

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Grant Davis:
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker
in 2008

Copyright © 2008 by The Regents of the University of California

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and Grant Davis date June 12, 2008. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, Mail Code 6000, University of California, Berkeley, 94720-6000, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Grant Davis, "Oakland Army Base Oral History Project" conducted by Martin Meeker in 2008, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2008.

Discursive Table of Contents: Grant Davis

Interview #1: May 14, 2008

[Audio File 1]

1

Background, birth in Lake Wales, Florida, 1944—joining the USAF in 1962, training in San Antonio, TX at Lackland AFB, later work at Travis AFB in California—1967 honorable discharge and move to Bay Area—beginning 32-year career at Oakland Army Base in January 1967—after base closure, five years at the Naval Weapons Station in Concord, retirement in 2004—more on Air Force service: work as an air policeman at Travis AFB providing runway and base security—ear infection leads to administrative post which allowed for education—more on teen years and high school—volunteering to go to Vietnam in 1966, technical and electronic work there—first-hand experience of the war changes attitude about the war, “this isn’t our battle”—mixed feelings about working for war effort: loyalty to soldiers, distaste for the war—housing discrimination in Berkeley and Oakland—thoughts on the civil rights movement and the Black Panthers, split loyalties—race relations and political opinions

[Audio File 2]

17

Initial job at Oakland Army Base: shipment clerk, GS-3—moving goods for the war, with ammunition shipped from Concord Weapons Station—movement of troops—administrative work coordinating with commercial carriers—base workforce primarily civilian—more on educational opportunities—social life—character of West Oakland, “red light” districts—workload at the port in relationship to America’s military involvements over the decades—the beginning of containerization—warehouse usage, including mortuary services—smaller amounts of retrograde cargo returning—effects of the end of the Vietnam war on the base, downsizing, transferring to other jobs—1974 transfer to transportation management specialist intern—management work: accomplishments and interpersonal relations—affirmative action, racial consciousness, and supervisory work—closing of the army base in 1999—thoughts on Dellums’ handling of the closure—closing thoughts

Interview #1: 05-14-2008

Begin Audio File 1 05-14-2008.mp3

01-00:00:00

Meeker: And I just want to wait a couple of seconds so that the tape lead—you know, there's always a couple of seconds at the beginning of the tape that doesn't record, but I'm sure we're recording right now. Okay. So today is May 14, 2008. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Grant Davis for the Oakland Army Base Oral History Project. And the way that we always begin these interviews is asking you to state your name and when and where you were born.

01-00:00:32

Davis: My name is Grant Davis, and I was born in Lake Wales, Florida, which is a part of the Polk County, in Central Florida, near Orlando.

01-00:00:45

Meeker: In what year?

01-00:00:47

Davis: In 1944.

01-00:00:51

Meeker: And also, you know, as part of this interview, I—other than the brief conversation we had on the phone, I don't know much about your professional history and your relation to the Army base. So what I'd like you to do now is just kind of provide a brief overview of, you know, your professional life. Kind of just an outline, if you will, and highlight your relation to the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:01:20

Davis: Well, I would say that I was a young man born in Florida that spent a number of years there. But in the course of living in Florida—I had relatives in New York City, and so I spent some time in New York City. And as a matter of fact, upon my schooling in Florida, my family moved to New York and I spent time there. While in New York, I was receiving draft notices from the draft board to get me into the Army and I figured that—you know, "I'm not sure if I want to go in the Army. I'm a patriot but, hey, I'd like to get education, as well." So at that point in time, I went down and scoured around and decided I wanted to go into the Navy. And I attempted to enlist in the Navy at a time when we were experiencing one of the coldest winters that we'd had in New York in a long time. This would have been the winter of '62. And the recruiter said to me, upon me asking, "Hey, where would I go for my training if I go into the Navy to be this underwater demolition expert?" And he said, "All trainings going to be conducted in Great Lakes, Illinois." And I'm thinking, "Great Lakes, Illinois. New York City. It's cold as heck here. It's even colder there in Great Lakes. I don't know if I want to do this." So I said, "Let me think about it." And on the way out of that office, I passed another office that said, "United States Air Force." And I went in there just for the heck of it, to say, "Hey, if I tried to go to the Air Force, where would you guys

send me for training?" And he said—the recruiter said, "San Antonio, Texas, the Lackland Air Force Base. I thought, "Wow. New York, cold. Texas, horses, warm." Hmm. I went through the motion and enlisted immediately and went to the Air Force. The Air Force sent me to basic training down in Lackland Air Force Base, which is in San Antonio. Upon graduating or finishing my basic training, I was sent to a place called Travis Air Force Base in California. And while at Travis Air Force Base in California, I became familiar with the Bay Area and decided that's not a bad place to want to live. After serving four years in the Air Force, to include a stint in Vietnam and other temporary duty stations, primarily here in California—upon my honorable discharge, I decided I wanted to live in the Bay Area. Well, I wanted a job and based on my experience, I thought I could get a job working with Pacific Gas and Electric, or PG&E, based on the training that I'd received while in the Air Force. Well, they supposedly liked my résumé but they weren't hiring. And a friend—

01-00:04:40

Meeker:

What year? This was—this would have been about 1966 or '67?

01-00:04:41

Davis:

This would have been in—this would have been in late 1966—more or less early 1967.

01-00:04:48

Meeker:

Okay.

01-00:04:49

Davis:

Very early 1967. And PG&E wasn't hiring and went to a few other places and they weren't, and this friend of mine decided, "Hey, let's go check at the Army or Navy base, or one of these military bases. We're veterans, why not." Well, the Navy wouldn't let us on the facility because we didn't have the passes. And we went down the street to the army base, personnel office, where we were directed to, and they essentially accepted résumés from us and hired us on that day. This would have been in very early January of 1967. And on January 11, 1967 was the day I reported to work at the Oakland Army Base in Alameda County here in California. And I worked at the Oakland Base in {Capsule?} from January 11, 1967 until March 1, 1999. Just over thirty-two years. And that was my time at the Oakland Army Base, which did cover those thirty-two years. In 1999, the Oakland Army Base closed. It was BRACed. The Base Realignment and Closure Commission essentially closed that Army base. And a few of the folks that worked with and around me, or most of them on the base, were given the opportunity to go to work at—either retire, take what they called early outs, or be transferred to the Fort Eustis, Virginia, where our headquarters was then going to be housed. A few of us, though, based on seniority, were given the opportunity to go to work at the Concord Naval Weapons Station for one of the terminals, or the terminal that had been in the Oakland Army Base. And due to seniority, I was able to go out to the Naval Weapons Station in Concord out in Contra Costa County and I spent five and

a half years there. And I retired from the federal government, essentially from the Naval Weapons Station in July 3, 2004.

01-00:07:22

Meeker: Sorry. [outside interruption]

01-00:07:39

Davis: So that covered the extent of my military work and essentially {Capsule?} military retirement and—which sort of leads me here today.

01-00:07:50

Meeker: [outside interruption] Sorry about that. So when did you say you retired from Concord?

01-00:08:31

Davis: I retired from Concord on July 3, 2004.

01-00:08:41

Meeker: Okay. That's my birthday.

01-00:08:42

Davis: July 3, all right.

01-00:08:44

Meeker: Yes. Okay, this is fantastic. So over what—it looks like about—well, over thirty-five years of experience. And were you—when you were first hired at the Oakland Army Base, was that a federal—civilian federal position?

01-00:09:04

Davis: Yes.

01-00:09:05

Meeker: Okay.

01-00:09:05

Davis: My entire career was all federal civilian employment. I was considered a civil servant. I was a GS employee, general schedule employee, and I was initially hired temporarily. Or better yet, they use a term TAPER, T-A-P-E-R, and I don't recall what that acronym stood for, but it implied that it was an appointment that was a little higher on the pecking order than a temporary appointment, and I'm positive part of that came about because I was an honorable discharge veteran, and it didn't hurt at that time to have been recently returned from, and having served in Vietnam. And they were looking for veterans to be hired to work for the Defense Department, and Army base was kind of a natural fit. I needed the job, and they apparently needed, "my skills," or my so-called worth.

01-00:10:15

Meeker: Okay.

01-00:10:16

Davis: But I needed the money more though.

01-00:10:18

Meeker: Well, let's back up a little bit, because I want to hear, first and foremost, about your period of service, the four years that you spent in the US Air Force. And maybe you can tell me a little bit about—so you originally did obviously training in San Antonio, and then were stationed for a period of time in Travis Air Force Base. Can you describe the kind of work that you did in the context of the Air Force?

01-00:10:45

Davis: Yes. I—

01-00:10:46

Meeker: On through your service in Vietnam.

01-00:10:49

Davis: Well, I reported to—after basic training, I went to Travis Air Force Base in March of 1963, and I was assigned to a military police squadron. Now, I had signed up to go into the Air Force thinking that I wanted to be in some electronic school. As a matter of fact, I was led to believe that. The Air Force recruiter said, "Yes, you know, with your aptitude and your scores, you know, we should have no problem getting you to a tech school." But upon graduation from the military basic training, you know, I'm expecting to get orders that said you're going to go to this tech school in Shepherd Air Base in Texas or someplace, and they said, "No, you're going to Travis Air Force Base and you're going to be a cop." I'm thinking, "What do you mean a cop?" A policeman. A military policeman, or what they call in the Air Force air policeman. An AP. I'm thinking, "Huh?" And I questioned—no, you don't question. I asked my drill sergeant—"Well, Sir, why this air police thingy? Why not tech school?" And his words to me were, "The needs of the Air Force comes first and what they need right now from you is to be an air policeman, so that's where you're going." So in those—of course, in those days, you didn't get explanations. You know, as a matter of fact, I felt kind of honored to be able to be told directly by him as opposed to something like, "You dip shit, you go where the hell you're told to go and you don't question it." No, he actually told me why that was. And I accepted it because I had no choice. So I reported to Travis Air Force Base in March and began working upon—with some training, after being trained, as an air policeman. And my primary job at that time was to provide security for the air craft that we had at the time—excuse me—on the—that was stationed at Travis Air Force Base. Which at that time was mostly carrier aircraft. Back in those days, we had the planes called the C-130s, C-124s, better known as Old Shakey, C-133s. And—

01-00:13:21

Meeker: These are large aircraft {inaudible}?

01-00:13:23

Davis:

These are large aircraft carriers. These are transporters. These are large transporters. And lived, of course, being a single airman, lived in the barracks. And we in the air police squadron had our own separate barracks that we did share with some mechanics, but it was away from the normal base environment, and our own gym, and our own—not service club, but we had our own facilities, as they called it, and football fields. Everything was out there all contained, just for us. And serving as the air policeman guarding aircraft. The other responsibility I had there was we had a secured area on that base, and to this day I don't know what was there. But we had to guard this facility that was enclosed with barbed wire and it had electrical wires all around it, and it only had the one way in, the one way out, which we guarded, and it had buildings on that base. Some of them had windows that were not windows. You know, it was obvious—you know, we of course being—we were told that, but of course, being an inquisitive young man doing one of those patrols, I actually got out, went up to one of those buildings, and you know, and looked sort of behind the window. And it was just that. It was like a window frame but it was concrete behind it. It was just all for showing. We had a few of those. So my job there was to provide security to that and then security for primarily the aircraft and the flight line. Just so happened during my time there as the military policeman or air policeman, one of the more major events happened. We of course had—we did have an accident. One of the planes went down and we lost some airmen. But it was also during the time, November of 1963 occurred—was the Kennedy assassination while there. Now, also at the Travis Air Force Base, at that time, we had some fighter aircraft called the F-102s. Never forget that. So we had a fighter interceptor squadron. We had the transporters and we also had a squadron or squadrons of KC135 refuelers, along with the B-52 bombers, which we're still flying today. So that was a pretty exclusive base, Travis, back in that day. Today I know it's all transport planes.

01-00:16:00

Meeker:

Were you ever trained as a pilot?

01-00:16:02

Davis:

Never.

01-00:16:02

Meeker:

Never.

01-00:16:03

Davis:

No, I mean—I think once you've been determined you're going to be an air policeman, the only way I'm going to get near an air—a cockpit is if I steal away or stowaway to get in there. No, no, I was never trained to be a flight crew member at all. I had considered load master school, which is something that you didn't require to be a pilot for that. You just had to load aircraft. And I even considered very strongly being a loadmaster, you know, had to go around and learn how to configure loads to go aboard those aircraft without

overloading them, and capabilities, and all those things. And unfortunately, while in the air policeman squadron, I developed a serious ear infection, and that not only knocked out any ambitions I had of becoming a flight crew member, it essentially knocked me out of being an air policeman. And so after two years as an air policeman, I was at Travis Air Force Base, and I was transferred to an administrative position, where I worked for high level, and some low level, officers in an administrative capacity at Travis.

01-00:17:20

Meeker:

So you worked as a clerk in sort of the management office?

01-00:17:23

Davis:

As a clerk. Well, of course, I prefer the term administrative specialist.

01-00:17:28

Meeker:

Okay.

01-00:17:29

Davis:

But I was a clerk, okay. And I found that to be somewhat of a step down, but also rewarding in other ways. Because—

01-00:17:39

Meeker:

How so?

01-00:17:39

Davis:

Well, it allowed me to pursue education, because I had then sort of an eight to five job that allowed me to take advantage of some correspondence school, as well as taking some college courses, which is what I wanted to get in to do anyways. And—along with defending my country, of course. But I wanted to get an education, which I was able to get done.

01-00:18:05

Meeker:

So prior to enlisting in the Air Force, I assume that you had completed high school?

01-00:18:11

Davis:

Yes, I did. I graduated from high school.

01-00:18:14

Meeker:

Okay. And that was in Florida?

01-00:18:15

Davis:

That was in Florida. And I played all the major sports and thought that I was a pretty good football player. As a matter of fact, I played all the major sports and I was a decent football player, decent football player. And every year I tell the story, I get better. Because initially, I probably should have gotten a scholarship. And then when I tell the story at a later point it's like, "You know, I probably could have gone All American. I probably would have been All American. Who knows, maybe even gone to pro." I was never that good. I

was never that good. But yes, I did graduate from high school. But I did not pursue any college work until I got into the Air Force.

01-00:19:00

Meeker:

Okay. So what sort of—what was the extent of your post high school education in the context of the Air Force? What sort of courses did you pursue? What were you interested in doing with that education?

01-00:19:17

Davis:

I had considered teaching. I thought that I would have been a terrific teacher, and I wanted to be a teacher. But I also wanted to get into some form of engineering, and my grades, albeit were not outstanding, they were good grades. I worked hard to sort of keep my grades up along with working while I was still in high school. You know, some part-time work. And I thought I had the grades to have gone to college if I had had the resources to do it. I was raised by a single mom, so money was tight. And I didn't think that I would be able to do the schoolwork that I would have liked and worked to support myself. Of course, I had one of those mothers that worked her butt off. Wonderful, lovely woman. Worked too hard, in my opinion, but still, she did all those things for me. And I knew that I could count on her for what she could have done to help me through school, but I knew a lot of it had to come from me. So that's when I knew to start pursuing other ways of getting, you know, moneys. And one way of getting money was—after really giving it thought, was if you go into the service, they had this GI Bill thing, which I figured I could use when I got out. But fortunately for me, I was able to take many of these courses while in the Air Force, after I was able to work an eight to five job. So that was one of the, I guess, good things of leaving the work I did with the air police stuff. And of course, being in that administrative position and loving my country, and caring about what was happening, you know, we were hearing about what was going on in Southeast Asia in a little place called Vietnam, and they were—so this would have been in early 1966. And they were asking even for volunteers at that time as to who wanted to go to Vietnam. And being a patriot that I was, I'm thinking, "I don't really care for this administrative stuff here." You know, I mean—it was good. I met some interesting people. I was able to pursue education. But I want to do something for my country, too, you know, beyond just being in the service. And I wanted to go over to Vietnam and show those people, you know, what I can do. Meaning the enemy. I wanted to engage the enemy because I was always a good shot and figured, "Hey, I may as well go over and do that." Well, of course, after spending time in Vietnam, I became very disillusioned with the whole war effort, but that's a different story. Whole different story. But upon my honorable discharge, which occurred after I came back from Vietnam, almost immediately, I got back here Christmas Eve of 1966 from Vietnam. And I was discharged, I think, December 29, 1966. Which was kind of nice in a way.

01-00:22:59

Meeker:

So I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit about your Vietnam experience. Did you go there as an infantryman or—

01-00:23:06

Davis:

That's interesting. No, I did not. Actually, I went there as like administrative specialist, which was on my paperwork as what my—what they refer to as AFSC. Air Force Specialty Code. It's a 702, for what it's worth, and that was an administrative specialist. And I had made some progress in that field and was able to, you know, get promoted as a result within the administrative field. I went there as an administrative specialist where you're going to work around the orderly room and do paperwork and that sort of thing. Instead, I got assigned to the 485th GEEIA Squadron electronic engineering agency, and that's the agency where I mention I got the experience that should help me to go work for someone like PG&E. I didn't know it at the time, but that's what I got assigned. And I was assigned to the orderly room. But it was the first outfit of its type to be assigned to Vietnam, or at least in Camron Bay. And so my job—even though that was my title, what I did was mostly drive trucks, delivering supplies, helping these specialists who install cable, communication equipment, throughout Vietnam. And I even became, as one would refer to it, as one of those guys where I had my own equipment. And I was right out there listening to what I was told to do. And after a while, there were a number of actions that I was able to do as it related to implant and out plant and connecting the wires for communication systems. And wow, was I—

01-00:24:53

Meeker:

So basically, when you say that, that's mostly at this point telephone kind of communications systems?

01-00:24:56

Davis:

It was mostly telephone communicational stuff. Signal communicational stuff. And at that time, it also allowed me to go what they call TDY. While I was in Vietnam, I was able to go and visit and provide some assistance to some of our guys who were in Japan and Korea for short periods of time, and then, of course, right back to Vietnam again.

01-00:25:24

Meeker:

So it sounds as if one of the things that encouraged you to go to Vietnam was the prospect of engaging in combat, but it sounds like it was mostly kind of behind the battle lines technical work that you ended up doing. Is that correct?

01-00:25:40

Davis:

That is true, except in the course of—exactly. I was not assigned to an infantry outfit that went out and search and destroyed, and you know, killed enemy and, you know, engaged enemy for that matter, and did all those things. Didn't get into that. And initially, that was a little bit disappointing to me, although I'm in the Air Force. You know, we're not—we're not the war fighters, per se. We support the war fighters, but we're not actually it. The Air Force role, primarily at the time, was mostly to provide combat support, provide, you

know, equipment via the air and deliver it to them. And of course, we had the aircraft, the fighter and the bombers that did other types of work. So yes, my intention was to go over and engage the enemy. And getting there, it became quite apparent that that's not what I was going to do, and yet, the work I did—we were out there often, where we had little or no cover, and yes, I did have to—not directly engage the enemy, so to speak, but I did have to assist with removal of deceased veterans and deceased Vietnamese people. It became a very traumatic experience for me out there in the field, to a degree that one of the—one of my issues today having to do with—I've been diagnosed with PTSD, which is a post-traumatic stress disorder, which they have linked with my service in Vietnam. So no, I never engaged with the enemy directly, but some of the experience that I incurred while in Vietnam are with me forever and they've shaped my life forever and it's made me a lot more proud of my service, proud of my country, but thinking that we had engaged in a terrible place, having gone there.

01-00:27:52

Meeker:

What—was it—I guess do you attribute—you had mentioned, when we first started talking about Vietnam, is that you went over there wanting to engage them {inaudible} an example of your patriotism, but then, by the time you left, you'd begun to think differently about the war and the role of the United States in it. Do you attribute this change of heart and thought to these traumatic experiences of seeing the loss of life right in front of you, or was it a larger—maybe larger questions also about the ability of the US to win this war? I mean, what—I guess how do you attribute that change of thought to?

01-00:28:35

Davis:

Probably all of the above. I think watching, you know, fellow airmen and soldiers that—some I knew of, some I did not. Having lost their lives and dismembered and just carnage that wasn't good. Watching Vietnamese who I didn't feel—"Wait a minute, they're really not a big threat to me. Well, I don't even see how they're a threat to the country." And then feeling like we were fighting a war where "we weren't really fighting it to win it." We were like fighting it to engage it. It's like there seemed to be a lot more we could be doing, but for political reasons—we got newspapers. You know, we heard all the stuff. We talked. Feeling like we weren't going all out to win this war, and I never understood why not. And feeling like, you know, we are really being—we really kind of shouldn't be here. This really isn't our battle. Not here, not for the reasons we were given. You know, we're here to stop Communism before it comes to our shores, which I was taught. Wait a minute. The French were here. They got their butts kicked talking about some other things. We're here for what reason? In other words, that just became—it was a combination of things that just made me very disillusioned with that war. And as I said, I think the loss of life. I am knowing that men are going to die, and women are going to die in battle. Somehow I knew that. But it seemed like this thing that was going on, it was senseless and I could not see even in 1966—at the rate we were going, we're just going to lose a lot more people

and I'm not sure if we can ever win this thing. Because some of the Vietnamese folks that we engaged, although very friendly in some cases, it was alleged that many of them were, you know, ordinary Vietnamese during the day, but they were Viet Cong at night. And it was nothing to think that they would—you know, they would kill us given the chance. And it was because they were protecting their own country. And I started thinking, "What if another country had invaded us here in the US and these people were there. What would be my feeling?" And I'm thinking, "Hmm, I'd want to do them in, too." So it became just my not liking it. That said, I still felt like, you know, this is the greatest country in the world and I'm an American through and through, and I'm a patriot, and I'm going to do what I can to support, you know, my fellow troops. But I just didn't think the war was good.

01-00:31:28

Meeker:

Well, also, when you return home—and it sounds like very shortly after you returned home from Vietnam, you took a job on an Army base. At the time, did you have any mis—I mean, I know that you initially looked for work with PG&E. But did you ever have any misgivings about starting a career in the military at the same time this war continued to expand, and you probably would have been exposed to some of the more tragic sides of war, even as a civilian employee.

01-00:32:02

Davis:

I did, I did. As a matter of fact, I started going to school at Merritt College, which was down on Grove Street. It's down there now where there—I guess part of Children's Hospital is there now. I went to Merritt College. And there was some pretty heavy, I guess you would say, anti-war sentiment going on there.

01-00:32:23

Meeker:

Well, that was the birthplace of the Black Panthers at that point.

01-00:32:26

Davis:

It was indeed. And Bobby Seals and Hughie Newton, and just a whole big black movement against many of the injustices. As a matter of fact, this guy that I had known before, went to Vietnam, and I shared apartment when we got out. And he—we both went to work for the Army base. And I'll never forget. We were looking for accommodations, and my then girlfriend lived in Berkeley. Nice woman, by the way. Pretty woman, too, she became my wife. And I decided that I liked kind of the Berkeley community. She lived here and it was a nice place to kind of be. And started looking for apartments and somehow we got—my friend and I kind of got pushed up here near the college, sort of, in our quest for an apartment. And I'll never forget. We went to some places where we were told there were no vacancies. This is after we have searched the papers. We have seen it. We know there are places there. But the same thing happened around the lake in Oakland. At that time, the Lake Merritt in Oakland, California here was a nice place to live. Now, of course, we're GIs. We don't have a lot of money, so we knew we couldn't live

right on the lake. But just off the lake. And we encountered what I thought at the time was a lot of racism. And we were told on more than one occasion that there were no vacants, when in fact, we felt truly there were. And it made us feel like, "Damn. Now, we both just got out of the military. I just got back from Vietnam and I'm being discriminated right here in my own country. Something ain't right with this picture." And yet, you know, do I want to go out and be a part of this, "I hate America crowd," whatever that is. I've heard that recently. "No, I still believe in this country right or wrong," and it may have many faults, and yes, there may be a lot of racism here. But that's not this entire country and I love this place and I don't have no choices because this is the greatest country in the world, even with its flaws. So I want to continue on. Working at the Army Base was definitely a change, because what I saw there is here's the place that's helping me to pay my bills, so I had no regrets about that. The war effort—I don't like this war that's going on. And yet, I thought I owed it to those soldiers, airmen, and marine corps folks who were still over there, to help them to get all the equipment supplies that they needed to protect themselves. So that was the big split that I had at that time, and that allowed me to go out there and do the very best job that I knew how working for this industrial complex, military, and yet feel that the war itself was not a good thing. That said, I had to be very careful about voicing that opinion, especially at work. And I never—and yet, I would. I'd share with different folks, you know, "I don't like this war thing." It never affected my ability, though, to do my job and to protect my soldiers. And yet, I did have one supervisor tell me, "You just better be careful, because you might just, you know, get fired." You know, that didn't bother me at all because I still spoke my mind, and yet I wasn't, you know, out saying that President Johnson was a baby killer or should have something happen to him, or we the United States are totally wrong. It wasn't that. But I just display and discuss my misgivings about the war while doing everything I could. And I tell you, back in those days, the Army Base, we worked some long hours and I felt that although I could use the money from the overtime, just as important was that I was providing a service and getting goods and equipment and supplies to those military folks serving in Vietnam that needed it.

01-00:37:02

Meeker:

That's a fascinating perspective and I think it's one that's not heard very often. But at the same time, I think it's one that was probably pretty widely shared. Did you find that other people who you worked with shared similar perspectives or did you feel like you were alone and kind of having conflicted feelings, I guess, about the work that you were doing?

01-00:37:33

Davis:

I sort of felt like—I was rather sort of raised by my mom as being kind of outspoken. And so I kind of didn't care what anyone thought, and yet, I always felt respectful. You know, I was raised in one of those family households where, you know, you respected your elders and you respected authority. And so even though I voiced that opinion, to be honest with you, I thought I was in

the minority as far as people talking. Sure, there was some people who I was closer to that may go and say, you know, "Yes, I think you're right," type thing, or I agree—but they wouldn't—they weren't as vocal and they wouldn't let those thoughts come out around most other people. Whereas, I did, but not in a disrespectful way. But see, back in that day, if you—even if you just said, you know, "I don't know if this is such a good war," there were those who looked upon you as, "How dare you talk like that?" You know, "How dare you think like that?" But I did. So yes, there were some, in answer to your question, that I felt did share my opinion, but they weren't going to let that many folks know that.

01-00:38:52

Meeker:

This period of time, you know, '67, '68, is also a period of time in which the Civil Rights Movement has gone, and is going through a big transformation.

01-00:39:02

Davis:

Yes.

01-00:39:04

Meeker:

You know, you still have the NAACPs, for instance, that are really focusing on things like housing discrimination, like everyday discrimination, but then you also begin to have, you know, the Black Panthers who have a much broader anti-imperialist program and they're critiques are much more vociferous or they're louder. You know, I'm wondering if you ever thought, "Okay, well, I appreciate what the Black Panthers are saying, but I'm going—" I mean, did you ever like want to work with the NAACP or any of the more moderate Civil Rights groups, considering—you know, considering the fact that you had experienced some discrimination around housing, and possibly in the military, as well.

01-00:39:52

Davis:

Yes. I could relate to and could see some of—could see what the Black Panthers were doing to some degree. But I never saw myself as being that far out there. Some part of that violence just didn't—would not have worked for me. And yet, I loved guns. I think I had a gun even then that I'd gotten, because I loved to target shoot. And when I was younger in Florida, I hunted a lot, you know, how dare me, having gone out and shooting little rabbits and Bambi's and stuff. But I did. And it was part of the sport. It was part of what I enjoyed doing. Today I can't shoot nobody's rabbit or a raccoon or even Bambi's, and yet I have a slew—I have an arsenal of weapons, all registered. I've got weapons like you wouldn't believe in my vault. You know, but they were there for target practice. I have no—yes, I do. I was going to say I didn't have an assault weapon, but I do. I'm putting this on tape? I have an Uzi that I bought, registered to me, and it's all been used for target practice. I believe in—anyways—the Black Panthers did one thing that I really did appreciate. They not only made it to where, because of their actions in going to the Capital with guns in hand, the state capital, made a lot of, quote, I'd call it racist folks, and in this case, specifically racist police officers and people of

the law, not feel that they could take the black for granted in the sense that if we want to just kick your butt, we can just come and do it. Well, now, if you come after us, you don't know what we're going to do. In other words, we're not going to be defensive like what occurred maybe back hundreds of years ago during slavery time. That part of the Black Panthers, I liked, that they made some of the so-called folks that were that way think about it. But just going around calling everybody pigs and all policemen, even, pigs, and this really heavy racist stuff, that I just thought, "No, that's way over the line," in my opinion. And yet, I could respect them by compartmentalizing and saying, "Yes, they did service this purpose." We also had someone out there at the time in the Civil Rights Movement that I respected a lot, and his name was Dr. Martin Luther King. He was a guy that would go around and get his butt kicked and still go on marching. Well, I personally thought he was a damn fool. Ain't nobody going to be kicking on me and turning dogs loose on me, and I don't do nothing about it. I ain't going to let that happen. You know, I would fight against that. I ain't going to let that happen and I ain't going down there marching nowhere and letting nobody just kick on my butt and I don't do nothing about it. But I respected him. I respected that movement and I respected what he stood for, and I later learned to appreciate it even more. So I've got—you know, here are these splits. God, these guys can be a little violent. This guy is very passive and talking about Ghandi, and these guys are talking about Mao. And what the hell. So I was—my allegiance in that sense was split, and yet I can relate to them all, and yet didn't feel totally a part—a direct part of either. We also had a group out at that time called the SNCC. Stokely Carmichael and that group, who was a student—

01-00:43:45

Meeker:

Oh, SNCC. S-N—

01-00:43:47

Davis:

SNCC, SNCC.

01-00:43:48

Meeker:

Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee.

01-00:43:49

Davis:

Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

01-00:43:49

Meeker:

Yes.

01-00:43:50

Davis:

And H. {inaudible} Brown and that group of guys. Now, they were a little strange, too, but they were more supposedly students. The Panthers may have been students to some degree, but that was sort of—it got sort of a violent element and they had many shootouts with police and that sort of thing. And I didn't—I'm thinking that's a losing battle, you know. So I couldn't relate to it. But the SNCC group was another group that I thought—I could see a little good in all of them, in all those groups, and yet did not feel like I wanted—

and the NAACP. The NAACP group that I respected for what they thought and fought for. And I didn't think they were the extremes of any of these things, and yet they tend to relate more to where the Martin Luther King side of the world was. But I didn't dislike or hate any of them. Now, at the same time, what came along a little later then was the whole Farrakhan—wasn't Farrakhan at the time. It was Elijah Mohammed, which is a whole different world. And I never could understand that, because I could never understand hatred, not to that degree. I can't brand every person of any color as being my enemy. Because I can see where a lot of the so-called people that were non-color had helped the people of color so well, so how can all the folks who are white be all white devils? You know, that is as extreme as the Panthers, if not worse. So I could appreciate those folks who felt that was a vision and a movement that they choose to be a part of. Just don't include me in it, because I can't relate to that.

01-00:45:44

Meeker:

Well, there was also a religious element, which was they were creating an American brand of Islam. Were you churchgoing? Was there—

01-00:45:55

Davis:

Raised Pentecostal and later became Baptist, so I—definitely religious aspect of it I liked. But in a word, even with Mohammed Ali or Cassius Clay became a Muslim, I couldn't understand it. I couldn't relate to that. No. But I respected him. Again, it was sort of a respect for people who wanted to choose, because in this country, you know, sounds like a cliché and maybe it is. Well, it is, what the hell. I think in a country here where we are allowed to be what we want to be as long as it don't infringe on other's rights. And I thought a little of that went on. But heck, I don't care what you did. So I had mixed feelings about all of those different things and elements, you know. And it was like I could see their place within the society, just as—believe it or not, I could see where the Klan was coming from and I could see what they thought they were fighting for. Didn't like them. I thought they were another hate group, similar to what I sort of saw in the Panthers, to some degree, or definitely the Muslim. And I'm thinking, "Why don't you guys get together and fight it out and kill each other, and then the rest of us can live." But I could relate to where they were coming from, I just didn't like them. And of course, they never invited me to their meetings, either.

01-00:47:25

Meeker:

I guess just kind of one question about—one more question about this period of time. Did—I guess coming back to the United States and seeing all the widely divergent opinions around, you know, race relations in the United States and the Vietnam War—but you kind of having your own perspective on things. Did this impact, you know, who you would have voted for in presidential elections? I mean, did you find it hard to find someone, you know, on the national political scale that matched your opinions or not?

01-00:48:08

Davis:

Well, actually, I was raised Democrat. I think I always felt Democrat. They support the poor working people. Them damn Republicans support them rich guys. And I ain't rich, so I can't support the Republican. Of course, that—you know, times change and I'm more of an independent today. But I think at the time, even though I thought President Johnson's effort in Vietnam were wrong, I still supported him. And I can't remember—who was the Republican Presidential candidate then? Heck, I'm drawing a blank.

01-00:48:50

Meeker:

Well—

01-00:48:51

Davis:

Whoever that was, I don't remember him being a force. You know, it was like Johnson has got this thing and he's going to be it if that's what he chooses to do.

01-00:49:02

Meeker:

Well, in '64, the only time that he ran, he would have been against Barry Goldwater, who was a fairly extreme—

01-00:49:10

Davis:

Was that '64? Yes, well, again—yes, yes.

01-00:49:13

Meeker:

And then Nixon was in '68.

01-00:49:14

Davis:

Yes, he came much later. Actually, I do remember. And Goldwater, you know, in my opinion just didn't have a chance. He was a Republican, number one, and secondly, I couldn't remember him doing anything in a positive way for civil rights, in any way, shape, or form, so I definitely wasn't going to support Goldwater. I remember him having his convention here in San Francisco in 1964. And he was the guy that just wanted to basically bomb the hell out of Vietnam. That's what he wanted to do. Nuke them even. And I didn't think that was a good thing, either, even though I wanted to protect, you know, my soldiers and our guys. I didn't think that was the way to go either. But I think in Goldwater's case, it was more that he was just too far right for me. Too far right. Today I don't know. He may have had a point. You know, I've—I have later studied some of his stuff and he was a—you know, he was a reserve general, or general officer, he was. Goldwater was. And yet—so I had to respect him for being an old vet. But no, I think it would have been Johnson all the way. Right. Because by the time Johnson ran again, it would have been '68 and that was during the whole Chicago Seven and that whole thing in Chicago and that big muckety-muck and Hubert Humphrey.

01-00:50:46

Meeker:

Well, and the assassination of Kennedy, of Robert Kennedy.

01-00:50:50
Davis: Well, that would have—that happened back in '62, thought. Oh, yes, Bob—yes, you're right. Bobby Kennedy's assassination. As I think about it, it would have been—Bobby Kennedy would have been my choice. If nothing else, the legacy of the Kennedys. And I just like his position a lot more than I did Johnson, as I think about it, because Bobby was somewhat against that war, too, and I want to think that—at the time, I'm thinking that may be a better way to go. But that wasn't until '68 when Bobby came on the scene.

01-00:51:30
Meeker: Yes, yes.

01-00:51:31
Davis: Sixty-seven.

01-00:51:32
Meeker: Sixty-eight.

01-00:51:33
Davis: Sixty-eight for the Convention, but I'm thinking—

01-00:51:33
Meeker: Well, that's when he was going to run for President.

01-00:51:37
Davis: That's when he was going to run.

01-00:51:38
Meeker: He was killed a couple of months before the election. And I think, if memory serves, it was Hubert Humphrey who was the candidate running against Richard Nixon in '68.

01-00:51:52
Davis: Well, yes, he's the one they drafted in Chicago.

01-00:51:55
Meeker: Yes.

01-00:51:55
Davis: But Bobby had been killed, what was it, in June?

01-00:51:57
Meeker: California, yes.

01-00:51:59
Davis: June in—how can I forget that hotel right there in—

01-00:52:02
Meeker: Ambassador.

01-00:52:04

Davis: Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. And I think that was June of that year. And didn't—Martin was assassinated April, just a few months prior?

01-00:52:13

Meeker: Must have been a hard time to live through.

01-00:52:15

Davis: It was a very—and now again, I'm working at the Army Base and it was a very hard time. It was a hard time, I can remember, for me personally, because I'm losing these people that I did respect and care for. But I also can remember thinking to myself—God, you made me think about. "Why are all the good people getting killed?" You know? I mean, we'd lost Kennedy in '63, and then his—and then Martin Luther King in April of '68 and then Kennedy in June of '68. And here were three people for sure that I thought—I realized I thought a lot of. And they were all assassinated. All the bad guys never got assassinated. Interesting. Anyways—

01-00:53:04

Meeker: How are we on time? We should probably change it because we're going to go into another thing.

01-00:53:15

Davis: Wow.

01-00:53:15

Meeker: Lot of memories, huh?

01-00:53:17

Davis: Yes, it's bringing back more than I—gee, where are we at. Haven't talked—

01-00:53:24

Meeker: {inaudible}.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 05-14-2008.wav

02-00:00:00

Meeker: Well, let's focus a little more on your work at the Oakland Army Base. And we've got a long period to cover. So what were you hired as and what was your initial assignment at the base?

02-00:00:18

Davis: Well, my initial assignment at the Army base was as a shipment clerk and I was a GS-3. I was hired as a GS-3 shipment clerk. Would have been January 11, 1967. And that was my responsibility. It was primarily documentation, paperwork of cargo. Well, we prepared—I guess we prepared documentation of cargo coming into the base that was going to eventually, though, be put on vessels, primarily ships, going overseas to the Pacific region, to include

Hawaii, Guam, Japan, Korea, and of course, Vietnam. And that—another destination for a lot of that cargo was also into the Philippines, which was a major, I guess, depot for cargo that was going to Vietnam. So it was a lot of paperwork that we did, and I was a part of as a shipment clerk. And—

02-00:01:36

Meeker: This cargo that was—I'm sorry, go ahead.

02-00:01:39

Davis: No—

02-00:01:40

Meeker: Well, the cargo that was coming in—so this is coming in, I guess, from around the United States on rail and trucking, or something? I mean, how's it getting to the Oakland Army Base?

02-00:01:53

Davis: The primary modes of transportation were by rail and by truck coming into the base from various military installations, as well as from vendors. This is companies that the government has contracted with and there was an old cliché that said, "We move or ship everything to include beans and bullets." Through that Army Base, you know, we shipped all kinds of goods and services, to include food stuff, desk tables, tanks, you know, armored vehicles. We moved it all. I was going to say we moved ammunition, but I'm not exactly sure that we moved, or were allowed to move, live ammunition. I don't think we did. I don't think live ammunition was allowed to move through the Port of Oakland.

02-00:03:03

Meeker: Most of that would have gone through Concord, then?

02-00:03:06

Davis: It would have gone through Concord. It would have been moved by aircraft out of Travis or Norton Air Force Base, or some other modes, and out of Concord Weapons Station, as you know, where I later ended up doing that. And that's part of my confusion. Like out there, of course, we shipped a significant amount of munitions in support of the Iraqi conflict. Notice I be very careful in saying that. Not Iraqi War. Iraqi Conflict out of Concord. But that was an army base. So that's what occurred during my latter five years working for the Department of Defense. But through the Army base, all of those things that I mentioned, though, were shipped through there.

02-00:03:58

Meeker: Was there anything else other than ammunition that wasn't shipped through the Army base?

02-00:04:04

Davis: I can't think of anything offhand. And I have thought of this, you know, many years. No. I think—I'm not sure—I'm almost sure we did not ship ammunition, but I think everything else was moved through there.

02-00:04:17

Meeker: What about troops? What about people?

02-00:04:21

Davis: Yes, we did move some troops through there. Early on during the Vietnam War, we still had control of the Naval Supply Center that had piers. The Naval Supply Center was just down the street from the Oakland Army Base, and down there they did have some troop carrier ships, Navy ships, gray bottoms, they called them, that did move some troops, you know, to the conflict areas from here in the immediate Bay Area. As a matter of fact, that happened on those gray bottoms, but the troops themselves, the Army base had what they called—I want to say production center, but it wasn't, and it wasn't an induction center. It was a whole office and a unit where all the soldiers primarily—we're talking Army soldiers. There was a processing center that soldiers came to when they were shipped from wherever they were coming from to the Army base to be processed to be put on busses and transported up to Travis to be moved by aircraft. Mostly those C-133s, C-124s, the Old Shakey and some of those other aircraft, and then later the C-141s that moved them to the war zone. But they were processed, almost all of them, through the Oakland Army Base. We're talking Army troops now specifically.

02-00:06:07

Meeker: Sure.

02-00:06:08

Davis: So although a few moved by gray bottom on the Navy ships, most of them were processed through the Army Base and moved—some may have even came in and moved up to Travis by train, but I think very few. We had large contracts with bus companies in the area that transported those troops up to Travis, and from Travis to process them to go to Vietnam.

02-00:06:43

Meeker: This sounds like a fairly large and complex operation of making sure, you know, that the cargo from interior United States is arriving at the base at the right time that it needs to be shipped out on the various ships that are in dock. Did you play a role in sort of the scheduling? I mean, I guess what sort of an administrative role did you play in this process? Where did you plug into the system?

02-00:07:11

Davis: Well, other than seeing many of those troops and greeting them unofficially and saying hi, I did not work in that part of the base that processed soldiers.

02-00:07:25

Meeker: All right. Well, then, processing cargo. Where did you fit into that system?

02-00:07:28

Davis: Processing cargo—well, part of the—the paperwork that we processed that was later, you know, computerized to make what is known as manifests, that listed all the cargo as being—that was coming in and then being placed on

vessels—ships to go overseas. I helped provide the paperwork that listed that cargo on those ships, and processing that. We also utilized the services of some commercial carriers that were around at the time and talking specifically—the Matson Navigation Company, American President Lines, Pacific Far East Line at that time, the Golden Bears, Sea Land, at that time, were all major commercial ship carriers that transported goods and services for the Department of Defense. And the paperwork for all of that was processed by the folks—us there at the Oakland Army Base. And, of course, once the paperwork was finished showing what was on each given ship, on the manifest, one of my jobs—I'll never forget. One of my jobs, along with a few other folks, was to deliver those papers to the first mate of each vessel prior to its sailing. Sharing with them what's on your ship. And, of course, it showed the destination that it was going to come off to. However, the longshoremen or the stevedores had loaded that cargo based on the discharge ports anyways. In other words, if it's going to Korea, it's going to Vietnam, it's going to the Philippines, it's that sort of last on, first off concept of loading ships, and so my role in that sense was primarily administrative. Administrative. I didn't ship any troops directly. I didn't do any manifests on any troops, for any troops. But the cargo was documented by the folks who worked with me, to include me to let them know what was coming.

02-00:09:52

Meeker:

It sounds to me like the vast majority of the work that's actually being done on the base is being done by civilians, whether they're longshoremen or whether they're federal civilian employees like yourself. Of the work that's being done on the base, how much, according—in your estimate, was done by enlisted or commissioned service people?

02-00:10:17

Davis:

I'd say, overall, very little. As a matter of fact, the Army Base had a small, the whole time I was there, and it got smaller as time went on—a small contingency of active duty military. All of the officers and the directorates, you know, office heads and all, were all military. They were all mostly officers. We had some enlisted personnel. Small numbers of enlisted personnel and we had small—what they call housing area there at the Army base. So there weren't many troops. Without question, the backbone of the personnel working at the Oakland Army Base were definitely civilians. I'd go so far as to say 90 percent of the workers on the base were civilians. So that would obviously have a major impact on the community, too, in terms of jobs and other things. But yes. The military was rotated out, generally, every two years. They changed military personnel.

02-00:11:28

Meeker:

Where were you living when you were first hired?

02-00:11:32

Davis:

Oakland. I was living out in East Oakland and later moved to Berkeley, because that's where my fiancée had previously lived, girlfriend, who later

became my wife, who after forty-one years is still my wife. Still ain't figured out how she put up with me after all these years. We just had our 41st wedding anniversary last month.

02-00:11:58

Meeker: Congratulations.

02-00:11:59

Davis: Actually, the 7th of this month.

02-00:12:00

Meeker: Oh, wow.

02-00:12:01

Davis: She'd kill me if I don't remember that. But we moved to Berkeley and then in '74—'73, I moved out to Richmond. So I guess we spent a few months, maybe a year, in Oakland, East Oakland, during my working time there. About seven years in Berkeley and the rest of that time I've been out in Richmond.

02-00:12:25

Meeker: Okay. So your experience on the base was basically a nine-to-five sort of job? You weren't—you didn't spend much time in the commissary or the, you know, the bowling alleys or movie theaters or—I mean, it doesn't sound like—for you, at least, it wasn't the center of your social life? Or was it?

02-00:12:44

Davis: Not at all. As a matter of fact, my job—to say it was nine to five would be incorrect only because I initially went to work there the swing shift. You know, working from like eleven until—no, it was from four in the afternoon until eleven-ish or twelve at night. Eleven—from four to twelve. Then I got a promotion and went to what was called the grave shift, from eleven at night until 7:30 in the morning. That was different. That was challenging. And then later to the day shift, from the 7:30 to about four. That said, during all the time that I've worked, I have worked every hour of every day at some point during my years working in the Army Base due to work requirements and circumstances. But also, while working there, even though my social life was not around the base, I did attend schools while working there. When I say school, colleges, taking extension courses, and in colleges—schools from like the Columbia College out of Missouri. I took some classes there where they had instructors and had a curriculum program to allow us to go to school on the base.

02-00:14:00

Meeker: Okay. So there were like university extension instructors on the base?

02-00:14:05

Davis: Abso—well, they were guys who'd been accredited. And some did come off base, but they were accredited to teach classes.

02-00:14:13

Meeker: On the base?

02-00:14:13

Davis: On the base. And so I went to school at night and working towards the degree program, and of course, that allowed me then to be able to go to that bowling alley a lot, you talked about. That's where we had lunch at night, primarily was the bowling alley. It was right across the street. So I had that interaction with—you know, some social life away from there. I was not an active duty military person, so I was not—didn't have commissary privileges. I didn't have their club privileges, although we had a club there that allowed us civilians to go and, you know, buy lunch, dinners, and that sort of thing. But there wasn't much social life beyond that—on that base. It was too small. You know, it was very small compared to some other bases in the area. The Presidio Naval Air Station or—

02-00:15:07

Meeker: Travis or—

02-00:15:08

Davis: Travis. No, it wasn't nowhere near like those type—it was small. So I think many of the military people may have looked for other places to go and socialize because it was so limited out there.

02-00:15:20

Meeker: Well, some people have talked about going to the Presidio or, I guess, the—there was a—one person claimed that the food was notoriously bad at the Oakland Army Base, so they would go over to the Alameda Naval Air Station for dinners or something like that.

02-00:15:38

Davis: Well, we—the Army Base had this servicemen's club where—there was some eating done there, but you're right. The Naval Air Station had an officers club for many years, because we lost our officers club early on. And we'd go there for some retirement luncheons and some other events, at the Naval Air Station. We did do that. Yes, we did that. And—because there was—the Army Base didn't have that facility. Travis has nice clubs but it was too far away. Later, we did some things at Travis, but we did a lot of our retirement lunches and those sort of things out on the economy. We went to Jack London Square. We went to His Lordship's. We went to, you know—wasn't Skate's back in those days, but wherever Skate's is now, that was some other place. Solomon Grundy's was out there. Holiday Inn, places like that for a number of social events as it relates to retirements and that sort of thing.

02-00:16:38

Meeker: Was there much in the immediate neighborhood of West Oakland that you would go to or would it mostly be down in Jack London, and, you know, up on the waterfront in Berkeley and so forth?

02-00:16:48

Davis:

Not much in West Oakland that, you know, you really cared to go to. Oh, there were some eating places down there. There was a place called the Barn. We used to call it Mom's, that served fried chicken, soul food place. That was very good, very good. And we'd go there occasionally. But there were no nice social places down in West Oakland. As a matter of fact, early on West Oakland had its issues back in the early days.

02-00:17:21

Meeker:

How so?

02-00:17:22

Davis:

It was—there were some places that had been tagged red light areas. There was, you know, prostitution, I guess, fairly rampant in some parts of West Oakland, in that part that was nearest to the base. That said, you had some very fine people who may have lived in those communities. But it was not a place where, you know, you'd want to go and have a retirement dinner, or you'd want to go and take your family for some social gathering in those days. Jack London was—and the waterfront or Berkeley. {inaudible} was probably your best choices.

02-00:17:58

Meeker:

What did it mean for it to be a tagged red light? Did that mean that it was off limits or was it just kind of known as a place that you would avoid for dates and so forth?

02-00:18:11

Davis:

Well, it was—I get that term red light from my military days. And I do remember, there were some places when I got there—as a civilian, you can't red light me here in the continental United States. I think they red lighted us in some places overseas if you were a civilian, where the government or the base commander said, you know, he didn't want his people in those places. But here in the mainland continental United States, that only applied to military personnel, and it generally meant, yes, these are places not only of so called ill repute, but maybe had a history of problems for GIs. Either fights broke out there or—because prostitution is interesting. It was like, you know, they didn't you around those places per se, and yet they knew a lot of the personnel would frequent those places and those places did exist. You know, the Army Base at Naval Air Station. And they were always not far off the installation. You know, it was like right down the street you'll find that. We're talking the Naval Air Station in, you know, Alameda or the Oakland Army Base in Oakland or the Presidio in San Francisco, or bases throughout the country. Or overseas. So, yes, those red light districts are not good places to go.

02-00:19:40

Meeker:

Okay. So I want to hear more about the work that you did, and in particular, you know, the Vietnam War begins to wind down in the mid-1970s, and you know, I guess until the military excursions of the 1980s, I'm guessing that the base might have quieted down. Maybe there wasn't much shipping going on.

And then again, you know, with the Gulf War in the early 1990s, I'm guessing it probably geared up again. I'm wondering if you can just give me a sense of this sort of life cycle of the base and how—and how the—I guess the relationship between the big conflicts the US was in in relation to, you know, how busy the base was, the different kind of cargo that was going out of there. I mean, was the base affected by—substantially by the different military involvements that the US got itself involved in?

02-00:21:02

Davis:

I would definitely say yes. Of course, when I came to the base in January of '67, we were heavy—they were heavy into the movement of cargo in support of Vietnam, primarily. And yet, I must say most of the cargo back in those days, too, from an administrative standpoint, and yet being down on the piers—even though I worked out of an office, I did have to go to piers for, you know, taking paperwork and documentation and just being a part of that process. And it wasn't that big a base. Most of the cargo we shipped was shipped on what they called break bulk vessels, on ships, you know, that required longshoremen and some stevedores to actually use hooks to load the cargo into the holds or the bellies of a ship, and that kind of thing. And we'd have cargo just all over the place. Now, I worked in what was called Building One, which is no longer there. They tore it down. But that was quite a ways from down the piers and the staging areas where the cargo was going to be sent and the warehouses to be loaded on ships. There would be cargo even all around that building, it was so heavy, and sitting on trains, you know, and that sort of stuff in the Vietnam era. And since a lot of it was going break bulk, as they say, that was the way it was. Very little cargo in those days went via containers, because there weren't that many container ships. And the ones there were, the only container ship that I can remember in 1967 that was of any consequence was the Matson Steamship Line that was stationed—that was over in Alameda. And they mostly moved fresh fruits and vegetables, frozen stuff, in refrigerated containers out of Alameda from the cold storage areas over there, and some, I guess, you'd call dry cargo in the containers. Matson was the only one using containers back in that day. So all the other guys primarily were just using—you know, these break bulk ships. And then, of course, Sea Land came along and these other major ocean carriers and the containerization age came about. So we went from a lot of cargo movement to some containers through a lot of it moving via container.

02-00:23:51

Meeker:

How did that impact the Army Base itself? Were they building large containerization ports on the base itself during this period of time, or was the Army then using—began to begin shipping the cargo through, you know, the private commercial ports?

02-00:24:11

Davis:

They started shipping it through the commercial ports. It became this stuff where—there were very few, if any, cargo coming to the Army Base itself in containers that were going to be shipped overseas. There was still a substantial

amount of cargo coming in break bulk that was loaded in the holds of the ships. But I say in time there was cargo being shipped to the warehouses there that was being loaded into containers that were going to be seaborne, that went to the Sea Land line next door, to the American President line, to Matson, through Pacific Far East Line, that was going on container ships that was going overseas. But most of it was going directly from the source, the vending source, right to these commercial carriers and put on the ships and sent overseas. We there at the Army Base still documented—we did still do the paperwork. We still had to tell our overseas terminals what was coming to them, what cargo was coming to them, in what container, how many, you know, and that sort of stuff.

02-00:25:30

Meeker:

Was there any movement within the Army to increase containerization kind of shipping on the base—capacity on the base itself?

02-00:25:41

Davis:

Not to my knowledge. As a matter of fact, even when—what was happening is cargo was being shipped from various vendors to the warehouses at the Army Base, and you had civil service employees stuffing that cargo, as the term goes, into containers that was being sent over to the commercial guys. I don't recall, even when the base closed, that there were ever cranes set up to actually load or unload containers at that Army Base. They used these old winches where they could load some smaller containers and put the hooks on it and so forth, and load those on a ship. But on any even semi-large scale, there was no container cranes set up for that purpose at the Army Base ever. And I qualify that by saying at the Naval Weapons Station, on the other hand, when I finally got moved out there, that was almost the only way that cargo was being moved on the vessel, is it was in containers, and they had—the Navy had already installed these—I think it was like \$11 million or something they had invested in the building of these container cranes that used to load and unload cargo. The Army base never had cranes to load cargo {inaudible}.

02-00:27:15

Meeker:

So I'm guessing during this period of time in which most of the cargo is beginning to kind of move around the base rather than through the base, all those big warehouses would probably contain a lot less cargo, you know, waiting to head overseas than they had in years that a lot of the cargo, you know, was loaded from the base directly onto the ships.

02-00:27:45

Davis:

I'd probably say—because I didn't work in the warehouse and yet I was there—over there in times and stuff. I didn't work right in and I couldn't give you the tonnage. But I'm sure it did. And yet, a significant amount of cargo that was being loaded onto pallets and taken to the pier to be loaded on those break bulk ships, as we called them, a lot of it was being—they'd gotten contractors that worked in those warehouses whose job it was to load this lose cargo onto pallets that was being stuffed in containers provided by the

commercial guys. So I'm not so sure how much of that, you know, how much it changed. My assumption is that it changed a lot. But there was still a lot of cargo moving, you know, that went into those containers. Still. And one of the warehouses that I just recall was operational during the height of the Vietnam period when I was there was the mortuary. We did have a mortuary unit at the Oakland Army Base. I didn't work in that unit. It was over there. A whole warehouse was devoted to what was considered mortuary services. And that was the warehouse that received and handled the remains of any and all military, you know, deceased personnel coming through that Army base. And they did full service stuff over there. I don't—I mean, without getting gross—I don't think they did, you know, embalming per se. I don't think so. I can't remember if they did. I think it all came in there. But I do know they dressed soldiers. They had uniforms—they had like rows and stacks of uniforms that they would dress soldiers in to ship them to family members from that Army Base that had been shipped in from overseas. And—especially during the Vietnam era. That was a huge thing.

02-00:29:59

Meeker:

So it sounds like you were mostly involved in the shipping rather than receiving component, because there was some material and so forth coming back?

02-00:30:05

Davis:

What we referred to as retrograde returning stuff, very little.

02-00:30:11

Meeker:

Really?

02-00:30:11

Davis:

Very little back in that day. I'd say after the initial Gulf War, we saw more of that. We did see quite a bit of retrograde as Vietnam wound down. Retrograde meaning, you know, old equipment and stuff that was moved on. But I think most of that stuff was left in the fields and was never shipped back.

02-00:30:35

Meeker:

Well, in addition to maybe an upsurge in some of the retrograde at the end of the Vietnam War, how did the end of the Vietnam War impact the base, from your perspective?

02-00:30:47

Davis:

It was kind of low key, I mean, in that—at the end of the Vietnam War, what we saw—what we did during the Vietnam War was a large—for that base, anyways, a large number of employees. After the Vietnam War, as it was winding down, we started having what was referred to as RIFPS, Reduction in Force Procedures, where folks were actually being let go. But if they were civil service employees that had, you know, tenure or time, they were offered other federal jobs in some other capacities at different bases, other installations. But it did impact us in that that was a downsizing of the personnel that we had there at the end of the Vietnam War.

02-00:31:44

Meeker: By that point in time, you had had seniority, so you were able to keep your position then?

02-00:31:49

Davis: Yes. I never—I was RIFPS, but I was RIFP'd just to move to a different job on the base.

02-00:31:56

Meeker: Okay. To what job?

02-00:31:58

Davis: All in administrative capacity. My initial RIFP, coming out of the terminal, as we call it, itself, I went to what was called the household goods directorate and that was the office that handled temporary storage of military entitled people that had cargo in storage, either because they were going overseas or they had gone overseas or was in temporary storage or waiting for them to give instructions on where it was to go next. I went to that office, and that would have been in the summer of '74, is when that move—when I was RIFP. After going in '67, I worked until '74 and I encountered my—say my first and only RIFP that put me in a different capacity on the base.

02-00:32:56

Meeker: How long did you stay in that position, then, in the household goods directorate?

02-00:33:01

Davis: Actually, only a few—less than six months. Because I then applied for another job that allowed me promotions—that led to other promotions and intern positions.

02-00:33:16

Meeker: In what positions?

02-00:33:17

Davis: An intern position, meaning that I was allowed—I applied for and was selected for a position that would become interned to be a transportation management specialist, or traffic management specialist. Meaning that I'd be able to get promoted at intervals without further competition. Considered a good thing. You know, it was like some of the internships you hear about today. It's like you're selected for the intern, so if you go through that and you get the training you need, you'll be promoted without further having to compete for the jobs. And I got into that line of work.

02-00:34:02

Meeker: And when did you move into this line?

02-00:34:06

Davis: In the summer of '74. I think July of '74 I was selected to go into the intern position.

02-00:34:20

Meeker: And this is work that you continue to do throughout the rest of your career, then?

02-00:34:24

Davis: It was, except, you know, as a result of that, I was promoted and then, of course, I was then able to compete for other jobs that allowed me to get promoted. And most of that involved eventually, you know, of course, supervising people. So that—I was definitely management.

02-00:34:43

Meeker: So you moved—basically moved into a management capacity—

02-00:34:46

Davis: Absolutely.

02-00:34:46

Meeker: —this time. Can you describe some of the work that you were doing as part of this management capacity, as part of—in a supervisory role? Who were you managing? What kind of work were they doing {inaudible}?

02-00:35:00

Davis: Well, the management I did was primarily—well, it was of personnel. Still shipping stuff. Initially, there were some loss and damage involvement, meaning that, you know, we had to document when the government received or damaged goods, and we'd go about, you know, filing claim paperwork against the party that caused the damage. But even in my intern position as a manager, my job was the same, in the sense, that I'd always been, except I'm in the management side of it. Early on, it was all—as used—they use the term grunt work. I then became the manager of the grunTERS and directed that work.

02-00:35:55

Meeker: Did you develop like a particular—your own style about supervising employees? I mean, how did you—

02-00:36:01

Davis: Oh, absolutely. You know, I'm one of those guys that thought—you know, I was a pretty darn good manager. I always—but see, prior to that, I'd served as a union representative, you know, within their while I was still in the—before I got into management. And I learned a lot as a union representative, because I always believed in the rights of people and they should be treated fairly by management, and didn't feel like management should take advantage of the workers. They should always be respected and you should always do what you can to help the workers to succeed. And so when I got into the management side of the world, I took some of those same skills, I felt, which helped me to be a better manager, because I still was concerned about the welfare of my people. I once had a manager, supervisor, who once said to me, "Grant, if you never do anything else, make sure you get your people paid for the work they done." That always stayed in my mind. The other part of that, I thought, was, "Also treat them the way you'd want to be treated. You saw

some poor managers while you were coming up. Don't be like them." By the same token, I felt that I was mission oriented, you know, from my military civilian days. I always felt like it was important that you get the job done. And so I was hopefully able to combine my union skills with my managerial skills to do the very best job that I knew how to do. And that was treating people the way I wanted to be treated, encouraging them, monitoring their performance, documenting their good stuff, their positives, correcting them when necessary, when there were shortcomings, and realizing I could only be as good as they are. And so it was important to me to work with people to get the best out of them, which in turn, made me look good. And when I am able—when I did retire after all that time, I felt that my accomplishments were some. I made some—what I thought were some tremendous strides, but I knew it was done on the backs of people, meaning without them I couldn't have done what I was able to get accomplish.

02-00:38:41

Meeker:

Well, in hindsight, what are some of the things that you would have considered to be some of your most memorable accomplishments?

02-00:38:51

Davis:

I thought something—now—well, the feeling that people are important and always putting the people and the mission together to get the work done. I thought that was one of my major accomplishments. I thought being able to look beyond some of my own personal hang-ups when it came to promoting and rewarding people for jobs being done.

02-00:39:26

Meeker:

What do you mean by that?

02-00:39:28

Davis:

Well, I never thought I'd get into this, but I realized there were just some people that you'd work with that for whatever reason, you just didn't like their personalities. You just kind of didn't have a—just a good feeling about them as people. Not that they were all bad or all this or all that. You just didn't get that—sometimes that warm fuzzy about them. And yet, I learned that people like that, if they did a good job for you, if they still did their job, you still encouraged them to do their work, and if they did their work, you rewarded them just as if it was someone who you did feel a lot more positive about, or you liked their personality, or you liked the hairstyle or any of those things. In other words, you let those things—and I always kept that in the forefront of dealing with people. Now, I also felt that when it came down for a promotion, the same would apply. Education was always important to me {inaudible} where people were, and I encouraged my people, "Get as much education as you can." You can't go wrong and you can use it in any way, shape, or form. And that'll often get you a leg up, where someone that just has the experience may not. So you want to try to combine the two. And yet, when I was selecting someone for a position, I would never use—or learn not to use any one criteria as being the one major reason for selecting them for a position. In

other words, if you had the education, and yet your social skills—or you didn't work well with people, it could affect you. Or if you were just a social animal and you didn't have quite as much education, that would not necessarily determine whether you got the job working for me, or promoted. I'd like someone more well-rounded, and yet I wanted to look at all those factors. You know, I wouldn't look at, "Well, this person has a BS degree, or a BA degree," and so on and so on and so on. "Well, you only finished high school." So that definitely gives this person a leg up. It probably did but then I considered other factors.

02-00:41:55

Meeker:

From the perspective of a supervisor—and I'm not quite sure the degree to which this even factored into the federal workplace. But during the seventies and eighties, were there affirmative action guidelines, and how did you, as a supervisor, you know, in charge of hiring some people and promotion, how did that factor into it, if it did at all?

02-00:42:21

Davis:

You know, for me—I always believed in fairness. And in that sense, I'm sure I have some racial tendencies that are sort of latent there. They are there. And I have made a strong effort in my life to try to work through those things. Because I think everybody has some racism in them. I just do. Whether you refer to it as favoritism or whatever, or—when it came to affirmative action, I thought it was a good program and I thought so because, yes, I had dealt with some racism. I don't know of a single job that I did not get because of racism, though. Frankly, I can only think of one, maybe two jobs in my whole career that I applied for I didn't get. Almost every job I ever applied for, they were jobs I wanted, and I got them. Do I think racism ever played a fact in any jobs I didn't get? Not really. It may have, but I never thought it did. But I do know, and I had to work with people who were—I felt that it was a problem for them and that they didn't—they did promote because of race and that sort of thing. So when affirmative action came, I thought it kind of helped with a level playing—it leveled the playing field a little bit. And yet, I don't know of any job I got because I learned or heard or felt—because I was black. So I don't know if affirmative action ever helped me at all. I don't think I was every truly helped by it, personally. But I think it helped a lot of other folks. And because I don't have blinders on, it may have helped me in that it made some job that I applied for where maybe they would have been thinking of, "Well, let's go with somebody, you know, not a color." They thought, "Well, we don't have anybody of color here and this kid is fairly bright. Let's just get this over, do it in there." So it may have helped me in that way but I'm not aware of any. My own feeling when it came to that—I always tried to select the best person for the job. I don't remember ever selecting a black person, even in affirmative action work, over a white person because I thought the black person needed the job because he had been discriminated against. I was always able to go for the best person for the job. And believe it or not, I guess I was very fortunate. And I'm not a saint, but I'm a religious man and I always felt that things kind

of worked themselves out. I really did. I felt that—because I probably interviewed more black people for jobs, I probably gave more jobs to black people. But I definitely—and Hispanic folks. But I spread it around and I did that based on merit and what this person brought to the table as opposed to any one factor. And I don't remember ever, ever letting race be my determining factor, even though affirmative action was something I had to work with.

02-00:45:32

Meeker:

So it sounds like you supervised a fairly diverse workforce.

02-00:45:36

Davis:

Oh, yes. I love it.

02-00:45:38

Meeker:

Is there anything that—is there anything that you felt like—you know, looking back upon it, that you did as a supervisor that helped the diversity be a positive attribute rather than a challenge? Or were there moments in which the diversity was maybe a source of challenge that you as a supervisor were able to provide some leadership?

02-00:46:04

Davis:

I would have to say yes to the extent—or maybe not—well, first of all, let me just say I never thought of myself as being the perfect supervisor. I never thought of myself as being above or better than anybody else. I thought some of my supervisory skills, through teaching, through learning, through some education, through trying to be open minded, made me a pretty darn good supervisor. I wasn't the smartest guy in the world, and yet I wasn't dumb. I think I applied a lot of common sense, and yet I always felt that I'm trying to do the right thing, and therefore, it's going to all work out well. If—in answer to your question, I think my sense of fair play—if nothing else, I don't think anybody that I ever managed, of any race or ethnicity or even gender, can ever say that Grant Davis discriminated against me because I was a woman or I was a man or I was Jewish or I was not black or because I was Spanish. I think the feeling would be, "Well, he treated me fair," and that's what I think was probably one of my better contributions. And because I wanted it to be that way. I thought it was important to do that way. Did I ever make mistakes as a manager? Heck, yes. I'm sure I did. There were a number of things that I would have did differently. Did I do things horribly bad that I would say, "Oh, man, that was—" No, I don't think that. But I think some things I would have did differently. I think there were times when I may have been too mission oriented and guided and not always think about where that person is at this point in time. And maybe had that goal of getting the job done. I would have looked, you know, later maybe back and saying, "You know, you could have maybe still got that done if you'd been a little more sensitive of where those people or that person may have been."

02-00:48:23

Meeker:

What was your final position at the Oakland Army Base when it closed in '99?

02-00:48:31

Davis:

I was a supervisory transportation management specialist and I had been in charge of, that last job, of booking cargo. Of having {inaudible} a team of personnel that booked cargo that was going—booked it meaning scheduled it to go on ships going throughout the Pacific Region.

02-00:49:05

Meeker:

People describe the closure of the Army Base as pretty quick, abrupt. There wasn't a lot of forewarning. What did you know about it before it happened? Did you have any opinion one way or the other about whether it should be closed or not? What are your thoughts about the process by which it was closed?

02-00:49:30

Davis:

Well, even today I have, you know, sad feelings about the closure of the Army Base because it became like a second home to me. I do, though, personally disagree with it being fast. I think the only thing fast about it was we heard that during this BRACC, these Base Realignment and Closure Commissions, that they had—they were closing bases and we had a sister base, as I called it, it was at Bayonne, New Jersey. And we were told that they were on the BRACC list and they were going to be BRACCed. And when they got word that they were going to be BRACCed and we weren't, some of their management types went ballistic and said, basically, you know, "We don't know why we're being BRACCed and they ain't being BRACCed." And so apparently it was then said that the Commission then looked at us and BRACCed us, as well. That's what we were told. We had hearings. Hearings were held. It was years from the time we went on that base realignment and closure list that we were actually closed. I don't feel like it was abruptly done. The only abrupt thing was we kind of—rumor was that we weren't going to be BRACCed and then we were on that list. But it took years for that to happen. Now, I was getting near the end of my career, but not really near it. I still had years to go. If I'd been more in the middle, I may have felt like it was abrupt. I think that if some of these people had known years before that it was going to be BRACCed, they may have went out looking for other forms of employment or maybe even through other agencies. But I don't think it was abrupt. I don't think it was abrupt.

02-00:51:29

Meeker:

Some people, local community members who were employed at the base or interested in keeping a large employer nearby, have been somewhat critical of Dellums role in allowing the base to be closed. Do you have any perspective on that?

02-00:51:49

Davis:

Well, kind of a backup to what I had just said. I was part of a management team that when the base was put on the BRACC list, of pointing out—of

going and pointing out to the BRACC commissioners, when they came over—and it was held out in Treasure Island, as a matter of fact. Putting together reasons why our base should not be closed. And I definitely did not think it should be. We had what I thought were some very compelling reasons.

02-00:52:15

Meeker:

Those would have been?

02-00:52:18

Davis:

Well, one of them that comes to mind is we were the single, only military installation that did not have ammo left on the West Coast that was at a water port. We were the only one. That would have made that a major concern.

02-00:52:38

Meeker:

So a safety concern.

02-00:52:40

Davis:

A major safety concern. We were at—as the term goes, "If hell broke loose in the Middle East, we would have no military base to stage our troops, our equipment, or any of that stuff where we could call our own here on the West Coast." Because all the others had been closed. So this was going to be a strategically important place to keep open. Oh, yes, we could have used the Port of Oakland, because they weren't—there was some agreement that allowed us to go into there. But that would have been so disruptive for their services and I didn't think that was a good thing to do. I felt that it would be an impact on the community in terms of the jobs that were being lost and that sort of thing. But I just didn't think that we'd have this forward base location that would allow us to mobilize in a hurry if they closed the Army Base. That was probably one of my major reasons.

02-00:53:38

Meeker:

How did they respond to that?

02-00:53:41

Davis:

I heard that they listened but it wasn't, in their minds, I guess compelling enough to keep it open. Dellums, on the other hand, I thought had been a very, very good representative for this area and for that base, and he was definitely a fighter for a lot of folks who went to him for help. He was not my Congressman, so I never had to go to him, but the base was in his district. I heard and I felt that Dellums feeling was that he—if the job, as it was told, was going to be put on the—in the private sector anyway, there would still be jobs in the area, even if there wouldn't be any for "civil service employees." There would still be jobs. Because there was talk of all the different things they were going to do with that land and that space. And that would employ people. So I felt that Dellums kind of saw it as a wash. So I didn't have any major misgivings about his position.

02-00:54:56

Meeker:

We just have a few minutes left and I know that there's probably a lot that we haven't covered. But do you have any sort of final thoughts or anything that—any areas that you think that we should be covering in this project as we go and interview additional people?

02-00:55:15

Davis:

Well, first of all, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity, because—I mean, because it is reliving some things, so it's {inaudible} positive things for me, as well, bringing back some good and some sad memories. I was very proud of my role and what I was able to accomplish and help accomplish at the Army Base. I think just talking to people, just getting other folks who had that experience, the opportunity to give their two cents worth on how they view things because, you know, there's a lot that I probably would say I wish I had remembered to say and all. But I think the more people you talk to, if you get the chance to, they'll bring about some things that I would have forgotten or didn't recall and some of their memories or recollections of things may be somewhat different from mine, in a sense, but I think if you were there, we all had that bond and it's hard to explain. And some of these folks—which is why I knew about this. Some of us still have luncheons together {inaudible} three times a year where we get together and see {inaudible} and discuss old times and where people are at and what's going on and who's dead. And just that experience is something else. So I think talking to those folks would be—other people, if given the opportunity, would be worthwhile.

02-00:56:47

Meeker:

Okay. Well, we'll certainly be talking to other people, so—unless you have anything else to say, I think we're going to wrap up.

02-00:56:52

Davis:

No. Oh, yes, I guess one last thing.

02-00:56:54

Meeker:

All right. Go ahead.

02-00:56:56

Davis:

And I—having had the opportunity to serve the country was good. I mentioned earlier about, you know, it allowed me to—I felt I got in a win-win situation. I won that I had a place to work, provide support to my family, and yet I served my country well, as well. So I think I was a blessed person in that I was able to bring all those components together and get something good about it. I'm very pleased and happy with my family and I'm happy with my service to this country.

02-00:57:35

Meeker:

Very good then. Thank you very much.

02-00:57:47

Davis:

When I was still working, {inaudible} time took forever. Time moved really slowly. Once you're retired—in my case, well, it started moving faster before that, so I can't lie. But I think—

02-00:58:00

Meeker:

After retiring?

02-00:58:02

Davis:

It really seems to move fast.

[End of Interview]