

Transcription: Richard Overton

First of all good morning, and thank you for letting us be here today to interview you. It's an honor for us and for our program. I want to start by letting folks listening or watching that today is Thursday, September 12th, 2013. My name is James Crabtree and you are Mr. Richard Overton, and we are at your home in Austin, Texas. So that way anybody listening to this knows when and where we did this interview. Sir, thank you again for letting us be here. The first question I always like to ask veterans is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military

Richard Overton: Well, I'll tell you I was out in the country then.

Where were you born?

Richard Overton: I was born out between Bastrop and Lockhart, at the same area Conn is.

Did you grow up on a farm or did you grow up in town?

Richard Overton: I started growing up in the country, and left there and went to Taylor. After that I went to Dallas.

Did you come from a large family? Did you have a lot of siblings?

Richard Overton: I had six sisters and four brothers. I was the fourth brother, and all dead except me.

What was it like having that many siblings?

Richard Overton: It was lovely, but I had to take care of 'em. My daddy died way back in the 20s I think, somewhere back in there. But anyway, I had to take care of my mother and the other family. I had an older brother. He married and he had to leave home, and my other brother was, my sister, she married and she left home. So that left me there with my other part of the family. So he left, got a chauffeur, he went to a chauffeur, he was chauffeured, black people there, and so I was left with the family. And I was taking care of my family back in Firewood. We'd pick cotton. I had to camp to the cotton patch. I'd sell about this old cotton patch and stuff, and I had to help them around the house, and I had to make my living. We had hogs, chickens, I had them in cages, I had a good living.

Was it hard work?

Richard Overton: No, it wasn't no hard work. I chopped cotton, pulled corn, I done all that kind of work, and I worked, helped build bridges out on Onion Creek, helped the concrete bridges. I used to go hunting, too. Of course a lot of people would come out _____, I'd come to town here when I bought a car. That's the first car I bought right there on top of that -

What kind of car was that?

Richard Overton: A Mercury.

What year?

Richard Overton: I bought it in '24. I bought that car, paid \$2,400 for it. Cars was cheap then. You could get 'em for \$600 or \$700.

I guess it's all relative. You didn't earn as much back then either though.

Richard Overton: No. But anyway -

What brought you to Austin? I think we talked a little beforehand, you started working at one point for some governors and also for the treasury.

Richard Overton: That was long before then. But anyway I worked and drove chauffeurs a little bit for some people, and then I left here. I had horses. I wasn't living bad, I was living good all the way. I learned how to save.

Did you live out, you said out by Bastrop? You had land out by Bastrop?

Richard Overton: I was out about between Creedmoor and Lockhart.

OK, by Lockhart.

Richard Overton: That's where my home was. So I moved. My daddy bought a home there before he died. After he died, we had to take care of that home, had to pay for it. And we lived, that's when I was taking care of the family over, and I done so much other work before I married. But then I turned around and went to church one Sunday, and about four men didn't have no work. That was back in '25. They didn't have any work to do, but I had cows and things, had eggs and butter. I worked this old churn, this old churn with a dash, and we would make pounds of butter and had eggs and bring 'em to town and sit on the side of the street and sell 'em. And so that Sunday in church, some of the boys said we don't have no jobs, and it hadn't rained that year. It didn't rain in '25 at all. And they said it don't rain, we don't make no money. So I was the only one that had a car there and could drive. Like I bought a good car. This car here I think, I think this car was new. Anyway I told 'em, I said I tell you what I'll do. I said I'll take all of you out there, but I ain't gonna pick no cotton. I'll be the cook. So we went out there, went out to Big Springs at Lamesa, Odessa, right in there, beautiful country. I went out there but I didn't pick any cotton. Cotton was just a dollar a hundred. But that's when they started, went out there first, a dollar a hundred. They picked a while and I didn't pick. I just stayed there and cooked around the house and ride around in the car. And so later on, it went up to a dollar and a quarter. I said well a dollar and a quarter, I'm gonna pick. And then a little preacher, Herbert Snead, we went out together, me and him went out together to pick at his, there was five of us out there, six of us rather, and we would pick, I would pick 400 pounds of cotton a day. Every time I'd weigh up, I'd weigh up twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon, and each one of the time I'd weigh up, I'd weigh up with a hundred in each sack.

So that had to have been hard work.

Richard Overton: That wasn't hard work for me, but it was hard work, but you know how to do it. So I picked like that and picked until we got through, picked up in that country, down in Big Spring. Then we moved up to Odessa and started picking there for a while. And so after we picked there, we came back home and my older brother and his wife, they was living here but

they didn't have nowhere to go. And I had bought another car, somehow or another, one here and one there. And so anyway they wanted to go to Dallas at a place they called Penfield I believe was in Dallas, had a cotton patch there. And so I had to turn around then and take my car and take my older brother and his wife. Then I let them pick cotton, and I always worked on cars at the time sometimes, so I went, my cousin was working in Dallas, and he worked at the ore mill, cottonseed and stuff, and he asked me would I like to work at the ore mill, and pick cotton. I didn't want to pick no cotton. I told him I already liked around machines, I worked on cars and so forth. And so I went to the ore mill and worked on the machine. And I started to work there and I worked there oh, I guess maybe a month or so, and it's a big wheel that was up high and the little wheel was down at the bottom, and that had a big band on it, and they had a concrete floor there but they had a concrete bottom a little lower, and he asked me could I do that machine, and so I did. I worked there, and he showed me how the belt, had a big belt come over about that wide, and it came off and he showed me how to put it on, and I put it on once or twice, but one time I put it on and that booger threw me on that concrete. Then I had to go in the hospital for about a week, or maybe two weeks, in Dallas. And so I called my mother and then had to come back home.

Let me jump ahead a little bit, sir, and ask you where were you when WWII started? Were you working here in Austin?

Richard Overton: I was here. I was out in the country, I believe. No, I can't remember where I was living. I was living out in the country here somewhere.

Do you remember Pearl Harbor day? Do remember learning the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and the war had started?

Richard Overton: I remember when Pearl Harbor started it.

What were your thoughts?

Richard Overton: I am married, see, I come back married when I come back, and everybody went to the Army and there wasn't but a few boys left. So one day I went down to Bastrop to see the soldiers. That's when they had camps down there. And they asked me why I wasn't in the Army. I was in good shape then, see, but then I was married, and they didn't call on married men then. When I got back that same week, I told them I didn't know when I would go in. I said I think I'll go pretty soon. When I got back that same week, well my letter came for me.

So you got a draft notice even though you were in your late 30's, right, and you were married?

Richard Overton: Yeah, I married when I was 18.

Were you surprised to get drafted?

Richard Overton: Well yeah, I was surprised because they wasn't drafting married men then.

Sure, and normally they were drafting young men, 20-25, that sort of thing.

Richard Overton: Sure did. When they started on married men, they ran out of young men. That's when I went in, they called me, and I stayed and come back home, stayed a week, and I had to go to San Antonio.

How did your wife feel about you going into the Army?

Richard Overton: Well, it felt all right.

Was she worried?

Richard Overton: Well, she worried, but she stayed there with mother, and stayed there until I come back.

So you went to Fort Sam Houston?

Richard Overton: I went there, I come to Austin first. No, San Antonio. Yeah, I went to San Antonio and that's when they operated on me and found out my bladder was way up on the inside. I wasn't sick or nothing.

They found there was something wrong with your bladder.

Richard Overton: Something with the bladder, it had webs in it, and then they had to go in that bladder and put a tube in me and run an iron tube in, and then they run a smaller iron tube, lit it and put a small tube in that iron tube and run it down in my bladder and shut it apart and burned all that in my bladder. You could hear my bladder fryin', sh-h-h, like meat on the stove. Nothing but webs. Didn't hurt the skin or nothing. Then they got through with that.

So you were awake through that surgery?

Richard Overton: Oh yeah, layin' there talking. I had a big board, they had a board up on me, and so just me and the doctor was in there together. The first thing he said, he said I'm gonna give you a whole gallon of penicillin and that's gonna be your gallon of penicillin. Nobody drink it but you. But you have to take a tube and go up your nose and go down your throat and go down in your stomach into your bladder. That's where they put that tube, because they couldn't give me that penicillin straight. They had to let it go in. I couldn't swallow it because it would get in my throat. It's too strong. Had to put it in that tube and that tube run down into my belly. And every hour, well anyway, when I go to bed, every hour in the daytime every hour on the hour they had to give me three drops of penicillin. They were serious. They kept me. They wouldn't let me come home. And so three drops of penicillin. They used to have a little eye dropper with a rubber on the end of it and a tube, and squeeze it.

So when you went in the Army and you did your basic physical and everything, that's when they found out something was wrong with your bladder and you said you didn't have any idea anything was wrong with it.

Richard Overton: I wasn't sick when I went in, but that's what they found. I was doing fine.

Did they fix it?

Richard Overton: I guess they did. They wouldn't let me loose. But anyway, they just let me go ahead on in the Army, and then they sent me down to East Texas. They sent me to North Carolina, sent me to South Carolina, then Riverside Drive, there in Portland, Oregon, and they

sent me another two places over here before I went in the service. They wanted us to get used to different countries. And so when I went to California, that's when they shipped us off overseas.

Tell us, sir, what type of unit you were in, what your specialty was.

Richard Overton: It was the Army. I went in for our base security, that's what we went in there for.

Security, OK.

Richard Overton: But after we got over there, after we got to Hawaii, they changed our course. That's when Hawaii got bombed. I went right over there after it got bombed. Ships was still smokin', and the big ship is still there now. They made a monument out of that ship. And Doris Miller down here, he's the one that shot that plane down -

That's right, the medal honor recipient, the Arizona, which was sunk, the one you were talking about, still had oil coming out of it.

Richard Overton: That ship is sticking up there now. It was just too big, but the other ships, they could do something about them. I don't know whether they tore 'em up or fixed 'em or what.

What were your thoughts when you were going off to war, when you were leaving to go to Hawaii, do you remember? Were you scared, excited, nervous?

Richard Overton: No, you wouldn't get scared. I never did get scared. You always wanted to fight. And you know, you just, you wouldn't care what happened, but you weren't scared of nobody, that's one thing.

Did you think you were well trained for what you were going to face?

Richard Overton: I was pretty well trained when I went in the Army, but a lot of boys didn't know how to shoot a gun, didn't know how to use a gun. But see, I used one, I got five of 'em now. I use 'em, I keep 'em, and so I can use a gun and shoot 20 out of 20, that's when they would let me shoot.

I think you had told me before we did this interview that they made you kind of a marksman or sharp shooter as a guard with the CB's?

Richard Overton: I was, the way they would do me, they would put me, referred me up to the captain, they would put a tractor and make a long track across dirt way out in a pasture, field somewhere, and that would be a white wall, white dirt, and put a black car, stand it in the middle of that dirt, and then put you about, referred me up to the captain. I didn't want to shoot a mine, but then after a mine, then you go to ____, and so that's what they would do. I had an M-1. The first time a little target, a little 22, shooting close, but after they found out I would shoot further and further, why then they put it with that M-1, and I would shoot at that car, and that's when they found out I was a marksman.

They found out you were a good shot.

Richard Overton: A good shot, but every time when I first shoot, see the most of them didn't know how to set the gun, set the sights. If you shoot too high, why you set the sight and then bring the shot down, and then they had a strap that they put on your shoulder and put on your hip, and the more you shoot, the tired you get, and you don't ever let that gun get away from you. You lay it right there and just don't use your gun, use your finger. Let your gun lay level and use your finger, and that gun never moves. And so you can shoot. The first time you may, I may shoot two or three times, but next time I hit right in that car, and I stay right there and just shoot right there, just with that finger, all I do, that gun never move. But the other boys would do that.

Yeah, jerked around.

Richard Overton: That's right, when you move that gun, you got to do that sight, so they didn't understand that. I used to go out now, boys, men used to come to town, and I would go out with them and they would go hunting. I had some bird dogs, \$100 dog. Yeah, I used to be tough and crazy.

Well I think you're still pretty tough. So tell us sir, then, once you were in Hawaii, do you remember where you went to after that? Do you remember any of the places you went in the Pacific, any of the islands like Guam or Okinawa?

Richard Overton: Palou, and Angwai, and oh, it's several little islands I went to.

Are there any memories that stand out to you about some of the men you served with or some of the places you were during the war?

Richard Overton: Ain't none of my men, ain't none of them here.

No, anything you remember about them. Do you remember what they were like or places that you went to, things that stand out in your memory?

Richard Overton: I went to Iwo Jima, but a lady called me here the other day from Dallas, and wanted me to go to Iwo Jima, and she say she's gonna send a man here and take me back to Dallas and then fly and take three days to go to Iwo Jima. I told them I didn't want to go, but they called that black island there. See, that belongs to America now, and they call that black island, and she wanted me to go there for some kind of meeting. And so I told her I didn't want to go there, so I didn't go.

Let me ask you sir, when you were in the war in the Pacific, were you able to get mail from home? Was your wife able to write to you?

Richard Overton: I could get mail from home every day. She would write every day. And I'd write her a letter about every day because after I got, went to officers, I could drive them over to a certain place and then I would set in the truck, in the jeeps. But what it was, I learned how to shoot that M-1 going over there, before I went over there. But after I got that Tommy gun, after I got on the ship, they wanted me to take that Tommy gun on the dash, on the jeep. I'd take that Tommy gun and I had to learn with that Tommy gun. They would give you a little can of milk, a soldier had a little can of milk. That's what they give you at nights when you drink, and you take that milk and drink that milk and then get a sack of cans on the ship when we was going overseas, we was going to our destination, but we left Hawaii then, and they would throw one of

them cans up, and a bunch of soldiers would get out there and throw one of them cans up for me to shoot at.

Target practice.

Richard Overton: Target practice all the way, every day I had to do that until I got to my destination. And so one day after I got that done, one day the ship we was on, they say he got drunk, a sailor man got drunk or something, never went to say, I don't know, we never did know, but anyway our ship – see, you was in a convoy with about five ships, they was all in a convoy, and on the side they had little chasers, outside.

Escort ship.

Richard Overton: Escort ship, so the big ships, bombs couldn't get in there. And it made like a ship and so anyway this little ship kept going to the left, and the ship we was on, and they went to blinking at him, but somehow or another he would never blink back. That was in the evening, and that went down to night, and we still couldn't get him to get back in that convoy. He got out of the convoy. But that little ship was kind of trailing him, tried to get him back in there, but he wouldn't control it, he wouldn't go back. So this little ship had to come back on his trail to get back into shape where he belonged. And so anyway, that ship, we stayed out there that night until the next day, and we didn't know where he was going, and the convoy was gone. It was plum out of sight. It went all that night. And that little one setting out, that ship was circling, didn't know which way to go, and bombs in the water.

That was the ship you were on?

Richard Overton: That was the ship I was on.

Did you ever find out what caused that, if they lost radio contact?

Richard Overton: We don't know why he lost contact. They claimed he was drinking.

The ship's captain?

Richard Overton: It just happened like that. And so that morning here come a great big fighting plane, great big ship loaded with bombs, big airplane fighter. They found out and they didn't know whether this was an American ship or what, so they sailed in, they come in, about from here to the captain, maybe further, but they wouldn't get close because they thought this ship had bombs on it, too, guns on it. But it was an American ship. So anyway they blinked one time and he wouldn't blink. He blinked another time, two times, and so we didn't know, at that time we didn't know what they were doing. So finally he blinked the third time and he still wouldn't blink. Well that ship was still coming, he's still right on our line, see, for bombing. And so he must've got the hint in some kind of way, that ship turned around and went back, and come back, out on the same track and done the same thing, and then we got to hollerin', why don't you blink? Blink? And when it got down to the third blink again, why he blinked. That big ship dropped right down onto us and see that was an American ship. It flew on around us until he seen it was an American ship, and then it called back to some fighter planes. So three fighter planes came that morning and trailed us, go out and come back, go out and come back, until they get low on gas. They would go fill up and the other three ships would take off. So he speed that ship -

So actually they were able to get you to your destination.

Richard Overton: The destination, oh, the Army don't stop, it don't turn around. And so anyway, that ship, they had, he caught up with us before that night, to speed that ship up. See, certain speed you can go, all the ships. You can speed it up. So he caught up with us that night. That's what saved our life. But if the Japs had knowed that was us, oh, they'd bomb that ship.

You could've been a sitting duck.

Richard Overton: That saved our life, for us to live, wasn't for to die, because them Japs was out in the water. And the next day they had, see the ship was out there catching those mines and taking the skins off of them and let the mines go. They wouldn't pick up the mine, they'd just catch 'em and take the skins off so they couldn't blow up.

Deactivate them.

Richard Overton: Yeah.

Do you remember what the first island was that you went to? Do any of the islands stand out to you, like your time in Guam or Pelou?

Richard Overton: Guam, I think Guam was one of them, and another island was Pelou Island, and another one was Angwar.

Did you see much of the Japanese forces? Did you see any of the Japanese soldiers during your time there?

Richard Overton: We seen some all right, we seen some dead. Put 'em in the water. We didn't have time to bury them. When we first got over there, we got over there at night and we got on a flat ship and he had a gate of steel, it was a steel ship but it had a big gate in front, so we all got on, the soldiers got on that and then we went into the bank where the CB was about from here to, they might've been from here to the capitol, maybe further, when we got on it. They we had to get our guns, because we had all our guns. We had 100 pounds with us. We had to get our guns, too, and we didn't have time to dig. They were still shooting.

So fighting was still going on. Do you remember what island that was?

Richard Overton: I'm trying to think. I think that was Pelou Island.

That was a bad battle.

Richard Overton: I know it was because in the day time, when it come to day, I think they had, let me see, we was close to some woods. One day we got there close to some woods, but you couldn't go in them trees. You had to send some planes. They sent three planes. Like this woods out there now, they would send three planes and they would let them go side to side, and they would strafe that place right on through, and another set would come on the next tie. You couldn't go in the woods because you didn't know what is in there, and you'd be surprised how those bullets would clean those trees where you could see. Finally they didn't know where the devil the food was, they were down on the water. They had built something right below the

water and they was above the water. They built a trench or something up in the water. They thought they was over. See, they were shooting over 'em. Then they found out that they was all down in the bottom, and so they killed a lot of those, and when we went in there, before we got off the ship, I got to go back to this, that ship would drop down so we could get off. It's steel. Well they would shoot in that ship every time we let that door go down. They would shoot in and the bullets would come in that ship. It was still, and the bullets would bee-zee-zee around in there.

You're talking about the landing craft?

Richard Overton: That's the landing craft. We had got off the big ship and we got on that flat landing ship. Yeah, they couldn't send the big ship up the bay. They didn't want to wreck that ship, so they stopped way off yonder and put you on that what you call it ship and your bag, landing craft. So when we got there we had to get in some hole, I got in with a hole of some CB's. We didn't have time to dig no holes because there was already a fight.

So you were pretty much always with the CB's then helping to guard them. They would build buildings and air fields and things of that sort.

Richard Overton: That's right, yeah.

How was your food? Did you eat primarily C-rations the whole time?

Richard Overton: Well at that time, they would give you a little stick of candy and you didn't have time to drink no water because you didn't know where that water is for and you couldn't, letting you have some water with you, but we didn't have no water. What they had on a tank, we bought. They give you of course a canteen. You couldn't pack no big water, so all you had to do then is wet your tongue and so do without water now. I can do without water for a week. But that's what get me. I forget about water.

What were some of the men like that you served with? Did you have any friends in your unit?

Richard Overton: I was always friendly. Everybody was just friendly with me just everywhere I went.

You were probably a lot older than a lot of the guys in your unit, right?

Richard Overton: I was the oldest two, when war come that said since you're vet, you can go home, they let two of us go. All of the rest was too young.

Because you were older.

Richard Overton: I was and another fellow. They put us on wheels why, I don't know where we were. Take us a day and a night to get back to Oklahoma. That's where they come back to Oklahoma.

Do you think a lot of those younger soldiers looked up to you because you were older than them?

Richard Overton: They had to. We was all friends. You had to be a friend. You couldn't be, don't hate, you had to be a friend.

Let me ask you, too, sir, I know that the military was segregated back then. What was that like when you got into the combat situation, were you still segregated or were your units more integrated at that point?

Richard Overton: No, you didn't have time. They tell you to go ahead and don't turn back. You never see a soldier turn around and run. Never did see one. You always go forward. They give you some food. And that candy would have stuff in it to make you mean, make you mad.

But in your unit you had white and black soldiers?

Richard Overton: I think it wasn't too many white, I think mostly black.

Was there any racial tension?

Richard Overton: No, couldn't be no racial. You would hug and kiss that. They was just a friend. That reason, some of them outdone me now, still nice, and some of them you strike some they act funny, but our whitest cap now, and I can go down the street, and some of them when they meet me, they got to honor this cap. They got to wish good luck, glad to see you, some of them will stop and shake your hands.

For folks listening to the interview right now, you are wearing a WWII veterans cap.

Richard Overton: Well World War I, I was here WWI. I was at the river bridge, me and my daddy lived in the country and me and him come to town that day, and they said the soldiers are coming to town, and he always liked me, and me and him come to town and _____, stopped car down here on 4th Street where there used to be an old engine down there, and it was just stockyard. We went over to the river bridge, and that day they let 'em out in San Antonio because the train wasn't enough, there was too many for a train, and so they let 'em walk. They started to walk and took 'em a day and a half, a night and a day to walk from San Antonio, and when they come across the river bridge, that's where I was standing.

You were there I guess for kind of a big parade at that point, right? This was a celebration at the end of World War I?

Richard Overton: Yeah. I was big enough to know. I was 12, around 12. And they come down there, and they had that horseshoe on their shoe, on the back. You used to put horseshoes on the back, a little thin piece of metal, and they let 'em walk more complete, but when they got down close to the bridge, they made 'em all get on time, and every one of them just kluk, kluk. It was a thousand soldiers, but look like it was just one kluk, kluk, until they all got on the side of the bridge and that's the day they opened Camp Mabry up. The soldiers had to walk here. And you can't remember, I asked many soldier, many persons, did they see them people walk across the river bridge, and nobody know. It seems like I'm the only one knows it. But Camp Mabry was opened up the same day. That's where they was coming, walked from San Antonio to here.

That's a long way to march a unit.

Richard Overton: They could walk, a day and a night, they made it, sure did. San Antonio wasn't too far for a soldier then, because he was mad and glad to get back to home and he would just take right off.

You said when the war started to wind down, they let you and another come home a little earlier because of your age. What was that like coming back home? Do you remember that day?

Richard Overton: Oh yeah, I remember that day. I can see that little ship now. We come on a fast ship. It took us a day and a night to get back that night, get back from there, and that ship was running all the time. I was just hairy. I was hairy all over. They said I was a monkey. There was hair all over me, and when I got back here, that hair just boo, gone. It did. It just growed, hair all over me. I don't know what's the matter, what that country was, but it wasn't all that long, but just hair on me.

Was your family excited to see you back home? I'm sure they were.

Richard Overton: Oh yeah, they was glad to see me, glad for me to come back.

Did you take a train back to Austin?

Richard Overton: No, I had a car. I had my wife, lady right there, she had the car, and I told her to get, she wanted to get some tires and I told her I was coming home, but I didn't know when, but get four new tires. We were the only ones who could get stuff. A regular person couldn't buy nothing, but we could get good tires and everything. My wife went everywhere I went. All them places I went, to those places, if I was going to stay there two or three months, well they could come there and work. They could. Now when I leave there and go to another place, the lieutenant always tell her you can have your wife here for three or four weeks, you can make that money, you can bring her here. Well they put her on a train for free. They let her come to where we was. And the last time she worked, she worked at that ___ Turkish, that's in California. That's the last place she worked. No, she worked at the shipyard.

When you went in the Army, I know you were married, did you have any children at that point?

Richard Overton: No, me and my wife. I have two kids, I had two kids with her and two kids by my other wife.

But that was after the war.

Richard Overton: No, that's way before the war. I was in the country. That was way back. At that time, they had to go to black wash park, and they was washing there, but instead of taking a cup, a bucket and lift that water, they would take that pot and tilt it, and miscarried all four of those kids, Miss Carrie. And they come here, I think they had ___, too. One living around the corner around here and one live here, and they're real friends, but they just, you know -

So you had four children?

Richard Overton: Four children, miscarried both of them, both women miscarried them. They worked in the wash parks and things, and lift that machine. They had a machine you could lift and catch at the window, and you get no light there, they would lift that machine up and carry it onto the window and set it down, not the whole machine. It didn't have legs, it was just setting on a table. They lift stuff like that.

When you got home from the war, how old were your children when you got home?

Richard Overton: No, they died before I went in the war. No, I didn't have no kids at all.

What was that like coming back to the United States after having been overseas?

Richard Overton: Well I come back, I was all right. I was just kind of a mean person, could hardly get along with, that's the way at that time because I was mad all the time.

Why do you think you were mad?

Richard Overton: I don't know, just mad. You get mad over there every day over there, you get mad.

You think being in the war made you angry? You weren't that way before you went in, were you?

Richard Overton: No, I wasn't that angry. I wasn't scared of nobody, but when you come back, yeah, you was a little bit angry. It didn't wear me or nothing, but you just had to be careful.

So you got back after the war, did you still have land that you farmed on or did you move into the city?

Richard Overton: I was working, I was out here on First Street here somewhere. I think I had a place across the river. That's where I lived.

When did you start working for the state, because I know you retired from the state.

Richard Overton: Yeah, oh that's way back. I worked several places before I went to the state. I went to the state then and worked there. I don't know. 10 or 12 years there.

I think you mentioned before that you worked for several governors, right?

Richard Overton: Well let's see, John Connolly, Christian Smith, and Ben Barnes.

Ben Barnes, lieutenant governor.

Richard Overton: Yeah, you remember him?

I don't remember him but I know of him.

Richard Overton: Oh yeah, Ben Barnes and -

Price Daniel maybe?

Richard Overton: Yeah, Price, yeah. And then I went to the treasury department – Jesse James, Ann Richards and her other guy come out of the Dallas, I forget him. Three of them, all seven of them people died and I'm still here.

Kind of funny to have somebody in charge of money named Jesse James, right?

Richard Overton: Yeah, that Jesse James, he lived a long time, but I used to, I traded a lot of cars at the time. I wanted another car, I'd get him the car whenever I wanted. People couldn't hardly buy their food, but I was buying cars.

Obviously you've seen Austin change a lot over the years.

Richard Overton: A lot of changes. All these houses in here, wasn't one house built, not that big rock house right up here, brick house, it was here, and all the other houses they weren't here. Some of them is old houses because this man next door owns a lumberyard. He would get secondhand lumber, and get new lumber, mixed, out of east Texas some way or another. He had a little lumberyard right around the corner there, and he would build, they built several houses around here, but I was living out across creek then, and then come to town, and then I moved up close to town, and then I moved out across the river.

When did you move here? Do you know what year?

Richard Overton: Back in '45. I built this house in '45 after I come out of the service.

You bought this house in '45.

Richard Overton: Aha, after I come out of the service.

What do you think about all the changes that have occurred in Austin since that time?

Richard Overton: I knew it, I seen all them building out there in the north part of town, when you go out, down far, all that was dirt roads. I had another car then and you had to go to the side of the road and stop to let another car by because you couldn't be going along, you'd slip off on the side and never get back up on the top.

I'm sure you remember when this wasn't even I-35, it was just East ____, right?

Richard Overton: Oh yeah, I remember all this, yeah, I remember that. Yeah, that dirt road, when they say put gravel, when they had streetcars running, you'd run out to 12th Street and go back. Couldn't go all the way because they didn't have it. It wasn't even built the tracks at that time. And under those streetcars they had blocks of wood about like that, but they were sticking under right by the track on each side of the track, not outside. They got rocks out there now. But they had wood right on the side of each track, and when it rained, they kept that for years. We wasn't getting much rain. It was dry, and the tracks would be all right. But after it got to raining so hard, well they had to, them tracks, that wood got wet and it began to swell and the streetcars couldn't run. You know they had to take up all that wood.

That's a lot of work.

Richard Overton: And when they was taking that out, that rice out of the tracks, one or maybe two on this side and two on this side. Then next thing you know, they said they might put gravel up. Well they say where are they gonna get the gravel? That's when they found the gravel pits out in the country. This mile or that mile, builder in different places found gravel pits to come and put on the side of the track. That's what they used then.

Let me ask you sir, I know you got to go to Washington not long ago on an honor flight for World War II veterans. Tell us about that trip.

Richard Overton: Well, it was new to me. I didn't never been there before, but the houses is built a little different. They're built all right, but some of them, they don't align. I don't know, she go every day. But you don't, they're not in line. They be setting this way, and the streets is shallow, little curved streets. She may not pay attention. Do you pay attention there? I noticed it there, and the bushes there is bigger. They got a lot of bushes there.

What did you think of the memorial? Did you get to see the World War II memorial when you went up there?

Richard Overton: I'm pretty sure I did, did I? I done forgot now what I did see up there. I went up in the building there and -

What did you think of the memorial?

Richard Overton: Let's see, what did the memorial look like? I done forgot. What do it look like?

There's the Lincoln Memorial and the reflecting pool and the World War II memorial surrounds that and on the other end there's the big Washington monument.

Richard Overton: Yeah, I seen that and I seen the black man, what's the black man?

Martin Luther King Junior? He gave a speech from there.

Richard Overton: Oh yeah, he got a long – he got a voice on every boy all the way around to his monument.

I was going to ask you, too, sir because you've gotten a lot of attention now, a lot of media is calling wanting to come interview you, folks like myself because you're 107. What do you attribute your long life to? I'm sure you get asked that question a lot.

Richard Overton: I'm just happy all the time. I don't get sorry. Ain't nothing to get sorry for. I don't beg for nothin', I don't have to ask for nothin', and I get what I want, and so I buy what I want to buy, and so nothin' to worry about. And girlfriend, Austin is just full of 'em. You got to dodge 'em all.

You got to dodge what?

Richard Overton: Dodge 'em, get out of the way.

Oh, the cars? Let me ask you about that again. Austin has changed so much in your life, you think it's changed for the good or the worse?

Richard Overton: It changed for the better because you make more money now. See, I worked for 25 cents a day. Now you believe that?

Oh I can.

Richard Overton: 25 cents a day. And I would save money out of that, usually \$5 or \$6 a week. Some of the stuff, you'll get a sack of flour for 50 cents, and soda water is 3 cents, chewing gum is 2 cents, see all that kind of stuff. I worked out in the country there where you could just, stuff was just nothing.

Obviously inflation has changed.

Richard Overton: It has changed, I'm telling you. There's just too much stuff and you just can't get all of it.

I know I've taken a lot of your time.

Richard Overton: No, that's all right.

I wanted to ask you, too, I know there's talk about trying to get you to Washington again to meet the president. Is that something you want to do? I think that would be a great honor.

Richard Overton: If I know, I can catch him now, I'll go back. I don't mind going back. I enjoyed the trip.

That'd be great. Yes sir.

Richard Overton: And they let me drink, the lady had a little bottle of whiskey, and it tickled me. A little bitty, and she come up to me one day and I thought she was joking, and she had that little bottle, what she drinks, have some of it, and come brought me some. I didn't know it was whiskey. I drank it. It was good.

And I think I read somewhere that you always drink a little bit of whiskey with your coffee, is that right, every morning?

Richard Overton: Oh yea, I do. I haven't drank no whiskey now in a long time because I'm taking pills. But in the evening – at the morning, you can take one for the three spoon in your coffee, you stir it up, oh my God, yeah, give you muscles. See, when you sleep at night you don't strain your muscle, you let 'em lay there and they just kind of druggish. But you get up the next morning and pour three spoons of whiskey in that coffee and stir it surely good and drink that, that muscle will get, you'll get up, take your time, but when you drink that whiskey and stuff and get that muscle warm, that make your blood run fast. Your blood run through that muscle. When you cut that muscle then you gonna lose a lot of blood. Well that muscle will get soft and that blood will come through faster. When that muscle get cold, that blood got to be slow. That makes you sluggish. You may not believe it. I tell people that but they say oh, just -

Well whatever you're doing has worked because you made it to 107, it worked for you.

Richard Overton: It works. I used to drink a lot of whiskey but I don't drink I now. I do drink a little bit.

I know you told me that Governor Perry came here recently and he brought you –

Richard Overton: There's two sitting right there now on that counter.

He brought you some whiskey and some cigars, right?

Richard Overton: Yeah, I sit all around here, and I got a bunch of them in there now, cigars. I got one here. I smoke five cigars a day, 12 cigars a day.

Well sir, I've got one last question and then we'll close the interview. We're trying like I mentioned before, we're saving these stories for posterity for future generations and we have archives at the Land Office that go back to the 1700s. With that in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview 100 years from now, 200 years from now, long after you and I are gone? Any advice or anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview? Any words you'd want to pass on to them? Or any questions I've not asked that I should've asked?

Richard Overton: Oh Lord, there's so many, that ain't no questions at all you asked me after what I've been through. I've been through this world up and down, in and out, on the water, on land.

I guess one last question. A lot of people think you are the oldest living veteran now in America. How does that make you feel?

Richard Overton: I don't know. I ain't got nothin' for it. If I got something for it it would make me feel good. But I ain't got nothin' and I feel like I just dropped. Instead of pushed up, I went down. One quarter since I've been -

You got some whiskey and some cigars -

Richard Overton: I know, but that ain't it. But anyway, I don't worry about it.

Well sir, it's been our honor. Thank you and Amand, as well for letting us come out and film you and record you today.

Richard Overton: Appreciate it.

On behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everyone at the Land Office, we want to thank you for your service to our nation. Thank you very much.

Richard Overton: Thank you, thank you very much.

[End of recording]