

**CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

INTERVIEW WITH: D. BURKE KIBLER
INTERVIEWER: JAMES M. DENHAM
PLACE: LAKELAND, FLORIDA
DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 10, 2003

D= DENHAM (James M.)
K= KIBLER (D. Burke)

D: Mr. Kibler, how are you today? Today, I'd like to focus primarily on your background so that we lead up to that point when we can talk about Mr. Chiles. Where were you born Mr. Kibler?

D: yes

K: That was both the Junior and the Senior High School back in those days.

D: Just a block or so from here.

K: Yes, Right across the lake.

D: While we're still in your early days even in Dunnellon, can you tell me a little about your father? His family? How did he get to Dunnellon? Did he meet his wife, your mother in Dunnellon? Was your mother also from Dunnellon?

K: No, she was from St. Petersburg. And she was a student in the Florida State College for Women. And she was a sorority sister of my father's middle sister; he had two sisters, Clara and Lucille. And they were both Pi Beta Phi's and she introduced him to my father who, at the time was, attending Georgia Institute of Technology. He was an engineer.

D: And they just had the chance to meet at some point?

K: Somewhere, I don't know exactly the details and they had I guess a whirlwind type romance.

D: Now was he a native of Dunnellon, or a native of Florida?

K: He was born, I think in Florence, SC. The family came, my grandfather, AB Kibler, DB Kibler, he had a twin brother called AB they moved from SC to Fla in the 1890's somewhere. He was a station agent, ran, operated a telegraph and then later went to Inverness (32 B(n)-62 Inverness)n's

D: Okay, so your mother's family. What was her maiden name?

K: Dew, D-E-W.

D: That's where Nancy comes in. [Nancy Dew Kibler Ross]

K: That's right, my younger daughter.

D: By the way, I'm going to be with George Ross tonight for our Historic Lakeland meeting.

K: Oh good

D: Your son-in-

D: Now so that day that you moved, where did you move first when you came to Lakeland? Where did you live?

K: 751 Edgewood Dr.

D: Way out back then.

K: It was, yet I live on Fairmont Ave now down on the lot, just before you get to Lake Hollingsworth, on the corner and the southern end of Fairmont, it's only two blocks long, if you just kept going south directly on Fairmount you'd run into this house. It's an English Tudor house. It was owned by Jim Manley. It was leased for a year and-a-half or two years until my father built the house which is caddy corner to where I live now. Dr. John Peacock, in Virginia, bought the house from my father's estate, from my mother's

since then. We roomed together in college and I've known him all of my adult, of course all of my life except for 8 years. Albert King, who is deceased, was a doctor at Watson Clinic, he was in high school with me and probably my closest friend in high school. His family, A. G. King's daddy ran a produce company. His sister is still alive. She is married to Billy Chase whose son works in a department in, I think, Smith Barney. His father was a very well known citizen and one of the great athletes produced by Polk County. He set records that were held for a long time at University of Florida in both swimming and in football and his father which was young Bill's, I say young Bill, he's in his 50's now, his

D: Yes, that was a long time ago. That was fairly recently.

K: That was more recent. But Hagan, Sheriff John Logan, I knew his son, Clayton, who was a good friend of mine, Clayton Logan.

D: What about Pat . . . ?

K: Pat Gordon. I knew Pat. Yeah, Pat. He preceded Hagan. Hagan came in because Pat was sort of scandalized. Pat had been a constable as I remember and he certainly was reputed to have been involved in petty graft and I had no doubt that those allegations were correct.

D: I did an interview with an African American gentleman and he talked about Pat's hiring. He was the first sheriff to hire African American law people. And it was very early on, in the early 50's and it was even long before the voting rights act came in and it was

Lake recently that it was pretty much sand bottom that you could still see that. My father told me that. This was a wonderful place back before the 1st War and even up until the middle of boom time when the development started it was a very popular place for people all over the county to come and picnic. Back in the early part of the century being in horse and wagon come in on the south side and they'd spend the afternoon, Sunday afternoons would be on Lake Hollingsworth. And that pavilion was built in order to cater to these people who would come in and have a place. And that when you'd go and rent bathing suits which was very common any place there was swimming. Of course, they had diving boards and a restaurant of sorts there. And that continued on, that I can recall, that you could get beer, 3.2 beer because Lakeland was dry then and people still did some swimming there. But the bacteria count in the Lake came up by the early 30's.

D: That's really amazing .

K: They still had swimming, I think, probably until the early 30's it still operated. But it burned down somewhere, I'd guess, around '34-'35 and the Crystal Lake remained the only really viable swimming option. They built a swimming pool on the north side, just south of where the hospital is now. A federal project, the WPA or PWA or one of the alphabet projects. That was the first swimming pool in Lakeland.

D: Now is it true also that you could swim in Lake Mirror? And in Lake Morton? Or was that similar to Lake Hollingsworth?

K: All those lakes were, had a form of pollution in them. It wasn't sanitary sewage and kids did swim in them. In fact, I've probably been swimming in most of them. Lake Hunter was a better lake, it was a deeper lake and there was a contest the Ledger would have, the first person to catch a bass in each of the lakes within the city limits. There weren't many fish in the lakes then, I mean bass, I guess because of the pollution there. Lake Hollingsworth had a lot of catfish in it, o

But I don't . . .

D: Can't really think of anything specifically?

K: Everybody was, uh, nobody had very much money then and everybody worked. I never had a paper route, I substituted on paper routes. I ushered at the Palace Theatre and at the Detroit Tigers, when they were playing baseball out there. I always loved baseball. The Tigers, of course, were training as long as I can remember. They probably started about '32 or '33 or '34 something like that. I remember the middle '30's going out there.

D: Do you ever get a chance to go anymore?

K: You know, I have a chance, I don't! I like minor league ball. There was a time when I'd go out and see, they were called the Lakeland Pilots. But somehow I lost interest. Exhibition ball doesn't really appeal to me as much. I prefer the minor league ball.

D: Now when your father came here did he continue in the phosphate business? Or did he change careers?

K: No, well, the phosphate business was depleting, the hard rock deposits were depleting and so time was limited. But he continued running the last phosphate mine, but it was the hard rock business, it was the merger of two businesses. CJ Camden and the company then that my father had acquired from the Belgians, called Kibler-Camp Phosphate Enterprise. They continued mining up until the middle to the late 50's and the deposits they were mining, they just ran out of them. Those deposits were smaller, a much higher grade than our Dunnellon Place.

D: So where was the location of his activities here in Polk County?

K: Well, he operated from the time he moved here. Of course, remember we moved here in the early 30's and he continued running those mines up there from the early 30's for another 20 some years.

D: You mean in Dunnellon.

K: In Dunnellon

D: Oh, Okay.

K: Even though he lived up here. They didn't stop mining until the late 50's so at least 25 years that those continued on. But, he would go up there once a week and a fine superintendent ran them and I would go with him from time to time during the summertime. And he was also with my grandfather in the cattle business and so expanded that during the time my father acquired it. A lot of it was on leased land in Polk County from the phosphate companies, some of the current companies are still there. IMC is one. The phosphate industry has changed so.

K: Well, my wife's mother was born in Germany and her and mother and her father was a baker and they came to Racine, Wisconsin and she came down and her father who was a Steitz was her maiden name and he was an avowed Nazi. When I say Nazi, he wasn't Nazi, of course, but he was very loyal to those, he had pride in what was going on. He would listen to the broadcast in German when Hitler would make a speech. And I would say that . . .

D: And he lived in St. Petersburg?

K: No, he lived here on Lake Hollingsworth in the house where Dr. Jack Stephans lives now. It's a yellow brick house just around the Lake from where Vane McClurg lives. He was an old man then, but he was proud of Germany and Mr. Bryant embarrassed him because he was very, very strongly against Hitler. I think most people in this country, there was very little support for the Germans. People were afraid of the Germans. So many people had just gotten through WWI. It hadn't been very long.

D: And the Depression was going on and that occupied people.

K: And the Depression and all and there was a strong anti-war sentiment. I have bits and pieces I remember, groupings when they had the, all kinds of clubs, protests, there about Veterans of future wars and things like that.

D: The America First Movement. I guess they would've had something similar to that perhaps here in Lakeland.

K: I'd say that it was pretty clear, obvious, that when Roosevelt was elected in 1940

D: So 1941 you entered University of Florida that5 h 05 F)-1 06 0)-4 3 5 0)31 0)-1 (2 1 0)31 0)31 0

K: But we weren't really certain, like it could have been in the Philippines someplace. Nobody really identified Pearl Harbor as being part of the Hawaiian Islands. And then that next day a lot of us went down and volunteered for the Army Air Corp. We had no Air force then. And they told me I was colorblind. I'm not, I probably wouldn't pass the test because I had some nearsightedness then that I kind of out grew. But several of my fraternity brothers went on in at that time. We, after it calmed down, decided that they couldn't absorb everybody and everybody; there was counseling, go ahead with the education. I was in ROTC, stayed in ROTC and they offered ROTC in the summer and they had never done that before. I stayed in school until I finished my sophomore year but I had a half year of advanced ROTC and went to basic training and after that came back to the University of Florida in to what they called the ASTP Arms Specialized Training Program and got another semester of college and went to officer candidate school overseas.

D: And that would've been in 1943?

K: Well, '43 is when I went into the service. And then went to Fort Bragg, NC. From Fort

thing because the whole circumstance changed. Suddenly we weren't moving forward anymore. And we discovered we were going up to relieve the 101st Infantry, I mean, the 101st Airborne Division that was at Bastogne and then we substituted for the 4th Armament, they decided they wanted an army division to go there. All of this was very chaotic and very, that was the thing about war, nobody really knew what was going on.

D: For a long time afterwards.

K: Yes, forever.

D: So the next question is pretty obvious. How did the experience change your life? I mean, that is kind of a follow up to this.

K: War does change you. It makes you, ways even to this day, one of the great fears you had, after a while it isn't so bad, but you find that you were just incredibly frightened of getting killed. And when you saw that you probably were going to get killed in this in the kind of job I had. The only way I could handle it was I said, okay, you got to die sometime. And you don't want to go by the example of some of the Forward Observers. The infantry said that they won't go out and adjust fire. They want to stay in the hole and get shot at. I wasn't going to do that. I just finally decided, "the hell with it." If I get killed,

and a half -- two hours, and finally they gave the word to go on. I can still remember that was as nervous a time, I can remember. One fellow said he really knew what he was talki

accepted at Harvard but I had to have a degree. I decided that I'd just stay. We'd had a child and going to Boston lost some of its appeal. I worked that summer and enrolled in law school that September of '47. I went straight through and got my degree in September of '49.

D: Well, what I'd like to do is pick-up when we resume with your wife, getting married. I think we've surpassed that a little bit. And then pick it up there when you began law school.