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Interview with: Major General Edward Greer
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IH: Today's date is July 23, 2007, and I am on the phone with Major General Edward Greer. He is at his home in El Paso, Texas. General Greer, can you tell me about where you are from originally, a little bit about your childhood?

EG: O.K., see, I am from West Virginia. I was born in Gary, West Virginia. That is a small coal mining town on the southern part of West Virginia. March 8, 1924.

IH: O.K. Can you talk a little bit about what it was like growing up then?

EG: Growing up in the coal mining area, of course, everything was predicated on the mines, the output from the mines. My father was a miner. And, of course, I grew up in that area. I went to elementary and high school right there in that area, graduating from high school in 1942. And then, I went and enrolled in West Virginia State College which is near Charleston, West Virginia which is the capital of the state, which is really in the central part of the state, about 120 miles from my home. There, I entered college. That was my first experience with an ROTC program because the college had an ROTC program even then and the ROTC program was mandatory for all males.

IH: So, you mentioned it was at HBCU then?

EG: That is correct.

IH: Before we get to that part, going back to your childhood, did you have an experience with the Jim Crow law?

EG: Jim Crow and segregation was the name of the game at that time, growing up in the 1930s and early 1940s. Jim Crow was the name of the game. Segregation was the name of the game.

IH: Was there any recollection you have about your grandparents, about maybe some things they taught or showed you coming up?

EG: No, my grandparents came out of North Carolina as farmers back there. They had farms, I guess, near Greensboro. I remember going there as a child, going there as a kid, like 10, 11, 12 years old, things like that, and visiting them. That was part of the growing up process and, of course, as far as talking about segregation at that time, I do not remember any conversation of that sort coming from the grandparents because, you know, you have to remember that was just the way things were. I mean, that was just the status quo at that time.

IH: Were your grandparent's descendents of slaves or anything like that?

EG: Oh, I am quite sure they were. My history, genealogy goes back very slim. In fact, after my grandparents, through my knowledge, I am running up against a brick wall from the standpoint of who is who, you know?

IH: Now, again, coming up through high school and everything like that, did your father or any uncles or anything, is there anything they instilled in you that you carried throughout your military career that you can reflect back on or anything like that?

EG: Well, I think coal miners in particular, have got to have a pretty good work ethic because if you do not work, the old story is if you do not put any coal in the coal car, you do not get paid. So, your whole financial bit is based upon what you produce. In this case, you are producing coal in the coal car. You know, the song like Tennessee Ernie Ford, talking about 16 tons and that kind of business, all that is true. Now, I never physically worked in the mines. I did work in a similar type thing when I was in high school working drilling shafts. And these are shafts that are going from the air tunnels to go into the mines. But as far as actually loading coal or anything like that, that was not a part of my experience. My experience was working in the production of a shaft so that the mines could actually operate with the air tunnels that were being produced to push air into the mines. After I quit, I realized it was a dangerous occupation and one you cannot fool around with. It paid good. And I am talking about the early 1940s now. It paid good. It paid enough for me to more or less support myself, tuition, board and room in college, more or less, that first year.

IH: O.K. Now, coming up in the late 1930s, do you have any recollections about FDR and the beginnings of World War II?

EG: Yes, I know that FDR was looked up as the savior. I can remember the Depression and the fact of when FDR, for example, closed all the banks and things like that, my father had a little bit of money in the bank but, you know, it got zapped up in the closure of the bank. And, of course, I was too young to really understand what was happening thereafter. But I do remember such a thing happening as a young child. And, of course, with FDR and a lot of the programs that were started like the CCC was a big boom to that part of West Virginia. And some of the things that were built, people went into . . . when I say CCC, do you know what I am talking about?

IH: Yes. Spring conservation.

EG: O.K. In fact, even today, there are a lot of projects that were finished by the CCC still standing and being operated at full strength in that part of the country.

IH: Now, during Pearl Harbor, do you remember where you were at and what you were doing?

EG: I was there in West Virginia. The little town that I lived in was called Welch. Although I was born in Gary - that was the coal mining town - but my parents moved to

Welch some years later. I guess I moved to Welch when I was maybe about 10, 11 years old. So, yes, I remember in 1941, of course, that was in high school.

IH: What was the general reaction of the black community when the Japanese attacked?

EG: Well, the general reaction of the black community surprisingly was very patriotic. I remember folks signing up for the service. In fact, my brother was out of college and teaching there in West Virginia and I know that . . . of course, they implemented the draft, too. So, the draft was in process. So, from a standpoint of going, it was just considered that you would go. There was really no discussion about not going.

IH: O.K. In your bio here, it says you were called to active duty on 12 May 1943. What was that like?

EG: See, that was after I was in college. What happened was that all the ROTC people were given the opportunity to join the Army and get into the enlisted reserves which would assure us of completing one year of that college year. So basically, the whole ROTC corps was called to active duty on May 12, 1943. Our first reporting station was a little army post right out there in Cincinnati called Fort Thomas, Kentucky which is right across the Ohio River there from Cincinnati. And then, we were processed there and sent on out to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for basic training. Now, we got to Fort Sill because, see, the ROTC in West Virginia was a field artillery corps, field artillery

designated arms, see? Now, other schools like Virginia State, it was Quarter Master and Hampton, I think, was Air Defense. But all the schools at that time had designed service arms as their primary source. And that is why we would up at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

IH: Now, when did you begin college? What year was that?

EG: In August of 1942.

IH: Now, as far as going to the university, did your father harp on that that hey, I want my son to go to the university, I do not want you to work in the coal mines?

EG: Oh, there was no doubt about it in our family that you were going to get an education - you were not going to spend 30, 40 years in those coal mines. My father did but that was not the program for . . . there were just the two of us, my brother and I. So, that was not the program for us.

IH: And the university that you picked, was it the closest HBCU in the area?

EG: No, there was another one - Bluefield State College. Have you heard of that one?

IH: No, I have not heard of that one.

EG: I think it was Bluefield State Teachers College at that . . . it was really about 50 miles from my home. But I had a better opportunity to get some of the courses that I

wanted to do at West Virginia State College. Look it up - Bluefield State Teachers College or Bluefield State College, I think it is called now. It is still listed as HBCU. However, its enrollment is about 98% Caucasian or whatever. And I understand they are still drawing money as an HBCU.

IH: O.K., I will check that out.

EG: That was closer but I desired to go to West Virginia State College, like I say which about 120 miles from my home was.

IH: O.K. So, after you were called to active duty, can you talk about your experience leading up to going to the combat area?

EG: Well, before we got there . . . we got to what they called active duty and went out to Fort Sill and did 16 weeks of basic training which, I think, like now, and we did this basic training as a field artillery unit, field artillery trainees. And we did that, and completed that series of training. The bulk of us were assigned to a brand new artillery unit that was being formed in Camp Beale, California which is north of Sacramento. That base is now Beale Air Force Base but, at that time, it was an army base. So, we formed up a brand new artillery unit field like a 155 mm _____ type unit and we started training there as a unit. Now, let me back up because all of us from West Virginia did not wind up there. The bulk of us did but some of the other guys were assigned to other

parts of the country in different units and different . . . basically artillery but different artillery units.

IH: O.K. When you actually went overseas, what was your date when you arrived in the theater of war?

EG: I think we trained there for about one year, so about 1944.

IH: O.K. Now, you went to Germany or Japan?

EG: Germany. I went to the European theater.

IH: Now, when you arrived in Europe, I have read things and talked to some of the veterans about they thought there was an exported racism. Did you have any encounters or witness anything like that?

EG: Our situation was a little bit different. We moved out of Camp Beale and trained right across the country to Camp Miles Standish Mass. for the port of embarkation and on a ship to England. Now, once we got to England, all the units were quarantined, more or less. So, we never had this experience of the pubs . . . I have heard other troops talk about their experiences and what they had run across as far as the racism having been exported which I do not doubt at all. But personally, I really did not get that opportunity because from the time we left the quarantine area, we were then put on another ship and

went on across the Channel. I guess we arrived in France and we picked up the activity because I think we moved on up through France on into Belgium. I think we actually did our first going into position, firing the first round of anything in Belgium there somewhere.

IH: O.K. Did you participate in the Battle of the Bulge?

EG: It was after the Bulge. I remember the first time we did any fire was towards the town of Okin, the siege at Okin. The type of unit we were in, we were not attached to any division. We were a corps artillery-type unit. So, that type of structure, you know, you are subject to being assigned to this corps today and tomorrow, you may be assigned to somebody else. So, we were shifted around a good bit like that. But the bulk of our activity was with the 9th Army though (inaudible) _____ up there. Well, I am getting ahead of myself but later on, we did get attached to the third army with Patton and spent a fair amount of time with him and then back to the 9th Army, and we spent a little time as part of the units that Bradley had. So, really it is hard for me to . . . all I knew then at that time as a youngster . . . we were not with the same unit sometimes, or organization we were with yesterday.

IH: O.K. Now, after the war, coming back to the United States, did you go through a parade ceremony and things like that?

EG: No way. No, there was no kind of parade ceremonies at that time. From that standpoint . . . well actually, our unit, like so many units, were programmed for transfer to the Pacific and we wound up on a staging area in Marseilles, France, where we just kind of set for, I don't know, maybe one week or so, got on the ship and headed for the Pacific. And then, of course, midway through that, we got the capitulation order of the Japanese. So, my ship, along with all of the other traffic that was out there at that time, all diverted to the States and a very rapid port of call, in our case, was Bayonne, New Jersey. We got there. The Army at that time was going through a very rapid demobilization and we got the . . . that is the last I ever saw of any of the equipment because I think the reason we were at Bayonne was they had the facilities there to handle the equipment. And, as far as personnel-wise, then we were gathered up and sent out on the troop trains through Camp Crowder, Missouri which is right there at Springfield, Missouri. And, of course, at that time, the Army was just trying to find anyplace they could send these units to get them off the books because there was no relationship to Camp Crowder, Missouri, in the artillery.

IH: O.K. Now, when you finished up in Europe and you got your orders that now you are going to the Pacific theater, what was that like? Were guys like, man, we just fought this war, now we have to go finish it over in the Pacific?

EG: Yes. You know, you are young - you do not even think about that. You just go finish this one up, now you are going to another one.

IH: O.K. That is interesting. So, now you go back to West Virginia and you go back to complete your education at the university. Did you find that the . . . I am sure that your active duty experience helped sharp you even more for finishing your ROTC courses. Is that true? Your active duty service?

EG: O.K., we went to Camp Crowder, Missouri. I was discharged, I think, in December there, the early part of December, 1945, and, of course, I left Missouri. I do not know how I got to St. Louis but I remember we got a train out of St. Louis all the way back to my hometown in West Virginia which required you to go through Cincinnati, then you pick up another train and you go down to that part of the country. That was in December. But by January, I had gone back to college. So, I enrolled back in college in January of 1946 and, of course, by that time see, they had what was called an advanced ROTC. That was for any of the veterans coming back. So, the bulk of us who returned just picked up right up with the ROTC program again. Now, at that time, I mean, I did not have any intention of coming back into the service or making the military my career at all, but from a standpoint of activity . . . now, see, you are also getting paid. It was not very much but at least you were getting a small check by virtue of the advanced ROTC. The other end of it was that you would be commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Reserve or if you decided to try to come back on active duty into the active Army. Now, of course, you had what you called the Army United States, AUS and also the regular Army but really, our thought at that time was just get into the ROTC. It was something that we liked, it was a few additional dollars, there was a little security of the payment of the commission whether you ever used it or not and then, you know, go

on from there. That did not enter my decision bit until graduation. Now, see, I graduated May 30, 1948.

IH: You mentioned that the Army . . . you had no plans at that time to be a career officer. What were your plans?

EG: Well, my plan was to go to dental school and I sent out applications to dental schools. And, of course, here again, you run into the segregation bit. There was no need to send in an application, say, to the University of Mississippi or even, at that point, to the University of Texas. So, I sent applications to schools that I knew had a program of acceptance and then, in those days, Negro applicants - we had not gotten into the black and African American designation at that time. Also, our two primary -- Meharry and Howard University. Now, I do not think I ever got an answer from Meharry but I did get an answer and an acceptance at Howard University but the acceptance came too late. Let me give you the story here. After graduation, I was also, as a distinguished military graduate from the college at that time as part of the commissioning bit which would have allowed me if I wanted to, to come into this Army, into the regular Army upon graduation. Now, I had to make a decision I thought by like about 01 August as far as giving the Army, yes, I will, or no, I will not. But what I was trying to juggle at that time was what would be the acceptance at the dental school. See, I still had some GI Bill time I could use. Well, like I said, I do not think I remember ever hearing from Meharry and, of course, I sent applications to people like Creighton University and University of Pittsburgh. And see, there was not much need of even me sending an application to

either the West Virginia University right near my home state because of the segregation business. Now, they would have paid the state . . . if I would have accepted at Creighton, for example, the state would have paid for my education or tuition at Creighton but they would not have accepted me at the University. That is how ridiculous segregation was at that time. So, I had to do one or the other. So, not having heard from the dental school application, I went ahead and told the professor of military science at the ROTC detachment, "O.K., sign me up." And, of course, I went ahead and got a commission. Of course, I was commissioned upon graduation but as far as the application for active duty, that was the time then.

IH: Do you remember how many people were in your class?

EG: I was called to active duty. And, of course, then, I got my orders to go to the Ground General School there at Fort Riley at this time. Now, the Ground General School was like. . . after college, after West Point, of all the second lieutenants that were coming on active duty at that time to go to, it was like a general orientation school. It was about 4 months. And, of course, what they did was gather all the nation's ROTC graduates that were called to active duty and the clients at this time, the clients in 1948, from West Point. And they assembled all these folks from Fort Riley, Kansas. They had there what is called the Ground General School. It was an education effort to the basic things, a recap of all the things, I guess, you had gotten in ROTC bit and I am quite sure for the folks from West Point, is a recap of all the things they had picked up in their education at the academy. And, of course, this all ended before Christmas and you had

the Christmas leave. Then, you were sent on to your basic course for your orientation. In my case, that was Fort Sill because, see, I was commissioned as a field artillery officer. So, we go from Fort Riley, Kansas, to Fort Sill, Oklahoma and the basic course, I guess, went from January to July or so. Now, we are into 1949. At this point, is there anything you want to back up on?

IH: Do you remember how many folks were in your graduating class?

EG: Which one?

IH: At West Virginia.

EG: I think we had _____ 300 or so.

IH: That is a pretty good number.

EG: But we also had a goodly number of folks commissioned, too. Now, I cannot give you the exact number but it was . . . there were folks commissioned from the standpoint of commissioned in the Reserves if they wanted to sign up to go that way and there were also folks commissioned in the regular army. There was, I guess, only two of us from West Virginia that were commissioned in the regular Army and actually went on active duty, reporting for Fort Riley.

IH: Now, when Truman signed Executive Order 9981 which was in July of 1948, do you remember what you were doing or where you were at when that happened?

EG: Well, in July of 1948, that was the same time that I was recalled back to active duty going out to Fort Riley. But as far as anything happening, nothing happened. They just went on as usual. That was the Executive Order of 1948 but as far as anything happening, nothing happened.

IH: The commanders did not address the cadets or anything - O.K., we are going to start doing business differently in a year or so or anything like that?

EG: Well, I must say that as far as the Ground General School was concerned, there was absolutely no problem, no segregation there at all. Now, of course, see, you are running into the problem of when you go off the base into the little town of Junction City, Kansas, you were right smack dab into the segregated aspect. Now, as I had lots of friends that I met from other colleges in ROTC that were married and, of course, I was married by that time, could rent an apartment in the little town of Junction City, that was not my case. It was so prevalent during that time of an Army officer's life, if you were not taken in by some family and given an opportunity to, say, room with them, you did not have any kind of life. Of course, now if you were single, then you stayed in the BLQ.

IH: How did you make out? What happened for quarters?

EG: Well, see, Fort Riley being an old town of a bunch of retired folks, Calvary guys from the Philippines who served in the Philippines and came back and retired there in Junction City because it was just loaded with old retired sergeants and guys who had been in the Philippines - a lot of them came back with Filipino wives and things like that . . . now, these guys, in 1948, you did not have much of an Army size going in there at that time anyway because, you know, all of the demobilization after World War II and, of course, the Army was very small. These guys were real happy to see somebody come in there and commission as a second lieutenant and they took me under their wing and just completely took care of us, schooled us. We lived with an old retired first sergeant and his wife. This went on from, say, August to December.

IH: So, that is interesting. The old buffalo soldiers were still trying to take care of you. That is great. So, let's fast forward to the Korean War, June of 1950. How soon did you arrive in Korea?

EG: Well, now see, I finished up the basic course at Fort Sill and then was sent over to Japan, joined the 25th Division Artillery which was stationed in Japan at that time. So, my little field artillery unit was stationed in a little town called Nara, Japan and we were all part of the 25th Division. Division headquarters was in Osaka and you had infantry regiments all around that part of the country which is in the central part of Japan. By I arrived in Japan in January of 1950, joined this unit, trained with them. We went on training exercises and maneuvers with the 24th Infantry Regiment which was stationed at Gifu, Japan, and we all met at Mount Fuji, the Mount Fuji maneuver area, and we trained

there together. But after the training, we went back to our base and they went back to their base. The only time we got together was at the maneuver area of what was called Mount Fuji Maneuver Area. So, this went on from . . . if the war had not started, I guess we would have completed a nice solid 3 year tour there in Japan because my wife and, by this time, I had one child . . . they were supposed to come over in August of 1950 because there was good housing right there in our little area and they would have joined us there. But, naturally in June when the flag went up as far as Korea was concerned, that took care of that.

IH: So, when did you arrive in Korea?

EG: The exact date, I do not know, but see, the whole division was mobilized I think in June and we went down to. . . I cannot remember the name of the old town in the southern part of Japan but we got on the LSTs there and went over to Pousson, Korea, and started getting our feet wet from a standpoint of establishing positions and moving north. We moved some portion of it on train up to Tegu. That was about where the line was which was south of Seoul and I guess we started our engagement somewhere around that time and at that place. All the divisions that were the 24th Division that were stationed on the southern part of Japan and the 7th Division which were stationed in the northern part of Japan, everybody was mobilized and shifted to Korea as quickly as possible.

IH: Now, was the 25th integrated by this time?

EG: No, they were not.

IH: I am talking about the 24th Division.

EG: You had the 25th Division and you had two regiments, the 27th regiment and the 35th were two white regiments, and the 24th infantry regiment was your black regiment. Of course, each of these regiments had direct support pretty much over the battalion and my (inaudible)_____ which was named 159, field artillery battalion, was the direct support for the 24th infantry regiment, the black regiment. So, at that timeframe, segregation was going on just like it has always gone. So, the Executive Order did not mean a damn thing.

IH: Now, at what point in the 1950s did you see that units were starting to be integrated? At what point did you start to see, O.K., well, 9981 was exactly starting to be implemented?

EG: See, we went through, say, all of 1950 and the early part, more or less, 6 months or more into 1951. Units were in segregated bases. Now, it was towards the fall. . . let me back up a little bit. The 24th infantry had better strength than any of the other two regiments in the division. In other words, there were more blacks in that regiment than there were in the other two regiments as far as the strength was concerned. As an example, the 24th infantry regiment had all 3 of their battalions full, more or less like 100%. Now, the 27th and the 35th did not have all full strength battalions, so it was after

June of 1950, for example, that you started getting replacements from the States very quickly. And, of course, that started filling up the two white regiments. So, you have got a situation of strength, of where you go into this with your black regiment more or less at 100% but your other two white regiments were not 100%.

IH: I see. O.K.

EG: So, all during that whole conflict, from the beginning until all the way up until 1951, we fought the whole war as a segregated unit. Now, it was in the fall that we started a talk of the integration bit of assigning black troops into white units and, of course, the idea was they were going to just inactive the colors of the 24th Infantry which they did. Now, I left Korea in December of 1951. The unit, the shifting, the movement of troops really just started, say, in November and December of 1951. So, from a standpoint of they realized, I think, Korea made the Department of the Army realize they could not continue to fight that war over there as a completely segregated unit type structure and to integrate the troops into one type unit, one unit regardless of race. So, as an example, a person coming from the States as a replacement . . . [end of tape #1, side 1]

. . . I knew if I stayed in the field artillery, I knew that I would wind up in the 159, because that was the only black field artillery unit there in the 25th Division. And an infantry trooper going over there knew he would wind up in the 24th infantry. So, there was no doubt about that. (inaudible) _____ of the Army was way, way ahead of the civilian structure.

IH: Oh, yes. Absolutely. When you were in Korea, did you see combat there?

EG: Oh, yes. You were in combat from day 1.

IH: O.K., it says you were decorated with a silver star and bronze stars when you were there. Man! That is a whole another interview but I would like to talk to you about that some time in the future. Did you engage the Chinese and stuff like that?

EG: Yes, that was all part of the battle. When they entered the fracas, the whole thing changed because they came down fat and trained and well-conditioned. The whole tenure of the whole battle changed after they entered. They were something else.

IH: But your whole time in Korea, your unit was all black?

EG: Correct. Now, with white commanders but, you know, your lieutenants, captains, and we did not have a black major in my battalion but we had captains, we had second and first lieutenants and captains in the field artillery battalion. But, you see, our authorization only allowed for two majors, two majors and a lieutenant colonel.

IH: And all the enlisted were . . .

EG: All the enlisted were black. Now, we had two black aviation pilots. They were our aviation guys.

IH: That is interesting, very interesting. So, going into the late 1950s and early 1960s, what were your recollections of the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement, looking back on that?

EG: Well, that all started . . . that was the 1960s.

IH: Yes, King really came on the scene in 1958 and started moving things forward then. I mean, of course, there has always been a civil rights movement but, I mean, when you really started to see the energy of this thing, let's just say in the early 1960s, what was that like then being in the service?

EG: That was chaotic, I mean, because I think you still had that business with Central High School there in Little Rock. You had the lunch counter bit back at Greensboro as some examples but as far as the . . . everybody recognized that the Civil Rights Movement was a plus. It was a positive thing.

IH: Did that ever cause any friction within a unit or anything like that?

EG: Not in that timeframe. In 1960, for example, I had gone to Command General Staff College at Fort Levenworth and in 1967, I was a student there at the National War

College in Washington. Now, see, we are talking about the Civil Rights Movement as such in between those two times I would say that I was in a school environment. Now, I had also been in an artillery (inaudible) _____ out at Fort Louis and, you know, it was all integrated. No problem. I went into Fort Louis as a major, as the executive officer. This was after I had finished up my assignment as a student at the Command General Staff College. So, of course, being out in Seattle was kind maybe a little bit better environment than if you were, say, in Georgia or Mississippi or someplace like that. But we had no problems that I can remember out there.

IH: And still sticking with the early 1960s now, who do you think most blacks identified with more during that time - Martin Luther King or . . .

EG: Oh, absolutely.

IH: O.K., him over Malcolm X?

EG: People like A. Phillip Randolph and Thurgood Marshall and people like that, they certainly identified with them, you know, from the standpoint of, especially your military people, as such.

IH: What were your feelings and ideas about Dr. Martin Luther King when he really started to make a name for himself?

EG: Well, a very courageous man. One of the things that I hope we will never discard or put into the file cabinets is all the tape of the things that happened in Montgomery and Birmingham -- the dogs and the fire hoses and things like that. These things have to be shown all the time. They have got to be shown so that generations now and these coming along will understand what the hell went on.

IH: O.K. Now, during this (inaudible) _____ with the 1960s at this point, during the beginnings of the Black Power Movement, again, of course, now we are kind of headed to the late 1960s - we are going to do a little bit of jumping back and forth - again, wearing the uniform and being in the military, when you saw Stokey Carmichael or Cleaver or Huey P. Newton, I mean, what did . . .

EG: I do not think we identified with them. We definitely did not take that on as part of our operation. I know that the people that I was with and associated with certainly did not look on that as the way to go. However, you know, you have also got to look at it, it was also the nonviolent way to go from the standpoint of the risks that you take by following that custom. But you have got to recognize that, I think we all, by virtue of the military people, recognized that hell, once you start shooting and the other guy starts shooting, you are going to wind up second best because of sheer numbers.

IH: O.K., now within the structure of your command, some of the other African American soldiers, did you sense or see anything that would make you think that some folks in here are disgruntled about what is happening in the civilian world?

EG: The two environments at that time, you know activities that might be happening, say, on a military base and then activities that happen once you leave the gate. Once you go into the local community from that base, you know, it is two different worlds. That was part of the confusing, frustration time that went along. I mean, just right here in El Paso, for example, a whole different ballgame from . . . I came down here for the advanced course in 1955 as to what was happening on the base and then what was happening in the city of El Paso. But when I came back in the 1965 timeframe, the activity here in El Paso was a whole different ballgame from the standpoint of the positive steps in this case that the city had taken. So, it was like two different worlds.

IH: Now, in the 1960s, it was kind of the creation or genesis of this black ideology, Black Power, and you saw a lot of scholars and things that were really trying to talk about black culture and masculinity - things like that. As a black man back then wearing the uniform, did anyone or anything. . . I should what was a symbol of masculinity for you? It could be like maybe Muhammad Ali or Martin Luther King or Thurgood Marshall. Was there anything like that that you saw back then that a young black man could identify with?

EG: Well, you know, when you have people like, take Thurgood Marshall, for example. Here is a guy that was not only a great individual but a learned individual and recognizing what he was going through with the legal system was accomplishing something. And also, you know, of course, the country was completely torn up from the

standpoint of what was happening race-wise in this country at the time. So, from a standpoint of who do you cast your lot with? Well, you cast your lot with people who seem to think that they know what the hell they are doing. And, you know, the redderick is fine and all this business, power to the people, black power and all this but you had to still . . . where in the hell is the money? The money is all in white banks. How would you actually support some of these things when you do not have the financial stability or the financial wherewithal to deal with some of these things? There were a tremendous number of pressures that were going on. Now, whether you get excited about this from the standpoint of the military because, at the same time, the military is quietly going about trying to take care of some of these problems. I will repeat myself. My experiences right here in El Paso and Fort Bliss go from one extreme to the other, from the standpoint of how it used to be, from the segregated bit to why it was from the standpoint of being able to go somewhere without having to say no, this is no colored served or go to the back or whatever.

IH: O.K. Now, staying in the 1960s and talking about Vietnam, what were your feelings about the Vietnam War in the early years?

EG: The whole racial business just transferred itself to Vietnam because now, you are running into problems with Black Power; you are running into problems with the tensions between all the races. Vietnam was a horrible aspect as far as race relations were concerned. It was in Vietnam where you had, as one example, a term called "fragging." Have you heard of that one?

IH: Yes, sir.

EG: And there was tension between, you know, blacks and whites, in the jungle, outside the jungle, just in trying to conduct the war. It was not a good theater for damn near anything. I went to Vietnam in 1970, 1971 timeframe, I think. I went over there to command a field artillery group. This is a group that had about 10 to 12 battalions of field artillery units, so basically about 6,000 people. I must say that I did not have the problems that the infantry people had. For some reason, it did not transcend into the artillery unit.

IH: Any theories on why?

EG: I think it might have been because you had small groups that had to work, like on the teams in the artillery gun crews, for example. You know, you just do not have time. You cannot deal with that and, of course, here, we had a combination of everybody -- we had blacks and whites at the command structure at all levels. So, you were not fighting the segregation bit as you were from a command bit in Korea because, say you had black officers command the battalions in Vietnam, you had folks on the ground - helicopter pilots and everybody else all throughout the structure. In my particular situation, I guess I am real blessed in not having had a lot of the problems that I know that other units had in Vietnam.

IH: Did you ever experience any of the black soldiers give you the Black Power salute or anything like that?

EG: I guess, no. Now that I think about it . . . as you get older, your memory kind of dims a bit but no, I did not have that problem.

IH: Now, throughout your career from Nam back to Korea, did you ever have any encounters with a white person having a problem with a black officer over them, like taking commands from them or anything like that or not saluting?

EG: Well, in the early 1950s, that problem was prevalent. I mean, that was the name of the game back in that timeframe.
There was a whole lot of that going on but I think as we advanced towards the 1960s, that diminished.

IH: O.K. During, I guess, your free time as far as socializing, did you tend to socialize more with blacks or whites, let's say, in Vietnam versus back in Columbus?

EG: Well, there was no socialization in Vietnam. It was just all strictly combat. I mean, you are in combat in our situation from sun up to sun down - all the time. Of course, as an artillery unit, we are firing 24/7 in a case like that. Socializing from our standpoint, in Vietnam, there was none. All it was was pure combat.

IH: O.K., in your command, did you ever see any forms of self-segregation with the black soldiers or anything like that?

EG: Yes, you see some of that but not to the point where it got to be a problem though. But I think that was kind of just the way the ball bounced at that time. Of course, you have got to remember now in Vietnam, you are living in the jungle. You are out there in some gun position. A lot of our gun positions would stay there a pretty good while and others, we would move about. But you were not in any situations where you had it. There were no days off. There was no USO or something like that to go to, things like that. Now, that was only for people that might have been down in Saigon and Camron Bay and places like that. But people like where I was in the northern part of Vietnam and people that were down in the Delta, down in the southern part with all that water and all that stuff, our problems were similar, the only thing was our conditions for everyday existence were just trying to survive.

IH: So, I guess that kind of stamped out any type of racial tension or anything like that.

EG: Well, when you have got somebody shooting at you, you do not have much time to . . . those bullets are all equal opportunity.

IH: They are equal opportunity employers, eh?

EG: But in Vietnam, I know there were problems with the racial bit in Vietnam. And like I said, more so in the infantry. And then I think you probably might have run into more of it if you had a base where you have like a supply base, a quarter master depot or someplace like that. I think you probably would run into more of that in a case like that, in that situation.

IH: Now, as an artillery officer, were you providing fire missions for fire bases and stuff like that? Is that what you guys did?

EG: Yes. And see, our whole business was supporting the infantry - the infantry and armor. That is basically what we are there for.

IH: O.K., now we are going to talk about one of my favorite things that I just cannot seem to stop talking about - dealing with the promotion system and the OERs. 1967, 1966, 1965 I guess in the mid 1960s and late 1960s, tell me about the OERs. Do you think the promotion system was fair in your opinion, dealing with the OERs?

EG: Well, what happens with any promotion system - it gets . . . I am trying to find the right word for it . . . it gets compromised and maybe that is not the right word but what happens is that you have got guys coming along, like in some of those reports, you got outstanding or truly outstanding, terms like that, see. Then, I think one of those (inaudible) _____ you had the blocks where you are rating as to where this guy stood among his peers and things like that. We had so many changes in the OER system during

my time that it was just hard to keep up with. To say whether it was fair enough? I am quite sure you cannot say that it was fair because, see, you still had folks looking at your black officers as they had to be supergood, super outstanding, to actually come up from the standpoint of whether you rate . . . so, you have got two lieutenants, one black and one white - is this guy superior or equal to the performance of the others in his peer group? And, you know, let's face it, you have got racial prejudices that enter into the rating aspect. You have got some commanders that would say, "Well, you know, I just do not have any black officers that are going to be superior to my white officers," no matter how good you might be. So, the rating system, it was frustrating in one aspect and, of course, like in my situation, see, I have written hundreds of OERs from the standpoint of rating not only just black officers but white officers, too. But what happens with the whole OER system is that there comes a point where - let me put it this way - everybody is truly outstanding.

IH: Inflation?

EG: And inflation hits into the calculation. I found that in doing the OER bit of trying to . . . too many OER raters and reviewers were doing nothing but just repeating the job description instead of actually saying what kind of a job did this lieutenant, did this captain, did this major or did this lieutenant colonel do, under what type of circumstances? And I think that these are the kinds of things, comments that are going to get the attention of promotion boards.

IH: I was speaking with General Brailsford probably one month ago and he was saying that in order for a guy to get promoted, they do things that mortal people cannot do - "This guy walks on water. He is general officer material in one day." Code words. Even Colonel Miller, Clarence Miller, he was telling me about when he sat on the lieutenant colonel's board, the majors board, about that they get a maximum score but after a while, there were certain code words in the OER that mean promote this guy or do not promote him.

EG: I mean, I just found that that having both ends of that bit, that you do not necessarily need to fill up the whole paragraph or put in a continuation page for an evaluation. I have found that the best evaluators were those who said really not much but what they said meant something though. It is true. If this guy is one that says, "Promote him now," say it. Move him along. For example, a lot of these guys, these OERs determine whether you are going to get picked up for command and the same thing . . . "recommend this officer be accelerated for command," things like that. Now, you are not going to say that about everybody. But you have got to put in there the comments that are going to get the attention of somebody reading that report.

IH: O.K., now do you remember the Butler report, the Butler study when that came out?

EG: Yes.

IH: That is what one of my chapters is about. It talked about this total man concept and how in the late 1950s, like 1956 on out from when the study was done, that, again, black officers were not being fairly rated, and the curves for the promotion scores were almost the same in 1966 as they were in 1956, so do you have any recollection of your early OERs during that time because a lot of the officers have said, "Well, we did not know that much about the promotion system so we did not know what a good score was," back when you were a younger tenant, that type of thing.

EG: Well, I guess I actually did not fill out any OERs until I commanded a battery as a captain and that is when I had to fill out the OERs on my lieutenants. I commanded a battery over in Germany in 1954, so I was in command over that structure over there from, say, 1954 to 1955 because I left Germany in 1955. So, I do not even remember if OER was even in use at that time but I guess the main thing was that I have always tried to call a spade a spade. Call it as you see it. And, of course, I must admit that even in my timeframe, I did not have any black officers. The officers that I was dealing with were white. And, of course, for captains in that timeframe to command field artillery battles in Germany, that was kind of a small number, too.

IH: Now, you put on your first star in 1972?

EG: I think so, yes, because I was assigned to the Secretary of Defense Manpower and Reserve Affairs when I got picked up and that would have been 1970 because I wound up getting promoted and then being assigned to Fort Leonard

Wood as the deputy commanding general.

IH: O.K., now that group of colonels, this is the question: Was it you, General Becton, General Gregg? It was 4 of you that were promoted?

EG: No, five.

IH: Five that were promoted in 1972?

EG: Yes, we were picked up for selection in 1972. That was Becton, Gregg, Harry Brooks, George Shuffer, and me.

IH: O.K., now this is one of the theories. I have not actually proved it yet, I just wanted to run this by you, that after the Butler Study came out and it showed the disparity in the black officer corps, that there was only basically one general officer, Benjamin O. Davis that was . . .

EG: For years, there was only that one. Of course, you have got to recognize, hell, how many colonels did we have? Then, we had like Colonel Frederick Davidson was one of the earlier ones to come along as a great colonel. But, you know, like, remember, Wes Hamilton who came out of the Reserve group, did a lot of ROTC assignments, and Howard. I do not know whether he was Prairie View or not but he came along at that

same time. But, you know, we went from B.O. Davis, Sr. to, I guess, Fred Davidson must have been the first guy to pick up a star after that. I think so.

IH: It is just kind of ironic that after that report came out, you know, right when it was in the makings, they say, O.K. . . .

EG: But, you know, you see, you had some things that started happening because, for example, here I go - just to advance to the greater colonel, and I never thought when I was back there in ROTC days that I would ever see greater colonel. In fact, my PMST told me that if I could retire after like 20, 25 years of service as greater lieutenant colonel, I would have had a successful career. And that was a realistic thing. And so, he was not off base - that was a realistic approach at that time.

IH: So, you far surpassed that!

EG: Yes, I mean, from a standpoint you had white officers who were in that same boat.

IH: As an officer, again, you know, you are a successful African American moving up through the ranks - at any time once you reached the field gray, did you feel the added burden of an extra responsibility to the race, you know, to African Americans like, O.K., I am blazing the trail for the next group of officers?

EG: Well, yes, because, you know, you definitely are a role model for all the youngsters coming along because, see, you have got a whole slew of young lieutenants coming up the trail from the colleges and we started to have a little bit more production out of West Point from the standpoint of that. So, the thing is you cannot go out there and make an ass of yourself because everybody is expecting you to do that anyway, from a standpoint of on the social side as well as you still have got to continue to excel on your performance side because there is not only . . . now, you are looking at it from the standpoint of being selected not only for command but also continue service school. Just those two selection areas alone are tough nuts to crack for anybody.

IH: O.K., now as a field grade and general officer, what strategies did you develop, or tactics, to become an effective leader for your junior officers, to help bring them up to make sure that they were successful officers? Anything in particular that comes to mind?

EG: In particular, I will tell you what. (Inaudible) _____ you have got to take care of your people. You have got to take care of your people. You have got to take care of the junior officers. You have got to let the junior officers know that you are interested in them. One of my problems, even today, is having junior officers actually be a part of the conversation, come up, talk, introduce yourself, do not think that you are imposing upon somebody. The thing is that you have got to . . . and it is just like a kid will understand whether you are sincere or not. You have got to make them understand that you care about them and that you are there for them. Now, you cannot hold them by the hand but you have got to know that it is possible, as they say, as the boys say, to get to you. That

is one of the things I try to do. I try to go out of my way to try to meet the young officers, a lot of young officers that run the opposite way when they see me coming and that is true with any . . . a lot of response from general officers . . . I think you have got to recognize that some of these youngsters think that, I will say it again, they are imposing on you and that is not the case at all.

IH: Did you have a mentor?

EG: I had lots of them. Lots of them, and surprisingly, lots of them from the South. Seven colonels who actually I have had more success, leadership, guidance were from southerners than I have had from so-called northerners. But I am going back to my days as a captain and I think I had one mentor was a colonel from Alabama over in Germany who, I think, I could list as a mentor. I had a mentor that lives up right now in Seattle who was, at that time, a lieutenant colonel and later got promoted to colonel there in Korea. Even after the greater colonel, for example, one of my mentors was with another southerner from Alabama. So, yes, I have had mentors and you cannot make it in this business without mentors.

IH: These were southern white men?

EG: All of them. Every one of them. Of course, all of us, those of us who have come along, one of our mentors was General Fred Davidson who is a black general. He was a mentor to all of us. And, you know, back in the early years of the Pentagon, they had an

office set up to handle that they called in those days Negro Officers in the Military and things like that. It was actually headed by a civilian who was a doctor, professor. As it happened, he was a professor at my college but he later went on to work in the Pentagon at EOD James C. Evans. He was a mentor for any of the young black officers at that point coming through Washington, coming through the Pentagon. In those days, they had to check in with their branch to check their records and to check with the (inaudible) _____ office to see what else was happening out there from the standpoint of our contemporaries. All of us have had mentors. They come in all sizes, shapes and fashions.

IH: We are almost done here, coming up on the last question or two. From your experience, what were the biggest problems in the military in relation to being a person of color, from your experience?

EG: Well, one of the things is there is a double standard. I mean, the double standard that existed where you had to be super, supergood. I think that was one of the things and I think any of us that have come along would perhaps maybe tell you the same thing - that when it comes time to be rated, be judged, I mean, you are not going to be able to do it on minimal site performance. That is whether you are in a combat situation or a support situation or just plain old (inaudible) _____. You cannot be a fool. Now, you know, there was a time when they were looking for us to be the comedian, should I say. That is not the case. You find that even today, I think we have to instill in our youngsters and our young black officers that the work ethic and the bit of education is a never ending

operation. Shop development, trying to prepare yourself for the next hurdle, you just constantly have to keep after it and there is no point where you just say, you know, I have done it, I have had enough, this is all I need and that kind of thing. That is not the case.

IH: That is so true.

EG: It is a constant self-education and to try to achieve what you can by virtue of work performance and the work ethic. There is no such thing as instant gratification in this business.

IH: Yes. O.K. Now, the last question that I have . . . [end of tape #1, side 2]

. . . What do you feel that people should know about African Americans' military service during the Vietnam era that has not been told or written about?

EG: Well, I do not think that what the black soldier accomplished in Vietnam, for instance, has been exposed. I do not think anybody has perhaps taken that one on. I do not think that anyone has actually taken that on as a specific project. The Vietnam War was so full of problems anyway, just in talking about Vietnam was a negative deal in itself, and to try and isolate that . . . for example, I have no idea how many black guys commanded a battalion in Vietnam. You find stories of what General Fred Davidson did with the one Monday night brigade there in the defense of Saigon because I think without

his actions and what he did there; I think Saigon would have fallen. I think that what we had there in the defense of Saigon is due to the execution that General Fred Davidson who was the colonel at that time did there in the defense of Saigon. That would perhaps be one single thing that could perhaps be done to write about that but you are so mixed up with assignments and where people were, I think it would be a hell of a task to try to isolate who was where and who did what. I mean, take my own case. Here, as a colonel, I commanded a major unit there, a field artillery group, but from the standpoint of history, probably no one ever recognized that except maybe the people that served with me. So, I do not think we probably will ever have the history of what African Americans did from a standpoint of service in Vietnam.

IH: Well, hopefully I can remedy that in about another 5 to 7 years.

EG: You know, trying to get the records as to who was who and where were they and what they did, you would really need to have some fantastic research going on.

IH: Yes, and people who were there, you know, like you or General Gregg. I mean, you could say this guy was there but those records are hard to track.

EG: Take, for example, there was a brigadier general, a black brigadier general at Kamron Bay by the name of Roscoe Cartwright.

IH: Yes. Rock Cartwright.

Move

EG: Right. Now, see, he was part of that whole Cam Ranh Bay structure.

IH: There was a hospital there, too, wasn't there?

EG: I am not sure. I was only there just . . . in fact; my entry into the country was at Kamron Bay. I got here and I spent a night or two and then went on up country to Da Nang, and that is where I checked into the 24th Corps headquarters because all the artillery units, this artillery unit that I later commanded was a part of the 24th Corps artillery. But as to who was in Kamron Bay and Saigon and places like that, let me tell you - I had no idea. But I knew that, for example, Rock Cartwright was at Kamrom Bay because I saw him there when I came in the country.

IH: O.K., well, that basically ends all the questions. Did you have anything else that you wanted to add or something we may have left out or anything that might be important?

EG: I am enthusiastic and I am thinking positive of what has happened in the day that, let's say, from the time I retired in 1976 basically the end of the year of 1976, as to some of the things that we have achieved since then and I am very proud of what has gone on. People have been promoted to . . . the senior grades have gone to senior service schools, they have commanded brigades and regiments and things like this, and picked up for general officers. For example, I cannot tell you today how many black general officers

there are but I know it is a hell of a lot more than it was when Becton and Grigg and I were around.

IH: I can tell you how many there were in 1999. There were 25 in 1999. Now, it has been a few years, I do not know how many. It has probably changed a lot since then. So, yes, it is still a lot. All right, I am going to stop the tape recorder now.