Coleman: Yeah. Middle and latter part of May in ‘45. Then they took us back to where they had occupied some houses in a little town and we got our first meal served to us on Dresden china and a tablecloth in a dining room, and it was on the second floor. They fed us and we went in and threw up [laughs]. They said, “Want some more?” I said, “No, I think I’ve had enough, thank you.” What was really funny, the guy took the four corners of the tablecloth and picked it up and threw it all out the window – all that china and glass and crystal and stuff. I said, “What are you doing?” He said, “Well, we got plenty of it. We’re not going to leave anything for these Krauts.” So after every meal, they just threw everything out.

I said, “We gotta get out of here, try to get somewhere.” He said, “Well, we can’t do anything with you, but there’s a depot ...” They told us where it was, about 100 miles from there, where they were flying people out. So we said we’d try and make our way over there. We went into town (this had been liberated and the Russians were coming that direction) and there was a guy that got out of an Opel Kadet (I never knew what that was, either). When he got out and went into whatever it was, I stole his car. We found a place where they had gasoline; we got one of those old tin cans of gasoline and got a map to direct us to that airport. We went over there and stayed there for about four or five days trying to get a ride to somewhere. Then they flew us to Camp RAMP (Recovered Allied Military Personnel), _____[??] POWs, and we finally got a ride ... in fact, there was a sergeant there ... incidentally, I had been made a sergeant before I went into combat. It hadn’t been approved, but I was wearing the stripes and doing the job and not getting the pay when I got captured. So they got us two seats on that plane to fly into Cherbourg, or near Cherbourg, I guess it was, where they had this Camp RAMP. This sergeant, I said, “You got a vehicle?” He said, “No.” I said, “Well, here’s the keys, there it is – it’s yours.” Gave him the car and got in there. And then we flew into Camp RAMP.

They kept us there for about thirty days, I guess. I had gone from my weight of 200 pounds to 130. They would have “eggnog call” – they would feed us breakfast and then an eggnog call – we’d go get a whole canteen cupful of eggnog; had to drink it. Then lunch, then eggnog, then dinner and eggnog. Trying to put some fat back on us. Then they took us over to Camp Lucky Strike, which was the port of embarkation then in Cherbourg ... no, not Cherbourg. Cherbourg was on the point, wasn’t it? This was, I think, the port where Hitler was trying to get with the Battle of the Bulge.

Sellers: Cigarette camps were all over the place.

Coleman: Yeah, isn’t that funny, that they would do that. But anyhow, they put us on the

boat and we went back to ... I think we ended in New York. You know, people were saying when they came back from Vietnam, they didn't have any bands or anything – we didn't have any bands, either! When we got back, they just took us off the boat and sent us into a debriefing camp of some kind. My mother and dad ... I guess they'd notified them that I would be released for furlough, and I had a little brother I'd never seen (I'm twenty years older than he was). I looked out the window and I could see Mom and Dad and that little guy running around out there. They were asking us questions and telling us how to readjust and all of this stuff – we weren't paying any attention at all.

Anyhow, I got back and they gave us a thirty-day R and R in Miami Beach (which was a hurricane the whole time we were there). Then went back to Benning, went back on jump status, and got ready to go to Japan. Then in August the war was over and I got out about September, went back home down here to Orlando.

Sellers: While you were in the prison camp, was there any contact at all through the Red Cross?

Coleman: Yes. That was great. One camp ... 4-B was pretty well established and the Red Cross dealt with them. 12-A was registration, and that's the first time that we were registered as POWs. So actually my family got a Missing in Action telegram, and about a month or two later they got a notice that I was a prisoner of war. So that was a registration camp there, and because it's established and the Red Cross was aware of it, they showed up once in a while there. Then over to Mühleberg – I think that was Mühleberg. No, that was Lemberg – that was 12-A. 4-B was Muhleberg, and 4-B is where they put us in those barracks ... it's kind of like "Hogan's Heroes" type thing. We would get a package, but it would be split between three and four guys (four guys, I guess, to a package) which would have some crackers and jelly and The thing I liked was that condensed milk. Man, that thing was so good! Boy, did we crave that stuff.

Then, when we got to the work party ... I don't think we got any after that. One time there was a delegation that came through, and it was really funny because they from all nationalities. They would speak to each other in English and then in French and then German and then in Polish or something – they would carry on a conversation – all these guys knew all those languages. I guess they did that, too, to keep somebody from knowing everything they were talking about that might have been standing by. But they did show up at some of the recognized camps; they didn't come to our work party camps, though.

Sellers: When you got back to the States, did you get back pay?

Coleman: Yeah, I got paid and the first thing I did was build a little sundry store that's still here in Orlando. I'm surprised it hasn't been torn down. It's had about four ownerships since then.

Sellers: Did you use the GI Bill?

Coleman: No, I took my mustering out pay and ... back then you could buy a house for \$2,000. But I lived with my grandmother – I moved back in with my grandmother and lived with

her for a while, then finally got a place of my own and got married and had children.

Sellers: So you didn't use the GI Bill for home ownership or school?

Coleman: Oh, wait. No, I didn't use it for home ownership, but I did get my degree with it. I went to Northwestern University. I forgot that. My folks in the meantime had moved to Evanston. He had a position up in Chicago, and so they had a house in Evanston. So they said, "Why don't you come up here and go to Northwestern?"

Sellers: You're only about twenty years old, right?

Coleman: Twenty-one, I think. And so I registered at Northwestern and stayed in the fraternity house and graduated from there.

Sellers: What fraternity?

Coleman: SAE [Sigma Alpha Epsilon].

Sellers: And your degree was in?

Coleman: I got a BS/BA – a Bachelor of Science and Bachelor ... what's the other one?

Sellers: Business administration?

Coleman: Business administration, I guess. Then I got a ... when I was fifty, I went to Rollins and got my Master's there – MBA. My mother and I were both in the Alumni Association at the same time at Rollins College. She had graduated from there back in the early '20s.

Sellers: What did your GI Bill pay for or provide at the university?

Coleman: Just about everything. They paid for the books and the registration and the classes; they paid for everything.

Sellers: Your housing? Or did they give you a stipend?

Coleman: They gave me a stipend, and I paid that to the fraternity. I can't remember exactly what it was, but it was comprehensive. I'll tell you, it was great.

Sellers: How do you think your involvement in the war affected your life?

Coleman: Oh. There is no way in the world to tell you how much it did. I went in there a dumb, stupid, wild kid ... but I'll tell you what – I didn't go through that teen things with my parents that most people had to, because I was in a military school for four years and the Army

for three, so that's seven years right out of my life there with pretty rigid discipline and everything. But not only the Army and war, but the prison gave me such a deep appreciation of everything. I've still got crazy things that I do. I'll pick up a hairpin and put it in my pocket because I'll think I might need this somewhere. I can't throw anything away.

Sellers: And you think that's a result of being in the prison camp?

Coleman: Oh, yeah, because we had nothing and every little thing had value. I never have left anything on my plate (and that resulted in some difficulties, too). But I just started taking lesser and lesser portions. And I can't throw anything away. My wife says, "Why don't you get rid of that?" I'll say, "No, I'll give it away. I'm not going to throw anything away." Because you just had nothing. And to have nothing ... like to take a bath and to brush your teeth and to have toilet paper ... the things that you just take so much for granted. You get back here and you think, Good Lord, it's unbelievable. Before that, they had no value to me; I had no appreciation of them. But everything since then – life, itself, of course. But then all the things that we enjoy so much ... [some conversation about current attitudes not transcribed]

Sellers: Is there anything else you'd like to add about your war experiences?

Coleman: I'm trying to write it all down, and you know, it's almost sixty years I went back and made the 50th anniversary jump with forty guys, and that created some problems for me because I went back to all those places and I got back home and I got depressed and everything started working me over. [some conversation about medication and writing down experiences not transcribed]

Sellers: We're about to run out of tape on this side. Let me ask you once more if you were aware that we were recording?

Coleman: Oh, yeah. I don't remember what I said, but ... [laughter].

End interview and transcription