

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Robert Taylor
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Jess Rigelhaupt
in 2008

Copyright © 2009 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 Robert Taylor, dated January 11, 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:

Robert Taylor, “Oakland Army Base Oral History Project” conducted by Jess Rigelhaupt in 2008, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2009.

Discursive Table of Contents:

Interview #1: January 11, 2008

Audio File 1

1

Family background and upbringing in Washington DC in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s—Reflections on race relations—Enlisting in the Army in 1965, serving in the infantry in Vietnam—Army career and various assignments—Stationed at the San Francisco Presidio from 1977 until retirement in 1985 as a Master Sergeant—Working the medical nursing section at Letterman Hospital—Employment as a civilian employee with the Army—Closing the Presidio and Hamilton Air Force Base—Involvement in the closure of Fort Ord and the Oakland Army Base (OAB)—Drafting the lease of the OAB for the City of Oakland—On the core functions of the OAB—Passing through the OAB en route to Vietnam

Audio File 2

15

Comparison of the OAB in the 1960s and 90s—Grounds for closure of the OAB—The Base Realignment and Closure Process—Relationship between the OAB and the City of Oakland—Comparison of closing the Presidio and the OAB, working with the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the City of Oakland—Comparison of Fort Ord and OAB—Environmental cleanup of the OAB—Reuse and redevelopment of the OAB—Historic preservation—Local politics of base closure and reuse—Base closure and military readiness

Interview #1: 1/11/2008

Begin Audio File 1 taylor_robort1_1—11—08.mp3

01—00:00:07

Rigelhaupt: It's January 11, 2008. I'm in Hercules, California, doing an oral history interview with Robert Taylor on the Oakland Army Base and the Port of Oakland and city of Oakland. This is tape number one. And to start, if I could just ask you to say your full name and the year you were born.

01—00:00:27

Taylor: Robert Taylor, 1945.

01—00:00:29

Rigelhaupt: OK. And where did you grow up?

01—00:00:32

Taylor: I grew up in Washington, D.C., the nation's capital.

01—00:00:37

Rigelhaupt: Whereabouts in Washington, D.C.?

01—00:00:38

Taylor: Upper Northwest Washington, D.C. for the most part; the bulk of my upbringing was in the upper area of Northwest Washington. Not far from the Capitol, maybe a ten-minute ride down 16th Street.

01—00:01:00

Rigelhaupt: And had your parents lived in the Washington, D.C. area for a long time before you were born?

01—00:01:08

Taylor: My parents were in Washington for about a decade, if my memory serves me correctly, before I was born, along with many other siblings. They essentially came from {Estelle?}, South Carolina.

01—00:01:29

Rigelhaupt: So it sounds as though they came in the mid-1930s to Washington, D.C.

01—00:01:34

Taylor: That's about right. That's about the timeframe of their arrival.

01—00:01:39

Rigelhaupt: And were they already married when they moved to Washington?

01—00:01:42

Taylor: They were married and brought along one child, my older sister, Katie.

01—00:01:50

Rigelhaupt: And did they talk about what prompted them to move from South Carolina to Washington, D.C.?

01—00:01:57

Taylor:

The times, the conditions, racial issues, economics, going North was a better opportunity at arriving at the American dream, achieving the American dream, owning a home, being independent—all of those things combined served as just great motivation for them to reestablish and relocate themselves in a better community.

01—00:02:30

Rigelhaupt:

Was there other family in D.C. when your parents chose to move there or were they moving on their own?

01—00:02:39

Taylor:

Slowly but surely people migrated from the south, north, and they all seemed to congregate in the Washington, D.C. area because that's where everybody was. There was support there. Everybody needs some kind of family support, a mechanism, and it just seemed to work out for all of the brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, who migrated eventually to D.C.

01—00:03:13

Rigelhaupt:

And about the time you were born, just at the end of World War II, what was a typical day like for your father?

01—00:03:20

Taylor:

You ask a very good question. My dad was a painter for the most part, but although he was a painter he eventually signed on to the—I guess it's the—what was that, the Union Station—Union Station at Washington, D.C. where he became a mail baggage handler. And, you know, during the times that wasn't doing too bad.

01—00:03:57

Rigelhaupt:

So he was working for the US Postal Service.

01—00:03:59

Taylor:

Actually not the US Postal Service. He was an employee of the Union Station in Washington, D.C. where he unloaded mail from trains. Back in those days apparently a lot of the mail criss-crossing the country went by train. Maybe everything had migrated then from—I guess to planes. But that's what he did for the bulk of his adult life there in Washington.

01—00:04:30

Rigelhaupt:

And what was a typical day like for your mom about your early years of life?

01—00:04:36

Taylor:

My mother was a domestic and so she worked in the homes of well-to-do people doing a variety of sundry things—housecleaning to cooking, you know, those kinds of chores. And she did that for all of her life. Unfortunately my mother and father weren't very well educated, so they had to take the employment that was available, readily available.

- 01—00:05:11
Rigelhaupt: How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- 01—00:05:14
Taylor: A total of nine children, my mother and father bore—at least my mother bore. Six boys and three girls. Big family.
- 01—00:05:26
Rigelhaupt: And where are you in the order of your siblings?
- 01—00:05:29
Taylor: In the pecking order, I have two who are junior to me—I have a brother and a sister junior to me. So I'm the seventh child. I guess the sixth child. Nobody's got seven (laughter).
- 01—00:05:50
Rigelhaupt: And you described that you had extended family moving to the area over the years. Were they living nearby?
- 01—00:05:59
Taylor: Generally they were within a mile or two striking distance from wherever we were located. And during my upbringing we moved three different times, but the family was generally located within a fairly circumscribed area of a mile or two. So we could get to one another pretty fast.
- 01—00:06:28
Rigelhaupt: So you had a lot of cousins, aunts, and uncles in the area?
- 01—00:06:30
Taylor: Oh, my goodness gracious, tons of relations in the Washington, D.C. area. Of course now today they've all mostly migrated to the suburbs of Washington or they've met their demise. We had an awful large family.
- 01—00:06:50
Rigelhaupt: One of the things I was actually just reading was in 1946 there was a President's Commission on Civil Rights and part of what they were describing—and they put out a report called, "To Secure These Rights," was that Washington, D.C. was a segregated city. And I'm wondering if your parents ever talked about what it was like being in the nation's capital during a time of change after World War II and at the same time a lot of the facilities were continuing to be segregated.
- 01—00:07:25
Taylor: My parents never spoke about Washington, D.C. as a segregated society or a segregated city. I was never brought up to even believe that there were those kinds of tensions in Washington, not until at least about 1957 when I realized that there was an issue with regard to a separation of the races, '56, '55, in about that timeframe, and as a ten, eleven, twelve year old I was just really dumbfounded because I had never experienced anything like that before. So it was unusual, it was different. There was a lot of tension in the air with regard

to adults. With regard to children it was a different story. I didn't feel any of that, not really. However, it's a different story with regard to my mother and father, their upbringing in South Carolina. I heard many, many negative stories about times, conditions, and how they were treated.

01—00:08:36

Rigelhaupt:

Part of the report was mostly talking about how it was especially embarrassing for the United States—foreign dignitaries would come to the city and sometimes not be able to get hotel rooms and that that was not particularly good for the United States' claim to be leading the world in freedom and democracy right after World War II.

01—00:08:57

Taylor:

Obviously a true embarrassment for the entire country and for the nation's capital, the people living there and representing the country. Just terrible, terrible times, and clearly the United States had to come to grips with that and eventually do something about it in a positive way.

01—00:09:20

Rigelhaupt:

Where did you go to elementary school?

01—00:09:23

Taylor:

In Washington, D.C. I attended three different elementary schools. As I alluded to earlier, we had moved around quite a bit. So three elementary schools—each of them not that far from the Capitol and the White House, but Harrison Elementary School on 13th Street in Washington, D.C., Cleveland Elementary School on 8th or 9th Street, and I went to one other elementary school, what—H.D. Cooke School. And I attended H.D. Cooke in the mid—fifties, and that's where I really came in touch with how people were different with regard to race and how people of color were treated.

01—00:10:19

Rigelhaupt:

Could you say more about how you were learning about that?

01—00:10:24

Taylor:

Actually I learned an awful lot about it on the playground. I remember it was May Day, it was a celebration that we used to have in Washington, D.C. It was May Day, probably about 1955, may have been '56, and we were having a baseball game. And suddenly I heard these chants from some of the children, and some were saying, "Two, four, six, eight, who do we appreciate?" And then another group had a little similar chant, and they said, "Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate." And I was really taken aback by that. Now, the latter group was small. But nonetheless it had some real impact on me and it focused me more on that issue, causing me to pay more attention to race relations, things that I was hearing with regard to race. It was a moving time.

01—00:11:41

Rigelhaupt:

Did you have a favorite subject while you were in elementary school?

01—00:11:47

Taylor:

Favorite subject, actually it was math (laughter). I was pretty good at numbers, pretty good at multiplication tables and I could do long division quicker and faster than anybody in my fifth grade class. Long division was a big deal back then and I remember once I was in fifth grade and my teacher came by and she was so surprised that I had done so many problems sitting there working at my desk. But I guess math was my favorite subject. I was intrigued by it. It was kind of a mysterious kind of discipline and I was always intrigued by figuring out things.

01—00:12:40

Rigelhaupt:

Did you continue liking math a lot as you got into junior high and high school?

01—00:12:46

Taylor:

By the time I was in high school I took a real interest in girls. So a lot of my focus dropped off and eventually I ended up in the Army serving with a lot of good men and women. But eventually things picked up while I was in the Army. I finished a couple degrees and was happy about that, came on to retirement from the Army. But in answer to your question, I really didn't keep my focus on math.

01—00:13:33

Rigelhaupt:

And did both your parents continue working throughout—until you joined the Army—throughout your time in their home?

01—00:13:41

Taylor:

Yes, absolutely. My parents were active workers, working in the disciplines that I had earlier told you about, up until the time that I went into the Army in 1965, and they worked beyond. My father worked until his death in 1972 and my mother worked probably a good ten years later, beyond that.

01—00:14:09

Rigelhaupt:

Were you still living in Washington, D.C. in 1963?

01—00:14:13

Taylor:

'63, absolutely. In 1963 I was 18 years old, hadn't enlisted in the Army at that point and time, and doing a lot of different things in terms of employment and the like.

01—00:14:30

Rigelhaupt:

What do you remember about the famous March on Washington for jobs and freedom where Martin Luther King gave his "I have a dream" speech in 1963?

01—00:14:41

Taylor:

In 1963 I remember that distinctly. I was eighteen years old. It was well-publicized in the city that the event was going to occur. I had all the intentions in the world of going down. I wanted to go down with friends, but I couldn't get anybody else to go with me. It was like, "We don't want to do that," you know, "We want to do some other things," chase girls, or whatever we were

doing at the time. And I was kind of taken aback because I didn't get there. But clearly, during the evening we heard about it on the news. Many people were talking about it; they were so enthusiastic about it. They thought that this was the time of change and the time was a-coming, and that more and greater events might occur that would foster greater times in the country with regard to race relations and people coming together. So it was a very excited time for many, many people, to include myself. Even at eighteen years of age I was very, very encouraged by Dr. King, his speech, his behaviors, and since that time I must tell you that he is my hero. I've read many of his written products. I've listened to many of his speeches. He was a very, very well educated, articulate African-American.

01—00:16:31
Rigelhaupt:

So as a D.C. resident there was a sense that that many people from different organizations, from all over the country, converging in August of 1963 was a turning point in the Civil Rights movement.

01—00:16:51
Taylor:

There's no question about that. It was an imprint, an indelible imprint, on the minds and the psyche of African-Americans for sure, and clearly now—given what we know today—on the minds of everyone in the country, around the world. It set the standard, it set the tone, and that tone is now reverberating even today, and resonating with everyone. Just a very, very important time in our country and in my own personal life.

01—00:17:42
Rigelhaupt:

And actually jumping backward from that moment in August of 1963, what do you remember about the news coverage of the really famous protests in Birmingham in spring, April and May, of '63 with Bull Connor's turning dogs loose on schoolchildren and firehosing school children, and those images that were being broadcast on television and in newspapers?

01—00:18:09
Taylor:

I was shocked. I remember the images distinctly. I thought Bull Connor was a mean, very mean man to do that to humans, set dogs and police and fire—it was like treating people of color like animals. I was sickened by it. Obviously a bad and very, very embarrassing time to this country to those viewing around the world. I think I was shocked. I was shocked because I had never been exposed to that. I wasn't from the South, I wasn't raised in the South like my parents were, who were accustomed maybe to that kind of violence that wasn't publicized. But for me, I'm saying to myself, "My good God, what is going on down there? Why are they like that? Things aren't like that here in Washington, D.C." So I was confused, I was angry, certainly knew that I didn't want to go South, go down South. I didn't want any parts of it. I remember back in—I was very young, in the early fifties, my parents actually did take me on a vacation from Washington, D.C. and loaded up most of the children. We went on a train from Union Station in Washington, and went down South and I just couldn't believe the conditions. But the thing that really

strikes me was getting off the train. Seemed like we went—we had to leave the train station from the rear, and when we got back there, there were some old buggies and there were horses. Didn't see any blacks. There were a lot of whites there. But everybody crowded into a pickup truck. My mom and dad were up front. My brothers and sisters, we were all in the back of the pickup truck. And this must have been like, 1950. And I have a prodigious memory but I remember it distinctly, very, very clearly, that people were looking at us in a certain way and I knew something was wrong. I just couldn't figure out what it was. Like, as if they had daggers in their eyes or, "What are you doing here? Why are you here? Go away." And as we slowly pulled off, in the rear of this pickup truck, people were following us with their heads and eyes as if there was something special going on. There was nothing special going on with regard to the occupants of that truck, but I knew something was really, really wrong. And that really served as the impetus, the occasion to have me to realize that something was wrong and connect the dots later on, when I was nine or ten years of age. Some time.

01—00:21:52
Rigelhaupt:

What made you decide to join the Army in 1965?

01—00:21:57
Taylor:

Well, I didn't have much of a choice. Times were not good. Employment was not good. Up until that point and time I had worked periodically, off and on, for Western Union. And you know, that was the time of the great telegrams. So I delivered telegrams on a bike. And I went in every government building in Washington, D.C.—White House, Capitol, Supreme Court, all the museums, old and new office Senate buildings. I was all over delivering telegrams in the city. But that wasn't steady work. And when I first started back in about 1959, 1960, the prevailing wage—I guess it was the lowest wage—minimum wage—was a dollar and five cent an hour. And so you worked an entire day, you made \$8.40. And all of a sudden, not long after that, we got this nice pay raise and I went from \$1.05 to \$1.15 an hour (laughter). Back in those days. So times weren't really good, OK? And you know, \$1.15 being minimum wage wasn't doing real well economically, and so there were some other things, dynamics occurring in my life as well personally, and my mother had the vision and the understanding that something had to change. She was very wise, although not well—educated, but very wise. And so she made the decision to, by hook or crook, getting me into the military and so by sleuth her and my brother, I believe, conspired and I eventually ended up in the US Army and spent those nearly twenty-one years on active duty.

01—00:24:09
Rigelhaupt:

Well, certainly the Vietnam War was not—1965 certainly probably wasn't the peak of the war but it was going. And I'm curious just to ask what it was like to join the military at a time of war.

01—00:24:25

Taylor:

That's a very good question. I've been asked that before. It was scary. 1965 I believe, for the most part, the forces were mainly comprised of Special Forces. Didn't have a lot of divisions, combat units, big combat units back in '65, but it was pretty clear that we were heading in that direction. So it was a scary time for me, and it didn't take very long because three years later approximately I was in the heat of battle. I was with the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam, traveled with the infantry units to various locations and there was not one day, not one, in which my unit, my position, didn't receive a lot of incoming mortar, or rocket fire. On those days that we didn't receive mortar or rocket fire it was small arms fire, and you were ducking quick and fast and hitting the dirt. It was very, very scary. I'm just so glad that once my first tour was over in '70, I guess it was, early '70, I was hoping I didn't have to go back for a second tour. Because I had met many men who had gone two or three times, two or three tours. Fortunately for me that was my only tour and the war wound down some eight years or so later, roughly.

01—00:26:07

Rigelhaupt:

Well, before heading to Vietnam where were you for basic training and some of your initial postings?

01—00:26:16

Taylor:

My first assignment was at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, where I attended basic training. And then we went to Fort Sam Houston training in Texas for some medical training, nursing training. Eventually went to Okinawa, was in Okinawa for a year and a half or so. So by the time my tour in Okinawa was completed, you know, I had about two years of active duty service. Was eventually assigned to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., my hometown, which was great. All the family and friends were there and so that was just a good assignment for me. And, you know, that's basically my early career, the early years. I eventually went overseas to Vietnam, went to Okinawa, was stationed at the Presidio in San Francisco, and that's where I retired from the Presidio, about 1985.

01—00:27:27

Rigelhaupt:

Could you describe your progression in your Army career, from the time you came back from Vietnam?

01—00:27:35

Taylor:

Well, in terms of progression, in terms of rank, promotion, when I returned from Vietnam by then I had received one promotion, I was an E6, what they used to call a {Spec?} 6, and I went back to Walter Reed. Left Walter Reed and again, took an assignment to Okinawa again. Eventually was promoted there at Okinawa to E7, and then in 1977, New Year's Day 1977, I arrived at San Francisco because I was being assigned to the Presidio of San Francisco. And that's where I wound down my career and retired some eight years later, received another promotion to E8, Master Sergeant, and is the grade at which I retired in 1985.

01—00:28:40
Rigelhaupt:

And what were some of your main duties in the Army?

01—00:28:43
Taylor:

Well, my last assignment at the Presidio of San Francisco I was what you'd call, what we call the Chief Wardmaster for the Medical Nursing section. And my duties and responsibility were to—or at least I was responsible for the tactical training, providing advice, guidance, and welfare for some eighty paraprofessional personnel who worked on seven or eight medical nursing units at Letterman Army Medical Center. Pretty big assignment. But that was the duty of a Master Sergeant E8 within the medical center. At one point and time, for a very short period of time, I also was in charge of the surgical nursing units, that is the paraprofessional personnel within the surgical units, civilian as well as military personnel, which essentially gave me about one hundred and some people under my wing. In that capacity, some of the things that I did—you know, I approved time schedules, their working schedules, provided certain types of training and ensured that soldiers were trained. Assigned or recommended certain schools, that they be trained in certain disciplines. I was very busy, very busy.

01—00:30:36
Rigelhaupt:

In the medical field you were working in, were you mostly treating active duty soldiers, veterans, or both, or what was the focus of the patients coming through Letterman at that point?

01—00:30:53
Taylor:

At Letterman at that point and time there were mainly civilians, retired military people of various services—Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine, Coast Guard. They were all patients there. Now that's a huge difference from the way things were at Walter Reed in the mid-seventies, mid-sixties, in that ten year window. There were a lot of guys who were in bad shape as a result of wounds they received during the war. So the house was full of soldiers, airmen. But there were also, you know, a sprinkling of military retirees. There was a good bit of people who—or patients who came from Soldier's Home in Washington, D.C. who were treated at Walter Reed. So the big difference is during the war years, Walter Reed had a huge number of people who were injured as a result of the war effort in Vietnam versus some years later when things had wound down in the war. At the Presidio of San Francisco we were mainly seeing military retirees.

01—00:32:22
Rigelhaupt:

And in your day-to-day work were you actively working with patients or were you more managing the operations?

01—00:32:29
Taylor:

I was doing a little of both. I filled in where necessary. Didn't have to do that very often, but I did fill in where necessary otherwise my job was principally, mainly an administrative, managerial function.

01—00:32:52
Rigelhaupt:

You retire in 1985, you said, from the Army. What were some of your thoughts on what you were going to do next?

01—00:33:02
Taylor:

At that point and time I had attended the University of San Francisco; I had an undergraduate degree in Human Relations and Organizational Behavior and had done my work in public administration. So I wasn't really sure what I was going to do. I hadn't really started a job search. I knew that I was at least academically prepared for work within the civilian community, within that sector. But I guess there was a little fright, there was some uncertainty because for twenty-one years Uncle Sam had helped me pay the bills, provided food and shelter and clothing, and all of a sudden I'm going to leave that environment and now I'm on my own. And so how do you best do that? Certainly there's got to be some concern and a little bit of fright there. But you overcome that over time, and I did. Didn't last that long. But I did eventually find some gainful employment and moved on.

01—00:34:28
Rigelhaupt:

What was the first job you started after your military service?

01—00:34:34
Taylor:

I had some part-time things that kind of kept the wolf away from the door during my job search, but eventually I landed a position at the Presidio of San Francisco as a management analyst. It was an intern position, and completed that internship, was subject to relocation at that time because of the great, great training that I received as a management analyst intern. But the Command wanted to keep me, and they did, and found a position for me. So I received a promotion for that and about a year later, another promotion. After that had all occurred and I'm feeling pretty comfortable, base closure comes around. And that's when I was tapped by my boss to work on a team of three people to plan and execute the closure of the Presidio of San Francisco as well as Hamilton Army Airfield, which was a sub-installation of the Presidio.

01—00:35:45
Rigelhaupt:

What do you remember about first hearing that the Presidio was slated for closure?

01—00:35:55
Taylor:

Just like everybody else, we were taken aback, surprised, very concerned. There was a lot of uncertainty, unknowns, the economics—all of those things came to play to create this atmosphere of, "Oh, boy. Oh, my. What do we do now?" I probably was more attuned to it than most people because the Commanding General had selected me to work on this important team to plan the closure of the installation. I saw it up and close, real personal. And so when in that position you just have to get over your own personal fears and just do the job.

01—00:37:04
Rigelhaupt:

So what were some of the major tasks as you began the process for base closure that your team wanted to accomplish?

01—00:37:11
Taylor:

We wanted to identify A, the number of people assigned to the Presidio, military and civilian. That eventually came out to about 5,600—5,700 people. What units were involved, how many units were involved, how do we best close the installation and migrate people off the installation—how do we best migrate them to their new locations, new destinations? How do we efficiently shut down operations for every unit here at the Presidio of San Francisco? So there were a number of challenges, difficult challenges. And so what we had to do was understand the units, we had to talk with the units, we had to determine what their needs were. Did they require new construction of facilities at their new installations, or did they not? If they were individuals relocating how can we assure jobs at their new destinations? And so there were priority placement programs and other things that were there available to assist people in their job search and relocation efforts. But there were a number of things that we had to be concerned about—environmental issues were big for the base closure team. Worried with contamination spots at the installation and how best were they to, you know, be cleaned? The installation was going to transfer to the National Park Service, so we certainly wanted a good, clean environment for people to experience and use the park. So that was a big, big—ticket item for the National Park Service as well as the Army.

01—00:39:09
Rigelhaupt:

Did it help the process that you knew that the Presidio was going to go to the National Park Service?

01—00:39:22
Taylor:

Did it help the process knowing that we had one single entity that was going to acquire the installation? I think so. Based on my own personal experience I also worked the transfer of Oakland Army Base. There just wasn't one entity that was or could acquire space. At the Presidio there was only one. So it really did, and I think there were like, five sub-agreements that the Army crafted with the National Park Service that helped to transition and transfer the installation. So, yes, it probably was better, that one single entity that was going to acquire and ultimately did acquire the Presidio.

01—00:40:16
Rigelhaupt:

Well, let's switch gears and talk about the Oakland Army Base. How did you first become involved in working on the closure of the Oakland Army Base?

01—00:40:25
Taylor:

In 1994, when I left the Presidio of San Francisco, I was asked by the Army Corps of Engineers in Sacramento if I'd be interested in working on their base closure effort. And I said, "Of course." So I applied for a position, the vacant position, and was selected, and I actually worked the closure of Fort—it's a base down on the coast, Fort Ord, California. And so I worked Fort Ord for a

year, a year and a half or so in terms of making preparations for various activities, units to acquire pieces of Fort Ord, California, and I had done pretty good. So the next year when Oakland Army Base came up on the closure list, my boss approached me and says, "Look, we need somebody to work this action and I'm selecting you to do that." And so, as a single effort, I took on the task of planning the disposal of the installation and assisting the activity, the unit, the Commander there, in its closure. So I had direct input from my boss, "You're it."

01—00:42:11
Rigelhaupt:

What were some of the major tasks that had to first be done in closing the Oakland Army Base?

01—00:42:23
Taylor:

Well, similar to really what occurred at the Presidio. The Commander, you know, has to determine what's going to happen with the assets, that is the personnel assets and equipment assets. What units are here and where are they going to go? There was a huge—not huge, but a very large transportation unit that was assigned to Oakland Army Base. And the decision was made in fairly short order that that unit had to leave and leave fairly quickly, and the Commander, from what I remember, tended to that pretty quickly to get that active unit off the installation and relocated. For the most part, who was left there? Civilians. Mainly civilian employees and so, OK, how do we arrange for jobs for them? Are any of those people—do they qualify for a priority of placement at different locations throughout the country? And so a lot of that process went on. And the Commander did seek, you know, guidance from the Army Corps of Engineers and sometimes myself, in terms of how best to do that, and identifying people who had to leave and when they were going to leave. And it was a staggered process, it just wasn't all of a sudden everybody was gone. It was a staggered, organized process because the installation still had to operate although on a smaller scale.

01—00:44:18
Rigelhaupt:

Was it about 1998 that the initial transfer or lease was given to the city and the port?

01—00:44:31
Taylor:

I'm trying to think back—that's about right. I believe about '98, '99 we drafted a master lease for the Oakland Army Base. I remember the event so vividly. The day of the signing I brought in—I believe there were three or four packets, and each packet was probably a good fourteen inches high (laughter). Because I had written it along with one of my colleagues, but there were multiple attachments referenced in the document and I had to make sure that each one of those documents were there and present for the signing. As a matter of fact, I remember one of the attorneys for Oakland looked at the documents very, very carefully before asking—I believe it was Aliza Gallo—to execute the document. That was a huge, huge, huge time for us. And it served well for the Army because what the Army was doing, it was taking

property essentially off the books and giving it to somebody else to manage that infrastructure at significant dollar savings, or cost avoidance. We didn't have to worry about managing it, putting money into that real estate. Now the city of Oakland had the opportunity to manage it, and in the process, earn important dollars, very important dollars. So it was really a symbiotic kind of plus relationship for both. The city of Oakland gets to benefit as well as the Army gets to benefit and divest itself of some property it no longer needs.

01—00:46:49

Rigelhaupt:

Were there unique points within this master lease to the city of Oakland and what were some of the goals in the way the lease was written?

01—00:47:03

Taylor:

We set out certain things that the city could and couldn't do. We allowed the city to sublease certain things, anything they wanted to really, buildings. But there were certain conditions that they had to live with, the subleases. Any condition that we placed in the master lease, the sublease or sublessees had to comply with that. One of the things that I remember very clearly was with regard to environmental issues. The installation was going to undergo some changes and environmental cleanup. The Army didn't want anybody coming on the installation and creating further contamination or disturbing other sites of known contamination, so we tried to approach those issues. Now in the master lease we also told the city where certain contamination might exist and those areas could be avoided or had to be avoided, or certain types of activities couldn't occur there. We wanted to be good stewards in terms of notification and safety, whereas the city could use the property to the best extent and not suffer any ills, if you will.

01—00:48:49

Rigelhaupt:

Now was the portion of the Oakland Army Base that is now run and really part of the Port of Oakland, was that covered by this lease or was this only the portion that is now owned by the city of Oakland?

01—00:49:05

Taylor:

Yes. At the time, the Port of Oakland had a lease of certain properties through the Army Corps of Engineers. I'm just trying to think now—the master lease—at a minimum I know that the master lease covered everything on the installation. We may have segregated out that part that we had leased to the port, I just can't remember of the top of my head. But I guess the thing that the Army was concerned about was whether or not it was all of the city's responsibility or a portion was given to the port, we, the Army, had divested itself of that responsibility and were saving taxpayer dollars.

01—00:49:59

Rigelhaupt:

Now in this process of divesting the Oakland Army Base, had you followed any protocols or ideas that had been setup in the decommissioning of the Naval Supply Center in the FISCO that was right next to the Oakland Army Base, that quickly became part of the Port of Oakland?

01—00:50:23

Taylor:

You know, I don't remember very much of that and I apologize. It's been so long. No.

01—00:50:35

Rigelhaupt:

OK. Let's jump back for a minute. When you began your work at the Oakland Army Base what did you understand that up until then—and obviously you came on board at its moment of closure—but up until then what did you understand the core base functions were?

01—00:51:03

Taylor:

I understood the main function of the port was a port of embarkation and debarkation, supplies would come in through the port. As a matter of fact, the Port of Oakland, because they had such a large lease, supplies and equipment were coming in all the time, coming and leaving and going. But the port was not the port but the Oakland Army Base was there as part of the war—fighting effort. If there was a potential war or a war, we had a means of transporting goods, soldiers, seamen, whatever. I remember back in 1968, '67, when I went to Vietnam, '69—when I went to Vietnam I actually stopped in at the Oakland Army Base and lived in these huge warehouses. There were thousands and thousands of soldiers there coming in every day and they leaving, and I slept there a night or two on my way to Vietnam. So it served its war—fighting mission then and its transportation mission, and that was my understanding of the port from what I remember. Or, not the port, from Oakland Army Base as I remember.

01—00:52:38

Rigelhaupt:

How do you remember the Oakland Army Base and how would you describe it for the couple of days you were there before leaving for Vietnam?

01—00:52:47

Taylor:

That's interesting. Back in those days you could not miss a combat shipment. You missed a combat shipment, that was like almost an automatic reduction by grade and rank. And so when we got there, they told us, you know, our leaders said, "Look, one, you don't go off the base, and two, you'd better not miss the bus that's going to take you to a plane because you are in deep trouble." So I was scared to death. I had a family. I wasn't about to leave the installation like some other guys and go to San Francisco and risk getting caught. I just hung around the installation, around the warehouses where there were thousands and thousands of steel cots, you know, guys laying around. So I didn't see very much of the base. I just saw the warehouse, that's about it. I was scared.

01—00:53:46

Rigelhaupt:

But that was probably a relatively typical experience for someone stopping at the Oakland Army Base during the Vietnam War.

01—00:53:55

Taylor:

Yes. The only thing you did—you were in the barracks and if you weren't in the barracks you were within walking distance of the mess hall, you know, the chow hall where we ate. So you could make a steady track between the barracks, warehouse, and the meal hall, mess hall. From what I remember, it was a boring time. When we were in the warehouses, I mean, you could read. Some guys I think even went to the gym when they had a chance. But I didn't do very much at all, I really didn't. I may have been there a day and a half before the buses picked us up and took us up to the airport.

01—00:54:44

Rigelhaupt:

Which airport did you fly out of?

01—00:54:47

Taylor:

It's been a long time. I believe I flew out of Travis Air Force Base to Vietnam, which isn't very far from here.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 taylor_robort2_1—11—08.mp3

02—00:00:11

Rigelhaupt:

OK, we're on tape number two, continuing with the interview with Robert Taylor. What were your impressions of the Oakland Army Base when you came back there in roughly 1995? Did it look the same as you'd remembered it from before you had left from there in the sixties?

02—00:00:35

Taylor:

The only thing I remember really from back in the sixties was the warehouse, the warehouses. They had these huge, huge warehouses. I tried to figure out which warehouse maybe I slept in (laughter). I couldn't because there was some six or eight of these huge warehouses. But I often wondered which one it was, whether it was the one that was closest to the mess hall or not. And again, because I didn't really get around the installation nothing was really familiar to me other than the warehouse area. That was about the only thing that came back to memory. But I was enthused about my assignment because never in a million years would I have thought twenty years earlier, after sleeping in a warehouse, that I'd be responsible for disposal of that installation. So it was interesting. I was kind of happy to have had the assignment.

02—00:01:53

Rigelhaupt:

Did you get a clear sense as to why it was being closed?

02—00:01:58

Taylor:

Yes, I did. I had a real good, clear sense. Congress made it very clear that we no longer needed the military infrastructure that we had. The military infrastructure was far in excess of our needs. There were other means by which to fight wars, the need to get lean, mean, like a fighting machine, and

that meant that we could consolidate soldiers and civilians at fewer locations throughout the country, and in the process, save the American taxpayer millions, billions of dollars. And that was the core set, and we've done that. And I assume that a lot of that, or much of that decision, was based on intelligence that we had received in terms of threats around the world. The Soviet Union, that had gone down or was in the process of going down, and that the world had changed. The thought being that we had to change with the world.

02—00:03:17
Rigelhaupt:

And in thinking back, how did the '95 process compare with what you remember about the 1988 process of base closure?

02—00:03:31
Taylor:

The differences in the two are the BRAC-1 in '88 and then BRAC of '95, the differences? You know, personally I don't really see any differences. One thing—one big difference I guess was that the learning difference between '88 and '95, we learned a lot. Because in the early days of base closure in '88 this was new to us. We hadn't done it before, and we were making up rules on the fly sometimes. And so over the years as we progressed, got smarter, we applied those learning experiences to subsequent base closures. So I guess by the time we got to BRAC '95 and Oakland Army Base we had learned enough to change a lot. As a matter of fact, there was a big manual that the Army had produced, it was called the BRAC manual, it was a big old thing. And I referred to it a lot because there's a lot of real estate stuff in there—things that we had learned over time had been captured in that document. And so, yeah, I guess there was a big difference. We were moving more efficiently in BRAC '95 then we were in BRAC—back in '88. I guess that's one of the big differences that comes to mind.

02—00:05:08
Rigelhaupt:

How would you describe the initial relationship between the Department of Defense and the Army in relationship to the Oakland Army Base and the city of Oakland and perhaps how that changed over the years of working on the closure of the Oakland Army Base?

02—00:05:27
Taylor:

Interesting question. I guess when BRAC was first announced for Oakland Army Base the city of Oakland had no idea that it was going to eventually acquire the installation. There were a number of deeds from the nineteen—late-thirties, early forties that essentially said when the installation closes that the city of Oakland has a reversionary right and interest to acquire the property. I won't get into the real specifics of all of that, but that's what it essentially said. And so when I first was given the assignment I was reading all these documents to familiarize myself with the history of the installation and how it was acquired, deeds, eminent domain, a number of different acquisitions over the years. And I came across this and I immediately talked with my attorney who was assigned to help me, and he said, "Well, yeah,

you're right, there is this reversionary right and interest of the city of Oakland to acquire the property if it should ever close," and there were some other requirements. And I went to the lead for the city's base closure effort and provided this briefing. I eventually briefed a number of different people influential in the city of Oakland with regard to this reversionary right of interest to include the Port of Oakland. That's how this really came about, and I have often wondered what would have happened if I hadn't done that work. Because the Army, we were heading in another direction. We were going to go through the base closure process whereas other entities could have acquired some of the installation. I kind of—I felt like I was being maybe somewhat of a detective, a sleuth, and I've uncovered some very, very valuable information that was very, very valuable to the city of Oakland. I eventually met with the mayor, I think it was Elihu Harris at the time, and briefed him. Because what the Army wanted to do was we wanted to get on with the disposal. And so one of the things that the city of Oakland had to do was waive its reversionary right and interest to purchase the property. We ran into some snags. I guess the bottom line is we eventually prevailed, both parties, and the property was transferred.

02—00:08:47
Rigelhaupt:

Well, had you not found this reversionary right how do you think the base closure process at Oakland would have proceeded? Would there have been private interest?

02—00:08:56
Taylor:

There could have been some private interest, there could have been what we call public benefit conveyances where other federal entities could have acquired property under that authority. But it probably would have—maybe would have had to have all unraveled if that reversionary right and interest had ever made its way to court. Maybe the city could have said, "Well, my goodness gracious, the Army never confronted us, never notified us of this right. And now fifty, sixty years later we discover it and the Army's transferred the property to somebody else—we want it back." My work, I believe, helped to avoid that situation or condition. And you're doing it right, I'm doing it right, whereas the party that's entitled actually gets the property, takes on responsibility of ownership of the property, and that's what happened. And I preached, by the way, this reversionary right and interest and briefed it many, many times over probably a good two years.

02—00:10:12
Rigelhaupt:

Well, in some respects it sounds as though this reversionary right to the city of Oakland meant that the base closure of the Oakland Army Base was similar to the closing of the Presidio in the sense that there was one known next step of who was going to be involved in taking over the Army base.

02—00:10:34
Taylor:

This is very true.

02—00:10:36
Rigelhaupt:

And I'm wondering if you could compare and contrast what it was like working with the National Park Service versus the city of Oakland, and I assume there was a local reuse authority involved with the city of Oakland or acting as their agent. And if you could talk about the similarities or differences.

02—00:10:54
Taylor:

True. The Presidio of San Francisco there was the Golden Gate National Recreation Area that we were working with very closely because the law required that the property go to the GGNRA, Golden Gate National Recreation Area. So that was great, and at one point and time I believe there was a city interest—the city of San Francisco had come up on board because the property was within the confines of the city, the legal boundaries of the city of San Francisco so they clearly have an interest in knowing what's going on, tax base and everything else. So working with that group made life easier. The Oakland Army Base, on the other hand, working with—in the early days with the mayor because they hadn't developed this local reuse authority, sometimes it's kind of difficult to get through the politicians sometimes, and sometimes I wish we had worked harder. But there was a big delay in the base closure process at Oakland until the local redevelopment authority was identified whereas we could work with them. Also at Oakland Army Base there was an effort to transfer some property to the public benefit discount conveyance entities—those are federal entities that qualify for public benefit discount conveyance. The Army-Air Force exchange service also had an opportunity to acquire property at Oakland and they were in line to do that. But there were some contamination issues and as a result they backed away and never got an opportunity to take on that property. So I guess the thing is here that we had the public benefit discount conveyance element involved at Oakland Army Base for a time, whereas we didn't have that at the Presidio of San Francisco. Just had one single entity that was going to acquire the property and convert it to a National Park.

02—00:13:28
Rigelhaupt:

As you began working with the local reuse authority in Oakland did you get a sense that the different interests from community interest to the city's interest to the ports, perhaps to real estate developers, all the different ideas and groups involved with local reuse, were they on the same page or were they trying to use this property—take it in different directions?

02—00:13:53
Taylor:

No, I don't think they were all on the same sheet of music, I really don't. The port certainly had its interest. If it could expand its operations to even greater heights, they would love to do that. On the other hand, I believe there were some community-based groups who had ideas, different ideas than the local reuse authority had for planning the base. I think that eventually the local reuse authority tried its best to get together with the community to galvanize a future for the installation and take that input and work it as best that they

could, that they were receiving from the community. And clearly, there was a requirement for us to comply with NEPA, the National Environmental Policy Act, and so the Army Corps of Engineers working with the base developed an environmental impact statement. And that certainly involved some community input, and we did receive community input and that input was shared with the local reuse authority that was charged with planning the reuse of the installation. I thought the city did its best in trying to work with the community to get the right mix.

02—00:15:41

Rigelhaupt:

How would you compare the experience with the city of Oakland and the base closure to the closure at Fort Ord and your experience working in closing Fort Ord?

02—00:15:57

Taylor:

Comparison, between Fort Ord and—

02—00:16:05

Rigelhaupt:

Did you write a similar master lease for Fort Ord and were you involved in that process? Were there the same goals in writing that lease at Fort Ord as there was in writing it for Oakland?

02—00:16:21

Taylor:

Actually a little different situation there. We didn't have a master lease. Let me just take a step—well, one of the main reasons for the master lease at Oakland Army Base was in support of the city of Oakland, local redevelopment authority, taking charge of the entire installation. It wasn't a huge place but it was about— [Pause of interview]

02—00:16:53

Rigelhaupt:

So you were talking about the master lease at Oakland.

02—00:16:56

Taylor:

The master lease at Oakland Army Base was really designed and intended as a vehicle that would allow the local redevelopment authority to manage this 422-acre parcel. Not a whole heck of a lot of land compared to Fort Ord where you've got tens of thousands of acres, OK? So we really didn't have a master lease at Fort Ord. What I did at Fort Ord is actually transferred certain properties to UC Santa Cruz. All the universities who wanted to acquire property, but we're talking now about transfer as opposed to leasing property. And at Fort Ord we were so well far along in the process when I was there that we were authorized and in position to actually start transfer of some properties. There were even properties that we wanted to transfer to the Bureau of Land Management that I was involved with, some 10,000 acres of land, most of which was contaminated with explosive devices. That property was valued at about \$198 million at that time that I was involved with the transfer and writing the memorandum of agreement between BLM, Bureau of Land Management and the Department of the Army. The transfers at Fort Ord were much more complex. And they were much more complex because in this

particular case I was just alluding to, property that we wanted to transfer to the Bureau of Land Management, there was a lot of contamination. There was an awful lot of talk about, OK, give it to BLM but let's put a fence around it. Well, a fence is going to cost a million dollars. Who's got that kind of money? Working through those kinds of complex issues—did we have a number of public benefit discount conveyances? They were all over the place, I mean a lot. And these were essentially transfers of property that were going to entities free, free of charge, like for example a school. I believe one school was a school called the York School, had applied under public benefit discount conveyance under the federal Education Department. So the complexity and the number, the sheer number of transfers were—there's no comparison whatsoever between the two installations, Fort Ord, Oakland Army Base. It was much different working at Oakland Army Base. It was easier as opposed to Fort Ord. As a matter of fact Fort Ord—I wasn't the only one working the disposal of property at Fort Ord. I believe there were five, think there were six of us who were working and I just happened to have had all of the universities who wanted property and some others, but those were my responsibility so we kind of segregated things out by realty specialists who were responsible.

02—00:21:02
Rigelhaupt:

I've certainly read that Ford Ord is talked about as one of the most successful transfers because it was not only UC Santa Cruz but also Cal State Monterey Bay—

02—00:21:14
Taylor:

There you go, those were both mine. Absolutely.

02—00:21:16
Rigelhaupt:

But that it's important for the community as an economic engine for public benefit, and I'm wondering, did it play a role that there was a transfer rather than a lease in comparison to the potential successes that might come at the Oakland Army Base?

02—00:21:42
Taylor:

I want to make sure I understand that. So you're asking me—

02—00:21:49
Rigelhaupt:

Well, I'm wondering if that's part of why Fort Ord has moved forward? It was a transfer rather than a lease to the city to then sublease.

02—00:22:01
Taylor:

Well, I don't know. Let's talk about it a little bit. Once the master lease was in place at Oakland Army Base we couldn't transfer for one main reason. That was because of environmental cleanup. And so what the Army had to do was to complete the environmental cleanup or make certain arrangements to finance the cleanup, give the money basically to the city and tell them to clean it up. And I think that's what we eventually did. We had an agreement whereas the city of Oakland was given the funds to clean the installation up to the standard necessary so that they could reuse the property. That's how

basically things happened at Oakland Army Base. With regard to Fort Ord, we were also concerned about environmental cleanup, there's no doubt about it. I know areas that weren't as dirty, if you will, or required the level of remediation, and so those properties were transferred sooner without any hiccups. There wasn't any real problem. We could do that. Whereas there were other large pieces of Fort Ord we just couldn't transfer until such time as the environmental remediation was squared away. So there were just all kinds of challenges, environmental challenges at Fort Ord, and that equates to time. And until those things are done you can't move. You're kind of like at standstill.

02—00:24:05
Rigelhaupt:

So is it safe to characterize that at Fort Ord the environmental impact from unexploded ordnances, proximity to the land, and the property was going to be used by universities and other community developers, whoever was going to use the property, that they were far enough apart that you could transfer the property that was going to be used quicker than at the Oakland Army Base because where there were environmental issues the proximity to what might otherwise be used after the Army left, they were closer together?

02—00:24:43
Taylor:

I think so. I think that's a fair statement, no doubt about it. See if I can amplify on that just a little bit with regard to Oakland. Originally the Army was going to do the remediation itself, do all the work. That would have probably taken longer. The city came up on that and said, "Look, you know, we can do the work and we can do it faster than you can. Matter of fact, we might even be able to do it cheaper than you can, and here are some proofs that the system works—it can work like that." So I think the Army ended up basically giving the city the necessary requisite funds to do the remediation and they claimed that they could do it quicker, faster, cheaper, and the Army—it was a win-win situation. The Army could get out sooner and the port could acquire the property sooner and start to generate jobs, tax space, money.

02—00:26:08
Rigelhaupt:

When you came on board to play a role in the process of closing the Oakland Army Base did your group have discussions about what you thought the property might be reused as? I imagine the Port of Oakland was a big player throughout, it makes sense, but were there other ideas about how this property might be used by the city?

02—00:26:32
Taylor:

We didn't care. The Army didn't care what it was going to be used for really. We wanted to get rid of the property. The taxpayer had spoken, the Congress had spoken, the President had spoken, get rid of the property. Colin Powell probably said it best, he said, "Base closure—we have to do it viciously." Get rid of the property. So the Army, we don't care. But what we do care about, or what the Army did care about, was that whatever reuse plan that they developed, it was viable, it was reasonable, and had to be approved by the

Army. And so the city is left with the task of outlining the specifics of what that reuse plan is and how they're going to carry it out, how they're going to manage the property and the dollars over time. And apparently, you know, that reuse plan was sufficient to meet all of those goals and requirements.

02—00:27:50
Rigelhaupt:

Now do you have any ideas as to why the part of the Oakland Army Base that is with the city of Oakland has not been as readily redeveloped as, say—I mean the Port of Oakland has taken their part and has worked in the port but that's a more—in some ways it's not a fair comparison—

02—00:28:13
Taylor:

Right.

02—00:28:14
Rigelhaupt:

—trying to do a new development versus take something and make it part of something that is already functioning. But do you have any thoughts as to why the part of the Oakland Army Base that's with the city of Oakland the discussions of redevelopment are still ongoing?

02—00:28:32
Taylor:

You know, that's a very good question. I really don't know. I can only speculate. Sometimes the wheels of government roll very, very slowly. And as I alluded to earlier, we experienced some challenges in the early years in terms of delay on the part of the local reuse authority. We waited probably a good two years for the mayor of Oakland to exercise its right, its reversionary right and interest. It never happened. And I personally wrote at least a couple letters to the mayor about this reversionary right and interest and why things were moving so slowly. Is that a snapshot of what's occurring today in terms of delay and procrastination? Again, I can only speculate that the wheels are going, they just roll, roll, very, very slowly. On the other side, I'm wondering if it has anything to do with some of the economics that are occurring there right now because I know that they've—the city has leased many of the buildings for warehousing, storage. Maybe they're satisfied with that but that's not consistent with their reuse plan that was approved by the government, and for me, clearly, a reuse plan, a fully imposed, implemented reuse plan, would generate greater revenue than through its leasing effort right now. So who's to say about the delay. And I haven't kept my finger on the pulse of things there in some time. That wasn't my mission. My mission was to help plan the disposal and reuse of the installation, and we're out of it, and we're not—the government is not stuck with the bill any longer.

02—00:30:50
Rigelhaupt:

One of the things that's been talked about, that I think fell through last October for the Oakland Army Base, was a movie studio and I think a hotel, some sort of development the Wayan brothers were going to try and bring in. For whatever reason, that deal didn't go forward after last fall. But I'm curious in your initial thinking and if you agree—did you have a sense that a

big, new project would work on that site or were there any general discussions about how this property could best be used?

02—00:31:27

Taylor:

Well, again, from my group there may have been some loose thoughts about how the base could be reused, but they were very loose because we really didn't care. It was purely speculation as to what may happen. But I will tell you one thing that the former mayor of Oakland said, and it's Jerry Brown, and he said something to the effect that the base was important because it was the gateway to Oakland, the city of Oakland. You come across the Bay Bridge, what's the first thing that you see there? It's the Oakland Army Base. And what you really should see is something that's out standing right there at the foot of the bridge that says, "This is Oakland, this is what we're about," and it's beautiful. No, that hasn't come about. We have to ask ourselves and speculate why not? And why are all these potential projects falling through, why they don't work or why they're not accepted by the political leaders of the city. I don't know. We can only speculate.

02—00:32:53

Rigelhaupt:

But there was nothing from your side, from the Army's perspective, that could be done either in the master lease or then in the final transfer, which I think took place in 2003.

02—00:33:06

Taylor:

Right.

02—00:33:07

Rigelhaupt:

It could have been more conducive to one plan or another.

02—00:33:11

Taylor:

I don't think so. I really don't. I remember the master lease being exactly, you know, the requirements. And if there was anything conducive in the lease, they didn't do it. It hasn't been done. So anything that the master lease could have alluded to didn't occur. Their grandiose plan, or reuse plan, that hasn't come to fruition. Other things that you've heard, like the Wayan brothers and all these other projects, those have all fallen through as well. So what's the problem? Is it leadership? Is it imagination? Is it a combination thereof, good leadership and good management? Imagination? Do you bring on board a super good developer who can make things happen? Why haven't all these things happened over the years? This base came on board in '95 for closure. It's twelve years later. What's the hiccup? The common man in the streets of Oakland, the common residents, they could have influence but they haven't really influenced this thing. The influence and the leadership comes from the politicians, I would think. The planning team there—the city has a huge planning team, people—that's all they do all day is they plan for redevelopment for the city. They do zoning and other kinds of important things. The Oakland Army Base—well, the former Oakland Army Base is really a diamond in the rough in my opinion. So why hasn't that worked? It's

on the waterfront. When I think of waterfront I think of recreational activities, I think about transportation, I think about restaurants, I think about great views. Boy, there's lots of things that you could do in a positive sense that would set the city off and help to improve the image of the city of Oakland. That hasn't happened. I hope it happens in the near term.

02—00:35:55

Rigelhaupt:

Well, in thinking about that and that it is a diamond in the rough, potentially, for redevelopment, was their discussion on your team as far as closing the Army base and thinking about its proximity to industrial uses, the port, that largely it's surrounded by industry, versus, say, at Fort Ord which doesn't have the same kind of industry around it that could be used for a university?

02—00:36:29

Taylor:

Again, when you speak of my team what we're talking about—I think you're talking about—is the real estate team at the Army Corps of Engineers responsible for planning and hopefully executing the disposal of the base. Again, we didn't care what they did with the property. Our mission was to transfer it. But ultimately the Army was concerned about reuse, viable reuse, reasonable reuse, and that the dollars associated with the reuse made sense. Please also understand and know that this was what we called a no—cost transfer. I'm just trying to think of the term—no-cost economic development conveyance, EDC. No-cost EDC, well, what were the dollars involved for the city of Oakland? Well, essentially nothing because if the government indeed gave the city money to clean up the installation so that it could implement the reuse plan that was approved by the Army, who wins? Well, the city wins. Have they won enough yet? Maybe not because they haven't implemented their reuse plan. Does the Army win? Big time. The Army won big time because the tax—I guess the federal—there aren't very many tax dollars, if any, continuing to go there, at least on the scale when the installation was in full bloom—when there was a full force, a full faculty of staff there, military and civilian personnel, when the installation was in full force. That's no longer the case. Those tax dollars are gone. They're doing other things. So, yes, the Army won, city's won, but probably not to the extent that it should.

02—00:38:50

Rigelhaupt:

In writing the lease, the environmental considerations were front and center, but were there also considerations about wildlife and historical preservation, and how were they different at Oakland, say than at Fort Ord or the Presidio?

02—00:39:09

Taylor:

From what I remember there was a historic district, or it may have been a historic place at Oakland Army Base and we wanted to protect them. We addressed that very specifically in the master lease about preservation and protection. We worked very, very closely with the California State Historic Preservation Office to ensure that our language that we were using was good and consistent with their desires in terms of how the historic place, historic properties were to be treated and maintained. With regard to historic places at

Fort Ord, I'm sure there probably had to have been some but I don't remember any in the transfers that I actually made myself. But I can assure you that if there were, we certainly treated those issues—the Army was very, very conscious of the importance of protecting, preserving historic properties.

02—00:40:29

Rigelhaupt:

As we've talked, one of the things that's come up and it's certainly one of the things I've read about, is that there's a political component to base closure—where it happens, how it happens. There's a lot of money in local lives, in local communities affected by base closure. And I'm wondering, in your impression, especially in relation to the Oakland Army Base but also in other base closures you've worked on, how do you think politics and the political process has affected base closures?

02—00:41:09

Taylor:

Clearly politics on a national level, that's where it all starts. That's the big push. And of course in the early years there were many people who were in great opposition to base closure because of the impact on their own particular districts. The Congress found a way to get around that and they did, whereas they were now all on the same sheet of music in terms of closing installations. On the municipality level, on the city level, the politics involved there, are probably even greater, the intensity. On one hand you want—the politicians want the property to be used as quickly as possible for the tax base that it's going to generate, the jobs, businesses. But on the other hand sometimes, you know, they're their own worst enemy. They don't do the things that are necessary in order to facilitate this process whereas it gets going quicker. And I guess the case and point here is Oakland Army Base, things haven't taken off the way they were designed to. So I believe that politicians have a very, very important role here. I met with Jerry Brown, mayor Jerry Brown, on at least one occasion with other colleagues and he was very enthused about the reuse of Oakland Army Base and he was the second mayor that I had interfaced with. And after that one particular session I was encouraged that things were really going to take off, especially since I saw other economic development opportunities occurring within the city of Oakland. I was very encouraged for the Oakland Army Base. Why that didn't happen is a different story. And again I'm not sure, but clearly to me it starts at the political leadership level with the imagination, the foresight, the force, and desire to make something happen. And again, the Oakland Army base being what I believe is a diamond in the rough is a golden opportunity that's been missed so far. I'm sure it'll be capitalized on in the future, but, boy, I think they're missing a lot in the interim period.

02—00:43:59

Rigelhaupt:

Did you get a sense that there were a significant amount of base closings in the East Bay, in the sense that California's 9th Congressional district, which in the '90s was represented by Ron Dellums, had more base closures than any other Congressional district?

02—00:44:16

Taylor:

That's interesting. I know exactly where you're going. You know, some say that Ron Dellums was punished because of his attitude about the military. And so if that's your attitude, Mr. Dellums, we're going to fix your business. Maybe we'll just close all the bases in your district. But it's not just Mr. Dellums's own district, it's the entire state. California suffered enormous, enormous losses of military installations. As I look back—let's say just in the Bay Area, I mean, there's nothing left—the Presidio, Hamilton Army Airfield, Oakland Army Base. Travis prevailed, Travis Air Force prevailed and I'm glad for that, but there were so many other bases that just went out, just closed, shut the doors. Why? Did it have anything to do with Mr. Dellums or did it really have to do all with about economics and reducing the military infrastructure? Maybe both.

02—00:45:48

Rigelhaupt:

Do you think it's potentially hurt military readiness that so many bases closed in California and the Bay Area in particular?

02—00:45:57

Taylor:

Initially I thought so, given my own military background. I really thought that the country was being done a disservice. Closing so many military installations so quickly, this rapid, precipitous drop in military presence on the coast of the United States—I thought it was dangerous. But then again, putting on my other side of my military cap I'm saying, "OK, maybe there's some intelligence out there that they know about that we don't know about that supports this precipitous reduction in military forces." But initially my concern was great. And I had this mixed emotion too because I'm the mix. I'm disposing or planning the disposal of military bases but yet I'm sensing that this isn't a good thing to do. And people are losing jobs by the tens of thousands. So what's really going on? I was really—I was ambivalent. A lot of ambivalence during that time, but I had this mission that was economically driven for me that I had to comply with, but, boy, it was tough.

02—00:47:27

Rigelhaupt:

Well, was some of that ambivalence tempered by the fact that you also got to play a role in transferring, say, Fort Ord to universities that would be self-generating and self-sustaining in creating jobs and good economic opportunity in that area as much as well, I don't know if as much but certainly, hopefully at least on par with or nearly on par with the Army's role in Fort Ord?

02—00:47:58

Taylor:

I got a good level of job satisfaction out of what I was doing because I believed I was doing it well, doing it proficiently. We were on time with regard to our planned closure, our planned disposals of installations, or elements or pieces of installations. I felt good about that but again I didn't feel so good because A, I knew I was working my own self out of a job, and two, there was this fright about reducing the forces, the force infrastructure, the military personnel and infrastructure, what happens if there's a sudden war?

Now the United States in the early years, World War II, World War I, when we needed land, you know, we'd probably just take it, a declaration of taking and we'd build a military base. Well, this is the 21st century, a completely different America, and you just don't readily do that if there were a war. You'd have a lot of trouble trying to impose eminent domain and taking property, is my guess, to build a military infrastructure. So again, just very concerned that all these military properties were going and we would never be able to retrieve them again, quite possibly—I just had some concerns.

02—00:49:38

Rigelhaupt:

Have your concerns been tempered over time?

02—00:49:42

Taylor:

Most definitely. I mean, I look out today and we have things today that we didn't have at BRAC-1 in 1988. Example: stealth bombers. They don't see us coming. That's a defense. We have other defenses that are improved defenses that we didn't have twenty, twenty-five years ago in 1988, or seventeen years ago or whatever—twenty years ago. My concerns had been tempered in that we have a better trained military, we have more sophisticated weaponry, more sophisticated intelligence, and those in itself serve as a form of defense. I feel just as safe today as I did then.

02—00:51:00

Rigelhaupt:

Well, as I look over, those are largely my questions. And the way I like to end is to ask, one, is there anything I should have asked and I didn't, and two, is there anything you'd like to add?

02—00:51:14

Taylor:

Let me think about that. Anything you should have asked—maybe one thing you should have asked was did people ever talk to you about their feelings about base closure. Yes, they did. People were very angry. They were very angry that the Congress had decided to close their base and threaten their livelihood. I don't know of anyone, and I've talked to many, many, many people over my BRAC career who were not angered by the disruption to their family, to their livelihoods, as base closure. People were turned upside-down. I've known people who have had to relocate from the Bay Area to as far away as Fort Eustis, Virginia—an involuntary relocation. Letterman Army Institute of Research, huge, very prestigious, important institute at the Presidio of San Francisco, adjacent to Letterman Army Medical Center, it and all of its professionals, its mission, relocated to the East Coast. Some of those people were absolutely livid that that occurred. So that's an element that I guess is expected but the scale on which I heard about it from people affected by base closure was something. And that was in regard to maybe a question that you didn't ask. If I do have anything else to add to this effort—if the Congress had to do this all over again I'm wondering if there would be any benefit derived from earlier notification of the public that it was going to happen and why it's going to happen and to the extent it's going to happen. Maybe it was a designed play, not to make it all that public because there may have been a

firestorm of protest and it never would have happened. So maybe we did do it the right way. That's about it.

02—00:54:48

Rigelhaupt: Thank you very much.

02—00:54:49

Taylor: OK, sure.

[End of Interview]