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CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: D. BURKE KIBLER

INTERVIEWER: JAMES M. DENHAM

PLACE:

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D: Are there any other people in Lakeland that may have served in other places? Not
right along side you, that you knew or kept in contact with and had a chance to talk
about your experience with?

K: Homer Hooks. Homer has been a close friend of mine. We were in college together.
We didn’t really know each other well then, he was a couple or three years ahead of me.
But Homer was an Infantry Platoon Leader and he served in the 102nd Infantry Division
and I was in the 103rd

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K: Oh, no, I think it was very clear that probably in the history of the nation has it been
more unified than in the effort of WWII. WWI was not the total and complete
involvement to the extent it was in WWII. During WWII it was really felt that the world
was at risk and we were the last hope to save the world from going through the tyranny
and domination of the Axis powers.

D: Now one of the things, in this regard, that I haven’t talked to you about is the role of
African Americans and black people that perhaps we can go back to a little bit, in
Lakeland. Do you remember what the role of African Americans was? Do you
remember seeing African Americans in the service at all and what kind of things they
were doing?

K: Of course, we were still a segregated service. Generally, in the army the Afro-Americans were in more service capacities. When I say service, I’m thinking in the terms
of, quartermaster, and truck driving, doing logistical things. There were some combat
units and, in fact, I had involvement, I can’t think of the name of it, with one that was a
black tank destroyer outfit and they had high morale. They had white officers and that for
the most part was true. There was one black infantry division that was called “The Black
Buffalo” and they fought in. . .

D: Kind of a kin to the Buffalo Soldiers?

K: I don’t know, they had a patch and it was a black division and they didn’t really have
success using it as a division, it was broken up. It was in the Korean War, I read
something about this, where they discovered, a lot of just the biases I guess, that were
there, and there were feelings that the black soldiers individually would not do as well as
white soldiers and they were trying to put them in units that would, billed as “free” and
that sort of thing. For the most part, there were some exceptions, I would say to that. But
it was the attitude about segregation, from history, that still tended to have segregation in

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and the chemist and a couple others, I’d say that a great number of people were black.
And we had some black people, our cook, who sort of raised me, in that way she was
sort of a member of the family. And when we moved to Lakeland from Dunellon, she

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was. They were trying to have answer sessions to try to educate the troops and tell them
what was going on but it became pretty apparent that the dropping of the bomb ended
the war. And that kept those of us who were combat units from making the assault on
Japan. That was something you were briefed on, the casualty rates. The casualty rates
were incredibly high.

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K: That‘s where I met him. He had been at the University before then, but when I first
met him, I was in law school. Then there was Dewey Dye, a very prominent Bradenton
lawyer. Dewey and I were very close friends, we studied together. He died recently.
That’s the trouble when you get to my age, Mike, so many of these that you are thinking
of are gone. They’ve died. I really need to refresh my memory about my classmates in
law school.

D: We can do that; we can come back

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someone needed a criminal lawyer, there would usually be sole practitioners that did
criminal work. But you did whatever needed to be done. If you represented a business,
you did their tax work, you formed their corporations, you represented them in
reorganizing and if that had merged. If they had domestic relations problems, they
expected you to handle them. Also, their divorces for their daughters and sons, too.
Really, if they were your client, you did whatever was needed to be done. And, of
course, real estate was an important part of your business practice. Real estate has now
become a function of title companies and lawyers don’t have the same role they once
did. It is almost now done with title insurance, while back then, it was done by the
lawyer’s opinion examining the title. Our firm developed into sort of a specialist firm
because we started representing the phosphate industry. This being a simple mining

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K: Oh Yeah, there clearly was a lot of tension. This was at the beginning of the media
circuses that came later. I’m trying to put together that Scott Kelly was in the state
senate and he became prominent and became a statewide figure who later became a
gubernatorial candidate.

D: Judge Kelly’s brother.

K: Yes, Scott was on the city commission, was mayor, and then he was in the
legislature, in the state senate and he conducted some hearings that were related, I
think. Hearings on the state level about scandals in the road [department]. Contractors
being on the take, that sort of thing. This was about that era and he ran, seemed like he
ran twice. Brailey Odham was another character.

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D: Insurance sales? Trying to figure out a way to get state insurance or something?

K: I had a former football player I used to fish with, he was in law school, friendly fellow
and he took up with Charley, he was one of his bag men and afterwards he was kind of
open to me about it. He was going around making collections and he was flush as could
be. Of course, Charley probably would’ve been elected, but it really became obvious
what he was doing and it was a real turn against him. I never knew Charley Johns. But
this was happening just about the time I was getting out of law school; it must have been
’48 or ’49?

D: Charley must have been in the state house at that time.

K: Well, he was president of the senate when Dan died and Dan died in 1949 [1953].

D: I think you’re mistaken because what happened was, Charley Johns ultimately ran

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D: Can you reflect a little on that?

K: When he was accused of all sorts of things. Homosexuals were a big problem and he
was .. . .he said there were a bunch of queers in our schools and they’re contaminating
our schools.

D: Particularly our universities.

K: Yes, I don’t remember him attacking the high schools, too. He was after the
universities, I know.

D: There was also a major attempt to investigate the NAACP and to destroy the NAACP
primarily through finding the names of the financial supporters of the NAACP. I think that
was another area, by claiming that the NAACP was under control of Communists. Again,
if you look at what is going on in the nation you can kind of see that, as well. This is the
same time as the McCarthy Hearings, generally the same time frame. Johns was the
Florida angle to that, I imagine. It made McCarthy quite popular for a while and I would
imagine that Korea and a lot of the things not going our way necessarily in the world did
worry people about the Cold War, etc.

K: This was the beginning of the Cold War and it was clear that there was fear of
Communism generally. McCarthy, at first, had pretty broad support and then he became
sort of obsessive and really he destroyed himself, which was an interesting era. But
Charley Johns was a much smaller fish in a smaller school.

D: Do you remember Leroy Collins?