

**Interviewee: Briggs, Ronald**  
**Interview: February 16, 2007**

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON  
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

**Interview with: Dr. Ronald Briggs**  
**Interviewed by: Isaac Hampton II**  
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**Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola**  
**Topic: Black Officer, OCS, Vietnam, Racial Tension**

IH: Today is February 16, 2007. I am at Prairie View University and I am interviewing Dr. Ronald Briggs, who was Prairie View class of 1969. Dr. Briggs, what is your date of birth?

RB: 02 February 1948.



IH: And did you grow up in this area?

RB: I grew up in Houston.

IH: O.K. Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

RB: Yes, I grew up in the hood! I grew up in fifth ward, Texas. Barbara Jordan, Mickey Leland and me. All went to Phyllis Wheatley. They were ahead of me slightly. Barbara was way ahead of me. Mickey was 3 years ahead of me. And probably growing was interesting because I grew up in a single parent family. My mother died when I was very young. Dad raised us primarily, myself and two brothers. And we grew up in a

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neighborhood that was strong in terms of family connections. People knew each other, they looked out for each other. I guess the downside of that is, you know, we had drugs, we had crime, we had gangs. These scars on my face show that every now and then, I had some fights. I was not gang connected but I was gang affiliated. I got beat up once and I knew I needed protection, so another gang decided to help me in terms of protecting me from other gangs. So, I was never formally inducted but they took care of me after I got hit that one time.

I did not know I was poor until I was in the 10th grade because everybody else looked like me. And then, I met a friend of mine who had his own room and his parents had 2 cars. My God, I am poor! But aside from that, I played sports. I played junior varsity (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ doing that, and basketball and football and lettered in swimming. I was all city (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ freestyle and (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ freestyle. I worked after school. I always knew I was going to go to college. When I was young, I saw the Bridge of Toko Ri, fighter pilots, and I wanted to be a fighter pilot. That movie fascinated me. I guess I was 10, 11 when I first saw that. William Holden. I never forgot that. I wanted to be a fighter pilot. So, it turned out I did not become a fighter pilot but I flew helicopters (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and that was close enough. I wanted to go through the military. But I also wanted to be a physician. So, after graduating from high school . . . well, I had some mentors - individuals who were important to me in terms of letting me be exposed to other (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ make sure that I saw Sachmo. He bought me tickets for Sachmo, Lena Horne. She tutored me. She was encouraging. She went to Syracuse, of all places. But she was very supportive in helping me (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ who would not have been exposed to that, get exposed to that

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kind of life and living. And that was useful. I had some professors that would help me with . . . because I liked science. I loved biology. They made sure that I took extra courses. They tutored me in the morning. Half of them just talked to me and it was very useful. But the idea of military was not there except for that one movie, and I knew that I was going to go back in as a draft (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ OTS to become a fighter pilot.

Anyway, I graduated with honors. I got a ROTC scholarship, a Jessie H. Jones scholarship, and decided to come to PV. Originally, I was going to go to Lamar Tech. Lamar Tech was segregated. I did not know that. So, I visited and I saw colored bathroom, white bathroom, and I said, I am not going here. But before I made that decision, Jesse H. Jones (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ get the scholarship. They took forever to give me the (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. I came to PV, enrolled like one day and took the letter to Jessie H. Jones saying that I was going to PV. I will be there one year and then I will transfer. I got here one year and liked it and I am staying. This is great. It was that same hometown feeling when I got here. Professors look after you, had you over the house. They were here. Most professors lived here on the campus. They had campus housing here. And the ones I admired were (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. So, I was a biochemistry major when I was here, was going to go to medical school, and (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ was compulsive. The first two years, it is like being in the Army where you are happy being in the ROTC. I had a scholarship so that was maybe a different feel. That helped me because I think I had a free ride. With both of those scholarships, I think I had a free ride.

IH: It was compulsive for the first two years?

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RB: The first two years. Unless you got a (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ exemption, you had to be in ROTC. So, we had like 400, 500 guys in the Army Corps. I thought it was O.K. I did not like dressing up on Thursday and going to drill but, you know, I got used to it.

My first experience with the real Army was summer camp in my junior year. I lived in fifth ward where there was limited contact with European Americans, so summer camp was my first experience. I was the only black cadet in my platoon. So, one day, I came into a tent . . . we had to house in tents because they could not put us in barracks because there were too many of us. So, I came to the tent and this one cadet from Arkansas State was shining his boots and made the comment . . . he was using his underwear to shine his boots. He said it looked like a nigger with the clap, that he was using black polish on his underwear. I looked at him and I said, well, I best stay cool about it but he knew I did not like the idea. I made some (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ said to him but that was one of the issues. My first time. I had been there a couple of weeks.

Whenever it was time on patrol to be on point . . . do you know what being on point is? They always chose me. I was always on point. I kind of liked it. I thought it was prestigious. I could always spot ambushes. So, it was like they picked Ray because Ray could always spot ambushes, put him on point. Little did I know (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ Vietnam, they put black folk on point so we have a high capture rate because people on point get shot. Anyway, during that summer camp experience, my tack officer, it was at night. It was my patrol and my tack officer said, "Hey Briggs, where are you?" I was right in front of him. "Hey Briggs, where are you?" O.K. He said, "Briggs, I wonder what you would look like in a red mustache." I said, "Smashing (inaudible)

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\_\_\_\_\_." So anyway, I finished first in my company and I was corps commander when I got back (inaudible)\_\_\_\_\_.

IH: How long is the summer camp?

RB: (Inaudible)\_\_\_\_\_. It was in Fort Seal, Oklahoma. You know, and there was some other kind of racial stuff. This other guy in my battalion from Louisiana Tech was throwing rocks at me. He said, "Hey Briggs, do you know something? Because of Civil Rights, we can't say Chigroes," (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ we called them Chigroes. So, again, I had to stay cool. I had to stay cool with that. Anyway, I got through that and then came back, graduated, and got my first choice, medical service group. And at one point, I thought I was going to go to medical school besides my two . . . I am going to serve my time and get out and go to medical school, and use that money to help pay for medical school. O.K. Got in. Second lieutenant, and I was the only officer in the med company, the only officer (inaudible)\_\_\_\_ med company. The only officer. And I remember we worked from 5 o'clock in the morning to 10 o'clock at night every day.

One of my first jobs was (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. Then, I went to flight school. And then, I was commander of the 21st (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ at Fort Hill. And then, from there, I went to Vietnam.

IH: O.K. Let me ask you this. Before you went regular Army, how did Prairie View -- the instructors, the climate -- how did they prepare you to deal with pretty much an all

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white Army. I know we had integration in the military but is there any special advice your mentors gave you or anything like that, how you can handle that?

RB: They never mentioned the white Army. We had a sergeant named Sergeant Green, and this is the kind of guy you want in combat but in (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_, he was hard to deal with. He was the typical officer and a gentleman - kind of first sergeant. What is that guy's name who played on Officer and the Gentleman? The drill sergeant. That is the kind of guy he was. I mean, he was all over you. If you did the wrong thing, he was all over you.



IH: It was Gates, or something like that.

RB: Yes.

IH: (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_.

RB: But that is the kind of sergeant he was. And I realize that in some circumstances, you needed that ultimate control of the people. He would not let you look sideways. He would be all over you. He would tell you about how it is in the real Army but he would tell you in that shouting, drill sergeant kind of way. Now, I realize that his saying that was useful but it was said out of context because I had no idea (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. I thought he was just being a hard ass, you know, because he was saying that. But really, the instructions were to make sure you got yourself together, to make sure your stuff

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was wired tight, don't go in there half (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_, to make sure you were good physically, your shoes shined, (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and if you say something, make sure you know what you are talking about. If you don't know, ask the sergeant, your lieutenant. If you have no respect, no authority, ask your sergeant. But he left out the fact that some sergeants do not care for you and would give information that is damaging or wrong just to laugh at you. And half of them (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. But prepare you for the bigger . . . I never got that this is a white army and you best step correct. There was none of that stuff. "I am preparing you for the Army and chances are, you are going to go to war so make sure you know what is going on."

IH: Looking back, and you kind of maybe covered this already but do you feel that graduating from an HBCU gave you something that a traditionally white ROTC program or OCS would not have given you?

RB: I think if anything, it was the closeness we had and your officer, NCOs would talk to you. I think at some bigger school, you might not have had that face-to-face, hands-on guidance. You might have gotten it in a group but not a one-on-one kind of instruction.

IH: O.K. During the 1960s, of course, even during the middle of the Civil Rights Movement, how did you feel about the Civil Rights Movement?

RB: I was actively involved. Red Lawson got me involved in that. Do you remember Bill Lawson in Houston? Wheeler Baptist Church. (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ Wheeler. And

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his daughter is a commentator on Channel 13. Melanie Lawson. Anyway, he came to our high school and when we were first marching for integration, he came to our high school at 7 o'clock in the morning and asked certain students to come out to talk to him. And I was part of the first march in Houston that involved students for integration and that is when I first got involved. I enjoyed that because he has always been soft spoken, (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ but when he talked, you listened, and I got involved with that, was in a couple of marches, and there were the flags waving on the side (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. We are having fun but this is good stuff. (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ involved in politics. Now, I went to a couple of Panther meetings in Colorado and Augusta, Georgia to see what it was like.

IH: What year was that approximately?

RB: This was 1970 in Colorado Springs. I was in the Army. Some brothers told me . . . we had a meeting. "Yeah, I want to go." Me and my roommate, "Yeah, let's go, George." So, we went. It was interesting because I (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ but it wasn't. We got there and it was (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ but it was that kind of reddecker that I thought was interesting. The revolution, the man taking over, and I am listening to this stuff, but I could tell that that was a type of hypnotic fever in some of the brothers (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and some of the sisters, too. You could see that glaze in their eye. They really believed what they were saying. And there was somebody that questioned, like "Why the hell are you in the Army? Why are you in the white man's Army?" kind of thing. I said, "Hey, the man paid my way, you know." They questioned it but they

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never asked me to leave. But I remember when I was in Augusta, Georgia, one of the brothers asked me about being a post defensive, like I am going to know how they defend their post, like if you were going to rush the post and take the weapons. I said, "I have no idea, O.K.? You have to ask your MP. I don't know." But it was that same kind of . . . it was that talk. And they talked and they talked and they talked. And that was a time when people were trying to out-black each other based on your militancy. If you were asked, O.K., do you believe in Huey or Malcolm X, I would say, "I think everybody from Martin Luther King to Hughey Newton have their place." It was like if you said that you were not part of the Panthers, you know, you did not carry any weight. But the idea is a lot of students who were partly (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and got attacked by dogs and washed down with hoses, everybody did not do that. But everybody wanted to have a vicarious claim to having done that. But everybody did not do that, O.K.? Now, no dog ever bit me but I remember having dogs on the side as I was walking, O.K., but no dogs ever attacked me. I never got washed down by hoses. But in those meetings, you would think that everybody that was talking had gone through that and they had not. They might have seen it somewhere but they had not. If they did, they did not tell me about it.

IH: So, in that context, as a man of color, commissioned officer, did you ever have feelings like, man, I am going to Vietnam, I might possibly die for my country -- my civil and social rights are not quite up to speed yet. What am I doing? Did you ever have that conversation?

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RB: That did not happen until I got in the country. Before that, I wanted to go to Vietnam. I volunteered for Vietnam. I wanted to see what it was like. I volunteered for Vietnam, and I got there, and it was an eye-opening experience. My first assignment was in Ben Wa which is close to Saigon. We were detoxing soldiers who were (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ addicted because what happened is they were coming home high on heroin and they were jones-ing, withdrawing over the Pacific, and they had to land the planes like in Guam somewhere to let them off because they were freaking out on the plane. So, they would come through that detox treatment center. They had a free plane ready for them to go home. And invariably, disproportionately, there were African Americans that were being sent there. It turned out later that sometimes if a commander had a black and a white soldier with the same dirty urine, they were more inclined to send the black soldier there than the white soldier, because anybody who went through there had to be discharged to a treatment facility, either the VA if they were getting our or the military, which means that was on their record. (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ if you were a white soldier and you went through that facility, that was not on your record. So, you were labeled once again.

Anyway, I saw how things were working there and these (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ would come from the U.S. to check on our soldiers. And (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ got together and they crowded on this (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_, "Ungawa, Black Power." And we had to call in PEs to break it up. But they did not do anything to the guy. They were just being intimidated. That was a chant. "Ungawa. Black Power." They were shouting.

IH: What is ungawa? What does that mean?

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RB: That is Swahili. Ungawa. Black power. It rhymed. Ungawa was Swahili. And that was kind of a chant. The big thing was to give people a (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. And everybody got each other (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. In fact, you could tell where you were from based on how you (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. Every (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ was different, like different parts of the country. You could not get no (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. "Hey, bro, you can't get no (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. And they would stop in the middle of the hallway and hold up traffic, you know, going through a 4-5 minute ritual. So, I am looking at this but it was impressive that the brothers would get together and scare the daylights out of this commune. I mean, he was scared. So, I am looking at this and it really impressed me. But to sit and talk with those brothers, I said, O.K., something is wrong. I happened to have a friend from the hood, he got strung out on heroin. This guy was brilliant. Both of us got scholarships. We were from poor families. And after one year, he lost his because of drug use. So, I am saying, based on what I see in Vietnam and my best friend, somebody missed those guys. Somebody had a chance to intervene and they didn't. At that point, I said, I want to become a (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ just from having seen that. So, while I was there, I applied for it and then I was sent to \_\_\_\_\_ in the Delta. Third Mash. Third Mash Hospital is like the mash hospital you see on TV. You have a Hot Lips. That part was educational.

I was on (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ command over there and I was known as number 1 (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ because I treated the Vietnamese with respect and that kind of gets around. Some of these guys, (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ but if they wanted something, they always knew to come to me. I had a Mamasan and I paid her more than all the other

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guys. There was a minimum wage they paid folk. They could not live on that. So, I paid my Mamasan more money and it got around. She was like in her 50s and her 60s but she always would iron my clothes. But the issue is if they needed something, they would come to me. One of my soldiers tried to rape one of the cleaning ladies, so they came to me. They were angry. They came in a bunch. They cornered this guy in the hallway. They were going to kill this guy. These women.

IH: (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_.

RB: (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ preacher. (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. And they caught this guy, they said, "(inaudible) \_\_\_\_ come here." So, they could not speak so one spoke for them. This guy took this girl into his room and tried the number 10. That meant rape, number 10. So, at that point, I said, "Look, brother, (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. I grabbed him by the collar. "You come with me." (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and I was going to take care of him. Slammed the door and started screaming at him (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. I said, "Look, you know something. You are damned lucky (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ court marshaled your butt." Anyway, but also part of that, we had a party, a going away party and we invited a band, that kind of stuff. So, we were having a good time. Everybody was drinking. I got up on the stage and said, "Thank you very much for your tour and for all your hard work," and that kind of stuff, and this guy - I never will forget, he was Italian. He always said, "I am Italian American," typical ... hey! He drank (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. All of a sudden, I got a word that, "Hey, how (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ that nigger?" And within 2 minutes, the whole mood changed. I had to

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call the MPs because people were getting angry because this guy . . . "What do you mean? I respect Captain Briggs. He is a man." Everybody was drunk but that one gesture kind of permeated that whole (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. And then, the next day, my commander called me in asking me what was going on yesterday at the party. I mean, 4 or 5 officers asked me what was going on, what happened. I heard one thing. But again, that was just one of the issues.

The other issue was that somebody sabotaged our armory by bringing in a frag. I said, "Who brought the frag in?" Nobody knew. (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. But interesting.

During combat . . . we were there during the last surge from the north. I mean, the North Vietnamese came in big time. So, they moved all the (inaudible) \_\_\_\_ from the Delta and sent them up north. So, (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ our own compound. So, we had cooks and medics defending the hospital. Cooks do not know how to shoot. Anyway, for 2 days, 3 days, we got incoming in a row. We were told that at 2:45, they had gotten word that they were going to blow up (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. On one side was the U.S. Navy; on the other side was the North Vietnamese. Anyway, the Navy brought all the equipment in from all over. They said at 2:45, they were going to blow up the (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. And, at that point, gunshots, traces everywhere. And I am on the \_\_\_\_\_ looking around. I said, what the hell am I doing here? And then, I go out to check on the men. I go inside the command center and there my commander is under the desk with the radio. "Well, why aren't you out here with me getting shot at?" I mean, this guy is under the desk in a fetal position with the radio. But it was interesting that as long as there is gunfire there, people forget about color. You know \_(inaudible)

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\_\_\_\_\_ kill my butt. So, that is kind of what happened. But then, when the gunshots stopped (inaudible)\_\_\_\_\_. At one point, all the black soldiers wanted to have their own barracks.

IH: Self-segregation.

RB: Yes, separate from the whites. I said, "You know, I would love to do that for you brother, but I cannot do that, O.K., because that (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ why are you doing that?" And every now and again, I would get word (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and some people quit their job because I was commander. I was also ahead of (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ activities on the post.

IH: Why would they quit?

RB: This was a special moonlighting job, like running the projector at movies, passing out equipment - that kind of stuff. They got paid off duty for doing that. When they found out that I was (inaudible)\_\_\_\_\_, 3 or 4 people quit. The swimming pool - all the lifeguards quit, every one of them, because I was over the (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. Every one of them. I had to go out there and sit (inaudible) \_\_\_\_ close the pool because I did not have any lifeguards out there except (inaudible.)

IH: In my research and talking with several people about (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_, like you said, in the (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ where the combat was not happening (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_?

RB: Yes.

IH: That is one of my questions about racial tension (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and you rattled off several of them.

RB: Yes, and like I said, at one point, my commander did not know anybody (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ but other people outside of the compound and there was concern . . . there were rumors there were whites who were KKK, Nazis, at some point, were going to start ambushing black people. And that became an issue. They could not prove it but that was a rumor. People came and asked me about that. I said, "I have heard about it but we cannot act on it. The CID most likely has the authority or the MP." They were investigating. They could not find any evidence of that being true. But it was interesting that you would see some of them get together and [REDACTED] they had their own, they called them rabbits, but blacks called them rabbit. So, (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_, "What is going on, rabbit?" Anyway, but I had my own (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ that nobody knew about because whenever somebody would come in and they were wounded, they (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and these were renegade weapons with no registration, modified weapons. So that means they were unaccountable. So, I could take them. And some of the weapons were souvenir weapons (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ 9 mm Swedish, he kept it, because a guy came in, he died - they knew it was not registered so he kept it. (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ back to the States but I had one you could take back to the States. I mean, I had some (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. I had some of everything. But anyway, I

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said, "If they get frisky, I am ready for them." I had a stockpile of weapons (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_.

IH: So, you are ready to rock! Man, this is good. You are just covering everything. So perfect - I do not have to hardly ask any questions. So obviously, when you did encounter things like racial tension under your command, what was the best way you would diffuse it or handle it?

RB: Well, actually, one of the things I found (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ you kind of isolate the leader. (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ in groups, you want to talk with their leader. And say, now, I would talk with you \_\_\_\_\_ nobody else. And we will talk. I'll say, "Look, here is where I am with this." But if they were white, then that became an issue. One of the first months I was there, I got cornered by a bunch of white dudes because they wanted to go home. They had been in that treatment program I was telling you about and they wanted to go home. They had cornered the commander and, I mean, they were all in his face. This guy was about 4'2" but he had his (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ with him. He was all up in the commander's face, pointing, making him mad. I happened to walk into that. The commander slips out. "Well, talk to Lieutenant Briggs here," and he backs out. So, my attitude is bad anyway. So, he said, "Sir, we command that you get us the hell out of here now." I said, "Yes, I hear what you are saying. What do you want me to do?" He started rattling off. I said, "Yes, I hear you but chances are you won't go until," this, that and the other. At that point, the brothers gathered around and they start looking (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_, "I think we had better back off this." That was when I saw the human entity of being black and being in Vietnam because we go back to our earlier

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story. When I was at Fort Hood, we were having a picnic and when people drink, that stuff kind of comes out. At Fort Hood, there were places MPs would not go at night because blacks ran that place. MPs patrolled in (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. This is some post. We are having a party and one of the black soldiers, our mail clerk, let all these white buddies use his car. And the guy was speeding on post. He kept running a stop sign and it happened to be right by the MP's office. The MPs came to the party and said, "Whose car is this?" They said, "It is Sergeant So and So's car." Without asking any questions, they said, "Come with us." He said, "Why?" "Just come with us." "Why?" "Come with us." And at that point, (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_, they formed a circle around this guy and the MPs were afraid. They called in those (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. And it is amazing, whenever he would move, the crowd would move with him. I mean, it is like they never considered getting shot. We are here, you are not going to shoot us. And the guy who they were protecting was not the bravest guy but he liked the idea that the brothers in the company were protecting him. Afterwards, "what is the problem here?" Well, somebody was driving his car and they ran the stop sign," yada, yada. I said, "Well, look, what you came in here with just caused a whole bunch of problems. Let me suggest that you (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. " "We can't do that, sir." I said, "Well, who is your \_\_\_\_\_, who is your officer? I will call him." So, I called the officer in charge who I think (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ I will bring the guy to his station myself." When I got there and we talked, this black sergeant major came up, a huge guy . . . "Well, this guy was doing this" . . . "Sergeant Major, (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_," and I talked with him. He apologized, that kind of stuff. I said, "Look, here is what happened. I will write an IG complaint about how your men behaved." At that point, he backed off

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and gave the ticket to the appropriate guy and the major apologized for the way \_\_\_\_\_ . That was cool. At that point, the party was over. But that mentality was constant, O.K.? A lot of brothers who went to Vietnam, went to get (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ never got a formal training in a containment peaceful area. The hood, basic training, Vietnam. No structure. Getting shot at. Doing what they were going to do. They would not even salute. They would give a Black Power sign instead of saluting the officers. And nothing would happen to them.

IH: How did you handle that?

RB: They always saluted me. It is like; you are an officer, (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. No problem. If you were a white officer, they would give you the Black Power sign.

IH: Oh, that is when they would do it many times?

RB: Yes. They would give the Black Power sign. But for me, nobody ever gave me the Black Power sign. It was always a salute. I might do this, "Hey, what's going on, bro?" I gave them a salute and that kind of stuff but it was white officers.

IH: During your free time, did you socialize more with whites or blacks?

RB: Black folk. It is interesting - we always had a network. Somebody would call somebody and when you got to the party, there were a thousand of us [exaggeration]. A

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whole bunch of folks there. Whatever post you went to, we had our network. And at one place, we started a black officer mentorship group to mentor young officers as they came on (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. But whatever post I went to, we always had (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ with the black officers. What was interesting was HBU black officers had a kinship but those blacks from like UCLA or Ohio State could not relate to us.

IH: How come?

RB: We would get together and talk about the football games, half time. At Ohio State, they do not have those half times. At Ohio State, you go for a hotdog at half time. You go to HBCU half time, you were there watching the competition.

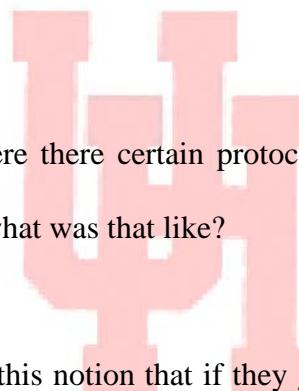
IH: O.K., there we go. So, HBCU grads versus traditional ROTC, even if they were black, their experience was "Anglo-ized," "Caucasian-ized," whatever you want to say, to the point that they did not have the same experience?

RB: No, but you could recognize those because at some places, those that went to the other HBCUs would hang together. But then, there were some brothers who went to the white school and still were able to relate because on those campuses, they were active in black groups, but what was interesting was on those white campuses, Roxy cadets got ostracized; at HBCU, we were idolized. At HBCU, we (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. We had the biggest money (inaudible) \_\_\_\_, we had the biggest bowls, and we marched around the town. People would line the streets to look at us march. Not at UCLA. They would throw apples, oranges and eggs.

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IH: From your recollection, did PV ever experience any type of . . . again, tieing this in to the ROTC was very popular . . . any type of student protest against the ROTC program?

RB: No. I have never heard that. (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ the height of Vietnam, no protests. No marching up and down, stop the war. In fact, they came on campus during Armed Forces day and students came to see all the weaponry (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ you were supported.



IH: As far as socializing, were there certain protocols that you needed to attend to network, to make sure you . . . what was that like?

RB: Oh, yes. The Army has this notion that if they give a function, you are going to be there and your wife is in the Army, too. You had the Wives Club. If anything went down, your wife should be there. So, if there was a social function, you had to be there, whether it was dining out, dining in, company party, buying savings bonds. If you did not do that stuff, that appeared on your OER.

IH: Really?

RB: Yes. If you missed functions, that appeared on your OER.

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IH: And that leads to my next question. Was the promotion system fair, in your opinion, as far as OERs?

RB: As I look back on that, I can say that except for maybe 1 or 2, I thought that my rating was consistent with my behavior. Now, that was a time when certain (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ would go for review. When I applied for (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ school, one of my officers told me, "Ron, you will never get it." I said, "Really? Why?" "Because they stopped doing that." And what he said was the truth. I said, "Send it anyway."

IH: So, you basically just came to school and then they just paid . . .

RB: That was my job - going to school.

IH: And then, when you finished your doctorate, you had to give them 4 years?

RB: Yes, it was a payback. I mean, there was no biggie there. It was payback. But the fact is I got several thousands of dollars and I do not have a student loan that I have to pay back. I was the only one in my class who was not working and going to school. The only one. So, I did everything I could (inaudible)\_\_\_\_\_.

IH: Back to the OERs, what were the biggest problems, again, for blacks concerning the OERs and promotion?

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RB: Well, first of all, I think probably there is a perception that officers \_\_\_\_\_ about black folk. They can't write, they speak funny, and they did not have the quality of socialization, and it would come out in conversations (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ you overhear it.

IH: I am just paraphrasing. So, they never thought blacks quite measured up just because they had color to their skin?

RB: Right. When I applied to flight school, one of my fellow officers who had been applying, too, said, "Ron, you are going to hear that black folk cannot fly." I said, "Well, why do you say that?" "Well, you are just going to hear that." O.K. I heard it. So, you would hear that thing every now and then and in flight school, again, I was the only black officer in the company.

IH: Concerning the OERs, Dr. Butler (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ said when he was in the Pentagon, he wrote a report called The Butler Report, why black officers were not getting promoted in proportion to their numbers above the rank of major, and his research showed that, again, a lot of black officers, they did not think you were good enough, they had something in your OER that said, so and so is my best black officer. And also, when they were talking, it was like you said, (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_, Alcorn State, Morgan State, I do not know. Do you think that had something to do with it?

RB: I do not think it was so much the schools. I think that just because you put a uniform on, if you were prejudice, the prejudices do not change. And the same thing was

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true for (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. There are certain places that a black could go. You could (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ but you could not be a CEO, you could not be a regional manager. (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ but nobody is going to listen to you or you do not come equipped to handle executive functions. You know, but the same old redderick. Dynamically, it is the same, that there is some conversation that is (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ except those brothers who could pass for white who would hear that stuff and then tell us about it. Then, they hear that talk about this N this and this N that and they really cannot do this.

IH: As a leader, what strategies did you develop to become more effective and did you have a mentor to help nurse you through this stage from your early up to the (inaudible) \_\_\_\_ years?

RB: Actually, I did not have any direct mentor but Becton from the hood did have a group of officers (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and he asked us to go over his house two times to tell us what to do (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and he gave me some advice. Becton is a hard-nosed guy. But prior to that, we grew up saying that (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ better than whites.

IH: Twice as better.

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RB: Twice as good but (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. And I kind of believed that. So, I think that was held with (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. I always had my boots shined, I got to work early, stayed late, did not take any crap from folks . . . [end of side 1]

At the same time, I would have black soldiers coming in expecting I would give them a break. I might give them a break. I want to know directly (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. This is what you did. "What do you think would be the useful thing to do?" "Well, you know (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. " "Hey, you did it, right?" So, at this point, (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ there it is. "Man, why do you do that to me?" "Because, hey, what do you think? What I do to you is going to be posted on the bulletin board. (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. " Any punishment, company punishment is always posted on the bulletin board. So then, you look at what is happening and what is interesting is for a while, when blacks were treated a certain way, the (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ would look at the (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and see if it was commensurate with the deed because blacks were getting severe punishment for doing the same offense. So, for a while, you started to look at all these punishments (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ the black folk. Like, a black that would go AWOL for 1 week, would come back and get court marshaled. If a white dude went AWOL for 1 week, he would get off with (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. And they were seeing a trend in that. You know, a court marshal is a felony in civilian life. (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ is a misdemeanor. So, if you would go AWOL for 1 week, you would be court marshaled. That is a felony. And you cannot say (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ when it is time for a job, that comes up. So anyway, I explained that to them and some of them did not like it. "That is the way it is."

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IH: I want to talk about masculinity for a moment and as for blacks, males particularly, that seemed to be something that we have always had to prove to ourselves and to the (inaudible)\_\_\_\_\_ as well. I want to give you a couple of names here and I want you to tell me which one of these to you represents a figure of masculinity. (Inaudible)\_\_\_\_\_ and maybe you have another one - sports figures, such as Muhammad Ali, Jim Brown, Fred Williamson who played for Kansas City, Tommy Smith - which one of those, if any, to you in the mid to late 1960s as a young black man represented masculinity to you and if none of those do, who did?

RB: That is interesting. I looked at those folk. I remember Ali came here to speak to our group (inaudible)\_\_\_\_\_ when he got stripped of his title and I said, yes, he is O.K., he is charismatic but . . . there was a but part. He would say some stuff. He did not stir me. The fact that he was a champion stirred me. His stand on the war impressed me. Jim Brown. I liked Jim Brown but I heard he beat up women. I did not like that. Williamson - I never liked the guy. I thought he was arrogant. So, if I thought about that, I was probably more impressed with like Sydney Poitier. It was only later that I found out something (inaudible)\_\_\_\_\_ but at the time, that impressed me, those movies that he made, that (inaudible)\_\_\_\_\_ that he stood out and he gave a different image of black folk. He had the talent and that part was impressive. But in terms of masculinity . . .

IH: What about (inaudible)\_\_\_\_\_?

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RB: No. Interesting. The people I considered masculine were the people in uniform. They were people in uniform. Even the actors that I saw on the screen . . . this is a biggie, and it is Freudian, too . . . seeing black men fight, and I did my masters on that . . . and if you look at a movie like Green Beret that was done by John Wayne, blacks never fired a shot in that movie. That was emasculating (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ because the gun is a phallic symbol and intentionally, he showed blacks in a subservient role. So, when I saw this movie Mandingo - do you remember that? But the idea is I saw a couple of movies where . . . and Sidney Poitier did some movies like that, too, but that kind of black, you know, fighting, that was the part that was impressive to me. They were authority figures but the authority was executed in a global kind of way, not in a short way. Like, a football field is confined. A boxing ring is confined. But if they were a judge, if they were an officer, like Chappy, Chappy James, to have a global kind of influence on people. And that was probably more impressive to me than athletes. See, the whole (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ of athletics to me was stereotypical, that there was a need to associate black with physical prowess as opposed to intellectual. So, I was more impressed with a physician who was black and we had a few of them. Most of them only had a few black physicians but those physicians were impressive to me. So, it was not that masculinity has to do with power beyond how strong you are because (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ that Mandingo syndrome that is stereotypical. I never thought about that until you asked. It just kind of evolved as you said. That is kind of a (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ question. I mean, I liked the athletes but it was too negative because the authority was limited to that one kind of confined context.

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IH: Do you think that the way society is, that the media, ESPN, that we see all these black athletes and they are good, they are fantastic, that maybe for this generation here, this is all they see. They don't see beyond that? Do you think that is a problem today?

RB: Yes, well, see, I think it is because they see blacks as one dimension. During the 1960s, there were always blacks to be laughed at but never any other role. When they had things like *Tenafly*, he was a black detective. They laughed at him. James Earl Jones, it was not a comedy so those TV programs did not make it but all the black comedies made it because it was O.K. to laugh at black people. Even when they had *Amos and Andy* and *Beula*, they were still laughing at black stories. So, the idea that athletes can be athletes but that is it, they cannot be anything else - physicians, politicians - and we still see that about what this guy said about Obama. My God, it is like, are you forgetting who ran for president when (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ about Obama? So, right now, hip-hop artists have replaced black athletes in terms of younger generation's idol images. In our times when I was there, it was athletes. I was proud of the black athlete but the fact is now they have been replaced by hip-hop artists in terms of who the younger folk admire. The dress is more hip-hop than it is athletic in terms of energies. But then, (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_, that one-dimensional thinking.

IH: Going back to the idea of more globalization (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_, if you look at athletics back in the 1960s, Tommy Smith and Jean Carlos when you saw that, what was your immediate impression?

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RB: I stood up and saluted with him when I saw that on TV, the first time I saw it. Now, he suffered because of that. But what he did, I thought was because his doing that showed more masculinity than what he did on the track. Blacks had been running fast all their life and when I was coming up, they said blacks could not run distance. They were quick, they could not run distance, and Aquino came from Kenya and wiped out everybody. Now, who wins all the marathons? Some black man from Kenya. But the idea is that was, again, one-dimensional thinking of America about what blacks could do. Jesse Owens had to run against horses because nobody would give him an endorsement like other athletes were getting. I mean, you see that kind of (inaudible) atmosphere. He won all these medals against Nazi Germany to show that, you know, you cannot . . . he got little respect. It lasted that long, one minute, in terms of America liking him. Joe Lewis and Max, one minute. He is a boxer but that is it. Do you remember . . . you are probably too young . . . but when Nat King Cole, they gave him a show and people would not sponsor him because he was black. They said they could not find sponsors. They couldn't not find sponsors? They've got Wrigley's Gum. I am naming all these sponsors - but that is why. (Inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ people saying "You are sponsoring a black person on TV?" because people would laugh at him. Amos and Andy got plenty of sponsors. Beula got . . . you are too young for that.

IH: I heard the name.

RB: Beula was a maid. First, she got an Oscar for supporting role in Gone with the Wind. Do you know that person?

IH: Oh, yes. Of course.

RB: She played Beula on TV. But she still had that rag around her head like Aunt Jamaima used to have and now she has more of a bandana. That shows that global, one-dimensional thinking about black folk.

IH: O.K. During the 1960s, once again, do you think, looking back . . . who do you think blacks identified with most, more Martin Luther King, Malcolm X or somebody else during that time?

RB: There is that question (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and my answer to that is blacks (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. They, by and large, do not decide that this person is going to speak for me. However, the (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ Society often assigns speakers for black folk. Black folk never get speakers assigned for them. They ask one person for his/her opinion. Anything that represents the anonymity of thinking for black folk, wait a minute, all of us have minds like anybody else so don't categorize me, put in a box and expect that somebody can speak for me just because they are black? I do not think so. So, if you ask different people who were black during the 1960s, you will get each one of those supposed leaders of black folk that went from the extreme of Huey and Bobby to Marcus Darby to Martin Luther King, because there were some people who would say King was being too timid. There were those who said that Bobby and Huey were too militant. Blacks said, "Bobby, why don't you go down to Mississippi and confront some

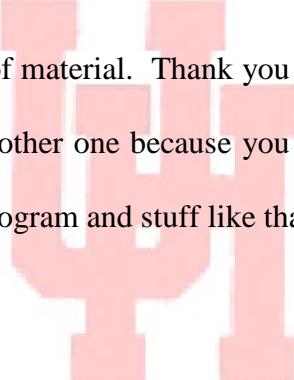
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of those Klan people with those shotguns you have got?" That was (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ but you do not do that. I am not saying what you did was to be discounted but you (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ if a cop went after you on account of this stuff and tried to kill you and so did Hoover, I am not saying, you know (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ but the issue is I do not think we should try and put (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_.

IH: I guess, wrapping up, I do not know what kind of answer this will be but what do you feel people need to know about African Americans' military service during the Vietnam era that has not been told or has not been written or has not been emphasized about?

RB: I do not think we have ever appreciated the percentages of people who were African Americans who were killed and wounded either physically or emotionally or spiritually, and the cost they had to pay even now for having done that. In one (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_, the casualty rate for black Americans was 22%, twice (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. And we have seen some of the family, some of the offspring of those Vietnam vets and they will tell you, "My dad was in Vietnam. He used drugs. He drank. And he has these flashbacks that terrify him and he will not do anything." Or, he will go to the VA and (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. I think there is a secondary effect for the guys who make it. You know, so I am lucky - I cannot say that I had any flashback but I know some friends of mine who do. They still go to the (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ hospitals to get medication for (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ and they still have (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ the pain medication. And it has destroyed or severely (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_ their marriage,

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children/father relationship. They suffer in silence. We might see the highest rate of heroin abuse was among Vietnam vets. That is gradually changing. When you see somebody who is on smack, they would say, "Well, it is a Vietnam vet "but, you know, you are a junkie, you are a bum. So, that is the second (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_. I do not think anybody has ever studied that. We saw Tom Cruise in Born on the Fourth of July. The closest thing they ever got to it was Dead Presidents, that might suggest, but it does not go into depth like Tom Cruise's movie does. So, like other kinds of contributions (inaudible) \_\_\_\_ and superficial (inaudible) \_\_\_\_\_.  


IH: O.K. You gave me a lot of material. Thank you so much for the interview. I am pretty sure we will have to do another one because you have so many areas particularly about the black officers mentor program and stuff like that.