CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Mr. Edgar H. Price, Jr.

INTERVIEWER: James M. Denham

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Bradenton, Florida

DATE OF INTERVIEW: June 25, 2003

E= Ed Price

M: I am Mike Denham and I am here with Mr. Ed Price at his office in Bradenton, Florida and we are going to talk a little bit about his early years. This is the first day of what will probably be a series of interviews. Today is June 25, 2003 and I would like to say once again, I am with Ed Price, former legislator, business and industry leader and public official. While we are here mainly to talk about your memories of Lawton Chiles, I would like to ask you some questions about your background Mr. Price. Can you tell me where you were born and where you lived as a child?

E: I was born in Jacksonville, Florida on January 1, 1918. I lived in Jacksonville for a short period of time and we moved to a farm down in Williston, Florida. I lived there for a year and went out to Lodi California. My father was a civil engineer and we lived in Lodi for a few years, came back to Florida and lived in Lake Alfred for a little while, lived in Lakeland for a small period of time, moved to Sarasota in 1924. I lived in Sarasota off and on during my growing up years even though we moved and lived in Valley Stream, Long Island for a year. We lived in San Antonio, Texas for a year. My Dad was a promoter more than anything else and during the boom years in Sarasota, that was back in -of-Door School and later started in the first grade in public school. I went to school in New York, went to school in Texas and to kindergarten in New Orleans, lived there for awhile, but I came back ultimately to Terra Ceia Island in Manatee County when I was 13 years old. I went to Biltmore High School (later Bradenton High School and now Manatee High School); I was in junior high at the time. I attended Palmetto High School as a freshman in the ninth grade in 1932 and, when my coach, Chet Ihrig, moved to Sarasota, I moved to Sarasota. My mother was in the hospital, my mother and father had been divorced, she was in the hospital in Tampa and in those days, we did not have any doctors down

was 33 during the boom years - the boom crashed first and then the stock market crashed in 1929, why everything went down the tubes, so it was a difficult time in that while we had no money, we all helped each other. I came back and went to the University of Florida for one year. I had been offered a scholarship to Rollins to play ball

too, so I supported Roy all the way and we were good friends, in fact he was the best friend I have ever had. I worked for him, I worked for Smathers when he ran for the senate, I worked for some other people and for local people and I served in some things like Chairman of the local school board trustees and things like that until the time came when Joe Bill Rood, we were in college together, he lived here, decided to retire from the Senate and that was in 1958. I was serving on the Board of Control and I decided to run for the Senate. Jim Haley was our Congressman. Jim was my Legion baseball coach in Sarasota when I was just a little kid. He married Aubrey Ringling, part of the Ringling Family, served a year in prison because of the Hartford fire when the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey tent burned down all those years ago in Hartford. Jim was in Congress and he had to run for reelection that year and I ran and I had the biggest multi-county district in the Senate, Manatee, Sarasota and Charlotte. I visited every newspaper in the entire district immediately, got a commitment from all of them. I gave speeches all over the district, not on politics, I would go talk about Tropicana Products or something like that because I went with Tropicana in 1955 and we were growing and that type of thing and I was elected without opposition. After my first session and the second time around, I had Democratic opposition and I also had Republican opposition. Mayor of Venice was my Republican opponent and I beat him in his own precinct in Venice.

M: To go back to the University of Florida, you were there one year.

E: I was at the University of Florida a year and felt reluctant to go on the Board of

I really enjoyed the Board of Control because as I say, we had an opportunity to create the University of South Florida in Tampa and also what is Florida Atlantic down in Boca and that type of thing and I have served with some really interesting people on there. I got an opportunity - in the Senate, I made it my priority to be involved in education. I was Chairman of the Institution of Higher Learning and Chairman of the Subcommittee and Appropriations on Higher Learning and Junior Colleges and I was on K-12 Board of Education Committee. At the University of Florida we had people coming out of the University that later became appointed judges and some federal judges like George Young and of course Smathers came out of there. Most of the state politicians in that day were coming out of Gator Land, University of Florida.

M:

E: Yeah.

M: So you went into World War II. Can you briefly summarize as much detail as you would like?

E: I was working at the Sinclair Refinery Company in Jacksonville to make money to pay back all the expenses that I had from the automobile accident. I worked as a cashier

I worked with a guy that delivered oil and grease to factories and everything else. I drove a truck for him the rest of the time and I wanted to come down to Sarasota and

that was what I originally went to Florida for, was going to be a premed student and go

on and I just went down and joined the Army and they let me select where I wanted to go. I joined the Medical CORP and went into the regular Army at $21.00 a month and went to Ft. Screven which is in Tybee Beach outside Savannah and while I was there, I was there a year, went to Ft. Sam Houston Pharmacy School and became a pharmacy tech and also since I had been an ROTC at the university, when they started drafting people, I became a drill sergeant for some of the West Virginia boys that were coming in and what not. I took a competitive exam for aviation cadets and went to Maxwell Field where I took my preflight and as a cadet, I was in hog heaven because as a sergeant, I was only making $50.00 a month and when I became a cadet, I was making $75.00 a month. From Maxwell Field, I went to Camden, South Carolina for primary, soloed in a Stearman biplane. From Camden, I went to Blytheville, Arkansas, which is up the river from Memphis. I went through my basic there and while I was there, they changed it to advance school, so I finished out basic with the advance school there, changing to an instructors school and they had just moved out to Texas at that time, so I stayed there and took three days of instructors school and got my first class. After that I wanted to get out of instructing and they put a list on the board for anybody who wanted to go to combat, so we signed up and instead of going to combat, they sent me to Tyndall Field in Pa

Germany not too far from Berlin, I lost an engine and came around and we had to take let us drop the first time and I lost #3, I lost #4 the first time so I had both engines out on one side. I came out obviously not with my group and by this time P-51s could meet you quite a ways out and so when I got close to Belgium, why I had P-51 cover us. I landed in Belgium with two out on one side. I made a terrible landing, but we got down safely and we stayed in an old chateau that the Germans had occupied and later by the Ninth Air Force. Finally got back to the field and they had showed us as missing in action and found that all of our canned goods and our candy and our soap was missing. The next time around, why we were coming back off a mission and took a piece of flak in the fuel line and my #3 engine caught on fire and my top man who was my engineer always told me he was scared to death of fire and that if we ever caught fire, he was going to get out. Well, it was my responsibility to ring a bell and tell them to prepare to bail out so they could open the

crew.

M: Did they happen to live in Florida?

E: Not in Florida to start with, they may have moved to Florida, yeah my bombardier lived in Melbourne and Jack Thorp my waist gunner died after Christmas this year. He lived in Tampa, but my co-pilot was from Brownwood, Texas and my navigator moved to Belgium after the war, France and Belgium and went into manufacturing business. He lived over there, but he was originally from Jacksonville and my waist gunner, one of them was from Memphis, Tennessee and the other one, tail gunner, the tallest man to put in the tail which is a bad place to be, but he was the mayor of Erlanger, Kentucky.

M: Now you said that Dolittle was your overall commander. Did you ever have any interaction with him?

E: Oh yeah. I had met him when I was a youngster when we went to Valley Stream, Long Island. The reason we were up there, my Dad was promoting a thing called the Rogles Orienttaor**,** which was a forerunner of the link trainer. We lived in Valley Stream, which is where Curtis Field is, and Garden City, Long Island was Roosevelt Field. This is back in the days when Lindberg was there. I got to know Red Jackson, a flight instructor and Casey Jones who was head of Curtis. He took me up in a tri-motor while I was up there as a kid and I got to meet Amelia Earhart, George Palmer Putnam, her husband from the publishing company put some money in this thing and I got to meet all of these people at that time and we got to meet Mrs. Dolittle. I saw her later when we were stationed in Kilmer and going to New York City. She liked to go to a little club that we went to at nighttime. I got to know her real well. I met Jimmy Dolittle when I was just a youngster. He was flying a mail plane at that time. He flew from a seat way in the back of a TravelAir biplane.

E: So, I got to meet all of those people then which was wonderful. My Dad who never became a pilot was always interested in aviation and that is how he got Gahagan to come down and work for him later on. Dad flew to New York with Larry Gahagan and bought an amphibian plane from Igor Sikorsky. Larry flew Dad back to Florida, and they lost one engine and landed in a lake near Leesburg. Dad wired Igor Sakorsky and told him to pick up his amphibian!

E: Lindberg got back from Paris and they brought the airplane in up in the Potomac on a barge, so Dad took us up there to see the plane come in and they were taking it to the Smithsonian.

M: Golly that is interesting.

E: We had a good friend down here, Fred Williams, who was a pilot over in Arcadia, Florida where they were training the British at Carlstrom Field. He took me up on my

in a Curtis Robin in Sarasota, an old dir
interested at that time.

M: Do you ever go over to the Fly-In over in Lakeland? We have the Fly-In over there.

M: You have flown by it, okay?

E: Scott Linder was a good friend of mine. I used to fly with Scott a good bit. Scott was a real good pilot, both fixed wing and helicopters.

M: Well, if you would ever like to go over, let me know. I get special tickets.

E: Looks like a wonderful thing.

M: It is really wonderful. They have a lot of those old planes and I think you would really enjoy it.

M: When you got back, what was it like coming back to the US after the war or were there some other things that you would like to finish up with on the war before we go on.

E: Long experience. I was in the service for five years and that was primarily during combat times that I talked to you about. I came back and went to Sioux Falls, South Dakota after D-Day and we were still fighting the Japanese at that time and we were supposed to form up and go to another field and take B29 training and go out to the

pilots out coming back in AT6s, it was something to do. I went down to a little place in Minnesota and worked in a restaurant there. We had 25,000 troops down there, nothing to do with them and they were shocking grain out in the field for $1.00 an hour at that time and I worked in the restaurant. There came a time I wanted to get out and so, I got

this point. I met the woman that later became my wife at Palmetto High School (where I attended my fresh

Rossi who had founded Tropicana had been talking to me since 1953 about joining the company. I really enjoyed what I was doing and in those days it was a real good job and o Tropicana as Vice-President and he was the only other officer, he was President. I became Executive Vice-President right after that and for a good long while there were only two officers. I made a relationship with the Gulf Coast Experiment Station which is now part of The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. Back in those days it was an experiment station and extension service, teaching college and so forth. Early on I started working with them and worked with them for years and years and ultimately when E.T. York came down and created the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, Tropicana was the first contributor to the IFAS share program and I served as a Director of SHARE.

M: I am familiar with that. I worked in that a little bit actually as a volunteer.

E: E.T. is a great friend and he sent me a book that he wrote which is real interesting. I got married in 1947 here in Bradenton. My wife moved to Palmetto in 1924, the same year we moved to Sarasota and her father helped do some developing over there. Everybody was either in real estate or a developer during the boom.

M: What was her name again?

E: Her name was Elise Ingram. She was born in Georgia, a very small place. Her father was an accountant also and worked with the Comer family and they owned a lot of property and they had a commissary and a little railroad yard and houses for all the

M: Can we get back to him a little bit, talk about Fuller.

E: Fuller was a real character. I mean, he was pure north Florida Panhandler.

M: He and my grandmother were friends.

E: He was really a great guy. I always thought the world of him. He gave some of us down here an opportunity to recommend people for jobs like, like later on Governor Collins, I had that privilege with Governor Collins, Governor Askew, Governor Chiles and some with Governor Graham. I remember we got a friend here locally who was highly qualified and got Fuller to appoint him as County Judge. He was full of humor and I thought he was a hard working Governor, but he was a little different than some that I have known, but I thought highly of him.

M: Do you think there is really anything to the charges of conflict of interest and some of the organized crime business?

in the State Legislature, set up a Haley Committee and their purpose was to dig out the organized crime in the state of Florida and they got deeply involved in that and Jim always told me that Fuller Warren was never guilty of anything.

M: That would have been, that Haley Comm