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Berkeley, California

Robert Nordan:
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens
in 2008

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Interview #1: December, 11, 2008
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Rubens: To start, would you please state your name and tell us when you came to the Oakland Army Base.

01-00:00:10

Nordan: Certainly. My name is Bob Nordan. And I was the Public Affairs Officer at Oakland Army Base from 1977 to 1984, and then the Executive Staff Officer from 1984 to 1986.

Rubens: How did you come to get the job?

01-00:00:29

Nordan: Well, very interesting question. I answered an ad in the *Army Times* newspaper, while I was working as the Public Affairs Officer for the Army shooting team, located at Fort Benning, Georgia. And I answered the ad and was asked to come out for an interview. So I flew out for an interview and got the job. So I moved, as a civil service employee, from Columbus, Georgia to Oakland. And the five years prior to that, I had been on active duty as an army officer, as a public affairs officers in Thailand and in Germany. So it was kind of a natural progression for me to follow my military service with a civilian job as a public affairs officer.

Rubens: Could you have opted to stay in the military?

01-00:01:19

Nordan: I could. I could. But I decided after five years of the military, and enjoying it very much, decided I did not want to make it a career. In fact, at that time, I thought I might make the Foreign Service a career, because while I was in the army, I got a masters in international relations. And so my goal was to shoot for the Foreign Service, until I found out exactly how you start with the Foreign Service and some of the downsides of it, and decided that that's not what I wanted to do. But I loved public affairs in the military, I loved dealing with the media, doing community relations, that sort of thing, and the job was very attractive to me.

Rubens: Let's back up just for one moment. Where were you born and raised?

01-00:02:07

Nordan: I was born in Panama City, Florida, in the northern gulf coast of Florida. I spent the first twenty years of my life there, before going to Florida State and getting a bachelors degree. I graduated in 1969.

Rubens: The masters degree was in—?

01-00:02:23

Nordan: The bachelors was in business, from Florida State; and I have a masters in international relations from the University of Southern California.

Rubens: But the masters was through the Army?

01-00:02:34

Nordan: No, I got it— In almost all military installations around the world, they have continuing education opportunities. And they usually have several colleges or universities that offer degree programs. So while I was in the Army in Germany, they offered a masters in international relations at a nearby Army garrison, so I'd travel there. And the University of Southern California brought in professors and instructors, over from the States on a rotating basis, to provide the classes.

Rubens: So the years you were in the military?

01-00:03:09

Nordan: 1969 to 1974.

Rubens: You then had the job for the shooting team. What was the shooting team?

01-00:03:21

Nordan: The army has a team of expert marksmen, competitive marksmen, in a variety of different disciplines. And I joined the army shooting team in early '76, 1976, in preparation for the Olympic Games in Montreal. The majority of the US Olympic shooting team comes from the army shooting team. So it was a year-round program. I think we had sixty or seventy people in the unit. And their job was to become world class marksmen. In fact, we had several Olympic gold medal winners on the team, even before '76. We had world record holders, multiple world record holders on the team. And we were preparing for the '76 Olympics in Montreal. And so my job was to promote, put out news releases, biographies, get everything prepared for the Olympics, and then go to the Olympics and help cover the shooting team. And I'm proud to say that the shooting team won two gold medals, a gold medal in rifle shooting and in skeet shooting, and a silver medal in rifle shooting, as well, that year. So quite a successful trip to the Olympics.

Rubens: Your military service was primarily in Germany? Did you go to Vietnam or—

01-00:04:49

Nordan: I did not go to Vietnam. I spent two years at Fort Benning, Georgia, from the time I went in the army. And I was an instructor. I was a weapons instructor at the Army Infantry School, where we taught army officers and NCOs about weaponry. I was on orders for Vietnam; but when the orders actually came down, they sent me to Thailand, to a logistics command in Thailand, rather than to Vietnam.

Rubens: How long were you there?

01-00:05:18

Nordan: I was there a year. And our job in Thailand, the command's job in Thailand, was twofold. One, as a transportation command, to receive the munitions and

supplies and fuel for the Air Force operating out of Thailand, for missions over Vietnam; and to also operate the R&R centers for soldiers in Vietnam. When they had rest and recuperation, they could go a variety of different places, but one of those was Thailand. So we ran the R&R hotels and all the support for that whole operation.

Rubens: You must've seen quite a lot.

01-00:06:02

Nordan: [laughs] It was a nice assignment. It was a very good assignment. The commander in Thailand at the time was General John Vessey. And General Vessey went on to become the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as a four star general. So I was very fortunate to have worked for some very outstanding general officers, and he was the first one I worked for.

Rubens: Was the fact that it was a transportation command, did that give you a background that made you more choice for the Oakland Army Base position?

01-00:06:33

Nordan: I think so. I think so. Tom Blezard, who was the executive staff officer at the time, was the selecting official. And he's the one I interviewed with in Oakland. And he had been in that position for at least fifteen years, I know. And I think it had some impact that I had worked for logistics and transportation command, because essentially, that's what Oakland Army Base was.

Rubens: So you are hired. You take the job, and literally move from Georgia.

01-00:07:15

Nordan: My wife and I had just had our only child, a baby boy. And when he was four weeks old, we came out for the interview trip and looked for a place to live. And then two weeks later, we got in the car and moved to Oakland. So we actually located in Concord, and then later, here in Walnut Creek. So yes, when he was very, very young. So he's lived his whole life in California. But moving to the Oakland Army Base and the Military Traffic Management Command, Western Area, was great, because the military operated as a community. And so they were very accustomed to having people come from the outside and integrating them into the community and making them feel at home and taking care of them. So it was very easy for my wife and I to come out and get associated with other people. At that time, I was thirty years old. There were other younger military officers and civilian employees at the base— so it was a very easy transition for us.

Rubens: Tell me about what the job literally was. How did you assess what it was that you needed to do? And where were you located?

01-00:08:36

Nordan:

Primarily, the job was for internal information. Previously, there had been a lot more public information when there was a lot of controversy about the Oakland Army Base and there were demonstrations and all that kind of stuff—

Rubens:

In protest over the war in Vietnam.

01-00:08:52

Nordan:

Protests over the war in Vietnam. So it was a lot more public information. By the time I arrived, most of that had died down. And so my jobs were primarily for internal information; a newspaper, publishing the newspaper, *The Western Arrow*; community relations, dealing with the local communities; and any problems that we had. But also trying to find ways that we could be a part of the community and help the community, either through charitable works or anything like that. There were times during my tenure when public information rose to the top and that was the most important thing that I was doing at any given time. But I participated in a lot of the different committees and activities and all, and in the staff meetings, so I was an integral part of the command and the base. Because the general who commanded western area also was the base commander.

Rubens:

About the time you came, how many people— what was the circulation of the newspaper?

01-00:10:03

Nordan:

As I recall, the civilian employee total was around 1100 people that we had authority for. In addition to that, the Navy Public Works Center was located at Oakland Army Base, as well. And I think there were another four or five-hundred people that we did not have authority over, that were with the navy PWC. In addition to that, when I first came, we had a lot more military people than when I left. I think there were about 350 or 400 military when I arrived. And they were the staff for the command. A lot of transportation officers for the port operations and that sort of thing, as well as a lot of the military people working on the staff within the different departments.

Rubens:

What were some of the committees on which you served?

01-00:11:01

Nordan:

They could be anything from— I know that you're familiar, or someone has told you about Humanity Week that we had. That whole thing came about when we got to the point of so many separate ethnic celebrations and there were complaints from smaller groups that said, "Well, why aren't we represented?", that Ralph Williams, the equal opportunity officer, and I—who was there the whole time I was there—got together as part of the committee and said, "Why do we have to have separate celebrations? Why can't we just celebrate humanity as a whole? And celebrate everyone's ethnicity, and have food and celebrations and all that." So that was one of the types of

committees. Later, when— I forget who the general was- I started working on the Federal Executive Board. The Federal Executive Board was composed of the heads of all the government agencies in the Bay Area. And so it was all the— whether it was Health and Human Services—which at that time, was not called that, but—HUD or the Coast Guard or the navy or the army or Social Security—you name it. All of the government agencies, all the heads, belonged to the Federal Executive Board. And I was the designated participant in the Federal Executive Board for the command. The official member was the general officer who commanded the base; but as a representative, I went and participated. And then when General John Stanford came aboard in the mid eighties, he became the chairman of the Federal Executive Board. And so I, along with other people on the staff, had a larger role in programs and other activities of the Federal Executive Board. In fact, we even had one of the staff come and have an office at Oakland Army Base, for that period while he was the chairman.

Rubens: How often did the Federal Executive Board meet?

01-00:13:04

Nordan: Usually, once a month. And then some of the subcommittees would meet more often than that, if we had special things going on. But the primary purpose was to coordinate the activities of all the federal agencies in the Bay Area, and also to provide some mutual assistance, if we could. There were some organizations that had facilities that other people needed, whether it was a printing shop— We had a large print shop at the base, so we did offer that on a reimbursement basis, to print some things. We had audiovisual activities and resources that others didn't have, so we would use those and do some exchange. So it was all for the betterment of operating as a federal government, in coordination and collaboration, rather than separately.

Rubens: Could you estimate roughly how many people met?

01-00:14:00

Nordan: It was about thirty, I think, on a monthly basis.

Rubens: Would there be representatives from the other military sites?

01-00:14:07

Nordan: There would be. So usually, we had the commander of the Coast Guard, the commander of the Naval Supply Center, a representative from the Presidio—not necessarily the commanding general. But there would be other military organizations represented, and then all the civilian agencies.

Rubens: We were going over committees that you had served on. You mentioned Humanity Week. Any others that you—

01-00:14:45

Nordan:

There were other committees, in terms of personnel selections. So there were personnel selection review committees, the equal opportunity committee. There were some collaborations along some legal aspects. When I arrived, we were under a consent decree from the federal court to increase the number of Hispanic employees at the base. And so it was known as the Hispanic Consent Decree. Ralph Williams, the Equal Opportunity Officer, was the project officer for that. But then we would meet as a committee, representatives of other parts of the organization, to provide input, to see the monthly statistics and to respond to any requests that we had associated with that. So that was a big thing that we went through, probably for the first five or six years that I was at the base, trying to meet those goals that had been mandated to the base.

Rubens:

Now, how was that initiated?

01-00:15:51

Nordan:

It was initiated through a lawsuit. There was a lawsuit on behalf— filed by one of our employees, and then entered into and supported by, I think, some Hispanic organizations in the community. And it resulted in a consent decree, where the court said in order to satisfy the, I guess, more equal distribution of ethnic employee at Oakland Army Base, we needed to reach certain goals. And at that time, I think it was 6% or 7% of the employees to be Hispanic.

Rubens:

And did you see there start to be a change in the—

01-00:16:32

Nordan:

There was. Before I finished, and I think it was before I became the Executive Staff Officer, we met the goal and the consent decree was lifted.

Rubens:

I know there was an equal opportunity officer-

01-00:15:49

Nordan:

There was an equal opportunity officer. That was Ralph Williams.

Rubens:

I assume that the army had goals to diversify.

01-00:16:58

Nordan:

The goals were actually set by the court.

Rubens:

Well, I didn't mean that specific one for Hispanics, but in general there were mandates that the equal opportunity officer had to enforce.

01-00:17:08

Nordan:

There's something called the statistical metropolitan area or something like that.

Rubens:

The SMSA

01-00:17:14

Nordan: Yes, that surveys the ethnic distribution within a hiring area. And then that determines, if you are in balance with the percentage reflective of the community? At that time, the consent decree, I think, was aligned with something that was measured by the SMSA or whatever it was called.

Rubens: Because what I was getting at was, I assume it was the responsibility of the equal opportunity officer to—

01-00:17:53

Nordan: Well, those are always goals. They're never mandated as—oh, what do you call it?—absolutes.

Rubens: I see.

01-00:18:01

Nordan: So they were always goals, to increase under-representation by certain ethnic groups.

Rubens: But in the face of the lawsuit, then there were real—

01-00:18:08

Nordan: Right. Then there was an absolute that we had to— Oakland Army Base, when I was there, the majority of employees, when you combine all the ethnicities, were from minority groups. So it was more than 50% minority -a very large portion of employees drawing from Oakland, so a large black or African American population. Large Asian, Pacific Islander population, as well. Grew to a larger employment pool of Hispanics, as well.

Rubens: Each time you mention a committee that you serve on, it really leads to some interesting stories characterizing how the base was organized and operated.

01-00:18:59

Nordan: Yes. Yes, I know the base has been described in other materials as being a community within itself. And it really was. Military bases are somewhat like that anyway. Oakland Army Base, being in a metropolitan area, had a community of military people; and then of course, the civilians who came to work there every day belonged to the outside community. But it really was, even with the civilians, a pretty closely knit community. Somewhat self-supporting, for the military; but also very attractive for people to belong. It had kind of a love/hate relationship with the city of Oakland, because of the prevailing political sentiment against the Vietnam War. A lot of people didn't want a military base in Oakland. At the same time, it provided a tremendous amount of employment for not only Oakland residents, but the surrounding community, as well. So it was a while before we really got the city of Oakland and the political leaders to really warm up to Oakland Army Base, even though we did outreach quite a bit. I remember when Mayor Lionel Wilson made his first, and I believe his only visit to Oakland Army Base while he was mayor. It was a big thing for us, because he was coming to better understand

what we were doing at Oakland Army Base and how we could work together, not just on jobs, but any other areas. So it got to be a little bit warmer relationship when he was mayor. I don't know what happened after that.

Rubens: Was that something that you were responsible for—

01-00:20:54

Nordan: It was, trying to—

Rubens: —for initiating it and—

01-00:20:56

Nordan: —trying to reach out. We did a lot more work with the Chamber of Commerce, because they were a lot more amenable to our outreach. We did provide speakers bureaus, where we would have some of our experts, some of our senior officers, go out and speak to community groups—like the Kiwanis and the Rotary Club—for luncheon speakers and all; have them go out and speak, to try to foster more of an understanding of who we were and what we were doing and what was our mission. Oakland Army Base was the central component of a very important mission for the western United States, because it was not just a port operation; it was the headquarters for the western area of the Military Traffic Management Command, and as such, really had responsibility for movement of defense logistics from the Mississippi River all the way around to the Indian Ocean. So we not only had the Port of Oakland or Oakland Army Base, but we also had one in Seattle, one in Long Beach, one in Okinawa, and one in Yokohama, Japan. And then we worked with the other military ports around the world, even though they didn't come under our command. So between that ocean shipping responsibility and the responsibility for all surface shipping in the western United States, whether it's rail or truck, yes, a pretty big responsibility headquartered there. And most defense goods at that time, and even before that and even during Vietnam, were shipped by commercial sources, not by military ships, not by military trains or convoys. So that's what we were all about; we were contracting for and monitoring the shipment of defense logistics.

Rubens: Just to go back to Wilson, when he came to the base, was there a convocation? Did you take him around?

01-00:22:58

Nordan: We gave him a tour. He was not a total stranger to Oakland Army Base. He'd been around Oakland for a long time. He was a judge before he became mayor. But as far as an inside look, he had not really had that. So we gave him a tour, we gave him a briefing by several of our senior officials; gave him a tour of the base, and tried to give him more of an understanding of what we had there, so that we could try to forge some mutual relationship between the City of Oakland and Oakland Army Base.

Rubens: There're so many lines I'd like to pursue. Let me just stay with your relationship with the city for a little bit more. You said you worked with the Chamber of Commerce.

01-00:23:43

Nordan: Worked for the Port of Oakland. Of course, the Port of Oakland being in the transportation business, from time to time had some requirements that we could help them out with. One of the things that sticks out in my mind, first of all, there were a lot of cars being shipped into the Port of Oakland at a particular time, and they needed a place to put the cars, because they had run out of tarmac space. And so we allowed them to come and park the cars in the huge parking lot out in front of Oakland Army Base temporarily. And I think we used some other parking areas, as well. Container storage for a container port is always a problem. So we cleaned out all the areas under the overpasses, the multiple overpasses that were part of the base, and allowed them to store containers there. Sometimes we got reimbursed; sometimes we didn't get reimbursed for it. But it was a cooperative effort between us and the Port of Oakland. So that also was kind of a love/hate relationship, because Port of Oakland coveted Oakland Army Base. And so they were—

Rubens: Still does.

01-00:24:55

Nordan: —yes—constantly wanting to know when we were going to leave or what they could take over and become part of the Port of Oakland.

Rubens: The other entity I was wondering if you had interaction with was the police. Now, the Oakland Army Base had its own MPs.

01-00:25:14

Nordan: Right. The base had its own MPs and security force. And I'll tell you an anecdote about that in a minute. But we had an agreement with the City of Oakland, under the hot pursuit clause, that if they were pursuing someone and they came onto the base, that the City of Oakland had the authority to come on the base. But only under hot pursuit. Otherwise, the US military, the army had authority only of the Oakland Army Base. So we worked with them closely. Maritime Street split the base right down the middle, so of course, they had authority over traffic on all of Maritime Street. But our MPs operated as security force, not only for the port, but for the large warehouses we had and the movement of freight. Now, given that, some time in the mid-eighties—I can't remember exactly when—we were selected, Oakland Army Base was selected as the first army base to go from military police to civilian security guards. So it was a large outsourcing deal, to hand over the security at the base from the MPs to a contractor, who would then provide security and police—still under the management eye of our provost marshal, but we basically didn't have any MPs after that transition was converted. And that caused a lot of interest nationwide, being the first, and so we had a lot of

media attention coming. And they wanted to portray rent-a-cops coming to secure a military installation.

Rubens: So this was a PR campaign you had to finesse?

01-00:27:17

Nordan:

I had to respond to that. Why does it make sense to contract that out? And what's the impact and the response of the military? But that was one of the ones selected. There were many things like that, that we really didn't have local authority over. At the Department of Defense and Department of Army level, at that particular time, they looked at the kinds of functions that were not really military functions, that could be performed by a civilian contractor. And either they would direct us to contract; or in this case, the Small Business Administration in San Francisco has the authority for any federal agency or military installation to select a contract to be a small business set-aside. So they can call the shots, and that's what they did with this particular contract. They selected it to be a small business set-aside, and gave it to a small minority-owned business and said, "Without further competition, we're awarding the contract to that business." It didn't work out very well. Within a month, I remember coming to work one morning and I saw the security guards riding some bicycles. And I thought it was kind of strange. And it was a time when I had some responsibility over the base, as executive staff officer. So I called the provost marshal and asked him what was happening. And he said, "All of their vehicles are broken down, so they don't have any capacity to patrol the base." I think it's seventy-seven acres; a pretty large installation. And so they're riding bicycles. So we had some discussions about that and demanded that the contractor abide by the contract and get some vehicles, even if he had to rent some cars, for the security guards to patrol the base. Over time, as I recall, we got another contractor in that was a little bit larger, had some security contracts at some other military installations, and were much better prepared to deal with securing a military installation than the first contractor.

Rubens: Were there ever any serious or significant breaches of security?

01-00:29:56

Nordan:

We didn't really have any breaches of security. What we had to deal with, more than anything else, was theft. Because we had a lot of goods that were being shipped into the base, being prepared for overseas shipment. We were a trans-shipment station, where the trucks would bring the supplies into one of the very, very large warehouses that we had on the base. Each of them was a quarter-mile long, and I think we had like ten of those on the other side of Maritime Street. And so theft of those goods is what we dealt with more than anything else. And then there were security cages, where high value items, as well as items such as cigarettes and alcohol, had to be locked up in a security cage until they were signed over to someone else for trans-shipment. So it was more things like that. Not really any kind of breaches that would threaten

national security. With the exception [that] when we had large shipments of military equipment going out of the piers, then we had to up security. But the whole pier operation was really a civilian contract operation, as well, because we contracted with the stevedores to run the stevedoring firms to load the ships. Because we didn't have any container operations on Oakland Army Base. Ours was all what was called break bulk. So piece by piece or "ro-ro" or roll-on, roll-off. It was drive on and drive off for vehicles. That we did have, some of those ships came in where we would load military vehicles, either for operations overseas or for some of the practice type maneuvers that we would do, particularly with Korea.

Rubens: How about just military personnel? Disturbing of the peace or drunkenness and disorder—were there those issues that you would have to—

01-00:32:07

Nordan: Well, I can neither confirm or deny— [laughs] That was our favorite phrase in public affairs, I can neither confirm nor deny. But as in any community, of course, there are disturbances you have to deal with, whether it's domestic violence or—

Rubens: I would assume that would be a regular part of—

01-00:32:24

Nordan: Yes. It was pretty much like any other community. But as I said, we were a community. We had a grocery store, being the commissary, and the post exchange, and we had the non-commissioned officers' club, enlisted club that was on—

Rubens: There was a bowling alley.

01-00:32:38

Nordan: —the Oakland Army Base. We did have a bowling alley. Craft shops, auto repair shops, education center. So we would arrange for continuing education courses and sponsor those, for people who wanted to get their education, get their GED or just take college courses. We had a dispensary, or a little medical clinic. Now, during Vietnam, it was a much bigger operation because people getting out of the army were brought back to Oakland, during Vietnam, and they were processed out in Oakland. So they had to go through their medical out processing and all of that. By the late seventies or mid-eighties, that had really diminished a lot. So that clinic was to support the military families that lived on the base.

Rubens: Just following up the idea of your interaction with the city, how about with the *Oakland Tribune*? Would you place stories in the—

01-00:33:42

Nordan: We did releases to the *Oakland Tribune*, as well as the other community papers in the surrounding area. We did quite a bit of work, from time to time,

with Channel 2. They were open to coming out and covering stories, some of the—

Rubens: That was a television station in Oakland.

01-00:33:58

Nordan: Television station, right. Some of the San Francisco television stations did, as well. Probably got the most attention whenever something would go wrong. Whenever we were shipping munitions by a civilian carrier and either there was an accident or the shipment was abandoned somewhere in the western United States— And so we were kind of called on the hot seat for that. We had an operation up at Travis Air Force Base to help coordinate the shipment of logistics out of Travis. And we had a sergeant up there who posed for *Playgirl* magazine. And of course, that became a big story for the local news. This soldier had posed. And so we were called, since he was under our jurisdiction, to answer media requests for, what are you going to do about it? And so of course, they would come, and they were looking for some sensational kinds of things associated with that. But those would flare up and then they would die down.

Rubens: Was there something to be done about that?

01-00:35:12

Nordan: He was not punished. He was, I think, admonished. Which probably nowadays—

Rubens: Behavior unbecoming a—

01-00:35:21

Nordan: Yes, unbecoming a non-commissioned officer. Something like that. But we had those things. And the biggest event during my whole time there was the People's Temple whole incident that started shortly after I got there. So in 1978. I came in '77, and around Thanksgiving of 1978, we began to hear the news reports of the People's Temple mass suicide. And because we had a mortuary, a military mortuary at Oakland Army Base, we were immediately put on alert by the Defense Department to expect that we may be called upon to receive the bodies back at the mortuary. So over a period of about a week and a half or two weeks, we were standing by to see what we might need to do to accommodate that repatriation of remains. As it turned out, the remains were taken to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, where they had even a much larger military mortuary. And they were processed there and kept there, to be claimed by the next of kin. But unfortunately, over a year's period, there were over 200, I think, remains that were never claimed. And so—most of the people who died came from the Bay Area—they decided it would be better to have the remains located closer to the Bay Area than on the other coast. So I was selected as the project officer to coordinate with Dover Air Force Base and the other logistic organizations to transport those remains across country via trucks to the Oakland Army Base mortuary, where they would be kept

until they were claimed by the next of kin. So we did that. That was about a month long project, tracking the status all the way across country.

Rubens: And this was well after the actual event?

01-00:37:32

Nordan: This was more than a year after the massacre or the suicide, whatever you want to call it. And so there was a lot of media interest nationwide—in fact, worldwide—on that. So we set up a media center in one room off of the cafeteria, and put in phone lines to accommodate all the media that came for that. So that was one of the big public relations projects that I took care of while I was there. And then over time, we still ended up with close to a hundred bodies that had not been claimed. And so those were eventually— There was a receiver that was put in charge of it by the federal court. And he dictated that the remaining bodies should be buried in a mass grave in Oakland. So that's what was done, and then that ended our responsibility for that.

Rubens: Boy, that was quite something.

01-00:38:34

Nordan: It was. A very, very sad, somewhat explosive— but of great human interest.

Rubens: Now, how many people did you have in your department? I would imagine you expanded somewhat at that time —you had to set up the phone lines and respond to all the—

01-00:38:50

Nordan: Yes. When I was the Public Affairs Officer, I had myself, one editor of *The Western Arrow*; at one time, I had an assistant editor also, and then a secretary. And that was it. That's all we had. So very small staff. But of course, as the project officer, I had the opportunity to draw on other resources from other departments, if we needed it, such as the security part of it, the legal part of it. So we could draw on those things. The base operations to set up facilities and issue passes and credentials to the media.

Rubens: I assume it's the commander who assigns you—

01-00:39:35

Nordan: Yes.

Rubens: How often did you have meetings, organizational meetings? Did you meet with the commander regularly?

01-00:39:44

Nordan: Yes. I was part of the general staff. And we met on a weekly basis for our weekly staff meeting; and then we had some generals that when they came in, they wanted what they called a daily stand up meeting. So we would go into the general's office and we would stand up and give our status updates.

Rubens: How many others were part of that?

01-00:40:09

Nordan: Probably thirteen, fourteen other people. It was the colonels who headed all the departments—inland traffic, international traffic; the Air Force colonel that headed the air operations part; the staff judge advocate, who was a lieutenant colonel; the other facilities and engineering operations; equal opportunity officer. I think in all, there were about thirteen or fourteen of us that went on a daily basis in for the daily status update. And then once a week, we would have a more lengthy staff meeting in the conference room, where we would go, we would sit down and we would present more detailed statuses—slides—foils, at that time, overheads—to give the statistics of, what have we shipped, what issues and problems do we have going on with any shipments around the world and that sort of thing.

Rubens: I am still thinking about a shipment just abandoned somewhere? [laughs]

01-00:41:17

Nordan: Well, and that was the question by the media. When you rely on civilian shippers—and we're talking thousands of trucks on the road every day in the US carrying military goods—over a year's period, you're very likely to have a driver that decides they don't want to do it anymore. And in one case, we had an abandoned shipment at a truck stop in Arizona. And it sat there for a couple of days before someone reported it. And so then we were basically called on to explain, how can this happen?

Rubens: Sorry, that was an aside. How often did your *Western Arrow* come out?

01-00:42:00

Nordan: The *Western Arrow* was published every other week. There were some times where we tried to publish it every week, but with the staff that we had— We did all the layout, all the design.

Rubens: It was printed there on the—

01-00:42:17

Nordan: No, actually. Funny thing about the printing. It's actually illegal, according to government statutes, to print a military newspaper at a government printing press. So we had to contract. And our contractor was in Hayward. So we would go down there every other week. We would send them the copy, they would print it up, get it ready for us to lay out. And then the editor of *The Western Arrow* would go down every other week and lay it out and get it printed, and it would be delivered the next day for distribution. We did it every other week, and then there was a period where we printed it every week, so there was a weekly newspaper.

Rubens: What is the reasoning behind the regulation?

01-00:43:09

Nordan:

At the time, I could explain that; now it's kind of all gone out of my head. I don't know. But it's a Government Printing Office regulation that prohibits certain types of printing at a government printing facility. If I had to guess, I think it had its genesis among the business pressure in communities, so that all the printing would not be done in government facilities, but would offer some opportunity for printing companies to get some business from the government, in the surrounding areas. I think that was the real reason for it.

Rubens:

You have to guide me what to discuss next: By '84, your position became—

01-00:44:07

Nordan:

In '84, very tragically, Tom Blezard Blezard, who was the Executive Staff Officer, and the one that hired me as Public Affairs Officer— And he had been the ESO for, oh, at least fifteen years, I don't know how many years more, going back to when the command was located at Fort Mason. He got very ill and died. And so for the first time in all that period, they needed to fill the Executive Staff Officer position. And so I expressed interest in it, and was selected to be the Executive Staff Officer, who had the responsibility for coordinating all the support activities. At Oakland Army Base or Military Traffic Management Command, it was under the command of an army general officer. The deputy commander was always a navy captain. And then the senior civilian was the executive staff officer. The deputy commander had responsibility for all the operations—the port operations, the surface transportation operations.

Rubens:

You're saying that was navy?

01-00:45:19

Nordan:

That was navy. Oakland Army Base and western area is what's called a purple command.

Rubens:

Or a joint command?

01-00:45:27

Nordan:

A joint command, but a purple-suited command, meaning you blend the colors of all the army, navy, or Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard together, and it's staffed with contributions from each of those services. So by organizational structure, the commander was always an army general. And then the navy commander, or the navy captain, was the deputy commander. And the reason they established the executive staff officer position was because the military turned over quite often. Every two years, at the most every three years. And so the ESO position was established so that there would be some institutional memory that would stay, even though the military rotated in and rotated out. So it was really designed to be a stability position. So Tom passed away, and I became the executive staff officer, under General Lanzillo. And I had responsibility for coordinating the efforts of everything— personnel, military and civilian personnel, procurement and contracting, equal

opportunity, public affairs, legal, base operations and facilities. Whereas the deputy commander—

Rubens: And public affairs.

01-00:46:49

Nordan: And public affairs.

Rubens: Did someone replace you, then?

01-00:46:53

Nordan: Yes. Sharon Brown, later became Sharon Swenson, who was at the navy supply center as a public affairs specialist. I recruited her, and she came and took my place at Oakland Army Base, and was there for quite a few years, six or seven years, before she left, I think. So the ESO was a civilian position, a GS-14 position, and was really designed to be the senior civilian person for the Military Traffic Management Command. When General John Stanford came in just about 1985, I think, mid-'85, it was his desire to give me more authority and responsibility. As ESO, I had a lot of responsibility, but no authority over those people, particularly if they were military. And there were some army colonels and other military colonels that had responsibility for certain departments. And so General Stanford really wanted to give me a little bit more authority. So very late into my tenure as the executive staff officer, he named me chief of staff—which in a military organization, was quite unusual, and I won't say it was without bumps, because having colonels report to a civilian is not always viewed in the best light. In fact, the headquarters back in Washington for the Military Traffic Management Command did not necessarily agree with General Stanford in that move. But he won out, and so that was the position that I was in until the time that I left in—

Rubens: Two years, you had that position?

01-00:48:53

Nordan: Yes, in mid-'86. So I was there a little over two years as the Executive Staff Officer.

Rubens: What does that mean, that back in Washington, they weren't happy with it? How was that manifested?

01-00:49:08

Nordan: The whole idea of having a civilian who had responsibility or authority over military colonels was not viewed well.

Rubens: And how was that manifested?

01-00:49:24

Nordan: That was expressed not to me, necessarily, but to General Stanford. But he felt that it was important that the deputy commander, the navy captain and I work closely together in managing and having authority over all the staff. And the

deputy commander had full authority over the entire staff, but his focus was in operations and the functions of the command. Certainly, he was senior to me. He was my direct boss. But General Stanford felt that it made a lot more sense to give me authority over those departments, since I had responsibility for coordinating those efforts.

Rubens: So how did that translate into what you actually did?

01-00:50:10

Nordan: In that position, it was a coordinating position. To monitor the performance, to monitor the activity of each of the departments; to coordinate those activities so that there is a lot of interaction and review, so that anything that was done by one department, if there needs to be another department involved, that they actually do have a review opportunity or an input opportunity.

Rubens: Are you getting written reports? This is prior to computers, is that right?

01-00:50:42

Nordan: Funny you should say that. Yes. Because one of the things that I did is I initiated an automation project to automate— What we were using then was Selectric typewriters. And so we brought in automated word processing for the entire organization to use, off of terminals, to a centralized word processor. So that was one of the things that I did. And the other thing that I had responsibility for was looking out over the whole staff and trying to determine, where could we get some more improvements and efficiencies. I kept track of was all of the different projects that the different departments had going. Part of my job was to keep track of— we call it a suspense system. So when something was assigned by the general for a department to do something, then part of my job was to record that, make a note of it, and put it into a due date; and then to track progress toward fulfillment of that request, and to make sure that it didn't slip through the cracks or go unnoticed, or that it didn't get overdue. So that was part of my coordinating responsibility, as well, is to follow up, keep track of that and make sure that whatever the request and requirements of the commander were, that they were taken care of.

Rubens: Now, did you have an assistant or a secretary?

01-00:52:38

Nordan: I did have. We shared some secretaries. The deputy commander and I shared a secretary. The general had his own secretary, and the general had an aide. And then we had an army captain, who was known as the secretary of the general staff. And the secretary of the general staff did report to me. And I did his performance appraisal and I worked with him. And he did all the nitty-gritty keeping of logs and sending out reminder notices and that sort of thing.

Rubens: I imagine this involved also the collecting of reports?

01-00:53:14

Nordan: Yes.

Rubens: Each of these departments would have to—

01-00:53:17

Nordan: Collecting reports, and then— More often than not, those reports were delivered to the commander during the weekly staff meeting. But then if there were other, more detailed reports or other summaries that were required, then that was part of my responsibility, to make sure that those got completed and got delivered..

Rubens: How is it that you decided to leave that position?

01-00:53:52

Nordan: [chuckles] It was a very good position. It was the senior position at Oakland Army Base for a civilian. The Bay Area is a very expensive place to live. And federal civil servants make the same money whether you're located in Arkansas or you're located in San Francisco. So I found it really necessary to try to find a place to make more money. And so when I was thirty-nine, I decided that I would go try to see if I could migrate myself into the civilian sector, the commercial sector; and was able to locate a position with Citicorp, which was in the process of establishing what they call their information business; and was able to get a position as the manager of government and aerospace sales, to sell an online information service for transportation costs. So what we did at Citicorp, what the service did was, it was a huge database of shipping information that if a commercial shipper or a government shipper, or a NASA, or the post office wanted to ship something from point A to point B, they could simply go to the terminal and put in the origin [and] the destination of what was being shipped, and it would calculate not only the cost, but it would give them a list of carriers that were the prime carriers for that shipment. I know today, that seems antiquated; but in those days, it was quite advanced. So I left. I left. A lot of people, including my father-in-law, thought that I was crazy to leave a GS-14 position and go into the civilian sector, but it worked out well for me for a little over a year, because Citicorp was building up its information unit. But then they decided that that business was never going to make them the millions of dollars that they can make investing that same money, so they closed the business unit. And then I decided to seek another sales position in telecommunications, which I did. So I actually went to work for a telecommunications company located in downtown Oakland, and was the sales manager for the Bay Area for that company; and then moved to another company, where I was sales manager for the South Bay and eventually became vice-president of sales for that company, selling telecommunications equipment. And it worked out well, in terms of compensation in the civilian sector, to make the kind of money that you really need to make to live in the Bay Area.

Rubens: And then subsequently, you've developed your own business.

01-00:56:42

Nordan: Yes. In the year 2000, I decided that I would start my own business, and keep it focused on sales. So in 2000, I established my company as a consulting company for sales, for sales management, for training, and also to do project management for the installation of data networks, particularly data networks that carry voice, now known as voice over IP networks. So that's what I've been doing the last seven years, is doing that project management, doing sales training and sales consulting.

Rubens: And the name of the business?

01-00:57:20

Nordan: Norcom Consulting. So we've been pretty successful in keeping it going for seven years.

Rubens: Great. Let's stop for a minute to change the tape

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 12-11-2008.mp3

Rubens: Getting back to the Oakland Army Base, are there other activities to mention?

02-00:00:39

Nordan: Some of the other things that we did relative to the community, there were a variety of charitable things that we did. And we did adopt a school in Oakland called the Ralph Bunche School, for mentally challenged children. And primarily through the works of Ralph Williams, who was the Equal Opportunity Officer, we established—

Rubens: Was he African American?

02-00:01:14

Nordan: Yes, he was. Wonderful gentleman. If I could pay tribute to him, he was a very good friend of mine, a golf partner. We had a golf league at Oakland Army Base, and we played weekly. And he was my buddy and golf partner, and just a wonderful man. And I really attribute to Ralph a lot, in terms of stability at Oakland Army Base, stability of the workforce, really intervening and keeping the lid on what could've been some explosive employment issues. Ralph was a retired army colonel. Graduated from UC Berkeley, so had ties to the local community, and really went out of his way to do good works and to try to bring some of the resources we had to bear for the community. So we adopted the Ralph Bunche School at his suggestion. And every year on Christmas, we would collect money and do bake sales. That was one of the favorite things at Oakland Army Base, was to fund things through bake sales and employee contributions. So we would raise money all year for the Ralph Bunche School, and then we would buy gifts and have the entire school come to the base, and we would throw them a Christmas party in early

December. So it was a very good thing for the base to do. It made the employees feel good; helped the community, as well. And then throughout the year, we would try to do other things for the Ralph Bunche School, as well.

Rubens: What happened to Ralph Williams?

02-00:02:57

Nordan: Ralph passed away in the past couple of years. And I lost track of him, unfortunately.

Rubens: He would have been a wonderful person to interview.

02-00:03:06

Nordan: Yes, he would've been one of the greatest interviews, because he also had a very good inside look at a lot of things that were going on at the base. But absolutely a prince of a guy. Just absolutely class. And I was very fortunate to have him as a friend and co-worker while I was there.

Rubens: You had mentioned early in the interview about Humanity Week. And it was initiated by him. Was that aimed at the community, or was it aimed at the internal community?

02-00:03:41

Nordan: It was aimed at the employee community of Oakland Army Base. Because there were movements for Black Heritage Week or Black Heritage Month, Hispanic Heritage Week, and there were other ethnic groups that felt that they were getting left out. And so there were repeated requests to have another week and another week and other activities. And so to be fair to everyone, we formed a committee—and Ralph was the head of the committee—to decide, how should we celebrate the ethnicity of all the employees? And we arrived at the solution to do a Humanity Week, where we would ask people to showcase their national origin or ethnicity. And some of them were pretty natural. When General [Vincent M.]Russo became commander, [he was] very proud of his Italian heritage. So when he became aware of Humanity Week and our tradition of serving ethnic dishes and national dishes, he really wanted to have everyone sample his grandmother's spaghetti recipe. And so he asked for my assistance and, how can I go about that? With this many employees, how can we provide them some sample of spaghetti? So we cooked up a scheme to use the Army Reserve Center field kitchen and boil huge, huge vats of water for spaghetti. And then he brought over from his house at Fort Mason, spaghetti sauce—now, we're talking about for a thousand people—spaghetti sauce that he brought over. And it took us forever and a day to cook that spaghetti and bring it over and put the spaghetti sauce on it and server it to employees as a sample of the General's grandmother's spaghetti sauce. But everyone was real anxious to show off their heritage. Whether they were really focused on it or not, everybody would look and say, well, what is my heritage? What can I bring and share with everyone else, in order to celebrate diversity? And before diversity was really an in word, that's really what we were doing.

Rubens: By the way, you mentioned that he came from the Presidio. Did the base commanders live— always lived in—

02-00:06:12

Nordan: Yes. Fort Mason. Not Presidio, but at Fort Mason in San Francisco. Because the headquarters of the command was located at Fort Mason in San Francisco, before it was taken over by the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. But the military held onto the officers' club, the chapel and the military housing. So the general that was the commander of Military Traffic Management Command had the general's quarters at Fort Mason. The deputy commander had the deputy commander's quarters right next door. And then most of the senior officers—in fact, all the senior officers—either lived at Fort Mason— A few lived at Presidio, because there wasn't enough housing. And then the junior officers, the captains and below, and lieutenants, lived in housing at Oakland Army Base, along with the non-commissioned officers. So the members of the staff that lived at Fort Mason would come over every day from Fort Mason, to work at Oakland Army Base.

Rubens: Now, the operating day, I understand, was about seven to four.

02-00:07:27

Nordan: Seven-thirty to four is what we typically did, or seven-thirty to four-thirty, I guess it was, with an hour or half hour for lunch. So at four-thirty, everybody tended to be leaving the base.

Rubens: And did you eat in the base cafeteria?

02-00:07:47

Nordan: I did a lot. The cafeteria was there, it was handy, it was the fastest place to get something to eat. Some people would go off the base, but I think most people either brought their lunch, and there were a lot of people that brought their lunch, or would go across the street to the cafeteria.

[Added during editing: I want to tell you about another thing that just came to mind. We had a childcare center at the base for both military and civilians. Not long after I got to Oakland Army Base in 1977, somebody brought up the idea for a childcare center. I think it was John Darling, who became a good friend of mine and was the Employee Assistance Officer. General Orlando Gonzales, who was the commander at the time, picked up on the idea and he and his wife supported it. He found an old building on the base that wasn't being used. It was close to the housing area and was in a perfect location for a childcare center. One weekend we had a painting party to fix up the building. General Gonzales and his wife, my wife and I, John Darling and his wife, and a lot of other volunteers spent all day cleaning and painting the building. In short order we had a childcare center with a paid staff. At that time it was a pretty innovative idea. As I remember the price was minimal and was very popular with the civilian employees. There was a waiting list at the time. My son went there for a while. It was handy to be able to drop in on them for

lunch. It was a great benefit for civilian employees, and military families used it too.]

Rubens: I meant to ask you earlier if your job involved traveling at all.

02-00:08:12

Nordan: I think in my entire time at Oakland Army Base, I think I traveled only twice. Or three times, maybe. One was to attend some training in Denver. And then when I became the executive staff officer, I asked for the opportunity to visit our sister command on the East Coast, in New Jersey, because we had an identical command there. So I went there and visited the eastern area, in Bayonne, New Jersey. And then I went to our operations in Seattle and in Long Beach, to see those. But I never went overseas. Never went to Okinawa or Japan.

Rubens: I diverted a bit from what you were saying about basically creating, I think, an esprit de corps among the community at the base. The golf tournament, that was kind of legendary.

02-00:09:15

Nordan: Well, every year for Army Emergency Relief, which was a fund, contributory fund to help out military families when they needed help, there was a big golf tournament every year. And anybody at the base who wanted to play in it was allowed to play in it, for a contribution. So we decided, in addition to the AER charity golf tournament, that we wanted to start a golf league. And so I forget who put it together, but I know that Ralph Williams and I were involved in that in some way. And so we arranged with the golf course at Alameda to allow us to play on that golf course. Now that I mention it, Doug Johnson, who was another one of the senior civilians who had been at the base for a long time, lived in Alameda. And I think he might've been the one to actually go to the Alameda golf course and arrange it that late in the afternoon, after work—we would start at four-thirty. And as many people as wanted to come out and play would play normally nine holes, sometimes eighteen holes in the summer. And it was just a good time to get together and get to know each other, outside of work.

Rubens: What was Johnson's position?

02-00:10:33

Nordan: Doug Johnson was the senior civilian for the— It was the Air Force logistics coordinating office. Now, that's not the official name of it. But it was headed by an Air Force colonel, and Doug was a GS-13, who was the senior civilian. And their job was to help coordinate military shipments through logistics offices at Tinker Air Force Base, Travis Air Force Base, I think maybe Dover Air Force Base, as well. So we had small operating units at those Air Force bases, as well. And Doug had been with that organization for a long, long time, and really was the glue that held it all together.

Rubens: Were there any other things you could point to, events or activities —

02-00:11:24

Nordan:

Well, let's see. Oh, well, here's another one that was kind of put on us; it wasn't something that we started. The community in the Bay Area tends to look at Oakland Army Base as a resource for things. And just because of our proximity at the foot of the Bay Bridge, people would come and approach us about things. So I was approached by a community group that wanted to have a bridge run, a run from Oakland to San Francisco, across the Bay Bridge. But they needed a couple of things. Number one, they needed Caltrans permission to shut the bridge, or shut several lanes of the bridge. And the other is, they needed a staging area to start the race. And so I fielded the request and got the general's approval to use our parking lot on a Sunday morning—which it was empty on a Sunday morning—as the staging area. So they brought in porta-potties and everything else. And so thousands of runners came and wanted to run across the Bay Bridge. So we helped coordinate that. Of course, we had our military police, with the traffic control and the parking and security of vehicles while people were gone. And we probably did a few other things; I don't remember exactly what we did. But we provided the facility.

Rubens: Did that become a yearly event?

02-00:12:58

Nordan:

It was an event for, I think, a couple of years. And then Caltrans said, "We're not going to close the Bay Bridge anymore." But I think they did it for a couple of years, and then it kind of died out because of Caltrans.

Rubens: There was a military reserve school on the base. You had been an instructor, you said, when you were in the military. Did you have any relationship, either personally or—

02-00:13:28

Nordan:

We really didn't have a relationship with the Reserve Center there. It was on the Oakland Army Base, but we really didn't have a lot of interaction with anyone there, whether— I think I did come in contact with the—they call them technicians—the civilian technician that was the day-to-day operating person there. We did borrow some of their trucks from time to time for things. And as I said, we used the field kitchen for Humanity Week a couple times. I think we might've used some of their tents. But they were somewhat of a separate entity, and really didn't interact—

Rubens: They didn't fall under your ESO position.

02-00:14:06

Nordan:

No. They really didn't fall under the base command at all. But I was also, when I was at Oakland Army Base as the Public Affairs Officer and Executive Staff Officer, I was in the Army Reserve. So I was a major in the Army Reserve. And two weeks a year, I would go over to the Presidio and do my

two week Army Reserve duty over there. During the monthly meetings, I would go to Fort Baker, on the other side of the Golden Gate Bridge, to do my monthly meetings. So it worked out well for me. That was another contribution to my compensation, trying to make ends meet in the expensive Bay Area.

Rubens: How long did you remain in the Reserves?

02-00:14:52

Nordan: I was in the Reserves for four years after I got off active duty, so I spent a total of nine years on active duty— or in the military; five on active duty and four in the Reserves.

Rubens: Is there anything more on your list that you wanted to talk about?

02-00:15:07

Nordan: A lot of the information you already have, in terms of the base and what it was and the nature of the operations— Most people in the community only knew Oakland Army Base as an exit right before the Bay Bridge, and had no idea what went on at the army base. But we really did play a big role in defense transportation on the West Coast, because it was the largest ocean terminal, military ocean terminal, on the West Coast. And the only port for munitions was at the Concord Naval Weapons Station. So for any munitions, ammunition, bombs and that sort of thing that had to go out, it would go out of the Naval Weapons Center at Concord. We never shipped bombs and ammunition out of the Oakland Army Base.

Rubens: Never?

02-00:16:04

Nordan: No. It was prohibited. So it was actually done out of the Naval Weapons Center in Concord. When I was there, we were trying to walk a fine line between getting recognition for the important role that we played for military defense; and at the same time, keeping a low profile, because we really didn't want to be targets for the anti-war movement or anti-military movement. But during the whole time I was there, I don't think we ever had an anti-war protest. If we did, it was minor.

Rubens: One of the things that you've referred to, is that in addition to providing a lot of jobs to the local community, it was a place of social mobility for the working class there. Secretaries could move up; there was the whole GS scale; they could take classes.

02-00:17:10

Nordan: The base provided a tremendous amount of opportunity for someone who wanted to work for civil service. And we provided a lot of upward mobility.

Rubens: Well, you yourself went to the top.

02-00:17:22

Nordan:

Yes, I came in as a GS-9 from Georgia, and seven years later, was a GS-14. So there was an opportunity for a lot of mobility. Provided training, provided assistance, provided opportunity for everyone who really wanted to do a good job. And there were just a ton of very dedicated, outstanding, hard working people at Oakland Army Base. And civilians that work for the government get a bad rap. And all you need is for a couple of bad instances, and everybody tends to paint the entire civilian workforce with that same brush. And that's not the case. A lot of talented people that could've gone and worked in a lot of other places, that were working at Oakland Army Base—not just because of a job, but a sense of contribution. Sense of contribution to the government and to the military. And over time, the civilian employees developed a real loyalty to the military. And you could real feel like you were accomplishing something. You could see how your contribution was assisting something. We played a role in a lot of different activities—particularly in the Pacific, but we did play a role in some logistics with regard to some other military operations around the world, that we would ship things out or we provide expedited shipping for some materials that needed to go from one base to another base, or to an operation, whether it's in Panama or in Granada. So it offered the opportunity to be involved in something that you could really feel that it was something special, that you were making a contribution.

Rubens:

By the next decade, it would sort of shine again and expand, with Operation Desert Storm, Desert Shield. Then came the final wind down and the the base closures began in the area and—

02-00:19:41

Nordan:

And by then, I was kind of an outside observer of Desert Storm and the requirement to ship materials out. The military always maintained an equipment store in the Indian Ocean, at Diego Garcia, which is a small island in the Indian Ocean. And we had some visibility to that, in that we were shipping things there sometimes or receiving things back from there for repair. But I know during Desert Storm and Desert Shield, there was a lot more activity going on at the base, and I really didn't have any visibility over that, other than as a private citizen.

Rubens:

When base closure began, my understanding is there was a significantly diminished workforce on Oakland Army Base.

02-00:20:32

Nordan:

Yes.

Rubens:

And that in fact, a lot of the employees no longer lived in the Bay Area; that a study of the remaining workforce showed people lived in Vallejo or Hayward or— well, throughout the Bay Area, but not immediately Oakland.

02-00:20:48

Nordan:

Yes, not immediately Oakland.

Rubens: Correct. And that speaks to the social mobility that it afforded, and it also speaks to the decline of the base.

02-00:20:58

Nordan: Yes, and what happened to Oakland Army Base and the port and all that is just reflective of what happened in the commercial shipping industry in general. When everything was shipped on break bulk ships, where everything was loaded by stevedores and individuals putting things into cargo nets and lifting them aboard the ship, and on cranes, there was a lot more work to be done. When the container shipping revolution came in, there was less and less work to be done by direct hire stevedores. It was all done through the commercial shipping facilities of American President Lines and US Lines and some of the other terminals still in the Port of Oakland, but the shipments never even came to the base. They went directly to those commercial shipping terminals. Even automobiles, at one time, came into Oakland Army Base directly. Those started coming into the commercial terminals, as well. So the requirement for actual work at the port diminished, but the very important work for coordinating and contracting for surface shipping, as well as international traffic shipping, could be done virtually anywhere, because it was a white collar kind of work. And so I think the defense officials started looking at that and saying, where could we consolidate? If it doesn't have to be done at Oakland Army Base, it could be done anywhere. It could be done centrally from the Traffic Management Command in Washington or some other location. Do we really need to have the facility, the ocean terminal facility in Oakland? And I think there were arguments on both sides. Do you really need a military ocean terminal, when all the things are being shipped commercially? And I think I could make an argument that yes, you do need one in a contingency. We ran into a situation at one time where we were going to ship army material and equipment out of the army base, and the longshoremen's union took issue with it and pulled a work stoppage and would not load the ships. So we were somewhat in a bind. We had military equipment that needed to be shipped, but because of a union's political stance, they called a work stoppage. And it took us quite a while to get the work stoppage resolved and get the shipments going again. So from a national security standpoint, unless you've got some guarantees that you could bring in military stevedores or some people that could work even in the face of a civilian work stoppage, a union work stoppage, then we're a little bit in jeopardy. And I think we are still somewhat in jeopardy. But we're in jeopardy globally, because the American commercial shipping capability is almost nonexistent now. It is so small that we are totally dependent on foreign flag carriers for the shipment of equipment and resources around the world.

Rubens: APL has just announced it's leaving Oakland.

02-00:24:26

Nordan: Yes. The headquarters is moving from Oakland. So yes, it's diminished, but we still have a big requirement for military response. So time will tell if it was

the right thing to do, to close Oakland Army Base completely or to keep it as a strategic resource.

Rubens: This is probably a good place to end the interview. I think we've covered a lot. Is there anything more you'd like to say?

02-00:25:00

Nordan: Yes, I think Oakland Army Base has just had quite a history from the time that they came into being, right after Pearl Harbor; played a big role as the embarkation port. Something that we were quite proud of, the role that it played, not only in World War II, but in Korea, as well as Vietnam. And in spite of local criticisms, I think history will show that it was quite an important place, and the people who worked there played quite an important role in some significant events in American history. So I'm very happy to have worked there and to have been a part of it, and I've very proud to have worked with the people that worked there during the time that I was there. So they were really good people.

Rubens: Well, I want to thank you very much for this interview. It's been very enlightening.

02-00:25:52

[End of Interview]