

UF 251A

Date: March 3, 1994

Interviewee: Kenneth R. Tefertiller

Interviewer: Mark Lesney

L: This is an oral history interview with Dr. Kenneth Tefertiller. It is being held in his office in McCarty Hall. The date is March 3, 1994. The interviewer is Mark Lesney. Dr. Tefertiller, would you please your full name and where you were born and when?

T: I am Kenneth Ray Tefertiller. I was born in Cleveland County near Noble, Oklahoma, May 2, 1930.

L: Do you want to give me any of your background in terms of your family life and what you thought was important from your childhood?

T: My mother and father both lived in rural areas. [They were] farmers. And they were good, honest, hard-working Christian people. I had an opportunity in a family where I had a lot of love. [I] had two sisters, _____ and Elsie; and three brothers, Ed, Bob and Homer. And so I had an opportunity to interact with brothers and sisters and grew up in a family where there was a lot of work and also a lot of love and an opportunity to learn how to give and take with other kids. Probably the first eventful thing that I can remember in particular is moving when I was almost fifteen years old to another county. That was particularly difficult on my older sister because she was already in high school. I think the whole family had [to make] some adjustments [such as] a bigger city high school versus the rural area we lived in.

L: Which city? Do you remember?

T: [We] moved to Purcell, Oklahoma, to McClain County from Cleveland County. High school days were important to me in several ways. It was not something I enjoyed [that much] like a lot of high school kids. There were several things about high school that were important to me. One was the vocational and agricultural teacher and track was an important area. It was not possible for me to play football even though I was one of the larger boys in track and [I had] more speed than most. But we always had to catch the bus home [because] we had work to do so there was never time to take three hours and play football.

L: So your family was farming still?

T: Right, [they were] still farming. We could work out for track from three to four and still catch the bus home. That is the reason I was in track. But it turned out to be that the vocational and agricultural teacher named Harold Minor and my being able to be somewhat successful on the high school level in running the high hurdles plus probably the support of my family and particularly financial and personal support of my older sister was probably the reason I went to college. At one time I was planning on staying home with my father and farming and not going to college. It was the vo-ag teacher that was very much a motivator and encourager and somebody instilling knowledge both in their students. That was important.

L: I notice that you wind up in the army in this period. Actually, it was during the Korean War, was it not?

T: Yes, that was probably a little later because it was after I graduated from college.

L: Oh, it was after you graduated from college. So do you want to talk about college first then?

T: Yes, college days were a very exciting time for me. To me, that was quite an adjustment in many ways. I am kidding some. One of the major adjustments was no longer having my mother's cornbread to eat. But there were a lot of other, bigger adjustments. I found that since academics had not been probably as high [a] priority as sports and vocational and agricultural [classes], [the first year, the first semester was a difficult adjustment period for me]. A small school [like my high school] did not prepare for Oklahoma City and Tulsa. But after that [first semester/year,] I was on the dean's list most of the time in college.

L: So it was Oklahoma State?

T: Yes, it was Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College at the time. They did not change it to Oklahoma State University.

L: You started off at A and M?

T: It was a very busy time. But still, you made a lot of friends and still had friends at that time. And I majored in -- following the steps of my vo-ag teacher -- I majored in agricultural education, which had a lot of physical and biological sciences in that and a minor almost in science and agronomy and did almost all of the program. Money was short and time was short. I sought other jobs and I was not an outstanding track star. I did run the high hurdles and kept my books and tuition scholarship. That was important. I continued to hold one, sometimes two jobs. I got up at 5: 30 in the morning every morning to work in the cafeteria and started going to class at eight. [I] worked out at track between three and five. It was a busy time most of time I was in school, including the summer periods. But it was probably the most important time in my life. It really was a chance to meet a lot of different people. The professors had an impact on me. So those years, even though it was a discipline I stayed in later on in life, it had a very broadening

experience. Also, I think I took Reserve Officers' Training Corps for four years and that had a pretty important [impact] on my life as well. Summers were always important. I usually went home and saw my parents but shortly after that, I was off for some job somewhere.

L: You put yourself through school probably with the scholarships?

T: Yes, pretty much so. My mother and dad sent a little money from time to time, a little egg money. It was not much. But they did all they could and they supported me in many ways. You see, my father's name was Homer Marion Tefertiller and my mother's name was Ruby Agnes Tefertiller. [Her] maiden name [was] Gentry.

L: Were they born in the United States?

T: Yes. My father's family, Tefertiller, has been in the United States since the late 1700s and [have] been farmers all their lives. [They] moved from Missouri to Oklahoma near 1900 in a covered wagon. My mother was from Texas and came north to the same county in 1918, something like that. They were married in 1926 in McClain County. So there was a farm background on both sides.

L: Quite far back.

T: Yes. But summer jobs were often important from the standpoint of making enough money to go to school next year. My freshman year, my coach encouraged me to find a job [that would help me] strengthen my legs. You know, I was a strong young fellow, gangling I guess, but in fact, I needed stronger legs. Partly because of that and partly because we knew one family in Oregon, [we got] a job there in the lumber business, timber business. A friend of mine who was not in college set out one Monday morning hitchhiking to Oregon and after a few hitchhikes and a train ride and a few other things, we ended up in Oregon about four or five days later and picked up with the family. Thorke was their name.

[We] roomed and boarded their with them and found a job working in the sawmills or setting choker behind tractors in the lumber business. That was an interesting summer. I came back stronger than ever before and weighed more weight. It served some purposes.

L: What year was that?

T: That was back in my freshman year. I went to school in 1948. That would have been 1949 [when I worked in that job]. The following year I went back to school and continued pretty much the same coursework. [I was] still in track and still [working], while in the summer I worked in ____ country up around Liberal, Kansas. My brother was also with me that year. The summer of 1951, the following summer, was unique because I went off to ROTC camp which takes up six weeks of the summer [with] very low pay.

L: [Laughter]

T: I came back home with a great interest in finding a high-paying job I could spend the next three weeks, six weeks, working in and get back to Oklahoma State with enough money to go to school the next year. [That was] my final year. [I] happened to see an ad in the paper, the Oklahoma City paper, saying that there was a job for triple time wiht the Santa Fe railroad and Rock Island, both, and Kansas City. So I made a decision to [go]--my parents somewhat objecting. [I did not know too much about that]. [I decided] to go ahead and go simply because I needed the money. And we caught a train to Oklahoma City one night, Santa Fe railroad, and arrived the next day in Kansas City. In arriving, I realized that I was in a different environment I had never been in before. They did not give a straw to put in a sack, they gave you some block bales of hay or

something to put in some kind of sack for your bed. And everyone slept in a box, in a car, just basically a passenger train.

L: [Laughter]

T: I did not think too much of it. [I] went to sleep and got up the next morning and went to breakfast and I realized I was really in a different environment then because I had made the mistake sitting down at the table and saying, "Pass the bread please." I ended up bringing up all kinds of tension. "What in the world was this here"--I was saying please and all that and getting a hard time. Most of the guys around me I noticed were thirty-five, forty years old and looked like they had had a hangover from the night before. Turned out [that] most of them were winos or former winos. It was a whole different environment then. I guess I was particularly impressed that all the attention I got for saying, "Pass the bread please." Somebody later on was chasing someone else around the table with a knife and the cook came out with two big platters and takes a look and the guy chased him with the knife. He just took one of the platters and cold-cocked him up on the side of the car and one even hardly looked up. [laughter] So I knew it was a different environment.

So I spent six weeks there and only went on in that area that I felt left out at times. The police would come down looking around. They were asking about someone somewhere and so forth who had been around there who knew somebody in some prison somewhere. I got [to] where I did not say I was from Oklahoma because they would ask me if I was from McCallister which is [where the state prison is] at. So I got to where I did not use that term. It was really kind of sad in some ways. I made a point to tell you I got acquainted with one of them. Most all of them had some tragic thing in their life [such as losing] a

girlfriend, [losing] a wife. Or something caused them to drink a little bit. Next thing they know they got to be some form of an alcoholic. Most all of them had problems in that way. Most of them did not give me advice [except to] stay away from the gambling game and to not get hooked on this place. [It was] really kind of a sad thing. [They were] talented people. As I say, a Harvard lawyer was there [and] a former operator of a shoe store. And then the other people-- something tragic happened to them along the way. They called themselves ganties or hobos [and they] caught the train.

The most rude awakening was to go to Stillwater, Oklahoma in September, the day before school started, and find how quiet and peaceful that town looked after almost being mugged a few times and things like that. It just really made me appreciate how different it was in the other world. I never ever forgot how there was another world out there. And that [it] to some extent had an impact on me all my life. I could always realize when someone appeared to be a criminal, appeared to be an outcast . . . recall also most most all the people I got acquainted with were just ordinary people that went wrong. That is a bit of a sideline, but it had a long-time impact on me.

L: A lot of people in academic life never see that side of life.

T: Yes. To tell the truth, yes. Looking back on it, it was kind of scary because it was just neat guys until they went to town on Saturday night or something and come home with and winded up and then knock you on the head or anything for the little bit of money and then what you would do is send all your money home as soon as you got it and tell everyone you sent it home already. [Laughter]

L: [Laughter] [It was] protection in advance.

T: But then back to school--[I] finished senior year and graduated in the summer of that year.

L: So you got your degree in [agricultural] education?

T: Yes. Essentially general agriculture. And then I did my practice teaching. I came back after the service and did my practice teaching. _____ were important to me and I never was outstanding at track _____. If you are not too _____ in high school getting to the finals of the state meet then once you get to college speed is so important _____ substitute speed _____. But I was never outstanding at track. **PLEASE IDENTIFY WHAT HE IS SAYING HERE!**

From there I went to the service, to the United States Army.

L: Was this part of the ROTC?

T: Yes, it was part of the ROTC and once you are commissioned you are subject to the call. I got called right after the Korean War [started]. I graduated in 1952 and I was in the transportation corps training the first year in Virginia It was in public transportation I got an **MOS** _____. It means I qualified to be skipper or mate on any vessel the United States Army had. That was a subtle thing at the time. But _____ the first year was just more or less training. I did not particularly enjoy that much. In fact, it was a little bit boring the first year in the service. But in the summer of 1953 I did not get orders to Europe, I got orders for Korea. I found myself in Korea in early September 1953. _____. I arrived by train _____ and after arriving there, an ocean-going tug vessel and told I was captain or skipper of the ocean-going tug. I told them I had never been on a tug before. They said it did not make any difference because _____ says you are. [Laughter]

L: [Laughter]

T: _____. _____ half Korean crew and half GI crew. I had three and a half GI crew. The Koreans worked twenty-four hours a day and the GIs worked from six in the morning to six in the evening. Most activity took place in that period of time. We stayed about three miles off the shore of _____. I am sure that must have _____. It was on call twenty-four hours a day for a year no matter _____. _____. I had a record number of books checked out from the library because there were not enough books around and there was not much you could read. [Laughter] It was a fascinating thing in particular when in the night run, it was a Korean crew only. You had to learn enough Korean to get by. It was a totally Korean crew. That was something more. It was an exciting time to try to take an assignment at night with a Korean crew. Most of the activity in the daytime is where you kept the GIs. Looking back on it, it was the first experience I have had. Before then, I had not thought too much about leadership roles, and things you must be prone to do in a leadership position. Many of the sergeants or the vp have an area that they have a lot of experience in. I was a young second lieutenant that certainly got thrown in above his head, I am sure. There were a lot of interesting civic kind of things that went on. It was not war time, but you were still in the army. As far as innovation, you would get along. Finally, you would get the supplies. We cooked. We had a crew that cooked. **Barber** had an early experience in negotiation. Later on, I get a lot of different aspects of that. There was a colonel that ran the port that listened in on the radios at night. **[[what is being said here??]]** killed somewhere. One time, head of the **York** port, I understand, **moved** out of there. He was really a loose canon. They had these very _____ things on all the harbour signifying the

location. Other skippers would steer left of that harbour because it was next to one place in Alaska where they had the most rapid tides in the world. There would be thirty feet tides to _____ within a matter of twelve hours. The only one that suffered injuries was _____ Brown. He did not get up again for twelve hours. All of the skippers that came in and anchored there knew about the harbour and how trecherous it was. So they were very skeptical of this. But this colonel would always have some place he wanted to assign, he said, "Let's take the ship out about ten miles."