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A. V. Black

James St. Peter

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
School of Medicine Oral History Project

Interview date: May 24, 1984

Interviewer: James St. Peter

Interviewee: A.V. Black, M.D.
Former Clinical Faculty Instructor, WSU School of Medicine
Interview 1

James St. Peter: My name is James St. Peter, and this is an interview with Dr. A.V. Black, former president of the Montgomery County Medical Society, and former voluntary clinical faculty instructor for the Wright State University School of Medicine. The date is May 24, 1984, the time is 7:45pm, and we are in Dr. Black's home at 182 Cherry Drive, Centerville, Ohio.

[Pause in recording; recording resumes in mid-conversation]

A.V. Black: ...I'll start just one year before that because it kind of fits in with things. I had graduated from Columbus North High School in 1930. I was then just 17; I was 16 when I graduated but I was practically 17. My dad had been unemployed for a year because at that time teachers were a dime a dozen and children were few and far between. And he had been a superintendent at the little town of Rushville, down in Fairfield County, Ohio, and we obviously had no money. And at that time you couldn't get jobs, especially if you had no training, and I was just through high school and that's all I had, a high school education, and I couldn't get a job for anything. You know, I carried papers for a little bit for my friend when he was off. So I went to school at Oakwood right here in Dayton for another year, so I had five years of high school and being the eternal optimist which I guess I've always been, I thought, "Well, I'll take half a day's course and then try to get a job the other half." Well, the other half didn't work out for jobs but I did take high school- actually I took a college course in zoology under the tutelage of the high school teacher. I sat in the class but I also went through the whole college text book, side by side. So I had really a college course in biology that year, and I took mended architecture and physics, which I had not had in high school, I had chemistry.

And so it was really serendipitous because I not only matured a year but I got physics and I got advanced zoology, so when I went to the University of Dayton, where I started the next year which was '31/'32 that I went to UD as a special pre-med, of course I took the usual things, chemistry and biology and a course in physics, and because of my background of having five years of high school I did quite well academically. So much so that when I applied for medical school, which I did after only two years as did my classmates, most of whom actually entered medical school after their second year of pre-medics, which is almost unheard of. Well, it just is unheard of now because very few

students are accepted with less than four years of study and a graduate degree, a bachelor's degree rather. So I applied at Ohio State because it was the only place I could afford to go. We had no money, you know. Teachers at that time didn't make more than barely a living wage. Not even near as good as they are now, although they think they've barely got a living wage now but I think teachers are pretty well paid in general.

Anyway, I applied at Ohio State and I was interviewed by Bland Stradley, who was the Dean of Admissions at that time and what he said was the law in the terms of admission. So he came out and he said, "Black, you've got the top grade on the amplitude, your grades are excellent, all A's, but you're too young." I was 20. And then he said, "I don't particularly like the chemistry course at the University of Dayton. So you come up here, you take a course this summer in organic chemistry," which I did. And said "You come to school and pre-med, take some pre-med or whatever courses you want to take, it's up to you. You take some pre-med courses, show us what you can do and if everything is in order, I'll promise you a place in next year's class." Which again was almost unheard of, and he promised a year ahead.

So I did one state the third year then 1931 to '33. And he kept his word and was admitted in the class of '34. So I was there '34, 5, 6, 7, 8, four years. It would be '35, 6, 7, and 8 in June of those years. So I got my MD degree. I was about in the, I was probably the middle third in there as near as I can figure, academically. You usually knew about what third you were in, they never told you any more than that, except that I was the roommate to the number one man in the class. I said we always balanced out each other. He was at the top and I was at the bottom, so we matched each other real well. Herb Kessinger who was the top student as you might know being first in the class and a fine gentleman. And he went to practice family practice and then ophthalmology, became an ophthalmologist and did excellent work. But we got separated. He was up North at Sandusky and I was down here in Dayton. So one of the tragic things in my life was the fact that we were not allowed by circumstance to get together very often. As a matter of fact I visited him very shortly before he died very suddenly. I was glad that I had taken the time to go visit him.

So finishing the school then like everybody else I interned at St. Elizabeth Hospital and I was there just one year, '38 to '39. And then I needed to get out and make a living, in spite of the fact that right at that point I would have loved to gone on to gynecology obstetrics, I liked obstetrics so well. I had 85 deliveries during my year there; which is almost unheard of for a general internist, intern rather. But again not in any money I, since I had some experience in psychiatric work, as a sub-graduate, I thought well I'll apply for a job which I knew was opening up at Dayton State Hospital. So I applied for and did get that job as assistant clinical physician at Dayton State Hospital; which is now Dayton Medical Health Center. And I went on the staff there and was on there uninterrupted then until 1942 except for a brief shift as a medical core officer at Fort Hayes, Columbus, OH. I went on active duty for a short time as a volunteer. And, I examined actually the first group of inductees who went to Fort Hayes in World War II. And had I stayed on duty then I would have naturally gone on to Correggio or Viton and probably wouldn't be sitting here talking to you then, I probably been on the death march.

So, serendipitously they turned me down because I was underweight. And I applied again and I was still underweight. And because I had a feeling then that I was doing custodial work and actually we could do very little more little more [inaudible] in those days; I felt that I wasn't contributing much to the national effort. So I went to my boss and I said, "I'm going to apply for a waiver of my," whatever they called it at that time. If you had an essentialities is what it meant, that you were differed and I had been differed because that hadn't, I hadn't said that I want to waive that. And so I applied a third time. This time I thought well I'll fox them out and instead of going to Fort Hayes I'll go out here to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base for examination and in the mean time I ate bananas by the pound, I drank milk by the quart to gain weight so I got all the way up to 125 I guess. And they passed me with a waiver because I was underweight. So I had to sign a waiver that I, they were sort of taking me because I wanted to go in. So I got in then. In the meantime, then I went back to Fort Hayes and was on duty there 8-5, great service. I was a psychiatrist along with Dr. Waldenalls [sp?] who was professor of psychiatry at Ohio State University, we had a great time. We were the last ones to interview the men going through they all had their chest x-ray and their physical, you know. And we were the last one to interview them to see if they were psychologically fit, in our opinion, for the service. So we would be on duty at eight o'clock, but the men did not filter through the line because they didn't do the shotgun approach like they do at golf tournaments. We got them last and about ten o'clock before we got them. So we would sit there and play chess for a couple hours, hour and a half or two hours. It was a delightful morning playing chess and then the candidates come and then we'd worked until five, time out for lunch. It was a really half madden, I moved in with family in Columbus at the time. They had a great time and thought this was going to be nice.

So after six weeks I walked in to my unit up on the second floor of one of those big buildings in Columbus and the captain in charge of our examining unit said, "Lieutenant Black you are to be on a train to Madison Barracks New York by six o'clock tonight. You're going to report for overseas duty." The whole world crashing, collapsed as far as my family was concerned. You could image what you had to do if you were told at eight o'clock in the morning by six o'clock that night you had to be on a train with everything to do. So, well I had to go break the news to my wife. Because we had forgotten about as, I really, I hadn't really forgotten but I hadn't thought about it but a year or two before that I had pledged myself to a commanding officer of a unit that was being organized for overseas duty in the Dayton area. Dr. Major Taylor, Doctor and Major Taylor from Yellow Springs was the commanding officer and he was recruiting and I said, "Well I don't think you can get me because I'm in the reserves," as one that notes there said. But I said, "If you can get me I'll go as your psychiatrist," because I was the only one of the group he was recruiting with psychiatric experience and good bit of medical experience as well. Hadn't forgotten really, I had pretty forgotten way in the back of my mind and then of course when that happened I knew immediately what had happened, that he had got the orders for me to go to Madison Barracks. So I was a train at six o'clock that evening. I had scurried around, got my picture taken for my family and had the power of attorney, had to go to the court house get the power of attorney for my wife so she could handle all the details of financing and insurance and all that. It wasn't much money to

handle but she had to write checks and take in what money we had which wasn't anything because I was on a very small salary at Dayton State Hospital. So we scurried around and bought a refrigerator. I think we paid thirty dollars for it and it worked all the way through the war and beyond believe it or not; and had to go in debt a little bit of that.

So, I hit Madison Barracks, New York which is at the eastern pole of Lake Ontario at Watertown which is famous for a couple things: the Camp Madison Barracks and making Faichney thermometers. If you look at some the old thermometers, the oral thermometers, it'll say Faichney Watertown, New York and that's all I knew about it. Now I know it's in the most god awful, decollate place in New York state. You go through miles and miles of nothing but old rivers and bare land until you get to Madison Barracks. So I was there three days and I had no more than hit the place before I was in a helmet and a gas mask and I could see the shells dropping and the gas bomb exploding and at that point I could have gone AWOL very quickly having just left my little two daughter and my six month son that was kind of tough to leave them on such short notice.

So in three days there I was on a train and we got marched out in the snow at three am one morning and got on a train for Camp Kilmer [sp?] in New Jersey which was our point of debarkation for the war. And the loud speakers in two days we were there. Families knew where we were but didn't know where we were going and nor did we. The band was playing "I'll be back in a year. We're in the army now." We were back two and a half years later. So I got clambered onboard the Queen Mary on D-Day, not D-day, Pearl Harbor Day in 1942, one day we sailed then the next day, which was one day plus Pearl Harbor Day we sailed from New York Harbor. We thought for Africa, and at that time I was with this stationed hospital unit of consisting of a cadre of doctor and nurses and a cadre of men from New Jersey area. And then we picked up other people as we went along, but the doctors and nurses were from this area so that all of the only, only one or two of the nurses I knew if that and most of the doctors I knew. So we were on the way to England as we found out. It took us just seven days to go across. We went solo zigzags because no submarine could catch up when they were doing that. It would be happenstance if we'd run into one. So that was quite an experience with 14,000 other people. We were one of the first hospitals in England to take care of enlisted men. There were a few small hospitals for officers and very little bit of the way for enlisted men because there were many enlisted men there yet, they were mostly officers you know to make arrangements, billeting and intergovernmental things. So we were the local run and area hospital for enlisted men. So very soon after we got set up then the GIs blew-in in droves and that was for nothing inkle while daily papers and one of the things which I remember and it was quoted in this paper and had I tried to save it, the British complained about the GI's. They say they're overpaid and oversexed and they're over here. And return the GI's would say about the brads balloons you know what you saw all over the place the all the items just got the ropes and let the damn island the sink. So there was, there was a lot of good humor playing and we generally got along quite well, but you know the English were not all happy with that and of course likewise we were not all that happy with England but I have a great regard for the English people. I love England. I'd go back every year if I could, I haven't but if I could afford it and get the time, didn't have any other places I want to go. I could enjoy, I loved English people.

So we went there, then travelled kind of all-around apart of the DTLC, setting up one hospital after another. That is our job. We would set up a hospital and this and did include Ireland as well as England and then France later on. We would set up a hospital, take soldiers, patients of course, and we treated anybody from the general right down to the private and some civilians if they needed it. We were a stationed hospital, that meant that we took anyone in the area that needed anything, whether that was a gunshot wound, an airplane that had been, an airplane man that had been shot down, or a child hit by a mortar or mine as we had in France. So we took care of them and we would send them back to a bigger hospital finalized or we sent them back to duty. That was our job, purpose. Main job of course was to get men back to the lines as fast as possible. So we took care of a lot of relatively minor things but very acutely ill things the Italian aid station could not handle. In other words we had to be put to bed we got them because the Italian aids that was the standard if they were really off their feet we got them from the Italians. It, surgeons. So we went to France on D+72. We went in on the second D-Day. That was when the Sicilian and the Italian frontier was invaded by the Allied troops. Sent picture, music, me and unit moved right across the continent and, so we were not too close. The guns were just about to penetrate Paris when we got there. So the first night we slept on the ground and we didn't sleep well because the ground was too hard and the guns were too loud. So we came in on Omaha beach, near Shernberg. We set up a temp, a temp hospital there in Shernberg and did the same kind of thing there and eventually turned that over to someone else and we went on and all of them handled and...

St. Peter: When did you finally get back to the states?

Black: Came back July 6, 1944, after of course after D-Day and very soon after the German's had surrendered. But before the Japanese had surrendered, so the Japanese were still on, actually I was sent back as part of what they called Greening Project; which was a program to take specialists, retrain them if they needed it, which meant primarily a course in tropical medicine and then we were going to the Japanese Theatre, the Pacific. Either that's where I was headed for when I left the reservation hospital where I was of course tickled to get home. I knew I'd get to see my family even though I knew I would probably go to Japan then. So I came back to Japan and I had briefly what I think was two weeks, and then I went to Camp Elderberry and I was there when the Japanese signed their surrenders. So I will remember that day. Because I remember three GIs coming down the street at Camp Elderberry. One of them was pretending to play a fife, the other one had a flag and the other one was playing the drum. You've seen *The Spirit of '76* painting. So they did a beautiful mock-up of *The Spirit of '76*. So I was sent to camp in Mississippi and there, what do you think? Setting up another hospital. It was not originally scheduled for that but it was rescheduled for that and gradually as the war came down and I had accumulated a lot of points having been overseas for nearly two and a half years. And if you know they discharged soldiers according to their points of service and I had a lot of points so really didn't need me there. In fact the place closed fairly soon after I left because the war ended fortunately and they didn't need that so, Camp Vandor Mississippi went out of business with the war that I was discharged in and went through the usual routine. By that time I had been promoted to the major but I

never got a major's pad and that was sort of a curse to me more than anything else. So I never worked as a major and never got a major's pay. Which I thought "Wow that's great! 4,000 bucks a year! My goodness!" But, I had been paid I went to work, I promised to go to work for 17.50 and a year that is and at the hospital. When I left I was making 2,000, 2,200 roughly 2,300 maybe, and then of course I made roughly the same amount in the army, with a major's pay without you know you really got it made. So that's how time changed to the extent that when I started a practice which was right after that [zarnabell?], you know you plan ahead and I figured you know how much we would eat a week, we had two children. If I could net \$4,000 a year, gross \$4,000 a year that we could make it, you know, that's what I thought. Course inflation kind a started way back then too, a little bit it wasn't too bad because I bought my property up there, for 125, 12500 not too bad, I don't know how I could ever pay that. I had to take on a lot of work in years to do it but over the years I did. And eventually we moved here and then we had the to two places to buy and I was just 60 years old, 6-0, when I had both paid for the office and the house, which actually was not as bad as it sounds because that was an investment really and I had now since sold that place at a pretty good profit so it's helped pay my retirement.

St. Peter: When did you become involved, first involved with Montgomery County Medical Center?

Black: Well, when I came back of course in the early years I went to the meetings but I was not particularly involved. That would have been 1939 to '42 when I was at the state hospital. I came back in '46 and as soon as I came back because I had always been interested in the medical society that started and I don't think I missed a meeting, you know, I was very sincere and getting that he had not only that but I have other things we're going to talk about in a minute if my voice holds up. So I finally became treasurer, I was two terms treasurer and then I was, I ran for president one year and the man who ran against me, we had a tie. He was a very well-known physician, Dr. Dewey, a well-known obstetrician and taught a lot of people here. Oh yeah, he probably delivered, he delivered my Jane and my Robert and my Jill. And Dan and I tied, and so then they had a run-off that night and he won by a couple of votes on the run-off. So the next year then I was elected president and Dan Dewey and I were very good friends. And I was glad that he got it the first time because he had been around a long time and worked real hard. But I had always worked hard and I decided to work on my committees and I'd done so many things I can't even remember all of them. I worked at that time we had what they called a Hospital Admissions Bureau, which worked to get care for the indigent in the area. And I spent hours after, in-between practice hours I would go down there hours on committee trying to work out programs so the needy would get medical care that they needed. So, since I got to be president I automatically got pushed into other committees and it was, you know, pulled around the whole time to the extent that I was slender, I couldn't get into the army easily. I gained 15 pounds in one year as president of the medical society, I was on [inaudible], you know, peas, meat, Swiss steak, and mashed potatoes and dessert. I finally learned to substitute salad for dessert so I didn't gain any more than 15 pounds tops and I've stayed just about there ever since then. I was 48 years, 49. I'm now 70 and

I've been within five pounds probably three pounds since then with my weight. I stayed almost on or above it now. Go ahead, ask ...

St. Peter: In 1957 they came out with, the General Assembly established an Interim Committee on Higher Education in Ohio and appointed Dr. Patterson from Vanderbilt University to-

Black: I remember that day.

St. Peter: -to coordinate the medical education aspects of that. He came out with a report listing eight possible sites, including Dayton. What was the reaction for the Medical Society of Montgomery County?

Black: There was mixed reaction. I guess I'll tell you mine first. I have always felt that the physician when he gets his MD degree not only has the burden of proving himself as a practitioner and taking care of his people but he owes it to the profession to pass along his skills and knowledge to students and other doctors as he is able to. That was my basic philosophy. And I think many other doctors had the same feeling. There are many other men and some of them are very good friends of mine who have different philosophies that they were not of the personality for that type of thing; that they would just simply practice medicine period. Unfortunately, I think they thought that way. My voice is giving out. So there was a mixed feeling. The preponderance was that we should have it. I felt that Dayton just would not have as good medicine practice in this whole area without a medical school. Couldn't help it update things because we by that time medicine had advanced so much it was beyond the stethoscope, aspirin, surgery. That we just needed it to bring a high quality medicine to the Dayton area. And so I think we just divided into two camps and there were those who thought it was important and those who really rather just not be bothered with it. Not that they weren't good doctors some of them were tremendous doctors, excellent clinicians but they had no interest in going to meetings on Wednesday afternoon, which is our traditional afternoon off and in the mean time I'd been officer of the general practice section and president in that and then I was instrumental in getting the whole region organized. So I can say without any pride particularly that I helped get the general practice, the family practice thing organized in this whole area and but I did drop out of it before it really got much recognition at the state and national level which of course it does have now but I... (The recording drops-off here.)