

Lancaster County Historical Society
African-American Veterans Oral History Project

Interviewer: Carole LeFever

Interviewee: Sydney Bridgett

Location: home of Sydney Bridgett

Subject: African American-American Legion Post 780

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[] indicates uncertainty of what was spoken

LeFever: Today is October 17th, 2006 and we're here in the home of Sidney Bridgett Jr. Actually—

Bridgett: Senior.

L: Senior. Okay I'm sorry, Sidney Bridgett Senior. And, we're having an interview that will be part of a program focusing on the charter and the beginning of the African American Legion begun in 1946. And, uh...Sidney Bridgett is one of the living members of those who signed this charter along with Nelson Polite, uh...senior, and uh Donald K. Wilson. And, uh, this event will take, uh, Armistice Day which does absolutely happen on the day we're doing it this year, on Saturday the eleventh of November. And so it's a good time to add to this story. So, my name is Carole LeFever, we're in mount Joy as I said in the home of Sidney Bridgett Senior, and uh Mr. Bridgett, this is a prequel to another interview did together, you and your wife uh...in, in lead up to a Fulton Project, and pinning down the history of our community. So I'm glad to know, or to find out a little bit about the beginning of the story before you two came together. But you have some wonderful documents here that um...are completely relevant to the stories of the...if you would begin at wherever you feel a good place to start this story, uh...as a young man, um...and again you might talk about your interaction with any of these people perhaps your brother in whose name this particular uh...Legion um was uh...named after, he was a casualty in combat I understand in World War II, and this was happening at the end of World War II.

B: Well um, to begin with, Howard um, went into the service quite early during the conflict. He was killed in the, the Philippines during the uh...active battle conditions.

And was subsequently awarded a bronze star and a purple heart because he died from his wounds. Um, I don't know what all you want me to say.

L: Well if you would like to comment on the situation uh, of his um...awards, um, anything you want to add to bring some life to this gentleman after whom this is named.

B: Um, well we were, uh, separated when my mother died when I was only 12. And I went to be, we both went to be with an aunt and an uncle. And Howard did not stay with my aunt and uncle. Uh...he was much older, he was older than I. I was 12, he was I think 18 at the time. So he was independent. Uh, then, and uh...he...left alone but uh, uh we were in close touch most of the time. And he corresponded with me while he was in the service.

L: Where did you live? Was this in Lancaster County?

B: I lived in Lancaster on S. Christian Street right across from the Mennonite Church at 17 S. Christian Street with an aunt and uncle who were part of the uh...patrons on the list of the uh, celebrate the first year military ball celebration uh...their name is uh...John Shorter, Mr. and Mrs. John Shorter listed on the, on the uh...patron's list of military ball that was held um in March 19th, 1948.

L: Now what is that document you're holding there, is that the program from that ball?

B: This is the program from the military ball, the first annual military ball. The Harris C. Bridgett Post No. 780. And it's auxiliary unit number 780 of the American Legion. Held at Crispus Attucks Community Center, 47 Howard Ave., Lancaster.

L: Well it's significant that this event, we're, we're giving honor to the formation of this uh, this group is also being held at Crispus Attucks.

B: This um, other program that I have here was the original program where the charter was presented, uh...to the Howard C. Bridgett Post No. 780 American Legion. Um, this is down at the Conestoga Lodge of Elks Auditorium, also uh, that was done in 1946 on the third November 1946 was the presentation program. Um...

L: Let me focus in on that because that was chronologically the first even then.

B: Yes.

L: Okay. If you could just hold that open then and I'll see if I can....

B: The front.

L: Okay.

B: And this opens. This reads African American Legion—

L: Yes I can read it, I can barely see it. So if you could just go over the contents of that program.

B. Okay, uh, the first page contains the uh three chapter verses of the Negro National Anthem and the program starting with the call to order and salute to colors. Um, followed by a solo uh, [Vester] Thornton who was a well known local baritone, very good. He sang the Star Spangled Banner. Prayer was offered by Chaplain James A. Yule. Uh...a reading by—

L: What church was Pastor Yule, do you remember?

B: Uh, well he...

L: What congregation?

B: He was a member of the Baptist Church he was, and after uh, his prayer I gave uh, a reading as the historian uh...and introductions were made. Comrade Amot, Amos Schultz, chairman of the Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin—Schaffer, the Greek Team of Pennsylvania Post 334 was a white legion, of uh....

L: So they anticipated—

B: Mmhm. And um, then the initiation of members, um, for Post 780 began. Introduction of District Commander Ambrose S. Plumber. Initiation of Post Officers by District Commander and then selection by Nightingale Glee Club Director uh...direction of Mrs. Hughes Heller. Presentation of permanent charter by district commander and

acceptance by Commander Arthur H. Brown. Introduction to Command...Comrade Kenneth Shade, Commander of Lancaster Pennsylvania Post 34. Presentation of new colors was made, and the call to colors by Bugler Comrade Nelson Polite. Advance of the new colors in place position. Acceptance by Commander Arthur H. brown. Solo then rendered by Ms. Gloria Wilson assisted by Nightingale Glee Club audience National Negro Anthem. The introduction of guests followed, and we had a moment of silence for departed comrades.

L: Who were the guests, do you recall?

B: Uh...offhand I don't have that list.

L: Mmhm, okay.

B: A moment of silence, uh, for departed comrades. And a solo by William Morris, my buddy, was the title. Then we had retirement of colors and the closing. The officers at the time were Arthur Brown, Commander; Harold Glover, First Vice Commander; Kermit [Tooms], Second Vice Commander; R. Victor Hardcastle, Agitant; James Jones, Finance Officer; Daniel Parker, Sergeant at Arms; Frederick G. Wilson, Service Officer; James A. Yule, Chaplain; Sidney Bridgett, Historian; Curtis E. [Neels], Medical Officer; David E. Brown, Legal Advisor. And also Matthew McCoy and Theodore Wright were trustees. Program committee for this event consisted of Comrade Harold Glover, Comrade Victor, R. Victor Hardcastle; Comrade Theodore A. Wright; Comrade William Cooper; and Comrade Theodore Miller.

L: Now the first thing that occurs to me is the fact that um...there was apparently a white and a black, an African American Legion. Now do you want to comment a little bit about that? You were saying that in this time right after the World War II there were a number that were springing up.

B: Yes, the, at that time, uh, there were no black membership in the uh, existing uh...chapter of the American Legion that was, was Legion Post 34. Uh...so a number of, uh, organizations sprung up like the one in Lancaster, uh, that became uh, Howard C. Bridgett Post 780. Others broke uh...uh...grew up uh, and Columbia was one and I remember about the same time, uh...and I'm sure in other smaller communities and even in larger cities they were separate uh, chapters of the American Legion grew up, or sprung up uh...I don't know how the, the local men liked the Lancaster one. I'm sure

they didn't, they didn't last too long. Now I think the one in Columbia still exists, I think, I think this one in Columbia is still active. I'm not sure.

L: Now the fact that uh...the main stream, the white Legion was there and-and presented the-the colors and the colors of the new Post, uh, was there ever a time when um, this was even difficult—the establishment and sanctioning by the main body group of separate legions since these people such as yourself were barred?

B: Now at that time I was probably one of the youngest members of the gr—of the group. And so I, and uh, I was not a uh, too active at that time because I was still um going to school and uh, trying to get into college, uh shortly after that I started working for the air force and moved to Europe and stayed in Europe for seven years. Uh—

L: So you were in finishing high school when you were a part of this group.

B: That's right, I was—I had come out of service and I still had two years of high school to finish.

L: Alright.

B: So I was quite uh...occupied with accomplishing that and then trying to get into college and, and eventually went to uh...F&M and graduated—

L: What high school did you graduate from?

B: McCaskey.

L: Mmhm. And what year was that in, finally?

B: I think I uh finally got my high school diploma in '46. Uh...I came out of the service in June and they had a-a military uh...school not, not a school—military school, but a school for military men uh established at, in conjunction with McCaskey.

L: At McCaskey's site?

B: At McCaskey's site. And we could work at our own speed to make up what were the basic requirements for graduation and I made up the two years in six months from June to December—

L: Ahh.

B:--So I was ready to start college in December. Um...

L: What program was that, was that a veteran's program, a federal--?

B: It's called a veteran's program, a veteran's program funded by I think by the, the...government and I'm sure they had some government subsidy. But it was administered by the school district okay?

L: Okay.

B: And uh, the teachers in the program were uh...usually McCaskey teachers or at least school district teachers. Uh...the uh...when I finished, I finished that and started the college program and that also was a special veterans school that was established and we had some classes at McCaskey, we had some at F&M, we had some at the...Phys. Ed for example at the YMCA, uh...so it was a, uh, collaboration of institutions that helped provide the teaching for this first year.

L: For the veterans.

B: For the veterans. When you finished that first year you applied to a full uh...four year program somewhere. And I was able to get into the program at Franklin and Marshall. I started there then as a sophomore really.

L: Aren't you one of the first African Americans on that campus?

B: Yes. At the time I got started at F&M, uh, there were there local African Americans on campus. Uh, Sumner [Bohee] had started a year before. Grant [Miens] and I had started at the same time, about the same time.

L: '46.

B: Uh, Grant has since died. He died a number couple of years ago. Sumner is uh, a doctor. Became a doctor and has had a bit practice out on the west coast, Los Angeles. Um, the three of us, Sumner was the first black American to graduate from F and Franklin and Marshall as far as I know. It happens he graduated in 1950. Grant [Miens] and I graduated in '51. Uh, now Grant and Sumner, uh, were not active as alumni. Uh, Grant eventually uh became a part of the African American Alumni Association. Uh...at F&M, uh but then he as I said he-he died a few years membership in that. And he, he worked uh...for Social Security and uh...he uh when he died was a I think district manager for social security and uh...for a while in Eastern Pennsylvania and I think also in New Jersey, um...

L: Now you—

B: I've been—the two of them, we were very close as friends at the time, uh...although we grew up and went to school in different ages because I'm, I'm much older than either one of them.

L: Alright.

B: Uh, but since I was so late getting my high school diploma and all that, we were still pretty close.

L: Contemporaries.

B: Yeah, contemporaries and friends. And uh, they were both part of my wedding when I got married. Grant [Miens] was my, my uh best man and Sumner was an usher when [May] and I got married. That's in 1950—

L: Now uh, in what year was that?

B: That was in 1950.

L: And what was her maiden name?

B: Her maiden name was Skipper. Uh, she was a member of the, the Skipper girls from Mount Joy Pennsylvania. Hahahaha.

L: So that's how you ended up in Mount Joy!

B: Yeah, haha. And I—

L: You followed one of the Skipper girls, haha.

B: That was in, we got married in the summer between my junior and senior year. And then uh...

L: Of college?

B: Of college, yes. And uh, she had been a student at Millersville. And uh, she used, we used to pass each other in the square. She'd get off a Mount Joy bus waiting for the Millersville bus and I would take the 7th Ward bus and I'd wait for the College Avenue bus and we'd always pass and never spoke. We noticed each other. Hahaha.

L: I bet you did! Hahaha.

B: And uh, uh...she supposedly told one of her friends on the bus, Millersville bus one time, "See that guy over there with the horn-rim glasses?" And her friend said, "Yes." "Well I'm gonna marry him." And the girl...poo-pooed, said ya know "Ah you're crazy—"

L: Haha, sure. Haha.

B: But uh...

L: But she uh, she got you alright! That's wonderful how long have you been—

B: Or I got her, whichever way you want to go.

L: There you go. How long have you been married?

B: We've been married fifty-six years.

L: Fifty-six years.

B: And we celebrated our fifty-sixth anniversary this past Aug-uh-July.

L: Congratulations.

B: Thank you. Um....

L: That almost sidetracked my brain too! Where were we? Uh, back-back with you being in the background of the formation of this uh...group.

B: Uh, I was on the, the original list.

L: Mmhm.

B: Because I was, had just gotten out of the service at the time, uh, and as it said I wasn't too active in the actual running of the, of the, the chapter. Uh, because I was also very busy trying to get my education going. Uh, but uh, as historian I was supposed to keep a record but uh, of course the, uh...the pressure that everybody was living under at the time, uh...played a part I think in the demise of the uh...

L: The group.

B: The group. Uh, the group still was very close and active in the community and almost everyone on that list was well-known in the community. Arthur Brown, the Commander was uh probably the first black postman that we had in the city. Uh, there may have been on before him but uh, uh...I knew of him but he, he was not a uh community man.

L: What was his name?

B: Um...I forget his name.

L: Alright don't worry about it.

B: But I knew, but I can picture where he lived up on Howard Avenue up above Rock, above [Rockman] Street. But I can't remember the name offhand right now. But uh, as far as I remember Art Brown, Arthur Brown was the first uh—

L: Mmhm.

B: Uh...

L: Lancaster person...

B: Yeah, mail carrier. Uh, look at the, looking at these officers uh...Harold Glover, and Kermit [Tooms], Kermit [Tooms] had one of the first uh, business then. He had a, um, gas station on Chester Street between Duke and Rock, and [Rockman]. It was a gas station up by [Rockman].

L: Do you remember what gas it was?

B: I think it was a...I think it was the uh...an Atlantic, I'm not sure.

L: Atlantic.

B: I'm not sure. Um, Victor Hardcastle was the Assistant Director at Crispus Attucks.

L: Who was the director?

B: Ruby uh [Bohee], she was [Bohee] and then she became Payne, and then she married a third time and the name...uh...Sumner's mother was the first uh, um...paid director of Crispus Attucks—

L: And this was Sumner's mother.

B: Sumner's mother, yes. Crispus Attucks at this time was a little house on Duke Street. A three story house on Duke Street, and the first floor was Crispus Attucks. The second and third floor were their, was the residence of the [Bohees]. That was Sumner, his mother, his sister, and his grandmother. They occupied the five rooms that were, I think two rooms of the third floor and three rooms on the second floor, plus the kitchen. But during the evening after school everyday the first floor was Crispus Attucks, uh, where we played games, and we had our crafts, this kinda stuff.

L: So essentially, the, the, the Assist—is it the Assistant Director that she was? She was the Director.

B: She was the Director. She was the prior paid Director.

L: Okay. So she essentially as part of her pay lived in this, this Crispus Attucks which during the day on the first floor then served the community?

B: Yes.

L: Ah. What year was that and uh—

B: Oh jeez. Um...that was even before the war.

L: Okay, it started before the war. What was the address of this Duke Street, um...?

B: I think it was 417, it was the first house, and the first residence after you passed uh Howard Avenue.

L: Okay.

B: There was a bakery on the corner, Romanoff's Bakery. Uh and then uh the store, and then Romanoff's and above that this Jewish family ran the bakery and the bakery was in the building between their store and residence and Crispus Attucks. That was a bake shop, a bakery.

L: Okay.

B: That run, they produced a lot of uh, local uh, Jewish uh, bread.

L: Mmhm.

B: And of course it was very popular with other things too, sweets and stuff.

L: A good bakery.

B: Yeah it was a good bakery. And um...it was very, very interesting because Mrs. [Bohee] as we knew her then was also the Summer Director of the playground.

L: Where was that?

B: That was on Chester Street, beside what was the [Obshole's] Hall.

L: Mmhm.

B: At the, at the top of, of uh...Atlantic Avenue which goes from Chester Street down to North Street, it was only one block. But at the upper end of that was uh, a-a large frame building that was uh, uh...[Obshole's] Hall.

L: It's no longer there?

B: I don't know if it's still there, I don't think it is. But beside that was an empty space that was used for a summer playground. And I used to remember, I remembered that I usually came home muddy, or dusty.

L: From the playground...haha.

B: From the playground because there was very little if any grass there. It's all just dirt and if it was raining there, ya got muddy. Hehe.

L: And everybody gathered there.

B: Hehehe. If it rained, you came home muddy. Uh, those of uh, odd memories that uh...James Jones, the Finance Officer, I think this James was eventually uh, Babe's brother-in-law. I think he married Babe's sister, Naomi.

L: Okay.

B: Daniel Parker, Sergeant at Arms; Fred Wilson, Service Officer; James Yule, James Yule Chaplain, he also had a catering service and uh, uh...and then of course, I'm the next on the list, historian I was uh...

L: How were you chosen to be the historian?

B: Huh? I guess, it might have been over a flip of a coin why they chose me as historian.

L: Haha.

B: But I was a student at the time.

L: Ah.

B: And that's probably part of it.

L: You get access to a good library in other words.

B: Probably.

L: Hahaha.

B: Uh, and this Curtis E. [Neels] M.D. I didn't know, it's the only one I don't remember. And David Brown, Legal Adviser he was a police man, that was Arthur Brown's younger brother.

L: Wasn't an attorney, he was a policeman.

B: Yeah, he was a policeman. Uh...

L: Was that on the city force?

B: Yeah, mmhm. He was one of the...there were uh...up until he became a policeman, there had been only one other a black policeman that was a man by the name of Lavender, Earl Lavender.

L: He was the first one then. Earl Lavender.

B: Earl Lavender was the first one. And Buzzy, and uh...uh, a guy that, he became Lieutenant on the police force. Duncan.

L: Okay.

B: Then Duncan, I think, then Wilson, Leonard Wilson became policeman after that. But I think uh, Buzzy Brown uh, the, was the...

L: And his name was Dave Donald?

B: David.

L: David.

B. Yeah. Matthew McCoy I don't remember, and Theodore Wright were trustees. Glover, Hardcastle, Ted Wright, and William Cooper, and Ted Miller were the in charge of the programs.

L: Now the other document that you have is uh...the Ball that followed by two years, the event—

B: The Military Ball, uh.

L: Let me see if we can look at the cover of that. Uh...*sounds of camera* Okay, now, see what, see what that tells us.

B: The First Annual Military Ball of the Howard C. Bridgett Post 780 and its auxiliary of The American Legion was held on Friday evening March 10th, March 19th 1948 at Crispus Attucks community center, 407 Howard Avenue in Lancaster Pennsylvania. And this is a picture of Howard.

L: How old was he um...when he passed?

B: Uh...either twenty-five or twenty-six because he was six years older than I and uh when I got out of the service I think I was only twenty when I got out of the service so uh...he was about twenty-five or twenty-six.

L: Do you remember anything about his action? Did you have any reports about his service from him, letters home?

B: No, uh, I don't have, I mean, we-he corresponded, he would always write, would write to me and encourage me to behave myself and all this kinda stuff like the big brother—

L: The big brother.

B:--Big brother attitude. And as I said I lived with my aunt and uncle John and Martha Shorter. Now they never had any children of their own, and when I went to live with them they were already fairly elderly in their fifties, early fifties or maybe sixties. They were very se—my aunt was a very good provider, uh. In fact my uncle wasn't too happy with me going to school. He thought I should be out working full time. Uh, he worked in, as a baker in the uh, um, I called it junkyard. Uh, which is a scrap metal collection down on, uh, off of Prince Street way down at Millers.

L: Millers.

B: Uh, but she was encouraging me to, she encouraged me to just go back, to go to school. And in fact to help settle that argument, she went back to work and did housework. Uh, one of the people she worked for was former mayor of Lancaster, the Trouts, before that, before I came to live with her, and then uh...uh, Doctor Stayer, she would also work for him, which was, I think was a family Doctor for her at times and also her employer. Uh...I think he was a mayor at one time but he had something to do with local government too as well as M.D.-ing. But Howard, uh, we were never physically very close because we didn't live together. But uh, he corresponded often, uh, and as I said would encourage me to uh...don't follow him. Hehe.

L: Oh he considered himself not necessarily a good example, haha.

B: Yeah, yeah, haha. Uh, he was well-known in the community, and they, his friends called him Turkey, because of the way he laughed. His laugh was like a, a cackle I guess but uh that's how he got his nickname of Turkey. Uh...

L: Can you remember the discussion or the what led up to the decision to choose him as the uh person whose name would—

B: Well as I understand, uh, he was the first uh African American Lancaster African American to die in, in uh the war.

L: World War II.

B: World War II.

L: And again where was his casualty?

B: He was, he was, he died on the island of Leyte in the Philippines during a battle, uh.

L: What year did he pass?

B: Uh...I think this information is written in here too. Probably duplicate this and...Howard C. Bridgett Post No. 708 of the American Legion has established in memory of Technician Fifth Grade Howard C. Bridgett of the Three Fifty—Thirty Five Twenty First Quartermaster Trucking Company who was the first negro veteran from Lancaster, Pennsylvania to be killed in action in World War II. The elder of two sons of Alexander and Louisa Bridgett, he was born December 21st 1917 at 410 Locust Street and was better known to his friends as Turkey. At 410 Locust Street is a little house on the corner of Locust and Duke, there was a drug store on the corner. Right behind that was the house that uh, my grandparents lived in when he was born.

L: Alright.

B: And that's where he was born. On June the 20th, 1941, he was inducted into the army at the United States at Fort Meade, Maryland and received his basic training at Camp Lee, Virginia and after four months of duty at Fort Sheridan, Illinois he was again transferred to Fort Ord, California where he uh stayed until August of '42 where he departed for overseas duty. In September of '42, Howard landed somewhere in Australia and he was among the first American negro troops to be stationed in that country. Then in December of '43 he was again transferred at the end, this time into action on the island of New Guinea, where he stayed until October '44. At this time he was again transferred to the Philippine Islands. And there's another...statement here. While on active duty on the island of Leyte, he received wounds from which he died on October 24th, 1944. Howard C. Bridgett was awarded the Foreign Decoration, the American Theater Ribbon, the Southwest Pacific Theater Ribbon with two bronze stars, the Purple Heart awarded posthumously on December 13th 1944 in recognition of wounds received that resulted in his death. The Bronze Star Medal also posthumously for service rendered above and beyond the call of duty. Now these notes were taken from the uh, celebratory ball that

was a military ball, uh...March 19th, 1948. And the program is full of congratulations to the organization from around the county. Uh, one that I note that we mentioned before that there were other Black Legions forming. There was the Harvey T. [Mackel] Post No. 772 of the American Legion, Columbia, Pennsylvania was one of the congratulatory uh...sponsors.

L: Now was it, was it common for American Legions to be named after a local person, or was that uniquely an African American thing?

B: No that was the common—

L: That was the practice.

B: Yes.

L: Now what were—would you say were some of the things that were accomplished between the onset of '46 and the military ball of '48? Or events, or, or, evidences of, or just how did the group play out in its meetings and so on in those years?

B: Well I think you'll have to, have to probably talk to someone like Babe who was more active probably.

L: Nelson Polite Senior.

B: Yeah, we called him Babe haha.

L: Do you remember how that name got started?

B: No I don't, he probably will tell you, haha. But uh, he was also my scout-master when I was in Boy Scouts. And there's not that much difference in our ages but he was a very active scout—

L: Right.

B: --And I know he reached the uh...Life Scout level which is the step below Eagle Scout. I'm not sure whether he made it to Eagle or not but I think he probably did. But

we used to go to the old Chiquetan Boy Scout Camp, uh, every summer for, oh I went I guess three of four summers.

L: When was that about?

B: Oh, I was twelve years old. Twelve to fourteen, so, uh, must have been in the late thirties.

L: And he's how much older than you?

B: I don't know really, not too much.

L: Not too much.

B: Now I think he may be...I'm eighty-one, he may be eighty-three or eighty-four, not not more than that I'm sure.

L: Now you had told me before we started recording about how you would, a person who perhaps saved your life because, in this whole process of being a military person...

B: Well as I mentioned before, I took basic training as an engineering replacement. But I was lucky enough to, to qualify for clerical school so I became a company clerk really. But uh, in the heat of the Battle of the Bulge, they were shipping replacements as fast as they could ship 'em. And your M.O.S. or your uh, occupational code didn't much matter when you, when they needed replacements. You went, you were sent, and I was in a, uh...um, a battalion of replacements from Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri which was the engineering training camp uh...

L: Well hi, how are you? Do you mind if I have a little entrance shot here? The famous person we've been talking about? This is Ms. Romaine, and this is the prequel to the three different tapes we did before the conversation. This is the before-Romaine Sidney Bridgett we're trying to get to know but I'm pleased to see you here today.

Ms. Romaine: I didn't hear anything and I said, "I wonder where she got to? Because you called and I didn't know where she was!"

L: She arrived, she arrived, but I'm, I'm honoured to be in your home again and to hear more of this story.

R: Thank you.

L: No thank you.

R: Now go right ahead and do what you gotta do.

L: We're going to do it, thank you! Haha.

B: As I said, uh, he uh, so I was in the um, um, um—a battalion of replacements headed for overseas and this was the staging area, Camp Reynolds, between Pittsburgh and Erie. And we stopped at on our way overseas. And this is sort of a staging area and for overseas shipment. And Babe, or Nelson, worked as the battalion or clerk, head clerk in uh division or battalion headquarters at Camp Reynolds.

L: This is the U.S. Army.

B: Yes, this is the U.S. Army, uh huh. And he saw that they did all the paperwork necessary for ship getting people, records shipped ready to shipment. And he noticed on this shipping list my name. And it so happened he needed an extra typist in the office where he worked and he arranged to have me pulled off the shipping list and assigned at least temporarily to the headquarters there on Camp Reynolds. And I became his sort of assistant as a typist. He was head clerk and uh, for the, in the office. And uh, I did a lot of the extra typing since I had gone to clerical school in Missouri.

L: Right.

B: And this saved my, this saved my life because the, all the replacements that I was with in that group went right over to Europe, assigned into uh battle units, and although I was a company clerk and may not have been carrying a gun on the front line, I think uh there was that danger, imminent danger because you weren't necessarily assigned on your aim, as your M.O.S. was called for when they needed replacements.

L: M.O.S. what's that.

B: Your Military Occupational...

L: M.O.S.

B: In other words, that was your code for your, your job.

L: In other words, they needed infantry, they needed bodies.

B: Yeah, and you could very well be uh, used at that. And uh, so that delayed my arrival in Europe. When the Battle of the Bulge was at its height. And I didn't get to Europe then, I was finally shipped to Europe in November.

L: When was the Battle of the Bulge?

B: That was, the Battle of the Bulge was during that summer.

L: Okay right.

B: And uh, there was still a little some activity when I did get over there in November, but here again, the situation with my brother being killed, he was killed during that fall battle—

L: While you were in Europe?

B: Well I had just arrived in Europe. And since I was the sole surviving son, the Red Cross somehow arranged through with my aunt, who is my, who is raised, who raised me, had reared me, uh...to have me, ya know, as a sole-surviving son, you were pulled, the policy was to pull you from active duty and you were assigned behind the lines somewhere. And that's what happened to me. I was on a shipment and we, the, I was on a train on my way into Germany and in Belgium I was pulled off the shipment sent back to Paris.

L: That's how you found out about your brother passing?

B: I didn't find out then because it had just happened. Evidently it had happened when I just was on, in route uh, to Europe. And uh I was pulled off this shipment and reassigned to a quartermaster unit behind the lines in France.

L: So you really didn't know why?

B: At that time, no.

L: Mmhm.

B: And I spent that whole time then in and around Paris. In, uh, quartermaster service company whose job it was to house and feed the work supervise German prisoners.

L: Alright.

B: And I was a company clerk by training, so I was assigned to uh, a battalion in a company that had this job. Uh, the quartermaster service company, we were attached to a uh, battall—, uh, transportation battalion. But we were handled the housing and supervision of uh, prisoners.

L: Is there any interaction or, or incidents stemming from you interaction with the prisoners you remember from that time?

B: No, I had very little uh...contact with the prisoners. I, I was—

L: So it was an administrative position.

B: Yeah I was in the, of the, company clerk. I did all the reporting and, um, morning reports, and all that kinda stuff and leave, uh, what the company clerk usually did, daily reports and stuff, uh.

L: Can you remember your reaction and how you did find out about your brother?

B: Yes, uh, I was assigned uh, to a unit in, in Paris. And, and we lived in a hotel uh for a while and then we lived in a, um, a closed up department store. It was a huge department store.

L: Do you remember the names of them?

B: Um...Dufayel, the, the, was called.

L: The department store?

B: The yeah, it was the, a large department store in [one lot]. And it was right almost under the Sacré-Coeur, in fact in the part of the building that I, our, our company was housed in, I could look out a window in our bedroom area which was you know, stacks, bunks and stuff, I could turn over and look out the window and see the Sacré-Coeur, that was right there.

L: Now was that a segregated residence?

B: It was an all black, all black—

L: All black—

B: All black company. Now there were—

L: And what was the company name?

B: --Other companies that were not black, uh, in this building.

L: So you were separate but together in that room.

B: Yes. Our officers were, were white. We had uh, uh...our, our non-com—non-commissioned officers were black.

L: What was the company?

B: Forty Fifty-Sixth Quartermaster Service Company, haha. That's something you never forget!

L: I guess not!

B: Your army serial number and your company assignment! Haha. 33874656, that's, that's—

L: Serial number.

B: That's my army serial number.

L: Now that was on your dog tags.

B: Nowadays they use the social security numbers the same.

L: Oh okay.

B: That's what they use but there we had separate, your social security number was separate. Uh. But, uh, I was called in to my commanding officer's uh, office one day this was, he was killed in November and I wasn't notified of his death until the spring. Um. And I was called into my commander's office and he just sat me down and said "I have some bad news for you. You have a brother Howard?" I said, "Yes." He said, "We have received word that he was killed in the Philippines in November." And this was probably about March.

L: Mmhm.

B: But my aunt and uncle had known when, in November when I, when it happened they were notified uh...

L: And they didn't say anything to you.

B: No they didn't tell me, they waited for the, uh, for one thing, they weren't notified right away either because I think it had something to do with security and this kinda stuff. But they were notified long before I was, they were uh notified soon enough that they could pull me off of that shipment.

L: Okay. So they knew before you were pulled off.

B: Yeah, they knew. Uh...But uh...It's a, it's a strange uh...situation of course. Uh...I was given uh...a furlough at that time. I uh...spent a lot of time, about a week, in Paris, uh...free. A free week, as the men call it, uh, where I could have free, a free time.

L: You didn't know what the reason for...

B: I did though—

L: You did then.

B: --That's when they gave me sort of what you'd almost call an in house leave. I mean, I was relieved of my duties and I could, uh, I had a lot of free time for about a week so that uh, I guess to, soften the blow or...

L: Mmhm.

B: Uh, but then I stayed in Paris the whole time for the rest of my enlistment, uh, in, for the rest of my time, and uh...so, when I did come home, the war engine in uh, Europe had ended and at, for one of my assignments over there, they had a lot of uh court-marshalling because of black market. At one time, there was at one minute, I think, there was about one battalion where oh, dozens of dozens of people in that battalion who were court-marshaled, uh and I was put on temporary duty in Paris, it was a separate unit, working on what they called statements of charges, which was preparation for uh, court marshal. And I-I uh was interested, I thought, that a lot of uh...the sentencing as a result of these court marshals, uh, people who were maybe guilty in the minor fashion evidently know how courts will sometimes, uh, allow you to receive a softer sentence—

L: Mmhm

B: --If you cooperate and help. Haha.

L: Mmhm.

B: Well some of these people who were uh, up in these court marshals got softer sentences by volunteering to go to the Pacific. The war was still going on in the Pacific and, but by the time they got them on the shipment to go to the Pacific, the war ended in the Pacific.

L: They lucked out! Haha.

B: They were lucky, but there was a lot that weren't lucky that really kind of got stiff sentences. There were cases where the whole truckloads would just disappear.

L: What kinds of things would disappear? Probably everything.

B: All kinds of things, all kinds of things. They came from, from uh, weaponry to food. Uh...

L: What was the most unusual thing? Do you remember anything unusual?

B: I don't know, Uh, I think, I couldn't even pin it down that much. But it was such a variety of things—

L: Right.

B: --And people court-marshaled were...but I was reassigned to a, a headquarters unit just temporarily for help prepare, to do the typing and stuff like that for the uh, what they call statements of charges. But uh, as I said, I spent the whole time, my whole an uh, time in the service in um...in Paris.

L: Thanks to Babe, thanks to Nelson Polite Senior.

B: And uh, oddly enough, I left my enlistment was up, my, my term was up and I was accumulated enough points to come home. Uh, I left Paris in May, I think it was the 20th of May. In the '40s, '46. And, I went back to Paris, landed at the same airport, the same date, in...'56...'56. And I stayed in '56 to uh...'62.

L: And this time it was with your wife, Romaine.

B: My wife, uh, three kids.

L: So you had some experience, with uh, the City of Lights before you actually lived there. And how many children and what are their names?

B: The oldest one is Sidney Junior, he is now uh...53. Ramona uh...my daughter is 52. And Jonathan, the youngest, will be 51 in November. So 52, 53, it will then in November be 51, 52, 53, until February when the oldest one has a birthday and he'll be 54. So for three months every one of them will be a year apart.

L: Hahaha. That's funny. Well now back to uh...the veterans um, association here. Do you remember other than the two events we've spoken of, the presentation of the colors and the military ball, do you remember any of the other things that occurred or happened? You were busy at school then. It's for someone else to tell.

B: I was at school, and Babe probably was more active at that time than I, yeah, uh...although I-I, I think by this time he was working for the government too but he worked up at uh, um, uh a military base on the other side of the river out across from Harrisburg.

L: In the service, he was still part of service.

B: No, this, this was—

L: Oh this was after.

B: Yes.

L: And so what position was that?

B: I don't know, I, it was uh—

L: I'll ask him.

B:—A supervising clerical position of some kind but—

L: Mmhm.

B: --It was a clerical position of some kind, uh, but it was—

L: Civilian.

B: It was a military uh, depot and I, I'm not sure what kind was it. There's an army uh...depot of some kind. I worked for the airforce—

L: Okay.

B:—when I was doing civilian work when I was in Europe.

L: Now do you remember anything about the end of the group? It just kind of faded away as far as you're concerned, no more—

B: Especially when I, shortly after I got out of college, I, I, I of course I moved back here to Mount Joy and I worked up at Middletown so I wasn't in the city much. And I, after five years up in Middletown I moved for seven years and lived in Europe.

L: That's right.

B: And so I was kind of disconnected during that time I guess that, that the uh...unit dissolved.

L: Okay.

B: Uh...but I'm sure, uh, Nelson could uh, was closer to the whole situation in that respect.

L: Well in closing, uh, and truthfully you've given a lot of information, about, about the world that existed, that this grew out of. Uh, would you like to add any final thoughts or comments about the group, that period of time in your life?

B: Well, I think the, the intentions were good. It was a, a, something uh, uh, a cohesive effort of togetherness that was necessary. And in itself, I think was a, was a healing process. Uh...because a lot of people, uh, suffered from the military action, and this was a way, I think, of uh...of pulling each other together.

L: Mhm.

B: To sort of help explain, help satisfy the need to understand what was going on, and why.

L: What your experience meant to you then.

B: What your experience meant, I think it was important for that. Respect. And anything, I think, that tended to bring the community, the black community together was very important. And always is. Uh, and this was one of those unifying efforts, and while it didn't last, I think it was well worth what was accomplished during that short existence, uh.

L: It supported the community in the way it was intended and helped people come back into society.

B: Yes, right. And it helped join people, bring people together, uh. To appreciate each other more. Uh. Because if the bare fact that there weren't automatically, uh, a part of the overall thing, the need was there to join together.

L: And have some, something similar for African American Veterans.

B: Right.

—END—