UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Interview with: Colonel John McLeod
Location: Phone
Interviewed by: Isaac Hampton II
Date: August 17, 2007
Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola
Topic: Black Officers, Vietnam, HBCU5

IH: Today is August 17, 2007. I am on the phone with Colonel John McLeod at his home in Orlando, Florida. We are going to be talking about his experience as a black officer in the Vietnam era through the 1970s. Colonel McLeod, what is your date of birth?

JM: I was born 03 August 1931.

IH: Where were you born?

JM: Bennettsville, South Carolina. The county was Marlboro. Marlboro County, South Carolina. And also I noticed the spelling of my name on your email. My last name is spelled McLeod.

IH: O.K., thank you. Can you talk a little bit about your parents and what it was like growing up in the 1930s?

JM: Sure. My father was an automobile mechanic born in 1900. Stayed on his farm until, I think about age 16 and he said one hot summer day out in the field behind the plow, he decided that he was not going to be a farmer. He laid the plow down and walked off the farm and said he would not tell a mule to get up if he was sitting on him. He left the farm and started driving a country doctor, riding him around in his horse and buggy. The man bought one of the first Model T Fords and he would ride with him in that. Then soon learned to drive it. He would drive it and when it would break down, it would take about one month to get a repairman from Columbia, South Carolina which was 100 miles away but 100 miles back in 1916, 1917, was a long, long way. He started working on his car and that old Model T Ford did not start getting going for him. As a result, he learned the trade of auto repair from that and opened his own shop when he was in his early 20s. And there, he stayed until his retirement in the 1970s. My mother was a homemaker. She went to Shaw University. My father dropped out of school in the third grade . . . no, he only went to school 3 days in his life and that was in the face of his brother but he actually went through the 8th grade. My mother finished at Shaw University. She was a homemaker and she ran a hotel and a cafe. We had the only black hotel in Bennettsville. It was right down on the other end of the block from the only white hotel in town.

My father, as I said, had a garage and my mother initially had a cafe at Blenheim down 8 miles from our home where my father was born but we actually lived in Bennettsville. My father did not believe too much in sports and all that sort of thing, and school. He believed in work. So, the boys had to go to the shop, my brother and I, after

school. As a result, we had cars. I had a driver's license at the age of 12 and 14, between 12 and 14, because we had to drive from Bennettsville which was 8 miles from Blenheim to work in the garage every afternoon. And we did that also (inaudible)_____ we picked up a skill that carried us through life and my oldest brother went on to graduate from Hampton Institute and he came back and went into the automobile repair business for a lot of years and also taught at the vocational school and also at (inaudible)_____.

My mother died early, at age 42, in 1945. She was born in 1903. My father lived to 85. He died in 1985, December.

IH: O.K. So, you were pretty young when your mom passed away then?

JM: Yes. I was 14 years old.

IH: Did you have any recollection or relationship with your grandparents?

JM: Yes, I remember my father's side, his father, George McLeod who was born in about 1865. I remember him and also my grandmother. I was born in 1931 and my grandmother died in 1936, my father's mother, and his father died in 1938. On my mother's side, my grandfather died before I was born and my grandmother died in 1949. In fact, she lived with us. She took part in raising us and teaching us a lot about etiquette.

IH: Your grandfather that was born in 1865, was he born into slavery or anything like that?

JM: Yes, he was. We are doing a history on our branch. We just had a family reunion this past weekend in Atlanta, Georgia. We were there and it comes we have a family reunion every 2 years. I was finally president in 1998. We had the largest attendance we had ever had. We had it back at home. We have a family reunion back at the hometown in Marlboro County, Bennettsville every third reunion which is every 6 years. When I was president, we had 192 people in attendance registered in Bennettsville (inaudible)_____.

IH: That is a pretty good turnout.

JM: Yes, very good. This past weekend, we had about 100, I think.

IH: Coming up, again in the 1930s and 1940s as a young man, was there anything you can remember particularly that your father taught you that you drew upon throughout your military and professional life?

JM: I think the biggest thing with me was work ethic. My father believed in work. He believed in honest, hard work. (inaudible)_____ about it. He was always big on promptness also, being on time. He did not tolerate it . . . if you said 7 o'clock that is what it meant. He believed in being very independent. He would tell us that "if your job

don't get you up in the morning, nothing will." I remember when we took on a paper route, the largest paper in the state which was The State. That was the name of the paper, the state paper, in South Carolina. My oldest brother and I took that on for delivery there in our home town. I remember asking daddy to wake us up at 4 a.m. His response was, "Son, if your job won't get you out of bed, nothing will." He never had to wake us up again. My father was a strong individual character-wise. We had prejudice everywhere but one of the things you did not want to do in Marlboro County and Bennettsville especially was to mess around with J.P. McLeod or J.P. McLeod's children. He was highly respected. He took absolutely no nonsense. I have never heard him use profanity. The heaviest thing he said for profanity was "lame" . . . so and so, "that lame nigger," or “that lame cracker." That was about the closest he got to profanity. But he always carried a weapon. He carried a gun every day of his life as long as I knew him.

IH: Is that right?

JM: He wiped out the police force in a little town called Blenheim, South Carolina. It was a little traffic trap is what it was catching people from North Carolina going to Myrtle Beach, it was the main route to there. And a little traffic light was high in the middle of the road just across that small town. But unfortunately, the little local police force which consisted of about 4 or 5 people, started giving the local people a hard time and they stopped my mother one Sunday morning when she was going out from the cafe, going back to Bennettsville to pick up my father because he went to church. They stopped her because they felt that as she pulled off, some gravel flew out from under the

wheel and they stopped her and the police mentioned to her that, "You niggers are getting too big for your pants down there." That is all it took. My father went back down there and by the time he finished with them, he locked them up in our store, took their weapons and called the county sheriff. They were all put in jail. They have not had a police force in that town since. This big farmer there, F.P. Rogers' son, and my oldest brother shot the traffic light down at night with a shotgun and they have not had a traffic light in that town since.

My father, also during the Second World War, they dropped off two prisoners of war, German prisoners, at his garage. He had the responsibility in the southern part of the county for maintaining farm equipment, for the southern part of Marlboro County which entailed the little community he grew up in, Blenheim, Brownsville, Drake and some other little small towns. Clio. He had maintained the farm equipment at those places in that area and, of course, he got the gas allocation and everything else much more than anybody else because we had to do that. Well, they dropped off a German mechanic and a German welder because the Germans could do farm work but they could not do anything to contribute to the war. And so, as a result, this big farmer, Rogers, had these prisoners which, incidentally, lived better than his sharecroppers did. But every morning at 8 o'clock, the two prisoners were dropped off at the shop and the welder, because at that time, a combiner tried to break down in the field - you would go out in the field and repair it. They were good at what they did because you also overhauled tractors but a lot of work during the heat of the summer, the machinery was too hot to touch so you went ahead and overhauled the tractor, put a jug, what we called a jug, or cylinder, in

a tractor. The metal was just too hot to work on in the daytime so we would have to do that at night. But the prisoners did not work at night because they would pick them up with the busses; I think about 5 o'clock in the afternoon and took them back to the retention place in Bennettsville. And also after the war, he was contracted to teach veterans auto mechanics. So, my father was quite a respected person in the town. The policemen stopped my brothers. I never got stopped for speeding or anything. Once they would see I was J.V. McLeod's son, they would say, "Well, son, don't you do that anymore." They got to a place they would call dad and say, "We stopped Eddie for speeding, so many miles per hour," Daddy would take his license for 1 week or 2 weeks or 1 month, depending on what he did. He wouldn't do it (inaudible)_____. He also slapped a police officer down in front of the chief in the chief's office because at night, my brother stopped at a filling station about midnight to get a tire repaired. He was a student at Hampton Institute at the time, to get a tire repaired. A police officer walked up and he was drinking a beer, asked him, while he was waiting for them to repair the tire, he asked him, "Nigger, are you drunk?" And he said, "What do you think?" The guy slapped him, put the cuffs on him and took him to jail. Well, the phone call the next morning came from the lady who was working that night whose husband owned the service station there in the middle of town. Her name was Sanders. She just died here not too long ago, a little over 100 years old. She called my father and wanted to know, she said, "Eddie did not come home last night. I want to tell you why. Come up here." She went up there and she told him what had happened. He went over and had the chief get that police officer in. He just went off duty. He came in. I went over there with him. My father said, "You locked my boy up last night?" He stumbled, trying to say

something. Daddy hauled off and slapped him down and then pulled his pistol out and put it to his forehead and said, "That is how it feels to slap someone. If you ever slap or touch one of my kids again, I'll kill you." And the police chief stood there looking at him and nobody said a word. Loaded the hammer back in the thing and told the police chief, "You had better get rid of this boy." We walked out. Well, first he had him get my brother out of jail right away and get him up in the office. So, that was the type of man my father was. Do not mess with him.

IH: I understand.

JM: I came up with that kind of thing. But the main thing with him was work. He believed that nobody . . . people would give you something to eat but they wouldn't give you somewhere to stay, so you worked for your living and do an honest job of it.

IH: That is pretty impressive. He was like probably your best role model coming up. Did you have any others that were really influential?

JM: I looked at the question about role models. I really did not. My father was my biggest role model and, of course, I learned a lot from my father. I learned how not to do a lot of things also as well as things to do. I learned not to do things. But I did not have other role models. When you think of people . . . I had a lot of people that I grew later to respect such as Thurgood Marshall. I think he was an honest man, a man of example and a man who fought for the rights of not just black people but old people.

Sports figures. I have never been up with sports figures. They were O.K. They were playing a game and that sort of thing. They did what they had to do. But really when I came up, there were no real blacks in the military that I had as role models, not even after I came in. I always wanted to be a soldier, as a result of the second world war, and the soldiers would come down from Fort Bragg to get married in South Carolina. In South Carolina, they had a 24 hour waiting period. In other states, you had to wait maybe one week and that sort of thing. So, in our hotel, we had a lot of soldiers who had girlfriends come down to stay there because they got married in the courthouse and, as I said, it only took 24 hours. And a lot of soldiers from my home including some relatives went in the service during the Second World War. So, as a result, I kind of wanted to be a solider but primarily, I wanted to be a pilot. I wanted to fly airplanes because I did do a little flying there at the home, a little crop dusting. In our cafe on Sundays, this pilot, his name was Powell, one of the Powell brothers, J.L. Powell, they owned the big hotel and some farms there. He had a plane and he and his wife were coming out of the cafe on Sundays to have Sunday dinner. You could go down to the airport for $1 and get a ride in the airplane on Sunday afternoons. They were in there eating one Sunday and I came in and I rode my bike up to the cafe and went in and asked my mother for $1 to go to the airport to ride. She remarked that "that boy loves to fly." Well, this guy, to make a long story short, taught me how to fly. He taught me how to fly and I was soloing in a J3 cub, a crop dusting machine where you put the dust in the machine up front where the front seat would be and the pilot sat in the back. You could not see directly in front, you had to look out the sides of the airplane. I learned to fly in that. I dusted a few crops of farmers

around there that did not know a black kid was flying that plane up there. But it became an aid to me, too, when I wanted to come into the service.

When I finished high school, I wanted to go into the Air Force and be a pilot. And in those days, the recruiting officer came to your town one day a week. They would come to Bennettsville one day and maybe McCall one day and the next time, Cheraw one day, that sort of thing, kind of circuit riders type recruiters. And he knew that I was flying. He knew I was serious about flying. And he explained to me about becoming an aviation cadet at that time. And he explained it to me this way and I will never forget . . . I do not remember the guy's name but I will never forget him, an Air Force sergeant . . . he told me that if they had two vacancies for a cadet and they had two white boys and me apply and we all were high school graduates, he said they would take the two white boys regardless. He said, if the same thing applied and had two white boys, both high school graduates and had me and I had 2 years in a college degree, they would take one of the white boys than me. So, he wanted to know if I could go to college. And I told him, "Yes, I could." He recommended that I get 2 years on a degree and then apply and that way, I would be pretty assured of going in the cadet program. And I think he did that because he was aware that I was flying and I really wanted to fly, so he told me that. I told my father I wanted to go to college and he took the high school principal, went down to South Carolina State, came back that day and I was accepted and had a room on the campus. I went to get 2 years in the degree so that I could go in the Air Force. However, during the time I went to school and graduated high school in 1949, the Korean War broke out and we had the helicopters over there. By being a non-ROTC, I heard

more about the ROTC program and also the Army flying program. And I decided if I could get a degree and a commission and go to flight school, I would accomplish the same thing, and that I elected to do. I went on to receive a regular Army commission and went into the Army as a regular Army officer in 1953.

IH: Now, if we can back up for just a minute, during the Second World War, what were your recollections about that? I mean, I know you spoke about the soldier _____ but the things with FDR and the black community, was there anything in particular that stands out that you remember about that time?

JM: Not really. I guess as a kid, I heard the things about the war listening to the radio because you did not have TV or anything of that sort, listening to the radio and listening to the grownups talk and listening to the soldiers that were coming back, but I think the one thing that made me want to go in the Air Force . . . there was an Air Force training school where they flew the biwinged planes, trainers there in my home. So, the Air Force had a flying school there and I think I was impressed by that and one reason I wanted to become a pilot because I wanted to fly. I used to, as a kid, would find a P38 when they first came on the scene, so I was impressed with those things, hearing about the P38 and how they shot down planes and this sort of thing, because I did not know about the Tuskegee Airmen. For example, I did not learn about them until later. I knew they were black pilots but I did not hear that much about them because that was not anything that people talked about, you know, in the papers and that sort of thing. So, I think I was more impressed with the training school that was there and what I heard from the soldiers

who served in the Second World War. My father was too young for the first war and too old for the second war to serve.

IH: Can you talk a little bit about your experience at South Carolina State College, basically, you know, the ROTC program, coming up in that time?

JM: Sure. At that time, it was mandatory. The first two years was mandatory ROTC. I say "mandatory," you had to take ROTC or you had to take PT but in most cases, it was mandatory initially and I went into that program. And, of course, when I initially went there, I just went to get two years on a degree but as I got into ROTC program, I really became interested in that, especially knowing about I could go to flight school if I was commissioned when I got out. So, I really took an interest in it from the beginning. Then, I went into the advanced ROTC training which we were getting about $26 every 3 months which was a lot of money to us, $23 or $26, something like that, about every 3 months while we were in school. It was a little stipend. I became so interested in ROTC I was made a first lieutenant my junior year where normally your junior year, that is where they would take all the sergeants and that sort of thing and the seniors filled all the officers' ranks. I was made a lieutenant my junior year and my senior year, I was appointed the cadet colonel. I was over the highest ranking cadet. I was the regimental commander. We had a regimental system in those days. So, I was a regimental commander my senior year in college. So, I took the program very seriously because I was interested in becoming a military person. I wanted to initially fly but when I saw I could get a degree and a commission at the same time, I decided to go that route so that

is where I put my energy. But it was a good program because we had some fine officers and NCOs there. They were all black, of course, and that was the missing ingredient. We got good training and the classes were good, everything. Map reading was one of my better subjects. I have just got a sense of direction. We had good training but if I can contrast with it that when I went through ROTC . . . when I went back as a professor in military science, we did not get those things that we needed for the social side of the military. I got everything I needed to become an effective officer in the basics that we got in ROTC plus the summer camp. Incidentally, in the summer camp at Fort Benning, Georgia, I was selected as the number two cadet in the entire summer camp regimen. That included all the schools. We were housed with . . . the company made our school and the University of Indiana made up the company that I was in at the summer camp at Fort Benning, Georgia. I was selected as the number two cadet graduating from summer camp that year in 1952. But let me contrast that with what I went through versus the young people that are going through now and when I was a PMS for the period beginning in 1980.

I found on active duty that the young black officers, second lieutenants coming on active duty were really lost when it came to those social skills. I had a practice when I got a brand new second lieutenant in my command, I would invite them to dinner in my quarters and their social skills were absolutely pathetic. They did not know what fork to use or anything of that nature. So, when I went to become a PMS and I went back to my alma mater, South Carolina State, I instituted a program there for seniors that I had the home economics department set up a class for them, classes for them, to teach them etiquette - what fork to use - and I had them set up a regular, like a formal dinner, an

informal dinner, and they would go through what glass to use or what fork to use, if you got more than two knives, what you do and these things. I actually had them go through everything and do it and also an informal dinner. And when those graduating seniors that were going to be commissioned, I had a cocktail party at my quarters for them and I had my boys to be a bartender and I had hors d'ouevres and things and I did not tell them what anything was, I mean, as far as the hors d'ouevres were concerned. And those that wanted alcoholic beverages, I served it. My boys would fix the drinks they wanted. And I was doing two things, for them to do not frown about anything they eat and that you can go to a cocktail party and not drink alcohol and just how to do small talk because, as I had things laid out, they did not know . . . one would come to me, "Sir, this is really good. What is this? What is this?" Well, I avoided telling them what it was. I said, "Hey, you like that? Get some more. Try this. Try that." This went on for 2 hours. And when 2 hours was up, we shut everything down and then I had a sample of everything we had out for hors d'ouevres to let them know what they were eating. And the fact that you can sit and nurse a ginger ale or a coca cola or some orange juice all night long and have as good a time as anyone else without putting any alcohol in there. And when I told them that that was octopus . . . one came to me, "Boy, that was some really good stuff." When he found out he was eating octopus, he could not believe it. The other one found out he was eating frog legs, he could not believe it. And I told them that. You can imagine . . . oh boy, "I don't eat that. Frog legs. Octopus. No. No way." But I just wanted to teach them something about social graces that I thought was deadly missing with these guys because I said they went through a thing called "white fright." When I went to South Carolina State, I had to take a PMS, they had one white instructor.

I called the infantry branch as I had been in the infantry branch, and I told them what I wanted. I wanted a white female because we started commissioning women in there in the program. And I wanted some white NCOs, which I got, because . . . I referred to it as "white fright" because that guy got commissioned through ROTC and he goes through the basic course and he stands in front of a group, and when you become a platoon commander or squad leader doing the basic course, or when he goes out to an auxiliary unit and he stands before those people and most of the faces he sees out there are white, how does he deal with it? He has never done this before because they have a tendency to polarize themselves, and going to a historical black school, they did not have an opportunity to interact with other whites to see that they put on their pants the same way, they are no different than you are but you look in the faces of all those whites and you have got to give them orders and tell them what to do. So, I thought this was a way to cope with that. So, I got a white major who came from a command in Belgium, I think. She was really good, could not have been a better person because the young women in that program really trusted her and went to her with their problems and then the others found out that NCOs and officers were no different than the black NCOs and black officers. So, the contrast when I was there - we did not have that because you were in a stark black college, you had all black instructors, PMSs and system PMSs. When I went to infantry branch and during my assignment as a captain's assignment officer, I was an overseas assignment officer and an officer at the next desk was the _(inaudible)_____ assignment officer. And he asked me . . . the school got a requisition for an assistant PMS at a college somewhere in Mississippi or Alabama - I do not recall which. And he said, "Mack, is this a white or black college?" I did not know. I did not know what it

was. I told him, "I don't know." He selected a black officer and sent to this college. He got a call from the guy, from the PMS there to thank him when this officer arrived. They finally had a black officer. He said he really wanted one but he did not know how to ask for him, if they would make that assignment. So, his name was Gerald Tippen, the assignment officer. We made it a point to find those white schools in the south and assign some black officers to those schools, and find the historical black colleges and assign white officers to those schools. I got a call from the president of A&T, Gerald Tippingiden (sp) and Gerald referred him to me, asked me if I would talk to him. He received this white officer and he did not want a white officer. He wanted black. And I talked to him and told him why we assigned that officer there and what a benefit it would be to the blacks there to be able to interact with these people before they go on active duty. And fortunately, he accepted my recommendation and kept the officer. So, we integrated. We tried to integrate. And that was in the early 1970s. We tried to integrate every historical black college and every white college in the south that we could that did not have black officers in their ROTC program.

IH: You are basically doing your own, like a resourcefulization program for the cadets. That is great.

JM: It was a learning experience because I remembered that when I went in. I did not have that much problem because my grandmother had cooked for the Hugh McCall family, the guy who eventually became CEO of the Bank of America. She cooked for that family and she would teach us, "You have go to hold the fork for this. Use this."

She taught us all the social graces with things. And we were in the public business. You know, my mother had the cafe and the hotel, my father ran the garage, and we dealt with whites all the time so it was not a stranger to me. I noticed that when I got black officers assigned to me in my command, they had those problems and that is the way I went about to try to correct it when I was on ROTC.

IH: So, this gave you sort of an edge when you went on active duty, correct?

JM: Yes.

IH: Now, you were a distinguished military graduate, right?

JM: Yes.

IH: That is great. It was so good; I lost my train of thought. Speaking of the HBCUs a little bit longer, looking back, again, you have had the experience of being a commandant of the ROTC program. Do you feel that HBCUs gave you something that you would not have achieved if you had went to a traditionally white ROTC program?

JM: You know, I thought about that and I was trying to think what, if anything, but I think maybe I did because we had an all black staff and they were interested in us doing the right thing to learning because if we did not, they would really correct us. And I think had I been in a white school, I do not think any personal attention would have been given.

As my wife (inaudible)_____ when she was teaching, that the black kids would do something or say the wrong word or shoot a word down or something, the white teacher did not bother to correct them, let them go; whereas, the black teacher would. So, I think maybe by going to an HBC and using that experience, that I got a little more personal attention than I would have gotten had I gone to a mixed school.

IH: It seemed like the professors really were taking an interest in you maybe trying to really prepare the next generation to take the lead?

JM: Right. I think the white instructor said, well, if you don't get it that is your fault. That is too bad. But I think the black instructor would take an interest and want you to be the best that you could be.

IH: I see. During summer camp, I guess that would be your junior year when you go to the summer camp, that was integrated, right?

JM: Yes.

IH: O.K., now although you had the experience of dealing with white folks, did the rest of your class, did you see that they were beginning to look to you then to help get them through some of these challenges early on, anything like that?

JM: No, not really. You know, Isaac, the guys in my day, I guess we were pretty solid. I think we were pretty solid citizens and maybe because we had those black instructors primarily and they were interested in what we were doing and that we be the best that we could be, but no, I do not think I was a leader or anything of that sort. (Inaudible)_____ maybe thought that I was a little bit too military, that I was a little too serious about that because I would give demerits and demanded that they do the best because I wanted to see them do the best. When we were in the basic course, we had a couple of guys (inaudible) _____ they went out and first time on and making that $220 a month. You know, that was great money. And they bought cars and they would stay out all night partying and come back and have their classes and sleeping the next day in class and (inaudible) _____ and washing out. Fortunately, in my day, we only had a couple of guys do that. When I went to South Carolina State for that job, I went down there because my old boss went to be the chief of all ROTC. He was the CG working out of Fort Bragg and he asked me to come there because South Carolina State was known as kind of the West Point of the south. We had a reputation. I remember in the infantry branch one time, I got a call from a commander, a lieutenant battalion commander, he did not have a black captain in his battalion and he wanted some black officers. I was the captain, the overseas assignment officer. (Inaudible)_____ a guy in Germany. He said, "Max, could you see if you could find an officer from South Carolina State?" That was the kind of reputation that South Carolina State College had. They wanted an officer from South Carolina State College because of the reputation we had of producing good officers and when I came on board, we had officers washing out like mad from the ROTC program there at South Carolina State. And the general told me that he really

needed help. He said, also, they were running short on black pilots. They were trying to get more black pilots. And he said, "Since you are a pilot, maybe you could help recruit or get black cadets interested in the aviation program." And that is the one reason I went down to that assignment because I was getting close to retirement. I really did not want to go back to Washington and it looked as if I was not going to get that star. So, I elected to go back to South Carolina State because they were really hemorrhaging. They were losing probably 10, 15, 20 officers because they were commissioning quite a few. But those guys would get washed out in the basic course and they came back . . . "They were prejudiced. They did not like me and that is why they kicked me off," that type of thing, when that was not the case because I instituted something there that really put a stop to it and it really pissed off the dean of Voorhees College. He especially came over, called me and told me how wrong I was for dismissing these kids that were supposed to get commissioned at the end of the year and I kicked them out of the program, until I got him over and had lunch with him one day and I went over the records and things with him, and instead, I could not understand how they were going to give that person a degree when they were reading at the 8th grade level and doing math at the 6th grade level.

IH: Oh, yes. Of course.

JM: And so, I instituted some things there that really, really turned the program around. They sent some officers off for training at the Army institute there in Virginia where they do a lot of research. I sent them up to be trained for this and we got the other instructors involved from those going to other classes, not just ROTC instructors

involved and they really saw a change in the kids that went to the program (inaudible) _____ instituted but my first year there, I disenrolled 17 seniors and juniors from the program. Ten of the 17 were to be commissioned that year. But I did not commission them because I would not have had those kids under my command and I was not going to send them out to be (inaudible)_____. And when they saw the results of the tests and everything that we did, the dean of Voorhees College told me that he was ashamed. He was ashamed that this girl was going to graduate with the performance level she had.

IH: O.K. Can you talk a little bit about your first duty assignment and the NCOs you worked around? For example, I talked to some of the offices who were commissioned in the early 1950s and they had mentioned that concerning things of racial tension sometimes, you would have a white enlisted that might have a problem with a person of color being in a position of authority. Early on in your career, did you experience anything like that?

JM: You know, I really did not. I guess I was always a figure. When I first went in, I was 6'4" tall and I was weighing somewhere in the neighborhood of 230, 240 pounds, good physical condition, ran almost everywhere I went, and I could recite regulations, ARs, Army regulations and special regulations almost verbatim by paragraph and page almost. FM22-5, the drills and ceremony, I could do that site almost verbatim, paragraph and everything else. And when they were confronted with me, they found out that, hey, I don't have a dummy, I don't have a second lieutenant here who

(inaudible)_____. I guess it was my whole demeanor that caused people to respect me. Like one commander wrote in my performance evaluation, that I had an air of authority . . . [end of Tape 1, side 1]

JM: I was looking through some OERs here today, this morning and I was reading some of the comments that they wrote. The numbers did not necessarily back the comments but they were using things like "the air of authority," "command respect," that sort of thing. But I really did not have that problem. I think in Korea was the most serious thing when I took a man of a heavy weapons company, a first lieutenant, and I had a couple of duds in there, white kids, that I collared and I guess they could have court marshaled me, kicked me out of the Army, but I did not tolerate it. One man said, close to the "nigger" word. And I came across my desk and collared him and was about to beat the hell out of him. The first sergeant ran in and said, "Let me take care of this kind of stuff for you, sir."

IH: Oh, man. Do you remember what the confrontation was about or anything like that?

JM: I do not know what it was. I called him in. I do not know if he had gone AWOL. I do not remember the exact thing it was about but he was, as I recall, flexing his fists, insubordination through insolence (?) I called it and said something with a tight lip, like under his breath, he said, “nigger," you know? I jumped up and grabbed him and threw him against the wall and went to pick him up and that is when the first sergeant came

over and ran back there. I guess there was an air about me that I was all business; I knew what I was doing. Even the NCOs knew that this guy maybe does not have the experience but he sure knows the ropes, he knows what is going on, and it is because I did not go to work at 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning, when I was a platoon leader, I was there to wake the troops up at 4 o'clock if that is when you had to get up. I gave my own PT. I ran them every morning. I did those things. I did not wait. I inspected the barracks before we went out to the field. I did those things early in the morning. I was not like the other platoon leaders that let the platoon sergeants do it and they come in just in time to board up to go out to the training area or whatever the situation was for that day. But I really did not have a problem with that. But when I became a commander, started being a commander, if the in fields could survive me 90 days, you could not melt them down and pull them out because they knew that I would go to bat for them, I would stick my neck on the chopping block for them if they did their job and that is all I ever asked of them.

IH: O.K. Now, early on as the second lieutenant, did you have a particular NCO that helped show you the ropes or got you acclimated or was that kind of a natural thing for you?

JM: I will never forget, at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, there was a sergeant Bagwell - his first name escapes me right now - but Master Sergeant Bagwell, the platoon sergeant, and Master Sergeant Bagwell . . .

IH: He was black or white?

JM: He was white. A white master sergeant, E7. Sergeant Bagwell had this thing that I picked up on quickly. He would never say, "Sir, you screwed up. You did such and such a thing wrong." He would always say, "we," "Sir, the day we." And every evening, a habit I picked up, every afternoon after we were training while the troops were having their dinner, we would go in the squad room and sit down, because I wanted to review everything we did that day with him and I wanted to go over what we were going to do the next day. He had this habit of saying, "Sir, we did such and such a thing today and we should have done this and we should have done that." He never said "you." But I picked up quickly he was telling me. And this guy was really, really good. He was in the second war. I had an experimental platoon, packet platoon they called it, that I was going to take to Korea, an entire platoon, and he was my platoon sergeant and was to go with me. And I learned more from that guy than I could ever imagine.

As a matter of fact, NCOs enhanced my career. They were really good. I had good NCOs. Those that were not worth a nickel, did not want to work, I fired them, got rid of them or got them reduced in rank or whatever the case may have been. I really relied on the NCOs because I respected them, trusted their experience, and I consulted with them. I did not make them take a back seat and feel like second class citizens. I made them a part of it that "we," he and I, were going to be the leaders for this platoon. As a result, they did not hesitate to give all to help me and help guide me in doing things. This Master Sergeant Bagwell, when we shipped out from Fort Jackson going to Korea, when we got to Oakland, California, they said at the time that he, because he had been

in Korea 2 times before, that he did not have to go back, he could be reassigned somewhere else. He came to talk to me in the (inaudible)_____ that night and asked me my advice, if I wanted him to go, he would continue on. I had already been informed that he did not have to go back to Korea. But I remember when we took off on the plane, when the plane lifted off the ground, I looked over at Sergeant Bagwell - we were sitting in the back because it was a charter plane - and I saw him wipe tears from his eyes as he waved to his family and the plane was lifting off. Sergeant Bagwell must have been in his 50s. I told him, “No, don't go back. Let them reassign you somewhere else but don't go back."

IH: So, you told him "Don't go back?"

JM: Yes, "Don't go back to Korea a third time," because he was willing to go. He went through the training with our platoon. We got them after they finished the basic and we took them through the AIT and they were experimenting in shipping a unit rather than individuals, and I was taking this platoon to Korea. So, it was people like him that I remembered, always remembered Master Sergeant Bagwell, because of that and the way he was actually training me in such a manner and I picked up on it so, therefore, I milked it for all it was worth. I would ask his advice and talk about how we can do it better and that type thing.

IH: Now, you made it to Korea at the end of 1953 or 1954?

JM: I went in, in June of 1953. When did I get to Korea? I got to Korea in 01 March 1954. As I said, with the experimental platoon because when I came in, I went through the basic student officers course at the infantry school from 16 June, that is when I was commissioned, and I finished there and went to Fort Jackson in October of 1953. I left Fort Jackson the end of February with this experimental platoon going to Korea.

IH: Experimental platoon was like for special weapons?

JM: I was chomping at the bit to get over there because I did not think the cease fire was going to last and, you know, I was second lieutenant, (inaudible)_____ and was anxious to get in combat. You had this experimental platoon company that they were going to move by platoons at overseas areas. So, the chief of staff . . . we were assigned out and going through the training, went through all the training. And then, when the training was coming to an end, it was time for the assignments. The four platoon leaders had to go up to the chief of staff's office. Went up there. They had two platoons going to Korea, one platoon going to Austria and one platoon going to Germany. So, the chief of staff said, “McLeod, you volunteered for this and since you volunteered, we will let you take your pick. Where would you like to go?" And so, the others just knew I was going to go to Austria or Germany and I said, "Korea." They sighed, boy, because that meant the other three had a chance, only one out of three chance of going back to Korea. So, I elected to go to Korea because, as I said, I wanted to get into the fight over there.

IH: O.K. and you were infantry branch, right?

JM: Yes, I was infantry. MOS 1542 infantry unit commander. And so, I went to Korea with that experimental platoon.

IH: And how long were you in Korea? One year?

JM: I stayed in Korea 16 months. I stayed with the experimental platoon and then gradually they broke us up. And meanwhile, while we were over there, we had to take this platoon test. We always had a platoon and company test every year. I had the highest score of any platoon in the 7th Infantry Division, the _(inaudible)_____ Division. I finally moved from the E company of the 17th Infantry to go to be the company commander of the heavy weapons company. Now, I was the junior lieutenant in E company of the junior lieutenant in the branches because I made first lieutenant a little bit early and so I was the junior first lieutenant with the battalion commander. It is like the (inaudible)_____, commander of the heavy weapons company. So, I went to command the heavy weapons company and I kept that until I left Korea in July of 1955.

IH: O.K. Let's fast forward a little bit to the early 1960s when the Civil Rights Movement was really starting to kick off, you know, King had been in Alabama and Mississippi. Where were you duty stationed at during that time, let's say, like 1961, 1962?

JM: In 1961, 1962, I guess in the early 1960s, I went through . . . in the early 1960s, I was at Fort Ord, California and from Fort Ord, California, I went from there to the

Commander General Staff College. But I was mostly at Fort Ord, California during the 1960s. Now, see, I went to Fort Ord after I got out of flight school. I finished the advanced course. I went to the advanced course. I got the advanced course, I think, in August of 1958 and went to flight school, and I finished flight school in March, I think about 01 March 1959, and I went to Fort Ord, California. And I stayed at Fort Ord, California until about . . . I was at Fort Ord, California, then I went to the Commander General Staff College.

IH: Do you remember how many blacks were in your class at the CGSC? Approximately?

JM: Yes, we had a few. I was trying to think in my particular section. I think I was the only black in my section but we did have a few blacks there. I went as a captain. I went there kind of early.

IH: O.K., so that was 1960 you went to Commander General. . .

JM: I went to CGSC in 1963, in August of 1963, I started class there.

IH: O.K., now during the Civil Rights Movement, what was your perception of King and the Movement and even of Malcolm X since he was, for some, the opposite of King when it came to nonviolence.

JM: You know, I think the people who were for King were more the older people that were really for the nonviolent movement. I think those probably for Malcolm X were the younger people who were more militant type. In later years, I did not particularly like some of the things that King was doing and I will tell you why. King was hard on the military because he said the military one time made a statement, something to the effect of the military was committing genocide with the black soldiers in Vietnam, I think it was, which was completely untrue and I kind of took a step back from King for that. But I thought the things King did, do not get me wrong - he was a great man and he really opened the doors with the Civil Rights Movement. And, of course, he was much more effective than Malcolm X was, in my opinion. I did not follow Malcolm X that much, did not know that much about him but I did know some things about King.

As a matter of fact, an efficiency report I got and I questioned it when I found out that this white colonel had rated me and should not have rated me, and when I asked him why, he said, "Well, what is it you people want?" And I said, “What do you mean what is it you people want, sir?" "Well, there is all this stuff with Martin Luther King." I was in Germany at the time. I said, "Do you mean that you are basing the rating you have given me on this report with what Martin Luther King is doing back in the States?" His name was Townsend, Colonel Townsend, a redneck from Texas. And I questioned that. Well, let me tell you what happened there. Living in the quarters at Melligan barracks, the corps A.G., a guy named McAffey, I think it was, knew me because I was the corps aviation officer for a while before I went down to command a battalion. We had social things on the weekends or something like that. He lived in the housing unit across the

street from where I lived. He called me one day and said, “Mike, did you know Colonel Townsend rated you?" I said, “What do you mean he rated me? He is not in my chain. The chief of staff is my endorser. Rainfield, the G3, is the rater." He said, "Well, he rated you because the chief of staff was brand new that just arrived and had been there less than 60 days and could not rate me." He said, "Man, it is not a good report. He tried to cut your throat. I want to let you know." He said, "I have got it here on my desk now." I said, "Wait a minute, do not send that thing off." I said, “Let me go over there and talk to him." He said, "Do not mention my name. Do not mention my name." I said, "No, you do not have to worry about it." So, I went to see the deputy chief. I walked in his office, saluted and I said, "Sir, I understand you were the endorser on my efficiency report and I was not aware that you were in my chain of command." I said, "That being the case, I think it would be proper for you to go over my report with me since I was not aware that I was working for you." "Well, you know, the chief cannot rate you because he has not been here long enough." I said, "Well still, sir, there is a procedure for that, too." He put in there, "I have known this officer long enough, you know, and you do not get a rating." I said, "So, I would like to see that report, sir." "Well, that report has gone already. I am pretty sure it is gone." And so, he reached back and got on the squawk box and called the AG. He said, "Listen, that efficiency report on McLeod, that has gone already, hasn’t it?" Don't forget those words now, "that has gone already, hasn’t it?" And I knew the guy was down there laughing his butt off. He said, "Wait a minute, sir, let me check and see if it has gone yet." He came back and on the squawk box, you could hear the envelope tearing. You could hear it tear. And I am sure he put it near the phone and just ripped an envelope. He said, "No, sir. It is here. He had not mailed it. It was in

the mail room. It has not gone out yet." And the guy turned red and he said, "Send it up here." So, he went up and when it came in he handed me the report and I read it. And he had things on there like, "McLeod does not get along with his staff. There is always conflict with him and his staff." All kinds of things. He rated me G3, maxed me out. And he rated me about 3 or 4 scores down. Boy, it was just going to ruin me. And I handed it back to him and I said, "Sir, I will not accept this so I want to talk to the CG." "Well." I said, "Thank you, sir." I saluted him and walked out. I walked in the chief's office and I told the chief that I wanted to speak to the CG. And so, the chief said, "Sure, Mike." So, I went in. The CG was busy on the phone or something and the deputy commander came out, the general brigadier had just been assigned. He introduced himself to me and I to him. The chief told him that I wanted to see the CG. "Is there anything I can help you with?" I said, "Yes, sir." I went in his office and I told him. He had Townsend give him the report. He looked at it and he said, "No, he has got no business rating you here." And so, he took the report and said, "We will straighten this out." And he had him redo the report. He put in there "I have not been here sufficient time to rate Colonel McLeod." I was lieutenant colonel then. He said, "However, I know and have great respect for the G3 and I respect his rating of this officer," and he signed off on it. So, I dodged a bullet because this guy did not like what was going on, and he was just a redneck anyway. Did not like what was going on. When I said, "What you people are you talking about" which is a phrase the white people like to use sometimes. He said, "Well, all the stuff going on with Martin Luther King."

IH: Were you a captain or major at that time?

JM: I was lieutenant colonel. In fact, I had just been promoted because I had just taken command of the aviation battalion over there.

IH: He was trying to shaft you, Colonel McLeod.

JM: Yes, he effectively would have cut my throat as I found out when I _____ to branch what would have happened. I found out more about OERs were handled.

IH: You know, this is one of my favorite subjects with OER. We will just skip to that right there. In your opinion -- you have a lot of experience working at the Pentagon and things -- do you think the OER promotion system was fair in the 1960s and early 1970s?

JM: The system was fair; let me put it that way. The system was fair. We had a scoring system and everybody reports, like the 6 or 7 -5 did not have a score. But some of the other reports always had a scoring system on them. So, in branch, they would just add up those scores and those scores were strictly used in their branch for an OML, an order of merit list. That order of merit list was used when it came time to riff people. You would do an OML and record the scores of each officer. And then, we would do what we called a reverse OML. Reverse OML, the worst scores came first. So, if you had to riff 200 people, you would take the first 200 in that reverse OML. But the efficiency report itself and the system of promotion itself as such, I think was fair. But the unfairness came in with the raters, those people who were rating and those people

who sat on boards. I sat on promotion boards. And things can happen on that board that will make or break you. Individuals who are rating you can make or break. . . I had a report in Fort Carson, Colorado that this colonel gave me and he said, "Lieutenant McLeod is one of the finest colored officers I know." He said, "Lieutenant McLeod is the finest colored officer I know." And he went over with me. I had this thing about my efficiency reports. You would get a report if you had been in the command at that time, 60 days. You would get a full report. So, I made it a practice at about the fifth day to the eighth day, I would go to my commander and say, "Sir, I will be eligible for a report soon. I wonder if you would go over it with me and let me know what my weaknesses and strong points are so that I can improve myself appropriately." And that was a catch all for them. They could not get out of saying no. So, they could not get out of rating me and sending the report in because in those days, you did not have to show the officer the report. You would rate them and send it in. And so, I made sure that I saw my report by taking that approach with them.

IH: Do you remember what year that changed, when the officer had to actually sign it versus when they did not?

JM: I am trying to remember when that was. I do not remember if it was 6 or 7 -7 report, a later report that you had to sign but in the early days, you did not have to show a guy the report at all.

IH: O.K., so anything before that, you did not know what you were getting?

JM: You did not know what you were getting, but I made it a practice of doing that or I would tell an officer, "Sir, you are going to be leaving and I wonder if you would go over my report with me so I can see where I need improvements?" That way, I put them on the spot. They could not say no. They had to say yes. So that I somewhat controlled and would not give them a chance. But anyway, this officer voluntarily called me in and showed me my report because he was proud of it. He had given me a max report and said I was the finest colored officer that he ever knew. So, as I read it, when I finished, I looked up at him and I said, "Sir, I really appreciate this. You really put me on the spot. That means I have really got to work my fanny off. But there is one thing here that I am concerned with. You said I am the finest colored officer you have ever known." I said, "I would really like to be measured against all officers." And he looked at it and you could see the look in his face. He said, "Oh shit, McLeod, I am sorry. I am sorry." He said, "You are the finest officer I know, not colored officer." He had to retype the report and take that “colored" out of there and change it to "the finest officer that he had known." I mean, it was all right, it was a great report. As I say, he maxed me out. It had great words and everything, words in there. But I wanted to be compared with all the officers, not the colored officers. He picked up on that. It was just one of those things. Like the officer in Brantz when I finally found out that these black officers did not go to advance course and I go to the school desk officer and I ask him why. And I always had a white officer's file to compare with it, equal file, and said, "Why did you pick him over him?" Like one Musselman, part of the Musselman Apples and that sort of thing, he looked up at me and said, "You know, I do not know why I did that. It had to have something to do with race, Mack. I am not going to lie to you." He said, "I do not think I

am prejudice. I do not know why I did that." He said "But you are right. I will put this man in the advanced course, change the file and send him to the advanced course." So, it was things like that. The efficiency reports were O.K., it was the rating that we got. We had to work twice as hard, twice as hard, to get the same rating and sometimes even during that, you would not get that rating because a lot of time, officers thought they did an outstanding job, only to go to branch or go to Washington and take a look at their records and find out the guy gave him a mediocre report. So, as a result of that, when the board looks at reports, then the board goes through your file for a promotion, they do not have much time to spend on each file. So, a lot of times, the tendency is just to flip the file and see what their score is or where you were rated. And so, you just would take the efficiency report and not pay too much attention to what is written. The only time you would look at what is written about the guy is if he got a very low report and a lot of them got the maximum reports but maybe something, he got a 2 or 3 in one of those areas like _(inaudible)_____, getting along with others, that sort of thing. You would look and see, well, why did he get this and you would read the remarks and see if there was anything in the remarks that explained why that particular rating was given. So, if they really looked at the score, you would have a black officer that was just as outstanding as any white officer you would find but he was not rated that way. He was rated . . . for some reason, the white officer would get the top block and they would put him in the second or third block. But if you read the writing and the words they said, the word picture that they gave, he should have been in the top block. So, the system itself was fair but you could not take the individual out of that. You could not take the individual out of that.

I was sitting on a board for the regular Army majors, I think it was, and one report a major got, he was an executive officer of a battalion at Fort Riley, Kansas, I think it was. The guy was a West Point graduate. He had an outstanding record. And all of a sudden, here is this report . . . the battalion commander gave him a maximum report but the regimental commander gave him almost a zero. Gee, let me read this. I was the last guy to get the file. Everybody's file was passed and you would mark your score and pass it on to the next guy at the next desk or (inaudible)_____ file. And they would add up the score and you would look and see who was going to get promoted. I read his reports, with interest. And then, I read this report that this gay commander had given him. Terrible. I looked up and saw the brigade commander, I cannot think of his name now . . . he made general. He was a little short guy but he had a Cesar's complex. He was short and he always felt that if he was around tall people, he had to stand up tall and put his hand in his button flap. And he smoked cigars. And what had happened, the troops were out. The guy was executive officer, battalion commander was on lead. And companies were out in the field training, practical training. And that night, one of the companies came back and reported a weapon missing. So, what he did, he told the company commander right away, "Go back out there and comb the area, sweep the area." And they did that. After they got the troops on the trucks back there and got them out of the field, he went to the phone and called the brigade and told him that there was a weapon missing and he sent the troops back out to get the weapon. They found the weapon. But his brigade commander did not like that because the rule said the first thing you do is call the brigade and report it. And since he did not stop when they told him that, pick up the

phone, call the brigade and say, we have got a weapon missing, he just gave him a bad report. So, with the scores, the other guy is looking this over and you see that report down there and here you are, a battalion executive officer and due to that, you got a low score from that guy . . . so, when the file came to me and I looked at that and noticed the others before me and 3 or 4 guys before me had reviewed the file, I was the last guy to add up the score. I said, "Time out here." I asked the board president, brigadier general, I said, "Sir, I want to discuss this officer's report," and the general had already rated him, too. He saw the file first and he gave him the lowest score. I said, "I do not agree with this. Here is an officer who was 3 times in Vietnam and he has done all these things commanding an outstanding score. Then we get" . . . I cannot think of the guy's name. I said, "I know the brigade commander here." I said, "He is egotistical, he is ashamed of his height and he is a little Cesar." And one of the other guys laughed and said, "You hit that on the head," because he knew him, too. And I said, "How in the world are you going to kill a guy's career who has had an outstanding career, a lot of potential, simply because he told the commander, get your troops together, put them on the truck, go back out and comb the area before he picked up the phone and said we have got a weapon missing, lost in the field somewhere?" I said, "You just do not ruin a person's career like that." I said, "I know him." As a matter of fact, he was on the BG list at the time. I said, "He is on the BG list but I am not in favor of killing this guy because of what he did, because of that." I said, "That is a little bit too strict." One guy said, "I move that we revoke this record." And so, the president agreed. And we sent the record around again and the guy was picked up for his regular Army promotion. So, it is the way that the people look at the records.

D.R. Butler, when he was doing his study, D.R. had limited access to OERs and he would come down when he was writing the study and show me these things. But D.R. did not really study the records as I did. As an assignment officer, we had to read everything. For instance, you could have an outstanding record and you want to go on attaché duty but if somewhere along the line, they said your wife was a pain in the butt or alcoholic or that sort of thing, you were not about to send that person on active duty as an attaché or military mission or with the reserve unit because of the wife's conduct. It has an effect. You would not do that. So, those are the kinds of things that really hurt the black officer because, let me tell you, I ran into a lot of fine white officers who worked hard to make sure that they were absolutely fair. There were some that would admit, hey, you know, guys, whites have a tendency to rate a little lower just because the guy is black and I have had officers tell me that, to tell other officers that, the white officers to state that. And the system itself was O.K. but we cannot take how the individual looks at the record and the prejudices within the guy itself. So, a lot of people probably would not agree with me about that but I will tell you, I reviewed a heck of a lot of records the 2 years that I spent in infantry branch, or 3 years or whatever the time was that I stayed there. I reviewed a lot of records because I did not move out of there just so I could help correct some of the wrongs that I thought were being done to the black officers. So, the system itself, the promotion system itself, is good but in that promotion board, when that board meets, a lot depends on the president. Sometimes you would get a president that would say, "There will be no discussion at all." Then you get another president that, O.K., if you want to talk about his record, let's talk about it and let's come to a reasonable

conclusion to make sure that we are being fair by what we are doing in here, because when I pulled duty officer over at (inaudible)_____ sometimes when it came around, about maybe twice a year, I spent my night going through the general officer's files and I will tell you the truth - some of those generals' mothers had to sit on the boards for them to get promoted if they looked at just the efficiency report because some had some terrible reports but they got promoted, they got selected for general. So, there is a little more to it than just the efficiency report.

IH: O.K. Interesting. Can you talk a little bit about your perception with the inflation problem and the OERs, what you made or saw of that?

JM: Do you mean as far as OER is concerned?

IM: Yes, sir.

JM: Definitely inflated. It was definitely inflated. There is no doubt about that, and I think we inflated it ourselves because if you gave a guy what you would think was a fair report and you have got somebody else sitting over here who says, I like this guy; I mean, he has got some flaws but he is white and he should get promoted and he is going to max him out . . . and so, you have got a guy who is good and should not be left behind, then in order to make sure that he is not left behind, you have got to give him more than he actually earned. And that is why I said . . . if you had to write a narrative only and not put a score on there and we went by narratives, chances are it would be the

fairest system in the world. It would be the fairest system in the world. Because I have got some reports here, I was thumbing through them this morning. I mean, I look in there and the guy talks about, boy, this guy is outstanding and with his experience, he is focused, he is this, he is that, and you turn it over and he marked me down on the second block, did not give me the top block. But to read his words, I was a water walker. But I got marked down to second block. And this is my early years when I was a lieutenant or captain. So, you just cannot take that part out of the subjective rating is what I am looking for. You just cannot take that part out of it because some will cut your throat.

Henry Doctor, I think, did a lot to save a lot of black officers when he was in branch and he was over at what we called the good guide/bad guide section that looked at the personnel actions when he reviewed reports, and he would see a guy with a bad report, look at his overall file and the guy is an outstanding but here, a couple of people that cut his throat. And you could see this as plain as looking at the palm of your hand. You look at that guy's file and then you look at the word picture to try to pick up on why they are rated so low, it is not in there. It is a beautiful word. But they just marked him low which cut him out of the track pattern.

IH: Colonel Miller, I was interviewing him and he mentioned the same word you did - water walker - and those secret code words they look for inside the narrative of the OER. When you would review records, when you had like a couple of max ratings, did you find those words were very apparent in the narrative, like, you know, promote this guy now?

Were there outstanding comments that told you, hey, this guy is a cut above this other officer here, with these special words or anything like that?

JM: Yes, we did because, as I said, in branch, we were dealing with assignments and looking at the MOS of the guy that is doing the serving and all the other things - the family life, his integrity, his tact and all that sort of thing. We read the words. We read the words. That is why a lot of times, the numbers did not add up for a guy for a certain assignment where you would think this guy should be a water walker. But you read the words on him, he is a water walker. But when you turn it over and look at the back, he is not. And that is the time you take that file and walk into the branch chief and say, "Sir, listen, this guy should go to this assignment. His numbers do not match the words." I think what it was, when the guy took a look and said (inaudible)_____ you read the words or he will not pay too much attention to the numbers back there or what block is checked in. But yes, we in branch had to read the words. But when you sit on a board, you do not have time to read the words. You have too many files to review so you are going to flick those numbers and look at those numbers or what block is checked and if you see something out of the ordinary, then you are going to stop and read that particular report and see why that block is so low.

IH: How much time would you usually spend on a file, a board, when they are going through these things?

JM: When you sit on a board . . . well, I had a lot of experience in reviewing files when I first went to sit on boards. So, I could probably review a complete file in less than 60 seconds. But the average guy just coming in there for the first time and did not have any experience in reviewing files, it would probably take them 3, 4 minutes on a file, 5 minutes on a file. You find some that will find the rating so mixed up, they might spend 20 minutes or 30 minutes on a file, one file, because you could tell how much time a guy would spend on a file by the numbers, how the stack was on his desk. But, as I say, being in branch and reviewing the files, I knew what to look for. I knew the key blocks that you looked at that meant something to us and the job the guy was in, you had certain key blocks that you would look to see where was that checkmark or what was that score for that particular block? And if it was out of a range that we considered appropriate, then you want to read the front part of the report and see did the rater or the endorser address that in the narrative with the report, in the word picture?

IH: O.K., now, when you retired, what number OER were they on then? 67-8? Do you remember?

JM: Let me see . . . when I retired . . .

IH: That is asking a lot. I guess my question was going to be do you think that the system improved over time? Do you think the biggest help was definitely the black representation on the boards?

JM: Yes, the biggest help was having blacks on the board for one thing, and the other was when you had officers to sign off on the reports. I think that was the biggest key because then, it meant that that guy could not sneak a bad report in on you. You know, it was kind of like the Navy used to have a two-system tier report. He had the report they would make out and give you and then they had the back channel report. And the back channel report would cut the guy's throat while the front channel report was pretty good. It was the same job, the same officer. But the biggest help was when the officer had to sign off on his report because, then, you had that commander who did not have the guts to confront you with what he wanted to give you because he did not like you or did not like it because of what Martin Luther King was doing or somebody else black was doing, because the way people stereotype the soldiers and minorities. If a soldier went into a town and robbed somebody, then hey, boy, watch those soldiers - they will rob you. But if a white person goes in that town and robs somebody, boy, that is a terrible guy. A black guy goes in that town and robs somebody, "you have got to watch those blacks." So, that was one of the biggest things, they way they stereotyped about you.

IH: O.K., I guess from there, we can segue back to the other questions we should start. Tell me about what your perception was concerning the Black Power Movement in the late 1960s.

JM: The Black Power Movement?

IH: Yes.

JM: You know, I think it probably frightened a lot of people and maybe frightened some people in the military, too, because we had cases who had generals where they tried to come up with all these boards and things to make sure people were treated right. And they started a system back when the general will have a meeting with these blacks so they could express themselves in the meeting . . . you know, "Don't call me a general. Call me Bill or Jack," or this sort of thing. Some of them would curse them out and all that sort of thing and they would sit up there and take it. I never did think that should have been part of the picture. So, I think it frightened a lot of people. An example . . . I got a call from Fort Hood, Texas, from the chief of staff of Fort Hood, Texas and Brigadier General. We had assigned a black officer for battalion command, black lieutenant colonel, and he had been command approved and I was chief of (inaudible)_____ branch at the time. We assigned him out to Fort Hood for battalion command. When he arrived there, the chief of staff called . . . it wasn't the chief of staff; it was the deputy CG out there. . . called and said "They want to make this guy IG." And I said, "Well, sir, he is assigned there for command duty." He said, "Yes, well, McLeod, we are having all these problems with the black soldiers out here. We need somebody in there that can handle that, can talk to them," and he gave me all the reasons why this guy should be the IG and not the Italian commander. So, I said, "Sir, you know, you can assign him to the IG and the first time a black soldier goes in there and tells him what his problems are and he disagrees with them, if the guy is a real dud and he points out that no . . . he investigated and found out the guy was lying, was a real dud, and he would tell the guy that. He would call it like it is. The guy goes out and says . . . this guy is Uncle Tom.

He does not like blacks. He has got that civil leaf on his shoulder and he does not like blacks. He is an Uncle Tom. Now, how effective do you think he is going to be among the soldiers you are trying to reach out there? I said he could be more effective as a battalion commander. [End of side 2]

IH: O.K., go ahead.

JM: I wanted to tell him that the advantage of him being a battalion commander, being in command and having control over those soldiers rather than being an IG that would be tagged as being an Uncle Tom and totally ineffective as far as the minority soldier would be. The general told me, he said, “McLeod, the problem with you guys up there in the Pentagon, you do not understand blacks." I said, "Sir, I am black." There was about a 5 minute silence. Well, not 5 minutes but he was set back because, I guess, my voice, he did not detect that I was black.

IH: Right. (Inaudible)_____.

JM: Yes. He said, "The problem with you guys up there in Washington is you do not understand blacks." So, they (inaudible) _____.

IH: Oh boy! That is pretty good. I want to tie this into Vietnam. Now, what year did you go to Vietnam?

JM: I went to Vietnam . . . let me refresh my memory here as to the date I went to Vietnam. After I got out of Commanding General staff, I was in Germany 1 year to the day and then let me out and Vietnam, here I come. I went to Command General staff and I went to New York and then I was pulled out and went to Vietnam. That was 1965. I got to Vietnam in September of 1965.

IH: Did you do one or two tours there?

JM: I was over there three times.

IH: Three times? O.K.

JM: The first tour I went over there, I was in Germany and had just been moved from the brigade to division staff and they gave us 24 hours to get out of Germany. I went to Fort Riley, Kansas where the commander there told his adjuvant that they were shipping in all these aviators because of the flying game in Vietnam that was coming up. And he told this adjuvant he wanted him to look over the records of these aviators coming in and he wanted the meanest, ugliest guy to command his air (inaudible) _____ retreat. His adjuvant happened to have been a classmate of mine. He saw my name and he said, "Here is the man right here," because out of all the aviators that were sent then, a lot of senior majors, how did I get picked for that one command job that was open? So, I went there and I picked up the troop D air of the first and the fourth cab squadrons, first division, and I trained them there without aircraft. We did not have any aircraft. The

(inaudible)_____ came in and sent them out to fly aircraft all over the country to the port to be shipped to Vietnam. I went to Vietnam and I commanded the company, came up with this 6 month command business but I stayed with the company from taking them over there, forming them here at Fort Riley, stayed with them until May of 1966. I left the end of May of 1966 and I moved on down to the aviation staff vis-à-vis where I finished the next two or three months of my tour of duty.

IH: Now, in Nam or stateside, did you ever have any black troops give you the Black Power salute or anything like that?

JM: No, I did not have any of that.

IH: Now, what was your last tour in Vietnam? What year was that?

JM: My last tour, 1972. I think it was about March of 1973.

IH: During that time, and I am still sticking with the Black Power thing, did you see any heightened racial tension among the enlisted or maybe blacks doing self segregation? Like, once they got off duty, they would just go do their thing?

JM: In Vietnam, I did not see that but let me talk about that a bit because that subculture type thing of segregating yourself, blacks had a tendency to do that, even among some of the officers, and enlisted men certainly did that, would segregate

themselves and have their own little cliques. I did not see any heightened attention over there for, maybe, two reasons: 1) A lot of blacks volunteered. I disagreed with Martin Luther King because he said we were sending black soldiers over there committing genocides. That was not true. Black soldiers were volunteering to go to Vietnam because their changes of promotion were better and they would get promoted quicker. They were recognized for what they were doing. They were good fighters. They went in and were getting the job done. They got promoted. You could go over there as a PFC and come back staff sergeant, and we had them to extend over there. I had black officers who volunteered to go and they would call branch and say, "Do not put it on my orders," because when you volunteer, we were put down as second 2 or third 2 volunteer. And we talked to the guys in Vietnam every morning and during that morning conversation, we would tell them who volunteered and what unit that they wanted to go to. And the guys over there would try to assign them to their units because they volunteered to go. So, we had those that did not want anybody new, especially their wives or families to know that they were volunteering to go. So, they would ask us not to put it on their orders and we did not. We just got their orders to go back to Vietnam with the reporting day, and especially if that was happening with enlisted men, they wanted to go so they could get promoted fast. Officers went over there and did their job, they got good efficiency reports and they thought that was great to have outstanding efficiency reports in a combat zone.

IH: So, that was like getting your ticket punched? I had heard that term, "getting your ticket punched." That is what I had heard . . .

JM: Yes, right.

IH: Now, this is a question I ask all the officers who served during that time. Now, let me ask you - here we are in the 1960s - we have the Civil Rights Movement going on, we have this Black Power Movement happening with more of trying to find these links back to Africa, and here in the United States, again, we still do not have equal social and civil rights. So, as an African American, how did you rationalize serving in the military then when quite possibly, you could be killed or maimed for life, lose an arm or a leg, when you still did not have equal social and civil rights back here in the United States?

JM: I guess I am kind of a strange bird. I was really ape about my military career. I went in there because I wanted to do well and I wanted to be a general. I did not reach the stars but I got to the moon. And, I guess, it could have been my whole demeanor. I was probably so focused on military that I did not put the two together. I kind of left the stuff and the Black Power and what was going on in civilian life there and in the military, I insisted on fair treatment among soldiers and by soldiers. I pushed there because if you were white and I thought you said the nigger word or something, I was ready to step in your butt and break your neck. And I did not care if you had stripes on your arm or stars on your shoulder. I did not make any exception. I was quick to speak up if I thought something wrong was going on or someone was being treated unfairly. And so, I guess my thing was that I wanted to make sure in this man's army, you are going to treat me fair if I have to kill you, so to speak. And I guess I really did not

connect it up too much with what was going on in civilian clothes. I really did not connect it. It could have been a flaw on my part but I was really concerned with what I was doing in the military and where the military was going rather than putting the two together because whatever we got in the military, we got what was represented in civilian life. And I guess I was more attuned to trying to make sure that that redneck that came in did not try to pull the same thing in there that he pulled in civilian life, or for that Black Power guy who came in, did not pull the stuff that he was pulling in civilian life because blacks could be as prejudice as whites and I found a lot of them who were as prejudice as whites.

IH: O.K., so would you say you were changing the system from the inside for the betterment of the country as a whole?

JM: Yes, that is what I was doing, because that is why I stayed in branch, that I would not go over to desk for desk ops or some of the more lucrative jobs that were great for punching a ticket to the stars. Instead, I thought if we could get black officers in those jobs out in a different post, divisions, get them in good, responsible command jobs, that that is the place they needed to be so that we could keep a tab on and put a stop to any prejudice that may pop its head up.

IH: Now, I remember during our first conversation, you mentioned you were instrumental in Colin Powell's career. Can you talk about that for a moment?

JM: Yes. I am trying to remember the year. It was some time after I went to branch. It was probably when I came from Germany in 1970 something. Let me look here and see if I can come up with an approximate timeframe on that, when I first went to Washington because it was during my first tour there that we did this. I left the 16th Aviation Battalion that was in the 1970s. I went to OSD, OPD, and assignment officer in 1969, I guess. That was the infantry branch. Yes, that was probably in 1969, somewhere in that timeframe. But anyway, we got a call that the White House was interested in seeing some black officers in the White House Fellows Program. We did not have any black officers in the White House Fellows Program. At that time, I was chief of assignment. I cannot remember. I was chief of assignment at that time. That is what I was, in the infantry branch, and got to where they wanted us to do a file search to find some outstanding officers to go in the White House Fellows Program. And during my screening, and I think we were supposed to be captains then, captains or majors - I am not quite sure. I do not exactly remember. It could have been both. But I went through . . . picked up the OML list and pulled the top files of the black officers. And as I recall, I stayed there until about 2 o'clock in the morning screening those files for that. And I came up with a couple, three files, and Colin Powell was one. He was my top choice, looking at what he had done and the potential and the . . . I read every efficiency report he had and looked at the words and everything else, if his wife was mentioned, whatever. And my top pick was Colin Powell. So, the next morning, I went in to the branch chief with the files and went over with him and told him that I recommend this captain or major, whatever he was, to go to the White House Fellows Program. So, he said, “O.K., Mac. Go with it, contact him and see if" . . . because we wanted people to want to go

and not just assign them, that we automatically assign you to . . . we talk to you about it. So, I called him and I think he was at Fort Leavenworth, I believe. I called him that evening, that night, and I explained to him what the White House Fellows Program was and what he would be doing and the advantage of it and that sort of thing, and he agreed to it, that he would do that. So, I went back the next day and we cut the orders of reassigning him to Military District of Washington with a duty at the White House and the rest is history. I think I only ran into Powell one or two times after that, once, as I recall, after that. I do not remember what function it was. I cannot even remember what function it was. And I have not been with him since. But I know I had handled his records since that time because he was assigned out for battalion command, to punch that ticket, so to speak. He went back to Washington, because he made an impression on people there. He was good. He was a good writer, a good speaker, was well-spoken and overall, a good officer. I saw he had great potential, I thought, and he proved that by his actions and what he did there because he went out and they requested he come back. When it was time for brigade commander, I was not in that part because I was on the colonel's division. He went out for that and then he came back. As I said, the rest is history. He proved himself to be with as much potential as I thought he had when I initially selected him.

IH: And he does mention you in his book as well, his first book, "My American Journey," or something like that.

JM: I did not read his books. My son told me that he had mentioned that he did not remember the name of the officer because my son told him about me and he bought me an autographed picture, that Powell autographed a picture to give to me. And this was when my son was up there. He was flying VIP . . . he would fly the Blackhawk. He was with the VIP detachment there at (inaudible)_____ flying the Army staff and the high-ranking civilians around.

IH: O.K. Well, wrapping up, I have about another question or two. From your experience, what were the biggest problems in the military in relation to being a person of color looking back? What did we as African Americans, what were some of the hurdles that you saw that we had to overcome throughout looking over your whole military career?

JM: You had to continually prove yourself, you know, until you can build a reputation that people know you. Then, when you go to a unit, they will put you in an initial assignment. But when I say you have got to continue proving yourself, you could go to a . . . let's say you are captain and you go to a new post, a new organization, and they have need for a company commander. Chances are, if they get a white officer and a black officer to come in, and not having records available to them, the black officer could be a water walker and the white officer could be a dud - and the chances are they would assign that command to the white officer and the black officer go into some other job, a staff job or some other job, and he is so outstanding, they say, "Hey, this guy is good." Then they will later assign him to command. So, he had to prove himself. I always had to prove

myself first before I could get that real job that I wanted. You had to prove yourself. I remember at Fort Carson, Colorado, I was pretty good at records and manuals. I mean, I could (inaudible)_____ special regulations and Army regulations to memory. I was so good down in the company when we had our command inspection; they pulled me up as a battalion adjuvant to help the other companies get their records and things straight. Then, the personnel office flunked their CNMI or flunked their IG inspection, whatever it was in those days - they busted the inspection. So, the colonel relieved the personnel officer and pulled me up to be the personnel officer. I went to see the regiment Army commander. I said, "Sir, I am a regular Army officer. I should not be a personnel officer," and this sort of thing. He explained, "Mack, I want you to go in there. You are good at that. You know it. I want you to go in there and straighten it out. When you get it straightened out, I will pull you out." Well, I did. 60 days later, we had the reinspection. I cannot write my name today because I have signed my name so many times, I cannot write my name today because of that. And then, he pulled me out of there and they needed a regimental adjuvant. And here I was, I have an article from the Mountaineer at that time, a picture where I am inspecting the honor guard because I set up a formal guard mount every Friday and it has this picture in there of me inspecting the guard. It has "Lieutenant McLeod, adjuvant 60th Infantry Regiment," and regimental adjuvants at that time were majors and all the other regiments had majors. And here, this first lieutenant is sitting in the 28th regiment of the 60th, or whatever it was. I think it was the 60th, I believe, infantry. At any rate, I always had to prove myself before I could get a good job, before I could get in that job that meant something. And I think most

blacks are plagued with that. They will not take us on face value, that you are an officer and you have done these things, and you still have to prove yourself.

When I went to the recruiting command after the war college, they called it poetic justice because I was not for this all volunteer army at all, and then here I go to be assigned to a recruiting command. And even though I was coming out of the war college, the best commander out there was a deputy commander initially. And each brigade had two deputy commanders, a deputy for the east and a deputy for the west because we had 13-1/2 states that we controlled there. But after I was there and I proved myself, that I knew what I was doing and could do a good job, then I was made a commander of the brigade. But the challenge always had to prove yourself everywhere you went.

IH: O.K., and coming to our last question, what do you feel that people need to know about African Americans' military service during the Vietnam era that has not been told or written about, or maybe has not been paid enough attention to?

JM: I think the biggest thing is, as I mentioned earlier, that their contribution in Vietnam. The black Americans were real fighters. They were good. And that is why a lot of them volunteered to go back over there and serve, so that they could make rank because in the States, they would have to get out and go through the mill of trying to make rank. There was always something that the sergeant major or whomever sat on the board and that sort of thing - no matter how good they were, they really had to be totally outstanding in order to make the rank where, in Vietnam, they could go back

there and they could make rank because they were good fighters and good soldiers. So, I think that was one of the things that a lot of people did not know and why a lot of them volunteered to go back over there, not like Martin Luther King said, that America was trying to get rid of them. They volunteered to go because they wanted to get these opportunities. Officers got better efficiency reports over there.

Let me tell you something that General Frank Mildron told me. General Mildron was the 7th Corps Commander. The 16th Aviation Battalion Commander, I was the core aviation officer at the time . . . the 16th Aviation Commander was relieved because he flunked the CMMI. I had been sent up there. Initially when I went over there, I was the executive officer of the 16th. I only stayed there about 2 months and was sent up to Corps to be active aviation officer while the lieutenant colonel came in from Leavenworth that was scheduled to be there, and I was a major at that time. And when the lieutenant . . . I went in and hit the ground running and was just doing a terrific job, the General thought, and trying to bring the aviation under control and eliminating accidents and that sort of thing. And so, when the officer came in from Leavenworth, the lieutenant colonel, the aviation officers, they decided the General wanted to keep me in that job and so they sent this officer to be the plans officer in the G3 section, and we all were in the G3 section. I became the plans officer. Well, I was there for, I don't know, about 1 year and I was promoted to lieutenant colonel. And a few months after I was promoted, they assigned a new commander down to the 16th aviation battalion. And, as I say, he flunked the command maintenance inspection and the general relieved him. And the IG, when they were deciding who to send down there, suggested me and the G3

jumped up and back that and said, "McLeod is the guy to straighten it out." So, he sent me down there to command it. And General Mildren called me in his office because he had dealt with me before. I flew his pilot and thought he was going to get upset when I told him why I flew him. He was O.K. with it. Then, he called me in his office and he told me, he said, "Mac, I am going to give you the same authority that brigade commanders have, special court marshals, lieutenant colonels, special court marshal authority. And he said, "Let me give you a piece of advice." He said, "I have always had an NCO - I would find an NCO that I could trust to keep me informed and keep me up-to-date on what was going on in the enlisted ranks." He said, "Because I know you are the guy that doesn't like surprises." And he said, "I didn't like surprises either, so I found an NCO that I could trust to come to me, call me and keep me informed on what was going on. Then you will find that you know more about the enlisted people than your sergeant major will know." He said "That has always been successful for me and you might consider this." I thanked him and he said, "McLeod, incidentally, I found black NCOs to be more loyal than whites." That came from General Frank Mildren. He found blacks to be more loyal than whites, NCOs. I took that advice. He was absolutely right. He told me, he said, "But you have to take care of them. Make sure you get a good outstanding NCO because you have got to take care of him when it comes to assignments and promotions." And he was right.

IH: O.K. Interesting. All right. I am going to stop the recorder now.