

## **MONTANA ROOTS**

Interview #1

Thursday, February 15, 2001

**KIMMITT:** The minutes of the Democratic Conference were always unavailable to scholars, historians, and everyone else. I had in my office in big leather bond folders, old scripture. Time and again, I got requests from scholars, historians, and so, to look at the minutes. They would never release them. Then we made a recommendation to [Majority Leader Mike] Mansfield, which was never carried out. It may have been carried out later. That's the purpose of my comment, to put in a policy that would permit any record being made available to selective scholars or legitimate people up to the point of the last senator deceased. Let's say hypothetically that there were no more senators of the class of '56. Well, anything up to '56 should go. I don't know whatever happened to that.

**RITCHIE:** Well, they finally got around to following your recommendation, although not quite the same way. Both the Republican and the Democratic Conferences have opened up their records prior to 1964. While there are a couple of senators, like Senator Thurmond who came in the '50s and Senator [Robert C.] Byrd who came at the very end of the '50s—

**KIMMITT:** I was here for both of them.

**RITCHIE:** —neither of the them felt that there was anything that would bother them by opening them up. So they're now available until 1964, finally. After that, scholars will have to wait for a little while.

**KIMMITT:** That's good. I'm glad you made a breakthrough on that.

**RITCHIE:** It took a long time.

**KIMMITT:** I bet it did, because, as I said, when I started making the recommendation as Secretary for the Majority, and I think I stepped into that job in '65-'66, that time frame. So here it is now 2001, that's thirty-some odd years. I'm glad you made a breakthrough.

**RITCHIE:** Yes, people are finding it very useful. With the Senate being divided 50-50 this year, one of the things the senators wanted to do was to go back to see how they apportioned committees in 1953, since that was a very similar situation.

**KIMMITT:** I remember. That's when [Robert] Taft was majority leader and died. [William] Knowland took over. Wayne Morse sat in the middle for a while, then he opted to go with the Democrats. [Lyndon] Johnson was the minority leader, but he had a majority. It was in one of those crazy situations.

**RITCHIE:** Exactly. We're very close to that situation right now. People are spending a lot of time looking back over those minutes.

**KIMMITT:** A lot of people are getting up every morning and wondering whether Jesse [Helms] or Strom [Thurmond] are alive. If it flips, what a turmoil that would provoke!

**RITCHIE:** I'd like to go back to your roots in Montana. I understand that you grew up on a wheat ranch near Denton, Montana. How did your family get to Montana and what was life like on that wheat ranch?

**KIMMITT:** Some of this is from memory and fact, some of it is from family lore, but I am confident that I am pretty accurate in this. My brother, who was eleven years older than I, was more of a family historian. Of course, he lived in the part of the era I will tell you about. Both my father and my mother were (in two different families, of course) part of the great migration west in the late 1800s and the early 1900s. My grandparents and their antecedents came over from Ireland. I think they got off in the Baltimore area and gradually moved into Illinois and then went into Wisconsin. My mother was born in Wisconsin and then moved into Iowa. My dad was born in Clarion, Iowa. She was born in a place called Veroqua, Wisconsin, which probably no longer exists. These two families and others moved as groups. In other words, as opportunities opened. They went on from Iowa into South Dakota.

My maternal grandfather was pretty much a businessman. He opened mercantile stores, hotels, etc. My father's side of the family was agrarian, farmers per se. In about 1910 or 1911, up in Alberta, Canada, they opened up a homesteading policy. Both of my grandparents' families,

one Kimmitt and one Bowe (on my mother's side) moved to Alberta. My dad was one of the first up there on a reconnaissance. My maternal grandfather was in a position to have several cars of a train loaded with machinery, livestock, furnishing, etcetera, and they moved to Canada.

My dad and his family went up coincidentally at about the same time. They didn't have the same affluent circumstances. My dad became a well driller, which was fairly common in those days, and a surveyor, not as we view surveying technically today, but it was very important to establish markers, surveying sections. Everything out in the West was in sections, which was really a square mile, 640 acres. You'd have to place the survey markers for the municipality up there, which he did.

They opened up the land, and my dad and his brothers and his father and my mother's family all filed on quarter sections of land, usually contiguous to each other. Homesteading rules required that an applicant had to live on the land. Well, living on the land in 1910 consisted—on my mother's side of the family and I think my father's side of the family, too—of a general main home for the family. Then the sons or daughters would go out on their quarter section of land and put up a very small shack. They would spend some nights out there, maybe a certain number of nights to confirm the residency, but they'd always come back to the home place, which was within riding distance on a horse or walking distance. Everything domestic was done in the home place.

World War I was approaching, and they were breaking virgin land. There was nothing up there but the railroads. The CPR, Canadian Pacific Railroad came through from the east through Medicine Hat and then on off to the Pacific coast. Then in the north there was another railroad, just as there similarly was in the United States. You had the Great Northern along the northern tier of America, and then down south a few hundred miles, you had the Union Pacific, and they were running competitive and contiguous lines. Everything else was just virgin land. So it was just strike out and establish a farm, form small towns and so on.

My dad was a tall, active, leader-type individual. Well, in about 1913, he got into some kind of fracas with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I know the story, but I'm not going to put it down, historically. It was not bad. It was not a felony. It was actually an affront to the mounted policemen. My mother was there in Canada. She was a school teacher. My older brother and older sister and another brother who died before I was born in 1918 were there. All

this occurred around 1914-'16, in that area. My Dad immediately took off and headed due south as rapidly as conditions would permit, and came into Montana. He went down to the Judith Basin, which is a very fertile, very fine farming area around Lewistown, Montana. He went to the bank. A little bank in a town called Windham. He wanted to make a loan to buy a quarter section of land to get started Well, at that time, if I'm informed correctly, money from all over the East was flooding out there. They wanted to loan it. They wanted to get it out. They wanted to get earnings on their return and land as collateral. They made the loan.

World War I came along. He, again, was breaking virgin ground in that area and using horses and men. It is a derogative term in today's culture, but we used to call them "Bohunks." They were middle Europeans who just migrated across the country and worked on farms. When I was born in 1918, Dad had built a home. My mother was teaching school. They had a big bunk house, and he had acquired, under cultivation with horses, seven sections of land. That's seven square miles of wheat land. It was the golden time with money coming in. Then, of course, things always end and along came the crash of 1921. I was three years old, maybe three going on four. The banks started going under. Well, he had become a director of the bank. At that time, unlike now, under our banking laws of modern times, directors became personally responsible for the banks' liabilities. So one of my earliest memories was my mother outside this home, which had only been built four or five years. It was a farm home, of course, with machinery all around it. There was a big copper pot in which she made doughnuts and a big thing of coffee. For lack of a better term, it was a sheriff's sale for everything we owned, for which he got nothing. It all went to fulfill the bank's debts. So that ended that particular era.

I was born in Lewistown. Our home was between Denton and Stanford, which are small towns in the vicinity of Lewistown, but removed by maybe ten, twelve, fifteen miles, something like that. So we then moved to Great Falls, which is a larger community about eighty miles up the road. It was the home of the Anaconda Company. It had a smelter and a big smokestack. Incidentally, Great Falls was also the beginning of Mike Mansfield's Montana roots. He came up from New York and lived with his relatives in Great Falls. Of course, you know that story.

We moved into town, but my dad did not move into town. He never worked for anybody in his life. He went north of town, up towards the Canadian border, and again started over, leasing a piece of ground. Then came not only the recession, but the drought. My mother was cooking

in one of the better restaurants in town. I remember very well. She would work a split shift. She would go to work early enough to cook for the lunch period and then she would have to take off in the afternoon to come again to prepare for the dinner menu until seven, eight o'clock at night, and then she'd come home. She would work six days a week on that shift. I remember very well her salary was eighteen dollars a week. My brother was in high school at that time and he worked in a service station, then he left high school to help support the family, because my dad wasn't getting anything north of town, there was no income there. My brother leased a service station, the H. Earl Clack Service Station.

By this time, the Depression was on in 1931 and '32. In 1932, I was a freshman in high school and I worked for him, pro bono, of course. Our goal, every day, was to sell a hundred gallons of gas, because the markup on a gallon of gas was 3 cents. If we sold a hundred gallons, his income was three dollars a day. Many days we didn't make it. Then we picked up additional money on grease jobs, as we used to call them. Tire repair, that kind of thing. I didn't draw any money from it. It went into supporting the family, which was his task at the time along with my mother. My sister was still in high school. My other brother died in the flu epidemic of '17, something like that.

I remember a U.S. Department of Agriculture agent in Great Falls would roll in with his stripped down Ford coupe, no chrome or anything. It was a government car and he had a government credit card. He would always give those magic words, "Fill it up." He was traveling all over the region. He was one of our best customers. Man, I'd go out there when he came in and I'd brush out the floor boards, check the radiator, check the battery, check the tires, clean the windshield, do everything for that fill up. One day he was driving out, and I said to my brother, "I wonder what that fellow makes." He said, "Well, it's a matter of public record. He makes \$1800 a year. That's \$150 a month." I remember thinking to myself at the time, and I've thought about this many times, if they had put a contract in front of me for life, just a flat indentured contract for life, for \$150 a month, I would have signed it and been on top of the world. Well, time went on. That was '32.

I graduated from high school and I went to work first as a waiter. By that time, liquor had come back in '36. Beer came back first, then liquor later on, during Roosevelt's era. Cocktail lounges were breaking out all over. I worked in the historical, oldest, and best-known bar in town

called the Mint. You'd go in and there was a cigar counter and a cash register and then a long bar for standing and beyond that a long bar for a lunch counter. On the right would be cabinets of western mementoes, primarily almost all Charles M. Russell. Up on the walls all around were his original paintings. This place was known not only nationally but worldwide. In the back, they had gambling. As time went on, probably after I left, I don't know what the year was, the Mint got in financial difficulty. The bank had loans on all the Russell paintings. So they called the loan and took ownership of the paintings. A movement started to have a public donation subscription to keep the Russell paintings in Montana. A man, I think Charlie Bovey was his name, was trying to raise two dollars apiece from Montanans and failed, couldn't do it. Later on Amon Carter from Dallas came and bought the whole damn outfit for practically a song. I'm rambling now.

**RITCHIE:** That's okay. This is very interesting.

**KIMMITT:** He couldn't raise the money, so Amon Carter went in and bought them all. Then to show you how times have changed, two years ago, I think, the University of Montana had a fund raising drive, obviously not all in Montana, and they raised \$40,000,000. They could have had those paintings, originals, for probably \$60,000.

**RITCHIE:** Did you bartend for a while?

**KIMMITT:** I later joined the bartenders and I'm a member emeritus of the Cooks, Waiters, and the Bartenders Union. I went over to the University of Montana, and I had this bartending union card. I didn't have any money. I spent all the money every damned night because in the Mint they paid you in cash every night. A waiter's salary was \$4.50 for eight hours, which was fine, but no tips. I'd go out at the end of the shift, usually at two o'clock in the morning. They rolled out four silver dollars and a half and that was it. Then I'd go out for the next couple hours and spend all but about forty cents of it. That went on for a couple years, then I decided I better get to the university. So I borrowed on a one thousand dollar insurance policy that my mother had taken out on me in 1931, (which I still have as a matter of fact, Metropolitan Life Insurance.) I borrowed sixty dollars on that policy and enrolled at the University of Montana. I got a job at one of the newer cocktail lounges there. I would work Friday night, Saturday night, and a Sunday day shift. That would give me eighteen dollars a week, which put me in a very advantageous position for a student at that time.

Of course, it was there that I first had contact with Mike Mansfield. Now I knew his father and family in Great Falls. I knew his half brothers, who were contemporaries of mine in school and everything else. I went to grade school with them. But I had never met him.

**RITCHIE:** He was out around the world in the service, I guess, before that time.

**KIMMITT:** Oh, yes, as you know, he had been in the Navy, the Army, and the Marine Corps. He came back to Butte and went to Montana School of Mines now Montana Tech, and finally the university and got his degree and married there. Then he earned his master's degree and ended up teaching at the University of Montana. Well, when he was teaching, I took a couple courses from him. I was not a very good student, which he will now usually volunteer with any group who may be around. But it was my first contact with him. It was not a warm, personal contact at that time, other than my relationship with his family. His family would be, of course, half brothers and sisters, and his father and his father's new wife. I went over there I guess in 1940, played football, and then I was drafted being one of the first names out of the box but they deferred me until June of '41. I had only five quarters of ROTC. I was doing very well in basic ROTC, but you needed six quarters to go into advanced ROTC. If you went into advanced ROTC, you were then deferred for a couple years until you got your commission. Well, I didn't qualify on the advanced ROTC because of time. When I finished the school year in '41, I immediately went into the Army.

**RITCHIE:** Before that, Mansfield ran for Congress that first time in 1940. Did you have anything to do with that campaign?

**KIMMITT:** No, did he run in '40?

**RITCHIE:** He lost the primary.

**KIMMITT:** He lost and came back.

**RITCHIE:** He came back and won in '42.

**KIMMITT:** No, I did not have anything to do with that campaign in 1940. I wasn't even

politically interested at that time. Who the hell knew who was running for Congress? We all knew we were going into the war. Our college days were more an interlude than a profession. We were very distracted students.

I went first to Fort Lewis, Washington, for induction for two or three days, and then sent south to a new camp that was just opened, Camp Roberts, California. It was basic training. They put you through a screening test. I was assigned to a radio school. The radio school consisted of Morse Code primarily and what today would be considered antiquated voice-activated radio. When the training started, the battery commander came out in front in formation and said, "It's going to be very competitive. We run this on tables. People are assigned on a weekly basis to different tables based on their proficiency. If you get to the top table, which should be the goal of all of you, you will be assigned to one of these new motorized divisions." Keep in mind, this is the transition from the cavalry and the horse artillery to motorized divisions. His criteria was: work up to the top table and you'll be assigned accordingly. So I worked my ass off and I did get up to the top table. I was sending and receiving fifteen to eighteen words a minute on Morse Code and I was learning. I had three months at eighteen dollars a month. After three months, it automatically went to twenty-one dollars a month. That wasn't enough to do anything. We were a hell of a long ways from anywhere. Los Angeles was a couple or more hours south. San Francisco was about the same distance north. So I stayed on post and I was hoping I'd get up to the top table. It came time for graduation and reassignment. We were all lined up in formation when the first sergeant comes out to announce the first assignments. This was an old horse artilleryman from Louisiana, named Guidry. He had that deep southern Louisiana dialect. He'd call off: "The following personnel are going to . . ." About two thirds of the way through, he said, "The following personnel are going to the 98<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Pack." He stopped and he said, "These men are going to a mule outfit! Field artillery Pack at Fort Lewis, Washington." I laughed. I thought, "Those poor bastards." He called off twelve names and I was right in with them.

When formation was over, I went in to see the battery commander. I said, "Lieutenant, you said . . ." "Well, you know, assignments are all made at higher headquarters. I'm sure they tried and so on, but you're going to have to go." I finished training, went up to Fort Lewis, arrived on a Sunday morning. It was raining about like today here. In Fort Lewis, it's always that way in the winter time. The sergeant picked us up. I still remember his name, Jack Clifford, even though that's a long time ago. He took us from the train to the barracks and said, "Get in your



fatigues.” Then he marched us right down on the line to groom mules. There were somewhere between five and seven hundred mules in the battalion. We had to curry the mules, clean them up. It would rain constantly on those goddamn mules. At least I grew up in Montana and knew a little about animals, but they had kids from the Bronx and everywhere else. They were hesitant and wouldn’t get up close. Those mules would kick them and knock them off the line and an NCO would order them back..

Anyway, this would have been in September or October of ‘41. Then, boom, Pearl Harbor was hit, in December, 1941. I remember being out on that Sunday—it occurred on a Sunday—on what was called herd guard. We take the horses, not the mules, officers’ horses, and we’d ride one and lead one. We’d get out there, take the saddles off and let them graze for several hours and then we’d ride back in. I heard this on the radio about Pearl Harbor. They closed the camp and blacked out the windows just like the goddamn Japanese were coming over the hill or something. Then, after days, maybe a couple weeks, sometime during January and February we moved into the field. The Olympic Peninsula above Fort Lewis, back in the very early twenties, had a hell of a hurricane-type wind come through there knocking trees down. There were no roads around the peninsula. There was no access. You could come ashore from the beach, of course, or you could go overland by foot. They understandably decided they would take the pack artillery with mules and we would go up and around this peninsula, which we did.

Prior to that, in January, they had interviewed people for the ski troops. I was interviewed and was selected. We went up to Mount Rainier, about twenty of us from the artillery. We took ski training from some of the best skiers in America at that time, Olympic skiers, tournament skiers and everything else. From there, that group—many of them—went to Oregon and Mount Hood and formed the Tenth Mountain Division. That was the division that later Bob Dole was in. But I stayed at Fort Lewis with the mules.

Now I’ll revert back to going around the Olympic Peninsula. While I was out there, because of the casualties at Anzio and Kasserine Pass there was a shortage of young officers. An order came out that anyone with an AGCT score high enough would go before a selection board. This score was an educational qualification. You took the test and they came up with a number on your AGCT. It’s like an aptitude test. The order said that anybody with an AGCT over 120 would be interviewed for Officer Candidate School. Well, I think I had 141, but I didn’t apply for

Officer Candidate School. By direction I went to an interview by four or five World War I-type colonels. I remember sitting outside before this interview next to a couple other soldiers going through the same thing. One of them had gone in and I was second in line after him. He came back out. As he went by, I said, “What sort of stuff are they asking you in there?” “Oh, they’re asking the darnedest things. One colonel asked me what eleven times twenty three was.” He said, “I blew it.” OK, and away he went. So I thought, well, hell that’s relatively easy. It’s ten times the number plus the number. So that would be 230 and another 23, that’s 253. I went in and sure enough, bingo, the sum of the number popped up. “What’s eleven times something?” I gave them the answer right away.

Anyway, while we out on this march around the peninsula, I got orders to come back to Fort Lewis to report for Officer Candidate School. Now the 98<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Pack was a regular Army outfit out of Panama, and the only thing lower in their estimation and status than the National Guard, was a draftee. There were twelve of us draftees. I had been there just almost a year and had never made PFC, just couldn’t make PFC. They had the old Army system where if somebody screwed up during the month, they’d bust him down, but they wouldn’t fill the vacancy, and after the next payday, they’d promote the same man back again. It was a common practice. I could never make Private First Class. I was leading a mule for miles and miles every goddamn week and living out in the field. No gas stoves for the cooks. We had what they called buzzy cots, large rectangular pots. You’d gather wood to burn underneath. Everything we took with us, we loaded on mules and moved along.

I came in and reported to this second lieutenant—he became a two-star general later on in the war—his name was Andy Pribnow. I reported to him for orders. “Kimmitt,” he said, “you’ve been selected to go to Officer Candidate School.” I enthusiastically said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “Now, before you go, I have a favor to ask of you.” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “Under Army regulation, anyone selected for OCS has to be promoted to corporal before they leave their station. I’m going to promote you to corporal according to Army regulation. But, you know this battalion pretty well.” “Yes, sir.” He said, “Would you wait before you leave the battalion area before you put on your stripes?” [laughs]

I went to downtown Tacoma and got a couple of corporal stripes, of course, which I had authority for. Then, the old Army drab uniform didn’t seem to have enough pizzaz to it even with

the stripes. These were civilian stores. I had them cross-stitch a bright golden thread around them so it would stand out a little bit more. I looked in the mirror and it still didn't quite have the elan that I was looking for, because I was going home to Montana on the way to OCS and I would have forty-eight hours at home. So I looked around and got a solid brass whistle and a chain. I hung the whistle over the left breast pocket and the chain up around the epaulet and that just sort of set things off. Here were my neon stripes and a shiny brass whistle. I was ready to go to OCS, which I did, of course.

I went to Fort Sill, where we lived in tents. In July 1942, I graduated from OCS and went to Camp Butner in North Carolina as a second lieutenant. I arrived at camp about ten o'clock in the morning in mid July, 1942. The 78<sup>th</sup> Division was just being formed. The cadre of about 300 stood out in front of the Headquarters building on 15 August. The whole camp was under construction at that time. Coming out of the northwest and into North Carolina, that heat was torturous and a lot of men were falling down and fainting. We went through combat training, as we should, but at the same time, we were building the camp. We were doing this while getting water out of Lister bags and eating unsavory rations. It was a real test. We would be doing road marches, twenty-five mile marches. They'd be experimenting on different things. On march they were experimenting with D-bars, which is nothing more than five or six ounces of very rich chocolate, and milk. So all you had was the D-bar and milk at lunch on the road during the twenty-five mile march on one of these miserably hot days. Before long, the stomach cramps else took over. Then we'd have the speed marches in the heat. We went to Louisiana maneuvers, which you hear about now from George Marshall's days. In the meantime, as a lieutenant, I became a Battery commander. Everything was turbulent. My battery would compete for everything within the battalion, and within the division. It was very competitive. We won more than our share of those events.

We went to Europe. Got over there not early, not at D-Day, but later on, before Thanksgiving of '44. We went to Germany, first into Belgium, then into Germany. We went into position on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December '44, right near a little town called Monchau, which was not far from another town, Roetgen. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of December, two days later the "Bulge" hit. We could hear the rumblings of tanks ahead of us by maybe two or three thousand yards. We didn't know what the hell was going on. When they hit, they went right around our shoulder about five hundred yards to our right.

Otto Scorzene's people—he was the dirty tricks guy—were dropping by parachute all over the area. We captured one of them. We'd get strafing from the German fighters. My battery, and the group around us, knocked one of them down. We had fifty calibers. He crashed about a quarter mile from us. It was a real mixed up mess. Of course, then came the cold and the snow and all the stories you've seen about the "Bulge." We drove it back and it stabilized. In the meantime, we were poised to take what was called the Schwammenal Dam. The Schwammenal Dam was that big dam on the Roer River, which was near the town of Schmidt. Now Schmidt is significant because prior to the Bulge, by a number of months, the Pennsylvania 28<sup>th</sup> Division, which had a red keystone patch and became known as the bloody bucket division, fought there. They tried to take Schmidt on a frontal assault down through a deep ravine and up through a little village at Simonskall, and they just got decimated. Their bodies were still down there. They were still lying in a no man's land between the lines. There were many destroyed vehicles. The reason I know this is because when we finally took Schmidt, I came down through there and there were many blackened corpses and burned vehicles all over the area.

Our job was to take the dam, and we had significant engagements in little towns of Kesternich, Lammersdorf, and others all through there. We finally did take the dam. The significance of taking the dam was, had they been able to retain it, if our forces (not our division so much, but the main force) would try to go across the Roer River to the Rhine, they could have flooded that whole area, by letting the dam waters loose. By getting the dam we protected that area. We took the town of Schmidt, crossed the Roer River, and we were moving over the plain towards the Rhine. One day at about ten o'clock in the morning (I was by this time a captain), I was riding in the back seat of the brigadier general of our division, our artillery commander named Frank Camm. He heard over the radio that our people had taken or were engaged at the Remagen Bridge. We raced down there and all hell was breaking loose. We went down to the bridge site, and there was probably thirty or forty people across the bridge by that time. The first jet aircraft I ever saw in my life was here. There was a German jet coming down stream on the Rhine trying to destroy the bridge. It never hit it. We got out of there, and I got my battery moving forward, closer to the Rhine. Two or three days later the bridge fell, I think, but by that time we had ponton bridges below Remagen. I took my battery across there and then we got involved in the Ruhr pocket, or as it was named, "the Rose pocket," for General Maurice Rose who was killed there. It was April and then came the end of the war. FDR died around this time.

We moved to a town of Kassel. It was primarily security guard duty and screening displaced persons coming out of what became East Germany, coming back into the western zone. We'd screen those refugees and guard the art museums and everything else. We were there for a while and then went on to Berlin. The first American unit into Berlin was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division. It was there between two and three weeks. Then the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division under M.G. Jim Gavin went in for about a month. Then we were sent in, the 78<sup>th</sup> Division, to take over Berlin when they moved out. In Berlin, I left the battery and went up to division headquarters and became chief of training. I have a lot of original Berlin stories which are not terribly relevant at the moment. I stayed in Berlin and met my wife there. She was a Red Cross girl. We were married in Berlin in 1947 and came home that fall and went to Logan, Utah.

But reverting to Berlin for a minute, it's a story unto itself. The occupying forces after having fought the Germans came into this big city. The cold caused terrible conditions for the Germans. The Russians had come in earlier and they were just atrociously cruel to them. Those who had any party affiliation—of course, the Germans were so well organized, everybody and every little community knew everybody and had records of those who had any party affiliation. Party members were authorized only 800 calories a day. That's bare survival. The winter of '45-'46 (or possibly '46-'47) was one of the worst winters that they've ever had in modern times in Berlin. These people, many of them, were just walking around like zombies.

We took over a Kaserne area, which was a facility like Fort Myer over here. Everything had been pretty much been destroyed. I had the job of going up on the advance party and getting glass, which was hard to find, to fix the windows and other materials to renovate the place. We would call on the local civilian officials to send us laborers. All of these people were of this 800 calorie a day group. They had a party affiliation. They'd send maybe a couple hundred in the morning, and we'd assign them to do different things. Right in the middle of the Kaserne was where they had bulldozed all of the debris from the destruction. They bulldozed a big pile of it. Obviously, we had to move it out of there. So I'd go down and tell the supervisor to start loading that stuff on dump trucks and get it out of there. It was just going excruciatingly slow. They were slow; they were malnourished. At the same time, over in our mess hall for the battalion, which was about six to eight hundred men, we were getting full rations. We would throw a hell of a lot of food out, wasted food. The war was over, and there was a hell of a lot of food just going in the trash and to the dump. Down in the basement of this mess hall was a large kitchen. They had these

huge—about the size of this desk around—stainless steel pots with gas heat under them for cooking.

We had a non-fraternization policy at that time, which was very severe. You were not to associate with or fraternize with the Germans. So it was a significant risk, but I went to the mess sergeant and said, “Instead of throwing that damn food out, I want you to separate anything that has a fat content, the meats, the butter, the bread, anything. Take down one of those pots, throw it all together, and keep a stew going. Then I went out to the supervisor and said, “Tell your people that if they will work a little harder and show more progress in getting this debris out of here, at noon today, you will take them over there to that basement and they’ll have a hot meal of some sort.” Well, when he spread that word, because they were so hungry, they really went to work. I mean, they loaded those damn trucks a lot more quickly. So for several weeks, that became standard. The food that we would be throwing away, we were feeding to them for their work and in order to keep them alive, and productive.

Anyway, we stayed on until the summer of ‘47. An interesting comment there, my son Bob, my oldest son, later became Ambassador to Germany. Whereas he had a big home in Bonn, he also had a residence in Berlin. Our fortieth wedding anniversary, my wife and I and some of our family went to Berlin. We stayed with them. It happened that my wife and I were married on the twentieth of March in ‘47, and he was born on the nineteenth of December in ‘47 in Logan, Utah. Now if you count those days, it is just barely nine months. As a matter of fact, she came from a very strict Methodist family, and thank God, converted to Catholicism before I married her. Her mother wrote later and said, “I hope you don’t mind, I’ve been telling all our friends that Bob was born on the twentieth, because you were in Logan and it was the twentieth in Berlin.” We were in the embassy quarters when Bob called a press conference on some official business. Two or three reporters were there. He happened to mention that his family was visiting from the states, his parents and siblings, and that we were married in Berlin. They wanted to talk to us about it. My wife and I chatted with them a little while. The next day on the second or third page of a major newspaper there, the headline in German was: “American Ambassador to Germany made in Berlin.” [laughs]

Next we were in Logan, Utah. I was in National Guard duty there.

**RITCHIE:** I was just going to ask you, when the war was over, did you think about

whether or not to leave the military or stay in?

**KIMMITT:** Oh, well, I skipped something there. While in Berlin, at the end of the war, they initiated a very competitive program called the integration program, that was integration into the regular Army. By this time I was a major. You made an application. You went before a board and competed. I didn't really have a great desire to do it or was really interested in it, because I thought I was going back to Montana. By that time, I secretly had the thought, like about every other returning veteran, of maybe running for governor or something. Anyway, I went through this process not very excited about it, and came home one day, and there was a telegram, "You have been selected to be a first lieutenant regular Army. Reply within 48 hours." I don't know the specific ratio, but it was one selected out of several thousand applicants. It was a very tight selection. I let the damn thing lay on my desk. I couldn't make up my mind. I didn't hurry about it at all. Then I figured, "I'll take it. I can always resign." So I accepted and was integrated into the regular Army, and that pretty well closed the door of thinking of the question that you asked, was I thinking about getting out? Yes, I thought about it but I didn't follow through. I stayed in. We had two more children besides Bob born in Logan. We had three more, when we went from there to Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

**RITCHIE:** So the Army assigned you to train the National Guard?

**KIMMITT:** Yes, the Utah National Guard. From there, we went back to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where I had gone to OCS. I became an instructor in the artillery school there. Then Korea came along and I was sent to Korea. I took the family back to Logan and left them and went to Korea for fifteen months. I was a battalion commander and had a good combat tour in Korea under the circumstances. We were there at the end of the hostilities. We had significant actions at Old Baldy, Porkchop Hill, and Triangle Hill. I was very much involved in all of that.

In the meantime, we had these four children and I was gone for fifteen months. I came back. My wife met me in San Francisco, and again, almost nine months to the day, we had twins. So we made up for that year I was gone. Then we had another child born here in Virginia after we came back. After Korea, I came back to Fort Sill again as an instructor. Went to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the command and general staff school. Then I was assigned, much against my will and bitterly protesting, to legislative liaison in Washington, D.C.

**RITCHIE:** That was around 1958?

**KIMMITT:** That would have been '55. I bitched about it and complained about it. They said, "Just do as you're told." "Yes sir, no sir, three bags full." Legislative liaison sent me over here to the Senate. At that time, they had 96 senators. That was 1955. Hawaii and Alaska hadn't yet been brought in. There were three of us assigned here. One was Guy McConnell who later worked on the Appropriations Committee for quite a while. He is no longer here. The other was a man named Ed Hathaway.

We split the Senate up three ways. Each of us had 32 senators. We didn't have an office over here. We'd come over from the Pentagon on a kind of a shuttle as they have now. Down at the Russell Office Building nearest to the Supreme Court there was a desk belonging to a policeman named Murray. We would leave our uniform hats there and he would be our contact point. If anybody needing us from my office they called there, we'd check in with Murray to see if there were any messages. Then we'd just walk around all day and hit different offices. In those days, of course, the senators included Bush's grandfather, [Prescott Bush], [Leverett] Saltonstall, [Richard] Russell, [John] Stennis, [Henry] Jackson. I could go down a whole list. [James] Duff of Pennsylvania, Denny Chavez. Whoever was in the Senate in 1955. Of course, in the 32 that I carved out, I took Mansfield and [James] Murray, the Montana senators. That's where I reestablished my contact with Mansfield. I had three years there and got to know a lot of the senators and traveled with many of them, particularly from the Foreign Relations, Armed Services, and Appropriations committees.

In 1958, they sent me to the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island for a year. I left the family here and graduated there. During this period I studied for a Master's degree off duty at George Washington, but did not have the time to graduate. I was supposed to go to Europe, but they brought me back because I knew most of the key senators, and as always, even as today, the Army was having a hell of a time getting "modernization money." So they brought me back. I worked for a year. We were quite successful that year in getting modernization money. I remember Senator [John] McCain's father, "Junior" McCain, was later a three-star naval admiral. He was the head of Navy Liaison. He'd walk around with the stub of a cigar in his mouth. He was similar in appearance to his son, but a little more aggressive. One day he came down the hall by the Armed Services Committee, and he saw me, and said, "Kimmitt, goddamn it, you beat me



again. But I'm going to get your ass yet." He kept walking along. Apparently, some of the money the Army got the Navy was hoping to get.

Anyway, I went to Naval War College, was brought back for a year, then went to Europe. I had two years in Heidelberg and was selected below the zone for colonel. Baumholder had a division artillery there and I became the first colonel to command it. In 1964, I came back to Washington, and again, they put me back heading the Senate liaison. You remember those times. The records will show that, of course, that Kennedy had been elected in '60, then was assassinated. Johnson went to the White House.

Bobby Baker was a real player in those days. He had the big office down in the basement of the Capitol. He was very influential, but he couldn't stand prosperity. He got involved in the Carousel motel at the shore, and Coke machines, and bags full of campaign contributions. He became an embarrassment to the party and Mansfield had to get rid of him, although Johnson was down in the White House and Bobby was the one of his very brightest proteges. Mansfield moved him along. Eventually, I think Baker was indicted, convicted and served time.

Then, they put Frank Valeo in as Secretary for the Majority. Frank was a cerebral individual, a good writer, but pretty well introspective. He had practically zero political sense. He didn't seem to really know who worked for him. He didn't seem to care. All he did was write speeches for Mansfield. They would travel together. He was his foreign policy guru. Frank was good. He knew his business well, but he was a square peg in the round hole as Secretary for the Majority. One day Mansfield called me in. Vietnam was going on. He asked if I ever thought about getting out of the Army. I said, "No, I haven't." He said, "Well, would you think about it?" I said, "For what reason, senator?" He said, "Well, I'd like to go to work for me, and after a reasonable period of time, you'd become Secretary for the Majority. Not right away. Frank's in there now. Initially, you'll be the administrative assistant to the Majority Leader."

It's amazing. I kept him waiting for two or three weeks for an answer. You didn't do that with Mansfield. But I went back to my boss at the Pentagon and made out my retirement papers. I said, "I'm going to Vietnam with Scoop Jackson on a tour. If I can find a job in 'Nam where I can command, or as a chief of staff of a division, I'll tear these up when I come back. If not--." In meantime before leaving, I told Senator Mansfield, yes, I would do it. I went to 'Nam with

Jackson. Everywhere I went, they'd say, "Look, you've had your command. You had your war college. You're going to get a star. Let somebody else have a chance."

So I came back and went to work for Mansfield. Administrative assistant to the majority leader was kind of a title without a function. I was in his Leader's office. It was a difficult transition for him and for me. When you come out of the Army and you go to work for a senator, it's two different worlds. I made my share of mistakes. We didn't have a terribly warm relationship for quite a while. Frank was the favored fellow, of course, and my friend Charlie Ferris was on the policy end. I was usually excluded from most of that action. That bothered me a little bit, at that time.

I went on and I was finally elected Secretary for the Majority on October of '65, if I'm not mistaken. I had eleven continuous years in that job through some of the most turbulent times here, highlighted by Vietnam. Then, it came time for Mansfield to say, "There is a time to come and a time to go," and that he was going to retire. Well, Valeo was Secretary of the Senate, I was Secretary for the Majority, and our patron was leaving. I was always viewed, understandably and correctly, I might say, as being conservative and military-minded, but, forgive me, certainly not a liberal in the true sense of the word. Most of the senators recognized that. I knew Jack Kennedy quite well and I knew Bobby Kennedy well. I never got to know Ted Kennedy. I mean, I know him very well, but I was never on his frequency. He was in the process of trying to stack committees his way with liberals. It was in his heyday. I was there during the Long-Kennedy contest for whip. I know all about that one, which perhaps we'll get to, but not today. I was there during the [Robert] Byrd-Kennedy fight for whip. I was very close to that one. I may give you some insight into that period later.

Anyway, Mansfield was leaving. Of all people, with me being considered as a conservative, Gaylord Nelson, who was about as liberal as anybody in the Senate, and Dee Huddleston from Kentucky, urged me to run for Secretary. Now, Frank, as Secretary of the Senate, had made a mistake with Huddleston in authorizing an investigation in campaign finances in Kentucky. Instead of doing the right thing by going to the senator off the record and saying, "I've got these allegations and I'll stall them as long as I can, but if I have to do it, I have to do it." He never let him know. He did the same thing to a couple of other senators. He referred them to the Justice Department. So Huddleston had an ax to grind. Nelson, I don't know what his

motivation was. But they more or less became my campaign managers. When they talked me into it, I said, “Well, all right, I’ll do it, but not until both Valeo and Mansfield are told. I’m not going to move out until they’re told first.” Well, it fell to poor Charlie Ferris to tell Mansfield, and for Mansfield to tell Valeo, that I was going to run against him. Frank had Harry Byrd, Jr. as his campaign manager, and I had these other two, and we had a good spirited elective campaign unlike these days when they’re almost anointed. I won handily, almost two to one, I think. Then, I had the four years as Secretary of the Senate under Senators Byrd and Baker.

Now, those fifteen years are really the heart of what you want to talk about. Since I’m going out to Ken BeLieu’s memorial service now, we’re going to defer that. I would suggest, but I’m open to your suggestions, that when we come back, we start with the election as the Secretary for the Majority.

**RITCHIE:** Okay. Actually, I’d like to go back a little bit further and talk about those liaison days and work our way up from that. It’s interesting, just in general of your impressions of back then.

**KIMMITT:** That’s fine. I’d be happy to do that, because they were of a different time, as you know. As a matter of fact, two things have happened in the Senate in the intervening times that significantly changed the Senate operations. One was Lawton Chiles’ government in the sunshine act. He, being young “Walkin’ Lawton,” a bright fellow coming in, and Mansfield being of a nature that if any young senator, a junior senator, made a proposal, he’d get behind it if it made any sense at all. This one was government in the sunshine, called for no closed committee hearings unless members voted to close the hearing. Well, you and I both know when you get twelve senators around a committee table with the press there, it takes a gutsy man to move to close the committee hearing and throw the press out. They very seldom do. However, for security matters they could and sometimes did.

So that was one of the ice breakers in changing the tone in the Senate. Prior to that time, Ken BeLieu, whom we were talking about, Bill Darden, Ed Braswell, were staffers on the Armed Services Committee—now keep in mind, this is all through the Vietnam War, Vernon Mudge was there before BeLieu. Dick Russell and his committee ran that whole national defense with four principal staffers and one political appointee. Darden was the chief of staff, BeLieu handled

military construction, Braswell handled personnel. Charles Kirbo was Chief Clerk. They would usually have closed committee hearings. Everything was deferential and dignified. It was a genteel senatorial condition until they had “government in the sunshine,” which opened nearly all hearings to the press, television, radio and the general public.

The second was Mike Gravel urging and passing I think it was S. Res. 41, which, in effect, said every member of the committee would have a staff member on the committee payroll who would have access to committee files and attend all hearings. Well, between government in the sunshine, which opened up the press and the public to all the hearings, and then adding a staffer for every member, the room was totally jammed. The members didn’t have to be there all the time. [Jacob] Javits would usually go to three committee hearings a morning. He’d have his staffers come in, sit down, and observe, come up and whisper in his ear and hand him a piece of paper. He’d get recognized, speak, then bam, he’d get up and go to another committee and leave a staffer behind. That changed the whole tenor of the Senate.

**RITCHIE:** Yes, it was really a different world at that point. We’d like to get your recounting of it.

**KIMMITT:** It was a different world in many, many ways.

**End of First Interview**