

Interviewer: Alright Mr. Brown before I begin I'd like to say thank you on behalf of Dr. Zieren and myself for letting me conduct this interview with you. Just to let you know the tape will be documented and transcribed to a hard copy for future generations to look at so they will know the history of the unit you were involved with as well as the Korean War and just the history about yourself. At any time during this interview if there is something you don't want to answer I understand you can tell me that and we will find another question find a new subject. Feel free to give me any information any stories that you find humorous anything that you want to share I'd be more than happy to get. First of all I'd like to start off with a little background information. Can you please just tell us your name, where you were born and your date of birth and all?

Brown: My name is Sidney R Brown and I was born July 24th 1931 in Birmingham Alabama. I grew up in Birmingham went to school there completed high school and my mother and father. And after I completed high school I decided I wanted to join the military that was what I wanted. So I signed up for airborne school before the Korean War started.

Interviewer: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Brown: I have one brother and one sister. My brother went in Korea too but got out of the military he didn't stay in. And they are all living today they both live in Atlanta Georgia.

Interviewer: What did your parents do?

Brown: Well my parents was extremely poor. We lived in a black ghetto in Birmingham and my daddy worked at WPA which was a Federal Government program in the 30s. He worked there and then in 1941 when the war started he got a job in a bakery in February this is 41 he got a job in a bakery and he worked there until he was able to work. And then he sort of retired later when he got a little bit older and then he just sort of done little odd medial jobs around folks homes.

Interviewer: And your mother she was a homemaker?

Brown: My mother was a homemaker.

Interviewer: What was the highest education level that your parents had obtained or do you know?

Brown: Well if you're talking about a formal education it was very little. But if you're talking about common sense and the ability to motivate and the ability to keep two boys and a girl straight not to get in trouble not to never go to jail or have a problem coming up they was a genius. Because there were very few black kids in my community that didn't go to the jail or get in trouble prior to being 13 or 14 years old.

Interviewer: Was there anybody in your family aunts, uncles, cousins that were in the military?

Brown: I had an uncle that served in World War I. He was went to France he fought in a black unit over there with the French then in World War I. But I'm the first in World War II or after World War II to be in the military.

Interviewer: What led you to believe you wanted a life in the military?

Brown: Well basically it was an opportunity. I saw an opportunity to better myself you know and the military offered that. Like many blacks I couldn't find a job, jobs were scarce, I decided to try the military. Of course we had the, Fort Benning Georgia wasn't too far away, and we had the black paratroopers coming to Birmingham in 47, 48, 49 from Fort Benning on a weekend pass. And these guys impressed me you know the way they carried themselves the way they dressed the attention people gave them. So I decided that's what I wanted to be.

Interviewer: So you said you enlisted shortly after World War II or in 1950 you enlisted.

Brown: Before the Korean War. The Korean War started in July 1950 June 1950 and I enlisted in August. I signed up in Birmingham I signed up in an all priority time but I signed up about May. But for some strange reason I wanted to stay home for my birthday July 24th and the recruiter told me he would do that but you know I had to wait for that to go into the military. So I got all the paper work signed took all the test and was ready to go really in June. But I got to do the delayed entry program you signed up in July you could go the next July if you want to.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: And that's what I done.

Interviewer: And you went to Fort Benning?

Brown: I went to Fort Knox Kentucky.

Interviewer: Fort Knox

Brown: Yeah Fort Knox Kentucky was segregated. We had I took basic training in Battery C with the 54th field artillery battalion. And we had two black batteries and two white batteries if I remember correctly or three white batteries and one black battery. Of course with the Korean War going on this whole unit I worked with went to Korea except the ones who had volunteered for jump school. They volunteered to come in army airborne unassigned which I did. And out of that whole company there was about three of us that me and a fellow by the name of Harrison Broomfield who is from ___ Mississippi came here together in October of 50. And the guys in the 505 Triple Nickel was here as cadre and that's all that come in here just the cadre. I was one of the first non-jumpers assigned to I Company 188 _____.

Interviewer: You told me at Fort Knox you were in a field artillery battery.

Brown: Yeah

Interviewer: Was that your MOS field artillery?

Brown: No we didn't know there. You took straight 16 weeks of basic training and basically everybody took infantry training. It was called not the battery but you know it was infantry it was still it was infantry training because of Korea. And it was troops needed in Korea so everybody they trained in the battery went to Korea as a replacement. You know they might have been in an infantry unit but they could have been in an artillery unit. But you've got both types of training artillery and infantry in the same unit because it was 16 straight weeks.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: Not like 8 weeks now, sixteen straight weeks of training.

Interviewer: Once you graduated and you left for jump school what was that like for you?

Brown: Well we stayed there from October 50 until about December 50 November 50. So those two months the black cadre and our unit got us ready for jump school. I mean we ran three or four miles in the morning prior to breakfast and we came back we had breakfast then we went out and did other things. And we done that for a total of 60 days. So when I got to jump school jump school was easy for me because I was physically ready to go and mentally ready to go. One good thing that the black units done especially black units back in those days they took care of the young soldiers. They made sure that we was ready to go to jump school and they made sure we were dressed properly they made sure that we knew how to act. They would tell us you know about the prejudice in the army they would tell us how to handle it you know and all because a lot of these guys were in World War II. And a lot of them didn't read or write. One of my first jobs was to help a lot of them sign the X on the payroll to get paid on payday. But that was still out of the army not only in the black unit but the white units too. Mostly out of the south and these guys came out of the cotton fields and came out of the rough hard times during that time to find a better way of life. And the army gave that to us.

Interviewer: You just mentioned the prejudice that was in the army at the time. What experiences did you have with the prejudice in the army? Did you notice it from the moment you entered or did it take you awhile to notice?

Brown: Well in basic training we were segregated you know we had like I said we had black units and white units. But me being from Alabama that wasn't nothing new to me that wasn't nothing new because Birmingham there wasn't a more segregated town in the United States at that particular time.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: It was strict racial line policies. I sort of got my first real experience when I went to we jumped up in Camp Drum in 1951 Operation Snow Fall. And the whole battalion I mean the whole division jumped with white parachuters. And after we left the jump was over with we had a little R&R time in Syracuse New York. I was a sergeant and I had two corporals and we had some young ladies come by and say some nice things about us white girls. Of course this whole jump group was on _____ on Syracuse New York Rochester. So I had an experience with a white a young white captain he wanted to know what we was doing up there you know and what those white girls were hollering. I just told him you know we were just walking around the street trying to find a place to go to. Of course he didn't like that and he ordered us to go back to Camp Drum.

Interviewer: Huh

Brown: Basically here at Campbell well when I first got to Fort Campbell in 1950 there was no black taxi cab drivers. And the white taxi cab drivers won't stop for the black. I got off the bus there on 26th Street and Indiana the same place the bus is at now and we was down on 11th and Indiana about 15 blocks away. And I was trying to get a taxi to help me carry my bags you know down to my company of course no body met me. So I just started walking wouldn't no taxi pick me up so I started walking from 26th Street. And I knew that's Tennessee now and Kentucky down toward 11th Street in Kentucky. And some

guy came by in a jeep after I got about half way and picked me up and took me to my company. Basically the problems we had no problem we got along pretty well. Our back door was facing one of them the 2nd battalion was all white and the 3rd battalion was all black. And our back doors faced each other and we used to get out there in the morning you know having PT and all they had their PT going to the north we had our PT going to the south. But we policed the whole area together in the morning picked up paper you know trash and stuff. And I can't think of a problem we had with the privates and we had very little contact with white NCOs. You see we had our own PX had our own barbershop had our own club I mean it was absolutely segregated you know. We had a company on about I guess nor it would be about 9th and Ohio it was called the Flamingo Club. That was a club for NCOs the poor privates didn't have nowhere to go on post. They'd go downtown they didn't have nowhere to go and the black officers didn't have nowhere to go there was no black officer's club and they wouldn't let them in the white officer's club at all. So that's the way we lived you know all of 51 and all of 52 until the army integrated in July 52. And it took you talk about a process it started in July and it took at least two years or a year and a half to complete. Because when the army first integrated they would only take blacks here who had high school diplomas. Very few had high school diplomas I was one of the fortunate ones.

Interviewer: Uh huh

Brown: I came in the army as a private in 1950 and eleven months later I was a sergeant. Well as a sergeant you've only got two more steps to go before that's as high as you can go E7 in those days. So I came in the army and within one year I had reached four grades you know and an education done that for me. So when we integrated they took us guys like me and I went to K Company 511th and I was the only black guy in the company for six months I guess or better. Then some of the guys trickled in here trickled in there and then what they did they started bringing in as new recruits came in they started going to Fort Knox for basic training. They would have a battalion training and then assign them to different companies. And when these trainees came in they came in mixed black and white together and the black and white train together and then they were assigned to other companies. And there was a job in the 511th that was when they got jobs. But prior to that I didn't stay there while they done that left that was in December 1952 and I was assigned to Headquarters Company 57th tank battalion 2nd armor division in Manheim Germany.

Interviewer: In 1952?

Brown: Yeah and over there I got involved in the same thing. Here we had started it I was one of the first black guys in Headquarters Company 57th tank battalion 2nd armor division. And of course everybody there was from Texas that was in a position it was a guard unit called to active duty and assigned to Europe. So everybody that had any kind of rank or anything was either a cousin or uncle or kin to one another.

Interviewer: Uh huh good ole boy system.

Brown: Good ole boy system. And I mean you're a paratrooper you know I didn't want to be in no tank battalion. And there was no airborne soldiers in there at that time except for they had a couple air delivery units and all that. And I was trying my best to get in one of those units but I stayed there and they sent me to Tech Commander School up in Vilsack Germany outside of Milberg. And I took over the recon section of a headquarters company platoon we had recon platoon we called it. We had two of them 24 tanks and then we had a rifle squad and we had a mortar section you know in this platoon. And they sent me to tank commander school and I took over the tank section. And I done that until just prior

to the Korean War ending and I got assigned to Korea. And the same thing over there at that time the war was just winding down I got assigned to a 96th quartermaster service company. All black and about half the company was gay and especially anybody who had any rank the company commander the first sergeant. And I stayed there for a while I didn't like that and I had a buddy down there in Pusan who was a first sergeant from my hometown he was trying to get me assigned to he was in charge of this port company. They handled the materials coming in on the ships but you know my MOS wasn't near that you know. Well it wasn't quartermaster either but I was there. But I finally got assigned to K Company 17th infantry Buffalo regiment 7th infantry division up there outside of 30th Parallel. And of course the war had just ended and all we were doing was you know finding bodies and trying to find mine fields and all that stuff you know. Trying to clean the area clean the roads and all and I left there and was assigned to come back to the states in January or December 55. And I had a bad experience in Hawaii, Hawaii was extremely prejudice in that day. But in those days you flew back if you took a seven day leave in Hawaii you flew back because coming by ship by ship it took anywhere from 20 to 30 days you know and the Pacific is rough in January and December.

Interviewer: I lived in Hawaii for three years.

Brown: Yeah so I came back there and stayed six or seven days. I didn't like Hawaii at all at that time in particular and I wanted to get back to the 11th airborne division because they were getting ready to go to Germany. But since I had just come from overseas they wouldn't send me there they sent me to Fort Benning Georgia. And I became I was assigned to B Company in the 3rd infantry. If I remember correctly in the 3rd armor I mean 3rd infantry division. That was Arthur Murphy's division I was able to get in the battalion he was in the brigade he was assigned to. Duran was the main battle then and I stayed there until January of 56 no May 56. And by that time the 11th airborne division had left Fort Campbell was gone they closed at. So I put in 1049 to come back on jump days and then by July 1957, 56 I came to Fort Campbell. And I was assigned to A Company 327 101st airborne division. And I stayed there for a while and the unit I was in we went to Little Rock for school integration. And of course we was integrated at that time but the decision was made that there wasn't no black soldiers going to the school they were going downtown to school. So they kept us in the area and requested that we not go downtown and all the white soldiers downtown with the guns and all and participated in the integration. (The telephone rang and Mr. Brown answered it)

Interviewer: Let's go back for a minute. You spoke earlier here at Fort Campbell when you got here the white barracks and the all black barracks the backdoors faced each other. Were they the same barracks or were yours different from theirs?

Brown: They were the same barracks the folks that had the white barracks was the troops that was at Fort Bragg in the late 40s early 50s. They were living in tar paper things down there at Bragg at Camp McCall. Now were talking about the difference of three years between 47 and 50.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: When I got here we had the same barracks I mean you know. What it was when they let us in the back there the barracks had been closed for a while because the 187th went to Korea in the first part of 50 and they had just vacated these barracks. So we had the same type barracks it was just if you to go 11th Street now and Tennessee they've got a shopping mall there you know. And that was L Company where that shopping mall is right now. My company was up on the next street on the corner of 11th and Indiana. I was the second barracks in the corner of 11th and Indiana and all the black soldiers was

assigned south of 11th Street. Went back down toward the officer's club and in that area all the white soldiers was assigned from 11th Street north until we were integrated. But 11th Street and south was the PX all black PX and barbershop a little snack bar. So consequently we really didn't come into contact with any white soldiers except when we had police call in the morning number one and number two is when we left to go off post. We had to go on 26th Street to get to the main gate to get off post. Now we did have once a month in those days we had a full field layout the whole division every month. Called it payday for payday for rank we called it. And we would march from 11th Street up to the area there now where the old hospital is at you know. All that now right now we've got a baseball field out there and I think there are a few more buildings. But that was all fenced it was a big field and you could put a whole division in it. So we would march up there once a month every month with a full field pack on rifle and lay out our equipment and in those days we had what we called it a pup tent. Two men had where they put together made a pup tent but you took that ___ and you laid it out square and you laid out your equipment. You know you toilet articles, your weapon, your canteen and your canteen cover and your pistol belt your training tools your steel ___ it was all laid out. And this young lead would come fly over in a helicopter and look at it or he might ride by in a jeep. And that was done every month prior to payday. We'd get together and stripe the tent you know and get all the equipment back together lay our horseshoe roll in our pack put it on our bag and march back down to 11th Street.

Interviewer: When you guys were back not doing the inspection like that it sounds similar to the inspections they still do today. You lay it out and they might come look at it but when you went

Brown: They are a lot better organized today though.

Interviewer: It's a little bit better.

Brown: Better organized.

Interviewer: When you did your training you know went to the field and things like that were you segregated in the field as well or did you integrate for training purposes?

Brown: We were segregated completely until 52. I mean we trained

Interviewer: Trained on your own?

Brown: Yeah I'll tell you what our main mission was not only my battalion but really the 188th. In 1951, 51, 52 there was something out here in this bird cage that was very important. Had to do with nuclear and this here material used to come in here to the airport same airport they got here now. And come all the way down Range Road Range Road was you know and our job was to guard Range Road when they brought this stuff in. We also pulled what they called bird cage security at this particular piece of property that was called the bird cage. And our job to guard that bird cage and we done that sometime 30, 40 days at a time. When we did it we went out there we lived in tents and we patrolled those roads you could stop but we patrolled those roads. And really we was the back side of that place where our barracks was so that wouldn't allow anybody to come up you know and get in the fence or anything. That was our main mission at the beginning we only went out at night and we rotated you know. On individual training you know we had you know the first black major I ever saw in the army was a guy by the name of Richard Williams. We called him black daddy he was battalion S3 and he was a brilliant guy and when I made sergeant I was about 19 years old and he used to tell me all the time I didn't carry you. Come my inspection I want to make sure if you have got any of that fuzz on your cheek anymore you

have it cut off. But our training was done by the S3 in those days I mean he laid out the lesson plan laid out the training schedule. Which that's his job operations and we did the same things the army done later on in years. The army has a training cycle in March, April you have individual training in May you pick up squad training then by June you have company training and in July and August you have battalion style training and in the fall you have a brigade exercise. The closer to the end of the first year the next year you have an all-out thing like we had at Camp Drum. The whole division goes somewhere the whole core goes somewhere. But it's a continuing cycle it's done every year.

Interviewer: In the picture that I took pictures of a minute ago your captain up there is a white guy. You had white officers in charge of you what was the feeling from the other soldiers all black soldiers with a white officer in charge? Was there any tension that you could pick up between the officers and the other white officers or anything?

Brown: Well in those days in ___ days if a white officer had command of a black unit that meant he wasn't going nowhere. He had done something he was wrong you know back just like you know back in history you know Custard turned down the 9th air you know. It wasn't because he was black it was a dead end for him just put him to rest. And most of these guys most of the black officers in those days white officers that had black units they was either on their way out, they was a reserve officer with nowhere to go no hope for promotion they were gonna do their little time and get out. For the main most of the white officers that I knew prior to that time sort of got attached to the unit. You know a good example is Black Jack Persian who commanded black troops. The people that commanded the 9th calvary I can't think of the name of it now the battalion commanders who commanded the 9th calvary 15 or 20 years. But they all become attached I don't know if you heard General Colon Powell's speech when we had the Buffalo dedication at Fort Leavenworth Kansas I've got it on tape here. McPherson was the guy's name I think one of them was and he spoke on how the troops had performed. It wasn't so much about black troops it was about it was just you know like today you get certain jobs in the military you're at a dead end you're not going anywhere. So it was a matter of looking out for one's self trying to get ahead. But most of the officers that came I had no problem with them I mean I think they was all good officers. I think they were concerned about their command and of course most of them like I said didn't go nowhere you know they might have made major they was out they made a major out of them.

Interviewer: You just also talked a lot about the give me a minute here, I just drew a blank I'm sorry I apologize.

Brown: That's okay

Interviewer: Let's go back to you were talking about you'd go through cycles. You were in one unit you began the integration process you went to another unit you had to start all over again. Each time you went to these units did you take the lessons that you learned from the first time and try to apply them to the next integration cycle you went through or was it whole new ballgame each time you went?

Brown: It all depended it was a whole new ballgame basically because you were in other units. The 11th airborne division was active duty, hard core, well trained unit. The 2nd armor division got called back to active duty you go to Germany I mean they was National Guard people you know. And there was a lot of difference in those two different type units in those days now we've supposable closed the gap there is a number you got integrated on. The National Guard is a part of the regular army but in those days it wasn't that way. The main thing was you know was everybody that had any power in the National Guard was kin to one another or lawyer you know back at home probably the mayor's son was a friend you

know. It was more political is what I'm saying in those days the National Guard was extremely political. And those people that had key slots you know was uncles and cousins.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: And of course the 92nd division was from Texas and Texas was in the south. So most of the people that were from the south I found out I learned you know and I was taught prejudice too when I was growing up in Alabama with my mother and daddy's folks the same thing about people who didn't get a long and didn't like one another. But after my experience here at Campbell and my experience in Manahan I found out my first sergeant in Manahan was one of the best I ever had in the army. And this guy was a red neck from Texas you know but he was fair. And that's all I wanted you know him just to treat me fair. If you know I'd had done the job I got credit for his roster was good I didn't pull no more duty than anybody else did. When it was my time to pull sergeant guard I pulled sergeant guard because I was watching that you know. I'm gonna make sure what I pull Sunday I don't pull it again if I don't say nothing you know. So I best speak up if I think it and I know I done that here. My first sergeant at Campbell was a guy by the name of Doughty he was from Maine I think was somewhere up there. But he wasn't fair you know I pulled CQ seven weekends in a row you know and I know we had more than eighty five in the company. But I was single you know and I didn't have nowhere to go you know. If you had asked me to do it you know I probably would have done it anyway.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: Unless it was payday and I wanted to go catch a bus and go back to Birmingham on the weekend I'd go to my parents or something. But you know a lot of the other guys were married a lot of them were married. The master sergeant in those days you didn't get married unless you were a sergeant anyway number one. And you had to have permission to get married anyways or even purchase a car. But he wasn't fair and this guy now here's a guy he looked like an old Texas farmer. You know he chewed tobacco and had spit in his mouth all the time but the guy he was a soldier and a soldier is a soldier. And if I done something good I got recognized for it you know. And of course if I screwed up I got and I expected to get the same thing everybody else got.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: He showed no difference and that shocked me.

Interviewer: You were talking about certain soldiers like this first sergeant you just spoke of not showing a difference. In your integration into the 2nd armor division the National Guard unit from Texas did you have to deal with a lot of the derogatory comments or was it did they have a professionalism? Or was it more of they were still back woods

Brown: I think we had been going through the transition I think when we were there yes it probably was there we was coming out of that. Now here's why I say that because see when they came on active duty the army started putting regular army officers in these units I mean you know some they got out of units they were in ____ they started infusion they started putting people in other divisions and brining new people in. My battalion commander wound up being General Elisions D Clays son Elisions D Clay at that particular time was the commander of all Europe. He was CG his son was my battalion commander. When he came in there from another unit so what they did they infused you know officers from other units you know. Because they were gonna let them stay that way now they fought this thing you know

and they fought it with political power too. Where you know you had some key senators and congressmen from Texas you these guys were writing these folks trying to keep these things together.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: But it took a long period of time but I was happy to see it changing you know. We'd get new guys in get West Point officer in and they made a difference. In those days a West Point officer they stood out so far from everybody else. You take a National Guard unit with captains and colonels and you one lieutenant in there now that's a West Pointer in those days he'd just out shine everybody. He was just top of the unit now General Roscoe Robertson who was a black four star general commanded Nato before he died sometime several years ago. He was a lieutenant in my battalion in 1950 Headquarters Company 188 I was in I Company. But when he came in there see we had a lot of black lieutenants but there was second lieutenants right out of Virginia Tech University or Gremlin, Ohio University you know they were right out of school. And they wasn't as sharp you know they wasn't up to par as a West Point officer was. And Robertson came in there wow he was 6 foot three six foot four he was slim and looked good in an uniform and he was just he just out shined everybody.

Interviewer: He was a West Pointer?

Brown: He was a West Pointer yeah. As a matter of fact he was the first black West Pointer I ever saw you know ever been close to. We had a lot of the Triple Nickel officers in this unit. As a matter of fact the guy that wrote this book about the Triple Nickel I've got a copy of it in there he was one of the first six officers he is a professional football player. And he was sharp you know he done a lot of good things but he wasn't a West Pointer. Those things I think when they are infused like that they helped it helped the integration process go a little bit smoother.

Interviewer: You talked about changed and you've definitely seen a lot of changes in the military form the time you joined until now. Looking at the military today and the way it was when you came in and when you retired what's the biggest difference you see and the strengths of that difference and the weakness of that difference right now?

Brown: Those of us that were in the army when I came in the army want to believe, and of course the biggest difference is education let me say that first. Soldiers that I came in the army with and like I told you when I came in the army especially black soldiers and white soldiers too were leftovers from World War II. We're talking 52 that would have been 41 so that's nine years these guys were in World War II and a lot of them stayed in the military after World War II and they were the ____ of the army in those days. But they were fully educated, they were good soldiers, and they had the ability to motivate people you know. They weren't in the military for the money you know there was no money in the army in those days. They was in the army because they loved being a soldiers I mean they loved the soldier they was dedicated professional soldiers that's why they stayed in there after World War II. And they were loyal you know I mean they was loyal to you they was loyal to the commander it wasn't so much concern about Korea you know. You could only go seven grades and E1 and an E7 if you done your job your company commander could make you an E7 tomorrow and have you reduced to an E5 tomorrow or the next day you know. There seemed to be more concern about individual soldiers I think you know because like I told you they got me trained to go to jump school. They didn't have to do that they didn't have to get all that physical training you know their job my job was to get ready to go to jump school myself. I mean they trained me on the M1 rifle you know in those days and guard duty and small ____ tactics company attack, platoon attack, squad attack individual weapons training. Those kind of basic

military subjects was what their job was and they went beyond that. Now I got out in 1980 with 30 years and I was in Vietnam twice. And around 1971 when President Nixon approved the all-volunteer army the emphasis shifted to education more. It shifted to eliminate those that couldn't make the education standards and put more emphasis on young folks coming in the army with high school diplomas and good scores. And of course the reasoning behind that was we were going to be a high tech army. So you had to understand more about ____ and education on the subjects because there is so much technology involved in the military and I see that today. The army today though is more officer oriented. The army I was in was more NCO oriented you know I didn't see my company commander probably once or twice a month you know the NCO ran the company. I was the company commander on payday he wanted me to do guard mainly you know 45 you sign pay forms those guys that couldn't find their name you put a little x there so they get their pay. And of course today that's altogether different you've got a higher quality better educated soldier. I don't know if you have a more dedicated patriotic soldier than you had in those days. I think now a lot of it has to do with money now a lot of it's got to do with opportunity you know education benefits you know. And now older soldiers like me think well now these soldiers won't fight you know, having to go to war, they will turn around. But they done a pretty good job in Desert Storm. Desert Storm was another Vietnam it wasn't World War II.

Interviewer: No

Brown: Where you had you know you are going to be there for a year you know you're coming back you and you're gonna go back for another year. And most of us done in the 1960s some guys did three tours you could have jumped up and got out of the army but you know they didn't. Today I don't believe we have that much, I hope I'm wrong, but I don't think we have the patriotism I don't think we have as much togetherness in the army today that we had in those days. You know in those days we were a tight company unit the first sergeant said we are gonna have a birthday party for so and so or we're gonna have a party for the company you didn't have to make people come.

Interviewer: They wanted to be there?

Brown: they wanted to come and bring his wife, you're not told to do that you know. Where today it seems to be more and it is more career oriented and everybody is concerned about punching their ticket. Before it used to be the officers it's always been that way with the officers but now it's the NCOs too you know. And the NCOs really don't have the power we have you know when I was an E5 I had the authority today that a company commander has probably.

Interviewer: I've noticed that change. My dad is retired from 20 years in the military retired as a CW3 he did two tours in Vietnam. The second time he came back if I'm not mistaken he was an E7. Went in as a private came back as an E7 and like you said he had the chance to get out but he didn't. And I came in in 91 and you're talking about the ticket punching from the time I was kid and watching my dad in the army and going and hanging out at the motor pool with him and going doing things with him seeing the change that I saw. The things that I saw then to what I saw now and even I've been out since 99 the change that I see and the things that my friends tell me are exactly what you just described. Everyone's worried about number one make sure my tickets punched you know whether it hurts your soldiers or not as long as your tickets punched they're good with that. And I think what you just said is a definite reflection of how older soldiers like yourself, people like my father, people like that that's the idea they have of today's military. I think it's a pretty sad situation that that's the idea they have.

Brown: Well and that doesn't mean I'm all right you know.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: It's my opinion and what I see as take one of the shell companies how it affects the army in combat and their own combat too remains to be seen. Now those guys performed well in Desert Storm there's no doubt about that.

Interviewer: Exactly

Brown: And they've got the technical knowledge, they are a lot smarter, they are highly educated you know they've got a better ACT score because they have to have today with all of the technical equipment we've got in the military.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: But there's got to be that want to do it something's money can't buy. You know there's a song Money Can't Buy Me Love, and money can't buy patriotism money can't buy a guy wanting to be a soldier. You know money helps but it can't be the controlling factor. And I would rather see I know we need to equal the pay and we should equal the pay. I think a soldier is a hard way to go especially in the combat arms. You've got infantry, aviation, armor, artillery who really is above the fighting force. See it takes about seven men to keep one man on the line you know logistics wise we're talking about. But those people in the combat arms I think really deserve the credit. And it seems like we count on them a lot to win these awards you know. Best soldier of the month or you know best soldier of the year and we've got guys that keep winning these awards less than the combat arms. Now you know if a guys an MP that's good there's nothing wrong with that.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: He's probably got more chance to study for an exam than John Doe down there in Charlie Company _____. Trying to you know got a wife and a family got to go to the field he has less time to fulfill his education to go for that board to compete. So you know there needs to be some kind of rational there I think. If you're gonna have them kind of you know best soldier awards. You know you give them to the combat arms you give them to the support soldiers.

Interviewer: I've had to give up many soldiers in the field to get ready to go to a board and they go out. I was in Bravo Company 3050 duce my last duty was out there

Brown: I was in Charlie Company 50 duce in Vietnam.

Interviewer: Were you?

Brown: Yeah

Interviewer: And I had to I had to give up two of my guys out of my squad three days before the board so they could make sure their uniform was together and they could study. Three days before I asked them if they wanted to go and they said yeah. I said you guys just want to get out of the field don't you, they said yeah that was all. I said go ahead you guys deserve it go for it. But I understand what you're saying about that.

Brown: The competition is not equal.

Interviewer: No not at all. I want to ask you about your you said earlier that you had to ask permission to buy a car you had to ask permission to get married. When did you get married?

Brown: Well I met my wife in 1957 and married her three months later. I was you know I had been in the army for eight years or more. And these guys running around in ___ and Bowling Green and Clarksville and Hopkinsville and Evansville you know and that life you sort of get tired of it. And I had been doing it for eight years I sort of I met her in Bowling Green in July of 57 and we were married in November. Been married ever since 40 we just had our 45th wedding anniversary we got remarried on November 16th.

Interviewer: Congratulations

Brown: Yeah now in 57 you really didn't have to have permission to get married. I'm speaking of 51, 50 you know back

Interviewer: Right

Brown: In that period of time. As the army integrated all these changes started coming out you know. We used to ___ wear clothes you better wear uniform on post those kind of policies changed you know. Of course here at Fort Campbell you know Clarksville was nothing but farm land on both sides of the road. So it was just in that particular time and era that the army saw that a lot of the policies they had and the army was cutting down them too. We're talking about the Korean War was over with in 54. You know we've got all of these soldiers we don't need them no more so the army started cutting back. And one of the most disgusting things I've been disappointed about the way they done it especially with guys who were too proud to say they couldn't read too proud to go to school and try to get three 90s on the aptitude test. But they trained me they were good soldiers you know. And in 1957 they came out with what they call a ___ Program you know a dumb dumb discharge they called it. If you didn't have three 90s on your, that's what the soldiers named it anyway the army didn't do that. But it was really you know you better get your education or you get out of the army one or the other. If you didn't have three 90s on your armed service aptitude battery scores you had to go. A lot of the guys had been in the army since World War II about 15 or 16 years in the army. I didn't need all of this here while I've been serving for 16 years so why do I need it now? They just got out in droves. And of course they did the same thing in Desert Storm they did it a different way.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: I think it was more you left in ___ and you got some money when you got out. In 57, 58 you didn't get nothing they just put you out. You had a cut off day if you didn't make that cut off day you're gone.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: Whether you had a family or whatever.

Interviewer: Do you have, just a couple of questions more and we'll be done, do you have joining the army? Is there anything you wish you would have done different or something other you wish you would have done that you didn't do?

Brown: No I wanted to be a soldier by the time I came out of high school. I planned on being a soldier I thought about it especially 1940, 41, 42, 43 all the men were gone you know all the older men were left and the young fellows like me. I was eleven years old in 41 and the soldiers came back and they just sort of instilled in me I wanted to be a soldier. And then you know the Triple Nickel guys came to Birmingham in the 40s in 48 and that done it. You know I came out of high school in 48 and my mother really didn't want me to go in the military you know she kept putting me off and putting me off. And I just finally made my mind up I'm gonna go of course she knew I was going.

Interviewer: What when you retired what was the last rank did you retire as a sergeant major?

Brown: Yeah uh huh. And of course in those days when I got out of the military in 1980 I think it was one tenth of one percent of enlisted people was denied. It is probably more than that now. But it was a long hard struggle and that was the pinnacle you know of your career. Just like the officer who wanted to retire a four star general everybody don't make it.

Interviewer: Right

Brown: Some do some don't some retire three star some retire two star and some retire a one star. But the army was a challenge and I loved being a soldier. The test that I did I tried to do well and I'll tell you another thing I know being black and being in the army in those days if I wanted to get ahead I had to be twice as good as the other guy. I sat out to do that. I guess you would call it punch your ticket too but I knew that was what I had to do. I'm gonna tell you a story while we're talking.

Interviewer: Okay

Brown: In 1961 I got assigned to Charlie Company the 505 in Nice Germany. I came from Fort Bragg Charlie Company from E Company 503rd which later on became the 173rd you know and went to Vietnam first. Of course in those days you only had two airborne units. You had the 82nd airborne division, you had the 101st airborne division and you had the 505 who was a brigade and the 504th was a brigade in Europe in Lee barracks in Nice. I had been through recon school there and I didn't make army graduate but I run up to army graduate. Recon school was a small ranger school I mean it's about two weeks of madness it's tough. I lost 22 pounds in two weeks my wife didn't know me when I walked in the door. I lived in these wooden barracks out here on post these soldiers live in. Anyway I got to Europe and they wanted an NCO to run a tactical _____. Good Pasture, Good Pasture became a four star general was the commanding general of the 80th infantry division. _____ we've got these other NCOs in the company you know but since I was one of the ____ guys to come in there the army the leadership said well let's put it on him. Just got in the unit been in the unit about a week I had to get ready for a squad it was a reinforce squad tactical exercise. You had to make up the operation order they gave you the operation order but you had to plan your attack you know you had to plan assembly and all that stuff plus you had to jump. You had to go to ____ and get on airplanes

Tape ended