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Interview with: Lieutenant General Marvin D. Brailsford
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IH: Today's date is June 28, 2007. I am on the phone with Lieutenant General Marvin D. Brailsford who lives in Beaumont, Texas. General, can you tell me what your date of birth is please?

MDB: Yes, I was born January 31, 1939.

IH: And where are you from originally?

MDB: I grew up in Burkville, Texas, in east Texas.

IH: And can you talk about your childhood, what it was like growing up in Jim Crow, Texas and your parents, immediate family?

MDB: Yes, my father as an educator. In fact, he was a principal of a school up at Wiregate, Texas. So, I grew up out in this rural community, you know, really not having that much contact with whites. Our whole existence was in the black community, going to a segregated school, would pass through the little town of Burkville to go to Wiregate to my school and really never thought about it. The only contact that I had with whites

was usually when we would go into the stores. My senior year, we used to play . . . I remember occasionally some time, we would play baseball, softball, against the whites to pick up leagues in the summer but that was it. I was kind of oblivious to them as opposed to a lot of folks. I guess we were not rich but we were not very poor. I always had clothes and I had plenty of food. My father worked hard. In addition to being principal, he always used to have a little farm. He would do farming on the side. He had cows, chickens. We would grow beans and sugar cane and all that kind of stuff. So, no, I had a very happy, uneventful childhood.

As I got older . . . I graduated from high school when I was 16. I guess as I got to be a teenager, I began to become aware of segregation and the effects of it but it really did not have that much (INADIABLE) _____ because I did not have that much contact with whites.

IH: How big was your high school?

MDB: It was a small high school. Let's put it this way: there were 13 in my senior class. We had, I guess, there might have been 200 folks in my high school.

IH: Can you talk about your relationship with your grandparents and maybe some things they tried to instill in you coming up as a child?

MDB: I never knew my grandparents. I was the youngest of 7. Well, my father's mother died when I guess I was about maybe 6 or 7 years old so, you know, I just vaguely

remembered her. I remember how she could make tea cakes. I would go down to her house when she would have something but I did not like to stay around because I thought she was mean! My mother was essentially an orphan so I never knew her parents and I just knew my grandmother very briefly. The last couple of years of her life, she was pretty much bedridden. My mother and my sisters all took care of her. My father built her a house right next to ours, right next door to ours so we could just take care of her the last couple of years of her life. So, that is my remembrances of my grandparents.

IH: Did your parents ever mention anything about them being descendants of slaves or anything like that?

MDB: Oh, yes. They used to talk about it, particularly on my father's side. The slave master was old man Joe Brailsford who was buried right there in the cemetery at Birkville, Captain Joe Brailsford, Confederate States of America, and he obviously was a descendent of slaves because my grandmother and my two aunts, if you did not know it, you could look at them and you thought they were white ladies. My father was the darkest one of all the group but, you know, my great-grandmother, as I understand it, was also very fair, very light, and her mother was a slave. My grandmother was born in slavery, as I understand it. She was born just before the Emancipation but she did not actually know much about slavery because she was born right at the end of 1865 or something like that.

IH: O.K., so the confederate soldier Brailsford, he was the slave master, is that right?

MDB: Yes.

IH: That is probably pretty interesting that you wound up at PV where the last Confederate battle was fought in Texas. So, coming up as a young man, who were your role models or symbols of masculinity to you, like, you know, some people you wanted to aspire to be like?

MDB: Well, you know, as I think back about my youth, my biggest hero was my oldest brother. I mean, I idolized him. When I was a young fellow, he was at Prairie View, went through ROTC, went into the Army. I just idolized him. Of course, my father, I thought was next to God himself. Then, there were teachers. For a period when I was in high school, my father was principal in Groveton, Texas, during my high school years and the principal of the school and his wife, I guess, not so much him but his wife had an impact on me. She was my English teacher. In fact, my freshman year, she left Wiregate and went to Prairie View and taught English at Prairie View and then left Prairie View and taught at Gremlin until she retired from Gremlin. She had a profound impact on my life.

My agriculture teacher took me under his wings and took me around. I won the state public speaking contest for what was then NFA - New Farmers of America. That was the black organization. The white organization was Future Farmers of America. But every year, you know, they would have contests where you would public speak and sing and go judge animals. And so, I won that in public speaking and won several awards for judging poetry. So, Mr. David Snell was another role model that I admired as a kid

growing up. So, those were the ones that stick out. There was another teacher there that she is still living, thank God. She is a nice lady, Ms. Vera Lacy. She still lives up there but she must be about 90 years old now. All of these people had great impact on me.

We grew up with people that were saw millers and lumber folks and farmers. I got an appreciation for hard work from the people who went to our church. Two brothers - the Harrisons - they were deacons in our church and I had a lot of respect for them. We used to play with their kids. So, you know, the community also had an impact on them.

IH: O.K., so your English teacher you mentioned, when you went to PV, she was there, too?

MDB: As a matter of fact, when she could not drive, my freshman year, I used to drive her back and forth from Prairie View to . . . she lived up in Jasper. She had the car down there. I would drive her back and forth my entire freshman year.

IH: O.K. So, when you finished high school, what year did you begin Prairie View?

MDB: 1955.

IH: That is when you started PV?

MDB: Yes.

IH: And you finished in ?

MDB: 1959.

IH: Now, you mentioned your brother had a big impact on you. Did you have in your mind ever since he went there, that this was going to be the school you were going to graduate from?

MDB: No. Listen, I grew up knowing I was going to go to Prairie View. My father graduated from Prairie View. My mother graduated from Conroe College but she never worked. She had too many babies. There were 7 of us. But all of my brothers and sisters graduated from Prairie View. Every last one. So, you know, it was just understood that that was where I was going to go to school.

IH: O.K., so you had a legacy at PV to keep up?

MDB: Yes. I mean, as opposed to many kids who were going off to college, Prairie View was no stranger to me. I had been on the campus at Prairie View many, many times, from when I used to follow my father down to football games, to go pick up my brothers and sisters. Also, I knew the dorms and I knew the campus. I would be down there for interscholastic league and for NFA stuff. So, I mean, I just knew I was going to Prairie View.

IH: O.K. Did you have any recollection or experience with Lieutenant Colonel Chase?

MDB: Well, I knew him but I met him on active duty when I was a lieutenant and he was PMS&T at Howard University. But he was the PMS when my brother was at Prairie View and my brother headed up the cadet corps, and he used to tell all sorts of stories about Colonel Chase and his reputation was known throughout as being a tough task master and all. So, I knew him through my brother talking to him and I met him . . . my first duty station was at Fort Meade, Maryland. We were running ROTC summer camp and I ran into him there and we chatted because he knew my brother very well.

IH: O.K. I heard good things about Colonel Chase, but he was very demanding.

MDB: I mean, if anybody talked about Colonel Chase, it was that he was very tough but I think that he made a difference.

IH: O.K., so during your time at PV in the ROTC program, what was that like and what are some of your best recollections of your experience there?

MDB: Well, you know, the best thing that ever happened to me when I was at Prairie View and ROTC . . . when I went to Prairie View, your first 2 years, all males were required to take ROTC. So, the first 2 years, you had no choice - you had to take ROTC. Then, you know, if you were good enough and needed to go into advanced ROTC, well,

the young captain by the name of Julius Becton came to Prairie View. I think it was like in my sophomore year, junior year, and he took me under his wing. It was like he did a lot of the other ROTC guys. And he had a profound impact upon my life at Prairie View and all the time I am in the Army and still, we are the best of friends. He is my mentor, my guide. He is just one of the stalwarts of my life.

IH: O.K., so you had an early mentor in your career?

MDB: Yes. Let me just tell you about the kind of guy Julius Becton was. Not only did he teach and showed that he cared, he was an example of what a leader should be like. On active duty, all the while he was on active duty, there were times when he would come in and a guy would say, "Hey, how do you know Colonel Becton?" or "How do you know General Becton?" I said, "What do you mean how do I know him?" He would always check and see how his boys were doing. And out of my class and under him, you know, we had two guys who came up under him that ended up being lieutenant generals - that was me and Cal Wallace. And, you know, a lot of that had to do with Becton. He caused Cal to change branches from chemical corps to armor. He tried to get me but I was already onto bigger things in the ordinance corps. But he took care of us from the days we were a cadet until right through our entire career and even after that. He was responsible for me getting on one of the boards that I sit, corporate boards that I sit on today. I mean, that is the kind of guy he was. He was one of my military guys. I had a good relationship with PMS&T, Colonel Wright, but Becton was the guy who made the difference.

Over in the biology department . . . I was biology major . . . the chairman of the department, I was very fond of him and I think that he cared a lot about me, was Mr. Mickler. He was chairman of the biology department and still, Dr. Martin is still down at Prairie View. He was one of the mentors that kind of looked out for me as I followed my academic studies - he and Dr. Collins who, when I got ready to go to graduate school, I came back down and went down to Prairie View and talked to them and got advice for them. I still hold Dr. Martin in high esteem along with a lady by the name of Ms. Frankie Ledbetter. She is still down at Prairie View. She was one of my English teachers.

The other guy who is now dead, who probably influenced me morally as much as anybody else was the dean of the chapel, Leesie Phillips. I used to help him run the chapel program and the vesper program in the evening. He kind of guided me, took me under his wings, so I had a lot of help.

IH: Do you feel that graduating from an HBCU gave you something that you could not have gained at a traditionally white ROTC program?

MDB: Oh, yes. You know, the difference is that when you go to a majority university or a large university, most times, you know, you get it or you do not. They do not care. It might be that way in smaller universities. I have not had that experience. But during the core reviews . . . you just heard me mention a lot of folks . . . well, you know, you had that kind of relationship and I could just go on and name other folks who helped but I was on the debate team, and Mr. Woods who . . . I was president of freshman class and he

helped me. So, there were a lot of folks in the south that I got to know. And then, there were folks, students, you know. . . . Now, we have made lifelong friends and that bond that we established at Prairie View, you know, I am not sure I can establish that anywhere else in the majority (inaudible) _____. It was a close-knit ROTC group. The (inaudible) _____ blades, the Persian rifles. We had a camaraderie and bond that still exists today that we developed during those formative years at Prairie View.

IH: O.K. Before you graduated from ROTC, do you recall any of your instructors trying to maybe give you pointers or advice on going into a white man's army, even though desegregation had already happened?

MDB: Oh, yes. I still remember some of the advice he told us. He said, "Listen, when you guys get in the Army and you get into your unit, don't you all just get all congregated there and all you do is talk to black folks. You know, if there are only 3 of you, all of you just huddling together. Spread yourself out. Talk to everyone." I still remember that advice. He tried to tell us what it was like, you know, and how we should carry ourselves. He talked about integrity. He talked about honesty. He talked about the kind of things that would keep you from getting tripped up. He talked about financial responsibility. You know, one of the things for a while there at Prairie View before me, we had a problem with young . . . well, it might have even been, to a lesser extent when I came in but guys were going into the basic corps and a lot of them were flunking out. What was happening to them?...They would go in and it was the first real money they had. They would buy a car and not apply themselves. We talked about how you should

keep checkbooks and handle your finances so that you could get through, how you should deal with your fellow officers.

IH: Can you talk about your first assignment out of Prairie View and what that was like?

MDB: My first assignment, I was assigned to the 3rd Armory Calvary regiment of Fort Meade, Maryland.

IH: Now, were you a distinguished military graduate?

MDB: Yes.

IH: O.K., so you had a regular Army commission then?

MDB: Yes, but I was accepted when I graduated college. I was not 21 so I had to wait until I was 21 before I was accepted. I was not sure I was being accepted until. . . I had never planned to make an Army degree. I was going to medical school.

IH: Wow that is amazing!

MDB: That is another story. My first assignment was Fort Meade, Maryland. When I got to Fort Meade, there were two black officers at Fort Meade, Maryland: one was in the

regiment, he was a captain, Captain Lipscomb, and there was another lieutenant who was over on the fourth post who we did not have much to do because at that time, you know, we were calves so we just felt that nobody else in the Army was equal to us in those particular headquarters. That was the way we felt. So, I was thrown into a post where I did not have any choice except to get along with whites because, heck, I was the only one there. Later on, right after . . . when I came on active duty, they did not send us to the basic course first. They tried an experiment. They sent us on to a unit and then gave us 3 months in the unit and then sent us to the basic corps. So, by the time I got back from the basic corps at Fort Knox and got there, there was another black officer from Sam U who was there. He was over at the Intelligence Agency which is NASA now. There were never more than 3 black officers at Fort Meade during the whole time I was there.

IH: Now, do you feel that was better to get acclimated at the unit first, then go to the basic course.

MDB: I do not know whether it made a difference or not, you know, because they flew us in, we went to the field. It did not particularly help me one way or the other. But I guess I knew where I was coming after the course. I knew a little bit about the Army. I did not know whether it was particularly helpful or not.

IH: Now, coming from an HBCU that is all black, in your first weeks of going to the regular Army, was it challenging for you to be thrust into pretty much an all white environment?

MDB: Well, you know, at that stage, I had gone through summer camp and we had cadets from Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, from the University of Texas and all that, so we had whites there and blacks. So, you know, I got immersed with them and we dealt with them when we were in summer camps. And then, there was never any doubt in my mind that I could compete with them. I felt that I was good as any. I never thought about it. I guess in a way, it probably was a good thing because it forced me to interact with them. Now, it kind of made for sort of a lonely social life because, you know, on Friday nights, you go to the club. At that time, they would go to the club after we worked on Friday nights to happy hour. Then, they would sit around. A lot of these guys would go out on dates and all that. Or if they had something back at the club, there was nobody there but me and, you know, you had to go to Baltimore or Washington to find a date. So, it was not the best but on the other hand, I did not socialize that much on post. On the weekends, we were gone. It was close enough to Washington, close enough to Baltimore so, you know we would go out and do that. But so far as unit functions and all that, generally, I can only remember once taking a date to a unit function. All the other times, I went by myself.

IH: O.K., now in the junior officer stages of your career, do you remember dealing with any whites that had a problem with taking orders from a black commander or anything like that?

MDB: As a platoon leader, on my first assignment, there was a private in my company who was from Georgia but, you know, it was a good thing. He did not like . . . It was

obvious to me he did not like me to tell him something but he would work his butt off so I would not have to say anything to him. He was one of our model soldiers. Now, there were quite a few black sergeants in there. I probably developed closer relationships with a lot of the black sergeants who would give me advice. "Lieutenant, you ought to do this or do that," you know. That is the only time that I remember that I had anybody who even acted like they did not want to take orders from me. I had to fight with the tool sergeant. We had a good relationship and I did not have any problems from that standpoint.

Now, where I did have a problem . . . discrimination is subtle. I remember that at the inaugural parade for John F. Kennedy, they said that the platoon that would be picked to go be in that parade (inaudible) _____ was going to be based upon how they performed and our tasks during that summer. Well, I came in first. My platoon came in first but I was not picked. Nobody ever said, but I was not picked to lead it. A guy who had second platoon (inaudible) ____ because our company was head and shoulders above all the rest of them in the squadron, the guy who had the first platoon and he was a pretty good friend of mine, Jordan, his platoon was picked to be in the inaugural parade. You know, was that because of race? I really think so. But do I know? I do not know. You know, I took the tact that says you have got to hit me over the head before I call it discrimination, do you know what I mean?

IH: Yes, I see.

MDB: But yes. I had one other incident that occurred. We were picked to go to Baltimore to put on some kind of show, demonstration on the 4th of July for Elks or some such organization. I do not remember what it was. We went out and demonstrated and all that stuff. After that, at night, I did the, "All you soldiers come on down," and they were going to treat us for dinner and so on. Well, you know, I felt very, very uncomfortable because it was all white folks. I was the black lieutenant in charge and, you know, I was with all these Elks, white - I cannot say I was discriminated against but I sure did feel very, very uncomfortable.

IH: You sensed something?

MDB: Oh, yes. But that was not from the unit. That was from the folks who were there. I was saying, well, they picked me to do this. I do not know why they would pick me to lead these folks down there. So, I supposed it had something to do with the fairness of it, I do not know. That incident and there was one other incident in my first unit, first station I had, and this one was completely off duty. It had nothing to do with the unit. I am not even sure this guy was in the military. My friend, Carl Vono ended up being Chief Staff of the Army, he was a battery commander with the artillery battery in the 3rd (inaudible) _____ and he got married. And, of course, we shared the same barracks. So, I was at his wedding, you know, and afterwards when you fixed up the car, I was one of the guys who colored the windows and all that sort of stuff. You know how you do that at weddings. So, he had asked me because I knew him and his wife, he had asked me if I would take one of the bridesmaids back home who lived - she was staying at the

University of Maryland - a bunch of the gifts that were left at the reception. I said yes. So, we were at the reception having a good time in the club, you know, and having a few cocktails, just having a good time. Well, it was getting late. His wedding was up in the day (inaudible) _____. I went over and told the girl "I have to go." This guy she was talking to said, "She ain't going anywhere with you nigger," or something like that. And before I knew it, man, I popped that guy right in the club. Of course, Monday morning, I was up seeing the (inaudible) _____ army commander [hoping] that nothing came of it (inaudible) _____. But other than that, you know, I did not have any big problems.

IH: The last one was pretty exciting. Wow, you had to see the Fifth Army Commander? I will bet that was interesting.

MDB: Yes, he came in and he said, "You are supposed to be conducting yourselves as officers and you don't do that stuff, you know, hit a guy in the club and all that stuff." I told him what happened. He chewed me out because my conduct was not my officer conduct but nothing else. He could have court marshaled me but he just gave me a good ass chewing and sent me on my way.

IH: So, I guess staying in that time period, you know, 1961 and things like that, what was it like being a black officer in the military during the Civil Rights Movement with all that racial tension and all the talk about, in truth, that as African Americans, we were facing so much social and political inequality in this country? What was that like then?

MDB: Well, you know, my emotions go all over the place. I would tell you that I was driving with my wife and young son when they were rioting because (inaudible) _____ was going to be admitted to the University of Mississippi. I was driving through Mississippi at that time. And you don't think that was kind of tense stopping to get gas, you know?

IH: Yes.

MDB: You know, you look back at it now; I guess you did not think about it as much when you were going through it. Driving from Texas to Maryland and Washington, D.C., you could make your stops. I could drive from Beaumont to Burkville to Birmingham, Alabama because the A.G. Gaston Motel was there and that was a decent place to stay. Or you could go to Atlanta and stay there. They had an inn right there. Or if you did not go to Atlanta, you could go into Bristol, Tennessee. There was a little place there. Otherwise, I mean, you took your chances about where you were stopping. When we would leave, it was always pack up the big lunch, fry the chicken, have the big lunches because, you know, where you could stop and eat was limited unless you wanted to be degraded. So, we knew how to cope with that.

When I was at Fort Meade . . . I forgot about that until you mentioned it . . . we were going down to the field. You could not train at Fort Meade; you had to go down to Camp AP Hill in Virginia which was a 2-3 hour drive from Fort Meade. And all of these young guys, lieutenants, just like me, we were down there - had not been to the basic course so we were driving down there and I was riding with one of the guys. I did not

have a car. And they decided they wanted to stop. Well, you know, Virginia and Maryland were segregated at that time and I do not know whether anybody ever thought about it when I was with them but I went in just with the rest of them, you know. Of course, they politely told us that they could not serve me. Well, there must have been 30, 40 lieutenants there. They all just got up and said . . . a lot of them had ordered because they were bringing that stuff out . . . "If you can't serve him, you will not serve us." We all left. I mean, that made a profound impact on me about the Army, that here are guys just out of college . . . I do not know how many southerners there were. Most of them that were coming up at Fort Meade, a lot of them were from the Academy and a lot were from northern universities and all, but that made an impact on me, that they would take that kind of stand. Not one of them (inaudible) _____, not one. So, again, you are faced with that. That was at Fort Meade.

The second assignment in the Army was at Fort McCullen, Alabama. Boy, what a change.

IH: The Deep South.

MDB: What a change. Driving in to Fort McCullen, Alabama, there was a sign outside of the back gate, a great big . . . they said, I do not know, that the service station was owned by the grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan but there was a great big sign up there that said "We Don't Serve Niggers." This was right outside the gate. That was where you saw all of the separate water fountains, black and white. You know, you would go downtown to the store, if you wanted to try on clothes, they would not let you try on

clothes. They would not let the women try on a hat or something like that. So, I was commander down there. I remember this. If your troops got in trouble, they would throw them in jail or something like that. This was a redneck (inaudible) _____ because we had the classic store and alcohol _(inaudible) _____ I think that Anderson was probably dry at that time but these guys would wait on the soldiers to come off post and all that. If they would get in trouble, they would put them in jail. But commanders would have to go down and pick them up. So, one Friday night, one of my white soldiers got in trouble. They picked him up. So, I went out to release him. They told me, "We are not going to release no white man to you. You go get one of them white officers to come down here." I said, "Well, you just leave him in jail until you can release him on his own because I am not going to send nobody down. You release him to me or not." To make a long story short, he stayed in jail all weekend because, you know, I just refused to do that.

Then I found out that one of the commanders down there. . post commander, chemical school commander, all these guys, were old, they were going to retire and they were looking to be the mayor and be in the town so they were in cahoots with all these guys. So, on post, it was O.K. but boy, it was pretty tough off post. That was in 1962, 1961, when I was there. It was pretty rough down there.

IH: It sounds like it.

MBD: Yes. And, again, on post, you know, when I got there, they had just had all of the Mother's Day fiasco down there where they got on in and rocked that bus and they beat

up folks down there and, at that time, the Army was having the race relation guys . . . we were beginning to show our rebellion, I guess. The Army was trying but in a way, some of it was insightful, a lot of it was better, you know, because the troops were getting out of control. The Army was trying, in its wisdom, to do better with race relations officers and guys . . . [end of side 1]

MDB: . . . for the plight of the black soldiers and how they were treated on and off post.

IH: When a lot of this was going on, did you ever ask yourself, why am I wearing the uniform when we do not have equal civil rights? Did that thought ever cross your mind?

MDB: No.

IH: Did you look at it like I can help change the system from the inside?

MDB: Well, there were two aspects of that. One, I always felt that the Army was way ahead of our civilian society, and there were opportunities available in the Army that (inaudible) _____ that will change. So, I guess from that standpoint, it never occurred to me (inaudible) _____ say we did not have that because change was coming. You could see it. Change was coming. I mean, it was coming tough but change was coming. I mean, I marched in a march when I was a student at Iowa State. I was on active duty but I was called more to be concerned about the treatment of soldiers coming back from Vietnam (inaudible) ___ than what was going on in society as a whole because I thought

that we were going to make it and things were going to change and yes, we had our battles to fight but that was never the thing that got me to serve in the beginning and I said that was just going to be better for all people.

IH: O.K., now, when the Black Power Movement came on the scene in the mid and late 1960s, what were your feelings about that? Huey Newton, Eldridge Cleaver?

MDB: Yes, well, I was pretty much a disciple of Martin Luther King. I believed in that progress was made through non-violence and not for the (inaudible) _____ Browns and those kind of guys. You know, in retrospect, they probably did good but I preferred more to do it without the violence. I think the Black is Proud movement, you know, that work, I did not particularly ascribe to some of the tactics that they used. For example, what was the situation in Mexico (1968 Olympics)? (inaudible) _____ to give the Black Power salute? No, I did not like that. I thought that we could work within the system because I believed that we could change the system better by working within the system versus exterior businesses. At the end of that phase, towards the end of that phase, when the Army was an undisciplined Army, we were coming out of Vietnam in the throes of Vietnam, race problems and all that, I was sent to . . . well, first of all, I was asked to go to (inaudible) _____ over in Germany. They were having all those problems. When I finally got to Germany which was to take over a battalion in 1974, you know, it was getting better but it was still tough and we had a lot to clean up to get discipline back in. People still wanted to wear the big Afros and the black (inaudible) _____ arm bands and dapping and all that stuff (inaudible) _____ to get control back there. A lot of that I

did not think was necessary, did not contribute anything and in some instances, I think that some of the race relations guys were kind of misguided in trying, whereas, a 4 minute dissent versus getting (inaudible) _____ and discipline there so, you know, you can express yourself without being undisciplined, O.K.?

I will just tell you as a young battalion commander, I went to Germany. My first day on the post or that weekend before I took command, all the black soldiers in the battalion, they had had a sit-in out on the parade field. I took command that afternoon and after the ceremony, I went back in the office, started to set up my desk and all that sort of stuff, and I had this young soldier come in and tell me, he said, "I am your Black Power guy here." In other words, I needed to go through him. Well, he did not know I came from the cuts, too. I told him, "Well, let me just tell you what - since you are now, anything that happens down here, I am going to hold you responsible and you are going to be the first one whose ass I put in jail." And I did not say it quite like that. Well, you know, I cleaned up that outfit and then I went up to a remote unit that was up in Vilseck, Germany. Vilseck, if you do not know it, it is where they support all of the training for all of the forces in Europe. It is a (inaudible) _____ training area.

IH: What year was this, General?

MDB: This was in 1974. At that time, NCOs were scared to go in the barracks. They would not go in any of the barracks. Black Power guys, they were running gangs up there. So, they were going in slashing the commander's tires, just intimidating everybody. Well, one night, I was up there and I said, "Yes, we are going to go in," but I put a 45 on my belt, loaded it, and we went in the barracks. At that time, there was drug

use, guys were coming into the ammunitions dump and they were getting ammunition and their supply of drugs to take over to the training area and my guys were doing it. So, one night, I remember I was back in (inaudible) _____ which was 4 or 5 hours away from Grafenwoehr where the company was. I relieved the company commander, put in a gun. The company commander up there had to have protection for him because his life was threatened. These guys, they were charging interest to go into the PX snack bar. They slammed the post commander up against the wall, they did not know who he was. He was a white guy. I went up there, I mean, the ammunition port was a disaster, the soldiers were a disaster, so we had to clean that up to get some discipline back. This was a time when rapping was there. Soldiers would get on the sidewalk and they would be rapping. You can rap all you want to as long as you do not block the passageway. You are infringing on the rights of other folks. They were going in the dining hall and you could hear the rapping going on. Well, you know, we did get some discipline back. So, that was the hectic days when I was in command and this was . . . we were just getting the Army back under control to get some discipline back there. And drugs were rampant. And race issues were rampant. So, yes, those were some tough days.

IH: It sounds like it. So, you were lieutenant colonel during this time?

MDB: Yes.

IH: You had the black soldiers giving you the Black Power salute ?

MDB: Oh, yes. Well, when I first got there, (inaudible) _____. They had been running rampant. I guess they scared the white battalion commanders (inaudible) _____ nobody had control of them. And I said, "No way." Guys told me they were going to sit down because they did not like what I was doing, I said, "Well, O.K., come on, you are going to go with me." I took them (inaudible) _____ out there 20 miles out and dropped them off. I said, “Now, when we get back" . . . they were so tired, they did not want to do nothing else. They said, "You don't have to use those techniques like that." They were going to use me, just because I was black, I think. But then, I would go to gym, I'd play ball with them and all that stuff, so they respect me. But they knew I would throw their butts in jail. But again, it just required some leadership. You had folks, well, they did not know what to do. They did not know what the standings were. So anyway, that was my worst tenure ever as commander, was during those days. Drugs were rampant, race was rampant, and discipline was nonexistent. The year before that, before I was there, I was in Washington at the Pentagon. So, you know, I was not in the middle of it there. I left Fort McCullen and went to the Pentagon.

IH: What was your assignment at the Pentagon?

MDB: I was staff officer over in, first, the chemical division, and then I was there in logistics.

IH: O.K., now what year did you go to Vietnam?

MDB: I was in Vietnam in 1963.

IH: O.K., so you are starting to heat up then, I guess?

MDB: Yes. Actually, I was an advisor. They thought we were going to come out so they were letting people go early. When I got there, we had 20,000 troops and it was shortly after that it built up. So, I was there early.

IH: So, you did not see much of the same type of racial tension you saw in Germany?

MDB: I had black soldiers, you know, but there were not that many. There were officers. There were _(inaudible) _____ officers.

IH: Now, during around after 1967, between 1967 and 1974, I think you mentioned something about Tommy Smith and the Mexico Olympics, but what was your opinion about Muhammad Ali during that time?

MDB: I guess at the time, when he said he refused to go, I did not agree with him. I did not. You know, he was famous. It is not that I disliked him but I did not particularly agree with his position. But, you know, I guess after I came back from Vietnam and I began to see the discord in Vietnam and how that war was still being run and all, I guess, in retrospect, I guess I could appreciate his stand because I guess I found it was . . . in

retrospect, I guess I thought it was a legitimate, valid concern of his, not that I particularly . . . I did not agree with him at times, but I always said that was his right.

IH: Now, concerning Vietnam, in retrospect, what was your opinion on the Vietnam war or your feelings? I mean, do you feel we should have been there, do you feel that we were really trying to stop communism from making its way to San Diego, as one colonel mentioned in some book I read?

MDB: Yes, I guess I did not know enough not to know that. They espoused the domino theory; you know, if we do not stop it here, that will happen. Yes, I guess I believed that. What I did not like about that was I felt, as I still feel today, that you cannot fight a war with one hand tied behind your back. If you are going to fight a war, you ought to be sure that you understand what your objectives are and then go all out to win them. And I believe to this day that two things happened in Vietnam: they did not have a clear objective, and we tried to fight a war and still have a good time. I mean, just from the standpoint of tour of duty, I mean, we did not call up reserves; we were drafting folks, taking all of these young kids out. Well, nobody was feeling the pain back here other than they were losing all these young soldiers. They were looking out for the draft to do that. And I do not think that we went in fully to win the war. And then, it was not clear what the hell we were trying to do. So, when you say win the war, what is win? We never knew. No wonder the American people got fed up with it.

IH: O.K., moving on to the promotion system and OERs, which is one of my favorite things to talk about because there is so little written about it, during the Vietnam era, well, lets just say from 1958 to 1973, do you feel that the officer promotion system was fair?

MDB: It was biased. And I think the Army that is why they put controls in over it because black officers did not get a fair shake, O.K.? Well, first of all, I hate to generalize like this but a lot of your officers came from the South. Not all of it was fair. And because a guy was black, they did not give him his just due. So, they got bit by a lot of their reports. If you did not know, and a lot of black officers did not know when they were getting fooled . . . they would look at some of the words, you know, and they would see the numbers - they thought they were doing O.K. And they were getting screwed. They did not know that. You know, they thought it was O.K. and so when they would come up for promotion, they would not get promoted. Well, you know, look what happened when they changed the ground rules and the instructions to the promotions board. That is when we started getting black officers promoted to higher positions. No, it was not fair. I think D.R. Butler, the study that he did, had a big impact on it.

IH: O.K., now what do you remember about that study when it came out? This would have been 1971, 1972.

MDB: Well, I think he just pointed out, you know, the inequity within the system and I think that that was well-known and accepted that they were inequities and it was a

scholarly study that was done, that was documented. I think that that helped influence the change in the system.

IH: Speaking about the OERs, tell me what do you think were the big problems with the OER?

MDB: Well, first of all, there was a problem with the OERs with inflation. It had nothing to do with race - it was just inflation. You know, officers tend to rate folks higher and then all of a sudden, everybody was getting top scores because, you know, you did not want them to (inaudible) _____ and say, hey, you are not doing it, right? So then, you look at the words. They changed OERs so many times. I do not remember how many times they changed it, trying to make it equitable and get it rebalanced. And every time they would rebalance it, the next thing you know, it was right back to where it was. So, what you had to do was essentially know the code words to get folks promoted because everybody was getting the high numbers and if you were not attuned to what was happening, then you got shafted.

IH: Can you talk about some of those code words, some that you remember?

MDB: Yes, you had to have some that said this is the greatest officer that ever walked things like that. Promote him now. Things that moral folks did not do. Do you know what I mean?

IH: Yes, sir, I do.

MDB: So, I mean, it was that kind of stuff. So, you know, you say, hey, you did not put in there promote this guy now, or if he was a good officer, you would say he takes care of his troops. Sounds good, right? But you did not say, hey, promote this guy now, promote him ahead of his peers. It has been a long time now since I have done this. This guy walks on water. That kind of stuff. So, you can just say, hey, this guy took care of his troops. He did a great job. He is one of my stalwart officers. All those are good words, right? It did not say that he was the best in my battalion, he was general officer material, he was ready to be promoted now. Do you see the difference?

IH: O.K. Did you know Colonel Giles Daniels?

MDB: Yes.

IH: I interviewed him a few years ago before he passed away, doing my masters work. He said, well, sometimes on the OER, you get a comment like you were saying but it was faint praise, like so and so is my best black officer and for me, I was pretty ignorant, I said, "Oh, O.K., that is not bad." But he told me, he said, "No, that kind of sinks your ship. That just tells them you are not as good as any of my white officers."

MDB: That is right.

IH: Did you ever have anything like that happen to you when you were a junior officer?

MDB: You know, I look back over my efficiency reports . . . my first efficiency report, it was O.K. It was not great, it was O.K., but I did not know enough to not know that. And I do not know whether the guy was doing . . . I did not have the hindsight . . . I do not know how he rated his white officers but I know that I was his best officer in this company, right? And then, when I look back at it, I just did not know at that time. But let's put it this way: it got me promoted to captain, all right, and then after that, I got promoted below the zone, so I got good efficiency reports but I understood the code words, too.

Let me just tell you - while the efficiency reports were important to get there so that you has level playing ground, the biggest difference is when you could get representation on the board. And then, you had somebody who was pushing you on the board - whether it was a black officer. Andy Chambers was one of the best at that. He worked the boards. He knew how to work them. He could get folks promoted. I sat on boards and I said, "Wait, you know why I am here. Wait a minute, let's go back and look at this." So, that is how you got people promoted. Yes, they had to have some kind of . . . you cannot have derogatory information in there but stealing . . . if the reports were not there because then the Army came out and said, "Yes, they were by before that and you have got to overlook some of that." So, that gave you the authority on the board to make these things happen. Do you see what I mean? If you really want to know the truth, that had as much an impact. You had to have the Army come out and say, yes . . .

acknowledge that there was a problem with them before and these guys did not get it because they would say, "Well, look at his efficiency report," and you just knock him off. He said, "Ah, ha, yes, but look at this and then you can get the folks in." It was very important to have somebody on that board who knew you.

IH: Now, the OERs, they were once a year or once every six months you got one?

MDB: Usually, you would get an annual OER or if you changed jobs, you got an OER. If you left, there was an OER. So, yes, you got one annually or upon change of job, so it was usually more frequently than annually.

IH: O.K. Now, in Butler's study, he has given me the entire study. It has taken me several months to actually understand everything in it and I still do not understand everything, but he spent hours and hours with me on recorded conversations of how to read the information that he put together. His study showed that the vast majority of black officers, thinking at the rank of major when it is the turning point of an officer's career, were other than regular Army, something like under 47% versus for white officers, they were way over 71%. So do you think that that had a huge impact on this? He predicted there would be a shortage of black officers in the future. Do you think that had a lot to do with it?

MDB: Well, there was a bias looking at regular Army officers. When a guy said, "I am regular Army," you said immediately he was a lifer. Guys who were U.S. either by their

choice or they elected not to do . . . I mean, there was not any reason if he was going to stay to just not have been regular Army officer. Now, it was tougher at the time period. If the Army was going to the draw down, well, yes, it was tougher to do that but it is even harder to riff regular Army officers when he first started out and maybe after Vietnam.

IH: Oh, now I know about the OERs. I think it was 67-6 and -5. This is the mid 1960s and late 1960s. I had read that, again, they were not in the habit of showing officers their actual scores and everything. Do you feel that that caused a lot of problems? Did that puzzle you why you could not see your scores?

MDB: I always saw my scores. One piece of advice I got was, "Hey, one of the things you should do is periodically go look at what is in your record in Washington. But no, I always got a copy of my score. I am sure that there were some that did not do that but I think mostly when I was coming along, officers really got their report because you were supposed to show it to them. In fact, you were supposed to sit down and counsel the guy. Maybe some of them did not but no, I got a copy of every efficiency report that was ever written on me.

IH: O.K. Shifting gears to, I guess, your transition from lieutenant colonel to colonel to when you put on your first star, what were some of the strategies you developed to become an effective leader or the ones that you tried to impress upon your subordinates about being successful in the military?

MDB: Well, you know, first of all, I used to tell lieutenants "Hey, listen, we don't need you to try to figure out how to be a general. What you need to do is figure out how the hell you are going to be the best lieutenant so you can make captain, and how you do that is no job is better than the job that you have and the performance that you do in that job." I said, "Hey, there are basic things that I used, I use in speeches even today. The first requirement is you have got to know your job. You are to be the best - to know how to do your job better than anybody else because if you do not know to do your job and do it well, all the rest of the stuff is not going to make any difference." And that is number one. Secondly is you ought to be able to communicate both orally and written communication if it is effective. And I am not necessarily talking about (inaudible) _____ but you need to be able to communicate so that you can impart what it is that you want done so that people understand it. And, oh, by the way, good English is always nice and it will help you. It is an asset. Bad English will pull you down. So, communication is key and that is both listening to verbal body language - you had to be able to read that because sometimes your boss is telling you something and you have got to read the body language or if you are talking to your subordinates and they are telling you something, you have got to be able to read body language as well. You ought to be able to tell it like it is. And that means you ought to be tactful, but you ought to be candid in telling it like it is. And I said, "Candid brings courage." And I do not mean courageous like bravery on the battle field but having the courage to tell it like it is and to do the right thing. And finally, commitment. If you know your job, you can communicate and you have got the courage you are a professional. Professionals do what it takes, and you are committed to it. If it takes 24 hours, 48 hours or whatever it

is, you ought to be committed until you get it done right. And I said, "That is what makes leaders and that is how you will get ahead." I believe that. I live by that. I tell all that. Now, you know, it works in life as well.

IH: That is excellent. We are almost finished here. From your experience, what were the biggest problems in the military in relation to being a person of color?

MDB: Well, you know, I guess people look at you first . . . the first thing they see is the color and then they have to go on from there. You know, the (inaudible) _____ of our history says that we came through segregation, (inaudible) _____ discrimination and all that. And yes, maybe some of those still linger and you are not immediately given . . . you are looked upon as your brother (inaudible) _____ initially that hey, you are the guy in charge, you know what you are doing and all that until you prove that you know what you are doing. That is subtle but (inaudible) _____. I never looked at my race as a handicap for me. As a matter of fact, I think it helped me in many ways after the initial period because I just made it a point that you have to almost hit me across the head with a 2x4 before I would cry racial discrimination. I always tried to move beyond that because it is a lot of wasted energy surrounded by people crying racism or race or color or whatever. I elected to put my energies elsewhere. Now, when I found it, I acted decisively on it and did stuff about it but I did not linger on it as many people use it . . . oh yes, that was because of race. Am I making sense to you?

IH: Yes, sir.

MDB: So, I tried not to focus on that but focus on it is above that and I am going despite that. And I attribute that to my success, that, you know, I did not dwell. Now, it was when I found it, I was brutal. I relieved guys who it was clear to me that they were not being fair. But I would not give an unfair advantage to a black guy over a white guy. I mean, I felt that you had to be fair and equal but I wanted to be sure that they could compete and understood that. I would mentor them and try to get them and I think that that worked in the long term.

IH: Excellent. 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, in your opinion?

MDB: Well, I do not know whether it not written about but, you know, there are many, many African Americans that made a great contribution to America and to the military (inaudible) _____ and a lot of those (inaudible) _____ but we should never, ever (inaudible) _____ during that period of time. I think the conflict that soldiers felt during Vietnam when there was racial turmoil, there was anti-Vietnam, all of that - I do not know whether that has really been treated. If anything that I am aware of is the conflict that goes on in a person when they are faced with that. (Inaudible) _____ because all folks did not feel like I did. There were folks who came from the innercity and they knew what they were faced with back at home or out of the sharecropper fields in the Deep South who had faced discrimination on a day-to-day

basis. Yes, the military service gave them an opportunity to rise above that but then the conflict that you had when you know that you have loved ones back there who (inaudible) _____ and all of this is going on at that time. I am not aware of anything that has dealt with (inaudible)_____ you see all of the Vietnam stories and all of that - they talk about the atrocities and all that but nowhere is it dealt with . . . what goes on in the mind and heart of a man who is out giving his life where he feels discriminated and he comes back and he is spit on, because he was in Vietnam and then was doubly . . . it was not nearly as bad as some of the guys who came back from World War II.

IH: O.K. One last thing I wanted to ask you about. What year did you get out of the service?

MDB: I retired in 1992. Just shy of 33 years. Just a few days shy of 33 years.

IH: That is a long time. That is impressive.

MDB: Yes, that is a long time for a guy that never planned to stay in.

IH: What year did you go to Command General Staff College? I meant to ask you that earlier.

MDB: I went there in 1969/1970, I think.

IH: Was that a good experience for you?

MDB: Oh, yes. That is one of the tickets you have got to get punched. You have got to go to Command General Staff College; you have got to go to Army War College. Those are prerequisites for advancement. So, yes, it was a good time. I always knew my time was valuable. I worked awful hard but I used time to improve, to recharge my batteries and get involved in family life again and spend time with the family because they pay a price when you are gone all the time, working all the time and all that sort of stuff. So, my time at Leavenworth, my objective was that I wanted to always finish in the top 10%. I did, in every class, every school I went to, but on the other hand, I was not busting my can to be number one in the class like some guys were. As long as I was in the top 10%. If you are in the top 20%, you are all right. Inaudible) _____ and that was a good time for us. We had a great time out at Leavenworth. We developed bonds and friendships with folks there and again in Carlisle.

IH: What year did you put on your first star?

MDB: 1984.

IH: And then, the second star?

MDB: Three years later, 1987.

IH: And then, the third star?

MDB: June 11, 1990.

IH: Man that is fantastic! It is an honor to talk with you, General. I mean, I have to admit I don't get to talk to many three star generals so that is an amazing achievement. I am going to stop the tape recorder now.