

## **Interview: Leroy Tombs**

**January 20, 2004**

**Interviewer:** Lahoma Yates Dennis, longtime Dole staff member

**Transcribed By:** Brent Garcia, July 27, 2006

Interviewer: It's January 20, 2004, this is Lahoma Yates, and I am visiting with Leroy Tombs. Leroy has been a good faithful republican in Kansas for a number of years and a friend of Mr. Dole. Leroy do you remember when you met Mr. Dole?

Leroy Tombs: Yes, he was quite young. It was during the Nixon administration and there were a lot of civil rights legislation going on. And, Bob Dole was quite young, but he had a clear understanding of how Nixon wanted to create a different kind of society where everybody was included in it. The republican password at that time was "Be more inclusive". Bob was a big advocate of that lets open up the party for everybody, let's let everybody want and come in and be a republican. I liked that attitude of Bob. I had heard about him from Newspaper people that I knew, Marion Vaughn, who owned the Bonner Springs Chiefton.

Interviewer: Oh, yes. I remember, Marion.

Leroy Tombs: He was flattered by this young white boy who had been shot in the war and came back and decided he would be lawyer, but couldn't write. Everybody said that's got to be a tough kid who is going to law school and doesn't have access to his writing. The claimed that this boy was so tough minded that he developed a memory system that replaced his inability to write effectively, training his left hand to do that. Harry Darby\* was smitten by him, too. Blake Williamson.

Interviewer: They are old timers.

Leroy Tombs: Yeah. So I worked with them on political things. We would have Wyandotte County fair days and that sort of thing. We would always get what candidates we were pushing. Wyandotte County never was very friendly to republicans. But, we always worked around that group over there. We got what republicans we wanted, just gave them pretty much the county for democrats.

When I first met him, just bright eyed and wasn't much difference between our ages. I was fascinated with Bob Dole. When I heard him say lets be more inclusive, let's open up the base, broaden the base, those are the kind of things I liked. As it went along, I got to know Morris Kay, and people who was running. Morris, at that time, was doing a lot of little political things and he ran for Governor. I met a lot of people, Dave Owen, and many, many people.

*\*Harry Darby was a member of the Republican National Committee from Kansas that was appointed to the US Senate when Governor Carlson resigned from the Senate in 1958.*

Interviewer: He [Dave Owen] really helped Bob in the early years, didn't he? To get contacts like Harry Darby, Blake Williamson, and then they intern recruited people like you that they knew would work on the roots level, right?

Leroy Tombs: Oh, yeah. Bob had the spirit and drive and had everything that you would want to see in an elected official. He came from a very poor family, very hardworking, honest people. Bob had the sign that should say,

“Bob, the sign is on, you’ll go far.” Even back in those days, they said that it wouldn’t surprise them if he became President. The more I met him, it was just a very easy meeting, “Hey, Leroy! How are you doing? Do you have any money?” [Laughing] We had very good conversations, we would have fundraisers.

Interviewer: As I remember, Leroy, didn’t he generally carry Wyandotte County, too, when he was running for the Senate?

Leroy Tombs: That’s right.

Interviewer: I thought he did.

Leroy Tombs: (Laughing) We would take everybody. Bob didn’t care what you looked like, as long as you voted for the Republican Party, you were all right?

Interviewer: He did a lot for Wyandotte County, the Federal Courthouse, and all.

Leroy Tombs: The Veterans, uh, not the Veterans, but the Environmental Protection. I would get calls from Bob, like, “They got a new congressman over there, Leroy, let’s pick his pocket. We don’t need everything over there on the Missouri side; we need some of these Government Agencies on the Kansas side.”

Interviewer: That’s right.

Leroy Tombs: I would go find the space and do things like that because Bob would say, "Go do it!" We were able to bring things across the river; at one time it was all over in Missouri.

Interviewer: I know it. He brought HUD over and the EPA. And you helped him do that?

Leroy Tombs: I got the spaces.

Interviewer: And they are still hanging on there. The new building for EPA is gorgeous.

Leroy Tombs: As I drive around there, I say to myself that all of those people are working in there because of Bob Dole. We give the people in Wyandotte County, it's beginning to show, but most of the candidates, I don't think can see it all. I see it all because I remember way back. All of the hard work that went into it and this is what they need to be telling all of the Democrats in Wyandotte County. We only have about 14,000 registered Republicans? That's not much. But, Bob would get out there and have a little office in Wyandotte County. The ladies would open up the office and serve coffee.

Interviewer: And that courthouse over there, he helped fund that and get that built.

Leroy Tombs: Bob's picture is all over. He has been very helpful in Brick and Motor and a lot of the programs. When I traveled around the country,

they would say, “Leroy, we need somebody to push the voters rights.” So the black caucus asked me if I would talk to Bob Dole about that. I said, “Well, I don’t think Bob is going to support any house bill with him being in the Senate.” Bob took a look at the voters’ right bill and said, “Leroy, I don’t know how you feel about it, but I’m embarrassed that you would need a voters rights bill. I am going to write one for the House.” The black caucus had one I think for 5 or ten years, Bob wrote one for the maximum, 25 years. The Senate had a program that Bob Dole embraced; I brought Norman Hodges in here with the Twenty Good Men. Bob would come down in the ghetto, take off his coat and sit there and help Hodges however he could. (Laughing)

Interviewer: Tell us about the Twenty Good Men of Hodges, I remember meeting him.

Leroy Tombs: Norman and I were good political buddies in Washington, but Norman had a bad heart. I said to Hodges, “I am going back to Kansas. I am not going to be a part of the black manufacturers, it’s not funded properly and most of the people that come in are kind of looking for a handout, it won’t grow, it’s got to have a foundation.” My group was contributing about \$6,000 a month to keep the national black manufacturers alive. We were doing all the work, so I said that we should shut it down. The members wouldn’t support it, they wouldn’t have a job. I said, “Well, you’re a big boy. I don’t know where you are going to go, but you are not my son,” and we laughed about it. And on the serious side he says, “I need to go out into Kansas with you.” He said, “I think there are some things we can do out in Kansas and Washington, DC.” So I had an apartment that

wasn't being used and I gave it to his family, it was furnished. It took "Twenty good women". [Laughing]

Interviewer: They did a lot of hard work?

Leroy Tombs: Yeah, the men were great at putting roofs on houses and building doors so handicapped people could get their chairs through, seven days a week. Norman died one Saturday morning at his desk, of a massive heart attack. I knew he had a heart problem and I had taken him to the doctor, and they had scolded him about working too hard. Norman didn't even have insurance when he died, so we took up a collection.

Interviewer: They refurnished houses didn't they? Didn't they take some of those that people refer to as inner city?

Leroy Tombs: That's where we were working, right in the ghetto. He cleaned up all of those vacant lots, where people were dumping trash and garbage. He cut all of the weeds; people up at city hall would give him lawn mowers and stuff they had gotten when people had stolen them. He had a wonderful connection with the mayor and the police, Chief of Police, really everybody, city managers.

Interviewer: Was that a funded program, Leroy? Was it funded locally?

Leroy Tombs: We funded it. We didn't have any paid staff. We would come up with money, find a house, fix it up, and put families in there. This one guy was a carpenter, but he was an alcoholic, and today he is a minister and lives in a lovely home in Kansas City, MO. We put him in a little house

over there, paid the bills until he was able to paint and do things. We have a lot of success stories like that out of our program of Twenty Good Men. Nancy Kassebaum and Bob Dole helped them to be recognized in the senate, and then George Bush, who was president at that time, made him one of the thousand points of light, to come back to Washington. It was a very proud moment for him.

Interviewer: And you too.

Leroy Tombs: Yes. But I thought he needed the, uh, oh, he always wanted me up there with him and I said, "OH, you go on up there and do it." I knew he had a bad heart. The car he drove I gave him and you would say to him, his daughter, his son, his wife, "You're not a very well person. Hodges, think deeper than that." He used to say, "That's all you think about Leroy, is money." I told him that somebody has got to pay the bills. (Laughing) He thought in terms of rehabilitating drug addicts.

Interviewer: Mr. Dole came to two or three things.

Leroy Tombs: Every time Norman called Bob Dole was there; Bob Dole would pick up the telephone and get roofing material from people. Bob would get windows to go in those little houses that the windows were old, everything that Norman would ask Bob for. Bob would take off his coat and the both of them would be there going over this plan of Norman Hodges, he thought that was the way to get things done. Norman stayed here because of his attachment to Bob Dole. Colorado wanted to pay him to come to Colorado with that program and Norman told them, "No, I have the support and I'm not going anywhere until I finish this." Norman worked with Bobs



help and they gave us little houses up here (Fort Leavenworth), and we put them on barge, on the port. We would float them down the river and put them down there at Fairfax. We could never get the city to come up with infrastructure money like. All those old sewer pipes were no good, old neighborhood; we need roads and everything in there. We showed them on paper where each one of these people don't have a home. By giving them a home, let's just say this home is worth \$35,000; this guy goes from almost poverty to having \$35,000 net worth. Just his house, not his furniture or what not. But he had to do so much work himself. It was similar to habitat, whoever got a house had to do a lot of work. There were rules and regulations; we set those up so that the houses would be up scaled and not down scaled.

I can't think of any legislation from voter rights that Bob didn't champion to affirmative action, Bob Dole championed that. I don't have time to share all of the stories. I was very fond of him, I still am. He was just a great unselfish person. He was an example because you couldn't cop out to a guy like Bob, who should have been dead. He willed himself to live and he willed himself to do what he did, and he took care of himself. As crazy as he was about his mother and everything. I always kidded Elizabeth about Bob. Bob was a handsome rascal, but he seemed to have the world on his shoulders, rather than marriage. I asked her, "How did you ever convince Bob to marry you?" She said, "She saw Bob one time and she swore if she didn't marry him, she would just as soon die." [Laughing]

Interviewer: Love at first sight, huh?

Leroy Tombs: Yeah. She was very proud of him. It was a perfect pair. I would just laugh because I would see a lot of pretty women trying to get close to Bob and Bob was totally blind. Getting business done.

I will answer any question you can ask me.

Interviewer: You have another program now, is that a funded program now?

Leroy Tombs: No, I don't get any money from anybody. I pay my way everywhere I go. I try to go help minority business still and it's getting tougher and tougher because sometimes people don't want you to tell them how to run their business. You have to be very careful when you go to some of these people, most of them are understaffed, and they don't have enough people to do what they should do. You have to be careful about criticizing them, that's a national organization. The Black Chamber of Commerce, I had black manufacturers still on my mind. That is located out of Washington, DC. We don't have an affiliated office out of Kansas City, Kansas or Missouri. Every little Black Chamber calls themselves a Black Chamber. We gave them, there are two national chambers, one African American chamber and the National Black Chamber of Commerce and we have an office in Washington, DC. We get a lot of support especially from President Bush, he is very proud of the program, the way Harry Alford has it set up. He goes to the White House quite often and you see him at the State of the Union Address. He's done a lot of good for the minority business; he works very well with the National Chamber, white chamber. He is for the organization in the interest of growth. We have in our organization, manufacturers, newspaper people, and all kinds of people.

Interviewer: To spread the word and let you know what's going on in the community, that's where they need help, correct?

Leroy Tombs: That's right and the basis is, and we think we are right on time. We need, and the president said two things last night, he was going to look at the junior colleges and help them because you don't need a college degree to be a good technician and if we had a lot of technicians then you wouldn't have to send a lot of jobs overseas. Then if we had the right kind of technicians, we could get a lot of stuff done here in America, right here in Kansas City, and I like immigration and all that, but it's getting so that you almost have to hire somebody else if you want to get menial kind of things done. The farmers in Bonner Springs can't get their tomatoes and beans picked until we hire those illegal immigrants, we call them. So the president wants to recognize them so they won't be illegal anymore. But more than anything, what he was telling America, that if our work force is trained, high tech trained, and we got people with that ability, America can do whatever they want to do, but we have never worked with the trades and all the trained people. You either go to college or you don't know what you are doing. Now, we need to train people in these junior colleges that you need to be a technician so you got a job. I think there is so much that we need and we can't get any help, whether it's to make eyeglasses or build whatever. We just don't have anybody to do anything. We will build a workforce that is nationally competitive. That's what we need, if we build a workforce, our military, or defense department is very competitive, the best defense in the world, but we have to have strong families to keep producing those kinds of men and women that think enough of their country and their cause to volunteer for that low pay. We are so proud; my nephew has been over in

Iraq since this began. We got word 2 or 3 days ago, not to write him any letters or send any packages because he is in Kuwait now, waiting to come home. We are so proud that he didn't get hurt or killed. He made it through the whole thing.

I retired out of the Navy. My father thought that was the smart thing for us to do, he said, "I don't have enough money to send you boys to college, but the government needs you." So I retired from the Navy. I've got a brother that is retired from the Army and one from the Air Force. We all see the wisdom of having become members of the armed services. The benefits, we don't have to worry about health benefits because my medicine comes from them, from Leavenworth.

Interviewer: The VA?

Leroy Tombs: No, the regular hospital. We think that's great. I have Tri Care for Life. Which I need co pay or anything when I go to the doctor's office. It's about the lack of service, now everybody sees that the VA is inadequate. They have gotten filled up in a hurry.

Interviewer: Mr. Dole really supported the VA didn't he? That new building at the hospital that was built in Leavenworth, that was the first built in 50 years, wasn't it?

Leroy Tombs: He knew what was coming and he knew how there was no real care for him. They just did so much. And then they had a cigar box up there in Russell; however he could get help he got it. A lot of people

thought that once you get shot up the government will pad you with so much.

Interviewer: Not necessarily. I know the veteran, which is some of what attracted you to Bob, his support of Veterans, right?

Leroy Tombs: Yes, because he understood. Once you have been wounded in battle and once you saw your shipmates and comrades wounded and dead, you have a different outlook. I met people in the military I was very close to, especially when you are in battle, you remember them forever. I was quite young, like he was. That really became the guys I grew up with, the sailors, not the guys I was born with out in Bonner. I got tired of going to family reunions because it was stressful, you know. Guys with strokes and one leg. Some were pretty fast, some drank pretty well. Only thing recognizable about them was their voice. [Laughing]

Interviewer: I have seen you too at a lot of political meetings; you have been helpful to a lot of Republicans other than, Bob, bringing young people into the Kansas Republican Party?

Leroy Tombs: Sure, I started the Black Republican Council. We had the first convention here in 1976. We had blacks from all over the country. We still kept our council and we are growing; now I have about 5 states that are up and started. We have a council her in Johnson County, the Black Republicans, one in Wyandotte County, and we have one in Topeka. I have been asked to join the, nationally, the blacks are asking me to be on the board; at the convention we are going to give Lionel Hampton a reward.

Interviewer: The one in New York, the one that's coming up this next year, 2004?

Leroy Tombs: Right. They want to make it a big affair.

Interviewer: Does Lionel have ties here in Kansas or Missouri?

Leroy Tombs: No, he was a great Republican. Nixon, Reagan, Bush, all of them, he did some nice fundraisers. He is just a nice person. We are going to do an appreciation for Lionel Hampton; there are not a lot of us old timers around. We have got a council here, Black Republican Council; hopefully we can get a couple of delegates to the convention.

Interviewer: That would be nice.

Leroy Tombs: We have someone on our council; he feels strong enough he could do at least two.

Interviewer: You've been a delegate in years past?

Leroy Tombs: Oh, yes. I was a delegate here when Bob was running before.

Yes, I had a lot of fun. We had a lot of pineapples, it was crazy.

Interviewer: We've all poured a lot of pineapple juice, haven't we?

[Laughing]

Leroy Tombs: It's been a lot of fun. But we were blessed, we had a great leader. Not a lot of people had a Bob Dole. He was for real. He had a fabulous mind. I remember a woman out in Western Kansas saying, "Hi, Senator Dole! I am sure you don't remember me." He said, "Oh, Janet, how are you doing? Where's Bill?" She said, "I know you don't remember our kids." He started naming them, asking how they were doing. He had a memory like nothing you ever saw in your life.

Interviewer: He remembered them all, didn't he?

Leroy Tombs: I remember when Bill Walford ran in the campaign; we were getting beat to death. Bill Roy had grabbed us and he was in the house, we kept saying, you know this guy is going to be tougher than he looks. Bob and I were sitting together when they had the Small Business 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary up in Abilene and Harry Darby was the emcee. Mike Hayden was the governor then, Bob was divorced. Bob and I were sitting on the bench together and Harry Darby said, "You know, you've got to have a great woman, and behind every good man is a great woman." So he introduced Governor Hayden [Laughing] I said, "Bob, that leaves you and I out." Bob said, "Boy he really hit me low." Sometimes Huck Boyd would say, "Is Bob helping you Leroy?" And I would say, "I don't think I'm on a good list right now." [Laughing]

Interviewer: You are not on a good list right now, huh?

Leroy Tombs: We were asking him for more than he wanted to do. Sort of shut you out. We had a lot of laughter, a lot of good times.

Interviewer: Sometimes Bob got the reputation for being mean or mean spirited, but he was always thinking.

Leroy Tombs: Bob didn't have patience for people who drug their feet and didn't measure up. [Laughing] I would call whoever it was that needed something and see if they would call Bob, maybe he would do "it" for them. But he never stayed mad long. If he got mad at you, it just taught you a lesson and went on from there.

Interviewer: You worked with Dave Owen quite a bit, when he was running Bob's campaigns, didn't you?

Leroy Tombs: Yes. Dave was collecting money and there was some dissention there.

Interviewer: Dave was brought in when Bob's numbers were down in the first Senatorial race against Dr. Roy, do you remember?

Leroy Tombs: Oh, yes. Dave Owen went out there in Western Kansas and cleaned house and I think there were some stories dropped that turned it around. We didn't have very long.

Interviewer: No, he was about 2 to 3 weeks to turn it around. It was the second time Bob ran, it was second term as Senator, is that right?

Leroy Tombs: And Bill Roy had him down. Because Bob turned to me and said, "Leroy, do you think anybody would like to hire a one armed lawyer who never practiced law?" [Laughing] I said, "Well, we will all be out there



looking for jobs if we don't get this thing turned around." We've had those kinds of evenings and then we've had evenings together when Bob would say, "If we get one more Senate seat, I'll get majority lead." We were together that night. We've spent some historical times together. Before the night was over he said, "Hey, Leroy, I'm majority leader now. We got that other Senate seat." So, I should have taken notes and brought the notes and tried to recall. When I leave here, ten thousand things will come to mind.

Interviewer: If you think of any, we'll transcribe this and send you a copy and you can add anything you want to it. I am sure there are evenings, or occasions, with Bob, he always had such a sense of humor, and it's hard to remember everything.

Leroy Tombs: He had a fabulous sense of humor. The world never got a chance to see that sense of humor until after he ran for President. Now, of course, Bob will be, always they will forget a lot of Presidents, Bob Dole will never be forgotten. The public loves him. When you invited me to Lawrence, I saw the love in the faces of the people that I talked to. Bob Dole will be remembered. Generally, young people love him. My kids said, "You never showed us that side of Bob Dole! He is funny." I told them that he had to show them that side. The other night my daughter called me and said, "I was trying to get you on the line," but Bob had some kind of debate with that General Clark.

Interviewer: Oh, yes, on Larry King Live. He told him he was now a Lieutenant, after the Iowa Caucus. He said, "You are now a Lieutenant now, instead of a General."

Leroy Tombs: Bob could cut you up in little bity pieces in a hurry. He has got a bright mind. Clark isn't worth spit, really, I hate to say that, but he isn't. I've heard from active duty people who have had the pleasure of serving under him. I knew this guy who was a member of the Army/Navy club, I would go in there and ask around and try to find out who this General was, and my buddy would say, "Leroy, wake up! He was with you down in Fort Leonard Wood." And then I said, "Okay, alright." (Laughing) So, I went over and I was in over in Mombasa, Kenya when I met again, General Felio, he said, "Hey, Leroy, how could you forget who I was?" I said, "Well, you look different without your uniform on." He reminded me that I had fed his troops down at Fort Leonard Wood. He was the Commanding General at Fort Leonard Wood, and then he retired and took over Brown and Ruff, an outfit in Houston, Texas.

Interviewer: You had a business that fed these troops?

Leroy Tombs: I fed military troops at Fort. Leonard Wood and Fort Riley, I had 17,000 troops that I fed 3 times a day at Fort Leonard Wood, I hired all the cooks and KP. I took that away from the Army, I was the first civilian to go in there and do that, to contract out. I turned that over to John Palmer. There was some misunderstanding in the newspapers about that.

Interviewer: Does John still have those contracts? The one down here at Missouri?

Leroy Tombs: Right and the one in Fort Riley, the two I had, he still has. He has them under a different program. He has them under the Randolph

Sheppard Act. John stayed with Dave Owen when Bob and Dave fell out. I went to the newspapers and explained to Bob what was going on. What we needed to do was to get John Palmer certified 8A\*. I couldn't do that. Dave Owen went to Bob Dole to get help; to get John Palmer certified 8A, like everybody else.

Interviewer: Everybody else would ask the Senators to do that, not only Bob Dole, but every Senator.

*\*Small Business Administration minority program for Small Business.*

Leroy Tombs: So, there was no wrong doing there. Bob was running for the Presidency and they tried to make a big issue about it and claim it as favoritism. Never in the whole time that I was in with Bob Dole, did I ask for myself or anybody, or receive, favoritism. You couldn't go to Bob for favoritism. I can remember Huck Boyd was trying to build a railroad up there (Laughing).

Interviewer: Up on Hwy 36 or somewhere, coming down from Nebraska through to Kansas, right?

Leroy Tombs: Right. Huck always said, "I'd be a lot better off if I were his enemy. Maybe he'd do a lot more for me." [Laughing] We would always laugh about that. I never went to Bob Dole and asked him to help me get a contract. When I was being beat up by some Government agencies, I couldn't get them to see. I would tell him that these agencies were too big for me to box with and I couldn't make sense out of what they were doing. Department of Transportation declared his system illegal, and they went

further still, to tell any prime contractor, that if they would hire Burkel, they would be denied privileges. I had one side of the building and he had the other side, we split a building. So I suggested that we go to Washington and get Bob Dole and go over and talk to the Secretary of Transportation, to find out how he arrived at such a decision. Come to find out, his advisor was an engineer who Charlie had fired. [Laughing] So, when we were there, Bob and his man came in. Bob asked to see the information that he used to make the decision, to show him who was damaged or hurt. I saw him get nervous, and Bob said, "I don't want to hear all that. You've disqualified him and you have a right if his method is damaging or costly or unfair. Do you have it in writing?" Bob chewed him up. Then we found out that the guy he was listening to had worked for Charles Burkel and Burkel had fired him. The guy said, "Well, this guy knows you and says you are a heck of a fine person." So Burkel asked who he was and the gentleman told him, and Burkel told him that he had worked for him, but he had to terminate him because he couldn't get the job done. So, when Charlie left there he was reinstated and now he is probably the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest auger driller in the world. He goes all over the world.

I've seen Bobs help for handicapped people; it really made me very close to him. My mother was semi invalid; I've seen a lot of black people that have had a lot of illnesses. Bob always went to their aid. Bob didn't let people kick them around because they were handicapped. I guess that was one of the most endearing things. I liked they way he didn't waste time. Bob didn't want you to bring a bunch of papers to him. [Laughing] He wanted you to get right to it. He didn't have any patience, if you tell me you have a problem; don't tell me you have something to show me. That was the kind

of fella he was. He used him time wisely. He could work. He was the greatest leader we ever had. I would listen to stories. I got to know Strom Thurman really well; I got to know a lot of people because of Bob Dole. We were in a hotel one night and this Governor from Texas [John Connally]; he was with Kennedy when he got shot. The hotel said, "You don't have any reservations," and I was giving him my confirmation number and they said it wasn't at this hotel. This guy in back of me said, "Give him my room. I can find another hotel." And I turned around and it was him. I told him, "no, no." And he insisted. The clerk finally said, "Oh, no, we'll give both of you rooms." [Laughing] That was because I had met him in Topeka when he came up there to campaign for Bob. Everywhere I'd see him after that he would say that I was one of Bob's guys. We went a lot of places. When I went up to Iowa, Morris Kay was up there, and everyone was up there. I said, "There wasn't a lot of black people up here in Iowa, I want to get the hell out of here and go home." Morris Kay and Elizabeth were up there. Bob won Iowa.

Interviewer: Yeah, he did.

Leroy Tombs: Wasn't to be. I don't know what Elizabeth will do.

Interviewer: When they had that celebration over here, it was his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. That was a wonderful tribute, not only to the service men of that generation, it was a marvelous tribute to Bob, and don't you think?

Leroy Tombs: Yes, I said that Bob didn't need a funeral after this.

[Laughing] What I really saw there, and I hope everybody can see this, is that across the board, to have, the guy from Georgia up here.

Interviewer: President Carter.

Leroy Tombs: Bob had a cross section of friends.

Interviewer: George McGovern, Senator McCain. He had them on both sides of the aisle.

Leroy Tombs: Everybody liked Bob. I had met Senator McCain out here in Johnson County, when he was having a book signing. His father was a shipmate with my father. His father was a submarine officer and his grandfather, McCain's father and grandfather were both top admirals in the Navy. McCain was in the Navy, but he was a flyer. I knew his mother, she was a twin. I was trying to get a school started on the submarine base. They had a lot of black guys that couldn't hardly read or write, I knew that they wouldn't be able to take advantage of the GI bill if they couldn't read or write. So his mother helped me to get a building and teachers.

Interviewer: You were in the submarine division?

Leroy Tombs: I spent the whole war in submarines.

Interviewer: Is that a different division or just a normal division in the Navy?

Leroy Tombs: Yes, it's a different division. In the Navy you would have aircraft carriers, battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and then submarines. We lived together, submariners. We have different needs than battleships, destroyer's, and the rest.

Interviewer: How many were on a submarine?

Leroy Tombs: Back then there were only 63 of us on the submarine, during the war.

Interviewer: Were you in the Pacific area?

Leroy Tombs: Yes. Our job was to destroy their Navy, to cut off their trading supply ships, so no supplies could come in or go out.

Interviewer: Submarines were dangerous, weren't they?

Leroy Tombs: Submariners had the highest loss of everybody. You sent out 3 submarines, you got 2 back. So we lost 1/3 of everything we had. But, we were brainwashed, they told us that we were unsinkable unless you make a mistake. [Laughing] We believed them. I was young when I went in. High-ranking people, when they told you something, you believed them. I've been that way all my life. It was real late in the day before we woke up and asked, "Where are our buddies?" A guy would take us aside and say, "Here's a list of all the submarines lost." I think ignorance is bliss sometimes. [Laughing]

Interviewer: That's very interesting. You have had an interesting career as well as being a good supporter of Bob's and a good friend. He's been a good friend and you have been a good friend to him. Isn't that right, Leroy?

Leroy Tombs: Yes, Bob did so many marvelous things. Bob didn't care if you were Democrat or Republican, if you had a need, Bob would help you if he could help you. Black Democrats everywhere I go, they would say, "Bob Dole pushed through that Voters Rights Act." Bob Dole pushed through affirmative action. Bob Dole later said, "Leroy, I don't think we need it anymore. I think we need something a little different." Bob wouldn't hesitate to tell you that you went overboard on something; you wasted time if you went to Bob and try to convince him. He's already thought it out; he doesn't just make decisions on what somebody's told him. He'll look at it himself.

Interviewer: He would give you his support if he said he was going to, correct?

Leroy Tombs: He did. All of those programs that Bob helped us get through, affirmative action, voters' rights, and many things. The greatest thing that ever happened to America, black and white, was to get them voters' rights. Once they could vote, all that other stuff was pretty much garbage, you know. If you vote for the people, they treat you differently. That's what the black man needed in the south. They needed to vote Sheriffs out of office; people learn that people will vote you out if you don't do what you are supposed to. They won't mistreat you then. I kept telling



them that they don't need all of the public accommodations and all this. I told them that they needed some of the things that Bob Dole played a major role in. Most black people would say, "Here comes that Kansan. Kansans started everything." I told most of my friends, like Andy Young, to read a book called "Bloody Kansas". I said the fight started in Kansas, not in Georgia or Mississippi. That we made sure we were coming in as free Kansas people. I'm gonna run off now, you are always a pleasure.

[End of interview]