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Interview No. 1624

J. Halbert Gambrell

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: J. Hal. Gambrell

Interviewer: Barbara Dent

Project: El Paso Medical History

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: March 28, 2008

Terms of Use: Unrestricted

Transcript No.: 1624

Transcriber / Summary: Pamela Krch

In this interview, J. Halbert (“Hal”) Gambrell shares his memories of his colorful family, early El Paso, and his military experiences during both World War II and the Korean War. Born in El Paso in 1920, Gambrell entered this world in the family home due to his physician father’s decision to avoid local hospitals overflowing with Spanish Influenza patients. His father had recently returned from service in France during World War I; earlier he had served under General Jack “Black” Pershing during the latter’s 1916 punitive expedition into Mexico in Pershing’s ill-fated attempt to capture Pancho Villa. Gambrell continues to relate the various historical events his father was involved with: the KKK’s entry into El Paso, the break-up of the city’s corrupt government “Ring,” as well as his father’s efforts to raise money for the construction of what became El Paso’s Providence Hospital. Gambrell reminisces about his father’s many interesting patients, from Detroit gangsters to Mexican smugglers. In addition, he discusses his mother’s family’s involvement in New Mexico’s ranching industry and his uncles’ business dealings with then Secretary of the Interior, Albert Fall. Gambrell briefly discusses the El Paso of his youth, including the city’s streetcars, movie theaters, and the “little straight bridge” that separated El Paso from Juarez. Going on to talk about his military service, Gambrell talks about his World War II assignment as one of the White officers commanding the Tenth Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers, a segregated unit. Gambrell closes his interview by sharing details of his life after his retirement from the military; he speaks briefly about his first and second wives, his children, and his involvement in several local organizations including the Kiwanis Club and the Sheriff’s Posse.

Length of interview 87 minutes

Length of Transcript n/a