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Interviewee (print) Interviewer (print)

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The home of Thomas Laney in Onatchee Al.

on the date(s) of 3-11-96

for the oral history collection being compiled by Dr. Marshall.

x Thomas H. Laney Date 3-11-96  
Interviewee's Signature

Address PO Box 230

Onatchee Al. 36271

Phone 892 0261

Janessa L. Kelly Date 3-11-96  
Interviewer's Signature

Address 1580 Chocoma Springs

Prd. Anniston Al 36207

Phone 237 6615

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: Thomas Laney M/F: Male

Address: PO Box 230 Ohatchee Al. 36271

Phone number(s): ~~892~~ - 892 - 0261

Approximate age or date of birth: Aug, 24, 1924

Mothersname: Ola Hinds Laney

Father's name: C.E. Laney

Places lived and when: Tallega, until 5 yrs  
Calhoun Co. from 5 til pres.

Education: 8th Grade, G.E.D. Graduated from Anniston H.S.

Religion: Prod.

Business, political and social memberships (past and present): Owens Laney A/c.

Present occupation: owner of Aircondition Co.

Former occupations: Army, union Foundry Co.

Special Skills: Medic Heating and Air Condition

Major Accomplishments: Set up own Business.

National Events in which interviewee has participated: WWII

Local Events in which interviewee has participated:

National born U.S. citizen?  Yes/No Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No

Country from which he/she emigrated:

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee:

Indian money from the country of India, all kinds Pictures.

Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview:

Additional information:

Mr. Thomas Laney was born on August 24, 1924. His parents were Mr. C.E. Laney and Ms. Ola Hinds Laney. Mr. Laney now owns his own air conditioning company in Anniston, Alabama. Mr. Laney lived in Talledega County for the first five years of his life. He then moved to Calhoun County in the Dhatchee area, where he still resides. He only completed schooling up to the eighth grade. Mr. Laney lived on a farm during his childhood. He remembers some about the depression like having to have stamps to purchase things like gas, sugar and car tires. His family was a large one, and he can remember having only cornbread and water to eat. He would go to the lake and catch frogs, so that they could have the legs for meat. He said, " I remember my mother putting a pillow in the window to keep the cold out because it was broken and I was sick with the fever."

Mr. Laney said, "in 1941 my mother came to the door and ask us young-uns if we knew where Pearl Harbor was, none of us did so she said the Japs just bomb it and I think that we are in war." His life started changing after this. He worked at Fort McClellan Noble Army Hospital for awhile, and he stayed at the barracks with the other soldiers because he had no transportation. Mr. Laney said, " I remember alot of northern soldiers came to Fort McClellan to train and would get sick. These men and boys would die form pneumonia, because at this time there were not any drugs that could help. They would have to just pray for the best and ride it out." Mr. Laney quit the job at the fort and went to work at Blue Mountain Cotton Mill in Anniston, Alabama making camouflaje nets. Because of this new job, he was deferred from the draft. The government said that this was considered to be war effort. Mr. Laney stated, " I did not like the job, for that matter I did not like any job, so in March of 1944 I quit and went to the draft board and ask them to draft me. The next day I

Where did you live?

Did you graduate from college?

What was the depression like?

Were you ever in the service?

What was the war like ?

What did you do when you got home?

Words

Pearl Harbor

Fort McClellan

Noble Army

Fort McPherson

Bushmal General

Camp Barkley

Melbourn Australia

Bombay India

Singapore Japan

Seam India

Burma Road

Hellsgate China

Burma Hills China

Con-ming

quinine

Niagara

Shanghai China

1 Background

a Childhood

b Schooling

c Achievements

2 Depression

a Food

b Houses

3 War World II

a Training

b India

c China

d Flying Tigers

e Convoy

f Swinging bridge

g Hospital

e End of war

they came back and got the troops. While they were waiting on the <sup>ferries</sup> ferry to get back they ate lunch. Mr. Laney said, "We were eating and a huge bird came out of the sky and took my bread out of my hand". When they got to the train, the engine the put train together and they moved on. During this time they did not have good water to drink. "Mr. Laney said " we would get water from the engine to drink. It did not look very good but atleast it was healthy." He reached Ssam India and was put into the 172nd medical unit, but this unit was put on hold and he was detached to a driving school. This driving school was teaching the Chinese to drive American trucks so that they could drive the road that was being finished over the Hemelayian Mountain. They took part of the wilderness and made a round driving range. Mr. Laney would teach the Chinese soldiers to drive but they could only learn the basics because they could not speak the language. The men were to carry gasoline up the Stillwell road to the Berman road over to China. The Flying Tigers were also stationed at the same place in Ssam India as Mr. Laney. The Flying Tigers were a Group of American me who flew American planes but worked for the Chinese Government. This particular unit was a very good expert at attacking the enemy. " They took out a whole entire unit of Japanese all by themselves. and they were only a handful of these Tigers." Mr. Laney said. The planes would come in so frequently that if five minutes passed by and another one had not came in you knew that it had crashed in the mountains. The mountains were so rough that sometimes a plane would hit an air pocket and crash into the top of a mountain. The Medic unit was still not sure of their final destination but they were not in a terrible hurry to go either. At this particular time of the war, the men at Ssam were not real scared of being attacked. That came later.

received a letter in the mail that said Greetings from the President of the United States of America. I had been drafted." From this point, his life changed at a very fast rate. At this time, the only way you can get into the service is to be drafted because the government has to keep up with everyone. He was inducted into the army at Fort McClellan, Alabama. A couple of days later, he was on his way to Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Georgia. This is where they issued him his uniform. After they gave him his uniform they told him to wait. Mr. Laney said, "the army had a game called hurry up and wait. This is when you hurry up to get there, and then you just have to wait. We did not have anything to do, and so they made us sweep the pine straw off the top of the buildings. After this, we sat on the railroad tracks waiting on the train." The train was nothing but box-cars with seats. The soldiers did not know where they were going. They could only guess. These trains did not have priority, they had to wait for the passenger trains first, so it took along time to get any where. After many days, they wound up in Abilene, Texas. Mr. Laney went to the medical training center at Camp Barkley. Here he received some training as a medic. When Mr. Laney was drafted, the army said he had a bum ankle so this is why he had to be a medic. The army did not issue them guns because there were not enough to go around, so they marched with broomsticks. When they went to the firing range they would be issued a gun, but it would be taken back as they left. They were not even issued a gun when they left to go overseas. When he left there, he went to Brigham City Utah to the Bushmal General Hospital to receive more training. In October of 1944, he was sent to Camp Ansa California. All they did here was practice abandon ship. From here he went to Long Beach California to deport for the war. His training had only taken a couple of weeks instead of the many weeks it takes now. They loaded the ship by a gang

need  
punch



plank. He was on the ship for fifteen days and nights before he reached Australia. Mr. Laney said, "The ship would zigzag to avoid being hit by a torpedo." He docked in Melbourne Australia. He stayed here for a couple of days. He left here and went to the Indian Ocean. At this time he stated, "we were only a few hundred miles out of Singapore where the Japan army had taken control. I do not know why they did not shoot us we were a lone troop ship without any back up. We only had one gun on the deck so we were no match for them. I guess we were lucky."

He docked in Bombay, India. He stated that anything can happen over there. This was a new world to him. Mr. Laney said, "on day we were walking down the streets of India, and a Indonesian women came running up and put a small child about four or five into the arms of a friend and then ran away. We looked for her, but could not find her so we took the child to the police. They were so poor that they would do this in hopes that we would keep the child(ren) to give them a better chance." They were thousands of men, women, and children in the streets starving. People would die while lying in front of a grocery store. "In this country the fathers would name there sons so that they would be beggars like them. Like father like son." Mr. Laney said. Mr. Laney said that he would give them his sea rations to eat if he was not hungry and sometimes even if he was.

He boarded another train here to go to some<sup>^</sup>where he did not know. The people would hang on to the sides of the train to try and get to the next town. They thought that it would be better there, but it was not. He rode the train stopping in every town until he reached a river, at this point the<sup>^</sup>were told to get off. A <sup>ferry?</sup> ferry came and loaded the engine and three box cars and took them down the river. A couple of hours later it came back with the engine and loaded three more cars. This happened several more times until all the train was transferred. then

Mr. Laney was in the driver school for about three months. After the men had been trained for about three weeks, they would take them out to a practice convoy to Hellsgate. This was the border of India, and the first mountain was seven miles high. This was the beginning of the <sup>sp coned</sup> Hemalayians. They would practice for about twenty miles. This is how they would teach them to drive. The troops could only understand the interpreter. Mr. Laney learned some of the language. It was hard because everything in China is backward to the United States. These men were assigned to a all black troop. Mr. Laney was transferred form the driving school and assigned to a mash type unit up at Hellsgate. The unit was the fourteenth evac hospital and he was there a few months. It housed about twelve doctors, twenty nurses, and one hundred enlisted men. Most of the patients were Chinese men because they would send them down that far from the front. They were fighting up in the Burma Hills at this time but it did not last long. " They kept fighting in this one town called Mishanall. ~~The~~ Americans would take this town from the Japanese and give it to the Chinese, and then the Japs would come back and take it from them. This went on forever. Mishanall was only two or three hundred miles from where we were." Mr. Laney said. In 1945 this ended. Later in 1945, he left this outfit and traveled the Burma road. They had finally set up the 172nd general hospital in Conming China. They were calling all of them home. They wanted him to go on the next plane. Mr. Laney said " I was called into the office and told that there was a bomber leaving in the morning and that I could go on it because it was making a stop in Conming. It was a B-24 bomber. I ask <sup>ed</sup> him if I could drive. I did not want to be on that plane because I did not like the idea of being shot at. He said yes you can drive, are you sure? I said yes and he

... said that I could go with them and I did." They assigned me a truck and loaded it with weapons and gasoline. His truck was numbered three hundred and sixteen and he was not even the end truck so this was a very large convoy. His truck was the smallest and the other ones carried twenty drums of gasoline. The first day out they went through Hellsgate. "At the top of this mountain it said to stop and enter first gear but I did not think that I needed to, but I thought it was necessary to the next time. I had to ride the big truck down that hill to keep from burning out my brakes." Mr. Laney said. This went on for the next fifteen days and they only went one thousand miles. They would stop every night and pull over to sleep. He said, "We would put hamacks between the truck bumpers and then put mosquito nets over them. They were scared we would get Malaria, so before we left they made us take a substitute of quinine and we all turned yellow. I was bite<sup>n</sup> many times, but thanks to the good Lord above I did not get the disease. We did not think that the pill worked. We would heat our bath water by the sun because it was one hundred and twenty degrees in the shade. Everytime the sun came out it was this hot, even in the monsoon season. I was so grateful for the rain." They had to make sure they would drink enough water to keep from dehydrating. Mr. Laney said, "Every day was like a new day because we would get to a new town and see new people and these people were wild. They would run and hide every time they saw a truck coming. It reminded me of wild animals that we have around here. These people were Niagara Indians but not like the Indians we have around here." They would try to show them they were friendly but it did not work. When they would stop for the night, if they happened to be next to a town, the people would venture up near the trucks but

would not get too close. It was like they were afraid they would wake up and eat them."

" We finally got to this thing I had always heard about, the swinging bridge. This American engineer had built it across the river and it was about a thousand feet down from the bridge to the river. He stretched cable from one side to the other and then put metal ties, like railroad ties, across it. It had gye cable like handrails to keep the trucks from tipping off of it but I do not think that they would have helped if one started to tip over. Only one truck was allowed on it at a time so it took along time to cross and all you could do was wait for your turn. This is where the Flying Tigers took out the whole unit of the Japanese. They had gotten trapped in here and could not get out. At one point we were at the top of a mountain and looked down onto the planes." The trucks from the Japanese unit were still there when he came through. You can only go one way on this road. He never met anyone coming the other way. Some of the curves on this road was so steep that he had to stop and back up, then go forward many times before he could turn it. Sometimes he wished he had flown over because he does not like heights and some of the mountain were ten thousand feet up and to someone scared of heights that is high. It would take one full day to go up the mountain and one full day to go down. They would stop and camp at the top because it was twenty seven miles high. At this point he was afraid of being attacked because there were Chinese bandits out there and there usually were not friendly. " At this point my truck broke down and I got real scared, we had a wrecker truck in the convoy and it came back to me and we stayed there and fixed it while everyone else went on. After we got it fixed it was just me and him."

depot was. All the supplies were left here. We were getting  
near the end of the war so this is where we set up the  
hospital. I was assigned to the hospital but the did not  
really know what they wanted me to do so they assigned me to  
operating the telephone. I would ask for the number and plug  
it in. I got switched from job to job. " He said. This was  
close to the end of the war. Mr. Laney recalls, " They would  
send the American prisoners of the war to our hospital and I  
remember thanking God that I was assigned to the unit I was.  
We would go get them at the airport and if they were able the  
first thing we would do would be feed them. They were halve  
starved to death. Some of the had sores all over their body  
that it looked like leporadacy. There were men that should  
have weighed atleast one hundred and sixty pounds that only  
weighed one hundred pounds soaking wet. There were men that  
were beaten so bad that you would not recognize them. Alot of  
them would loose a limb because of gang green." It was not  
long after this that the Chinese came down out of the  
mountains and even though they had faught in the war together  
they began to fight among themselves. " This new war broke  
out right in front of us. We had a victory sign at the  
airport made out of lights and they started throwing  
artillery through it. One of our men was killed from their  
stray bullets. At this point the American government said to  
pull out and we did. Thirty minutes after they issued the  
order we were packing. We went to Shanghai China. We moved  
the Japs out of the hotels and put them in tents. It bothered  
me most when the Chinese student rally us demanding us to go  
home after all our help." He said. " The thing that I did  
first when I got home was get an ice-cream."

*need  
surveys*

*lots of  
good  
information  
next person  
will on  
writing - comments  
sentences 90 -  
etc -*

I believe that Mr. Laney was a great contributor to World  
War II because he was there to help the men recover.