UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Interview with: Major General Robert Gaskill
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IH: Today's date is 06 September 2007. This is part 2 of interview with Major General Robert Gaskill. O.K., so General, could you talk a little bit about your ROTC experience at Howard University?

RG: Yes, I was at Howard from 1948 to 1952. I graduated in 1952 as a distinguished military graduate from the Army program. We actually had both Army and Air Force ROTC units there and Howard continues to have both Army and Air Force units. When I graduated in 1952, I was the Army cadet battalion commander. The program there was staffed with outstanding NCOs and cadre. The two officer cadres that I was closest to were Major Elliott Johnson and Merle Smith. They both achieved the rank of colonel before they retired. Colonel Elliott Johnson is still around. Merle Smith is deceased but Elliott Johnson, as I speak, is 90 years old. He is looking forward to his 91st birthday. He also taught at Prairie View after he left Howard, but both of them as well as the NCOs provided outstanding professional instruction as well as mentorship for the cadet program there. Lieutenant General Andrew Chambers was at Howard at the same time I was. He graduated in either 1953 or 1954. General Chambers is, in fact, the senior Army ROTC alumnus from Howard University.

IH: Senior alumnus. O.K.

RG: The program did what it was intended to do. It prepared us for officership on active duty, and many of us went on active duty. Most of us did, as a matter of fact, most of us who graduated went on active duty because in the mid 1950s or early 1950s, the Korean War was ongoing. We have several distinguished alumni from that program, one of whom is now deceased - Colonel Robert Burke, Bobby Burke, who served in significant commanding staff assignments throughout the country to include the Pentagon and was also one of the founders of The Rocks, Incorporated, the organization to which many black officers are members.

IH: O.K. Did the instructors in the ROTC program . . . again, this is in the 1950s, late 1940s - did they give you any type of special mentoring as far as serving in a predominantly white military that still had segregationist tendencies?

RG: I would say that the most useful thing that they did for us in that regard was to provide us with the basic officership training that all ROTC cadets get. We knew that we were not getting the same scope of training that the cadets at West Point got but neither were any of the ROTC units across the country. I would say that the main emphasis of our cadre was to make us competitive, make us qualified and competitive to do the jobs that we would be expected to do when we came on active duty. The mentoring, the personal mentoring took the form of the mentors reminding us that the Army was a very

competitive institution, it was a very demanding professional institution; in many ways, it was an unforgiving institution, but on the other hand, it offered opportunities for leadership at a young level that far surpassed what we would like to be offered in the civilian world. We would be in charge of young soldiers and NCOs - and I say young advisedly because many of the noncommissioned officers, of course, would be older than we were, which would provide a very real personal challenge in terms of leadership. They echoed really what our mentors in other departments of the university urged us to consider; that perhaps on an individual level, if we were not involved in specific litigation regarding racial issues, that the most important individual personal thing that we could do was to be qualified, well qualified, to perform whatever tasks we were given or had the opportunity to have, and to simply overwhelm the critics and detractors with a high level of our competence to do the job that we were expected to do. And that advice proved to be very valuable over the years beginning with when we first entered active duty.

IH: O.K. I am going to go to the summer camp. Can you talk about your experience in the summer camp once you reached the advanced course?

RG: Yes. The summer camp was conducted in the summer preceding our senior year. For us at Howard at that time, it was at Fort Meade, Maryland. Of course, most of the cadets in the camp were white. However, the camp cadre was integrated. It consisted of cadres from the various universities that had ROTC units. We really did not know at the time exactly how students were selected for various cadet leadership responsibilities but we were very much aware that we were being evaluated on the basis of our performance

in whatever assignments that we had. I personally felt well qualified to do what I was tasked to do during that summer encampment. I mentioned that the camp cadre was integrated. The organization of the cadet training was also integrated, and so I am talking about 1951. Of course, that was after Truman had signed the Military Integration Order, but in 1951, there were still vestiges of segregation within the active Army.

IH: Were the Howard cadets housed in the . . . did you sleep in the same barracks as white cadets?

RG: Yes. The housing was integrated. The training activities were integrated. I suspect it is fair to say that the off duty socializing that occurred was somewhat integrated but at that time, folks who knew one another tended to gravitate towards one another. But I recall no racial incidents that occurred during the summer camp, nor at the basic officers training at Fort Bening, Georgia which is where I went as my first military assignment after I was commissioned.

IH: O.K. As far as the . . . I know you mentioned that it seemed like the whole faculty at Howard was obviously real supportive. Can you talk about the culture of Howard during that time revolving around attending that university? Was the black community really involved with the university or was Howard just kind of an institution unto its self? I mean, was there a lot of community involvement?

RG: Well, my sensing is that Howard certainly had a culture of its own and I do not know how best to describe that culture other than that it was an academic culture. It was also a very socially oriented culture. I used to attend chapel services there frequently. Even though I was not really on campus, I was communting from Arlington, Virginia, and I was struck by the fact that there were some regular folks who were not part of the campus commuity per se, who attended chapel services. And, of course, one of the reasons was that the dean of the chapel organized really outstanding guest speaker programs or schedules. And so, that was a draw.

In terms of the outside influence of the campus, they distinguished faculty was well respected by other academic institutions both HBCUs, and selected other institutions as well. One of the reasons was that we had faculty members who were graduates of Harvard and other distinguished universities across the country. John Hope Franklin.

IH: He was one of your instructors?

RG: He was a member of the history department. I did not take a history class from him but he and some of the other distinguished members of the faculty gave lectures that were open to all the students and, in fact, required by freshmen. There was a social science survey set of courses and a humanities survey set of courses that folks like Dr. Snowden, Frank Snowden who was chairman of the humanities department; I think he was a Harvard graduate as well - John Hope Franklin was. Of course, Mordecai Johnson spoke at chapel regularly. Dr. Nabrit, who was a law professor and secretary of the university, worked with Thurgood Marshall in that team that worked on the school

desegregation cases. In each of the departments, there were very distinguished faculty who, during the summer and sometimes through the regular 9 month academic year, also lectured at other universities including universities abroad as well as Harvard and other universities that were in the States. Dr. (inaudible) _____, the philosophy professor, shared his insights with us in those humanity survey lectures. And the way those survey courses were done is that the very distinguished members of the faculty would present lectures and then in smaller groups, we would discuss both the personalities and the content of those lecturers. It was a really stimulating time. And then, of course, there were selected adjunct faculty members who were practicing their craft in the business world or in the courts. For example, I had a very distinguished business law professor, Dr. Rafael Ursiola, who was very active in real estate and law in D.C. You probably can tell by the name, he was not an African American but he was a very distinguished instructor. I had a very high regard for him. I learned a lot from him. He was very dedicated to the students. He required a lot of us, he expected a lot of us, but he gave a lot of himself also and he went out of the way to recognize student talent. I can remember that we had two students from African countries and I do not remember which countries they were now in our business law class and he challenged them, in fact, required them to give special presentations on their country, on their culture and what it was like to live in their country. He was very demanding of them in terms of the quality of their presentation.

I remember the first one that gave his presentation, Dr. Ursiola told him that he had just earned an F for his presentation and that he had done his fellow students a great disservice, that he had just scratched the surface of what he was sure he was capable to

see, that he, Dr. Ursiola, was sure that the student was capable of doing. And he said . . . but he would give them another chance and when that student came back with his second presentation, it was a very different presentation.

IH: Oh, I am sure.

RG: And Dr. Ursiola complemented him and that set the tone for the others. That was very special.

IH: Did they bring in any military figures, maybe Benjamin O'Davis, Sr. or anything like that?

RG: No, as a matter of fact, they did not. And I would say that is a change in terms of the current program because the current cadre does do that and, of course, there is a larger pool of folks from whom to draw now than there was in the 1950s. At that time that I graduated, I am trying to remember whether or not Theo Davis, Jr. had gotten his first star. I do not think he had.

IH: No, I am sure junior had not.

RG: He had not received his first star. And the next general officer after Theo Davis, Sr. in the Army was General Davidson. There was a long period of time in which there were no black general officers until Davidson got his star and then it was in the early 1970s before we start getting general officers promoted. I do not think there were any in

the 1960s. I think General Becton was among the first group in the early 1970s. But I am stretching my memory here and you have got documentation that gives you the facts in that regard.

IH: Right, yes, we can pull that. Now, looking back, I guess from this point, back to your HBCU years when you were going through school, do you feel that since you graduated from an HBCU instead of a traditional white university or OCS, that attending Howard gave you something special that would not have been attained at one of the other officer commissioning institutions? That being a traditional ROTC program like Ohio State . . .

RG: Well, to be honest, Isaac, I have thought about that but I am not sure that I have any really good basis of comparison because I only went to Howard. The only basis for comparison that I have is the experience that I had during cadet summer camp and when I came on active duty. And, as I explained to you earlier, I never felt that my Howard experience was a handicap. I did not feel that my Howard experience was deficient in any way and there were several instances that I had the very clear distinction or feeling that white superiors knew of Howard University and respected the fact that I was a graduate of Howard. But I guess the best way to sum it up is that I never felt that my experience at Howard was deficient in any way, and I have always been very proud of the opportunity that I had to be a Howard student and a Howard graduate.

IH: O.K. Fantastic. Now, we can fast forward up to, I guess, the Vietnam era and . . . I am trying to think of exactly where to start. I have my questions laid out so that we can segway comfortably into it. I guess we can start by what year did you go to Vietnam?

RG: 1969. So, I was in Vietnam 1969 to 1970.

IH: O.K., and this was still a pretty turbulent time in America. Can you talk about what your perception was specifically in the 1960s when the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement was going on, and your perception of our involvement in Vietnam?

RG: Well, the beginning of that decade, I was finishing up my graduate work at George Washington University. I felt privileged to have been selected by the quartermaster general for graduate schooling under the auspices of the Army. So, one of the great advantages, career advantages that I had and that many of us who made the Army our career was that we had this outstanding educational opportunity. I certainly did not know of the detailed internal workings of the system that resulted in my selection for a year of graduate study at George Washington but I was certainly grateful for it. I requested it and I got it and when I graduated from George Washington in 1960, I got what the Army called a utilization of tour. It was assigned to the quarter master school at Fort Lee where I taught for 3 years. That was a very satisfying 2 years professionally. I had the pleasure of working with very competent folks. Yes, I was somewhat surprised to find that my immediate boss was a black Army major and the two of us worked well together, and I think he was well respected, as I was. Then, when I left there in 1963, I went to the Commander General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. When I finished

Leavenworth, I went to Korea as executive officer for a battalion there in Pousson, Korea.

IH: Do you remember how many blacks were in your Command General Staff College class? I do not mean exactly.

RG: I do not remember exactly. I do not know that number. But if you determine that that number might be particularly relevant, that is a fact that is ascertainable. But I do remember that General Gregg was in that class. We were in that class together. I also remember that General Roscoe Cartwright was the comptroller for the post and I think he was certainly the first black officer to have that position at Leavenworth, and probably the first black to be on the general staff of Fort Leavenworth. I suspect it is fair to say he mentored every black officer who came through Leavenworth while he was there unless the individual officer resisted being mentored, and that explains why our professional organization is named in his honor, the Rock, because that was his nickname - Rock Cartwright. And he continued that mentoring when he went to Washington and served in the Pentagon, and when he served in Vietnam as well.

So, as far as the decade of the 1960s is concerned, when I left Korea in 1964, I found that I had been selected to go to the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk, and that was really a bonus because at that time, it was not routine for officers to go to both Leavenworth Commander General Staff College and the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk. I do not know how I came to be selected to go there other than the quality of my efficiency report but anyway, I was fortunate to be selected to go there. That was very encouraging to me because I came to understand that folks who were selected to go

to the Armed Forces Staff College after having completed Commander General Staff College were somehow being looked upon favorably in the personnel business, if that makes any sense to you. That was a 6-month course. Then, after that course, I went to the Pentagon for 2-1/2 years. Following that, in 1968, I was assigned as a battalion commander at Fort Carson, Colorado, and when I finished that command assignment, I went to Vietnam in 1969 and came back in 1970.

Now, in terms of race relations during that period, you will notice in the book that my wife sent you that she and Mrs. Gregg wrote, I provided them with an anecdotal piece regarding my involvement in trying to get the commanding general at Fort Lee to use his moral influence to encourage local public school officials in Petersburg and Prince Georges County to integrate the schools. This was in 1962. And frankly, my keen personal interest in that at that time was because my son was about to enter the public schools for the first time. He had been integrated on post schools at Fort Leavenworth and at Fort Lee. I guess he was in preschool at Leavenworth and kindergarten at Fort Lee and by that time, 1962, I suspect most, if not all, of on post dependent schooling had been integrated but at Fort Lee, the on post schooling was only at the kindergarten level. If you ever were to try to recount that experience, I would refer you to my anecdotal information and in my wife's and Mrs. Gregg's book. I will just say that a small group of us did have an office call with the commanding general and presented our complaint regarding the fact that our children were being subjected to segregated schools in countervention of the Supreme Court ruling and that we thought it was worthy of the commanding general's attention that a significant portion of his command were being so discriminated against, notwithstanding the fact that we had all taken an oath to defend the

country with our family as well as we personally were being discriminated in that way. The commanding general did not do anything about it. He listened. And I will let the piece in the book stand for itself but it was significant that nothing was done in 1962 about integrating the schools in that area. But Secretary of Defense, McNamara, during the course of that school year, directed all installation commanders to do exactly what we had asked the commanding general at Fort Lee to do in that office call and that was to use their moral powers of persuasion as well as the economic influence to get the local jurisdictions to comply with the law of the land. And, of course, McNamara went a little further. He was not requesting that these commanders do that, he was directing that they do that and further, with respect to recreational activities and housing, off base housing facilities, he directed them to place such facilities and institutions that did not comply with the law of the land off limits, so that that got into the pocketbooks of business leaders in the local communities. The actions taken by the Army as an institution, say, the Department of Defense, I think enabled the military to really become trailblazers in terms of promoting integration of the larger society.

IH: O.K. That is excellent. So, I guess McNamara is obviously real popular with African Americans at that time. I am sure that made McNamara and, of course, the whole Kennedy administration, real popular with African Americans at that time, for sure.

RG: Yes, it certainly did.

IH: So, when the United States began the hot war in Vietnam, what was your perspective on what was happening in Southeast Asia?

RG: Well, the United States was involved in Vietnam during the time that I was in Korea. And that is the timeframe of 1964 to 1965. In fact, I had been alerted to go to Vietnam directly from Korea rather than complete what would have been a normal 12 to 13 month tour in Korea but I did not go to Vietnam at that time. And frankly, during the time that I was in Korea, I was really not overly knowledgeable about the international intrigue that resulted in the escalation of US assistance to South Vietnam and resistance to the North Vietnamese activities there. I got very involved, of course. I became very knowledgeable during my time as a student at the Armed Forces Staff College and I really knew something about Vietnam when I was at Leavenworth because we were studying counter insurgency there at the time. We were studying Ho Chi Minh. So, I guess I did really know a little bit more than I alluded to earlier. During the time that I was in the Pentagon, my primary duties involved developing and reviewing the requirements for logistical support of the Vietnam War and providing data for the Pentagon through Defense . . . [end of side 1]

RG: . . . and most part, I personally and many of us working on the logistics side of the Army were so consumed on a day-to-day basis in doing the nuts and bolts work in support of the war that the larger issues of the conduct of the war and the international implications of the war were issues above our pay grade, as we say. We were in the trenches, so to speak, in doing what needed to be done in support of national policy that

was being decided by folks at a higher eschelon, responsibility and authority than we were. Many of us had the opportunity to review after the fact how we got into that war, and the conduct of it, and the ebb and flow of it, and to identify lessons learned and that kind of thing, but for me personally, it was a matter, and I was in the logistics business, it was a matter of how best to support the combatant troops that were committed to fighting that war and to achieve the national objectives in that regard. I know there are many folks who do not like to make the comparison of Vietnam to what is going on in Iraq and Afghanistan now but for many of us, there are some lessons that we learned in Vietnam that many people have seemed to have forgotten or never really knew in terms of what we find ourselves enmeshed in in Iraq today.

IH: So, you would say you see some striking similarities between the Vietnam War and the Iraq War?

RG: There are certainly similarities in terms of the cultural divide, and the cultural divide is a very big part of our problem in Iraq, and the culture divide itself, in part at least, reflects the limited knowledge that many policy makers have regarding really what is at stake there and what is motivating the folks over there. One of the issues that has been widely debated since 911 is why do they hate us so? And the answer to that question is a very complicated answer. We do not have enough people that are really knowledgeable enough in the power councils to address that and so that is making it very difficult for us to come up with a satisfying, satisfactory and honorable solution.

IH: What part of Vietnam were you in?

RG: My office was on the outskirts of the capital,

Saigon, because I was the deputy senior advisor to the chief quartermaster for the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces. So, the short answer to your question is that is where I was located, that is where my office was.

IH: When you were leaving Vietnam towards the end of your tour, did you witness . . . I think I was talking with General Parker as I remember . . . I think on one of the interviews - I have had so many - but he had mentioned that going into 1970, you could see almost the disintegration of the Army because of discipline, drug use, racial tension. Did you see anything like that happening around you?

RG: Not in my immediate organization or element. My troop contingent, my enlisted contingent and my officer contingent also was such that we did not have elements of my organization in daily pursuit of the enemy and we did not have the kinds of social problems that occurred in troop units. The advisory team that I was the deputy director of was really part of the headquarters at the J4, which was the director for logistics. So, we were not part of a division or a brigade, a combatant division or brigade. We were in a supporting role and supporting primarily the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces rather than the U.S. fighting forces.

IH: Now, you were a lieutenant colonel or colonel?

RG: I was a lieutenant colonel during that timeframe, yes.

IH: O.K., now if we can change gears to one of my favorite topics, on the officer promotion system. Can you talk a little bit about the promotion system and if you believe it was fair or not? This is referring to the OERs.

RG: I guess I got my best education with respect to the officer efficiency system during my tenure at the Army War College, so we are talking my student days there in 1971 to 1972 and the 2 years following that, 1972 to 1974, when I taught at the college, and one of the subjects that I taught was the Army Officer personnel system to include the workings of the officer efficiency system. As a member of the faculty, I had access to a large number of officer efficiency files that had been sanitized so that the names and social security numbers were not available to me. They had been blacked out.

The system is a very well-organized system. My personal impression is that as bureaucracies go, the system is about as good as it can be except that it is almost impossible to control personal bias and there are certain systemic rules and procedures that are in place to try to make the system work as fair as possible. The purpose of the officer efficiency report system is to provide a procedure for evaluating officers and to provide a basis for selection of officers for promotion to retain the best officers possible, to attract well-qualified officers, and to provide the future leadership of the Army with the best possible leadership. I think the Army does a reasonably good job of doing that. It is doing a much better job now than it did in the past with respect to fairness based

largely upon strong leadership at the top on the part of certain individuals. And so, in assessing the system, I find that it is almost impossible to make such an assessment without comparing what we have now to what we had earlier. Now, I do not know how familiar you are with the system and there are others who can address the quality of the system, at least as well as I can because the system, in many respects and in many details, has changed over time.

One of the problems in the past, and I am sure others whom you have interviewed and will interview have addressed this or will address this, is that the career of Army officers is affected from an officer's early beginnings in the Army by the kind of assignments he or she has. There are certain assignments that, by their challenging nature and their influence, and by the kinds of persons that the individual is permitted to interface with, provide special opportunities for recognition, but in the earlier years of the Army's history, many of the types of assignments that were Korea enhancing assignments just did not go to minority officers. And so, that made it very difficult for those minority officers that had not had those kinds of assignments to compete with those who did have those kinds of assignments. And one of the systemic changes that had to occur and did occur were some far ranging policy changes with respect to the types of assignments that minority officers would get and, of course, some minority officers were exceptions. They, for a variety of reasons, came into contact with senior officers who recognized their talent and their value to the Army, and mentored them and watched their careers and influenced their assignments. I must say that I had some of that good fortunate myself. I probably did not recognize the importance of it early on but certainly, the longer I stayed in the Army, the more I could feel the impact of that kind of assistance on my behalf and

sometimes I really did not know how the good fortune came about. Even now, I can speculate about some of it. Some of it I know for sure but some of it, I may never know. So, the good advice that we got at Howard University about thinking in terms of doing the best possible job that you could regardless of whatever assignment you got and overwhelming the critics and the distractors with your professional competence just turned out to be very, very good advice.

Now, there are folks who worked in the personnel business like General Henry Doctor, General Chuck Busley who is now deceased, but there are others who worked in the officer personnel operations and at the Department of the Army level in the director of personnel who could address this matter in a lot more detail. General Chambers is another one who worked in personnel. They can tell you more about the nitty gritty of how promotion boards were constituted and how they worked. I have some knowledge of that, having sat on some selection boards both for advanced schooling and for promotion. That is a fascinating process. It really is a fascinating process.

IH: I am sure it is.

RG: The Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army provide guidance to those selection boards and several years back, for example, the board in their instructions were told to consider the fact that minority officers, by and large, had not been given opportunities for career enhancing assignments and that the evaluations tended to be impacted by the general societal prejudice regarding minorities, and they were instructed to consider that in terms of how they weighted the efficiency reports of the officers

whose records they were reviewing. I can tell you from personal experience, that is a very challenging job to sit on a promotion board or a school selection board but as a result of that kind of proactive instruction to selection boards and proactive review at the senior levels of the Army and I am talking about three star and four star level and the secretariat level, the Army made some major shifts in its personnel policies and practices that resulted, among other things, in the 1970s particularly, the selection of African American general officers and subsequently, Hispanic general officers, and Pacific and Asian heritage officers. And I would suggest to you that the period of time when we had black secretaries of the Army and we have had two, their influence regarding the review of selection of senior officers made a difference, made a difference in the climate of personnel management and senior officer selection. I presume you know the two secretaries of the Army that I am referring to?

IH: Was one Togo?

RG: Togo West, and before him . . .

IH: I remember Togo. I cannot remember the other one.

RG: I think I can tell you in a moment.

IH: Wasn't he under Jimmy Carter?

RG: Yes, I am looking at a picture of him right now. The name is not there. Well, let's (inaudible) go on. It will come back to me.

IH: O.K. Shame on us. We should know that.

RG: It will come back to me.

IH: Can you talk a little bit about, sticking with the OERs, the inflation problem and maybe some of the things you ran into when you were writing these evaluations or maybe an evaluation that you received as a junior officer that you look back on that maybe was not entirely fair?

RG: Well, the evaluations that I received as a junior officer . . .

IH: I mean, I have heard some great stories.

RG: . . . especially in the 2 years that I served in the infantry . . . I suspect that they were not entirely fair, as you say. Part of the systemic procedure is that the longer you stay in the Army, the more of a performance profile you develop, so that over time, those earlier evaluations carry less weight. Having said that, I mean, if you really screw up, that recorded experience can have a long-lasting impact. And you may remember the system itself, at least during the time that I was in the service, provided for both a rater and a reviewer. And so, if an officer had a problem, a personal problem with a rater in

terms of prejudice or hopefully, the reviewer would consider that and provide comments and evaluations that would present a more balanced, more accurate and more fair depiction of the officer's performance. I can look at it from two standpoints: I was not as knowledgeable about the nuances of the officer efficiency reporting system when I was a second lieutenant. As I became in later years of my service and as I said earlier, I really came to a full understanding after I became a field grade officer. So, I consider myself fortuante that in my formative years in the quarter master corps, we had a very people-oriented quarter master general and he influenced his staff and his personnel management people. He took a keen interest in getting as many of us into graduate school as his budget would allow, and I personally, for the first 3 years in the quarter master corps, after I finished my basic quarter master officers training, I was in a very professional oriented organization in Europe. It was a one-of-a-kind organization, and I experienced no racial problems at all, notwithstanding the fact that I was the only African American in the organization initially. But the relationship that I had with my immediate boss who had an MBA from Stanford and was a certified public accountant, and our commanding officer was a graduate of Senior Service College and had an MBA from Harvard, that was not a typical Army unit and I had the benefit of being a part of that unit, and I had the benefit of having the opportunity to brief general officers when I was only a lieutenant myself, and the relationship that I was privileged to continue with one of those general officers I am sure is what got me into graduate school at a subsequent point in my career. So, that is an insight on my personal good fortunate. Other folks will have difference experiences. I would commend to you the written record of General Ed Honor in that regard and what he experienced and how he was mentored.

You know, life is a composite of a lot of opportunities and the ups and downs that we all have. For most of us that achieved the grade of general officer, we have a lot of folks to be grateful to. And hopefully, we have had the opportunity to be helpful in the career of others who have come behind us, and that is why many of us continue to work i the Rocks organization - to try to ensure that we do not go backwards as an institution.

IH: It is coming down to the last couple of questions. Could you expound a moment on making sure that we do not go back as an institution, "we," of course being the military and the Army and the contribution of African Americans. Can you talk about what you see as the core things to prevent that from happening?

RG: Well, I think it begins with trying to strengthen the input to the Army in terms of high quality minority officers. So, that means ensuring that we have ROTC units at the HBCUs as well as the other universities, colleges and universities; that they have high quality cadre, and that the cadre, as well as those who support the cadre, provide not only the functional instruction that the curriculum requires but also provides the mentoring that the young cadets need, and that we have a strong mentoring program throughout the minority officer's career, and that is the main commitment of the Rocks. And there are comparable Air Force and Navy organizations that provide that kind of mentoring as well. So, that is one level of what we can do.

Those who are privileged to be senior officers on active duty can also use their influence to ensure that policies with respect to assignments and selections for schooling provide the windows of opportunity for minority officers to acquire the experience, the

knowledge to be competitive as they go forward. There are educational opportunties, in assignment opportunities that officers coming up through their careers need to be aware of. Unless they are aware of them and take advantage of the opportunities and often, that means applying for them, then they will not know about them.

Whitehouse fellowships, for example, is one opportunity that enabled Colin Powell to be set on a fast track and achieve what he was able to achieve, but we cannot take for granted that the progress that has been made so far will automatically be perpetuated without continual monitoring in identifying possible glitches, because if we do not identify the glitches, then we cannot fix them. And fortunately, we have some folks who are sensitive to that and, again, the Rocks is one organization that we have to try to monitor that process. One of the measures of success in this regard is that for the past several years, the leadership of the Rocks has been able to get senior members of the Army staff to include the Chief of Staff and the Director of the Army staff and the _____ to come and speak to the Rocks in our meetings -- not only to make presentations but also to take questions from the group, from the members. As you might suspect or have been advised by others, when the Rocks was first formed, there was some concern that senior leadership, the white senior leadership, might misunderstand the purpose and the role of the Rocks and, in fact, some young officers were reluctant to join the Rocks because they were concerned that their white colleagues and bosses might take a negative view of their belonging to this predominantly black organization of officers and accused them of being separatists, not a member of the team and that kind of thing. Fortunately, over the years, we think we have successfully addressed that issue in that we have senior white leadership members encouraging their staff to support the objectives of the Rocks

and they themselves participating in the meetings and professional development seminars that the Rocks conduct from time to time. But I think it is going to be an ongoing challenge for years to come. But that is the way it is with large bureaucratic organizations. You have to keep working at it so that it works as close to excellent as you can make it.

IH: O.K. I have about two more questions. From your experience again, looking back from major general and back down to lieutenant, what do you see were the biggest problems in the military in relation to being a person of color, or maybe challenges, I should say?

RG: I say it starts with your individual confidence and comfort in your personal identity. Folks need to know who they are and they need to know what they are capable of doing, from both a positive and a negative standpoint. They need to be honest with themselves in terms of the capability and when they identify capabilities that are not as high as he or she determines that they ought to be to do something about it. In terms of schooling, in terms of getting a mentor, in terms of putting in the time that needs to be put in [end of tape 2, side 2]

IH: O.K., General, please continue.

RG: O.K., so the first point is to know who you are and to be comfortable with who you are, and to be realistic about your competence in what you are required to do, and to

take the necessary steps to improve your competence if you recognize or you are advised that you need to do that. Second is to know what your job is, what your mission is. Only if you know what your mission is can you yourself fairly evaluate your performance or be fair about how others are evaluating yoru performance. Now, this matter of knowing what your job is may seem to be a simple matter but it is not always as simple as it appears. Some folks are well into an assignment before they really understand what their job is, especially from the standpoint of their boss, in terms of what does the boss expect of me. One of the important aspects of our present personnel management system is that senior raters are required to make it very clear to those whom they rate what is expected of them and to periodically discuss with the individual how he or she is measuring up to what is expected of him or her. Individuals need to take that process seriously. Certainly, individuals need to be honest in their relationship with their bosses and their coworkers so that they are willing to take the initiative themselves of clarifying what their job is and how well they are performing. So anyway, I would say never be completely satisfied with yourself. Now, that is not to say that you need to beat yourself up about your human-ness. I mean, we are all human, we all have imperfections, but being a professional, inherent in being a professional, I think involves seeking continuing self improvement. So, that includes continuing personal professional education and the things that we can do on our own. We can take the initiative. I probably got more military schooling than many folks because I sought it, I requested it. I did not always get everything I requested but I got a lot more than I would have gotten if I had not requested it and I think that helped me in terms of my performance and the perception of those who, over the years, have evaluated me as an only asset. I think it is helpful for a

professional's career, Army officers to understand that every once in a while, to ask themselves in what ways am I better and a more valuable an asset to the Army now than I was 2, 3, 4, 5 years ago, because the answer to that question may help explain why they are progressing or not progressing at the rate they wish they were progressing.

IH: It sounds like there is a lot of self-examination on the journey.

RG: Yes, absolutely, and that is not unique to the militay profession. I mean, doctors and lawyers and college professors, engineers, architects - all those who are at the top of their game, over time, have taken the initiative to make themselves better and that is what makes them better, that extra effort. And the folks that they serve, whether they are the doctor's patients or the lawyer's clients or the engineers who build our bridges and skyscrapers, or the folks who are dependent on their expertise, benefit from that continuing self-examination.

IH: O.K., and coming around to our last question, what do you feel that people, certainly the American public, needs to know about African Americans' military service during the Vietnam era that has not been told or written about, of course, I mean, in a positive light?

RG: Well, I suspect that there has been more said about it than I know about, number one. From my personal vantage point, I think one of the things that the general public does not know about what soldiers in Vietnam did and what I am sure soldiers in Saudi

Arabia are doing now is what they are doing on the person-to-person humane level. Most of the troops, the combatant troops, are concerned on a day-to-day basis of accomplishing their specific unit and individual mission, and staying alive. Many of them are involved or have been involved in significant humanitarian efforts to make life better for local nationals. I know the civil assistance efforts that my unit was involved in, in Vietnam and in Korea, for example, for the most part, did not make headlines because what generally makes headlines is bad news. Good news makes news on an exceptional basis, in my experience. So, I personally have a very, very high regard for what I know takes place on a very personal level in terms of just improving the living conditions around a local national. I think a lot more could be done in that regard. Now, I think it is also fair to say that in terms of minority military members, that it is particularly difficult for them to deal with any instances of disrespect that they encounter. (Inaudible) _____ the continental United States, and I said continental United States but, of course, I really include Hawaii, Alaska and Puerto Rico . . . it is particularly difficult for them to deal with instances of disrespect or discrimination, racial discrimination in light of the life and death committment that they made to the country. That is tough. This matter of fighting two wars is a heavy personal burden that all of us have had to deal with, and some deal with it better than others. A person of religious persuasion helps him or her to deal with it. Some people do not deal with it well at all and they become bitter. Some leave the service because they cannot handle it. Others stay with the conviction that maybe they can make the situation better for others if they stay and work on the inside within the system so that the system itself becomes better, so that the society itself becomes better,

and I think those who have risen to positions of great leadership have played a commendable role in doing that kind of thing.

Now, I am not at all satisfied with myself that I have not come up with the name of the Secretary of the Army! All right, here it is - it is Clifford Alexander.

IH: Alexander. O.K.

RG: I think it is Clifford C. Alexander, Jr. In fact, we made him an honorary Rock of the Year for the work that he did as Secretary of the Army and what he has done subsequent to the time that he served as Secretary of the Army.

IH: O.K.

RG: I know you are concentrating on the Army but did I mention to you when we talked last that the Navy now has its first surgeon general, black surgeon general?

IH: No, I do not think we talked about that.

RG: Well, I think it just happened recently. I do not know him personally but I have a friend that was up at Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland recently and he learned of the Navy Admiral Robinson, as the Navy's first African American surgeon general and that makes him the first black surgeon general for any of the services.

IH: Wow, that is impressive. O.K. General, I am going to stop the tape recorder at this time.