

Interview with Former Arkansas Governor James “Jim” Guy Tucker, Jr. by LR  
Central High School Student Alex Crawford Concerning His Father, James “Jim”  
Guy Tucker, Sr. and His Service in the First World War

**Alex Crawford:** OK, so today is August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017, and I’m interviewing Jim Guy Tucker in regards to his father’s experiences in the First World War. Before I begin, is there anything you want to say about your father that you would want me to know about him?

**Jim Guy Tucker, Jr.:** Well, I think it may help some in your questioning here – yes, I can give you a little bit of background – this’ll be a little lengthy – but first let me go just directly to World War One. He never spoke to me about his experiences in World War One – with one exception. Just one time he ever spoke about it. It was clearly something that was very difficult for him to discuss, and he did not.

The one exception was when I was learning to drive – I was driving by then – but I was driving my father to work – he was manager of the Social Security Administration for the state of Arkansas. He had been one of the original former state auditors who had set up Social Security back in the ‘30’s – but I was driving him to work and he suddenly began telling me a story about one day when he was in France and they were working their way north against the Germans.

They came into a small village, and that nightfall, they came under intense artillery fire and took shelter in a home along the road, which was then hit by a shell and the floor collapsed. It was pitch dark; he checked all his men to see if there were severe injuries – and then they started trying to figure out how to get out of the basement. They could see nothing; their flashlights’ batteries had long since gone, and so forth, and they were not really available like we think of them today.

But in any event, in the course of feeling their way around the walls, they figured out they were actually in a wine cellar. This was a happy discovery, and it took them until almost noon the next day to find their way out. He shut up after that and never said another word to me about the war. So as far as any day-to-day experiences, virtually nothing.

However, he left a few mementos behind. There is a map that I have given to the – virtually all of my papers are with the Arkansas Center for Arkansas Culture and History, I think it’s called – I will occasionally call it the Arkansas Studies Institute because that’s how it was known for a while – it’s just three blocks away. But, for example, there’s a German map and I’m sorry that I can’t show it to you, but it’s available for you to go see. But I noticed that it’s got emplacements, it’s got lines on it and so forth, with some of his handwriting on it – it’s a German map – down in the lower left hand corner – it’s a German map, so I don’t know whether it was a map they acquired, that had been provided to them because the Allies didn’t have reliable maps of their own or what, but at least during a part of that period, he was utilizing a German map and he had his notes on it.

There is a certificate for valor that he received, there’s his later diploma that he received from George Washington University Law School, and there is also a – somewhere over there – a short diary that he kept while he was there. He wrote in it for a very short period of time, and then the entries stopped. There are a few letters that he exchanged, but there’s very few of them because mailing back and forth from the war zone was just not something that happened, as far as I can tell. Those are also over there and at one point they were actually available – some of the commentary on his experiences in World War One were online, published by the Center. So you should look at that, but definitely go over there

and I'll tell them to expect you – if you want to go, and it is open to researchers, and they've got them indexed, located, and everything. So that's available.

**AC:** I actually do believe I ran into your father's journal one of the days I was interning there. It seemed interesting, but I did not have a lot of time to actually thumb through it and look.

**JGTJR:** Yeah. Listen, I gave them boxes of stuff; hundreds of boxes, and I did not go through every box. So the deal I cut with them was if they are personal papers or something nearly, clearly should not be considered of historical value, then I would like for you to destroy them please, or give them back to me for me to destroy. But that would have not fallen in that category, so they may have things that I don't even know they have.

Now, with that being said, there's a little more background that would be helpful. My father's – my grandfather on my father's side – was a man named Guy Beckwith Tucker, and his family came out of Georgia. After the Civil War, they had come down from Virginia, and before that, out of the Islands. He became the marshal for the city of El Dorado, and the city marshal in those days had a good bit of influence, and also had a good bit of enforcement activity that was pretty rough. The most memorable incident in El Dorado was a feud – what was referred to as a feud – with the Parnell family. When I was in high school, a guy named Cliff Parnell played right tackle, and I played left tackle on offense – we went both ways; I played offense and defense, and on offense I was left tackle – and we'd ask, we'd each ask if we knew who the other was, and then we'd continue to battle. He later became a doctor, and was a very nice guy, very successful.

But in any event, it resulted in several shootings and ultimately a major shootout on the town square in which the governor had to call out the National Guard, and there's these huge papers – the Arkansas newspapers, the Arkansas Gazette – across the headlines, and they thought he had been killed; he was shot so many times they thought he was dead, but he in fact survived.

He later was ambushed riding back out to where my grandfather's family lived, on the Champagnolle River, in the town of Champagnolle, which is north of El Dorado. It no longer exists; there was a small oil well there, a bag swing and the open river, and that's it. But he had the Mink-Eyed Saloon, in Champagnolle. On one of the trips, he went into town to pick up the mail; he and my father were riding back and he was ambushed, and it blew his left arm off; the horse bolted, but it fortunately threw him into a sand pile out front of the house, and so he survived. And my father announced – my father had previously lost some mail going back and forth and was disciplined for having lost mail – and my father proudly announced that he hadn't lost any mail!

But he recovered from that; he then ran for the Commissioner for Mines and Agriculture in 1906 and was elected. I went back through old papers at one time, that were on those horrible reels at the Arkansas State History Commission, and I think they slowly are getting them moved, and I could not find any stories about the ambush, and I couldn't find any relevant date El Dorado papers. Somewhere there's news stories of that, I'm sure. What I did find constantly as I went through those news articles were Klan stories, and there were lynchings that routinely occurred that were reported in the paper. 'So-and-so was lynched.' While there are strong racial overtones in it, there's also a lot of indiscriminate white or black lynchings of people who had violated, or were perceived as having violated, some law or behavior or pattern entitled folks had executed arbitrarily. So that was part of my father's childhood.

He joined the Arkansas National Guard, and when Pancho Villa was being chased on the Mexican border, he went down with the Arkansas National Guard and Pershing to pursue Pancho Villa in Mexico. He did tell me all he could tell me about that, which was: they got up every morning, ate some beans – cooked some beans and ate them – got on their horse, rode to noon. Did not see Pancho Villa. Got off their horse, ate some beans, got back on their horse, rode until four or five o'clock in the afternoon, got off, made camp, ate beans, slept, and did the same thing the next day. And they never saw Pancho Villa!

**Paul Crawford:** That was a lot of beans!

**JGTJR:** They ate a lot of beans, rode a lot of miles in the cavalry down there, and the cavalry was his group, and that was primarily what you had in those days. So, he came back from at least that active duty experience. They mustered out of the National Guard, and then called them back up into the Army within a matter of months. And so he went to Germany, as a second or first lieutenant, and I'm not sure what his rank was when he actually departed the United States. There are several photos of him down there; one photo of him is in Camp Pike, over in North Little Rock, which is now known as Camp Robinson. But that was because Joe T. Robinson was a candidate for the Vice Presidency of the United States, and of course you've got the Robinson Auditorium.

His experience there, as I've told you, he just did not want to talk about it. And he didn't. But he became a captain while he was there. He was gassed, and he was wounded. His wound was to his leg, and he had a scar from it, but it didn't affect his walking or anything, there was no permanent injury. But it was a shrapnel wound. The gassing, however, did affect his lungs and hurt his lungs for the rest of his life. He ultimately died of cancer of the lungs, but he had tuberculosis before that and was hospitalized at the T.B. sanatorium in Russellville for several years in the early '50s. But he continued as director of the Social Security system in Arkansas until he retired in 1961, '60 or '61. So, that's a lot of background, but it gives you some sense of him.

**AC:** I have a question. So, he served in Northern France, then?

**JGTJR:** And he served in the Meuse-Argonne and Saint Michael Offensives.

**AC:** I see. So he saw extensive combat service.

**JGTJR:** As far as I know. All I can do is tell you his units did.

**AC:** And what unit did he serve in?

**JGTJR:** Well, I believe it was the 89<sup>th</sup> Division that came out of Arkansas, and below that, you'd have to track it down.

**AC:** I see. Well, thank you. So, when your father returned home, after the war, what did he do for his job between the two world wars?

**JGTJR:** I don't know what he did immediately after the war; his Georgetown diploma – I didn't look at the year of graduation, so it could have been postwar, or it could have been just prior to being called up for duty in the Guard – but he never practiced law to my knowledge.

He did go to Florida – he did get married; I later met his former wife, who was living here in Little Rock before she died, but I never met her until long after my father died – and he went to Florida during the Florida Land Boom and was down there, and he came back here. He got called up to help on Social

Security in the early '30s, - I want to say '33 or '34 – with some other former state auditors and other people. It was primarily a math issue, and he was very, very good with math. The rest of his life was spent on that. So he was down there when the Land Boom – I think trying to take advantage of all the selling and stuff that was going on – got divorced, married my mother in '32, I believe – and she was considerably younger than he was – and my youngest sister was born in '33 or '34. He lived in Washington a good bit of time and did not become director of the Arkansas Social Security system, I don't think, until the early '40's. He did volunteer, tried to sign up in the Army, during World War Two, and was rejected for both his health and his age at that point. Primarily his health, though. That's about all I know all around.

**AC:** I see. It sounds pretty extensive, though.

**PC (to AC):** You might want to ask if he knows the unit he was with– you know, what did he do? Artillery, or cavalry, or what.

**JGTJR:** In France? I assume that it was cavalry part of the time. And while there were a lot of troops that moved by horse from point to point, there wasn't much battle going on on horseback, unlike it might have on the Mexican border had they ever caught up with Pancho Villa or his forces. Between the trenches and the barbed wire, and the mud and the artillery, it was just a – I'm sure you've read a bit about World War One, and the massive casualties and insane frontal assaults on machinegun positions that took place, and I think that's the reason he did not speak of it. I was in – and I say that based on my own experience – I was in Vietnam, '65 and '67, as a civilian reporter.

**AC:** I heard about that.

**JGTJR:** Yeah, and I was asked to interview the other day at AETN for a series they're doing on Vietnam. They asked me to talk about the individuals and I said, 'I'll do that; I don't want it to be about me.' But I said "I don't want to talk anything except how I met them and everything. I can tell you about that." But I got emotional and had to stop the cameras because as we were talking about it I started having my own flashbacks on the unpleasantness of that experience. And I cannot talk about it to this day. I've tried to deal with myself, so I could explain how awful some of the things were and I just – I can't do it. I never have been able to and I'm not going to attempt to. I mean, when I just start talking about it I get close to being unstable about it so I would think, compared – what I saw, compared with what my father would've gone through in World War One, would just be nothing, or the people who just went through some of these horrible things in World War Two or Korea.

An uncle, my mother's brother, Jake White – he was from Bald Knob, like my mother was, in White County – and he was in both World War Two and Merrill's Marauders, over in Burma, and then called back up for Korea. And the slaughter was just – it was just hard for us to imagine today, I think, how horrible it was. And of course we know how terrible the Civil War was, just because we studied it so much as kids, but we don't really know. But you go down to that battlefield in Mississippi, at Vicksburg, and you get some sense of just how awful it was down there. So, I think that affected him very strongly, and I think that's why he didn't discuss it with me, and I just don't know, and I expect ninety-five percent of the men who went through that did not discuss their experience with their family when they came home. It was true with World War Two, as well, and I'm sure with Korea and Vietnam it was certainly true.