

Interview with Cornelius P. Price

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Interviewer: Robert Young

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Young: I am Robert Young interviewing Cornelius P. Price, also known as Pappy, on March 7, 2008 at his home. This interview is part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember* Oral History Project. Pappy, would you please give us your birth date?

Price: 11/25/1920, Springfield, Illinois. Been here a lifetime: went to school here, went to grade school here, high school here – 1939..

Young: And your parents? What were their names?

Price: Well, my dad was dead but my mother was living. Her name was Thelma Price. Thelma Matilda Price, died 1959.

Young: She was from here in Springfield also?

Price: No, she was from Missouri, from Jefferson City. She come here I guess in—I don't know, it's so far back—1923. But that's where she was from. Her and my grandparents, all of them was from Missouri, and then they come here to live, I guess. That was before 1920, before then.

Young: Well, see, you're eighty-eight years old, right at, anyway. What was your branch of service?

Price: Quartermaster truck combat. Quartermaster truck combat.

Young: Okay, and that's the Army, correct?

Price: Army, yeah, I was in the Army. Yeah, I was in the Army. We just went everywhere. We traveled everywhere. We hauled supplies, hauled prisoners back, went to the frontline. Sometimes they'd get prisoners; we'd have to haul them back. Then we'd

haul the dead ones back. We'd haul them back and go to a certain place. And then we would wait there and they'd tell us when to back up—let the tailgate down, back up, let them slide down till they piled up, and then they'd come and take the dog tag and bury them.

Young: What was your rank?

Price: Sergeant.

Young: When did you enter the service?

Price: Let's see. I went in the service in nineteen forty—I don't remember.

Young: Nineteen forty-two? I think the paper says something like 1942. I believe so.

Price: Nineteen forty-two?

Young: September 23, 1942. And you were discharged on November 19, 1945.

Price: When you get old, your mind gets—

Young: That's why we're here today. Why did you join?

Price: I didn't join; they had to draft me.

Young: You were drafted?

Price: You better believe it. They had to draft me. I wasn't going nowhere. No, didn't want to go to no Army. But they drafted me. And got my draft papers, and then I went to—where the heck did I go? I went someplace out east there. One of the places where they—well, they left here. I went to Chicago first, had to go up there and take the exam and everything they do, and they would take you and give you examination. And oh, I don't know.

Young: Where was boot camp?

Price: Went to boot camp down in Virginia. Down in Virginia. I was trying to think of the name of the town, I can't remember the name of the town. Went to boot camp down there, then I stayed there until it was time to go. What's the name of that company down there? Doggone it. I can't remember.

Young: You'll think of it here in a little bit. How was your experience in basic?

Price: Well, just run around, do things: get up early in the morning, four, five o'clock, get out, do exercises, clean the place when police call, pick up everything. Sergeant said, "Hey, you guys, pick up everything that don't grow!" So that meant matches, matchsticks, cigarette butts, whatever's on the ground, pick that up. Then you come back in. We'd go in and then we'd dress, get on the regular clothes to go out. Then we'd go to breakfast. We'd have breakfast about six or seven, something like that. It

was early, I know it was real early. We'd have breakfast and then we'd go to our trucks. Each one of us, they'd show us how to drive them, how to back them up, how to drive them forward and everything about the trucks, they would show us how to do it.

Then after we got done with that, then we'd go on in and then we'd go to class. We'd have class and sit down, and they'd ask you different questions about different things. How's this supposed to go? How's that supposed to go? And that's what we'd have to do. We'd have to give them the questions and answers to everything that we had to do.

Then when we got done with that we'd go for a hike with a rifle, big old rifle. That was awful heavy to me. And we'd put our rifle – no ammunition, just the rifle—and then walk. And then we'd walk oh, maybe two or three miles and come back. And at night they'd pick out guys that was to do guard duty around the place, and you had to do guard duty, and they'd give you the password. Somebody come, you say, "Halt! Who goes there?" And if they can give you the password then you would put the rifle—it was empty, but you put—

Young: We'll start off again here with that. Pappy, you said you went to Virginia for this. You've lived all your life in Springfield. I'm just learning an awful lot just doing a little research about the Second World War. I didn't realize that they were segregated.

Price: Oh, yes.

Young: Now how was it when you got—Virginia is a southern state.

Price: Yes it was.

Young: And was it different?

Price: Yes it was.

Young: Were you treated different than you were in Illinois?

Price: Yes we were. Yes we were. Our camp was black and white, but the black was on one side of the camp and the white was on the other side. And we couldn't go and sit down and—well, they had places where you could go buy stuff.

Young: Commissary?

Price: Yeah, commissary. We couldn't sit in the commissary. We'd get ours and we'd have to go out, take it and leave. Whites, they sat in there and eat. But we'd go in there, we had to take ours out and leave. And then we had such a hard time with the white guys. They treated us like we was dogs. Just like you see some one of them, "Ararararar!" They'd react back at you, and you'd react to them. But we didn't get along too good.

Young: Was that the southern whites and also the northern?

Price: All whites; it didn't make no difference northern, southern or what. They were white. And they all done the same thing. The whites from north that was in Virginia at the same place I was down there, Camp Lee, Virginia, but they'd all do the same thing. All done the same thing, wasn't no different. Some of the white guys were pretty nice guys though, some of them were. They come from the north. I guess they were from the north. I didn't know where they was from, but they might have been from the north and might have been from the south. But they treated us nice, some of them treated us real nice, real nice. We had Camp Pickett, went to Camp Pickett and then left Camp Pickett and we went to Camp—oh, I just said the name of it.

Young: Lee.

Price: Lee, Camp Lee. Went from Camp Pickett to Camp Lee. And then that's where we were getting ready to go overseas. Training to go overseas there. At Camp Pickett we was doing the odds and ends and everything and learning how. And then we went to Camp Lee. In Camp Lee we getting the final part of it done then, doing everything that we had to do, that we drove the trucks, we'd go up in the mountains, drive the trucks up in the mountains, up in the hills, and come down the hills, and come down the curves, and show just how to drive them without tearing them up. And of course, we had all types of terrain to go over after once we got overseas. We had different types of terrain to go over.

And you had to know how to drive them pretty well. So they taught us how to drive.

Young: When did you go overseas? Do you remember? Must have been early '43.

Price: Yeah, '43.

Young: Where did you go to?

Price: North Africa. We landed in Oran in North Africa and then we went all the way across North Africa down the Sahara Desert. And then we come back from there and we stopped at—can't think of the name of the town. It was a nice town. We stopped there for a while, stayed there for a while. Then we left there and we went over to Sicily. Yeah, we landed in—what the heck is the name of that town in Sicily? It's right on the coast. I can't think of the name of the town. But we left Sicily and then we went over to Italy and we landed down in the southern part of Italy.

Young: Always living in Illinois, when you got to Africa or your first time on foreign soil, what'd you think? Much different?

Price: Oh, well, yeah. The people were different. They talked different languages. "Abumibuabababa!" What the hell they talking about? But it was a beautiful country. We was in North Africa, not in southern Africa. And in North Africa they

had beautiful cities. They had cities there that'd make Springfield look like a garbage dump. Those fine cities.

Then I met one guy there in North Africa. He was from—oh, out east someplace, Boston, one of those towns out there in the United States. But he'd lived over there for a long time. And he was nice to us. But they had fine streets there. They had trackless trolleys. We didn't have any of that stuff here. Fine big tall buildings and verandahs on them where they'd walk out on the verandah and you could look all over. It was huge cities. I don't know how many people they had in them, but I imagine they had 500,000, 600,000. I don't know. No need me trying to guess that far back. But we went over there, and we went through the cities and all over the place.

Young: Treated better over there?

Price: Oh yeah. Yeah, they treated us fine. Yeah, them Arabs, they treated us fine. We was more closer to their color. And they really treated us fine. We had nice time; we'd go places and do things. And it was all right. Then we left North Africa and we went to Sicily.

Young: Did you see any action in North Africa as far as driving? The tanks were there and there was—

Price: No. Well see, the Germans was way ahead of us. Where we come in, the Germans was way on up the road. We was a long ways from them. Hell, they might have been four, five cities or counties—or whatever you want to call them—ahead of us. They was way ahead of us. Well, sometimes at night we'd see them shooting. We'd see fire from the guns. Big guns when you see them firing. But we had—what in the heck was that? Awful hard to remember.

Young: Sometimes it is.

Price: Yes sir. But anyway, then when we got down Sahara Desert; that's where we got to see the fighting. We could look out; we could see tanks one place, American tanks, and the German tanks. And I can't think of that general's name. He was a smart general. He was really smart. But anyway we'd see something down there. We'd see a little of the fighting. Didn't see too much of it. We could hear the guns and different things like that.

Young: So you were driving a truck at that time?

Price: Yeah.

Young: And running supplies back and forth?

Price: Yeah, that's what we was doing. We'd just go back and get supplies, get ammunition, get everything they need. We'd load it on them trucks. See, the ammo dumps that kept moving as we moved. As we moved, the dumps would move.

They'd move up so far. Then we'd go back and get ammo and stuff, haul it up there to them. We carried their food to them; whatever the food they had, we had to load that up on the trucks and haul that up to them.

Young: You remember any of the names of the fellows that were with you? Or did you ever keep in contact with any?

Price: Oh, yeah, after I got out of service no. Only while I was in service. I remember some of the guys' names. Trainum, Traham, Trainum, and oh, Lord, I can't think of—

Young: That's okay. Okay, we were talking. Stopped for a second. About what you were doing, and traveling. You were hauling wounded?

Price: Yeah, we hauled the wounded back, and we hauled the dead bodies back. We hauled everything. Everything they had to haul, we hauled it. We hauled ammo, hauled food and stuff, whatever they needed, whatever they had, we had to haul it.

Young: When the wounded got back, you sent them into a hospital then?

Price: Yeah, we'd take them back.

Young: Took to the hospital?

Price: Yeah, taking them right on back.

Young: And with the dead?

Price: Well, it's hard; they'd have different places. When we hauled dead back, we'd come back with a bunch of dead ones, we went to a certain place. Then we'd dump them off, and wash the trucks out if you could, because some of them had maggots and stuff on them, they'd been dead so long. But we'd wash the trucks out, keep going, keep going, go get another load, bring them back, go get another load, bring them back. Yeah, done a whole lot of it.

Young: Now we were asking about different friends and friendships that you kept. Can you remember any of them?

Price: Well, I remember one. Ed Crawley. Ed Crawley calls me every year and I call him every year. Now he's the only one I remember. Ed Crawley.

Young: And he was a driver also?

Price: No, he was a sergeant. He was sergeant over me. I was tech sergeant, and he was a sergeant. He's the sergeant one rank over me. But he done driving, I'd drive, we'd both drive. One drive so long, you get tired driving, handling them big trucks all along up and down the road and things.

Young: I understand that black soldiers for the most part were not allowed to fight in combat. How did you feel about?

Price: Oh hell no. We had black soldiers that fought in combat. Bullshit! We had—what was that? That black outfit, the Ninety-ninth, Ninety-ninth, think it might have been the Ninety-ninth. We had black soldiers that fought in combat, yeah, we did. Heck, yeah, we had plenty of them. And one guy that I knew—he's dead now, but his name was Pickett. Pickett was in a combat outfit. And see, what in the heck was the name of that outfit?

Young: Well, we'll get to that., You'll come back, you'll remember that one, I'm certain here, in a little bit. What was the morale like of all the fellows that you were with in that?

Price: Oh it was all right. Morale was all right. We kept our morale up. We knew we couldn't do anything. We was used to it, because coming from the United States, and they was prejudiced here in the United States, so we accepted there, same difference. But them people over there treated us better than the people did here in the United States. They treated us a lot better. We got to go places, and go in the—like they'd have shows —and we'd go in their show. Couldn't understand what they were saying. But we'd go over there and go to their shows. Oh, it was nice. They got along fine. We got along fine.

Young: When you weren't on the lines and driving that truck then, what was recreation? What kind of relaxation? USO shows?

Price: Well, they'd have USO come over there. They had—shuckee darn, they had—USO come over, we got to go to the shows. They'd have them in a big field, and we'd go out and sit in the field. They had built the stage, and they'd get up on the stage and perform. God, I was trying to—

Young: Movies?

Price: Oh, yeah, we had movies. They showed some movies. We got to see movies. They'd take us to movies. Well, we'd go to movies. They'd come to us. They'd come to our area. And then they'd set up. You'd have to go over to where they had the shows that was in your area where you was stationed. They was in your area and we'd go over there and we could see the shows over there. I was trying to think of the name of that—doggone that. I can't think of it now. Anyway, but—

Young: We will. What'd you think of the ability of the enemy as far as their supplies and the way they—

Price: Well, we never was close to the enemy. Like we was maybe ten, twelve, fifteen miles, twenty miles. The Anzio beachhead, and they used to shoot their shells over at us. It was a small place, Anzio beachhead was. And they'd shoot and we'd hear them coming in. Hear them shells coming in, “Dooooo!”, and they'd go right on over you. They wouldn't land. They was firing over. I guess they was trying to hit the

ships and things that was sitting out there in the harbor. But I think that's about as close as we got to combat.

Young: From North Africa, you went into the Sahara, then to Sicily. Is that correct?

Price: We left Africa. Yeah, we went to Sicily. And then we left Sicily and then we went to Italy. And then we stayed in Italy, oh, I don't know, thirty-four months I guess. Long time. Not thirty-four months. I was overseas thirty-four months. I was overseas like in two months of being three years. We was the oldest truck company overseas. And then we was loaded up to go. They moved us down to southern Italy. What in the hell is the name of the town? I can't think of the name of the town. Load all the stuff aboard ship getting ready to go over to Japan, see. They was sending troops over there. And the war was over. We was glad of that. But—

Young: Did you celebrate after overseas there?

Price: We was glad the war was over. It was over. Wasn't no celebration to do. Naples. We was down in Naples when Mount Vesuvius erupted, and they was talking about they was going to bomb it, they wanted to blow it up, stop it from erupting. They didn't do that. And it went on down into—yeah, Mount Vesuvius, it erupted, we was right there at—

Young: You'll come up with it here in a little bit; you will.

Price: Yeah, it takes time.

Young: It sure does. So what'd you think of the military? How did it change you as a person?

Price: I don't know it changed you any. I really don't know how it changed you.

Young: What do you remember about when you were discharged and your feelings about being back home?

Price: Glad to be back home. That old colonel. "Sergeant Price, come here! Here's your discharge papers! You want to join? You want to stay in the Army?" "No, I don't want to stay in nothing, I'm through!" I wanted to hug and kiss that old colonel when he handed my discharge papers. Then we caught the train to come on back to—we stopped in—where was that? Someplace out east there. We stopped out there at that place out there on the way home. And you got rid of your—well, you got to keep some of your stuff, because you didn't have anything to wear. I still got my uniform. I got my uniform.

Young: I know I've seen you in uniform in that picture that you showed me the other day.

Price: That's the one I had in World War II.

Young: It still fits.

Price: Yes, I can get in it, yeah, I can get in it, still got it.

Young: What about when you got back here into Springfield?

Price: Got back to—

Young: Your mom happy to see you?

Price: Yeah, my mom was happy to see me. Of course I wasn't drawing that much money anyway, but I sent it all to her. I just kept like fifty dollars or sixty dollars for myself, and I sent the rest of the money to my mom, because she was here. And my mom and my sister was here.

Young: How had things changed back home?

Price: Well, there wasn't much of a change. It was still about the same. See, I was raised up over in an Italian neighborhood with the Italians. We got along fine with them, they got along fine with us. But the Americans was something else. You just got along with them when you could and let it go. But I come back home. Home was nice. To come back home was real nice. Real nice to be at home again. And I don't know.

Young: You were raised over—you told me on what? Eleventh and Reynolds? Over in that area? And you lived on what? Washington?

Price: I was born and raised on Eleventh and Reynolds right down the street there. And I moved on Madison, Mason, Washington Street, then Jefferson, lived on them streets.

Young: So when you come home then where'd you go to work at? Do you recall what you did at first? I know what I did. I lay around for a few months.

Price: I did too. I lay around for quite a while and didn't do much. Then I went to work for construction work. Done a lot of construction work different places; they were building different things around here. And we got jobs there. And then I worked in a junkyard for awhile. I drove a truck on construction. Drove a truck. I went to—I forgot what—then I went to Fiat Allis Chalmers. Allis Chalmers there.

Young: Yeah?

Price: Yeah. That's where I went to work there. I stayed there.

Young: How many years were you there?

Price: Thirty-four.

Young: Thirty-four years.

Price: Thirty-four years, yeah, thirty-four years.

Young: Were you there when they closed up? What was that? 1985, '86?

Price: No, I got out of there before then, because see, they was going to cut your wage, cut your pension off, get so like you got so much money now, if you waited until they closed they'd take so much of that away from you. So I come on out when I got my chance to come out. Well, they closed about a year and a half after I come out. I had thirty-four years there and that was enough for me.

Young: I understand.

Price: Yeah.

Young: Was there much of a difference between a black soldier when you come home and a white soldier here in Springfield on jobs, and how you were treated?

Price: Yes, yes, yes, there was.

Young: You were a truck driver all those years. Did the—

Price: Well, let's see, we didn't get any good—better jobs. We got the menial jobs, what I say menial, like truck driving and working around helping the carpenters. I helped carpenters when they'd done things. I was doing the carrying the lumber for them, and they'd cut it, and I'd carry it to the next one, and things like that. And yeah.

Young: You said you spent some time in the reserves. I thought your colonel—you told him you didn't want to stay in. How did this happen?

Price: Yeah, but—oh, heck, oh, this was way years after that. Oh, heck, yeah. This was way up in—way up in the years.

Young: Yeah?

Price: Yeah, they had the reserve and I joined the reserve. And went in the reserve and stayed, I think, seven years I stayed in the reserve. And it was an artillery outfit, 755 outfit, 755 Howitzers. I was with them. We had three guns. And we'd go to Fort McCoy up there for training every year. We'd do two weeks training on the guns up there. And that's about it.

Young: That's about that?

Price: Yeah.

Young: Tell me about the years between 1951 and 2008.

Price: Fifty-one. Good gracious.

Young: Been good years for you?

Price: Yeah, been good years, I have no complaints. No complaints whatsoever.

Young: Got any children?

Price: Yeah, I had two boys.

Young: What are their names?

Price: One was Harry, the oldest. Harry. And Frank. I had two boys, Harry and Frank.

Young: They live in town?

Price: No, Harry is dead. Frank is still living. Frank lives here in town. Yeah, he lives here. Frank. I see him quite often. We talk to each other and yak and so forth and so on.

Young: Grandchildren?

Price: Yeah, no, let's see, Frank has got two girls. Harry didn't. Harry had one daughter. That's it.

Young: That's it?

Price: That's it.

Young: Tell me about your bowling. I see that you're in the Greater Bowling Hall of Fame.

Price: Oh, yeah, that's it up there, all that stuff up there, yeah. I was in the Hall of Fame. Went in the Hall of Fame. Then I had back problem, I had to quit bowling. I had a back operation. Something was wrong with my spine, and I went in and got operated on. Yeah, I liked to bowl. I enjoyed bowling, yeah.

Young: You'd come back from the service, you were telling me earlier about your bowling experiences here in town and how—

Price: Oh, yeah, they—

Young: Talk to me about that.

Price: Yeah, well, the thing of it is, see, they wouldn't let us bowl in their leagues. Only place they'd let us bowl, have our—we didn't have— We had teams we made up. We said we had leagues, like we have leagues, yeah, but you didn't get no things, nothing that the whites got. Well, let's see, we bowled at Spillway. Art and his brother was the ones that let us bowl there. But we still wasn't in the league. Elmer Fischer was the head of all of the bowling in this district, and he wouldn't give us any cards.

Young: To be part of the—

Price: Yeah, to be part of the—

Young: Bowling Association.

Price: Bowling Association. He wouldn't give us cards. So I wrote to the people in Chicago. I think that's where they were. I think they was in Chicago. I wrote to them and told them that we couldn't bowl in the league. We weren't sanctioned; they won't sanction us. And they sent me back, told me, "Hey, you go pick up your stuff. We going to send it to Elmer Fischer. You'll get your stuff, and you can go in the leagues, you can join the association." And we joined the association, and that way we got to bowl in the other leagues.

Young: In the other leagues with all the other—with the white bowlers.

Price: Yeah, we bowled with each. We all bowled. But let's see. What else did we have to do? Oh, no, nothing, nothing, I can't remember, oh, that's so far back.

Young: Lot of years, lot of years. What advice or wisdom would you give a young person today?

Price: Go to school. Get an education; get as much education as you can get, so as you can get you a decent job. And stay out of the streets. Don't run in the streets, run around here, run around there, getting in trouble, getting yourself locked up. That's no good. That's no good. Being locked up is no good at all. I know that for a fact, because I worked with the police department for awhile. I was with the police department; we had to catch them, lock them up. That's what I'd say. But I'd just tell them just go to school. Instead of getting smart and all of that stuff out here in the street, get smart in school so that you know what you're doing.

Young: How has life changed in Springfield from 1920 till today?

Price: Oh, shit, it's—oh, hell, it's changed, really changed. Yeah, hell, I remember we used—couldn't go to—only one or two shows we could go to. They had shows here. All kinds of shows all around. We could go to the Orpheum: we'd go into the Orpheum. And we went to—what the heck is the name of the other show? –Tivoli?? No, not Tivoli? Yeah, Tivoli –and we went to the Tivoli. That was the two shows we could go to. And then you sat way up in the peanut heaven. Now the Orpheum, when it was crowded, you sat anyplace you wanted. But when it wasn't, everybody sat up there. Not only the blacks. Everybody sat up in the balcony when it wasn't crowded. Got married in—

Young: Here, let me start. Okay, Pappy, when did you get married?

Price: I got married back in forties.

Young: In the forties? And who did you marry?

Price: Sarah. Sarah Price.

Young: Sarah Price? That was her maiden name also?

Price: Oh, no, that wasn't her maiden name.

Young: What was her maiden name?

Price: Sarah – doggone, what the hell was her maiden name? Sarah Barnett. Barnett. And I stayed married to her until she died. And then I married Aretta. Aretta Watson. And then when she died, then I married this one. Heardesteen. Heardesteen, H-e-a-r-d-e-s-t-e-e-n August 20, 2004..

Young: That her maiden name?

Price: Oh, no.

Young: Okay. When did Sarah die? Do you remember?

Price: Nineteen sixty, I guess, someplace in the sixties I guess it was. I had to take her to the hospital. She had a problem. She died. I think that was the sixties. Lord, I'm—

Young: I'm going way back. Pushing on your mind a little bit.

Price: Yeah, and then I married Aretta. She died—she just died here. She's been dead about four years. Aretta, that was the second one. She's dead about four years. Because I've been with this one here four years. So it was right after she died.

Young: Is there anything that I've missed that you'd like to cover? Anything you'd like to say about anything in your life?

Price: Well, I like to bowl. That's the one thing I like to do. I used to really like to bowl. I've done everything in bowling you can do. I had some good scores. Of course scores today nowadays, these scores, they shoot 700, 800. (end of interview)