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ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Interview with: Colonel Clarence A. Miller, Jr.
Interviewed by: Isaac Hampton II
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IH: Today's date is June 23, 2007. I am interviewing Colonel Clarence Miller from his home in Alexandria, Virginia. Colonel Miller, can you please state your entire name?

CAM: Clarence A. Miller, Jr.

IH: And what is your date of birth?

CAM: July 21, 1931.

IH: And where were you from and where were you born?

CAM: Well, I am from Texas. I was born in a small farming community of Chatfield, Texas. It is about 50 miles south of Dallas, Texas.

IH: O.K. Can you tell me about your parents and your upbringing?

CAM: The first 12, 13 years of my life, I spent on a farm. It was a little farming community, as I said, outside of Chatfield, Texas, close to Corsicana, was the county seat of Navarro County. It was kind of an all black community. I went to a little school that went from the 1st through the 8th grade and that is where I did my first 8 years of schooling. The school year was from October to April and that accommodated the farming community where we lived because where most schools start in September and August, the cotton was still being picked, the corn was still being harvested and whatever. Our school year started in October and it ended in April. So, we had a 7 month school year. That was probably not that uncommon in rural areas of the south, especially for boys. They did not go to school anyway, all the crop (inaudible) _____. We owned our own farm and we lived just my brother, myself, my dad and mother. We farmed. Dad was also a carpenter and when he was not farming, he also built houses and did carpentry work. And my brother and I helped him out. After I finished elementary school, my aunt, my mother's sister, lived in Dallas and they looked around for a place for me to continue my education. And so, they sent me to live with my aunt in Dallas and I began high school at Booker T. Washington High School in Dallas, Texas. I was 13. And since I had been skipped a couple of grades, I ended high school at 13. And then, after 1 year in Dallas, the family moved to Corsicana, Texas, which was, as I say, the county seat of the county we lived in. So, I came back and finished high school at G.W. Jackson High School in Corsicana. That is where I did my last 3 years of high school, and my brother also went to the same school.

So, for the first 12 or 13 years of my life, we were on the farm. We lived a typical farm life and then we moved, in my sophomore year in high school, we moved to Corsicana. Actually, my mother and brother and I because at that time, my dad and mother split up and she moved to Corsicana, so that is where we both finished high school and then went from there to Prairie View.

IH: Do you have any recollection of your grandparents and did they come from slavery or anything like that?

CAM: Yes, very well. In fact, we lived in walking distance from both my grandparents. They were also farmers and originally, when I was born, my dad and mom lived in a house on my paternal grandfather's farm because they farmed with him. And then, they bought their own little 80 acres and built a home about one mile away from my grandfather's place.

IH: Were they sharecroppers?

CAM: No. All of my people owned their own land. My dad, when he was working with my grandfather, I guess you could call that a sharecropper with my grandfather because he stayed in one of the houses. They built a house on the farm. And so, dad and my mother, they lived right there on the farm and worked there. And then, they got their own place when I was about 4 years old.

IH: Do you remember anything in particular that your grandparents instilled in you that carried over into adulthood?

CAM: Yes. We loved our grandparents and we were very close to them. They were always very kind and loving. When we wanted to really get far, we would ask to go stay with our grandparents. My grandfather on my father's side was a very stern disciplinarian. I noticed how he operated. And even in a segregated community in those days where blacks did not have any rights, he was a very well-respected guy. And that always carried over with me. He was also an entrepreneur kind of guy. I mean, if people needed stuff done, if they needed hay bailed, he was the guy who owned a hay bailing machine and in the fall when they cut the cane, they came to him and he had the machines and the cooking things that you make molasses out of. And he would make molasses. And he would get paid by keeping part of what they had. I took a lot of that away from him. Unfortunately, he died when I was about 7 or 8 years old, about 8 years old, but I remember him very much because he took a lot of time with my brother and me. So, he was a very big impact on our lives.

My maternal grandfather, he was a more gentle kind of guy. We enjoyed him more. He was kind of laid back, easygoing and, in his own way, good guy. We loved him very much. Both of them are also, I guess the strongest thing is that both sides of my family, they were the pillars of the little church in our community. And so, that started a habit of going to church at a very early age and that was just something we kind of grew

up with. And except for a brief period of time when I was in college, never departed from that.

IH: O.K., so you grew up in the church then basically?

CAM: Yes, and that had a lot to do with my grandparents and my parents, too, but I certainly think it started with my grandparents.

IH: Can you talk about . . . this is before Prairie View . . . what it was like growing up in Jim Crow, Texas?

CAM: Yes. Well, there were two things, not only Jim Crow but it was also the era of the Depression. I was born in 1931 and until World War II broke out, I mean, the country was, even though Roosevelt had implemented a lot of programs like the WPA and CCC - Civilian Conservation Corps if you never heard that term - that was a kind of (inaudible)_____ program putting people to work. And WPA was the Work Project Administration. These were all programs started by Roosevelt in the New Deal in the 1930s. But even with that, the country remained in the grips of depression. And so, the thing was growing up, it was not only the segregated but everybody grew up poor. But, I guess looking back on it, at the time, it seemed normal, if that makes any sense, because that was our only experience. So, we were happy. And we really, because we lived in an all black community, we kind of were sheltered from (inaudible) _____ like when, we would call going to shop on Saturdays and that sort of thing, that we ever really

encountered much of the white community. But that was an impact that (inaudible) _____.

IH: I guess you can pick up from you talking about the Depression and Jim Crow; Texas affected your life coming up.

CAM: Yes, I mentioned that I was born in the rural area of Chatfield, Texas, and my first 12 years of my life was spent on the farm. So, when I was born, the country was in the grips of the Depression. And although President Roosevelt had implemented several work programs to try to get people to work and try to get the economy moving, really, the country pretty well stayed in the Depression until we began preparation for World War II. And then, the country came out of the Depression. So, during the first 9 years of my life, most people were poor. I thought that my family was, compared to most other people that I knew around us, we did fairly well. We owned our own farm. Dad was a carpenter contractor also so he was able to get work doing that. And so, we made ends meet. It was a pretty rough time. Also, it was a time of this was the pre-Civil War era so all of my elementary, high school and college education was done in a segregated school system. I went to a little small country school, a two-room school, in fact. We had a principal and we had an elementary teacher. The elementary teacher taught the first 4 grades and then the principal taught 5th through the 8th grades. And so, everybody was in two classrooms. That is all the size that the school was. And it was a 7 month school year because we did not go to school until October and we got out in April, and all of that had to do with farming to make the youngsters, particularly the boys, available for farming

from spring through the fall months. So, after I finished elementary school, I indicated that my parents sent me to Dallas to go to school and I went to Booker T. Washington High School my first year in high school, and then my mom moved to Corsicana which is the county seat of Navarro County where we were from and I finished high school - I went 3 years and finished high school at the G.W. Jackson High School in Corsicana. And like many southern cities at that time, we had the black high school. We were on the east side of town. That is where all the blacks lived. And then, there was the white high school, Corsicana High School, which was on the west side of town and that is where most of the whites lived. So, I graduated from that school in 1947 at the age of 15 and then that takes me up to the time I entered Prairie View at the age of 16 in September of 1947.

IH: O.K., September of 1947 is when you entered PV?

CAM: That is when I enrolled at Prairie View A&M College.

IH: Now, did you have another option of college besides PV that appealed to you?

CAM: Yes, because a lot of my classmates were going to Houston Tillison College in Austin. I should not say a lot - I mean, there were only 33 of us in my graduating class but several of my friends were going there and I had some friends going to Bishop and Marshall. But it really was not a serious option for me because of my economic situation.

The only viable means of me going to school was to go to Prairie View where we could afford the tuition which, at that time, was under $50 per semester.

IH: Oh, boy! We wish for those days now, don't we?

CAM: So, that was really my only option.

IH: O.K., so you have lived through the Depression, you have lived through World War II. Now, as far as going into the ROTC program, is this something that you had always wanted to do or did someone really influence you into wanting to become an officer in the military?

CAM: Well, when I went to college, the first two years called basic ROTC, your freshman and sophomore year, were mandatory for all able-bodied, non-veteran men. Prairie View is a land grant college and this was common during those days throughout all land grant colleges that ROTC was mandatory in your freshman and sophomore years. Then, you could elect, if chosen, to enter the advanced ROTC program which worked towards leading towards a commission in the Army. So, as I said, there was no decision about enrolling in ROTC. I enrolled and found out that I liked ROTC. I had a great deal of respect for the officers and the non-commissioned officers that were in the ROTC and dealing with them. And so, I kind of became pro-ROTC. Also, so, that aided me in my decision in my junior year of applying to attend the advanced ROTC program, which I did. Also, quite frankly, in my economic situation, we got paid . . . it was small but we

got paid. I think it was $27.90 a month that you got as a stipend for enrolling in advanced ROTC. So, in addition to liking it, also, the $27.90 a month was an economic factor and so, I eagerly enrolled in the advanced ROTC program.

During that time, this would have been 1949 when I entered my junior year in college and, of course, this was after World War II was over and prior to Korea. So, most of us who entered advanced ROTC at that time envisioned that we would be commissioned as reserve officers and did not think about, really, at that time, the implications that we would probably all be called to active duty upon graduation from college because that was prior to the Korean War.

Now, Korea changed everything. At the end of our junior year which was the summer of 1950, we went to summer camp which is the 6 week training program that advanced our ROTC student (inaudible) _____ between their junior and senior year. And it was during summer camp in the summer of 1950, of course, that the north Koreans invaded south Korea and we found ourselves yet again in another war only a few years after the end of World War II. And, of course, the senior class ahead of us, just about all of them immediately upon graduation were called to active duty, sent off to basic training and sent to Korea. And the same fate pretty well awaited my class when we graduated, that we would be called to active duty, and many of us would be sent to Korea, although not all of us. But, in my case, I did.

I went through infantry basic after graduating from college and then immediately was sent to Japan for what they called some troop duty experience, and then shipped to Korea in the summer of 1952. But I am kind of getting ahead of myself because we were talking about advanced ROTC, and I indicated I really liked ROTC. I liked, as I said, the camaraderie, the guys, and I guess it was during my advanced ROTC that I considered to have had the opportunity that I would make a career out of the military. So, in my senior year, I became the adjutant of the cadet corps which is the position I had aspired to ever since my freshman year when I used to see the adjutants strut out across the field in the parades. I said, "That is what I want to do." And, sure enough, when assignments were handed out, that was my choice and I got to be the adjutant. I did not want to be the commander, I did not want to be the executive officer, I wanted to be the adjutant, because that was a big deal during parade times on Thursdays when we went out for drills on Thursdays. And so, I liked ROTC and I did well in it in addition to doing O.K. in my studies in college.

During the time we were in summer camp in 1950, we got a new professor of military science - Colonel Hyman Y. Chase, who became a legend among black officers.

IH: Yes, I have heard his name mentioned.

CAM: He was known as the meanest SOB who ever put on an Army uniform, but he did a wonderful job of turning out cadet corps. We had a record of Prairie View graduates going to basic training at Fort Benning and flunking out of school. We did not have the

best reputation of how a cadet performed in summer camp and this guy was a no-nonsense, hard-nosed guy who everybody hated but he did a lot for ROTC. He made us all better. In fact, I used to say when I went in the Army, anybody I worked for in the Army could not be worse than working for Colonel Chase and ROTC. And that was probably true.

So, another thing that came with it though is there were no distinguished military graduates in our class. Since he was new, he would not endorse any of us for distinguished military graduates which would lead to a regular Army commission. So, everybody in our ROTC class that graduated in 1951 went in as Reserve officers. And there were no regular Army officers out of my class, although there were several that were invited to go on what they called a competitive tour which is a one year which you are evaluated under various assignments and if you did O.K., you could get your regular Army commission. I was not one of those. I got my regular Army commission a little bit later on.

IH: Let me ask you this: Now, when you were going through the ROTC program at Prairie View, I mean, we are still under segregation . . . 1948 is when the military was integrated.

CAM: Well, not really. That is when the order was issued. Not a hell of a lot happened until the Korean War broke out.

IH: O.K. Can you talk about that and did Chase or any of the instructors at PV . . . how did they prepare you to deal with a segregated military?

CAM: Well, all of them, that was their experience. Everybody who had ever served in the Army up until that time served in the segregated Army. I do not remember, and I think their assumption was that, you know, that we would probably do pretty well what they had done up until Truman issued his executive order in 1948. But it did not change anything for those of us in school. I mean, when we went to summer camp in ROTC, we went to Fort Hood, Texas and we were in . . . there was our class at Prairie View along with a few other black cadets from white schools like New Mexico State and so forth that were integrated, we had about 5 people like that from various schools and plus our cadet, we made up one platoon . . . every one of us were all in the same platoon. So, even in 1950, at Fort Hood at our summer camp, it was a segregated situation. While we were in a white company, I mean, in another company just because there were only 38 of us and we made up enough to have one platoon, we were still treated separately. We had our own barracks and we trained with our company but we trained as the Prairie View platoon pretty well. That was it.

I do not remember, getting back to your question, that we really talked much about the integrated Army among the faculty, our cadre at ROTC. It just was not something that really came up of saying, O.K., you guys are going out into the big bad world, you are going to be competing against other guys. I guess we kind of all knew that but I really do not remember in any of our leadership classes that our professor or

assistant professors of military science ever really addressed that in the terms of what it means in leadership and the fact that you guys are going to really be in a different world. Most of you grew up in a segregated school system, you grew up in a segregated community and when you go into the Army, you are going to be in an integrated Army and this is the way it works. And the reason, I suspect, is that was never an experience any of them had. Their world was a segregated Army. So, it really was not until we got to Fort Benning, Georgia and I went into the advanced course that we started really experiencing working with white officers and being side-by-side competing in the classroom and in other activities with people who were other than black people.

IH: O.K.

CAM: But having said all that, I think that Colonel Chase and his faculty, his staff, did one heck of a job preparing us for anything that came along because they demanded the most of us and they were pretty tough on us.

IH: How many people were in your graduating class at Prairie View?

CAM: Do you mean commissioned?

IH: Yes.

CAM: I do not remember exactly but it would be in the neighborhood of 30 to 35. Now, at that time, everybody that graduated from Prairie View was commissioned infantry. And when I went to school, we had what we called branch material schools. Prairie View graduated infantry officers. Southern University graduated transportation corps officers. Hampton graduated artillery. Florida A&M graduated artillery. Virginia State graduated quartermaster officers. And so, each of the schools had what they called branch material. So, everybody that graduated with me at Prairie View initially went into the infantry. We were all infantry. And we all went to Fort Benning which is, of course, the infantry center of the U.S. Army. And it was really only until later on when I got to meet guys from other schools, from Sam U. and Hampton and Virginia State and Morgan and all these other ROTC programs, that I ran into guys who were in different branches because we were all in the same branch. Now, that does not operate that way anymore and it has not for at least 30 years. They got rid of that system and they really commissioned people based on their background and experience and the needs of the service rather than if you were from a certain school, that is what you were graduated into.

IH: O.K. So, can you talk about your experience during the Korean War?

CAM: Yes. As you remember, the Korean War started in June of 1950 and, as I indicated, when the Korean War broke out, we got a big shock - all of us down there enjoying summer camp and then all of a sudden, when the north Koreans invaded south Korea and we started the implications of all that sunk in, is that next year when we finish college, we would probably all be going into the war and going to Korea. So, after

summer camp of 1950, we went back to Prairie View, we finished our senior year, and we graduated in May and were commissioned in May of 1951. I went on back to Dallas. By this time, my family had moved to Dallas. I went back to Dallas and went to work because I had orders to report to Fort Benning but I was not going to report until August. I did not go directly out of school. We finished school the end of May. And in June and July, I was at home working. Then, I went to Fort Benning, Georgia, and attended the basic infantry officer course. Of course, at this time, the Korean war was in full blast and many of the people . . . I mean, the class of 1950, the class right in front of me, those second lieutenants who were commissioned infantry, there was a high toll of them who never left Korea alive. I mean, the casualty rate among those young lieutenants was very high, including the West Point class of 1950. After I finished the basic officers' course at Fort Benning, this was in December I was there - it was a 4 month course, August through December - after taking a leave and going home for a while, we were sent to Japan along with another contingent of about 47 guys. Not all of these were black or from Prairie View but anyway, we were assigned to the first calvary. This unit had been pulled out of Korea. And so, in February of 1952, I arrived in Japan and was assigned to the First Calvary regiment. And the whole point of us going to the First Calvary rather than going directly to Korea is that the class of 1950 had experienced such a high casualty rate and they had such an experience of some of these young men came right out of school, went to basic training, went directly into Korea with no experience whatsoever, never having seen their first platoon that they had ever seen, they were put in charge of in combat. And, as I said, we lost a lot of those young men from the class of 1950. So, the idea was, in my class of 1951, that we would get 90 days of troop duty and they rotated

us around between rifle platoon, weapons platoons and a weapons company. We were supposed to get 1 month in each assignment, then we would be sent further on and sent to Korea from Japan. However, by the summer of 1952, things were starting to calm down in Korea and we were going into more of a stalemate situation. Peace talks were in effect. So, I say all that because we really, rather than staying in Japan 3 months, I stayed in Japan 6 months. I did not get to Korea until August of 1952. So, one year after graduating from college after attending the basic course, then being in Japan, one year later after coming on active duty, I wound up in Korea. And I was assigned as a platoon leader in company I 23rd regiment of the second infantry division.

Before I got to Korea, all of the segregated units had been disbanded. Originally, when Korea was opened up, the 24th infantry regiment which I am sure you have heard of if you talk to some of the other people, and a battalion of the second infantry division allotted a black artillery organization, these were segregated units in Korea but by the time I got to Korea, all of the segregated units had been disbanded and we were assigned to units irrespective of race, creed or color. So, I wound up as a platoon leader in the rifle platoon of the 23rd infantry regiment, 2nd division. So, I thought I did pretty good. I had a platoon. I think that my experience in Japan as a platoon leader had stead me in good stead and I became one of the trusted better platoon leaders in our company. In fact, I was chosen to lead a raid where the whole object was to capture some prisoners so that we could interrogate them, and another lieutenant and I led a patrol out one night to do this. We got ambushed, I got wounded, wound up in the hospital, and this is about 6 weeks after I got to Korea, I got wounded by a hand grenade shrapnel and wound up in

the hospital for 3-1/2 weeks. In fact, it was one month I was in the hospital down in Tegu. After that, when I was released from the hospital, I still was walking a little gingerly on my right leg, so they did not send me back to the rifle platoon. I got an assignment as a company exec. I did that for a few months. Well, actually, just for a few weeks. I got promoted to first lieutenant and was selected to become the battalion S1 of our battalion. So, my days in the field were kind of short. So, I was a platoon leader for about 6 weeks, in summary, got wounded, after 1 month in the hospital, came back, was a company exec for a while of our rifle company, and then, after getting promoted to first lieutenant, became the battalion adjutant and I spent the rest of my tour in Korea as the adjutant of the 3rd battalion.

IH: Did you experience any racial tension or anything like that while you were in Korea?

CAM: No, not really. If I did . . . you know, I often think about that, Hampton, and if I did, I did not realize it. I did one time, had . . . I remember our commo sergeant was out one night and the lines got cut and he was out trying to trace down the wire and he came back in the bunker and he said, "Man, it is blacker than a nigger out there." Obviously, he had never served with a black person before or Negroes as we were called. And then, he said, "Oh, lieutenant, I am so sorry. I didn't mean" . . . well, I really chose not to make a big deal out of it. I guess I could have. So, I am sure that those sort of things existed.

One of the things that I found throughout is that there is less tension and so forth where there is not a social situation involved. For example, what I mean by that is that when I got back to the States and you were in social situations, I do not think, while the Army was integrated, you know, people still looked around when they saw a black officer walk in the officers club when they were sitting in there with their wives. You know, still I can remember a friend of mine being reprimanded for dancing with one of his white lieutenant's wives. This is 1957, you know, back at Fort Bliss, Texas. Colonel said, "That guy must be drunk. Get him out of the club." So, I say that in Korea, there were no women - there were just a bunch of guys and, as they say, there is an old saying that there are no atheists in the fox hole. Well, in combat, I think people tend to look at who they trust and respect the most rather than what his color is. Now, that probably was not always true but I think as people got used to serving with people of different color, that kind of became the norm, and I noticed the same thing in Vietnam. So, no, I do not know whether, for example, I tried . . . I have often thought about this in looking back as whether I got any less cooperation or so forth from my sergeant, my troops and, say, a white lieutenant, I did not think so but, you know, I do not know. So, in Korea . . . [end of side 1]

. . . in the rear where there were any women or anything else, I was in the combat zone the whole time I was there.

IH: O.K., let's fast forward out of Korea and up to the civil rights era, the Civil Rights Movement when that started, after 1958. Well, let's go into the 1960s - what were your feelings about the Civil Rights Movement?

CAM: You know, I kind of observed this from a different environment. I was not a participant. But my feelings were I was a supporter. Certainly while I thought that the military was much farther advanced as far as integration and giving some opportunities and I do not mean that everything was fair in the Army because that is another subject we will talk about, but I certainly was supportive of the Civil Rights Movement. I tended to be more of a Martin Luther King supporter because I thought it was more effective than some of the, what we called in those days, the more militant guys, O.K.? And so, I probably tended to support his approach because I also had a cousin who worked for the NAACP and, you know, they were doing a lot of work in the legal arena and I thought that that was the thing that would lead more to the lasting change for the betterment of our society. So, I tended to support that approach. However, later on, I became to appreciate that I think that it took really both because we needed the Stokeleys and some of the other guys that really brought the thing to the forefront and really took a more demanding stance. I think that they made it easier for . . . they facilitated, for example, people dealing with people like King and the Southern Christian leadership conference because they just kind of were like the hammer force. So, I got to later on certainly appreciate their contributions to the civil rights although, as I say, I tended to look more at the legal and institutional changes rather than the personal confrontations.

I can remember when I went before the board for regular Army and I was being interviewed. This would have been around 1957. It made me think about this because I mentioned NAACP. To show you the atmosphere, I remember the colonel who was sitting on my selection board, asked me a question. He wanted to know if I was a member of any subversive organizations and I said no. And then, he wanted to know if I belonged to the NAACP. Well, actually, I did not so I could say, "No, I do not, however, you never asked me if I supported the NAACP." But the point I am making is that in 1957, here, we have someone who really looked at the NAACP as being a subversive organization. I would suspect that that colonel would have equated the NAACP to being a communist organization.

IH: That is interesting.

CAM: I wanted to go back to something you had asked me earlier about did I experience segregation, prejudice. You know, although the Army was integrated, we still had a lot of commanders, and this is particularly true in the 1950s . . . many of them have retired, maybe by the 1960s and when the Civil Rights era came along, but these guys were firmly wedded, some of them to the old status quo. I can remember when I reported in to Fort Bliss, Texas, as an instructor in the gunnery department at the Air Defense Missile School, Colonel Blankley told me that when I reported in, he said, "Well, I did not ask for you and I do not think Negroes ought to be teaching gunnery. So, that is all I have to say." I saluted and left. That was my welcome to the organization. And, you know, other people had same experiences. So, while legally, you know, the Army was integrated, we were still fighting internally the personal views of a lot of commanders

who were still, at heart, segregationists. Now, I would not say that was prevalent in the Army but we certainly ran into enough of them.

IH: O.K., so some commanders were still segregationists?

CAM: Now, in my timeframe when I finished college, this was before the sit-ins and the Civil Rights Movement, and when all of that came along, I was in the Army, and for much of it, I was overseas. Like, for example, 1959-1962, I was in Germany. So, a lot of what was going on, you know, I was kind of removed from it and I cannot really say that as far as the Civil Rights actions are concerned, people protesting or people doing anything, I cannot really say that I paid my dues because I just was not involved in it at that time.

IH: Let me change gears just for a moment. I probably should have asked you this a little earlier, but one of the questions I wrote up concerns masculinity. During the 1960s, there was this shift of the black culture that seemed to uplift what manhood was. In your opinion, coming up as a young man which, again, would have been in the early 1950s and I guess into the late 1960s, who or what figures represented masculinity to you? Was it your dad or soldiers? What sorts of things represented this is a masculine figure, a man or role model that I would like to model myself after?

CAM: My dad. My high school principal. My coach. These were very strong figures in my life that I looked at. My best friend in high school whose dad was a doctor, Dr.

Smith, who was the only local doctor we had. We all looked up to him as a guy of great achievement. I think I mentioned to you one of the things . . . while I looked at these as positive role models, and I cannot say that I had any . . . I look back, and I do not think that I had any white role models. On the national scene, when I came up, of course, I do not know whether you could call him a role model because, you know, that was so far removed but Franklin Delano Roosevelt, when I grew up, that was the only president we knew for the first 13 years of my life. Roosevelt was inaugurated in 1933 and he died in 1945. So, you know, he was just that figure at, what, 2-1/2 terms, well, almost 3 terms as president before he died. Starting, led the U.S. through World War II and died just before World War II was over. So, he was kind of bigger in life in everybody's life if I remember it. And his wife, who was the only one who was not afraid to speak out about civil rights - Eleanor Roosevelt. And black people kind of looked at them as friends. And it was sort of like later on, John F. Kennedy, every black living room you went into, you saw a picture of FDR. Just like 20 years later in the 1960s, you saw the picture of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy. But, you know, there were no real national . . . when I was growing up as a kid; I do not think that we were connected to any, what I would call national leaders. We heard of A. Philip Randolph who was over the Pulman Porters union but generally, the heroes that we had heard of - Booker T. Washington, William E. Beatty Boyce, Frederick Douglas - all of these guys were off the scene when I came along and I did not come along in the era when there were any Martin Luther Kings and Jesse Jacksons and Malcom X and so forth. There just were no blacks in my formative years that were big on the national scene. So, my heroes were more or less local.

IH: What was your opinion, again, in the 1960s, of figures like Muhammad Ali and Hughey Newton, Thurgood Marshall, those types of figures?

CAM: Muhammad Ali, at first, I did not really appreciate his stance and his contribution. I was in the military, did not understand anybody who was saying they, "They ain't gonna fight. The Vietcong ain't done nothing to me. They ain't never tried to lynch me." It was not a position that I supported at the time, and it was only later on that I came to appreciate Ali as a very principled kind of guy. You know, he just was not trying to get out of going to war or trying to get out of serving in the Army. That may have been part of it, too, but it was more towards not and I probably did not appreciate that as much at the time.

Thurgood Marshall, I certainly thought was a hero. Going all the way back to the times when he was the counsel with the NAACP, he blazed a trail, was, of course, a driving force behind Brown versus Board of Education decision. This was a guy that I had a lot of respect for and I think most people along with me did. I was very happy to see him be nominated and to serve as justice on the Supreme Court. I thought he was a great lawyer, a great jurist, and was very saddened to see somebody like our friend, what is his name . . . follow in his footsteps.

IH: Oh, Clarence Thomas?

CAM: Yes. My namesake. But anyway, Malcolm X was an interesting figure. I was not, here, again, a great supporter of the Muslim movement, did not understand it, I must say, and did not really appreciate Malcolm until I had done a lot of reading. Just as an aside - I got to know Betty Shabazz very well later on in life. She and I were very good friends and I learned a whole lot from talking to her before she died. His widow.

IH: How did you get connected with her?

CAM: Well, I had a friend who was a very good friend of hers and through them, we met her socially. And every time she used to come to Washington, it just became a habit that we knew what she liked to eat, she always liked some soul food, so we would get together and we would have something for her whenever she came to Washington. And she was always in and out of Washington. And so, through this mutual friend, we just got to be very good friends with her and just enjoyed sitting around talking with her and learned so much about what she went through in those days. It was tragic the way her life ended.

During that same era, I thought obviously Martin Luther King . . . I think he was all of our heroes. Martin Luther King was only 2 years older than I was so these guys, they were more . . . except for Thurgood Marshall . . . you are talking about Malcolm X and Martin Luther King . . . these were almost contemporaries. But they were doing different things. As I look back on it, I think they all did their part to tear down the walls of segregation in the United States.

IH: O.K., still staying in the Vietnam era, were you ever over in country over in Southeast Asia?

CAM: Yes, I spent one year in Vietnam. I did not go to Vietnam until 1970. I went to Command General Staff College in the Army as a major and when I graduated from Command General Staff College in the class of 1966, most of my class . . . everybody was trying to get an assignment to Vietnam because the war was going, the American forces were building up, and everybody knew that that was good for your career. However, I was an air defense artillery officer at that time. There was no good assignment to get in Vietnam. So, I wound up going to Saudi Arabia in 1966 as an advisor to the Saudi Arabian Army putting in the hog missile system. I came back to the States after 1 year in Saudi Arabia and I was a battalion commander at Fort Bliss of a Hawk missile battalion. Then, I got orders to go to Vietnam, so I got to Vietnam in May of 1970.

By that time, Vietnam was, here, again, I think was in its, what I call, phase 3. I look at the Vietnam era during the time kind of in 3 phases. The early troops, early American officers who went to Vietnam were mostly advisors because that was the time that we went over as advisors. That was kind of what I called phase 1. And later on was the buildup of American forces where we got up to almost 500,000 American forces in the country in Vietnam. And then, TET occurred in 1968. And then, I look at phase 3 as post TET when we had lost the support of the American people who had kind of lost all

stomach for the war after TET. And that is the era that I went into, where it was obvious that we were no longer really going to win the war. I am not even sure we were trying. Peace talks were going on. So, I got to Vietnam in May of 1970 and I would say things were starting . . . we could see that the war at some point was going to be over and it was probably going to be a negotiated settlement.

I went to Vietnam and I was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division, which was really 101st Air Mobile which was one of two helicopter divisions - the other one being the First Calvary division. I was assigned as the deputy commander of the second brigade of the 101st. And, as you might imagine, even though it was a helicopter, everybody, all the officers in the division, were Airborne officers because they still considered themselves in the legacy of the 101st Airborne. And so, we all wore the Screaming Eagle patch, we were paratroopers, so that is when I went to Vietnam.

Vietnam, during the time I was there . . . people used to ask me, "Were you a supporter of the war or not?" I really had no political or ideological objections to the war but by the time after being there for a while, there was a great deal of racial polarization in Vietnam. I cannot say the military everywhere because I was in Vietnam. But it was a time of racial tension and racial polarization. The black troops pretty well kept to themselves, white troops kept to themselves, although they were integrated units, and this was more in the rear areas than out in the combat zone; you know, for the troops out on the fire bases, I think the morale was high, union cohesiveness was pretty good, but back on the base camp in the rear areas, it was characterized by racial tension, drug use. We

had a lot of drug use going on at that time. We also had some pretty low morale and we had attempts, not only attempts, but real assassinations of the troops' leaders in our unit. They called them fragging incidents, where troops just would turn on their own leaders. Now, this was not prevalent but we had enough of it that it was a problem.

IH: Did you ever have any of your colleagues that were fragged or anything like that?

CAM: I would not say colleagues but, yes, people that I knew. Yes. We had a platoon sergeant who, one night while he was sleeping in his tent, someone placed a claymore mine outside the tent by his head and detonated it, blew his head off. We had another incident where troops had come back . . . when the companies would stay out on the fire base for weeks at a time, then they would get to come back. We would rotate them and they would get to come back in the rear area, get to get some good showers. We brought in shoals for them. They would eat good, hot meals. And during a little beer party, we had someone detonate a hand grenade right in the middle of the party and wounded 18 people. We had a lieutenant who was killed under suspicious circumstances. We had a captain; there was an attempt on his life. So, these were isolated incidents but we had those. Heroin was plentiful and easy to get. Here, again, I am talking about in the rear areas back on these big base camps. Like, I was the commander of Fubi which was an air base close to Way (sp?) and it was my job to have security of the base, and that was one of my jobs as deputy brigade commander, to run all the base units while the brigade commander was out running the war. And so, it was left to me to kind of handle all of these things. So, you know, I got to the point where I really wanted us to be out of

Vietnam, not as I said, for any ideological or political reasons but just because of what I could see it was doing to the Army back in the 1970 and 1971 timeframe. So, there were many nights that I would go out checking the perimeter and I did not know if I was going to run into some hophead out there all hopped up on heroin or not. So, we had some real morale problems during those times. Now, if you talked to guys who were in combat units in the forward areas, you will get a different picture, but this seemed to be endemic in the base camp in what they called the REMFS - the rear echelon MFs. That is what the guys out on the front line called the people in the rear areas.

IH: Rear echelon MFs, O.K.!

CAM: The REMFS.

IH: That is a new word.

CAM: I was lucky to get a good assignment. I think that was really what got me to the war college and got me promoted to colonel and so forth, was the fact that I got assigned to the 101st. The 101st Airborne is one of the elite units of the Army. Some friends of mine, General Greer, I am sure was instrumental in getting me assigned to the 101st, getting me a job in a combat zone rather than spending my time back in some big headquarters at Da Nang, back in Saigon, something like that. I was up there where the action was and it was in Vietnam while I was selected to go to the Army War College. And I think that had a lot to do with it.

IH: Real quick, back to the fraggings just one moment. What do you think was the cause of these fraggings besides drugs?

CAM: I think the cause was there were just some people who were disaffected, if that is the right word. I mean, they were pissed off about everything in the Army in particular. Remember, this was the era of the draft. There were people who were drafted. I think there was a great deal of resentment because of the unfairness of the way the draft was administered. You know, there were people, as long as you were in school or you had enough money, you never would be drafted, you know? The Bushs and the Chaneys and Rumsfelds and all of these guys never went to Vietnam. O.K.? I can just kind of single them out because I know them. Now, by the same token, I know other people. And black troops, there was a lot of feeling that blacks were taking an undue portion of the combat, casualties, that an undue number of blacks were assigned to infantry units where casualties were higher and, as I say, there were just some of our troops . . . and they were not all black, by the way, but some of our troops had just become completely anti-Army, anti-military discipline, and I think that this attempt on their leaders was really an attempt to just demonstrate against the Army, and the displeasure about being in Vietnam in the whole thing. But it was not a pretty sight, O.K., and as I say, that was not predominant but it was enough of it that I could see that the Army, you know, was really beginning to strain at the seams and a lot of it had to do with people . . . there were people in the military who were drafted and who were in the military that were anti-Vietnam as people who were back in the major cities demonstrating. So, some of these people were the same ones who I think were perpetrating things that were against good order and

discipline. They were just completely against the whole Vietnam. So, everybody who was in uniform were not necessarily supporters of the Vietnam War.

IH: O.K., now during your time in Vietnam, what was your recollection of the Black Power Movement or any type of black subculture that may have been happening? Did you witness any of that?

CAM: Oh, yes. We had a strong Black Power subculture in Vietnam among the units in Vietnam and I understand from my friends who were in Germany at the same time, that this same thing was happening in Germany, that there were units that white officers would not even go into at night, that they were scared. So, yes, I can kind of laugh about it.

I remember one night, we had a show . . . the USO brought in a bunch of girls and they put on singing and dancing in a club there on our air base at Fubi which is where our brigade headquarters were at. So, there were a bunch of brothers sitting right down front and one of the brothers came in right in the middle of the show, and all the brothers on the front row got up to greet him and they were dapping and going on and rubbing elbows and fists, and everybody behind them was pissed off but nobody would dare say, "You guys sit down," because that would have created a confrontation. But, you know, that was just an obvious display of solidarity among the black guys and, you know, just kind of like a show of solidarity and black power. So, yes, we had some of that in units. Here again, as I talked to people, I found this to be more prevalent in the rear areas than

when you are out in combat and your life depends on the guy next to you, a lot of this gets left behind. But in a more safe zone, yes, we had some of that. So, I do not know how much of this . . . I think some of this was a reflection of what was going on in the larger society because we had the Black Power Movement, black solidarity was going on in all of the major cities across the nation. So, I think some of these same guys were drafted into the Army. So certainly, some of that was just a reflection of what was going on in the larger society as a whole. We certainly had some of it in the military.

I can remember, to give you an anecdotal incident . . . I can remember one night that I was in headquarters, in brigade headquarters, and the phone rang and it was someone from one of our battalions rear area and they called to tell me that they had taken over the battalion headquarters and they understood that one of their brothers was supposed to be going to the stockade and the MPs were coming down to pick him up, and they would advise that the MPs not come down because they were not releasing him to go to the stockade. This is a military unit, O.K.? So, obviously, we could not have that happen. Everybody was all shook up. So, everybody said, "Well, what are we going to do?" I said, "Well, hell, I am going to go on down there." I said, "Sergeant Major?" I got the sergeant major, we got a Jeep and we went down there. And sure enough, we had all of these guys, these brothers, hanging around battalion headquarters and they said, "We are in charge here."

IH: Were they armed? Did they have M16s?

CAM: Everybody had their weapons. But when I said that, I do not mean that they were brandishing them like they were going to . . . they pulled security and stuff so, you know, it was normal that guys would have their weapons. So, I went down . . . basically, I went down and talked to the guys. I said, "Look, this is a no-win situation. Your best bet, if you really care for this guy, you had better let . . . I can guarantee you that he is going to get a good hearing." "Well, he is not guilty of anything." I said, "Well, if he is not guilty, then nothing is going to happen to him." I said, "But all of you right here, you know that this cannot be allowed to stand. You guys are on a course that is not going to work so you may get some personal satisfaction out of this right now but you have got the entire United States Army. This cannot happen. Somebody is going to dictate what is going to happen." So, they said, "Well, Colonel, if you say that he will be treated fairly, then we believe you," and so they disbursed and went on about their business and nobody got arrested. These people were saying, "Well, we are going to arrest" . . . I said, "No, no." These guys went on about their business. MPs came, they got the guy, they took him off. I do not remember really what the outcome of the case was but this was an extreme kind of thing. I do not mean this happened all the time but this actually happened one night in Vietnam. I mean, these guys just actually said, "He ain't going. Don't ya'll come down here. You come down here, there is going to be a fire fight." So, I said, well, this cannot happen. I have got to go. So, there was a lot of disaffection and people felt that they had been wronged. Guys got where they would not salute, you know.

IH: Did you ever have them give you the Black Power sign instead of a salute or anything like that?

CAM: Yes!

IH: As a commander, and this is one of my favorite questions now, as a man of color, as a black man in the Army during the Civil Rights Movement, was it ever difficult to rationalize that, hey, I am fighting in this country, putting my life on the line, where my people do not have full civil and social rights back home? How did you rationalize that?

CAM: Well, I rationalized that by looking at the alternative, and the alternative would be to let us withdraw from society which, to me, would be a sure way of . . . I just had faith that the system, that we were going to make this system work. But I saw the other way as a sure way that you would not achieve full citizenship. That was my idea.

IH: So, you were a lieutenant colonel when you were in Vietnam?

CAM: Yes. I went to Vietnam as a lieutenant colonel, and I came out on the promotion list for colonel while I was in Vietnam but I had not gotten promoted when I left Vietnam. I was still a lieutenant colonel.

IH: Did any of your lieutenants or anything like that; did you ever have any problems with them not wanting to take orders from a black commander or anything like that?

CAM: No. I think by Vietnam, we had gotten past that. Yes, there was some of that in the early days of the 1950s after integration. I mean, I have had a white troop back when I was a lieutenant in Fort Bliss, Texas in 1953, I guess 1954, somewhere along in there, walk by and did not salute. I would go back and tell the guy, "You are going to salute or I will have you court marshaled." But I think by the time we got to Vietnam, certainly, I think we had been integrated enough that there was not an issue there. People were more or less looked at for their competency and I certainly never saw any white officers who indicated that they did not want to work for black officers. If so, they kept it well hidden because during those times, by the time we got to Vietnam, we were in an era where making a comment about one being racially insensitive or not in support of the Army's affirmative action plan would be the kiss of death Korea-wise.

IH: And when you socialized, I guess when you had time to socialize as an officer . . .

CAM: Now, when are we talking about?

IH: During the Vietnam era, I guess.

CAM: Do you mean in Vietnam or during the Vietnam era?

IH: Let's start with when you were in Vietnam, did you tend to socialize more with the black officers or white officers or was it just such a small amount of officer corps, it did not really matter?

CAM: In my case, I had no black peers. Yes, I had some friends in other units that sometimes, you know, was a guy on the IG team, was from Prairie View, when he was up in the area, he would come visit me and spend the night in my trailer. I had a friend over in one of the artillery battalions that I used to go see. But in my brigade during the time I was there, I was the only black lieutenant colonel in the . . . well, there were two of us. There was another one there for a while. So really, there was never a choice. In fact, there were a few black lieutenants I ran into, a few captains, but, you know, all of my associates were white in Vietnam. My commanders, my executive officer, the staff. So, at the end of the day when we went and had a drink or when we went to the mess and had dinner, it was not a consideration because there were no blacks there anyway.

Now, earlier . . . well, when I came home, the official functions, certainly, and I had one of my best friends when I was a battalion commander at Fort Bliss, was a white West Point graduate named Morris Herbert. His wife and my wife, we did everything together. Anything you ever had, we went to his house. Anything I ever had, they came to our house. But outside of that, most of my personal friends tended to be black because my wife and I, these were people that we had known over the years, we served with them in Germany or somewhere, and so they were friends of ours. So, my closest friends probably were and still are black. But that is just a social thing. It did not mean that I had anything against socializing with whites . . . when we would go to a unit party or

something and we all had a good time and then me and the black officers, we would probably go and have our own party after it is all over.

I can remember when I was in Germany back in the early 1960s, there were two of us in the battalion headquarters, myself, I was a captain, and another guy was a first lieutenant from Howard, and we would go to the battalion party and we would have a good time. And then, we would go to one or the other's house, cook breakfast and sit up and talk all night long, and eat breakfast. But during Vietnam, in Vietnam, it was not really one of any choice. It just never occurred because there were not that many black lieutenant colonels and majors. There just were none. [end of tape 1]

IH: So, this goes to the next question. Talk about the Army promotion system and do you think it was fair, in your opinion?

CAM: What was that?

IH: The Army promotion system, as far as the officer corps. Can you talk about that a little bit? Was it a good system? Was it a fair system?

CAM: I think the Army . . . there are two aspects. First, let's talk . . . I think the Army is a meritocracy. It comes pretty close to it or as close as you can get. However, in other words, I think people generally rise on their merit. However, taking into consideration the institution and also they are individuals and that is, the system was not . . . while institutionally, it may appear to have been fair, it was not always fair because, as I indicated when we were talking earlier, we had a lot of guys, a lot of people, who did

take out their personal biases and prejudice, found their way into the efficiency report system. O.K.? And they could not see rating a black officer as high as they were rated, for example. One of the things I always wanted to do was find the best guy, the real achiever, that is who you wanted to work for, not a do-do because do-do could never see anybody in a better light than himself. So, if he is getting mediocre efficiency reports, very seldom is he going to give anybody else better than he gets. He just cannot see himself that way. Also, I heard so much about this that I know that in the days before there was really a lot of emphasis on affirmative action and taking actions to promote blacks, the military was not fair and there were several ways that you were cut off at the pass. One was that blacks were not selected to go to the schools that would get you promoted. For example, when I was a young officer, blacks going to schools above their branch career course was a rarity. And so, obviously you are not going to get . . . if you did not go to Commanding General Staff College out at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, you were not going to get a good assignment as an Army commander or a staff officer because that was the stepping stone. People who were graduates of the Army Commanding General Staff College is where they picked their commanders and staffers from. So, by the fact that you were never selected to go to those schools kept you from getting promoted. It was not fair. You know, the Army started putting a lot more emphasis on it in the 1960s and it became not only fair but there were affirmative action (inaudible) _____. And also, people would play games, or not play games . . . I think they took advantage of officers on the efficiency report because many of us black officers did not have mentors and so forth to tell you what these OERs really mean and what these scores really mean, and many of us who thought we were getting good scores did

not know that we were getting damned with faint praise. So, the system was not fair. I think it became much fairer in the 1960s when the Army really started emphasizing and looking at trying to do something about giving black officers a chance. So, there were two ways that you were kind of cut off at the pass. One was on the OERs and this has affected the guys a little bit older than me. They just never got a break. And also, by not getting selected to go to the schools, you were not selected for the plumb assignments and that was it. I went to Command General Staff College in the class of 1965, 1966. There were 18 of us in a class of 600 something and that was unheard of.

IH: How many were there?

CAM: 18 others.

IH: 18 blacks?

CAM: Yes.

IH: Out of how many?

CAM: Just a couple of years before that, it was normally 3, 4 or 5 blacks in the class. It was 600 and something, in what they called the regular course. That was the long 9 month course. There were some that got to go to the short associate course but, you know, that obviously did not count as much as going to the regular course where you took your family and lived out there for 1 year and went to school.

Starting when Nixon came in, Mel Laird, who was Secretary of Defense under Nixon, really implemented a lot of policies of Affirmative Action and started trying to do something about it. This was around 1968. And so, black officers started to get a break and you saw people being selected in greater numbers to go to school, blacks being placed on selection boards so that they would be there to look at efficiency reports. That became a requirement that every selection board had to have a black on it. Well, that was not the case before. So, we started to get a break during those days but for the first, oh, I would say . . . I went in the Army in 1951 . . . for the first 14 or 15 years I was in the Army, you did not get many . . . black officers were still not getting a fair shake. And, you know, I remember the first efficiency report that I got. I mentioned to you that I went to Japan to the First Calvary Division and I got a report from the captain. And this was the system back; I think this was from 67-4. This was where the highest rating was a 7. I got 4's. I was a second lieutenant. And so, when I went in and asked my company commander . . . he gave me my evaluation and he sat down and discussed my evaluation with me, he said a lot of nice words and he gave me all these 4's which I look at as average because that is what the form says. And I said, "Well, is that what you think of me?" He said, "Well, Clarence, that is really good for a lieutenant because, I, as a captain, I get 5's. And majors get 6. And lieutenant colonels get 7. So, a 4 for a lieutenant is good." And I was stupid enough to believe that, you know?

IH: Did you ever get to see your OER?

CAM: That is the way the game was played. I understand that there were a lot of guys who never got to see their efficiency reports. Now, that did not happen to me. I think I saw all my efficiency reports. I think the Army's policy was that you show and discuss the efficiency report. However, they did not go . . . I think it was really, oh, heck, only about 20 years ago where it became a requirement that the officer signed that he had seen his efficiency report and that it has been discussed with him. This commander used to sign and say, you know, I discussed this and that was it, and went on to the endorser so, some guys never really saw their efficiency report.

I think also another inequity of the system is that people would give people ratings but there were code words in the efficiency report language when I was in anyway, that commanders communicated how they really felt about an officer. A lot of officers were, I should not say cowardly but did not like to sit down and face a guy and tell him that I think you are an average kind of guy and so I gave you an average report. What he would do was give you good marks but in the word section, he did not say the right words. For example, on this form that you sent me which is the 67-6, which was a form used back in the late 1960s and so forth, if you were a lieutenant colonel or a major, no matter what you gave him in a score, if you thought a guy was good, you would put in that report, this officer should be promoted ahead of his contemporaries and sent to the next level school as soon as possible. When a board saw that, they knew what that meant. But you could give another officer the same rating but not use words like that, just saying, this officer did an excellent job in a very difficult situation - some such stuff, you know? He improved his unit cohesive, but never made a recommendation about him being promoted or being selected for school. When a board saw that, they knew that you

thought he was mediocre. And so, a lot of people, and I was fortunate enough to have, by that time, garnered a few mentors along the way and people who will tell you how the system really works. But if you did not, you would think that you were doing O.K. only to find out that you were placed way down in the pile because the guy you were working for may have given you a good score but he did not say the right words. Those were the kind of code words - "selected ahead of contemporaries." If you were a lieutenant colonel or colonel, you know, "should be a general one of these days." There were several of these kinds of things, you know, "select to go to the next level school as soon as possible," and "accelerate his career development" - these were the things that you learned when you got into the . . . I was fortunate, I was on the Army staff, so I knew all this stuff. A lot of guys who thought they were getting good efficiency reports, were not getting good efficiency reports because the words were not true. So, yes, I thought the guys kind of got . . . black officers were treated rather shabbily in the 1950s, early 1960s, but I think that changed in the late 1960s and the 1970s and by the time I got out in the 1980s.

IH: For the OER that I sent you, how do you know what score you got?

CAM: Well, at the very bottom of the score, you placed an officer in a percentile.

IH: O.K., on the second page?

CAM: Yes.

IH: O.K., I am looking at it.

CAM: For example, on this one, the guy was rated 96%. The endorser said he did not know him well enough, so you put those two scores together and that would be the same equivalent as giving a guy 180, whatever that is. The possible score there is 200, although it is expressed as a percentage. So, he got 96%.

IH: O.K., I heard exactly what you said but I did not understand it. Can you talk me through it one more time? I am seeing the 96%.

CAM: The rater and endorser have 100 each.

IH: O.K., I see it. Right above it. Rater, endorser.

CAM: They do not have anywhere for you to record the score but basically he got the equivalent of 192 out of 200. If an endorser does not know you well enough to give you a score, they just double the score of the rater. So, he got 96 of this. Then, also, another evaluation on this and when they tried to force you into make a choice of stating whether this officer is in the top or right above that, he will say, "Look, if all the people you know are doing the same job that he is doing, how many are there and where would you place him in that group?" So, in this case, the rater says there are 3 people that I know that are doing the same job he is doing and out of the 3, I would place him number 1. Now, he

said the same thing on everybody's report. This guy does not know that but that is what he said. So, that was the score. So, I look at this, if I was on a board, and he got 1 out of 3, O.K. And then, his score was 192 out of 200.

IH: How long would it take to do one of these? Like, if you are on the board, did it take you maybe 5 minutes for each one or how does that work? I am just curious.

CAM: I sat on a lot of boards. You go through a guy's file, probably on this efficiency report, I suspect a board member would probably spend about . . . unless there was really something that jumped out and you wanted to have a discussion with somebody else, that the board member would probably spend about, reading through this, 2 to 3 minutes because, remember, at this time, he was a major and he had about 12 years in service. O.K.? Well, more than that - 12, 13 years of service. So, you know, there are a lot of these in the file. So, when you are looking at an efficiency report, you start in the early years and you are looking for a couple of things. You are looking for trends. And you see a guy that is looking better and better, getting a better efficiency report, or you see a guy who is erratic, so if you look at maybe 6 or 7 reports that he has got, you begin to get a picture because he has been rated in several different kinds of assignments. So, you begin to get a picture of the trend. This is only one report probably of 7 or 8 that is in his file.

IH: O.K.

CAM: So, on this individual, probably spend 2, 3 minutes looking at it.

IH: O.K., and then collectively, you look at this trend over 7 or 8 OERs and say, hey, this guy, he is in the primary zone so we are going to recommend him for lieutenant colonel?

CAM: Right.

IH: O.K., now, about this OER I just looked up, with the 67-6, I see that the maximum score on that was a 240. So, if this guy got a 192, he was in the lower zone then?

CAM: Well, I do not know how you got 240. I think there was only 200 on this.

IH: I can read them to you. I mean, I know it has been a while, Colonel. I am not trying to put you on the spot, of course. I have been looking at these things for months. I have everything right in front of me so that is why it is easy. So, for OER 67-4, it was from 0 to 150. Then for 6, it was 180 to 240. And let me see if I can find a 5 here. O.K., here we go. 67-5. It is the same, 180 to 240. I guess that is when they made the jump to the other OER. So, I was just curious.

CAM: Well, I remember this form. There were several things that you looked at on this form and that was part 6 was the performance of duty factors where you rated him top,

second, middle 4 bottom. At this time with this form, they were trying to force people/raters to make some distinction. But as you see here, they give him all 1's.

IH: Which is good, right?

CAM: Which is good? Then, they try to get another (inaudible) _____ here by saying, "demonstrated performance of present duty," and this is kind of the overall. And he got basically a 2. If you say so, I do not know how they come up with a score of 240 on this form.

IH: Yes, I don't either.

CAM: I do not know where the other 40 points come from.

IH: Right. O.K. Can you talk about the inflation problem with the OERs?

CAM: That is the reason that there have been so many versions of the form because once it is out in the field for a period of a few years, it becomes, you know, everybody gets . . . the ratings are too high, so they changed the form to try to bring them back into line. And inflation was a problem because, you know, everybody cannot be . . . if you assume that officers fall somewhere along a distribution curve, everybody cannot be outstanding. But that is what started happening on the reports. There are a lot of reasons for that but there is one that most people do not think about and that is that commanders, many times

when they are filling out these forms, they are really filling out - rating themselves. In my unit, I have these officers, I think I have a good unit so I am going to rate my officers better because I know the other people are rating theirs better, plus when I say that this guy is outstanding, that means I am an outstanding leader. So, that tends to . . . and then, there was also the fact that people have a tendency to have a tough time being very candid in counseling with people and saying, well, you did an average job and here is what you need to do to improve. Rather than do that, they take the easy way out and just rate him high and keep moving. So, every form that we put out in the field would get overcome in 3 or 4 years by inflation, and by that, I mean a predominance of the officers getting maximum scores, when you know that that is not really true.

When I was in the deputy chief of staff personnel, as a colonel who had been a group commander and the requirement that there had to be blacks on command selection boards, promotion boards, there were not that many black colonels who were college graduates, had been on the Army staff, in command, so I got a lot of those jobs, and I wound up on board - I should not say a lot - probably I was on selection, lieutenant colonel's command selection board, I was on the lieutenant colonel's promotion board, I was on the sergeant major promotion board, and then I was on one other board. So, I guess during the time I was colonel, I was on probably 4 different promotion and selection boards. So, you kind of get to see the system up close. Every time we redesigned the system, was an attempt to combat the inflationary tendencies. But it was a factor, made it difficult for boards to make meaningful distinctions between the truly good officers and the mediocre officers. And, as I said, people who knew the system then started looking for codes . . . you kind of know after a while what commanders are

saying about people by the way they worded their reports. I mean, I saw two guys get 200s but, you know, they were two different reports whatsoever depending on what he said about the guy he was rating.

For example, I was saying, when I was in the 101st, I never, unless a lieutenant colonel really screwed up, I never saw a rating other than maximum for a lieutenant colonel during my entire year in Vietnam. There were two things that we assumed: one is that nothing but the best field grade officers were selected to serve in the 101st. So obviously, you could not put them on the curve with everybody else. I mean, that is just the way they felt. So, if you were in the 101st and you did a good job, you got maximum efficiency report because that was a hotshot outfit and only the best got in there. It was the same thing when I was division chief on the Army staff. We hand selected the action officers that we had our majors and lieutenant colonels that worked for us. I mean, we had the pick of the litter. We could interview people and say, yes, this is the guy we want. So obviously, he came in with a leg up on any other Joe Schmo that was out in the field because he was considered to be outstanding or we would not have brought him to the Army staff in the first place. So, his competition were all people of like caliber. And so, we assumed that if they were all doing a good job, why not rate them all maximum? And so, ergo inflation, inflation, inflation. I mean, you just were not going to get me to say . . . I had four lieutenant colonels and two majors working for me in the Army staff. I picked them all. I am using this as a personal example. And they all did a good job and they all got maximum reports. And that went on across the board. That is just the assumption.

IH: O.K., so when you are on a board like you were, you talked about these code words. You have to learn the code words and reading between the lines then basically to combat efficiency?

CAM: Yes, you would diligently . . . and I think boards really, really, really did their job of trying to pick the best officer for a promotion, selection for command, and so forth. So, in the face of inflated reports, yes, you did tend to look at the assignments that a person had and what the commander said - that some assignment that we looked at and we gave more weight to is the guys, the battalion commander or he was a high level staff officer. You would not look at the merits of his job the same as some guy who was a Reserve advisor somewhere.

IH: O.K. That brings up a question. For Colonel Butler's study, one trend he found was that folks that were regular Army versus other than regular Army were rated a lot lower.

CAM: You said regular Army and Marine Corps?

IH: No, other than regular Army, were always rated lower than regular Army.

CAM: I am sure that is true. Yes, I observed that on board.

IH: And you said the vast majority of black officers . . . you said there is a trend as black officers, even if you were regular Army, unless you were really exceptional -- he mentioned Colin Powell kept beating the curve -- a lot of times, black officers were rated the same as a white Reserve officer.

CAM: Do you mean black regular Army?

IH: Correct. He said that was a problem that kept showing up when he found that. That is some of the evidence that he put out in the report.

CAM: Yes, I do remember that, and he may be correct because most of my observations are anecdotal. I have never really sat down and was in a job where I tried to study this and pull data from the files and looked at it. Most of my observations are anecdotal. But I suspect that he is correct and a lot of it had to do with the fact that, you know, sometimes people did not know the right questions to ask and people gave them bad reports, not bad reports but maybe not super reports because the guy did not appreciate what kind of report he was getting. So, you know, he was probably right. I do not know but I suspect that is right.

IH: Yes, from your experience, what you had seen. We are almost wrapping up here. We are on our second tape now. This has been great. Let me ask you, so from the time, let's say, with this inflation with the OERs, do you think they made improvements on them with the next batch, with the 67-7 and 67-8? Do you think it was more equitable

after 1972 when Butler's report came out and we had a lot of black colonels make general?

CAM: I am not sure that that had anything to do with . . . whether the changing of the OER had anything to do with it as much as the change in the Army. I mean, boards were charged. We were never given quotas, but we were charged in many cases to look for that officer with potential who may have not gotten as good a report as he should have in the past because he was black. And let's take some affirmative steps to promote and select to school some of these black officers. O.K.? As I said, there was never a quota given but I think that is the guidance that the president . . . I mean, when you were sitting on a selection board for lieutenant colonel, a command selection board or picking people to go to the Army War College, the board got briefed by the deputy chief of staff for personnel and we got guidance in what the Army was trying to do. And back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, well, continuing throughout the time I got out, affirmative action was always part of the briefing. And so, I think the inflation thing affected everybody the same. Now, maybe if you were not getting as good a report as a white, you probably were not going to get it. It is degrees of . . . it is all relative. If you were the lowest in an inflated system or the lowest in a noninflated system, you still were getting screwed, but I think the guidance that boards were giving and the leadership of the senior leadership of the Army back in the late 1960s and 1970s really changed things more than just changing the OER. I think the OER needed to be changed to have some integrity in the system because after a while, they do get rather meaningless when everybody is getting maximum scores and when you see an officer who gets . . . I can remember when the

lieutenant colonel or colonel, you got 198 out of 200, they knew that you were not in the top tier. O.K.? That is just how meaningless it became.

IH: O.K. Only two more questions left. From your experience, and maybe we have kind of already talked about this but what were the biggest problems in the military in relation to being a person of color throughout your tenure in the service?

CAM: I did not hear what you said.

IH: Yes, from your experience in your whole career of being in the military 30 years, what were the biggest problems that you saw in relation to being a person of color and I guess how did that change over time?

CAM: That is a tough one. Well, I would say that when I first came in, being a person of color was a distinct disadvantage because there was just a perception among senior officers and also a belief among many senior officers that blacks should not be in leadership positions. So, some of that when I came in was pervasive. Remember, I came in, in 1951 and I (inaudible) _____ my first unit in 1952. All senior officers were World War I holdovers. There were no captains, majors and lieutenant colonels who were not World War II veterans. They had all served in the segregated Army. They had all heard the studies about, you know, blacks can't fly airplanes, blacks can't lead troops. So, we suffered from that perception and I think that everywhere you went; you did not go in on a level playing field. The perception of you was as a black officer and you had to prove

that over a period of time that, hey, this guy is pretty sharp. O.K. So, you did not go in with the same perception as a young white West Point lieutenant that walked into a company. You were seen differently. I think that has changed over the years. You know, I do not know about now but I think that people are received more openly as, you know, you kind of are like the page is blank, let's see what you write on it rather than it starting off with you have got negative marks. So, I think that that has changed over a period of time. I think that when I first went in, we had fairly low expectations about where we were going to go in the Army because we did not really know any black officers who were above the rank of captain and that was an exceptional . . . every so often, you ran into a major. So, I think we had low expectations, at least I did originally. My expectation was that man, if I make major, I would have thought that was a real successful career. That changed, too, over a period of time. And so, as you set your . . . one cannot achieve more than you can conceive. So, if that is the way you see yourself, that is probably the way you will be. So, that had to change also in our minds, that hey, we can be all we can be. So, I started striving to be all I can be, and not the fact that I probably would be lucky if I made captain. So, that changed. I think that as officers changed over a period of time, we got rid of the old World War II officers and even some who followed them in that the perception of blacks changed. I think also that . . . I really think that our younger officers come in much more prepared today than when I came in. I think I may have told you that I must confess, when I came in the Army, I had a tough time, not a tough time but I was not brought up to be an assertive, self-assured young man. In the Jim Crow south, my mother's admonition always was, "Don't do anything, Junior, to get yourself in trouble." I do not think that our young men . . . and it took me a

while to get over that, you know, because people are supposed to obey me and do what the fuck I say to do. Pardon me, erase the tape!

IH: It is O.K. It adds to the scope of the tape. That is great.

CAM: But, you know, my son never grew up with that sort of baggage. He never knew that he was supposed to have a status that was second to other people. So, that changed over a period of time and I think that I see our young people out there competing in the world, the civilian world, the military world and anybody else, and hey, they are confident, they are prepared . . . [end of tape 2, side 1]

IH: Oh, you are in the Rocks?

CAM: Yes, I am one of the founders of the Rocks. I am one of the charter members.

IH: What was that guy's name?

CAM: Roscoe Cartwright.

IH: Yes, Cartwright. He died in an airplane crash or something?

CAM: Yes, he did. He sure did. He had just retired; he was a brigadier general, artillery officer. He just retired, went out to visit his daughter, I guess it was in Indianapolis or

Columbus, Ohio. I think they went to both Indianapolis and Columbus. He had his civilian job, they were getting ready to live a good life and he and his wife, Gloria, on the way back from Indianapolis, flight 514 coming into Dulles crashed and he was killed in a plane crash.

IH: His wife was with him, too?

CAM: Yes.

IH: Oh, wow! That is terrible.

CAM: Rock and Gloria. We all called him Rock. He was one of our early trailblazers.

IH: Yes, that is what I have heard.

CAM: I remember when I went to Vietnam, I landed at Vietnam at Camron and we were then beginning to develop the kind of relationships that other officers have had all that time. A friend of mine who retired as a major general, Greer, he was a colonel. He was my assignment officer. Cartwright was the commander of the depot at Camron Bay where we landed. He called him and said, "Hey, there is a guy named Clarence Miller coming over there and he is going to land on your base and then I think he is going on up to the 101st, so you ought to meet him." So, he did. He met me; put me up for the night. He had met me before, by the way, but, you know, he would have never known I was

coming unless he got this call from General Greer. And so, he was a real rock. I think that he had the right nickname. I can remember when he was a brigadier general in the Pentagon. That was a big deal back in 1972. That was a big deal. I mean, we only had one or two . . . he was one of the first guys that got promoted, he and Freddy Davison.

IH: What year was that when, was it 4 black generals made brigadier, do you remember? Was that 1972 or 1973? Do you remember when that was?

CAM: I think it was 1972. I am not sure.

IH: I knew it was in the early 1970s. I would have to look it up. We are coming down to our last question and I thank you for going through this interview process with me. My last question is this: What do you feel people need to know about African Americans' military service during the Vietnam era that has not been told or written about?

CAM: Well, I do not know about what has not been told. One, Vietnam was the first war that we fought as a fully integrated army, where there were no black units, white units, because Korea, while the Army was integrated in Korea, Korea really started out with segregated units. So, I think that is the first thing, that Vietnam was the first war that we had that was a fully integrated . . . where whites and blacks served together in units and there was no thought of assigning people to a particular unit based on their color. I think that Vietnam, here again, I am not sure whether the story has been told . . . the military in

Vietnam did a pretty good job. If you could look at Vietnam as a defeat, it was because after TET, the American public lost its stomach for Vietnam. There was not that we could not have . . . maybe we would have prevailed but it was not that we . . . the Army was never defeated, it had just become so unpopular back home that we had lost the support. You know, much as I see going on now in Iraq. If we do not get this thing in Iraq straightened out after this surge and these people continue to bomb and go on, the same thing is going to happen. The people are going to get tired of seeing caskets come home and they say, for what? And we will be out of Iraq. So, I think the thing is we never lost Vietnam; we just lost the will to pursue Vietnam. That blacks in significant numbers, for the first time, were recognized for their bravery and were decorated accordingly. We had, for the first time, blacks getting the medal of honor, we had many blacks getting distinguished flying cross, silver stars, and so their service was recognized which was not true in previous wars. And I think that blacks got the Korea enhancements that came from serving in Vietnam just like everybody else, particularly the black officers. That is where a lot of the guys made their imprint. I mean, you know, Colin Powell did an excellent job as an officer in Vietnam. Many of the guys that I know . . . General Ed Greer, who commanded an artillery group in Vietnam, went on to retire as a major general. General Harry Brooks, who was an artillery battalion commander, went on to become a major general and a division commander. General Charlie Rogers won the Medal of Honor. So, there were a lot of guys and they got recognized for what they did. For some reason, I never have quite understood . . . you know, when I see the Vietnam veterans, you know, they still roll in here on the rolling thunder and they come to the Wall every Memorial Day, I am always surprised that most of these are white . . .

blacks have never taken up the challenge of being what I call the perpetual Vietnam veteran like I have seen some of the whites.

IH: Why do you think that is?

CAM: I do not know. I really do not know.

IH: Maybe it is because we made our peace with the war or our contribution.

CAM: I do not know. That could be true. But, you know, I call some of these guys perpetual Vietnam veterans. Do you know what I mean? That has become their life, being Vietnam veterans.

IH: Yes.

CAM: But I do not see blacks as much into that.

IH: There is a guy that I used to know, he used to sell insurance, and he would have a tie on and a white shirt and his pants and every time he would go to a restaurant, he wore this big Australian-looking camouflage hat that had his Vietnam unit on there that said Vietnam vet, whatever year. He was like a medic or something and, I mean, like in the rear but I guess he thought that would get him free food or something sometimes, I don't

know! Really, it is amazing. O.K., well, that concludes the interview. I am going to turn the machine off now.

CAM: What is something that maybe has not been written about, that needs to be known? One of the things that I think that maybe has not been appreciated is during the era when we had so much strife and racial tension in the Army and throughout the service, many people do not recognize the great job that black officers and black NCOs did in trying to ameliorate the racial problems and maintain unit cohesiveness in the military. I mean, I know guys who could do things that white officers could never do. As I said, there were units in Germany that racial tension was so bad, white officers would not even go into their own unit at night. And the black officers and black NCOs, I think, deserved a lot of credit for the turnaround in alleviating some of the racial tension and racial polarization that was going on in the military.

IH: O.K. Now, if anything else crosses your mind, send me an email and I will call you and we can continue if anything else comes to light that you feel needs to be discussed.

CAM: Yes, I sure will.

IH: So, blacks just became a part of the fabric in Vietnam?

CAM: I mean, they were part of the . . . there was not a black officer corps in Vietnam. So, consequently, except for individual things like heroism like Charlie Rogers who got the medal of honor or a guy who went on to become one of the highest and most popular people in our country like Colin Powell, you know, the rest of our stories are just kind of like I was in the 101st, like all the other guys.

IH: O.K. Well, I mean, I think that is what historians have tried to do.

CAM: I think that that is something that probably, yes, historians, to some degree but it takes a lot of work and a lot of interviewing and so forth and a lot of research to tease that out, to start to get a thread of, you know, this was what the black officer looked like, because I think it has to be pulled out of the fabric.

IH: Yes, and I think since you said there really was no black officer corps, I agree with you but I think in a way, that that is history's way either by accident or on purpose to almost minimize what blacks have done to a point. I mean, in one way, it is great, the integration, but the other way, it kind of deemphasizes what we have done because if we do not talk about it, who will?

CAM: Yes, that is true.

IH: So, that is the reason why I want to tell you guys' story because, again, you were not on an even playing field and you guys did a tremendous job and blazed a trail for the rest of us so, you know, I think you guys deserve some serious accolades.