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AN INTERVIEW WITH VEDA BATEMAN

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TINSLEY: Three, two, one, Stan Tinsley speaking. This is the 6th of August, 1990, ahh, we're here with Ms. Veda Bateman at her home in Knoxville, Tennessee in regard to her service with the Red Cross and the later part of World War II. Ms. Bateman, umm, how did you join the Red Cross?

BATEMAN: I joined in 1945—no wait a minute. Yes, that's right, July 1945.

TINSLEY: Why did you, uh, pick that particular branch to go into?

BATEMAN: Well, originally I was helping a friend of mine, assisting a friend of mine, in getting a job with the Red Cross and when I took her down there they ask me why I didn't apply, and I advised them that I wasn't a citizen of the United States, but if they're interested that I would obtain my citizenship. And they said yes so I filled out an application and I got my citizenship and went in to ah, the Red Cross.

TINSLEY: Okay, what do you remember about leaving home?

BATEMAN: Getting on a train. (Laughs)

TINSLEY: Anybody in particular?

BATEMAN: Uh, not in particular ...

TINSLEY: I know you probably traveled quite a lot before that time then ...

BATEMAN: Yes, I had traveled back and forth to Canada quite frequently.

TINSLEY: A lot of these people, it was the first time that they ever left home was to go into the service. They have a lot of reactions. But how old were you at that time?

BATEMAN: Ahh, I believe I was 18.

TINSLEY: Was anyone else from your family in the service?

BATEMAN: My brother, my younger brother was in the, um, airborne troops, and my older brother was in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

TINSLEY: Tell me about the different places where you trained and where you worked before you were overseas, what you did here in the states in some form ...

BATEMAN: Well, um, first, as you probably know, I went to Europe, and secondly I went to Korea, Japan and Korea. Prior to going to Europe in 1945 we trained in Washington, D.C., and I, we—I believe that was the extent of that lasted for about a month.

TINSLEY: You sail from where to, from where to Europe?

BATEMAN: Yes, we left New York on the Queen Elizabeth.

TINSLEY: What sort of training was it?

BATEMAN: Tell you the truth I don't really remember what, what, what it was. Just rules and regulations regarding Red Cross and our association with the troops.

TINSLEY: Tell me about the crossing and what was going on in Germany.

BATEMAN: You mean?

TINSLEY: Sort of broadly just go through it.

BATEMAN: Well, we left ... New York in July, as I recall. And we landed in England first and were in London for a few days and then we departed for France. And I remember that, I don't know whether we arrived in Paris [France] on Bastille Day [July 14], but it was quite an experience. And from there, I went to Wiesbaden, Germany.

TINSLEY: How did Paris feel liberated when you went there the first time?

BATEMAN: If I recall it was 1945, Bastille Day.

TINSLEY: So it hadn't been liberated throughout the ...

BATEMAN: No

TINSLEY: I guess there was a big celebration.

BATEMAN: Yes, there was dancing in the streets. It was a quite a celebration.

TINSLEY: And after you left Paris you went to ...

BATEMAN: To Wiesbaden. And in Wiesbaden, they, the head of the Red Cross thought that it would be a good idea for me to get in to cinemobile [Red Cross Clubmobiles Program], which is a showmobile unit. Being very musically inclined, they thought, "Well, we wanted to do something." So they sent me off to study magic with Frank Dexter, who is one of the foremost magicians, I believe he was in Paris at that time. And I studied under another magician, I forget his name, in one of the Scandinavian countries. Then I came back and joined a troupe. And I first started out with James Mason [Actor, 1909-1984] and Fillmore Drake in a unit. At that time James Mason and Fillmore were with the English Red Cross on—and I was the only one on the American Red Cross in that group.

TINSLEY: After studying magic, under these two people, did you then display what you've learned, in some kind of show that the soldiers watched?

BATEMAN: Yes, I, I, um, performed in—on stage in the showmobile in some of the Red Cross clubs. A lot of the soldiers were so interested in it. Some of them were magicians and would teach me some of their tricks, so it was an exchange proposition, and, and it was quite exciting.

TINSLEY: Did you like the people you worked with, Masons and others?

BATEMAN: Well, I guess I didn't work with the Masons as long I did with the other Red Cross girls. I guess I would work with them maybe a couple, or three months, and it was a different experience to say the least. I'd enjoyed working with the Red Cross people.

TINSLEY: I guess the Red Cross people you worked with were from all different parts of the country weren't they?

BATEMAN: Oh yeah.

TINSLEY: You got leave at any time during World War II to come back to the States then go back to Germany?

BATEMAN: I resigned in '46. I was over there about, oh I don't know, about for a year. So I decided to come back at the end of that year, and when I got to the States it was so difficult for me to adjust, I felt like a displaced person, that I signed up again to go to the Far East, and did not decide that I would go to Korea until I got to Japan.

TINSLEY: Did you keep in touch with any of the people that you met during your service in the Red Cross?

BATEMAN: Yes, I did, do. Every Christmas I receive a card from several, and in fact I was in California last, last year and saw two of them. One of them was my roommate in Germany, and the other—she was a singer, and the other was a hospital worker, Red Cross hospital worker in Korea. And I hadn't seen either one of them for twenty years and it was like no time had lapsed.

TINSLEY: What kind of, what kind of careers were they engaged in now?

BATEMAN: The one that lives in San Francisco, that I met in Korea, is a retired social worker. She was a director in her region, which is pretty high up in the social work field. The other, lady ... pursued her musical career after she got back to the States, and she has, she's now retired.

TINSLEY: What do you remember most about your time in Europe?

BATEMAN: Well it's almost like a closed door. It's hard to, I'm not, I don't reminisce about the experience and the experiences that I had, but as a matter of fact I think mostly of my trips to Idar-Oberstein [Germany]. Idar-Oberstein is a jewel center in Germany, and I used to go over there quite a lot with an Army colonel. He'd buy jewels, and I just enjoyed that, that type of experience. We both like the same things.

TINSLEY: Uh, what were relationships with the civilians, in Germany in particular?

BATEMAN: (Clears Throat) Well, we did not have any personal relationships other than with a—we didn't have any personal relationships because, actually, the ones that we knew most worked for us. They did cleaning and helped us to learn their language. We tried to teach them our language, but they were far more versatile with the English language than we were with their German. Probably in both countries, both Germany and Korea, people who work, who work for us, are the ones we knew best.

TINSLEY: Do you have, did you have any contact with troops other than American, for example the English or French troops?

BATEMAN: Ahh, no, not really, but on leave we, we'd run in to, meet some of the Russian troops.

TINSLEY: What did you think of them?

BATEMAN: Well, we had the feeling that we weren't supposed to be walking down the street with (laughs), the same street with them, or looking in the same window.

TINSLEY: Did you ever have—did you ever wonder if why you were there and why you'd go over there, was worth it?

BATEMAN: Well, it, it was worth it. In retrospect it was worth it. While we were there, I had the feeling that I'd never get back home. The experiences you had, you, you just didn't bother to repeat them to anyone because they're just unreal.

TINSLEY: Can you tell me about any of them?

BATEMAN: Well, I remember that I took some Red Cross ladies to Idar-Oberstein, and before going, or on the way ... told them that they had to do everything that I told them to do. And it was an open command car that we had. As you know, a command car is larger than a jeep. And we had a large group, and I guess there were about six of us and they were—had gone in to, to this man's house to see what kind jewelry they had, because they wanted to buy some. So, they stayed and they stayed, in other words we went in, in groups but, in twos, and then maybe three would stay in the truck and command car and three would go in. Well, they stayed and they stayed and I said—one of the German boys came out and said, "They're getting ready to, to take your car and steal everything you have." And I said, "I know." In other words, the command car was surrounded by German civilians, and most of them male. So, finally, we got the girls out and into the car, and by that time they were taking off my shoes.

TINSLEY AND BATEMAN: (Laughter)

BATEMAN: I was sitting on my camera trying to keep them from taking it, none of them did. But anyway, it all ended up safe and sound, but on the way back we did have a flat. And, ah, it was in dangerous country again and so we managed to change the tire ourselves and get going

before we were mobbed (Laughs). But those were two narrow escapes, and I decided at that time that I wouldn't take any more Red Cross girls to Idar-Oberstein.

TINSLEY: What were your—how did it feel when you came back from Europe?

BATEMAN: Um, I'm a tell you 'bout another experience. Okay ...

TINSLEY: Okay, okay, okay.

BATEMAN: I was on the way to a show, to show a movie to a camp in the—I believe it was one of the cigarette camps [Temporary U.S. Army Tent Cities] ...

TINSLEY: What do you mean by cigarette camp?

BATEMAN: ... well, they had the Lucky Strick Camp in the, Normandy [Located Between Cany-Barville and Saint-Valery, France] ...

TINSLEY: In Normandy

BATEMAN: ... In Normandy, France yep. I was running late, and I got lost, and I just knew approximately what direction I should be going. And it was dark and I got to a river, and I knew that I had to get across it and ah there was a boat, and they said they couldn't take the truck. I had the big truck, the showmobile truck. They said they couldn't take the truck on the ferry because the truck was bigger than the ferry. I said I'd got to get it on the ferry. I got the truck on the ferry, and the people who were on the ferry stood all around the truck. And when we got to the other side, the ferry operator said, "Look I don't know how you're gonna get off." I said, "Well, let's just get two boards," and we put these boards between the ferry and the land. And he said, "They'll break." I said, "Well, we'll try." I got on—in the truck, and a put the (Laughs) hammer down, and gunned the truck and shot up the hill. The ferry landed out in (Laughs) the middle of the river. But I didn't—the boards didn't break, I wasn't on the boards long enough to break. One of the passengers of the ferry ran up the hill, of course the passengers got off the ferry before I did ...

TINSLEY: Mm hmmm.

BATEMAN: ... and one of them—said that's "The best driving I ever saw." I said, "Oh, you speak English!" So anyway, that was quite an experience.

TINSLEY: Was it a civilian ferry or a military ferry ...

BATEMAN: A civilian ferry.

TINSLEY: ... a civilian ferry.

BATEMAN: You were gonna say the differences, but they spoke better English than I spoke German (Laughs). That was ...

TINSLEY: That's difference from what you would run into in the States, that's for sure. So tell me, you stayed over—how many months were you overseas?

BATEMAN: I was in Germany and France about a year, and then in Korea that was about a year.

TINSLEY: So you came back to the States ...

BATEMAN: Mm hmm.

TINSLEY: ... and then went to Japan?

BATEMAN: I came back to the States from Germany. I resigned Red Cross, and then reenlisted in Red Cross.

TINSLEY: You were having issues—if you care to comment on. Why do you think when you got back from Europe you were having trouble adjusting?

BATEMAN: Well ...

TINSLEY: To life then.

BATEMAN: ... I had—as I said earlier I had become an American citizen, a US citizen I should say—to be able to go to, with Red Cross to Europe. When I got back, my mother had left Tennessee to go to Canada to take care of her ... and my two brothers—one had joined the Royal Canadian Air Force, because he was not eligible to join the United States 'cause he was Canadian. But my younger brother, he was born in Tennessee and was a US citizen, joined the paratroopers. So he was still in the paratroopers and my older brother who had returned from the Royal Canadian Air Force and joined my father in Canada to—and also to, to, to go back to the university. And so there was no one in Tennessee, of my family, and I was a US citizen and didn't know where to go or what to do. So I realized that—after I got back from Japan that I'd just better go University of Tennessee because it's the only university that I'd have in-state tuition. So that's how I ended up in Knoxville.

TINSLEY: I see. Your family ... Knoxville at that time.

BATEMAN: Uh, no not my father, my parents are divorced ...

TINSLEY: I see.

BATEMAN: ... My father was in Canada and my mother was down here with me.

TINSLEY: I see, um ...

BATEMAN: And we weren't in Knoxville at that time, we were in Nashville [TN].

TINSLEY: I see

BATEMAN: Where my father had originally set up his business, Bateman Construction Company.

TINSLEY: I see. What about Korea?

BATEMAN: Um, there's not much to say about Korea. Uh, we were, um, stationed in Pusan [Busan, South Korea] which was, uh, on the beach. We couldn't use the beach or use the—swim in the water, though, because of the parasites. Uh, there was no, um, life except base life. Wasn't anything to do, um, when you're off duty except to go to—well, we, we did go to Seoul [South Korea] quite a bit.

TINSLEY: But, um, a civilized place to be as far as theatre, movies?

BATEMAN: Uh, no ...

TINSLEY: Places to eat?

BATEMAN: ... Nope. No places to go or to eat. Seoul was, um, sort of, uh—at least to my knowledge there weren't. There might have been, um, places for the enlisted men to go, but no real place for, uh ...

TINSLEY: And you were in Japan after Korea ...

BATEMAN: I was in Japan for a very brief period. We landed in Japan, and I had the opportunity to either stay in Japan or go to Korea. I elected to go to Korea, I probably would have been off to stay in Japan, but.

TINSLEY: Do you have any particular feelings about, uh, the men of draft age in this, uh, country who managed to move around or avoid their service?

BATEMAN: Well yes, I did. To be honest I did. I was uh partial to the ... and my brothers' enlisted, of course, and maybe that's why I formed that ...

TINSLEY: A normal reaction. Um, did the war affect you? Did it change you?

BATEMAN: Oh, I don't think it did, uh, change me. Uh—um, I guess one of the things that did affect me quite a bit is when we got to Wiesbaden in Europe, in Germany. Uh, the odor of the dead bodies under the debris and seeing all the destruction I guess did have an effect on me. Um, you see it was so soon after the end of the war that they hadn't really cleaned up and, uh, the flies were just something awful.

TINSLEY: Guess that was, um, the bodies were from the bombing weren't they?



BATEMAN: Yes. And incidentally I learned later that, uh, our headquarters, our Red Cross Headquarters was in Wiesbaden. And I learned later that my brother had, uh, been over Wiesbaden a number of times, bombing it, and was, as a matter of fact, shot down over Wiesbaden, uh, he managed to get back. Even if he didn't come all the way to our—cause I understand the plane was, um. Pretty much they very nearly had to land.

TINSLEY: You think, uh, the war changed the United States?

BATEMAN: Well, it raised prices.

TINSLEY: (Laughs)

BATEMAN: Um, I um ...

TINSLEY: Well then. So that's where all of the trouble started ...

BATEMAN: Yeah ...

TINSLEY: ... with ... if you trace it back.

BATEMAN: You know once, uh, and I didn't mention it to you, that I was in Frankfurt, Germany performing, uh, some of my magic, and after the show my brother came back stage and said, "I didn't know you were in Germany, and I didn't know you were a magician!"

TINSLEY: (Laughs) That's great!

BATEMAN: We ran into each other ...

TINSLEY: I guess you didn't know he was in the audience.

BATEMAN: ... I didn't know he was in Frankfurt. And I didn't mean to change the subject.

TINSLEY: Oh, I'm glad you did!

BATEMAN: (Laughs) And then I ran into him accidentally in Paris!

TINSLEY: Is that right?

BATEMAN: Mm hmm.

TINSLEY: Hmm

BATEMAN: Later.

TINSLEY: Your brother in the RAF [Royal Air Force] ?

BATEMAN: Uh, no, that brother that I mentioned in Frankfurt was the one in the para—the paratrooper, and they were stationed in Frankfurt and I didn't know that he was in the Eisenhower Compound. Uh ...

TINSLEY: Your other brother who was in the Royal Air Force, he must have, uh, been there ...

BATEMAN: ... in England, yeah ...

TINSLEY: ... when the going was tough, wasn't he?

BATEMAN: He was there when the going was tough.

TINSLEY: ... somebody ...

BATEMAN: So he, he, he was out before I, I came back, and uh ...

TINSLEY: ...

BATEMAN: Mm hmmm, I think it's even in the den, in there

TINSLEY: Another question I'm supposed to ask, not that anybody can answer. Could we have done better during the war?

BATEMAN: Um, I, I really don't know, I think that we could have done more training in terms of teaching, um our people to where were cities (Tape Degrades) being civilians, um I ... by the Americans that were there ... the hold that in their crow ... and I knew that ... and, uh, I do feel that we could have had more training in that respect.

TINSLEY: Anything things that changed very much in this county when you got back? You had been gone for, what, two or three years then?

BATEMAN: Well, yes ...

TINSLEY: When you came back.

BATEMAN: ... Yes, I was, and it was, um, very difficult to adjust. Um, very traumatic to come back, but as far as things changing, I don't guess that they did change as much as we thought they changed. Uh, in, in my case I just had no place to go as far as, uh, I didn't have a home in the United States. I didn't have any family in the United States. But I felt like it should have been home, and I ended up in Knoxville as I said before because I could claim in-state tuition. (Laugh) I graduated three times! I got my Doctorate at UT [University of Tennessee] in, um, '60, 1960, got my Master's degree in '58 or '59, no '58 I guess.

TINSLEY: Who did you first go to work for after you graduated?

BATEMAN: Well, I was working full-time while I was in school.

TINSLEY: Oh, you were?

BATEMAN: I was Executive Director of the children's home out on Cecil Street, and, um, we took children from broken homes, and incidentally my, my overseas experience and work with the soldiers, uh, helped me in my work with the bro—people from the broken homes and, uh, parents. Well I worked there until 1955. I had already gotten my Bachelor's and was working on my, uh—the reason I got my Master's was I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to get my Doctorate because, working your own way, it's pretty tough. And, um, oh, my first job from there was at Millers [Department Store], and as a matter of fact one of our board members, Jimmy Lee Clark, uh, is the one that I showed movies to in this hospital, uh, they weren't at the ... and the Red Cross people who were assigned to the hospitals. And I was one of the first to show movies on the ceilings to a pair of ...

TINSLEY: ...

BATEMAN: Well, it was a makeshift, uh, thing ...

TINSLEY: Mm hmm.

BATEMAN: I think later, in later years, he did, uh, make equipment to do that. Our equipment really wasn't, certainly wasn't forl that ...

TINSLEY: You didn't have any thoughts about going to Vietnam, did you?

BATEMAN: Uh, no, but I've thoughts about ...

(Bell rings in background)

BATEMAN: ... going with the Peace Corps.

TINSLEY: Really?

BATEMAN: Mm hmmm. Yeah, I have no family here.

TINSLEY: No ties.

BATEMAN: After I came back to, uh, Knoxville to go to school.

TINSLEY: Mm hmm.

BATEMAN: My younger brother's in California.

TINSLEY: Would have been better if there were more, but it's certainly not too late because I knew some, an awful lot of people sixteen and up that get together and do wonderful work.

BATEMAN: Oh, I want to show you something

TINSLEY: Yeah.

BATEMAN: Incidentally, that desk in there that in that office...

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