

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY
The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin ValleyOral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Reverend Billie H. Pate

PLACE OF BIRTH: Kemp, Kaufman County, Texas

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATES OF INTERVIEWS: March 5 and 12, 1981

PLACE OF INTERVIEWS: Dos Palos, Merced County

NUMBER OF TAPES: 4

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Preface

Reverend Pate is an extremely literate man. He is quiet and careful in speech and manner. He seems to be a person long accustomed to being in front of the public. His voice is well modulated and pleasant to listen to. We conducted each of our interviews and then sat back and talked. I always enjoyed seeing Dr. Pate. He made a very special impression on me. One of those people you never forget and always long to see again. Interviewing him was the high point of my activities with the Project.

Michael Neely
Interviewer

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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INTERVIEWEE: Reverend Billie H. Pate (Age: 55)

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATED: March 5, 1981

M.N.: This is an interview with Reverend Billie Pate for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Michael Neely at 1613 Ida Street, Dos Palos, California on March 5, 1981 at 9:00 a.m.

M.N.: You were eleven years old when you came to California. Is that right?

Pate: Ten.

M.N.: Do you remember anything at all from Texas?

Pate: Yes, a good bit, but as I said there are parts of the early days in east Texas that I've really kind of blocked out, but I remember a lot of things.

M.N.: What's the earliest thing you remember?

Pate: Well, school for one thing and then also our living conditions and the way we lived and the work that we did. You see, my father was a sharecropper and we had a small farm.

M.N.: What was the country like where you lived?

Pate: Well, we lived in the river bottom area and there were lots of trees where we lived in particular--small hills, sand hills with trees and clearings for farming.

M.N.: What kind of trees?

Pate: A lot of oak trees and pecans, this type of tree.

M.N.: And your house, what was that like?

Pate: Well, the last place, we were there about three years, there was just a small house with a living room, a kitchen and one bedroom.

M.N.: What kind of a bed did you have?

Pate: Well, we had a regular size bed, but three of us slept in it.

M.N.: Was it a feather bed?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: Did you make it yourself, your family?

Pate: Yes. My mother was quite handy on these things, and she and other ladies helped each other and they made their own bedding and quilts with their down and with whatever they had available.

M.N.: And who did you sleep with in this bed?

Pate: My brother and then my sister who was older than both of us.

M.N.: Did you have any problems with three people sharing the bed, someone pulling the covers?

Pate: Yes, that's always a problem, but with each other I don't remember any problems. We seemed to have gotten along quite well. But we didn't have room, so we just had to double up.

M.N.: Did it bother you that you didn't have your own room?

Pate: No, because I didn't know you were supposed to have your own room.

M.N.: What did the house look like from the outside?

Pate: It was an old house, just boards nailed on the outside, and it was old. The cracks were bad and wind would blow through and the dust and all but it was just an old shack, really.

M.N.: What did you have on the floor?

Pate: Nothing, just wood.

M.N.: And the kitchen, what did that look like?

Pate: Well, it had a cast iron wood stove and just a table and a couple of benches, one on each side.

M.N.: Did you have indoor plumbing?

Pate: No.

M.N.: Where did you get your water?

Pate: We had a cistern that caught the water.

M.N.: What's that?

Pate: Well, a cistern is a holding tank, like, and it catches the water from the house, it's piped in through the gutters--from the gutters into the cisterns.

M.N.: From the roof of the house?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: And you had enough water that way?

Pate: No, not really. Well, in the summertime if it didn't rain we had to be very careful, so there was usually a shortage of water.

M.N.: Was the cistern underground?

Pate: Underground, yes.

M.N.: And you would dip with a bucket?

Pate: A bucket and a rope.

M.N.: And then you carried it in. Did you set it in a bucket in the kitchen?

Pate: Yes. There was always a water bucket and the dipper that went with it for the drinking.

M.N.: Was it a wooden bucket?

Pate: No, it was metal.

M.N.: Do you remember what your father looked like?

Pate: Yes, quite well. He was a tall, slender person. I was thinking back the other day that when we came to California he was a young man. I guess youngsters always think of their parents as being old.

M.N.: How old was he?

Pate: Let's see, he would have been about 38.

M.N.: And he was 28 when you were born. A young man.

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: Do you remember how he dressed in Texas, what kind of clothes he usually wore?

Pate: Yes. Then, Sunday clothes were khaki and they wore the blue denim type clothes, docking they called it, for work, but the dress clothes were khaki.

M.N.: Did he wear overalls?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: And what kind of shoes did he wear?

Pate: The lace up work shoes, the heavy type work shoes.

M.N.: Did he wear a hat?

Pate: Yes, straw.

M.N.: And what did your mother wear?

Pate: Now, we're talking about the summertime, when we were working. She always wore a jumper type garment and she was always overdressed. I can remember very plainly. She always wore a lot of clothing. She said, "Well, it's cooler when you wear more clothing." And I can remember my mother making and wearing bonnets. She liked the bonnet.

M.N.: Was she a good cook?

Pate: Excellent. Excellent.

M.N.: What time did you all get up?

Pate: Well, probably around 6:30, 7:00 o'clock because we walked to school so we got up a little earlier.

M.N.: What time did your parents get up, the same time?

Pate: No, no. My father was always up before daybreak.

M.N.: And your mother?

Pate: Shortly thereafter.

M.N.: Do you remember the morning routine for the family?

Pate: Yes. I can remember my father would get up early because he always

had the animals to feed and wood to chop and these things. He had to do chores in the morning and the night. And my mother would be up cooking and getting ready for the day, for the field, for school.

M.N.: Did your mother work in the field?

Pate: Yes, always.

M.N.: What did you have for breakfast?

Pate: Well, we always had chickens so we had eggs, and we always had a milk cow so we'd have milk. We ate the things we grew or supplied there on the little farm.

M.N.: And then, the children would go to school?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: How far was it?

Pate: About three miles.

M.N.: And you walked?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: Where was your parents' work?

Pate: On the farm, because you see my father was the sharecropper so he had the land leased by the year.

M.N.: What kind of work did he do there?

Pate: Well, in the spring you'd get the land ready, harrowing, plowing and so forth, getting the land ready. We raised cotton primarily. He farmed strictly with mules so it was rather slow going. He didn't farm too many acres but it took him a long time to get ready and so his days were spent on the line and in the wintertime there wasn't much to do except take care of the livestock.

M.N.: Was he paid?

Pate: No. No. See, he sold his cotton, maybe he made three or four bales of cotton a year. That was very good.

M.N.: How much was it worth? Do you remember?

Pate: No, I don't. Not much.

M.N.: How did you dress to go to school?

Pate: We just wore the ducking pants and most of the time they were made by Mother or someone. They made most of our clothes. We didn't buy clothes; we didn't buy very many things.

M.N.: Where did you get things that you had? Did you make them?

Pate: Made them, and the food stuff. We grew everything we ate except sugar and coffee, I guess, primarily sugar and coffee. The rest of the things you know we grew there, and really our diet wasn't that broad. I can remember we ate a lot of gravy.

M.N.: What would be a special treat?

Pate: A special treat? All right. In the summertime we would pick a bale of cotton to be able to go to town with father. He had to haul the cotton about four miles to the gin and then if you'd have a little money, a special treat would be to have store bought bread--we called it light bread--to have light bread and bologna that night, or cheese and crackers, those were special treats.

M.N.: Do you remember what your school looked like?

Pate: Not too well. Not that well at all.

M.N.: Was it a one room schoolhouse?

Pate: No. In Texas, we had about four teachers in the school where we went. So it was a one grade school, each grade had a separate teacher.

M.N.: I don't think I asked you what that town was.

Pate: A little rural area about 50 miles from Dallas called Kemp, Texas.

M.N.: Well, how long did you stay there?

Pate: At the last place we lived, about three years.

M.N.: And then you came to California?

Pate: Yes, from this place we came to California.

M.N.: In what year was that that you came to California?

Pate: 1935, in the fall.

M.N.: The year or two just prior to coming to California, do you

remember the kinds of things that happened that made your family decide to leave?

Pate: Yes. As I mentioned, Dad was a very poor sharecropper and times were really hard for him to make a living. There were four children and I remember when we decided we were coming to California the summer of 1935, Dad worked not only his little farm but he worked out in order to save a little bit of money. He did what they called row binding--binding corn in shocks--running a row binder at night by lantern. It was pulled by horses, and he worked all night and his pay was \$1.25 a night. Then he worked the next day to get ready. And then another thing that helped, my father's father's estate was settled, and my father got \$36 from it. This was the money that we used to come to California on.

M.N.: Were times hard for everyone?

Pate: Everyone, yes.

M.N.: Was there a dust problem?

Pate: Not where we were, but you see this was the heart of the Depression.

M.N.: What effect did that have on you? How did things change?

Pate: I don't remember anything before the Depression. I just remember this part and I thought everyone [was the same]. [We lived] in a small area which was 50 miles from Dallas, but I had never been to Dallas.

M.N.: Had you ever ridden in a car?

Pate: Yes, my father had an old car.

M.N.: What kind was that?

Pate: Well, I remember he had a Model T Ford.

M.N.: Do you remember the first time you rode in it?

Pate: No, I don't, but I remember we traveled by wagon a lot before that and I can remember traveling by wagon going down to see relatives a few miles away and riding in the wagon.

M.N.: Had you ever ridden in a train?

Pate: No. No. Had never seen one.

M.N.: Can you describe the immediate preparations of your family before

leaving [for California]? What did they do?

Pate: Yes, it was a happy time. My mother had two half-sisters that were living here in Firebaugh, and we were coming here to where they were. We worked all summer getting ready and sold the few things that we had that had to be disposed of which wasn't much, and then working and trying to get a few dollars together. And I remember that when we left Texas we loaded up a few things and we came to California in a Model A Ford, the six of us with a couple of mattresses on the top of the car and we took off.

M.N.: Exactly what time was that do you remember?

Pate: Yes, it was late August, early September, in the fall of 1935.

M.N.: And do you remember the trip out?

Pate: Yes. It was very hot that year, I remember that, and we stopped up in west Texas. This was quite a trip for me because as I said I had never been to Dallas and to see the tall buildings and the cars and the people was unreal. We drove up to west Texas and spent some time, a night, with my father's sister.

M.N.: Where was that?

Pate: In Wichita Falls, Texas. We hadn't seen her for years and years because back then if they lived any distance at all they didn't visit very much.

M.N.: Was her house modern?

Pate: No. No.

M.N.: Was it outside of town or in town?

Pate: Outside.

M.N.: Were you impressed with it in any way?

Pate: No, I was more impressed when we got to New Mexico. Then we came on to Albuquerque, New Mexico, and we spent about a week there. My mother had a half-brother that lived in Albuquerque and he was rather affluent. He worked for the power companies and had for years and so he had a good job and they had a nice home, a little Spanish stucco home and we spent a week there. And this was when I was exposed to the bicycle. The kids had a bike, and we spent the week there learning how to ride the bike.

M.N.: And you had never seen one before?

Pate: No.

M.N.: What kind of bicycle was that?

Pate: Well, it was the old clunker type. It wasn't the five-speed or three-speed, it was just a regular old bike that was rather difficult to operate, to peddle and so forth. But we learned to ride it.

M.N.: And you liked that.

Pate: I liked that very much.

M.N.: Was there anything else on the trip that surprised you?

Pate: Yes, yes. I remember coming through the mountains over Needles area, the Oatman Hills. I remember that very well. It was the old road, very steep, and with very sharp curves. I remember the fear of coming across them, and my poor mother was oh terribly frightened coming across there and always telling my father, "Howard, slow down."

M.N.: When you were traveling from Wichita Falls to Albuquerque, did you stop on the way?

Pate: No, we made that trip in one day, long day. But then when we left Albuquerque we had to stop over.

M.N.: Where did you stop?

Pate: Well, we spent I remember one night down by Needles and we slept along the road.

M.N.: Wasn't that dangerous?

Pate: Yes, I guess it was and quite scary to me because we spent the night. We stopped after dark and it was a gravel pit and we had heard about the rattle snakes in California so I was very frightened all that night. I just knew snakes were everywhere.

M.N.: Did you sleep on the ground?

Pate: No, we slept on the mattress. We'd take the mattress off from the car and sleep on it.

M.N.: Did you cook food?

Pate: We ate mostly sandwiches, stuff like that that could be purchased.

M.N.: How much money did you have when you left Texas. Do you remember?

Pate: Had the \$36 and not a whole lot more.

M.N.: Do you remember how much you had when you got to California?

Pate: None. No, my father just didn't have any resources when we got here.

M.N.: Do you remember how he reacted to that? You were talking about him being a hard worker. He had to be a proud man. Only a proud man would work like that. All of a sudden having nothing. Do you remember how it affected him?

Pate: My father never shared feelings. He was a very quiet man and I really don't know how he felt. I wish I did, but he was a very quiet man. He just didn't talk about things like that. He didn't talk about personal things. Never shared a feeling with me that I can remember.

M.N.: Did he laugh?

Pate: Not a great deal. I think the hard life really took a toll on some of these fellows because it was hard and the big responsibility he had feeding six people.

M.N.: How about your mother, did she talk about it?

Pate: Yes, yes. My mother talked about it a great deal, a great deal more than he did which was nothing. But it affected my mother differently. My mother was, for that day, rather intelligent having gone through the eighth grade which was quite good from that area. So she felt things perhaps more keenly or expressed them more openly.

M.N.: How much education would a school teacher have?

Pate: My mother could have taught school.

M.N.: So she was actually very educated.

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: Well, you got to California and you went to these relatives in Firebaugh?

Pate: Yes, we drove from Needles to Firebaugh the next day and this was a rather long trip in a Model A Ford and we got into Firebaugh after dark again.

M.N.: You came from Needles in one day?

Pate: Yes. You stay with it. And it was after dark and we didn't know where we were so we spent the next night just outside of Firebaugh by the canal and again we took our mattress down and slept on the ground.

M.N.: When you came into California were you stopped at a station?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: And what was that like, do you remember?

Pate: Well, we had heard about it and they were looking for fruits and plants and so forth and of course, we didn't have anything like that but we did stop for the inspection.

M.N.: Were they polite?

Pate: Yes, I'm sure they were.

M.N.: They were decent people.

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: Did they ask a lot of questions?

Pate: No, because we didn't have much to inspect, you know, it didn't take long.

M.N.: You didn't encounter any hostility on the trip?

Pate: I don't remember any. I can remember it was really quite pleasant, under the adverse circumstances. I guess Albuquerque helped a great deal.

M.N.: Now, you were camped outside of Firebaugh.

Pate: So then the next morning we asked, or my father asked, where the Hammond Ranch was. That's where we were headed.

M.N.: Hammond?

Pate: Yes. Hammond Ranch. So we went out the next morning and my uncle had a little store at the cotton camp. At that time it was a large cotton camp, huge.

M.N.: When was this?

Pate: This was in September of 1935, when we got here. We were able to get two cotton cabins, one to cook in and the other to sleep in.

M.N.: What did they look like?

Pate: Just very small wood cabins, probably fourteen by sixteen. Just a small square cabin with no water, no plumbing of any kind.

M.N.: Did they have beds in them?

Pate: No. We had to furnish our own, everything.

M.N.: How did you establish housekeeping?

Pate: Well, we stayed in this first cotton camp about six months, we just had the beds, that's all, and a stove and table.

M.N.: What kind of stove?

Pate: At this time when we came to California, I remember we had the bottled gas, the Flame-0 they called it.

M.N.: Flame-0?

Pate: Flame-0, it was like butane is today. And so we picked cotton that fall. We started to school also. There was a school at the cotton camp, but my mother didn't want us to go to that school.

M.N.: Why was that?

Pate: Well, she just wasn't accustomed to migrant people and she thought well it just wouldn't be best, we probably couldn't get the best education there so we went to a school called Oraloma.

M.N.: It was a public school?

Pate: Yes. Now this was a one room school out about fifteen miles from here.

M.N.: How did you get there?

Pate: Our teacher's husband picked us up in his car which was the bus. It was a little sedan car.

M.N.: Can you contrast the migrant school from the public schools?

Pate: Well, really the other school was migrant also, because we were all migrants. But the school at the camp had many Mexican-Americans, and we were not accustomed to these people. We had never been around them and so my mother wasn't comfortable with it at that time.

M.N.: And in the public school?

Pate: There were fewer and at the public school many of us were from the south.

M.N.: What about the teachers, were they different?

Pate: Well, I didn't know the teachers at the camp school, but the teacher at the public school was--well, it wasn't a good situation. Probably this was one of the hardest years of my life, the first year we came.

M.N.: How was that?

Pate: Well, for some reason our teacher resented and made it known that she didn't like the Okies and the Arkies and the Texans. So, it was a very bad relationship. See, my brother and I were in the same grade and then there were two other boys, one from Oklahoma and one from Texas. So there were three of us from Texas and one from Oklahoma in this group and the teacher made it very difficult for us.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

M.N.: How was it difficult?

Pate: Well, abusive, she was abusive towards us.

M.N.: How's that?

Pate: Well, calling us trash. We were really trash to her.

M.N.: She called you trash? Why were you trash? Did you misbehave?

Pate: At first, I don't think so, because we had not been reared to misbehave, and we were good students in Texas, very good students. But somehow, we got off on the wrong foot here and that year we were not good students and we slipped into behavior that was not good at all. We reacted towards this type of treatment and we were in trouble.

M.N.: Did you dress like the other students?

Pate: Well, not as well, but we were always clean, that type thing, very clean.

M.N.: She called you trash. Did you act like trash?

Pate: No, no.

M.N.: What was the problem?

Pate: Well, then there was a term, we were called Okies. Oh, we weren't

from Oklahoma--that is just a term for this group. We were just Okies to her and Okies were inferior.

M.N.: What were the reactions you had to being treated as trash?

Pate: Oh, I certainly didn't like it because I didn't feel like trash. It's kind of interesting when you only know one way of life and for the first ten years you grow up in an environment and that's the only thing you know and that's the only thing you've ever experienced. Then, that's a good way of life because you don't know anything differently. And then, one day at the age of ten you're called trash, and we thought we were doing quite well. Getting to California was really an accomplishment for us. But it wasn't so great--some of the people we encountered, especially this one person. So we reacted against her and against her little girl who would come to school.

M.N.: What was that?

Pate: Well, we would treat her kind of mean.

M.N.: The girl?

Pate: Yes, because during the lunch hour we would be out in the salt cedar trees and she would come out to tattle on us, to go tell Mama, and we would mistreat her sometimes, we really did.

M.N.: How's that?

Pate: You want me to share personal things here? It's nothing bad.

M.N.: Please share it.

Pate: Okay, we'd be up in the trees, and I remember one day in particular she came out in order to tattle on us. One of the boys decided to get even with her so he peed on her, so we certainly got ahead that day. But then we would catch it. You see, we did after this classification, we did kind of live like this, you know, the behavior was uncalled for.

M.N.: How did your mother handle this change in your behavior?

Pate: Oh, oh, daily spankings, at least daily. My mother would not tolerate this type of thing, but she certainly didn't agree with the teacher but regardless we should not act the way we acted, so we caught it.

M.N.: As a child I know you felt that you were good and that what you were doing was okay. How did that affect you in the next period of

years? Did it have a long-term effect?

Pate: No, not really, because we went there--I say we because my brother and I were in the same grade all through school, he was older but we went to school together--so we were there just one year, in the fifth grade. We were supposed to have gone there the next year, the sixth grade, but my mother said, "No", she would not have it and so for the next year we came into Dos Palos to the sixth grade. Now my mother went so far as to provide transportation for us. Now at this time they had a school bus that came into town and if there was room on the bus we could ride it. But if not, my older sister drove us into town each day to school, and she was in high school. The next year, the sixth grade, was probably the best year of all the years in school.

M.N.: This was 1936?

Pate: 1936. We had a young teacher, just out of college that appreciated us and worked with us. She's still here today. It was the best year of school. So, the fifth grade was bad but the sixth grade was super good.

M.N.: Did that have a permanent effect on you?

Pate: Yes, yes, that helped a great deal, but the fifth grade did have an effect. I see it now because a little later we got into junior high and we were not good students then.

M.N.: Well, when you had this young teacher, did she have a permanent effect on you? How would you describe that?

Pate: Yes. Well, the self-worth. She treated us as kids want to be treated with dignity and respect. She showed us kindness, real kindness, which we needed.

M.N.: Did you ever forget that?

Pate: No. No. As a matter of fact, I saw her recently and thanked her again.

M.N.: I've heard it said that with teachers sometimes a particular experience or a particular act on the part of the teacher can change a person's life. Now, I know that you had a great deal of education after you became an adult. Was she in any way responsible for it?

Pate: I think so. I think so, because when you look back after all these years and you have such a warm feeling and you've had that all these years toward this teacher and this particular time, I know it had a very lasting effect for good.

M.N.: What do you think might have happened if you'd have had another bad teacher? Do you think it would have turned you around permanently?

Pate: It could have, because we had already had a real bad start and things were not going well, so had this continued we could have been turned around. I think so.

M.N.: You obviously have strong feelings about this.

Pate: Oh, very strong, very strong.

M.N.: Can you describe this teacher you liked so well? What did she look like?

Pate: I really don't remember, because I know her today, but I remember she was just out of college and a young teacher--first job--very kind, extremely kind to us.

M.N.: How did you act in school in the sense of different behavior? Did you still cut up? Did you still create problems?

Pate: Not for her, no. No. We did not.

M.N.: Trying to be a good student. Were you?

Pate: Yes, even during the fifth grade I was a good student.

M.N.: It must be pretty tough to know you're okay and have somebody tell you you're not.

Pate: Oh, it's terribly hard, and in looking back as I mentioned earlier, I think it's so important that when you don't know differently and someone tells you you're trash, you don't know what trash is.

M.N.: You knew, it's not me.

Pate: Right. No, it couldn't be, because we're okay, but then to be hammered on with that, it does have a negative effect on you, but luckily the next year offset it for the most part.

M.N.: Okay, we can go on then. I did feel that that's important though.

Pate: Yes, it has been.

M.N.: Well, how about your family adjusting to living in Firebaugh? How did they adjust?

Pate: All right. So we got here in the fall of 1935 and we were living

out in this one ranch and we picked cotton that fall because my father couldn't get a job, and then the winter months came on and they were terribly bad. Living in the camp with no running water and no inside plumbing which we had never had though but the mud. It was a bad winter and I can remember this, that he was very upset because he could not find work but there was nothing to do and it was raining but he did one thing, he learned how to drive a tractor during this time. Because this was what he wanted to do. He felt he could do better driving equipment than any other way.

M.N.: How did he get this instruction?

Pate: Well, through the foreman there at the ranch, he got to know them, and my uncle having a store there knew the people very well, and by making friends. He learned how to operate the equipment. We stayed at this one ranch about six months through the winter and then in the spring we moved a few miles over.

M.N.: How did you eat that winter?

Pate: Well, my aunt and uncle helped us, I remember that, during that time, especially during the winter months when it was raining. The cotton picking would last, because we picked cotton after the first of the year.

M.N.: Did you pick cotton?

Pate: On the weekends, yes. When it wasn't raining, we worked. Oh yes, we worked. I've picked cotton all my life.

M.N.: So you went to school during the week and picked cotton on the weekends?

Pate: Yes. My mother and my father were able to pick up a few dollars this way and we just survived, that was about all.

M.N.: Do you remember what kind of food you ate in the camp?

Pate: Yes, again, we ate a lot of biscuits and gravy. This was really our main diet.

M.N.: How did your mother make the biscuits? Do you remember? Were they water biscuits?

Pate: Water biscuits, yes, water biscuits and water gravy. Then we were introduced to the canned milk and my mother learned to use the canned milk very efficiently.

M.N.: After that six month bad winter what happened?

Pate: Well, we moved just a few miles where my father was able to get a job.

M.N.: You moved a few miles to where?

Pate: To another camp, just a couple of miles away, to another cotton camp.

M.N.: Which camp was this?

Pate: This was called the Lyon Hoge. We lived there for six years. My father in the spring of 1936 started driving tractor for them.

M.N.: That was a good investment in training?

Pate: Yes, it really was. It really saved the day but again, he worked long, hard hours.

M.N.: How old was he at that point?

Pate: He was nearing forty. I can remember him working at night. He drove a tractor at night, from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.--all night, with a lunch break in there. He was paid \$60 a month.

M.N.: How much did you get a hundred when you picked on the weekends? Do you remember?

Pate: Oh, we would pick cotton for fifty cents a hundred.

M.N.: Did the money go to the children or to the family?

Pate: Family, always to the family. And this is how we survived. We worked. We always worked and even during the next summer when I was eleven--in 1936 I was eleven. We hired out in the fields. At eleven I chopped cotton with adults, and then we chopped cotton, hoed all summer.

M.N.: That wasn't too hard, was it?

Pate: Chopping cotton? Extremely hard and extremely hot in the Valley here.

M.N.: And you were eleven years old?

Pate: Eleven.

M.N.: That's pretty good work for a little kid. Were you a little kid?

Pate: Very small, but strong. We were strong kids, because we had worked. Evidently we had built up some resistance, so we chopped the cotton

and the weeds all summer and then in the fall we'd pick the cotton and it would go into the winter months and we were able to buy clothes.

M.N.: When you chopped cotton in the fields, did you just do it leisurely like you wanted to?

Pate: Oh, no, we always had a foreman and were chopping with adults. We would chop hard all day. I chopped row for row with adults.

M.N.: I mean, you were eleven years and you must have goofed off.

Pate: No, you didn't goof off.

M.N.: What would have happened if you did?

Pate: You'd get fired. Then you'd answer to Mother. Mother carried a big stick. No, she was very sweet, but we did work. We had to work and she knew it.

M.N.: How many hours did you work a day?

Pate: We would go to work at eight and we'd work till five or six. We'd work eight to ten hours a day.

M.N.: Well, did things then generally improve after your father got the job driving the tractor?

Pate: Yes, yes, a good bit.

M.N.: Were you still living in the camp?

Pate: Yes, at this time we again had two rooms for a while. Then not long after that my brother and I--see, by then we were eleven, twelve--we decided we wanted our own bedroom, so we were able to get a tent frame and we managed a tent, so we had our own bedroom for the first time. It was a tent.

M.N.: And did you have separate beds or the same bed?

Pate: No, we slept together, one bed.

M.N.: Did your family gradually furnish the tent in an improved way?

Pate: No, we just had a bed, that was all.

M.N.: What about the table and chairs and things?

Pate: Oh, you mean in the kitchen area, yes, my mother was able to

upgrade that.

M.N.: Did the food improve?

Pate: Yes, considerably. But we always ate the very staple things, you know. My mother was a good cook, but when you are reared on certain foods, that's what you eat--heavy starch.

M.N.: I have a question that might go all the way back to Texas. What about health care? Were people healthy?

Pate: I again would have to say that they were healthy to a large degree for this reason, we never went to a doctor.

M.N.: Why not?

Pate: Well, people just didn't go to the doctor. If they got sick, they were sick, they got over it or whatever else, you know. We just didn't go to a doctor for anything.

M.N.: Wasn't there a doctor there?

Pate: I guess there was one in Kemp, but I must have been fourteen before I went to a doctor.

M.N.: I can't imagine why you wouldn't go to a doctor. I have talked to doctors in that period and they say that one of the problems was that when they did see a person, they were so far gone usually that there wasn't anything they could do. Would that be consistent with what you've seen?

Pate: Oh, definitely, definitely. As a little sad thing, my father passed away three years ago. He had a stroke in Santa Cruz and they took him to the hospital and he was sort of semi-conscious--well you know he was really unconscious really, he couldn't talk. The nurse wanted to know who his dentist was and he didn't have one. My father had never been to a dentist, and he was 78. They asked him who his doctor was and he didn't have a doctor because he hadn't been to a doctor in twenty-five years. Now this was three years ago. You see, this was the way we grew up, just not going to doctors.

M.N.: What did people do when they were sick? Did they have home remedies?

Pate: Oh yes, yes.

M.N.: Do you remember any?

Pate: Oh yes. I can remember kids would get impetigo--we called it itch then. I remember the sulfur remedy. For the croup, which is a cough, we would take sugar with a little kerosene on it. It doesn't sound too good does it? And the poultice type thing with the mustard plasters.

M.N.: Did you ever have one of those?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: Was it fun?

Pate: No. No. It smelled terribly and burned.

M.N.: Was it effective?

Pate: I guess so. I think we got better in spite.

M.N.: What about childbirth? Do you ever remember any instances of people having children?

Pate: No, I don't remember that, but I know we were all born at home with a midwife.

M.N.: Midwife? Who would that be?

Pate: Relative, usually.

M.N.: Did the children usually survive?

Pate: Well, now in our family the oldest one died of complications, but the other four are still living.

M.N.: The oldest one died because of complications of childbirth?

Pate: No. It was about two.

M.N.: Did you have the flu, either in California or Texas?

Pate: Oh, I'm sure we would get colds, but like I say, we would take a little home remedy for cough and go on.

M.N.: What about after you came to California, did you have better medical care here?

Pate: We still didn't have any. You see, I was fourteen before I went to the doctor. So we still didn't use the doctor even after we came here. I remember my mother--we had been here for some time--my mother had to have surgery and that was quite an experience for

her to go to the hospital and have surgery.

M.N.: Was she comfortable with that?

Pate: No. No. Not at all. Not at all.

M.N.: Do you remember visiting her in the hospital?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: Do you remember your impressions?

Pate: Yes, I remember it didn't smell very well. The odors.

M.N.: Which hospital was this?

Pate: Fresno Community.

M.N.: Was it private?

Pate: No, it was county hospital.

M.N.: Did you feel that she got good care there?

Pate: Yes. I remember at that time the doctors she went to here helped with that down there and this helped a great deal.

M.N.: Do you remember the doctor here?

Pate: Yes. I remember him.

M.N.: What was he like?

Pate: Very nice, very nice. I remember he was my doctor when I was fourteen. I went to him and I still see him occasionally.

M.N.: And this was your first contact with a doctor.

Pate: First contact, yes.

M.N.: What was it about?

Pate: At fourteen, the circumcision.

M.N.: And what did you think about going to a doctor, having not seen one before?

Pate: It was really quite scary having to go in and talk to a person

that I didn't know, had never seen. And then something so personal as the genital. This was really tough.

M.N.: You got through it though.

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: Did you see him more frequently after that?

Pate: No. Not very often, no.

M.N.: Well, you were going to school all this time. We've talked about 1935 and 1936 and 1937. What about that period, 1937?

Pate: In 1937 we started to junior high here. Yes, this was quite an experience also, because in junior high you are away from the self-contained classes and I can remember going into the other departmental type classes, and this was a big change to have three or four different teachers.

M.N.: Which school?

Pate: Here in Dos Palos. We came into town here.

M.N.: Were you a good student at this time?

Pate: No. I could have done so well, but I didn't. I didn't work very hard.

M.N.: Were you still working in the fields on weekends?

Pate: Oh yes, always, always.

M.N.: Maybe that had something to do with it.

Pate: I'm sure it did, but looking back the teachers and so forth for the most part at this time were okay. And then we were exposed to scouting and things like that, and we got to do a few more things. There was a skating rink in town so we did a few more things and we were getting on up. See, my brother--I would say I was fourteen--he was sixteen, we had a car by then, an old clunker, but we could go places.

M.N.: This was about the time that the United States was getting involved in the war in Europe. Do you remember that?

Pate: Very well. I was sixteen.

M.N.: Do you remember what you thought about it?

Pate: I don't remember that much about what happened before but I remember Pearl Harbor extremely well--that day.

M.N.: Where were you?

Pate: Well, we were at the Lyon Hoge Ranch and it was on a Sunday and we had a little radio and it came over the radio around noon and I remember it so vividly. And of course, what made it even more vivid was we had a cousin on the Arizona that was in Pearl Harbor and he was killed there, so then it became personal immediately.

M.N.: How did you feel?

Pate: Well, soon after, having learned that our cousin was dead--personal interest, I should have said.

M.N.: Did you feel anger?

Pate: I don't think so at that time, but I probably didn't know that much about what was going on. Didn't know that much about current history, because our only exposure was what we got in school.

M.N.: Your brother was old enough to go into the service, right?

Pate: Yes, he went into the service in 1942 or 1943.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

M.N.: How did this affect your mother having been a good member of the community in Texas and coming out here and being poor and being a migrant? How did that affect your mother?

Pate: Well, I think it affected her greatly in that she took great pride in her children, and then to see her children or to feel that her children were being abused would greatly upset my mother.

M.N.: She was fairly educated herself.

Pate: Yes. For that time she was. But the thing was, I think perhaps my mother overcompensated in this degree, perhaps her children could do no wrong. I'm sure she overprotected us in that respect. But yet I think she really showed great wisdom when her children were being abused and she felt they were being abused to take them out of a school and provide an alternative for her kids to go to another school even costing money that she didn't have, but yet she was willing to sacrifice this to buy gas and to pay for a car so her kids could go to a school where she felt they could get a better

shake.

M.N.: Did she feel that people looked down on her personally as well?

Pate: No, for this reason. At this time we lived in Lyon Hoge and this was a permanent type camp. At Hammond's it was really more of a migrant camp. They would come and go. Lyon Hoge had a few houses, cabins where people lived the year-round. All of these people were from the same area--Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas. But for the next several years our environment was still people from the south and so forth.

M.N.: So in essence, you created a new community.

Pate: Yes, my mother felt okay in this community because they were our kind of people, if I can use that.

M.N.: She felt more comfortable there. What kind of social activities did the community engage in? What did they do for recreation?

Pate: Very little, very, very little. My wife was asking me about this recently and as a family we had almost no recreation. And as a community once and a while they would get together with their instruments and sing a little bit, or they'd have a little dance.

M.N.: Why was it so tough?

Pate: Well, one thing is--and this developed with my father not long after we came out here--my father always drank a little bit. In Texas they made their home brew because they couldn't buy it, they made it. Then we came to California and things were tough and my dad did work awfully hard so he drank occasionally--well, more often than occasionally, pretty often. When he had a few extra dollars, he would drink. The men at the camp drank, this was their recreation. This was the way they dulled their senses. Because of the hard times they drank.

M.N.: So it might have been possible for an outside person that came in to think that they were all alcoholics or all drunks if they saw them at this particular time?

Pate: Oh, very easily, and I guess today they would be classified as alcoholics. They would be called weekend alcoholics or monthly alcoholics because practically all the men I grew up with did this.

M.N.: It was an escape.

Pate: Oh definitely, definitely.

M.N.: What did the women do for an escape?

Pate: Work. Work.

M.N.: Did your mother make quilts, anything like that?

Pate: Yes, yes, she could quilt. Very self-sufficient, she would make her own soap, render the lard and make soap. My mother had a hard life, a hard life, with four kids and working in the fields. She worked in the fields every day that there was work to be done. And then to take care of her children, laundry--this was one of my jobs, to be helping my mother with the laundry. We'd get out and build a fire under the pot and heat the water. Rub board, the old rubbing board, I can remember that so well. Then we had been in California a couple or three years and my mother was able to get a washing machine--the old agitator type, and this was a godsend because my mother, after working so hard and then to bend over a scrub board to wash the clothes, to cook the food and clean the house. It was a big job. And then out of this she developed an illness and she died quite young.

M.N.: How old was she when she died?

Pate: She was 48.

M.N.: What was the illness?

Pate: She had arteriosclerosis, and working so hard didn't help this a bit.

M.N.: You feel that she more or less just worked herself to death?

Pate: Yes, I do, because you see my mother died at 48.

M.N.: How old was she when she came to California?

Pate: She was 33.

M.N.: So it was a fifteen year period after she came to California.

Pate: And it wasn't long after we came to California that she was sick.

M.N.: How did it first show up that she was ill?

Pate: I don't recall. The picture of my mother is that she was never really strong, real well, because I can remember my mother always hurting a great deal but yet going on with all the pain.

M.N.: Do you think that maybe it was that way for your father too?

Pate: Oh, I'm sure my dad suffered great pain. Not as much physically as my mother, but I'm sure the other pain was just as acute as the other, if not more so.

M.N.: Do you remember your father talking about those times? Did he talk about it later in life?

Pate: We were gone from there for many years. After I came home from service I didn't spend a great deal of time with my father because we lived away. He never talked a great deal, but before he died just a few years ago we got to spend some time with him and one thing I noticed in particular about him. When we talked about those days, he remembered the good things, which I thought was real good. He'd remember the good things about his boys and girls, so I guess time is a good way to take care of these things. But I know my father suffered because having to do what he did and having the time that he had, having to sit on a tractor all night long, six nights a week.

M.N.: Now that was here in California.

Pate: In California. A man could think a great deal.

M.N.: Did he have trouble sleeping during the day?

Pate: No, not really. It was an awful drag on him. I can remember him being tired. And to work six nights, when I look back and things that he went through, I guess most people would drink or do something under those conditions, those circumstances.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

M.N.: You were saying that you had a very limited, circumscribed type of life back in Texas. What was your feeling when you came to California?

Pate: Well, in one it was very traumatic because we had lived in Texas in a very protected, rural society, never having had any dealings with ethnic groups or minority groups and then were thrust into a labor camp with lots of Mexican children.

M.N.: Do you remember the first Mexican person you saw?

Pate: I think so. Yes, couple of young boys. I remember it was very intimidating, very intimidating, because to me they seemed to be aggressive and hostile types. I built up a fear for them, a dislike for them really that grew out of fear is what it was. We were afraid of them but it seemed to me they were aggressive kids

and we hadn't been used to that.

M.N.: Did your parents prepare you in any way for that?

Pate: No. None whatsoever because they didn't know much more than we did when we came out here because this was another world.

M.N.: What was your first actual contact like with the Mexican person, do you remember?

Pate: Oh, I remember one evening about dark the toilets were way out in the back in the camp and I was coming from the toilet and a couple of Mexican boys took after and scared the life out of me so I took off for the cabin. The father of one of these boys saw what was happening and he really worked the kids over severely. This is one of my very first contacts and it is interesting. We were different, very different.

M.N.: Meaning the people who came from Texas.

Pate: Yes, because we had never seen this. Well, I didn't know what a Mexican child was. From one environment to a totally different environment in three days.

M.N.: Did they seem afraid of you as well?

Pate: No, because they got their bluff in first and then they became intimidating. They would intimidate us and they would control us through intimidation.

M.N.: How old were you at this time?

Pate: Ten.

M.N.: How old would you say they were?

Pate: About the same.

M.N.: Well, how did it turn out?

Pate: In the long run it turned out very well because we became friends.

M.N.: How did you make that break? How did you break that hostility down?

Pate: I think simply by [playing] after school. We went to different schools from the same camp--remember earlier, we were picked up and hauled to another school.

M.N.: You went to the public school rather than the camp school.

Pate: Rather than a camp school, yes. But then we gradually got to know each other through after school playing ball or whatever and gradually built up a small relationship, I guess. Never anything very tight, because we lived there about six months and that was kind of the end of that phase. When we moved to the next camp just certain times of the year we had these groups coming in but for the most part we lived with people coming from Texas and Oklahoma and Arkansas.

M.N.: Did you have a tendency to stay in the same place--your family?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: These minority groups were actually moving with the harvest?

Pate: Yes. These were the days of the migrant.

M.N.: So you were not so much a migrant as you were someone who was transplanted?

Pate: Yes, true, because we did not travel at all. We only moved about two or three miles the first six years we were here.

M.N.: Do you consider yourself a migrant?

Pate: Well, we migrated, certainly, we migrated from Texas to California. We were in the same environment as the migrants so yes, I guess we grew up as migrant children.

M.N.: Once you got out here do you see a difference between people who migrated with the crops and people who stayed in one area? Is there in fact a difference?

Pate: Yes, I think so. I think there is a very definite difference, especially with the children with their schooling and environment. Because they were locked into such a close environment you know from camp to camp to camp and that's really all they experienced for the most part. Usually they were behind in school. We had a lot of those.

M.N.: You're not just talking about Mexican migrants.

Pate: Oh no, because there were probably more white migrants. We were associated with a lot more white migrants than Mexicans.

M.N.: Did you see any particular problems that migrant children from the

midwest had as a result of moving around with the crops, other than being behind in school?

Pate: Yes. I think there was even then and looking back, there was a real identity crisis going on. They couldn't identify with anything because about the time they would come in with the harvest in the fall, they were gone and would be back next year. They didn't belong anywhere.

M.N.: Did that create problems in school for them?

Pate: Yes. They moved from school to school, maybe three or four, five schools a year and they were always behind. For the most part they were behind, not always, so it was a very definite trend.

M.N.: It would seem to me as though they would be placed in an outcast or an out group sort of situation when they came to a school, a public school especially.

Pate: Well, they were segregated because they were called migrants, so that was a particular group.

M.N.: Did it become that way even for you that you were in the local group and they were in a migrant group?

Pate: Eventually I think this happened. After a while we were certainly with that group. In one way, I don't think we ever got away from it. We were pretty well accepted into the other groups, but yet we were the dust bowl kids and we associated with this group for that's where we lived. Our friends and so forth were from this background primarily.

M.N.: This community tends to have that background too, doesn't it? In Dos Palos, Firebaugh?

Pate: Very much so, very much so.

M.N.: Do you think you feel comfortable here for that reason?

Pate: No, I've really never thought of it in that respect. I think I feel comfortable here because these are almost lifelong friends that we grew up with and so forth.

M.N.: I see this in other interviews, this stability, that while people moved from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, to California they stuck where they came from and for some reason they've moved and when they got here they stuck again. The actual migrant phenomenon seems fairly limited in my experience.

Pate: I think a lot of that is that where we came from was not a migrating society. We came off of the farms and the farm people stayed. We lived in one area and my mother grew up in that area and my father had moved a little ways into the area and so they just stayed on the farm. They couldn't move. They didn't have money to move. It was very difficult. Where would they go? It was the same thing wherever they went down there, more cotton. More cotton to pick.

M.N.: Do you remember working in the crops out here.

Pate: Oh yes, definitely.

M.N.: Could you describe that?

Pate: Well, we always worked.

M.N.: What kind of crops did you work?

Pate: Cotton. When we got a little older we worked in the grains, harvesting the grain, but for the younger years--until we got old enough to work on the equipment we worked in the cotton. Cotton, cotton.

M.N.: How did you feel about cotton?

Pate: I didn't like cotton.

M.N.: Why not?

Pate: Well, kind of interesting, I was talking with my wife recently about this. When I was growing up, if a kid didn't like to do something, for instance, if you didn't like to pick cotton--and I certainly didn't like to pick cotton--then you were lazy. I was called lazy because I didn't like to work in the cotton. Today I guess they would say that you were not motivated, but boy it was true back then. I was never motivated to the cotton field. So I didn't like it, I resisted it, so consequently when it came to that part of it I was just a lazy kid. But as I got a little older and worked around equipment, I was a super equipment operator.

M.N.: You like that.

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: When did you start working with equipment?

Pate: About fourteen.

M.N.: How did you get into it?

Pate: I would go out the days we didn't work in the fields I would go out and ride the harvesters or the tractors and just learned. The men taught me how to do things. I would ride the harvesters all day, and I would learn to sew the sacks and tend the header and so forth. I couldn't lift the sacks but I could sew them.

M.N.: Tend the header, what's that?

Pate: Yes. The header is what cuts the grain and brings the grain into the shakers. The headers, where the grain falls on. Then you had to do it all by hand. We had to stand there all day and raise and lower the headers over the levies and so forth to get the grain.

M.N.: Then it would bring the grain in and shake it?

Pate: That time when I was 14 I did a lot of equipment operating and we learned to drive the tractors and later on we learned to drive the trucks. When we got a little older, a little stronger we would haul sacks which was terribly hard work.

M.N.: What do you mean hauling sacks?

Pate: Then things were all put in sacks, maybe 100 to 110 pound sacks, and we would buck those sacks onto trucks out of the field.

M.N.: The machine would leave the sacks in the field?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: And the truck would come along and...

Pate: ...pick them up.

M.N.: And bucking is throwing them up on the truck.

Pate: Yes, yes. Which was very hard work.

M.N.: Were you paid well for that?

Pate: For that day and time it would be good pay.

M.N.: Do you remember how much it was?

Pate: Oh, we could make five or six dollars a day which was a lot of money then.

M.N.: About what year are we talking about?

Pate: We're talking about the late 1930s, 1938, 1939, 1940 along in there. Then, everything see was hard work. Everything was manual work. We would haul hay but everything was hard work, because it wasn't mechanized but getting back to the cotton field, as I said a while ago, that's one thing I knew for certain that I never wanted to work cotton.

M.N.: Did you express that feeling to your parents?

Pate: Always. Always.

M.N.: What did they think about it?

Pate: Not much, they didn't like it, and it was always a little cause of friction. Their idea was we've got to do it, and we might as well go ahead and do it and not complain, but I complained.

M.N.: That made you malcontent.

Pate: It did, it certainly did.

M.N.: Did they feel better once you got into the machinery part of it?

Pate: Oh yes.

M.N.: I assumed you were in high school at this point.

Pate: Yes, going into high school.

M.N.: Did your studies in school in any way help you?

Pate: No, no.

M.N.: Did you continue to work in the fields while you were in high school?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: Would it be on weekends or after school?

Pate: We would work after school, weekends and then during every vacation. We always worked every vacation.

M.N.: It doesn't sound very lazy.

Pate: But if you griped about it that was lazy, see.

M.N.: How did high school turn out?

Pate: For the most part I would say high school was a good experience, because some of the teachers were very kind and some were not. The very kind ones you remember the most.

M.N.: How were they kind?

Pate: An example, when we were in junior high we had a young teacher right out of college and he enjoyed the boys and he started a scout troop and we were able to come to scouts. Another teacher started a rifle association and these were great things for us. Of course, it was about the only thing we were involved in except the farming. I look back and think, we are grateful for men that did things like that for us. You know, a bunch of little urchins off the farm and here he is with a scout troop, rifle association, so those were good. And then there was the other side too, some of the teachers didn't like us.

M.N.: How did that show up?

Pate: Well, I remember one in particular calling names.

M.N.: Calling names?

Pate: Yes, I remember once in particular. My brother and I were always in the same grade, we took the same classes. We were together day and night. This one teacher liked my brother but he didn't care for me. I was kind of a nonconformist. If I didn't like something I would say it, and this didn't go over too well. It wasn't very smart on my part, either. This one teacher would call me "addle-pated" meaning not quite all there, and I remember it.

M.N.: A little put-down.

Pate: Put-down, yes.

M.N.: Grade-wise, did you do well?

Pate: I could have done real well, but I settled for average, mediocrity, really.

M.N.: What happened after you got out of high school?

Pate: The war came along while I was in high school, I was 16 when the war came along, and this was the beginning of my junior year of high school.

M.N.: How did it change your life?

Pate: I don't remember much about that. I have to say we weren't really that much informed, really didn't know that much about it.

M.N.: You got into it, how did that come about?

Pate: It really changed our lives quickly, the call of the servicemen. The whole country was affected and right down where we were in the lower echelon it wasn't long until we were affected because men were going into the service. It wasn't long before we had a shortage. We finished our junior year and in farm labor by that time it was already becoming very acute, so my senior year of high school we didn't go very much. The boys--we worked.

M.N.: Did you get paid better?

Pate: Yes, yes. I remember my senior year in the fall, I worked in a cotton gin, down in Firebaugh. I was the yard flunkie. I hauled the bales from the gin out into the yard and stacked them, that was my job. I worked there all fall and went to school some after that. Right after my senior year I went into the service.

M.N.: Did you actually graduate from high school in spite of not having gone?

Pate: Yes, the principal was very kind, very understanding.

M.N.: They made some exceptions in those days.

Pate: Oh definitely, well they had to, because the work had to be done so the boys really filled in a big spot.

M.N.: How did this decision to go into the service come about?

Pate: It was the thing to do. It was the manly thing to do--boys of 17, 18, you know, the propaganda was rather heavy so you went into the service. If you didn't, there was something wrong with you, boy, they looked askance at anyone that wasn't in service.

M.N.: Did your brother go into the service?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: Which service?

Pate: He was in the Army.

M.N.: Why did you pick a different one? You went into the Marine Corps.

Pate: That was a little more manly, you know.

M.N.: Macho.

Pate: Yes, the propaganda got to me on that one.

M.N.: I am surprised you didn't go with your brother.

Pate: Well, see, he was a little older, and he went in first. I didn't go in until later.

M.N.: Did you and your brother talk about it?

Pate: Oh yes, we would have gone in together, but I wasn't old enough. We would have gone together.

M.N.: He couldn't wait for you?

Pate: No, no. See he was the older brother so he had to kind of pave the way. This was the propaganda that went on, it was very intense. Eighteen year old boys, they were supposed to be in service. The talk was "Why wasn't so-and-so in?" "Oh, he's 4F"--that was a bad word.

M.N.: Shirker?

Pate: Right, shirker.

M.N.: I know you were gone but how did the work get done when you left? The younger boys?

Pate: Yes. And women. Women took up a lot of the slack there.

M.N.: When you got into the service, did you have some of the discrimination you had in the high school or did that suddenly disappear as a part of your life?

Pate: If it was, it wasn't noticeable in the service because in the Marine Corps for a long time everybody is a dog. Just a dog, that's just all there is to it.

M.N.: Did you know what the Marine Corps was going to be like before you went in?

Pate: Had no idea.

M.N.: Was it a challenging experience?

Pate: Yes, in a way, but it was a hard experience, too. It was harder than picking cotton at times.

M.N.: Just for fun, could you briefly describe your orientation into the Marine Corps as far as getting in?

Pate: Getting in? Yes. Fresno was the place where we were inducted. Then we left there and went to San Diego for boot camp and that was an eye-opener.

M.N.: They didn't do anything to you before you got to San Diego, did they?

Pate: No, nothing.

M.N.: Just rode a bus down there.

Pate: Just rode a bus, we were just inducted, caught the bus and went to San Diego. No preparation whatsoever, didn't talk to anyone. We got to San Diego in the wee hours of the morning. It was very vivid. We thought we'd get a little rest today. But there was no rest. Man, we hit the gate and we were busy. Ran us all day from place to place. It was quite an experience for a boy right off the farm who had never been to a county fair.

M.N.: Were they as abusive as the stereotype?

Pate: Yes. Worse.

M.N.: You had not been accustomed to that.

Pate: No, and that was pretty hard to take because growing up on the farm in a lot of ways you can have a lot of freedom and be very independent. Then to come into a situation as a seventeen or eighteen year old boy where you're totally controlled, totally, day and night you're controlled and this was hard. But when you look back on it it was a necessary thing to break some of those things in young men. They had to do it. Terrible though to do it.

M.N.: Did you have any particular problems in boot camp?

Pate: No, not really.

M.N.: You talked about being outspoken back in high school. Were you you outspoken in boot camp?

Pate: No, I wasn't, but I was defiant, yes. There were some things that I kind of rebelled against and I shouldn't have.

M.N.: Like what?

Pate: We had to get up early to get in line to shave. The lines were long and

one morning I didn't want to wait. I didn't have enough whiskers for anything and I didn't want to wait and I wasn't going to shave because I thought I could pass inspection. Well, I didn't pass inspection. That evening the D.I. [Drill Instructor] said, "Be at my hut at six o'clock with a dull razor blade."

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE I

Pate: So that evening, I saw that he was real busy, so I thought I wasn't going to be outdone, so I ran to the wash house and soaked my face in hot water for two or three minutes and then I put a new blade in the razor. I didn't take a dull blade. I wasn't that stupid. So I jogged down to his tent and he was so busy. I stood there and shaved and it wasn't that bad, really, not very many whiskers, the hot water and the new blade and he was busy and didn't check it so I got by that one all right. I caught myself being defiant. I wasn't going to be submissive in everything. Another day we were out drilling and it was hot. We wore those old pith helmuts. You know what those are?

M.N.: The round one made of canvas?

Pate: Yes, the old canvas--we called them pith--sounds bad doesn't it? Anyway we were out drilling on the hot asphalt and I had a headache. I thought if I could get that band off my eyes I would feel better. You had to have it one finger above the eyebrow, that was the regulation. I pushed it back a little bit and this little D.I., who was a very small person and had a big macho complex, liked to work us over, so he came up the line--we were drilling, marching--and he saw that my helmut was too far back. He took his and drilled mine down over my ears.

M.N.: You mean he hit you with his?

Pate: On top of mine, yes, just drilled it over my ears. You know, I didn't like him too well after that. I didn't give him any trouble because I couldn't, but I was very resistive inside. This is what they want, you know, get you angry and brainwashed and then you make good assault troops. They did, oh yes, you're angry, and you're brainwashed and you don't care. You get to the point where you don't care about anything.

M.N.: It's hard for me to look at you today and put you in that mold, to see you as an angry, aggressive assault trooper.

Pate: Yes, I look back and I don't like it either. This was a hard thing for me to overcome, it really was. All of that drilling and drilling, we'll talk about that later, but it had a very adverse effect on me because I wasn't like that by nature.

M.N.: Well, now, you asked for this.

Pate: That's right, I asked for it, and I got it. But see, when you are sixteen or seventeen, you don't always make the best decisions. This wasn't a good decision. I should have gone into the Coast Guard, I guess.

M.N.: Well, anyway, you made it through.

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: And then what happened?

Pate: Well, then we drilled for a long time, for several weeks.

M.N.: Still at San Diego?

Pate: No, we leave San Diego now and boot camp is over and we go to Camp Pendleton which is just a few miles from San Diego. We go into combat training. This was about a six week course and it was hard.

M.N.: Was it real to you? I mean, were you actually anticipating going into real combat?

Pate: Oh yes.

M.N.: So it wasn't a game.

Pate: No, it wasn't a game. No, no. We drilled every day.

M.N.: Do you think it made a difference in your attitude, knowing that you were actually going into combat?

Pate: Yes, yes. It made a difference. It really helped prepare us. You get it into your mind, you get it programmed in, day after day, that you are going into combat. We drilled all day, combat all day. Combat drills all day and night.

M.N.: What was a combat drill like?

Pate: Oh, we would get up before daylight. We were out in the field long before daylight with all of our gear. At this time I was in communications and we carried on our backs our radios and wire and heavy equipment--we carried it. We would be out early in the morning and take off over the hill, never walking always in a trot, and here you may be on the other end of a ninety pound drum of wire or forty pound radio on your back and we would go for a while and set up our command post. You had a communication breakdown--set up,

jog, set up, breakdown, day and night. And this was what it was like getting ready for combat. We did this for weeks. Then we were almost ready to ship out. This is where I get into a little trouble. In fact, we were really packing equipment to load the ship and we had leave. You know, we could get leaves on the weekend. We had a 48 and 72 hour pass. Well, on a 48 hour pass you could come to Los Angeles for a weekend. On a 72 hour pass I could hitchhike home. My folks lived in Firebaugh. My brother was home and he was getting married this weekend and I wanted to come home.

M.N.: Do you remember what year that was?

Pate: Yes. 1944.

M.N.: What month in 1944?

Pate: In June. June of 1944. I wasn't scheduled for a 72 hour pass and I thought I could switch with no problem so I went to my C.O. [Commanding Officer] and told him I wanted to go home and told him the reason. I would switch and make up anything, but he resisted and said, "No, you can't, no, you can't," a very firm no. I thought, "Well, I'll go home anyway on a 48 hour pass" so I came home and when the wedding was over I wasn't quite ready to go back, so I took six extra days. You see, this was rebelling. He said I couldn't go and I was going anyway, and when I got there I thought I'll extend this leave, so I was six days late getting back to camp.

M.N.: I'm sure they understood.

Pate: Yes, they understood all right, and I did too, later. But it went pretty well, really, I could have gotten brig time and all of that. But my buddies at Headquarters covered up a lot of it, and the Lieutenant had really made a mistake too, and he knew it and they reminded him of it, but he had to do something and I got 30 days E.P.D.

M.N.: What's that?

Pate: Extra Police Duty. That means you get all the crap. Anything that's dirty you get it. I was shoved into a warehouse packing gear which is hot and heavy work, but it didn't matter. I had a vacation so I could whistle on through the warehouse, and in two weeks we shipped out, we were aboard ship.

M.N.: What was that like, it certainly wasn't luxurious?

Pate: No, we were aboard the oldest ship in the Navy, The American Legion. That thing must have been from Columbus' days. It was a terrible old thing. But my E.P.D. wasn't up yet so they shoved me in the mess hall. So my trip from San Diego to Hawaii was below deck

washing pots and pans.

M.N.: Was that good or bad?

Pate: It was terrible. It was hot and dirty and all those good things, but I could still whistle through because I knew it wasn't going to last long. So we got to Hawaii and some of them were getting a leave and I was still on restriction. But it wasn't bad, you know, you can take anything for a month. But my first cruise to Hawaii was below deck washing pots and pans. We got to Hawaii and set up there and that was our home base.

M.N.: Where did you set up in Hawaii?

Pate: Hilo. We were on the big island. We had a division up above Hilo.

M.N.: What were you doing, preparing for an invasion of some kind?

Pate: Yes, it was all combat training, all combat. We spent a lot of time on the beaches in rubber boats--the Higgins equipment. For a year we prepared for landings.

M.N.: You stayed in Hawaii for a year?

Pate: No, here in California and then in Hawaii we continued. You see, we were assault troops and we had to spearhead. We were always the spearhead, that's what we were called. As a matter of fact, our division was called the Spearhead Division.

M.N.: Your division must have been very good at it with all that training.

Pate: It was, we were good, really good. And we got to Hawaii in August and then we shipped out of Hawaii just before Christmas. We went aboard ship I think Christmas Eve and we spent three months, almost three months aboard ship. A long haul, boy, with 5000 troops on one ship for three months.

M.N.: Had plenty of room and lots of recreation?

Pate: Well, I went aboard ship last, because we stayed behind to do some last minute things, and the bunks were all gone. So a group of us slept on deck, on the deck, for three months, but that was nicer than the hold anyway, even if it was steel. We'd pull maneuvers out in the Pacific. We would go to an island, pull more maneuvers, more landings. You see, at this time we were going over the side of the ship, this is the real thing. We were pulling maneuvers, getting ready to go in.

M.N.: Did you lose people in these maneuvers?

Pate: Yes, frequently, especially if it would get rough, you know the ocean would get rough, and it wasn't unusual to crush a person against the side of a ship.

M.N.: Did you ever witness one of those?

Pate: Yes. Yes.

M.N.: How did that happen?

Pate: Well, we were loading, we were going back aboard ship. We were climbing nets. These were all nets that we were climbing and at the same time we are loaded with equipment. We have our equipment on our backs, or whatever, and we are climbing these nets, and some fellow got caught between some equipment and the ship, and it crushed him.

M.N.: Did you know him?

Pate: No, I didn't know him.

M.N.: In some ways that was preparation for what was going to come though.

Pate: Yes, yes. I guess you get hardened to these things and you don't really take them to heart. So then we went on, and in February of 1945, we landed on Iwo Jima.

M.N.: Were you in fact the spearhead?

Pate: Third wave, so we landed H-hour plus 19 minutes.

M.N.: What was your mental state the day before? Did you know you were going in?

Pate: Yes, yes.

M.N.: Do you remember?

Pate: You know, yes, I remember.

M.N.: Were you afraid, anxious, eager?

Pate: No, I don't really think any of those. I wasn't afraid and I don't even remember being very anxious. It was hard to realize what we were going to be doing the next day, although we had seen films and all these things. We knew what we had to do but it was hard to realize that it was going to happen tomorrow. Young men like that I don't think give it a great deal of thought anyway. I think we had been so propagandized in the wrong way that we were just going to

do it.

M.N.: Well, how did it go? I mean, take me from the ship on in.

Pate: Well, it didn't go well at all. We load up in the landing crafts, packed in. A few of us were in a different boat than the rest of our outfit, and I remember my buddy and I had a 90 pound drum of wire between us.

M.N.: Your buddy? Is this a friend of yours at that time?

Pate: Yes, eight of us were in this one boat.

M.N.: Had you been close to some of these people?

Pate: Oh yes. Oh, we had been together, some of us, from day one. We had gone through boot camp together, in the same outfit so we had been together now well over two years.

M.N.: So these were actually some of the closest friendships you had ever had.

Pate: Oh yes, really, so we were very close, very close. We had trained together all these months, so we land on Iwo and it was volcanic ash--the beaches, there was a steep cliff going down and it was volcanic ash and you would step into it and you would go up into it up to your knees, right out of the boat into the ash. We were really catching fire, everywhere, everywhere.

M.N.: Were there dead people?

Pate: Everywhere, everywhere you would look, there were already.

M.N.: Did you have a reaction to that?

Pate: Yes, save your butt. Really, you know you react quickly.

M.N.: This is a leading question but from the time you were approaching the beachhead, when you hadn't actually seen that there was death involved in this to the point where you saw your first bodies and actually hit it, was there a thing that you went through--a mental thing? A mental change?

Pate: I remember going in you had to keep low in the boat, so we couldn't actually see the beach going in until we hit it because we were down. We had left the transport and pulled around the battleship Missouri to go in and we got around the battleship and got very far past and they opened up their sixteen inch over us.

M.N.: The Missouri did?

Pate: Yes. Well, I knew then the real thing was happening, boy, when they started firing those big salvos over us. They had a big naval fleet and they were shelling over us all the time, and I knew then that it was for keeps. So we hit the beach, and the eight of us were to join our other group which was close by. When we hit the beach, a number of the fellows froze. What do you do, you know, where do you go?

M.N.: Did they freeze upon seeing the dead or the devastation?

Pate: The devastation, and the shelling was so heavy, so heavy, everywhere you'd look.

M.N.: Did they freeze in the boat or after they got out?

Pate: After they got out. I saw quickly that they were really shelling the beach, and my idea was to get off the beach.

M.N.: The Japanese were shelling it?

Pate: Oh yes. So there was a kind of cliff maybe fifteen or twenty feet high coming right down to the water, and I said, "Let's go!" So I took off over the hill, the little cliff and dropped in the hole, and nobody was there. They stayed. Well, I learned later that I had no sooner dropped over the cliff and one of my good friends that was supposed to have been with me caught shrapnel and it killed him dead. And then I saw I was alone and I was going to get off the beach--something told me to get off the beach.

M.N.: Something very wise.

Pate: Yes. So then I would take off and run a few yards and drop into a shallow hole. One of the sergeants that we were to connect with saw me drop into this hole and about that time a big shell came on, and he thought I was dead. It was that close. He yelled.

M.N.: What did he yell?

Pate: "Bill." He thought I had caught it.

M.N.: Now were you friends with him?

Pate: Yes, yes, you see we had been together so long.

M.N.: So you were all close then?

Pate: Very close, yes, and it was a bad day. It wasn't really so bad after the fifth wave. They stopped sending in troops.

M.N.: Now, you say a wave. What is a wave? How many men can be in a wave?

Pate: Oh, a wave can be a whole row of boats going in.

M.N.: How many men would it be?

Pate: Oh, it could be several hundred.

M.N.: At a time.

Pate: Yes, because our landing covered maybe two miles of beach, and these were these little landing boats going in pretty close together picking up a slew of men. They'd go in by waves, then they'd go out second wave, third wave, and so forth.

M.N.: Now, you were in this hole and this shell just about got you. What happened after that?

Pate: Well, then I got with the other men in my outfit.

M.N.: Did you stand up and walk over there?

Pate: No, no, no. You don't stand, you run low. You run low.

M.N.: At this point, did you come to some kind of mental conclusion about what you were doing? When you got off that landing craft you were still green, you were inexperienced, but by the time that you got out of that hole, did you have things pretty much in hand as to what was going on?

Pate: Yes, I think so. This is why I got off the beach, because this was where they were getting killed. Man, they were dying on that beach, and that's no place to be. Not only big shells and small shells--we were close to Suribachi.

M.N.: Suribachi was the large mountain?

Pate: Yes, on the south end, a big rock. We were close to Suribachi, and the machine gunners were getting us also.

M.N.: You were that close to Suribachi?

Pate: Oh yes, yes. We took Suribachi, my outfit. The fellows that raised the flag, one of them was in my outfit. It was that close.

M.N.: But you were actually within machine gun fire.

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: That would be what, a thousand meters, or two thousand meters?

Pate: I just don't remember, because the reason why I remember so vividly, is that one of our code talkers died of machine gun fire on the beach--fifty caliber or so caught him on the beach--so see, we were that close.

M.N.: That would be even longer range.

Pate: Yes, so we were under machine gun, rocket, and mortar fire and something told me to move, keep going, anyway, keep going. Then I joined up with the others in my outfit, and we immediately started setting up communication lines and we got into communication. You see, our job was to stay in communication with the front line. We handled all the front line communications.

M.N.: Did things get a lot easier from then?

Pate: No, no. For the first three days it was just hell. They pounded the life out of us. What I was going to say a while ago, at the end of the fifth wave, they stopped sending in men, because we just about got pushed off.

M.N.: You mean, the losses were so heavy?

Pate: Yes, they almost pushed us back in the water, and we just took it by sheer manpower, that's all, just manpower. We didn't have any new troops come in for a long time, and we thought, "This is it, boy," but then they decided that we were going to stay, and we stayed.

M.N.: You mean, they put you on and then more or less sat back and watched to see whether you could keep it.

Pate: Right, whether we could keep it.

M.N.: But there was no out for the guys that were already on that beach.

Pate: No, no.

M.N.: Once you got on that beach you were going to stay there or die.

Pate: That's right. We had an old general, they called him Blood and Guts. Howling Mad Smith was another one. You know, these old boys would howl, "Blood and guts!" but it was our blood and our guts, not his, that was at stake. So we kept it and stayed on.

M.N.: Did that change your life--that short experience?

Pate: Yes, it sure did. I don't think a man can go through that kind of stuff and ever be the same.

M.N.: What change did that make?

Pate: Well, I really developed a nervous condition from the war. It really bothered me. I was not cut out for this kind of stuff. I know that now, that I was not cut out for this killing, the maiming, and this type of thing. [It] is so against my nature. To do it, and then to suffer the consequences of shot nerves and bad stomach, these things came in later.

M.N.: You knew when you were on that beach that you could die any second. How did you cope with that, or did you cope with it?

Pate: You stay busy, stay busy. Soon after I hooked up with my outfit, we were in communication, the word came to break down and move. We were going to move a little ways, so the warrant officer and I were to splice in lines and he started splicing them in. He was a little older and he was so scared, so shaky, he couldn't splice the wires. There were shells everywhere, so he said, "Here, Bill," so I had to splice in. I think sometimes you are too green to be scared, really too green, so I spliced in and we went up and there was a big shell hole with a lot of people in it. We dropped in there for just a minute, and then I said, "Let's go," because I could see quickly where they were shelling. Anywhere there were people they were shelling. We just got away from this place and a shell caught it. It was just that way hour after hour, you leave one place and seems like a shell was there.

M.N.: It was like you were one step ahead of the one coming after you.

Pate: Yes, and this went on so long and you don't know why these things happen but you're thankful you are one step ahead. So out of all of this, we lost a lot of people.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

M.N.: Obviously you made it off that beach and you made it through that campaign. What happened?

Pate: Well, to kind of sum it up, we did take the island and we were there 32 days, on this little eight square mile island with all the troops and all the equipment. Just before we left we had a big memorial service where we buried 5,000 men.

M.N.: You mean they had just been left there until that point?

Pate: No, we had a memorial service. They had already been buried.

M.N.: They were buried on the island?

Pate: On the island, yes. We had a service and we had buried 5,000 there.

M.N.: How many total were on the island?

Pate: I don't know but quite a few.

M.N.: Do you have any idea of what percentage of loss that would be?

Pate: No, but it was very high. Our orders were to leave Iwo. We were supposed to have secured the island in three days. Our orders were to secure it in three days and then go on to Okinawa. We were scheduled for Okinawa right after Iwo. We were almost a month late and by this time the operation on Okinawa had already begun, and we didn't have enough troops. We were so shot up that we had to go back to Hawaii and regroup. That's how badly--my outfit was just gone.

M.N.: Of that group, of the eight people that were with you in your section, how many survived?

Pate: Two were killed and one lost a foot. Two died and a number of them were injured, but two died.

M.N.: Were you injured?

Pate: No, no.

M.N.: Were you the only one that wasn't injured?

Pate: I can't remember that. No, I didn't get a scratch.

M.N.: You were very lucky.

Pate: Very.

M.N.: A little voice telling you to move when it was time.

Pate: Right, I guess that helped a great deal.

M.N.: Have you thought about that during these years about why you were so fortunate?

Pate: Yes, it goes through my mind. It has to make an imprint on your mind when so many people are killed and so many people are injured, and why are you spared, you think about it. You're thankful. You're remorseful that so many died, but yet you're thankful that you did survive. So we left there; we got off the island and went back to Hawaii for a while. Not too long, shortly after that the war in Europe was over. As you know, not too long after that the bombs were dropped on Japan and the war was over there. In August the war was over in Japan and we went aboard ship immediately.

This time we went to Japan.

M.N.: The bombs were dropped and they just loaded you up on these ships?

Pate: Well, just shortly after the bombs were dropped, the war was over and just as soon as the war was over we started loading up. We were going on occupation duty. We were in Japan probably a month at the most after the war was over on occupation duty. This was quite an experience. Here were a group of people that were so geared to shooting and maiming and so forth--and here we are in their country. It was a wonderful experience.

M.N.: Did you have personal contact with Japanese soldiers or prisoners on Iwo Jima?

Pate: Prisoners, yes.

M.N.: How did you feel about them in these circumstances?

Pate: How did I feel about them? I think the best way to describe it would be that I didn't have any feelings about them, one way or other, good or bad.

M.N.: Did you see them as men, individuals, or just as the enemy?

Pate: Enemy, just as the enemy, and I never built up a hatred for them. That never got into my system. They were just people and really, not to have any feeling at all was bad enough. That's probably worse than having bad feelings. We took a number of prisoners out of there, but I didn't have any feelings.

M.N.: When you got to Japan?

Pate: I guess it made it easier when we got to Japan. We landed and we learned shortly that had the war continued this was to be our area of assault. We were to land here. The Japanese men didn't treat us very kind. They didn't treat us badly, they couldn't treat us badly, but they still were very bitter. I find the Japanese women and children were super. I had a real nice experience in Japan with the Japanese people.

M.N.: They were open and courteous?

Pate: Very courteous. Very open. You see, we had a number of them that worked at our Headquarters where we lived and they would come in and do our washing and a number of things and they were very kind, very lovely people. You would think, how could we ever do what we had done to such nice people?

M.N.: What you had planned to do?

Pate: Right, what we had planned to do.

M.N.: Did you ever visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Pate: Yes. I was in Hiroshima.

M.N.: What was your impression?

Pate: Oh, sad, sad.

M.N.: How long was it after the bomb that you were there?

Pate: Not very long, just very few months, very few. See it had not been restored or anything, and my first impression when I saw Hiroshima was that it looked [like] a huge garbage dump--rubbish dump.

M.N.: How far did it extend?

Pate: As far as you could see. It just went on. You know, it is a pretty good sized city and it was just rubbish, rubble, far as you could see. You wondered how one little old small bomb, they called it, do that kind of damage. And that made a real impression on my mind. It is still very vivid what it looked like.

M.N.: Did it smell bad?

Pate: I don't remember any odors. I don't remember that.

M.N.: What did you think when you saw it?

Pate: Well, the devastation and the people that were killed and injured.

M.N.: Did you see any people that had been injured or killed?

Pate: Yes, we saw some that had been burned, you know, the heat. But it was a terrible sight, it really was. Now today, they talk about clean bombs--unthinkable.

M.N.: How long were you in that place, there with the bomb, how long did you stay there?

Pate: Oh, we just stopped over.

M.N.: This was at Hiroshima?

Pate: Yes, we just stopped over there. We had been up by Tokyo on a little R & R [Rest and Relaxation] and we had to go through Hiroshima going and coming so we stopped over there just for a while.

M.N.: But it did make an indelible impression?

Pate: Oh, I can see it. I can still see it. Then we spend about six months in Japan, and then home after a couple of years in the South Pacific.

M.N.: Home being Firebaugh?

Pate: Yes. Well, by that time my folks were living in Dos Palos, so I came back to Dos Palos.

M.N.: Was it a warm homecoming?

Pate: Yes, very, very much so. My family were very supportive in it.

M.N.: Supportive?

Pate: Of me. My mother had gone through a lot with my being gone so long and where I had been, and my mother had suffered quite a bit for it.

M.N.: Had your brother been at risk also?

Pate: No, no. My brother didn't go into combat.

M.N.: So you were the one they were afraid wasn't going to come home.

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: Did you have some adjusting to do when you got back?

Pate: Yes, it was tough, it was really tough.

M.N.: How old were you at that time?

Pate: Let's see, when I got home I was 20.

M.N.: That's a lot of life in a two year period.

Pate: I went in at 17 and was gone three years.

M.N.: Three years?

Pate: Yes, yes.

M.N.: Not the same person as when you left.

Pate: No, not really. You can put a lot into three years. I came home and it was a very tough time. As I said earlier, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had no idea, really, but I knew one thing I

didn't want to do, I didn't want to go back to the farm. I just didn't. And I mentioned earlier I was limited because I did have a very, very bad speech impediment. There were limitations there also.

M.N.: You stuttered.

Pate: Oh badly, badly.

M.N.: Had you stuttered in the Marine Corps?

Pate: Oh yes, yes.

M.N.: That has real possibilities.

Pate: Yes, well as a matter of fact, I almost got booted out. Had I not fought a medical discharge, they would have discharged me. It was that bad, and then after Iwo I developed nightmares real bad.

M.N.: After you came off the island?

Pate: Yes. I was really pretty well shocked, you know. Psychologically, it was hard on me.

M.N.: Was that a common experience with the men?

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: Well then, you got home. What decision did you make?

Pate: I kind of kicked around for a while, you know, doing things like that. I would haul hay to Los Angeles, little long distance hauling. I liked equipment, always liked equipment, but then I was hauling hay and almost died from sunstroke so that cut that off. Then I had to work inside for a while. I liked equipment, always wanted to work with equipment, so I went to work as a heavy equipment operator for several months. This was where I encountered Sam Hamburg as an adult. We were digging a canal out by his place, and he would come over and show us how to do it.

M.N.: Sam Hamburg is a big farmer?

Pate: Big farmer, yes, that had come in and carved out quite a big empire in the early days. Then, I met this girl. This is the big turnaround when I met this girl.

M.N.: This girl?

Pate: This girl is now my wife. She was just out of high school and a

very marvelous young lady.

M.N.: What is her name?

Pate: Dorothy. I met her in about May or June, the summer after I came from the service.

M.N.: What year was this--1946?

Pate: 1946, yes. So we started going together and we would talk a lot. I had never really talked to anybody and with all my stuttering naturally you wouldn't talk very much. But she was a great help to me. We talked about things we could do--schooling. She was set on going to school. She was going to college. She was a very active church girl. In about August of 1947 we were married. At this time I was working on the stuttering part and things were better. It was getting easier to cope with things and we got married in August 1947. We knew that we wanted to go on to school. At this time I was still operating heavy equipment and doing very well. I was a good operator. I had applied to barber college in Fresno because I knew if we went to college I would have to work. Of course, I had the G.I. Bill, but that wasn't enough. So, two weeks after we were married we got a call from the barber college that there was an opening. So we were in school.

M.N.: She was at Fresno State?

Pate: No, she didn't go at this time. She started later because we would just be in Fresno six months.

M.N.: So, six months for the barber college?

Pate: Yes. I went on through barber college, was licensed and had something to fall back on. I could at least make a little money. Then in 1948 we were in Hardin-Simmons University.

M.N.: Hardin-Simmons?

Pate: Yes, that's down in Abilene, Texas. We enrolled there, both of us.

M.N.: You really wanted to go to school, didn't you?

Pate: Yes, we really struggled to go and then we had been there less than a semester and my wife took very, very ill with a very serious case of undulant fever. We thought she was going to die, and if not, at best she was going to be crippled. Neither happened, but we had to come back to California and regroup and we stayed here about a year getting her well. Then, there is a Baptist college in Arizona. We went to a Baptist college in Phoenix.

I graduated, she didn't graduate. By the time we finished college--I finished college--we had two kids. You know, we had really planned, so I worked and I pastored a small church out west of Phoenix and we made ends meet.

M.N.: This is after your graduation?

Pate: No, during my school years.

M.N.: Oh, you were pastor at a church?

Pate: I pastored a church, yes. By this time I had gotten the stuttering pretty well under control by just a lot of hard work so all during my college I pastored this church. It was a grand experience, so we spent three years there. Then from there it was on to graduate school.

M.N.: You just went right on into graduate school?

Pate: Right into graduate school, yes and then during the slack periods I would work in a barber shop. We started at the Golden Gate Seminary where we spent four years. At times I would pastor a small church or work in a barber shop, or whatever, so we made out pretty well.

M.N.: Let me interject a question. Did your wife ever finish school?

Pate: Yes, yes, she has her Master's Degree in Psychology. She kind of got hers in bits and pieces over a period of time.

M.N.: It sounds to me like yours was really a matter of a joint effort. Your accomplishments at that point were really a combination of the efforts of two people.

Pate: Oh, oh all the way. Very definitely, because it took both of us to survive. It was nice. They were good days because being poor wasn't anything new to me. I never had anything, so we survived quite well. Then, going for another four years of graduate work and during my last semester of graduate school, I went to a church in San Jose. I pastored there for eight years. By this time, you see, we are getting into the early 1960s and I was really having some difficulties which was really kind of a residual effect of the war.

M.N.: Difficulties? You mean psychological?

Pate: No. What happened, for some reason--probably the psychological part, the frustrations from the war--from that, I developed a stomach

condition which grew progressively worse over the years then, I guess with the psychological strain of the pastorate and all of those things. You see, I went from an assault trooper which I shouldn't have been in the first place, into the pastorate with all of its strains and so forth which probably wasn't great wisdom either. I probably should have done other things with less strain but anyway, this resulted in major surgery in 1962 or 1963.

M.N.: You had your degree by this time?

Pate: At this time, I had a B.A. and I had worked off a Master's and Bachelor's of Divinity. I did my Ph.D. just a little bit later. I had already done several degrees I guess. So then, I resigned the pastorate. The doctor really encouraged me to get into something with more administrative work in it. I had no sooner resigned than the Sheriff's Department calls me asking me to set up a church program for Santa Clara County in the penal system. I had worked in the jails for years on a voluntary basis. I would hold services in Juvenile Hall and the adult facilities and so forth. I would always work around prisons.

M.N.: You did that in addition to running a church and going to school?

Pate: Yes. I would leave early Sunday morning and hold services, early, then get back to my church in time for the regular services.

M.N.: Just a little stretch.

Pate: Yes, and I did it for years, for years. So then I went with the Sheriff's Department for a number of years. But it seems like all the time on the side I worked in penal institutions. While I was in college in Arizona I was a chaplain in federal prison out in western Arizona. So then I set up some programs for the county. And this was a good experience. This was really on the job training for inter-personal relationships. This probably did as much as anything I had ever done to help me understand people. In a penal system you get to know each other, quickly.

M.N.: Talking about you and the prisoners?

Pate: Yes. I spent the next four years in the penal system.

M.N.: Did you recover well from your illness?

Pate: No, no. I was having trouble all the time. Again, the stress, so the doctor recommended another change. I always was very resistive to this type of thing. I wanted to do what I wanted to do, you know, and I felt I should do, I guess.

M.N.: Now, when you were working in the prison, did this personality trait of working harder than necessary come out again?

Pate: More, much more. The churches of Santa Clara Valley supported me also, so I would work all day at the jails and then almost every evening at a church or a meeting or a civic organization somewhere. Then during this time that I was in as chaplain, on the side I set up the alcohol program at the county. I developed the first Halfway Houses for alcoholics for that area. I always try to do two or three jobs and that's not good. I did alcohol work and prison work.

M.N.: Good or bad, you did it for a reason.

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: You are what you are because of that.

Pate: Yes, that's true. So this went on and then I really got down again to where I couldn't go on and again the doctor said to get out. I got some good managers for the Halfway Houses and the day that I decided I was going to make a change, I went home and we had company. It was a lady from up in the Valley here that worked for the school system, and she said, "Why don't you teach for a while? Try that." They had jobs for both of us, and so for the next three years I taught high school.

M.N.: What subjects?

Pate: I taught Civics and Government.

M.N.: How was that, stress-wise?

Pate: Still not good, I was sick a lot. For some reason I was always in stressful situations, because working with people is all I know, working with people is all I know to do, all I wanted to do. We were there for about three years. Since then I have been kind of semi-retired. I do some teaching, and I do some writing. And during this time I was teaching, that's when I finished my Ph.D. in the Philosophy of Religion.

M.N.: Are you proud of that?

Pate: Oh, I enjoyed doing it. I enjoyed the work, but the degree doesn't mean much. The work was great, I liked that.

M.N.: How old are you now?

Pate: Fifty-five.

M.N.: You went into semi-retirement at what point, at what age?

Pate: I really cut my real involvements about six years ago. I still have an alcohol recovery house, but I have it leased out now. I'm not involved in the day-to-day operations. That part is taken care of. We moved back to Dos Palos after 27 years, back to where we started.

M.N.: Did your wife originally come from Dos Palos?

Pate: Yes, she came here from Arkansas when she was five.

M.N.: Now, what do you do? What are your interests now? I know a man doesn't stop having an interest.

Pate: Well, my main interest today is in teaching on the Gospel of Mark. My real consuming interest today is in studying the life of Christ from the Gospel of Mark. I'm memorizing it verbatim. We will probably be here three or four years and then we will be doing a lot of seminar work, my wife and I.

M.N.: How would that work, how would that be?

Pate: Through the churches and retreats and weekend seminars and so forth.

M.N.: We'll probably be hearing about you then.

Pate: We want to do this, but she wants to stay in education another three or four years.

M.N.: What has your wife done in that period since you quit teaching?

Pate: She has been vice-principal and counselor at the junior high here.

M.N.: Does she enjoy that?

Pate: Loves it. She won't quit. She could be semi-retired today if she wanted to, but she doesn't want to. She enjoys the youngsters.

M.N.: So you are both preparing now for this seminar work that will come.

Pate: Yes.

M.N.: You're actively preparing for it?

Pate: Very much so, very much so. I'm very involved in it, every hour, every day.

M.N.: Have you planned the rest of your life?

Pate: Yes, this is what we would like to do. We would like to do some traveling and do seminar work. That's what we want to do.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

M.N.: You've planned out what you want to do. Now, just before we conclude, there is a question that is important to me. I would normally ask you to look back on your life and in retrospect, what do you see, what conclusions have you drawn about your life and your experiences coming from Texas? What do you feel about that?

Pate: For the most part, I feel good about it. It has taken all of these experiences to get me where I am today. Looking back today, you say they were hard times, but they were not hard times. In many respects they were good times, not knowing any differently. Through college we worked hard. You might say they were hard times, but they were good times. We grew, we grew together and now we've been married almost 34 years, good years, and today is a good day, a very good day, and tomorrow will be even better. We're very optimistic about life. We enjoy it. We want to share it.

M.N.: How do you feel about the experience of coming out here? How do you feel about that as it influenced or affected your life?

Pate: It has been a great experience. I think two things in my early, younger life really affected and influenced me. When we left the small rural community of east Texas--which even today is pretty much the same--and coming to California was an enlarging experience. Although we came to a cotton camp, it was a big step from east Texas. That, and then when the war came along, that got me out of the cotton camp, you see. I was exposed in a way, in a manner that I wouldn't have known in any other way. So I guess there's something good in everything if we will just use it and work it. War is a bad thing but yet, some of the outcome can be good. So, coming to California from east Texas to the cotton camp was a big step, and a good step.

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CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project
Oral History Program

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b. 1896, Mineral Wells, Texas
[His parents from Texas]

Mary Pate
b. 1902, Henderson, Texas
[Her parents from Texas]

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b. 1925, Kemp, Kaufman Co.,
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m. 1947 →

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B. Gregory
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