

Interviewer: Dr. Zieren and the class we are doing this interview for. To start the interview off could you please just tell us your name, when you were born, where you were born, and branch of the service things of that nature just some background information?

Morris: My name is Garrett Alexander Morris. I was born in Haran Kentucky 1928 and I more or less entered the service in 1945 April 1945 I ran my age up two years in order to serve. And I served in the quarter master quarter. Basic training Fort Lee Virginia and advanced training Fort Lee and changed over to the transportation core leaving in October 1945 Brooklyn Harbor for Lahar France.

Interviewer: Before you joined the army what was the highest grade level school that you completed?

Morris: Tenth grade high school and I worked as a soda jerker at one of the local drug stores making \$12 a week.

Interviewer: So many people I've interviewed my grandmother is one in particular in North Carolina tenth grade was the highest level before you graduated in the school system they were in. Was that the same case with your school system?

Morris: No ours was twelfth grade.

Interviewer: Twelfth grade. What did your parents do and what were their names and who were they?

Morris: My father's name was Samuel Russell Morris born in Little Rock Arkansas and my mother's name was Millie McClain and she was a house wife. My father was a coal miner.

Interviewer: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Morris: Two brothers' one sister.

Interviewer: Did they stay in school until graduation or did your brothers were they younger or older than you?

Morris: They were older than I and my oldest brother he was also drafted and he spent time in Chanel Burner Theatre of Operations in WWII until the end of the war and he graduated from Tennessee State University. My brother he only finished the ninth grade he also run his age up to go into the Navy.

Interviewer: You said you were born in 1928 correct?

Morris: That's correct.

Interviewer: I know you were a little young but maybe some of the later effects of this do you have anything that you remember or stories that your parents told about the great depression period and the way life was during that time or before that time?

Morris: Well the great depression hurt everybody that's rich and poor during I can only have vague ideals or scenes as a child a young child in the Kentucky area. As coal miner it didn't affect us too much because that was part of the lively hood for the whole country at that particular time. We didn't have to depend on automobiles as much per say as we do today. And coal was more or less king.

Interviewer: You say you joined the army in 1945 so you were in school when Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese?

Morris: That's correct.

Interviewer: And do you remember where you were and how you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Morris: Radio

Interviewer: On the radio. Was it a nightly thing that your family would gather around the radio and listen?

Morris: That was more or less like what you would have today of people gathering around TV. Very few people had radios so more or less the people in that area would go to certain houses and they would listen to radios.

Interviewer: What was the reaction when the news came on that Pearl Harbor had been bombed and that the U.S. had been attacked by the Japanese? What was the reaction of the people?

Morris: Well there was a lot of excitement going around and it didn't affect me immediately because I wasn't more or less matured that much to know anything about war.

Interviewer: Did you know where Pearl Harbor and where Hawaii was?

Morris: Yes by geography yes.

Interviewer: Some people I've interviewed said they didn't have any idea. They didn't know if Pearl Harbor was the next state or wasn't. It seems to be interesting to me that something like that would happen and people wouldn't understand where that was is the reason I ask a question like that. It struck me as odd the first time I heard someone say no I had no idea where Hawaii or Pearl Harbor was. So that is one of the reasons I like to ask that question. You say you went to Fort Lee Virginia for basic?

Morris: That is correct.

Interviewer: What was it like when you got ready to join? What was your parents' reaction when you were going in?

Morris: Well they didn't want me to go this is my aunt my parents died when I was five years old so I had widowed aunt that raised me and my oldest brother. And she didn't want me to go because you know she said she didn't want me to go along way over the water as she put it.

Interviewer: Where did you go before Fort Lee where did you go for your induction?

Morris: Fort McClellan Alabama.

Interviewer: Fort McClellan at McClellan did you go through a series of the IQ tests the aptitude test in order to find you a job or did just being an African American did they just say these are the only branches you can apply for and you took what was there?

Morris: Well you must realize that up until 1950 when President Truman gave the proclamation that the services would be integrated you have to realize that the blacks more or less served in menial jobs as quarter masters, engineers, etc.

Interviewer: So from Fort McClellan you left Kentucky you went to Fort McClellan you did your induction process they sent you to Fort Lee. When you got to Fort Lee was it a big cultural shock for you to get there and see what goes on and the way things were supposed to be done?

Morris: Not really more or less excitement to me because I had never been that far away from home before. And meeting people from other parts of the United States and hearing some of the stories as to how they lived and the conditions some of them lived in. I figured that I was in seventh heaven.

Interviewer: During your training at Fort Lee were you ever involved in any mass maneuvers in training exercised where I'd say large scale brigade battalion division large scale maneuvers such as that?

Morris: Not on a large scale but we all had to go on maneuvers that's what you call field training here today. And that was part of the graduation process out of basic training up into your what you call technical training. You had to learn skills in technical.

Interviewer: How long did you go through tech school?

Morris: Tech school took approximately five months.

Interviewer: Five months this is for quarter master?

Morris: That was for quarter master.

Interviewer: The training that was given to you and the soldiers that were with you was it done by all black officers and NCOs or were there some white officers and NCOs that conducted the training?

Morris: Company commanders are more or less white majority I would say and your NCOs were all black.

Interviewer: The training that you got from the officers and NCOs do you feel that it was adequate for what you went in and did later looking back? Do you feel the training you received was adequate training, was it subpar, was it outstanding training?

Morris: I would consider for the time period it was outstanding the same as today you are more or less in a scientific technical field today as to where you was in more or less a grinding stage in WWII. There was a difference between the time frame to you can't compare the soldiers or the service people of WWII with service people of today it's a little different.

Interviewer: Right. When you left Fort Lee and got ready to go to France were you in a quarter masters unit or were you sent to like an aviation unit as a supply quarter master representative? What type of unit did you serve in?

Morris: It was quarter master but the thing of it is see the war was already over when I went to France. But we had the mission of getting American vehicles and equipment out of France and out of some of the other zones of operations the French the British and the Russian so that's trained in over. More or less we had a designation change from quarter master to transportation.

Interviewer: And obviously when you went to France you were loaded on ships and left the United States to go to France right?

Morris: That's true.

Interviewer: About how many people can you remember how many people you shared this ship with to get over there?

Morris: The only thing I can tell you is it was a large number but I did sail on the USS George Washington Carver that was the black Santos of Tuskegee.

Interviewer: What was the what were the living conditions on the ship I mean did you have enough space for yourself did you get plenty of food an adequate amount or was it just kind of like a free for all with that number of people?

Morris: No it was very well organized you would have about the same compartment arrangements as you would have on troop ships today they haven't changed. I've been on about eight troop carriers and they are all the same.

Interviewer: What port did you leave from when you left the United States?

Morris: Brooklyn New York.

Interviewer: And you're in between Fort Lee Fort McClellan Fort Lee and then other places that you had gone to up to Brooklyn was this all train trains that you took or did they have truck convoys to move you from point A to point B?

Morris: No this was troop train.

Interviewer: Troop trains what was the living conditions on a troop train like?

Morris: Very very limited.

Interviewer: Did they make did they make special arrangements in the cars with the bunk racks down the sides or was it you know just a big cargo car with x number of troops put in there?

Morris: It was more or less x number of troops places in each compartment.

Interviewer: And when you first landed in Europe where exactly did you land?

Morris: Lahar France.

Interviewer: Lahar France what was your first impression when you landed in France and you know your mission began and obviously you went out farther than Lahar France to take care of some things. What was your impression of the French people and France in general?

Morris: We didn't have any contact with many of the French people because we were sent in what they call a containment area and this was restricted. And so people would come up to the barbed wire fences and things like that would try to buy commodities and things off of us. But that was all of the contact we had.

Interviewer: When you got to when you landed in France what type of living conditions did you get? Did you get there was it permanent structures that had been built or were you in tent cities or were you two men tents how were your living conditions?

Morris: Pup tent.

Interviewer: Pup tents how long were you there?

Morris: Approximately six or seven days my memory doesn't go back that far is to say I was there for any less of time because arrangements had already been made that x amount of people would be going to different places. This is where we were separated some stayed in France and some went to Germany and places.

Interviewer: Any you said some didn't stay where did you go after that six or seven day time period?

Morris: West Germany Nuremburg.

Interviewer: What type of job did you still have the transportation job?

Morris: No this was quarter master transportation come about I believe it was in April 46 if I'm not mistaken.

Interviewer: What did you do in Nuremburg as far as quarter master?

Morris: This was more or less supply food supply rationing gasoline ammunition food supplies and things of that nature.

Interviewer: Did you have any contact with civilians in that area or were you still in a restricted area?

Morris: Yes we had a lot of contact with the Germans the French the Russians English.

Interviewer: What type of reaction did you have to these people and on the flip side of that what was their reaction to you and the job that you were doing when you would leave with supplies or supplies would come in and out?

Morris: Very good relationship very good.

Interviewer: When you weren't taking care of the job that you just described and you had some down time what typically did you do and as a group were there anything that you did? Did you play baseball did you guys go to did they have movies for you guys to go to you know things of that nature? What did you guys do during your free time?

Morris: Well they had movies each organization had people who could operate the movie projectors and they could get the films from the signal core and things of that nature. I visited upper houses a lot of the castles things of that nature that you studied about was real rewarding.

Interviewer: So you did a lot of sightseeing?

Morris: Quite a bit of sightseeing.

Interviewer: Quite a bit. What when you were in Nuremburg did you go from the tent situation of living did you go into a permanent barrack structure?

Morris: No we had permanent barracks structures anytime that we were moved from one area to another on a permanent basis the United States government and the Germans always had something worked out as to where we could take over civilian buildings.

Interviewer: So you ended up leaving your tent and going to

Morris: Permanent structures.

Interviewer: Permanent structures. What was I mean you're in charge of the beans and the bullets here what was your rations like when you sat down for breakfast lunch and dinner were you guys eating the c-rations or did you have hot chow the entire time?

Morris: No the only time we didn't have hot meals is when we was traveling from one area to the other a long distance. You would more or less have to scrounge your own food stuff there. And of course the Germans had a lot of bakeries and we did that and a lot of times we would change cigarettes things of that nature to get certain types of food.

Interviewer: So you'd been in the army from the time you entered until Nuremburg you had been in for roughly a year?

Morris: Yeah

Interviewer: About a year, how long did you stay in total?

Morris: Eighteen months.

Interviewer: Eighteen months during this time period were you promoted?

Morris: Yes I was promoted before I finished basic training graduation of basic training PFC. Went in as a technical training and became a technician 5th grade which is equivalent to a PFC today. And I was up for a T3 which would be a buck sergeant I decided to get out of the army.

Interviewer: What were the reasons I mean why did you decide that being in the army wasn't what you wanted to continue doing?

Morris: Well I felt that I had completed what I had started out to do but there wasn't any jobs after the war because the war effort was what was keeping jobs afloat. And going back and seeing some of the older people coming back from military not being able to find jobs I decided to go back in.

Interviewer: When you went back in how long was there a break in service for you?

Morris: There wasn't any more breaks I served 21 years.

Interviewer: No I mean eighteen months you got out how

Morris: I stayed out for ten months.

Interviewer: For ten months?

Morris: Yes I went back to school then decided to come back in.

Interviewer: What did you come back when you came back what was the rank that you came back in?

Morris: They gave me my same rank.

Interviewer: Same rank what same MOS same job?

Morris: No my job changed a little bit there. I went back in hoping to go back to Germany but they didn't have any quotas at that particular time. So I spent a little time at Fort Dicks New Jersey and then I was transferred to the 10th horse calvary at West Point New York. They was also deactivating that and all of the materials and horses that they had there except the show horses were sent to Fort Riley Kansas. So we ended up as then what they called a cadet mess stewards serving the cadets at West Point.

Interviewer: Can we go back for a minute to your time in Nuremburg and immediately after WWII during the occupation. Is there any particular officers or NCOs that stand out in your mind that when you saw them or you saw heard of their names or anything like that you thought that's how I want to be that's how things should be run?

Morris: No nothing like that ever took effect until years later.

Interviewer: With you being there after the fighting had been done there in Europe and more of the occupation and moving the supplies did you have a sense of in basic or anytime that you spent before your break did you have a sense of the big picture and what was going on and why things were going the way they were? For an example Europe was the number one priority and then Japan and then the way things shifted you mentioned you had a brother who went to the China Burma Campaign. Did you and him write letters back and forth?

Morris: Yes we communicated on a limited basis what you call V-mail. A lot of things that was said in the letters that I received from him were taken out because of the war effort at that particular time. But you could also rad between the lines in a lot of the correspondence.

Interviewer: While you were in Europe did you ever have any injuries did you ever get wounded from doing any of the jobs that you had?

Morris: No more than frost bite there wasn't any heat in the vehicles.

Interviewer: There's not any heat in them now they say there is supposed to be but I haven't found it. Did we ask you did any of the people around you in your unit other than frost bite did any of them suffer severe wounds?

Morris: There were some of the older soldiers part of the Red Ball express I don't know if you've heard of that or not. There were some that had been wounded at Normandy and there was also a few that had served in the Battle of the Bulge which history don't depict the blacks as serving in the Battle of the Bulge.

Interviewer: Let's go ahead and go back to your taking your break you've taken a break and you've come back into the army. You went to Fort Dicks New Jersey for some training and then you end up as a steward after you left West Point where did you go from there?

Morris: Well the way that the army did this they would screen your records to see if you had clean records first of all. And they only took a certain caliber of people in because you know you would be working with the cadets. And I felt that this was demeaning so it was quite a few of us once after the word had gotten out that there was recruiting for the paratroopers a lot of us put in our letters and started taking basic training air borne training at Fort Benning Georgia.

Interviewer: And what was this because you had already gone in and done basis your tech school and you seen that was completely different when you started your air borne basic training?

Morris: It was very much different because the training was more intense.

Interviewer: When I spoke to Mr. Brown and did his interview he seemed to have a lot of good things to say about the NCOs and the people that were training him for air borne school not in air borne school but training him to get ready for air borne school. He said they really pushed them to make sure they weren't going to be washed out physically or mentally do you remember this same type of training?

Morris: Mr. Brown and I came in the army at different intervals and at the time he's speaking of was out there at Fort Campbell Kentucky the 11th air borne division. The cadre was sent out from Fort Bragg North Carolina in 1950 September 1950 to integrate the 11th air borne division. And we would train people that wanted to go air borne after their basic training we had set up an air raid thing that they would have to go through and the ones that failed or wanted to change their mind that was it. But we didn't have anyone that we sent to the air borne school that flunked out everybody made it.

Interviewer: After you completed your air borne school your basic and things where did you where did the army decide they wanted to put you?

Morris: After air borne school?

Interviewer: After air borne school where did they need you the most?

Morris: There was only one place that the black paratroopers could go that was Fort Brag North Carolina.

Interviewer: And at Fort Brag what were your job duties there?

Morris: Just the ground powers.

Interviewer: Just the ground power.

Morris: Incidentally this was the unit 505 started out the black paratroopers started out as the 555th they got the cadres from the 92nd division at Fort Huachuca Arizona and they were the first to come in to take negro troops to take airborne training. And we consider them the sweet 16, 16 of them graduated. And they started the 555th the triple nickels' and after that they were integrated into the 87th division as the 3rd battalion of the 505. And it was integrated also led to the way of integrating the whole United States Army. In fact they were the first black unit in the United States that integrated before integration was more or less geared on from the war department.

Interviewer: After airborne school and your basic infantry training that you had done and you go to Fort Brag how long before you received your next promotion?

Morris: Approximately a year.

Interviewer: About a year.

Morris: You must realize that this is peace time you don't get promoted every day.

Interviewer: Right exactly

Morris: In peace time

Interviewer: That's one of the reasons I am asking because it seemed that you had made your promotions relatively quickly from basic even though it was a five month tech school. And just wanted to try to get an idea of how long it was before you received the next promotion. Do you remember the first enlistment you had what was the pay for your enlistment?

Morris: Fifty dollars a month.

Interviewer: Fifty dollars a month. Did you have any special types of pay added to that for occupation duty or anything?

Morris: No

Interviewer: No what was your pay when you came back in the army at the same rank? Was it still \$50 a month or had that decreased?

Morris: It was \$50 a month and later on it was raised to \$60 I think it took effect in either 49 or the early 50s somewhere along in there. But joining the paratroopers was an extra \$50 so a lot of people joined just for that.

Interviewer: I think I've got it pretty much covered for the time period I needed. Is there anything that I have asked you or that you can remember that you would like to a story or someone you can remember or something that happened to you that I might not have covered or that you would just like to share?

Morris: No I think that you've covered quite a deal here but I think on assignments I feel that Fort Campbell is one of the choice assignments I would say because I would always end up here regardless of where I would go I would always end up back here at Fort Campbell. And of course this being a small base you can only hold so many people but it seemed like to me the people here were more or less a more outgoing toward GIs then they was in other situations because a lot of people turn their nose down at military people. That's about the gest of it.

Interviewer: Did you ever make it back to Germany?

Morris: Yes in 1959 I spent three years and came back and spent approximately one year no it was ten months here back at Fort Campbell then I was shipped out to Fort Benning to reactivate the first air camp which went to Vietnam.

Interviewer: Well again Mr. Morris I would like to say thank you for the interview.

Morris: My pleasure.

Interviewer: I had a good time talking to you. Thank you sir.