



VIDEO: **An Interview with LeRoy A. Battle** - July 25, 2002

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Sponsor: Shady Side Rural Heritage Society

Location: Captain Salem Avery House Museum

Interviewer: Ginger Corson

Camera: George Daly

Transcribed by: Christina Davidson – September 2006

[Part 1 of 2 tapes/DVDs]

Q [Interviewer]: We have a special guest, LeRoy Battle – thank you for joining us.

A [LeRoy Battle]: You're welcome.

Q: I'm going to sit over here and I wanted to ask you your full name.

A: LeRoy Andrew Battle

Q: And when were you born?

A: December 31, 1921 in Manhattan, New York.

Q: No kidding?

A: Yes

Q: Now how did you come to be in these parts?

A: Let's see... it's a long story. Well, I was working down on 52nd St. in New York with a band and... the bass player, named Oscar Smith... and Oscar was a very, very fine musician, and he got a job as the head of the music department at Morgan State College in Baltimore... and so, he left the group... and in about, I guess three months, I had a telegram from him saying that he needed me to come down there to organize the percussion section... see, because I was a percussionist, you know. And he [made sure]? I got a scholarship. So I asked my mother – I told her what I'd like to do – so she said "fine." But at the time, at the time I was taking courses at the Julliard School of Music, see, so I left there and came down to Morgan, and... when I got to Morgan and I stayed and graduated.

And after that... the guidance counselor, Miss Thelma Thomas – she was a good friend of my wife, you know, they were very good friends. So, one day after... when we had a PTA meeting... see, I was living about 15 miles from Upper Marlboro, teaching. ... so she said "Roy, you don't have to go home... just come with me and we'll go over to my friend, Allison's house, and we'll have dinner and so forth... then we'll be right down here, near to Harwood. It's only a few miles to Upper Marlboro – that's where I was teaching in Douglass High School in Upper Marlboro. And so, that's how we met, Allison and I met.



Q: OK, and the rest is history (laughter). Now what age were you when you came here?

A: Hmm... let's see, I guess I was... how old do you think I was [asks someone off-camera]

Q: ... like, just out of high school ?

A: No, I was just out of the service. I must have been about twenty-five. I was in the service about two years... went in, in '43, came out in '45.... that includes college and the year I _____ ? So, I would say I was 27, maybe.

Q: OK, and so you just settled in this area?

A: Right, I settled in this area. I stayed at Douglass for about 17 years, and then I was their band director and then I became a guidance counselor for about two years, and then I went into administration as vice principal. And I was at these schools: Douglass, _____, _____, and then.... the thing that got me, I didn't enjoy being a vice principal, because I was mixed up with about 1-percent of the school population and they were the ones who presented the problems. I did good, very good with them, but I didn't know the other students, you know, because the students who were making it... that bothered me, so I asked out of that and went back into counseling.

Q: OK, so then, how long were you in the teaching field?

A: All together, 28 years. See... I was there for retirement because they gave me two years of service at that time... I don't know if they still do it, I don't know. So I had the requisite of 30 years. See what I mean?

Q: OK, now how has your music been involved in your profession?

A: Well, I stayed with the... you mean professionally in the...?

Q: Well, how did you do music and still be a teacher and counselor and all?

A: Well, OK, I joined a lot of these small group combos, music combos, and I played with them on the weekends at various clubs in Washington, Maryland, Virginia... then my major, being music education... I organized the school band. See... that's what – for 17 years, I was the band director. So there I could do both – then, part of the time I was in the Redskin's band for 17 years.

Q: Washington Redskins?

A: [yes] so I was immersed in music professionally and with the school.

Q: Do you still play?



A: Yes, in fact we've been playing down at the [Happy Harbor] ? for the past month. We'll be down there again on August 4th and 18th and September 8th.

Q: ...and what's the name of the band?

A: Roy Battle and the Altones.

Q: And which instrument do you play?

A: I'm the drummer.

Q: Drums, OK...do you play any other instruments?

A: Not professionally. I mean, I play... as a band director, I played trombone, clarinet, saxophone... I played them all, I mean. I'd sit maybe a few feet behind the beginning students, you know, and maybe be able to... but I could tell them when they were wrong and I knew how to make them play and have them form a great embouchure... how to breathe correctly and so forth. I had the technique.

Q: OK... and you have two children?

A: Yes, two by this marriage with Allison. I was married before and I had one child. But this current... we have Roy, Jr. and Lisa. Roy, Jr. is a professional musician and in fact, he plays... he has three churches that he plays... at Addison (?) _____ he has a choir. At _____ and St. Matthews, and there's another church that he's the director of. And my daughter, Lisa, she's a physician, she went to Johns Hopkins... so, I'm very fortunate.

Q: OK. One of the biggest purpose in having you down here is to talk about your war years, your service time. We would like to have your input, your version of what it was like to be a Tuskegee Airman.

A: Well, first of all, it's my honor to be a Tuskegee Airman... to be associated with that group. As you know, B.O. Davis (?) or beloved leader passed away, _____ Davis , passed away earlier this month.

Q: July 4th.

A: Yes... now, how I got there... now this, I think this is uncanny. Now, growing up, my parents had a candy store in Harlem on 154th Street and 8th Avenue and all the... and it was sort of a middle class neighborhood... and all the musicians used to come into the store. I don't even know who...



like Buck and Bubbles, they were a famous theater group, you see. When they would come to town – one played the piano, the other tap danced and had a big act. And when they would come in town, they'd go to my father's candy store and get... what they would do... they would get a whole bag full of nickels and dimes – I mean a whole bag full. Then they would line up all the urchins... that's what I would call us, you know... the 8 and 9 year olds, up to 15... and line them up along one side of the street. You have a long line... and then across the street, what they would do... they would call it a cock scramble, that's what they would do. They would just throw this money across and it hit the wall there... and they would say "go" and you would go running and everything you would pick up was yours, you see, and when they would come, on a good day, you could get at least fifty-cents, you see, which at that time was tantamount to \$100 in our minds.

So, talking about that time because... I must have been about 8 or 9 years old at that time... but there was this resplendent soldier... he would come into my father's candy store, and he would be resplendent in his formal army blues and he was an officer... he was, I think, a Second Lieutenant and his name was Benjamin O. Davis, Sr.

Q: No kidding?

A: His father... yes, and so he and my father would talk together about them and it would give such an impression upon me... so, I'm jumping now...

When I started writing my book and I talk about him in my book, my autobiography. B. O. Davis, Jr. was living in Arlington at the time... so I called him – this was in 1995, I called him – and I said, "sir, did you ever live up in Harlem?" He said "no" – and I was desolate, you know, because I said, how could I get everything mixed up. But then he said "but my father did." (laughter) and I said "did he live around 154th Street?" and he said "yes" and then I related to him the story. So he said "Well young man, you go right to it – you have at it – go right to it" you know, that's all when I was going to put that experience in my book. So this is uncanny that I would be serving with his son, never having realized that.

Q: Sure, sure... the grand plan...

A: Yeah, how about that...

Q: So, now, did you get drafted?

A: Yes, I got drafted in '43, August of '43 and, you know, at that time, the bus used to pick us up... they had a bus... they had a camp up in Long Island... it isn't there anymore. But the bus would go around to the neighborhood and pick up... I think they had about 60 of us, you know. I had my old



beat-up suitcase and everything... mother was crying, all like that, you know. And when we got out to Long Island...when we got out there... it was just what I call a cavity (?) of noise... and you know, confusion, in my mind. There were squads that were drilling and I understand that they were going to be inspected, from Washington... they were expecting a group to come in. And as we were getting off the bus, a sergeant came up to us, you know, he said “they are starting a flying class at Tuskegee. Any of you colored want to be flying? Step over here.” – you know, and I was getting off the bus, and I didn’t know nothing, but the idea... it was actually a pain in the neck to me because I was on my way as a professional musician... of working down in Manhattan. I was working as a drummer, you know, and I was playing... I just wanted to play music, you know....

Q: ... you wanted to be the Boogie Woogie Bugle boy...

A: ... yes, of Company “B”... So I stepped over there... there were four of us. It didn’t mean anything to me... Tuskegee didn’t mean anything to me at all. And I stepped over there and he told the others to “freeze” – he took us, he said “you have to go take your, what they call _____ and that’s when they give you your physical, your color blind test, your hand and eye coordination type of thing. And one test... you have to picture this... they had a turn table, just like a record turn table... and right in the middle of it, they had... it was flush... about the size of a dime... they had a metal disk, that was flush... the other... it was sort of felt, you know what I mean? It was going around and they gave you a rod... the rod must have been about 15-inches long, and it was attached to electricity and something else. The thing was this – you had to keep that rod in tact. At the end of the rod there was a module, metal module, and you had to put that on that metal disk as it rotated around. You had to keep that... and if you pressed too hard, the rod would break and it would break the current... and the score would be up in back on a board. And you could hear the click, click, click, click... and it would stop, you know, but that was right up my alley, you see what I mean, because as a drummer, we use brushes, you know, and that’s the delicate touch, you know. And I was down there going and that thing was clicking away. And the corporal looked at me – and I’m going to say “white” corporal – I’m saying that to be objective in this story – and he looked at me, you know, and he went down like this here [reaches arm down to the floor] and did something... and this thing started rotating faster. And I was right there with him, you know what I mean? Well anyway, you know... he shook his head and said “you made a perfect score” – he said “it’s never happened before, it has never happened before.”

Q: That’s awesome...

A: Well, you know, I don’t know, fate or what... you see what I mean? That’s how it happened, you see what I mean?



Q: So you were still in New York...?

A: Yes... doing the test. So then, after I finished the test, they gave me a couple of _____ tests, asked me questions... the psychologist asked “do you like men?” and I said “yeah, I like men. I like my father, and” ... you know what I mean (laughter). I knew nothing about it, you know. Then after a while they came and he said, well, of the four, I was the only one to pass. I told the sergeant “I’m hungry! ... because we haven’t had anything to eat.” So he gave me a line “later boy, later, later” and he said the class is going to start the day after tomorrow. He took me right on the train, gave me my records in a big brown envelope and said “guard these with your life” – you know. He put me on the train and I had the whole coach to myself, you know, going all the way down to Washington. Well, finally when we got to...

Q: But did you get anything to eat?

A: Yeah, oh right... he gave me a bag lunch.

Q: OK, good.

A: Yeah and I remember it was a dry ham sandwich, and an apple, you know what I mean... that was all.

Q: Now, was this the army?

A: This was the army, you see what I mean... ‘cause I wasn’t in anything at the time, technically, see what I mean. Technically I wasn’t in anything except that... I was what you would call a pre-aviation cadet. See, I wasn’t even an aviation cadet. See, the thing was... we were a little above the regular recruits. Actually, it was the Army Air Corps.

Q: So there wasn’t an Air Force yet?

A: No, no... and so when we arrived in Biloxi, it was about 3 o’clock in the morning. We had traveled all day and all night and it was 3 o’clock in the morning. And the train... I like to call it “threw me off” at the station... and they had one light – one open bulb light at the station, you know... here I was, you know, talk about a culture clash... you know, because, previously... a day and a half before, I was in my mind, the toast of Manhattan... you know what I mean? I was a premier drummer, up and coming, you know what I mean... with other musicians, plenty of girls... you know, I was living the good life, you know. And here I was, the first time really away from home... this was alone and desolate, dark, and the dust and sand was blowing. I was feeling kind of low.

Well, I guess in about 15 minutes then I saw these headlights coming up... and there was a jeep. And this Corporal... and he said “Boy, your name Battle?” and I said “yes.” He said, “Well, get your



blank in here... we don't have all night."... you know what I mean? So that was my "welcome" to the South... you know what I mean?

Q: OK, so you're in Biloxi now.

A: Yes.

Q: So what did you do in Biloxi?

A: OK... that was the... it's almost like basic training... that's where we... in addition to the calisthenics and learning the basic outline of map reading, solving problems, basic military courtesy, and this type of thing. So, after compass reading and going on solo night missions...

Q: ... What base?

A: Let me see... Biloxi... Mississippi... I can't think of it.

Q: I can't think of it either, of course, I don't know if it's still there or not.... It wasn't Keesler was it?

A: That was it !

Q: It's still there.

A: That was it.. Keesler Field... that was it! Because we used to hike from Keesler to Gulfport, I remember that because it was 15 miles... you know what I mean. I used to hike... dear old Keesler Field.

Q: It's still there...

A: Really?

Q: I was just there two months ago.

A: No kidding? Isn't that something...

Q: So how many people were you training with? It was all men...?

A: Yes, all men, and it was a well, actually in our platoon, there must have been about 30... in my particular class.

Q: Now, at this point, it was all black?

A: All black... we never, we never... it was all black and we never had any... it was all white officers... never had any black leadership until after the mutiny (?), you know what I mean... which was further down the line.

Well, this one day when we left... when we finished Keesler... well, what happened, the sergeant called us out and he said "dress khakis" and we knew it was important... and he said... he lined us up, you know – parade dress. And then he said, "when I call your name, you line up in back of me." He said "the name I call... you're... you will be full fledged aviation cadets, and you will be moved right to Tuskegee"... to the Tuskegee Institute. And so... we lined up, you know, and I could see... my peripheral vision... it was getting kind of weak around me... the spaces were gone. And I started



panicking, you know... he hadn't called my name! you know. And then he... and then... see... if you failed then... if you failed aviation cadet, they would ship you to Squadron F. Now, Squadron F at that time, was reserved for illiterates... those who really can't read, those who would be doing blank details, as we called it... it was the mud group, you know what I mean.

Q: ... sure, you didn't want to be one of those.

A: ... no future... No! So he said ... I'll never forget this... he said "Squadron dis...", and I was going to cry, you know. Then he said "wait a minute..." – he looked, and then he said "Battle!" and I said "Air! Air! Air! (?)" ...he said "alright Battle, shut up and get behind me!" What happened, see, he ... I don't know if you remember... at that time, the 3m machine, like a copy machine, it used to have liquid to copy, you know, and it would bleed... and this copy – his thumb was right over my name, see what I mean. Boy!... so, this... seems like I was dodging a bullet all throughout life, you know what I mean... just dodging, you know. So, I said "good Lord" ... I don't know how, and I still say it... here I am.

Q: That would have been something if you would have ended up in Company F because of a 3m machine.

A: Yeah! Oh gosh... I see it now and I...well, at that time, I got the sweats, I really did. Anyway... and then they shipped us on a bus to Tuskegee.

Q: So that's like a five or six hour drive...

A: Yes...

[Part 2 of 2 tapes/DVDs]

Q: Tuskegee is just east of Montgomery, Alabama, right?

A: Well, I guess...I don't know... could be...

Q: Trust me, that's where it is...

A: But the thing was, it was stormy... it was storming when we got there at night, you know what I mean. And Sergeant Bowie, I remember his name... Sergeant Bowie said -- when we got home (?) the buses were lined up, and the rain was coming down and we were running around ... and he said "So you wanted to come to TUS-ke-gee, huh?... well you're at TUS-ke-gee – give me a hundred!" And you know what we had to do? ... get down in that mud and everything, and give him a hundred [push-ups]. Yeah... that was our introduction.



Q: You figure it's all up-hill from here now !

A: Yeah... it was there we got our class work, you know what I mean ,really, our class work... chemistry, we got ...chemical warfare, gas mask education. You know, you go into a room, almost like a trailer, you know. And there were... I'll never forget, they would release this CNS gas – that's a tear gas, CNS, the “crying now system” – that's what they would call it. Man, you had to take your mask off, you know what I mean ... I mean, that was terrible! You would come out gagging and smoking... and you got to recognize it. And then they ... you had to go back in there, and they've got CNB “crying now brother” ! And then, outside, out in the field, they would explode this other thing and put it up on a shovel... “smell that, that's.. [inaudible] _____ gas smells like new mown hay, you know what I mean. I'm just saying... _____. So, we stayed there for... we got the math, basic computations, learn how to read the...[inaudible]. These things were to help you with flying.

Q: Were you actually at the Tuskegee Institute?

A: That's correct, ... had classes with the students that were there. And we stayed down... we didn't stay with the students... they had... we went to classes, not with the students, but in the... they had a schedule so we'd be in classes together as cadets, see what I mean. And then we stayed in what was known as “Amereese” (?)... that's where the buildings... they were red brick buildings, and that's ... they called them the “Amereese” (?).. and that's where we stayed. Oh, and by the way... that was where... I first learned details about George W. Carver... the scientist, you know what I mean...

Q: Carver?

A: Yes. George W. Carver

Q: I know who Carver is, he was the scientist with peanuts.... exactly...

A: ... they had the whole museum there and I was lucky to go in there and see everything... it burned down.... [inaudible]

Q: I wanted to mention... I have here in my notes that Booker T. Washington arrived at Tuskegee and organized the Normal School for the training of Black teachers, in 1881, and this aviation idea was only a fantastic dream in 1881... for Booker T. Washington. So he was elected as principle of the school, so I guess that was why you all ended up down there... because they had this aviation branch...

A: No, not really. We ... anyway, when you go into Tuskegee, you'll see the slaves (?)... black monument statues ... and you'll see Booker T. Washington [inaudible....] But, aviation.... didn't come



in until...they were looking for a place to start the aviation program for Blacks... you know, when the war started in 1941... you know how many Black officers there were in the whole United States?

Q: Just a few...

A: Five...

Q. ... that's a few...

A. That's right, and Neil (?) Davis and his father and three chaplains from Fort (Leavenworth?). Now, the thing is this, they were looking for someplace... they were started in Washington DC ...[inaudible] one of the students sued the War Department... for a... to enter into the service... for the flying service. Blacks could not...you know, and all that... the Navy ... all they could do... I forget what they called it... all they could do is...wait on... Black sailors... But, the thing was, when they finally settled on Tuskegee, there was one man who had a flying school – his name was Chief Alfred Anderson. They called him Chief Anderson. And he was the one who taught 99% of the Tuskegee pilots, see, but... on an inspection tour... this was in 1941... early, late 1940... Eleanor Roosevelt was on a inspection tour ... she got the word that... somehow she knew that Chief Anderson was at this school and that's where the Black pilots were being trained... and so she... [inaudible]... well, she knew that he... they were considering that, because of him, because of this school, that's where they wanted to put the Tuskegee ... what they would call, the Tuskegee experiment.

So she went there and she asks if she could take a ride with the ... she asked the colonel... with Chief Anderson... see, all these Secret Service men, they had a collective baby(?), they didn't want anything to happen on their watch, see what I mean. What if Chief Anderson crashed? ... the President's wife, you know [inaudible]... So, he took them up, and was there for a half hour... and then she said she would talk to her husband...and she did and... actually what happened – FDR somehow maneuvered... they had \$75,000 to build, to start...it was a wilderness there... and they had a black architectural firm... [inaudible].. a black firm that cleared that and set up housing and so forth... actually it was called Motton(?) field, Motton field was 8 miles from the campus, see what I mean? So what I'm saying is the Tuskegee airmen owe a huge debt of gratitude to Eleanor Roosevelt. ... huge debt.

Q: ... good thing the conditions were right that day...

A: ... Yeah, that's right... definitely.... so see, going around... it's quite involved...you see what I mean, but, so... that's the thing... they don't give credit for that.

Q: Now, how long did you train there?



A: ...ah, let's see... I went in to Keesler Field in August... and then, September, November I moved to ah, '44..., November to... about four months...then from there... I moved to Tyndall Field, Florida... for gunnery... that's where we took our gunnery. Then from Tyndall Field, Florida we moved to Midland Army Air Force Base in Texas, for my navigation and bombardier... see, I was essentially a navigator and bombardier... I've still have got my... those are wings, right here [points to patch on coat] ... bombardier... and, what happened.... now, around this time, towards say about 1945, the war in Europe was winding down.... so, we were preparing to go to the Pacific theater... alright, well... Godman field... that were... Godman Field, Kentucky -- that's where we were stationed... 477th bomb group. It was too small for... over water training, and so forth... so they moved us up to Michigan, to Southrich(?) Field [see *note below**]. And the Colonel up there ... Colonel, um... I forgot his name... anyway, he got wind that there was a black group coming up there, and he didn't want them... he didn't want them.

The Colonel was... the Colonel of a field was... a Lord master... I mean, they had dictatorial powers, unbelievable, see what I mean... and ah, he said he didn't want us up there. You know, and we found out... but we still had to go, because that's were the orders were to send us up there. And when we got there, he said, we go to the movie then we were to go to the Officer's Club, see? Well, there were 19 of us... so we got to the Officer's Club after the movie and we all got up...[inaudible] ... and the Colonel, he had MPs there with Thompson sub-machine guns. He had... there from the military...adjutant general, the inspector general's office... he had them there. And he said "you can not come in" ... and we wanted to know why, because in 1940, the official bible of the Army regulations, you know... stated that [inaudible]... it said that all commissioned officers have the right... there would be one club for commissioned officers, one for non-commissioned, and one for the enlisted men. All bonafide officers could have access to the Officer's club. Well, he didn't want us in there, so, we went in and he put us under arrest. Then the next day, ... all together in three days, there were about 104 of us arrested. One fellow pushed up against... just pushed up against, going in... and they charged him... they charged three of them... court-martial, they court-martialed three of them. And they... and what they would do, if they found a ____, they would call me on it... individually, they'd call us up... maybe two or three o'clock in the morning... go down to this closet, you know... then they would... there would be about three of them, and they'd say "do you realize"... this was their strong point... "do you realize that you could be hung for disobeying a direct order in a time of war"... see, and so... you know, I was a young shave-tail(?) looking at these full chicken(?) colonels, and so forth... it was very heady(?) stuff, but just personally... I just had a talk with the Lord and said "I know I'm right, this is wrong..." If they're going to hang me, they're gonna hang me... and that's what it is (?)... we're just going to go to the wall with this.



**[note: according to Mr. Battle's autobiography... Freeman Field, Seymour, Indiana was the location of this Officer's Club incident, not Michigan. The Colonel's name was Selway]*

Q. So this event is what you called "the mutiny" ?

A. ... yes

Q. So you're in the pokey...

A. Actually, it was like they confined us to the area of barbed wired yard... But you know, the thing that hurts the most, and it's still... you know, and it still eats inside me... while we're inside, bonafide United States Officers, ... walking around the base with Italian and German prisoners of war going to the PX and doing all this stuff,... you figure it out. See what I mean?

Q. Yeah, that's tough.

A. Especially put yourself in that mindset... back then... and I'm saying, why would you want to fight for a country that treats you like this? ...see, but the thing was... we just said, we're going to do the best we can.

Q. Now, could you talk to each other?

A. Yes, we could talk... in fact, they wanted... we would meet in the latrine, you see... and then we would decide on what we would do. Be strong... bolster up the weak... there were some who were afraid, some were afraid...

Q. I'd be afraid...

A. Yea, you know....

Q. That's a scary proposition.

A. What happened... we were smuggling notes out, to our parents and people. My mother wrote the War Department. She wrote.. and she said she was going down and camp out on the Constitution Hall steps ... you know... I have this in my book... And so, what happened eventually, eventually, you know the... they couldn't explain this to anybody, in a rational type of thing... so they just court-martialed three. Then they gave us all... next thing to a court-martial is what they call a letter of reprimand ... that states that your behavior is unbecoming to... as an officer and gentleman, and so forth. They were reaming you out... so they gave us all that. But they court-martialed the three, then they... actually the three – found two of them guilty. One, Bill Terry ([book: Roger C. Terry]) they found him guilty... [inaudible]. You know, it's like if I go in there... in a crowded room and brush against... he didn't... well, anyway....

Q. So, the one had to get out and the other two get to stay in?

A. No, they don't stay, but what happened... they "red flagged" them, see what I mean? That meant... his career was over at that time, see what I mean? Now, this was a reprimand and all that...



they stayed with us until 1995 ... that convention (?) down in Atlanta, Georgia... and Gen. Fogleman and Assistant Secretary of the Air Force... ah, he was a Black fellow... he was a test pilot... I can't think of his name ([book: *Rodney Coleman*]). But, he fought very hard to have... in the end he convinced the General to have all of our records expunged. Now, the thing was this... we had to... the burden was on us ... in other words, you had to write to have it expunged. So we had to [inaudible]... to tell the parents (?) ... some had past away... so we had to [inaudible]... off the record. And still, we haven't... [inaudible] over a thousand officers went through and you have to think ... [inaudible] because, behind me, there were ten to keep me fine (?)... see what I mean, you know... to see after the paymaster, the food, the parachute, the _____, the engineer, and all that.... who enlisted... non-commissioned officers... and there were about 10,000 votes (?)...

Q. Oh wow, that makes sense... OK, now how long were you incarcerated? Was it days... weeks?

A. No, it was months.

Q. Months?!

A. It was 22 months (??)...

Q. Wow, OK so, how did you get out of there?

A. Well, that's what I'm saying...

Q. I mean, who let you out?

A. George Marshall, the General, you know... that's one thing. There were a lot of papers... Black papers, especially the "Amsterdam (?) News," the "Pittsburgh Courier" ... the ah... what's the other Black paper?... Los Angeles... I forgot ... the "Chicago _____" ... and they kept at it, you see what I mean? They kept at it...

Q. You almost had another underground down there. You were all sneaking the notes down... that's incredible. So it became a national issue?

A. Yeah, it was. And what made it worse – Roosevelt passed away during that time.... Truman took his place. But as a result of what we did... in the end... Truman, in 1948, passed the... I mean, not Truman, but with the officers... passed the official law about no segregation in the services... instillations... see what I mean?

Q. So was that technically the end of the Tuskegee Airmen?

A. No.... see, actually that was... see what happened... they called B. O. Davis back during the riot... the mutiny, they called... they removed Col. Selway ... that's his name... they removed him, see, then they called back... from the European theater, they called B. O. Davis in to take over, and he brought his kind of officers, and that was the first time we were under Black.... direction... first time. And... no, at that time... that's when we tightened up. Now, I was in the 477th medium bomb group. All right, when Davis came back... it was... the technical name was the 477th Medium



Bombardment Group, OK... now when Davis came back, he brought with him, elements of the 99th Fighter Squad from overseas, and I was in the 616th Bomb Squad... there were four of them: 616th, 617th, 618th and 619th... and he eliminated the 616th and 619th, and kept the 617th and 618th, and then he added the fighter pilot group. So it became the 477th composite bomb unit... in other words, they were streamlined so they could hit faster... getting ready for the Pacific Theater... so there was the reorganization. Now, with us, he said we're going to need more pilots... see, we're going to need more pilots, so, we had to write (?)... so I enrolled in pilot training, after that... I enrolled ... I was in there for two months. Then at that time... they dropped the bomb in Hiroshima, Nagasaki... and the war concluded, see... so they said that all officers, if you had enough... points... in service, you get so many points, and this and that... and I had enough, and so I... wanted to get back to business... so I went right up to the administration office... in November '45... I was... I got out.

Q. So you were able to stay in the United States the whole time?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you have any friends who wound up going overseas?

A. Oh yeah, but... not from the 477th, see what I mean? The 477th...

Q. They just kinda went where you went...

A. We were trained... you see, they didn't want to send us over to the European theater because that was winding down... they had control. Then they knew that the big thing would be over in the Pacific theater. So that's what they were training us for... that's what we were reorganized for.

Q. But the Tuskegee Airmen, in general, had such a great record, as far as being able to maneuver and distract and all that sort of thing.

A. Yes, well they... the 332nd... they were composed of four fighter groups: the 99th, the 100th, 101st, and the 102nd. And then, it was at that time they became the "Redtails" ... and that's the red tag... an honor... see we wear the jackets. They became the Redtails, and then, they were doing... you had to go back, because when Britain was carrying most of the air war... they were doing the daylight bombing, but they were losing so many of the bombers... they were losing so many of them, that they were very... they were elated when the United States came in, and took a part with the B-17s and the Northern (?) bomb sight, see what I mean? And we could go... but... that's one thing. Now, with the B-17s... they had a crew of about ten... and they would go on these raids... if they shot down, say, 20 planes ... that's 200 men would die. So, they were losing so many, even the United States, but then they... because the plane did not have the distance to take the bombers from Berlin and back... they didn't want to take them part of the way. But then they came out with the best fighter plane... the best fighter in the war, and that was the B-51 Mustang. And they put that... and they put the wing tanks, the belly tanks in the nose (?) and they could take the planes right on in to Berlin and



return... OK, now, they didn't want... the crews... the white crews did not want the Tuskegee Airmen to accompany them at first, because they... the old wise-tail that Black... didn't know how to handle the plane. That's what they were telling themselves. They just did not have the skills to do it. But what happened... one thing added up... those missions that the Tuskegee Airmen did accompany the bombers... all those bombers came back. Now, not one of them was lost, due to enemy action. Now they may have lost... a plane.. due to a flat (?), but not to enemy action.

Now, that brings me to the next... the technique that B. O. Davis used... he was very strict, I'll tell you about Bill Davis... he was very strict... he would place the plane in between the bombers and above the bombers and below the bombers. .. and if a gaggle(?) of messerschmidts (?) or _____ come over, he would not let his pilots go after them, you see... Now, the other pilots in the other group, they would go chase the _____ to be Aces... and shoot down five planes and become an Ace. But he would not let them do that. They say, he put an umbrella above the route (?)... and that's why he was so successful. But 200 missions that they had... 200... they never lost a bomber to enemy action. So after a while, they were getting requests from all over Europe for the Redtails... to accompany them.

Q. That's great, that's great... so which of these planes were you involved in?

A. The B-25, Billy Mitchell... at first, then after that, when I was in pilot training... then I was at basic training, primary (?) training, advanced training... and I stopped... you know, because I wanted to... to play music. I'd be drumming all over the plane... I had my sticks with me, you know what I mean! But the thing was this... it was... I don't know... B. O Davis was the type of man, and I don't know if you know about him, but they gave him the silent treatment at West Point. Nobody would speak to him. see...

Q. Now, was he the only Black there?

A. He was the only Black there in the 20th century. There was a _____(?) that came through in the 19th century, see, who graduated West Point. He wasn't the first to graduate, but he was the first in the 20th century... see what I mean?

Q. And this is B. O. Davis, Jr.?

A. Junior.

Q. The one you were with?

A. That's right.

Q. OK. It a... there's an article from the Sunday Capitol, dated July 14th, 2002 by Clarence Page.

A. Oh yeah, I read that.



Q. He ... this is his first paragraph. "Next to the listing for discipline in the dictionary, they should put should put a picture of the late General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. "

A. That's right. He was a strict disciplinarian. In fact, ...[inaudible]... he wouldn't smile, he wouldn't smile. He was ramrod straight. He was... 'cause he went through four years of this stuff, you know, at West Point. Boy, nobody spoke to him...

[break in filming ?? 34:27 – 34:32]

A... in November... '45... I was [inaudible]

Q. So you were able to stay in the United States the whole time?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you have any friends who wound up going overseas?

A. Oh yeah, but... not from the 477th, see what I mean? The 477th...

[This is a repeat of a previous section above]

[at 42:16... continues from:] Boy, nobody spoke to him...

Q. He said he "felt like a prisoner in solitary confinement, yet he persevered, in 1936 he graduated 35th in a class of 276 students. He says, I was always a pretty stubborn kid..." [laughter]

There's another thing I wanted to mention down here, which you kinda covered here. It says "they finally had their opportunity to fly for their country in Europe, against the German Luftwaffe. A lot was riding on their wings. Under Davis' command, the 332nd fighter group compiled an outstanding record. They shot down 111(?) enemy planes and destroyed or damaged 273 on the ground, while losing more than 70 of its own pilots, who were either killed or... killed in action or missing in action."

A. Yes, right.

Q. "... and it's proudest achievement – not one of the bombers the destroyers protected on escort missions was lost to an enemy fighter." So, yeah, that's... pretty impressive.

A. Yes, right... But you know, the Tuskegee Airmen really ... they made their mark, actually, again, during the Korean War.

Q. Really?

A. Yes, that's where most of them got their ____ promotions... I mean, practically all of them, the fliers who stayed in... became colonels, lieutenant colonels. And then you have McGee(?), he was a fighter pilot in three wars.

Q. No kidding?

A. Yeah. WWII, Vietnam, and Korean War.

Q. Wow, that's incredible.



A. You see?

Q. Now there's an article here, on McGee, from the Washington Post, dated June 23rd, 2002... and in this, he talks about going up to _____ ? the week previous... with a hero's welcome, he even got to stay in the VIP Suite at Lockberry(?) Hall ...

A. Lockberry, yes....

Q. ...and it says "the gesture was meant to acknowledge the patriots who proved(?) that totalitarianism abroad and racial prejudice at home" and someone was quoted as saying "he was fighting two wars and one _____ ?" McGee said "he never let the slights(?) deter him – we weren't happy about it, he told the Detroit News, we still carried ourselves in a way so that people would respect us for our ability and accomplishments and not our color."

A. Yeah, that was... that's the thing that kept us going. When we would meet in the bathroom... we would ... both see each other's spirits, see what I mean? We'd say "just don't give in, don't give in." you know what I mean?

Q. That's a great thing for people to live by every day.

A. Every day.

[break]

Q. Well, I thank you so much for coming in today and sharing with us your memories of the Tuskegee Airmen and we're glad you came down to these parts. [laughter]

A. I elated that your... you invited me. You know, because it's a story untold. It's not in the history books, you see... it's a footnote... and that's why I wrote my book ...

Q. ... which is entitled...

A. "Easier Said."

Q. "Easier Said"... awesome. And you're working on a second book.

A. Yeah, the second book is called "The Beat Goes On." See...

Q. OK... great. Well, I look forward to seeing those books... so thank you so much.

A. It's a pleasure, thank you.

[break]

[another man (George Daly ?) is seated with Mr. Battle]

Q. Go ahead...

MAN: Well, I was in the Pacific, and I don't know where in the Hell you guys were. I was over there for three years, and um.... but one thing that impressed me, I think it was the ... it was when the



Army, I think it was a ... [inaudible]... and I read about a General Davis, and it must have been his father. Was his father a general?

Battle: Yes, his father was a general.

MAN: I read ... the thing I read about him that sticks to me all my life...is that, when he went into his office, he'd set his jacket on the chair... and if you start to come in... he said, you don't have to salute me if you don't want to, but you [salute?] with the stars [points to jacket?]. And I've always, in my mind lived with that statement. That I don't have to respect a politician or anybody but I've got to respect the office he holds.

Battle: Yeah... let me tell you about that...that brings up an incident that I had.... are you familiar with the name Coleman Young?

MAN: No

Battle: He used to be a... mayor of Detroit, you see, and he was a Tuskegee Airman. Feisty, very feisty. And, one day, at Midland(?)...he was a... at first he was a... at first he belonged to the 92nd, you see, but then he transferred and became a student officer with the Tuskegee Airmen, you see, he was going to get his wings. Well, one day, I was going down to the post... to pick up the bus to take us to town... and so, this car pulled beside me and it was Lieutenant Young, you know, and he said... ___ can I help you? are you going to town? And I said "yes sir" and he said "hop in." So I got in the car and when we got down to the gate, got down to the gate, you know... the corporal's guard was there... you know, and he was saluting and sending the cars through. And when he got to Coleman's car, he looked and... did like I said [waved the car past]... and Coleman sat there ... and Coleman turned off the engine... and called him, and said ... no, I told you, you can go. And the cars are starting to line up in back of us, you know. "I told you, you can go." And Coleman looked at him and said "you don't salute officers?" The fellow looked in and looked at me, ... now, as a cadet we have, like gadgets on our cap, we have like, wings, you see... as a cadet we had propellers and wings... but the officer had a shield and the eagle... he said "oh, I'm sorry, I thought you were a cadet." And Coleman said "well, you see I'm not a cadet." then he said "if you don't salute me, then salute this [points to his collar]." and he put that bar in front of him.... and he popped to a salute. So, that's what you said.

MAN: I'll always remember... Did you... your organization, not your company, but... they flew mainly... guard duty for the bombers, right, they didn't fly bombers did they?

Battle: No, no, they accompanied the bombers. .. as the last thing. But in the beginning, they didn't send them... they didn't put them up in front, they were doing...



MAN: ... training...

Battle. No, no, they were bombing the trains and the ... all the trucks and all the ground, ____? they called them, see, and they wouldn't put them up in front because they didn't want... the congressional people, didn't want to a... didn't think they could handle it, see what I mean?

MAN: Well, I think you are the perfect person to tell this story. I have interviews that are very bitter and it shows. Maybe you're bitter too, but it doesn't show. And when you get a bunch of kids like we had the other day, ... and the program? ... was really bitter about it, you know. And... it changes the kids minds about everything. So it wasn't good...but you should not stay bitter all your life about it. You can sit and explain it like you have, and it comes through good.

Battle: Thank you, thank you.

MAN: It's been a pleasure interviewing you [shakes hands]

Battle: It's a pleasure... I really enjoyed it...