

## HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

- 1929 Alabama's 83 cotton mills consumed nearly a tenth of all cotton used in the nation
- 1929 Bibb Graves upgraded the four normal colleges at Florence, Troy, Jacksonville, and Livingston to the status of state teachers' colleges.
- 1929 Goodyear decided to locate a tire plant in Gadsden
- 1929 Auburn began a fisheries program
- 1929 Alabama's per capita income had dropped to 44th among the 48 states
- 1930 Tom heflin vs John H. Bankhead, Jr.
- 1930 University of Alabama won the national championship under Wallace Wade
- 1933 T.S. Stribling won a Pulitzer Prize for The Store
- 1934 University of Alabama won the national championship under Frank Thomas
- July
- 1934 Huntsville textile workers walked off their jobs
- 1935 Alabama State Planning Commission was created
- June
- 1937 Alabama Chamber of Commerce was organized
- Dec.
- 1941 Bombing of Pearl Harbor
- April
- 1945 Roosevelt dies and Truman takes over

May

1945 Germans surrender (World War II)

Aug.

1945 Japanese surrender (World War II)

1948 Truman elected President

1949 Agricultural Act passed

June

1950 North Korea invades South Korea, starting the Korean War

1952 Eisenhower elected President

May

1953 Submerged Lands Act

July

1953 Armistice signed in Korea

1954 Brown vs Topeka Board of Education

1956 Suez Crisis

1957 Civil Rights Act of 1957

1960 Civil Rights Act of 1960

1960 Kennedy elected President

1961 Peace Corps established

May

1961 Area Redevelopment Act

1961 Freedom Riders

Aug

1961 Berlin Wall started

1962 James Meredith and University of Mississippi

1962 Cuban Missile Crisis

1963 George Wallace and the University of Alabama  
Nov.  
1963 Kennedy assassinated and Johnson becomes President  
1964 Economic Opportunity Act of 1964  
1964 Civil Rights Act of 1964  
March  
1965 Appalachian Regional Development Act  
1965 Civil Rights Act of 1965  
July  
1965 Medicare established  
1965 Elementary-Secondary Education Act of 1965  
1965 Higher Education Act of 1965  
1968 Civil Rights Act of 1968  
1968 Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated  
1973 Watergate  
1974 Nixon resigns  
1976 Jimmy Carter elected President  
1978 Camp David Accords signed by Egypt and Israel  
1979 U.S. embassy in Iran seized  
1980 Reagan elected President  
1986 Republican governor elected in Alabama for the first  
time since 1876

## INTERVIEWEE CHRONOLOGY

Feb.

1928 Mr. Jennings born in Birmingham, Alabama

1935 Moved to St. Clair County

Oct.

1937 His youngest sister was born

1939 Mr. Jennings father was killed

1940 Moved to Ohatchee

1946 Joined the Air Force

Nov.

1961 Went to Vietnam

Aug.

1963 Returned home from Vietnam

Nov.

1963 Attending school in Nashville, Tennessee

1964 Stationed at Belgian Congo

1965 Went back to Vietnam

1965 Contracted tuberculosis

1970 Return home from overseas

1975 Retired from the Air Force

1977 Started his own business

## Interview with Floyd Jennings, Sr.

**Q: What is your full name?**

**A:** Floyd Hurst Jennings. Of course, I'm a senior.

**Q: When and where were you born?**

**A:** 8 February, 1928 in Birmingham, Alabama.

**Q: How many people were in your immediate family?**

**A:** Total, counting mother and father, ten.

**Q: How many brothers and sisters did you have?**

**A:** Three brothers, four sisters.

**Q: What did your dad do?**

**A:** He worked at a CITGO pipe shop in Birmingham, Alabama for many years. I don't know when he first went to work there, but I was probably about five years old when he bought a farm in St. Clair County, we moved up there. Maybe I was six years old, then. It was probably around '34, '35, in that area. He was a farmer.

**Q: What kind of farm was it, a vegetable farm or a cotton farm?**

**A:** Well, I guess the technical name for it, back in those days, well, I don't know whether it was technical or not, but it was referred to as a truck farm and general farming. We raised vegetables, that type of stuff. We done what they called farm-to-market selling. Our place in what we called Brompton-Odenville, Alabama, we were on the Odenville, Alabama mail route and we would haul our produce to Leeds and sell it there. In addition to that, of course, we had the cotton, corn, and you know, they didn't have beans and that stuff back in those days, but that's the type farming we did. In the winter time when we cut from the forest or woods, we cut telephone poles, cross ties and that, and sold it to the railroad or different type people. Whoever was in the market for those goods at that time.

**Q: Did your mom have a job, too or did she just work around on the farm, too? She was probably pretty busy.**

**A:** My youngest sister was born in October 1937, so my mom had her hands full of doing housework and house chores cooking and washing. Of course, we didn't have wash-and-wear clothes back in those days, so everything had to be ironed, especially your Sunday clothes. You know, you had to take a little bit better care of the clothing back then than you do now because of the, we had the, kind of handicapped financially on the farm.

**Q: What was your family life like? That was the years right after and during the depression and we were trying to rebuild things economically and according to our history book, Alabama was one of the hardest hit states by the depression.**

**A:** We didn't have a lot financially, but there was of course, a lot of love in our family. We unfortunately lost my dad in 1939, in a vehicle accident. As I was telling you, we were logging in the fall and that to supplement our farm income. My dad fell off of a log truck and it ran over him. Ran over and killed him right in front of our home and that really put us in a bind for many, many years.

Of course, my mom had to sell the farm, and we moved to Ohatchee in Calhoun County in the Spring of 1940. This was August '39 when my dad was killed, and we moved, like I say, my mom sold our farm, and back in those days, it didn't bring a lot of money and we had a mortgage on it, but we moved to Ohatchee where we could be close to my dad's family and of course, closer to my mom's family, which was up in Steele, Alabama. Of course, us kids we worked for relatives during the summer and that type stuff, and of course attended school and my mom worked some when she had to, when she had time, baby-sitting and that type stuff. It was pretty rough back in those days for us, pretty rough.

**Q: What were some of the first jobs that you got as a child, that was not on the farm?**

**A:** Chopping stove wood for my grandmother, for 10 cents an hour, and she'd kind of watch me pretty close. She'd bring water out to the woodpile so that I wouldn't have to take a break, and go to the well and get it. But she was good, and that helped with our income. My dad's family was real good to find things for us boys to do to keep us, I think, entertained, primarily and to help us with a little income for social activities. Back in those times, there was very few, but a nickel or dime really helped out here, now and then to get a Coke and a pack of peanuts. That was one of the first jobs I had, and then, well, every summer we'd work for, if our uncles or aunts didn't have something for us to do, normally some of their relatives on the in-law side would find something for us to do. We stayed pretty busy.

**Q: You said that you had cotton sometimes. How hard was it, picking cotton?**

**A:** Oh, it was very easy for me, as small as I was, I didn't have to bend over. Picking cotton was really rough in those days. We didn't have the machinery that they have now. It was all done by hand. You had to be pretty dumb, I guess to pull a cotton sack all day, and pick cotton, or pretty hungry to do that. But, yes, it was rough. It was really rough. Having a place to store it, we'd have to store it for weeks at a time before we could get it, enough to haul it off to the cotton gin and have it baled and that before you'd ever receive any payment for it. Yes, it was rough to answer your question.

**Q: So, you stored it and brought it to the gin after you got it all picked?**

**A:** Well, I think, if I remember correctly, a bale of cotton was somewhere around five or six hundred pounds and so you'd have to pick it and put it into the wagon and the distance from our home to the cotton gin was a long ways so we'd normally try to, we'd store it in the barn, or in an empty room in another house that we had rented, and until we could get a real packed wagon full of that stuff and maybe two wagons and carry it to the gin and suck it all out at one time, and have enough to make one bale. A bale of gin cotton, seedless cotton, it takes a lot of cotton to do

that once you separate the cotton from the seed, the weight changed drastically in the cotton, so it takes a lot. That was one of the reasons. You know, it takes you all day to go to the gin and back, so you have a lot of lost time there, so it was much easier to try to do it that way and when you went, hopefully you'd have enough to make a big bale of cotton and your income would be a lot more.

**Q: You mentioned that your mom ironed your Sunday clothes, so you went to church every Sunday?**

**A:** Well, I'd be a little hesitant to say every Sunday, but we had very, very few excuses for not going to church. Of course, in a family of ten, we went to church a lot of times when we really didn't feel like it because my mom didn't want to stay home or leave one of the others home with one who was sick, so yeah, we went to church on a regular basis.

**Q: How old were you when you left and went out on your own?**

**A:** I was eighteen. I went in the Air Force when I was eighteen and six days old. I lived at home until that time.

**Q: Where were you stationed at when you went into the Air Force?**

**A:** Well, I took basic training in Texas, and went to technical school in the state of Texas, and then I was stationed in Europe for two years and then returned to the states and got out. I was discharged at that time. I was out of the service for about two years and then I was recalled when the Korean War came about, or the Korean conflict, as it was referred to, or police action, but to the G.I.s it was war. So I was recalled for that period of time. I served about sixteen months and got out again, that was in December of '51, just before Jesse's mother was born. She was born in February of '52. I returned to the Air Force in February of '56 and I stayed then until 1 July 1975. A little over 26 years in the Air Force total.

**Q: What was it like in Korea?**

**A:** I didn't go to Korea during the Korean War, but later in my career, in the early sixties and seventies, during the flying in Southeast Asia, and in the Pacific area, I had the privilege, or unfortunate privilege to travel some in Korea by air, military air. I was a crew member on a C-130 type aircraft. Of course, it had changed, from what I had heard about Korea, it had changed quite a bit. The economy had gained considerably from the Korean War until the time I was there. But it was still far, far behind the United States. People were living in shacks. Well, the standard of living, if you put a percentage on it, us being a hundred percent, I would say that they were, their standard of living would be somewhere like six or eight percent, as compared to ours.

**Q: Were you in the Air Force when the Vietnam War started?**

**A:** Yes. We went to Vietnam, we meaning my organization, in November 1961. We carried the Agent Orange aircraft over there. We started what they called, the code name of the mission was Ranchhand Mission, which was spraying the Agent Orange. In December '61, we sent a full unit over

there with sixteen aircraft and I don't recall the number of people, somewhere around 300 people flying, maintenance, administrative, cooks, and all this type stuff in there. I went in February of '63 to relieve one of my co-workers or counterparts, I guess, and as we arrived in the Philippines I found out that he had just been killed in an aircraft accident up in Thailand, so my tour there was kind of hectic. Of course, this man had five boys. One of them was about, the youngest one was about seven months old. He and I had flipped a coin to see who went first out of my section. We were both evaluators, but he was attached to my unit for duty and I was assigned there full-time as the NCOIC. He lost the flip, and we were just doing it. It didn't matter to me whether he went or I went, that's just the way we felt about it. My boss said you guys settle it, so he and I just flipped a coin, and I was just lucky enough to win. That was in February of '63 and I returned home in about August of '63. Then I went into the C-130 program. I was in C-130 fly engineer school in Nashville, Tennessee when President Kennedy was killed in November '63. Then I made numerous trips back to Vietnam. '64, '65, I contracted tuberculosis in '65, in that area. When I wasn't in Vietnam, I was in Europe. We were going there ninety-days at a time, primarily out of Evaru, France, flying throughout Europe, flying what we called the "Turkey Trot" up into England, Greece, Turkey. We had a bunch of radar sites up in there at that time in northern Pakistan, so we were resupplying all those people. In '65, when I came back from, oh, I was in the Belgian Congo in 1964, and before I went to France. I made numerous trips into Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic. You know we had that little uprising there, we were on that exercise. I was grounded for seventeen months with tuberculosis. I took thirty-two pills a day for seventeen months, and that was quite hectic. I worked with a quality assurance NCO in aircraft maintenance at that time, and then I returned to flying, and guess what? Right back to Vietnam, again. In '69 I was sent over there, and sent to Taiwan for a fifteen month tour and that's when I moved the family back here (Piedmont) and we bought this house. Of course, the family's been here basically ever since then. I came back from Vietnam in, I believe, December of 1970. I was stationed at Little Rock, Arkansas and taught in a school squadron up there, both flight simulator and flight training for nine months and then I was sent back to, no, I had a choice to go on the inspector aircraft C-130 gunship or go back to Taiwan, so I chose to go back to Taiwan. While I was in Taiwan, it didn't look like the Vietnam War was going to change any, so I applied for cross-training and was accepted into the instructional portion of the school of engineering, and returned to Blytheville Arkansas in 1973 to July '73. I finally retired. They transferred me later on to Shreveport Louisiana Barksdale Air Force base and I retired from there in 1 July 1975.



**Q: And then you came back to Piedmont?**

**A:** I came back to Piedmont, yeah.

**Q: Do you remember the civil rights movement in Alabama? When you retired and came back, was it a big movement here in Piedmont?**

**A:** No, the biggest thing I remember about that was, and I'm a little confused on the year, but when James Meredith entered the University of Mississippi. I was stationed at Pope Air Force base, North Carolina, which is, Fort Bragg is right there. Our primary mission was to support the Army special forces in the 82nd Airborne Division. Of course, I believe they had a detachment of Rangers there, too. Our primary mission was to support them. During that time, I believe that was in '62, '61 or '62, we went to, flew to Columbus, Mississippi, and took a bunch of Army personnel down there, in case there was an uprising or this or that. We just dropped them off, their personnel and equipment, and returned back to North Carolina. When that thing was over, we went back and picked them up. No, that was during the University of Alabama when George Wallace, the governor of Alabama stood in the door of the University of Alabama, and I was going to say Miss Lucy, but I'm not real sure on that name. We landed at Columbus, Mississippi. On the James Meredith thing, seemed like it was Meridian Mississippi Key Field, seems like, were we took the Army personnel at that time. That's been so long, I don't remember that too well. During the late sixties, when all the people were protesting about our activities in Vietnam, we were on alert or there in North Carolina either pre-positioning Army personnel to where the Pentagon or the government decided there might be some problems. Coming up on the weekend, we would take this people to different locations, you know, we had a lot uprising on college campuses back in those times. That's when the Watts thing came up and all that, so we were pretty busy. All the civil rights and the Vietnam protesters was really a hectic period for us in the military, especially in the cargo-passenger hauling business like we were in. It kept us real busy.

**Q: Do you remember the segregation of things like water fountains and restrooms being separate? The blacks had to use a certain one and the whites had to use a certain one.**

**A:** Oh, yeah, yeah. I remember that well. You had a white and colored label on the bathrooms and this and the water fountains, all that stuff. I don't remember it too well. My first tour in the Air Force, we were segregated, so to speak, but then when the Korean War started and I was recalled, well we were all in the same barracks and everything was equal, far as I can remember. You were just military, it didn't matter the color of your skin or ethnic background or what. You were just a G.I. and they're all the same and you were treated, as far as I know, equally, because I didn't see any difference personally with anyone.

He had a job to do, and he done it, he or she, and that's just the way we were.

**Q: After the Civil War, Alabamians had an attitude towards Republicans, because that was the party of Lincoln, and it was considered a bad thing to call someone a Republican. Then the attitudes kind of changed over the many, many years and Republicans started making their way back into Alabama. Do you remember the changing attitudes towards Democrats and Republicans?**

**A:** Not really. All I know basically is what I was told or what I read, and I remember very little about that. I do know there was quite a bit of animosity towards Republicans right at the end of the war for Southern independence, but from what I can recall of that period, I don't really fault Mr. Lincoln with that. I think the South would have been much better off had President Lincoln lived. The carpetbagger time-frame would have been much easier, I think, under his supervision then it actually was. They just kind of got out of control. The Reconstruction days, I think, it would have went much smoother under President Lincoln's supervision.

**Q: Having traveled a bit because of the Air Force, you got to see a lot of different areas. Did it give you a different outlook on Alabama's life, as far as education, and the economy and the attitudes of the southerner?**

**A:** I don't know. Well, it kind of increased my faith in the state, I guess, more especially in the people. The attitude of the people was much better then what I encountered in my first introduction into military life. I ran across a few guys that were less educated then I was, very few, and I had the unfortunate privilege of meeting some that were dumber then I was. But attitude for the southern G.I., his ability to cope in the military environment, so to speak, to work with strangers, was just thrown together, and expected to train together, get along, love one another, and give your life for the other. I think the southerner's, and my, and I don't believe that I would be prejudiced in thinking that, it's just, as you sat back and tried to grade the ones above the Mason-Dixon line, so to speak, and those of the South, I think the grade of getting along and working hard to complete the mission, as we understood it, they just put forth more effort. It might have been because of the southern people, and in most cases having to work for what they had rather then to be handed to them on a silver platter, as a lot of people that come into the military from the northern area of the U.S., they just didn't have to work as hard as we did. I always just figured that was part of it, and this still holds true, or held true later on in my military career when I had the occasion to work with some of the younger G.I.s that came in, to train them in the mission of our organization, and the aircraft, and to teach in the flying unit. The Southerner, sometimes you would run across one whose head was kind of hard to penetrate with knowledge, but once you got inside that old

hard head it's just no getting it out. Once he understood it, it was there from now on. That's the biggest thing that I see, the Southerner over the Yankee, so to speak. But G.I.s, they're a different breed, really. You take five or six G.I.s and give them something to do, and this is just picking at random from different walks of life, and they'll do the job for you and do it in a professional manner.

**Q: During the time of the Great Depression, Hoover was President, and he was blamed for a lot of that, and for some FDR, President Roosevelt, when he was elected it represented hope for the future. Do you remember hearing comments on Hoover and Roosevelt from the adults?**

A: Oh, yeah. My father-in-law, that was one of the things, that when we first married, my wife and I was, he was talking about the days of Hoover and how bad they were and all that and how much better they became under President Roosevelt. He said if it hadn't have been for him, this country really would have went down the tubes under Hoover. He was, he never voted Republican, and he never would. I would just almost say that he would choose death over voting for a Republican, that's just how he felt about it. But those things, I remember that real well, about his feelings toward, comparing Hoover with FDR.

**Q: What did you do after retiring from the Air Force and returning to Piedmont? Were you just a retiree or did you go into another line of work?**

A: Well, I tried to play the role of a retiree, but having almost never been out of a job in my adult life, late youth and adult life, I worked kind of a car salesman, parts chaser for an auto dealer here in Piedmont. Then a year later I started my own business, my boys and I, in the insulation business. Of course, it continues now with my two youngest boys. They're making a fair living out of it today. So, that was quite a successful business or developed that way. Initially, it was really rough. Had it not been for my meager retirement income, of course, we wouldn't have survived in the early part of my venture I guess on the other hand, if it hadn't have been for my small retirement, I probably wouldn't have jumped off as an entrepreneur into the business world. Yes, I started my own business. My entire family invested in it initially five hundred here and five hundred dollars there and we started a grass roots type of business. Like I say, it's still very successful today, so we're real proud of that. And a lot of my military training, I have to contribute my success to my background in the military

**Q: How did the people here in Alabama, do you know how they felt about the Korean War and the Vietnam War?**

A: Not really. I was kind of out of pocket as far as the state of Alabama goes, although I was stationed in the state of Alabama during the Korean War, down in our state capital of Montgomery at Maxwell Air Force base. I was on flying status there, as a, I guess, flight mechanic back in those

days. I was flying on B-25s. This was a U.S. wide type mission, and I was out of state a lot, and just being a reservist and concentrating on getting back and trying to make up for two years that I had lost in the aircraft business and trying to get back to current, I have done a lot of studying. I can't remember a lot really about the Korean War, how the Alabamians felt about it. Vietnam, about every time I'd come home, Alabamians they never knew whether you were in the Navy, the Army, the Air Force, or what, and I got a big kick out of it. Every time I'd get the opportunity to come home, most of the people would ask me if I was still in the Army. And they all knew really that I'd never been in the Army, I'd been in the Air Force my entire career. To them, if you were in the military you were in the Army, it didn't matter whether you were Navy, Air Force or what. I do recall, I can't remember the years now, about in '65, the March on Selma, that a bus came through Anniston with some protesters, and I remember reading about that. Maybe that was in the summer that we happened to come home on leave, or vacation. Some of the whites that really got into it with blacks and black sympathizers with ball bats and I think burnt a bus out in west Anniston or something. Of course, that bothered me, but not being right here, it was just a feeling that gosh, that's sad that those type things happened. Of course, as a professional military person, I had to take the government's side of that, regardless of my personal feelings. Of course, any time you do something like that to another human being, it's wrong. Those were some trying times and I hope we don't have to go through those again. I sure hope we don't ever have to face those again. It seems to be getting better and thank the good Lord for that.

**Interviewee Background Information**

Name: Floyd H. Jennings, Sr.  
Address: 23424 AL HWY 9 N, Piedmont, AL 36278  
Phone Number(s): 205-447-7246  
Approximate age or date of birth: Feb. 8, 1928  
Mother's name: Mary H. Jennings (Deceased)  
Father's name: Dewey D. Jennings (Deceased)  
Places lived and when: Birmingham, AL Birth - 1935; Odenville AL 1935-40, Dhatchee, AL 1940-1950, Montgomery, AL, North Carolina, Arkansas, Louisiana, Germany, Scotland, Taiwan, Phillipines, Vietnam  
Education: Some college

Religion: Baptist

Business, political and social memberships (past and present):

Mason, Shriner, Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars,

Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Air Force Sergeants Association, Sons of Confederate Veterans

Present occupation: USAF Retired

Former occupation(s): Flight Engineer Instructor/ Flight Examiner C-130 aircraft, Business Owner - Retired.

Special skills: None

Major Accomplishments: Appointed by the mayor of Piedmont AL to assist in design, oversee, & erect a war memorial monument to 48 Veterans from the Piedmont area who were killed in action from WWI thru Vietnam. Started a business.

Local events in which you have participated: Conducted Veterans Day Ceremonies, conducted Memorial Day Services

State and/or regional events in which you have participated:

Chairman of State Youth Activities, Department of Alabama VFW.

National events in which you have participated: Participated in numerous military exercises as a crewmember.

International events in which you have participated: Participated in numerous military missions through-out the free world. Demonstrated use to include air worthiness of the C-130E aircraft to the governments of France, Great Britain

Natural born U.S. citizen? Yes/No

Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Country from which you emigrated: \_\_\_\_\_

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in your possession:

Individuals you recommend who might be candidates for an oral history interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information: \_\_\_\_\_

Gift and Release Agreement:

We Floyd Jennings, Sr. and Gigi Nail  
(Interviewee, print) (Interviewer, print)

do hereby give and grant to Jacksonville State University, all literary and property rights, title, and interest which we may possess to the audio or video recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) conducted at the home of Floyd Jennings on the date(s) of November 8, 1996 for the oral history collection being compiled by the Jacksonville State University Library.

Floyd W. Jennings Sr.  
(Interviewee's signature)

Address 23424 AL Hwy 9N  
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Date 8 NOV 96

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Gigi M. Nail  
(Interviewer's signature)

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Date November 8, 1996

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JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

AN INTERVIEW WITH FLOYD JENNINGS, SR.

HY 444

DR. JACKSON

BY

GIGI NAIL





"It was pretty rough back in those days for us, pretty rough."<sup>1</sup> That is what Floyd Jennings, Sr. has to say about the early thirties. The Great Depression had hit the United States. While many people remember the stock market crash in 1929 when thinking about the depression, farming had been hurting before that Black Tuesday. Mr. Jennings' family had bought a farm in St. Clair County at a time when jobs were at a steady decline. With a family of ten, it took everyone's help. The farm was a truck farm. The Jennings' grew the vegetables and brought it into Leeds to sell. Cotton was rough, because it had to be stored until there was enough to be sold. "We'd have to store it for weeks at a time before we could get enough to haul it off to the cotton gin and have it baled, and that before you'd ever receive any payment for it."<sup>2</sup> During a period when prices were low, farming was difficult to make a living by. Mr. Jennings' father logged during the winter to help supplement their income. They would sell telephone poles and cross-ties to anyone in the market for those goods. Unfortunately, in a time when bad luck seemed to be more common than good luck, a tragedy struck the Jennings' family. "We unfortunately lost my dad in 1939, in a vehicle accident. As I was telling you, we were logging in the fall and winter to supplement

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1. Gigi Nail, "Interview with Floyd Jennings, Sr."  
(Jacksonville: Jacksonville State University, 1996)

2. Nail

our farm income. My dad fell off of a log truck and it ran over him. Ran over and killed him right in front of our home." His mother would have to sell the farm and move to Ohatchee to be closer to her husband's relatives, and closer to her own relatives, who lived in Steele. The family would pitch in to help the growing children stay occupied. Mr. Jennings remembers with a smile the time he chopped stove wood for his grandmother. "She'd kind of watch me pretty close. She'd bring water out to the woodpile, so I wouldn't have to take a break and go to the well and get it."<sup>3</sup> The depression would be blamed on Hoover, and the people would look to Roosevelt to save them. Perhaps one of the reasons Hoover was so disliked is because he refused to acknowledge the problem. "No one is going hungry and no one need go hungry or cold," he still insisted in the winter of 1931.<sup>4</sup> By the time of the election of 1932, Hoover knew "he had little chance for re-election."<sup>5</sup> Mr. Jennings' father-in-law was one of those people who were looking to Roosevelt for hope. "My Father-in-law was talking about the days of

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3. Nail

4. T.H. Watkins, The Great Depression: America in the 1930s (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 56.

5. Louis W. Liebovich, Bylines in Despair: Herbert Hoover, the Great Depression, and the U.S. News Media (London: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 183.

Hoover, and how bad they were and how much better they became under President Roosevelt. He said if it hadn't have been for him, this country really would have went down the tubes under Hoover."<sup>6</sup> The economy would take years to recover, but Roosevelt would get the job started.

I left home when I was "eighteen years and six days old" and went into the Air Force. Mr. Jennings would serve two years and get out. He would be recalled two years later when the Korean War broke out. "I was out of the service for about two years and then I was recalled when the Korean War came about, or the Korean conflict, as it was referred to, but to the GIs it was war."<sup>7</sup> On June 24, 1950, troops from Communist North Korea invaded South Korea. Truman responded by getting the United Nations to support South Korea and then sending in American troops. The Korean War would end with the situation in Korea the same as it was before the war. There would be a divided Korea, with the boundary at the thirty-eighth parallel.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Jennings would not be sent to Korea during the war. He would be stationed there later in his career, in

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6. Nail

7. Nail

8. Michael Barone, Our Country: The Shaping of America from Roosevelt to Reagan (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 236-239.

the early sixties and seventies.

Mr. Jennings would be involved in the Vietnam War. "We went to Vietnam, we meaning my organization, in November 1961. We carried the Agent Orange aircraft over there."<sup>9</sup> The Vietnam War was a war "that saw over fifty thousand Americans die in a country halfway around the world, killed in a war few Americans understood."<sup>10</sup> The Vietnam War would bring out protesters across the United States. While the people were protesting the war at home, the GIs overseas were fighting and watching comrades die. "I went in February of '63 to relieve one of my co-workers, and as we arrived in the Philippines I found out that he had just been killed in an aircraft accident up in Thailand, so my tour there was kind of hectic. Of course, this man had five boys, the youngest one was about seven months old. He and I had flipped a coin to see who would go first out of my section. We were both evaluators, but he was attached to my unit for duty and I was assigned there full time as the NCOIC. He lost the flip, and we were just doing it. It didn't matter to me whether he or I went, that's just the way we felt about it. My boss said, you guys settle it, so he and I flipped a coin, and I was just lucky enough to win." Mr. Jennings would leave

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9. Nail

10. Jules Archer, The Incredible Sixties: The Stormy Years that Changed America (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1986), 39.

Vietnam and return home in August of 1963. He would make numerous trips back to Vietnam, but he was always "lucky" enough to come home safely.<sup>11</sup>

Mr. Jennings would also be involved with the uprising in the Dominican Republic. In 1962, the Dominican Republic had held free elections and had made Juan Bosch president. He would be overthrown the following year. In 1965, a popular uprising in the Dominican Republic wanted to restore Bosch to the Presidency. President Johnson would send twenty-two thousand marines to the Dominican Republic.<sup>12</sup>

"At 12:30 p.m. on Friday, November 22, 1963 while his car was passing Dealey Plaza in Dallas, John Kennedy was shot dead, the top of his head blown off by a bullet fired apparently from the top floor of the Texas School Book Depository. Almost no American old enough to remember the assassination forgets where he was when he first heard the news."<sup>13</sup> Mr. Jennings is no exception. He was attending school in Nashville, Tennessee when President John F. Kennedy was killed.

Mr. Jennings not only remembers the Civil Rights movement started by Kennedy and his successor Johnson, but he also played a part in it. When James Meredith tried to enroll in the all

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11. Nail

12. Archer, 152.

13. Barone, 364-365.

white University Of Mississippi, Governor Ross Barnett "appointed himself acting registrar and personally refused to enroll him." Federal troops would have to deal with the mob and ensure that James Meredith was enrolled.<sup>14</sup> Mr. Jennings' organization was responsible for bringing the Army personnel to Mississippi.<sup>15</sup> His organization would also bring the Army personnel and equipment to Alabama when Governor George Wallace stood in the doorway to block the enrollment of two black students into the University of Alabama.<sup>16</sup> He recalls the days before desegregation of public facilities. "You had a white and colored label on bathrooms and the water fountains." Mr. Jennings saw the changes in the military as well. "My first tour in the Air Force, we were segregated, so to speak, but then when the Korean War started and I was recalled, we were all in the same barracks and everything was equal, as far as I can remember."<sup>17</sup> When reflecting upon the Southern attitudes and the Southern people compared to other areas, his heart remains loyal. Having

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14. Harry S. Ashmore, Civil Rights and Wrongs: A Memoir of Race and Politics 1944-1994 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 142-145.

15. Nail

16. Barone, 354.

17. Nail

traveled around in the Air Force, and experiencing different regions, Mr. Jennings said "it kind of increased my faith in the state, I guess, more especially in the people. The attitude of the people was much better then what I encountered in my first introduction to military life." He said that the Southern people in the military tended to work harder, and get along better with one another.

After retiring from the Air Force and returning to Piedmont, Mr. Jennings found it difficult to play the role of a retiree. He got a job with a local auto dealer, and a year later, started his own insulation business. "Initially, it was really rough. My entire family invested in it, five hundred here and five hundred dollars there and we started a grass roots type of business. Like I say it's still very successful today, so we're real proud of that." The business continues on, run by his two youngest sons.

At the closing of our interview, Mr. Jennings reflected on the past times. "Those were some trying times and I hope we don't have to go through those again. It seems to be getting better and thank the good Lord for that."<sup>18</sup> Mr. Jennings has not only experienced history, but taken part in it as well, in events both good and bad. In agreement with Mr. Jennings, may life continue to improve.

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18. Nail



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