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University of California  
Berkeley, California

Davetta ThiBeaux:  
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by  
Robin Li  
in 2008

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[The following interview was heavily edited and parts rewritten by Ms. ThiBeaux during her review, causing drastic inconsistencies with the audio and video files.]

Interview #1: August 26, 2008

Begin Audio File 1 08-26-2008.mp3

Li: So it's August 26, and we're in Oakland, California. This is Robin Li, speaking with Davetta ThiBeaux.

01-00:00:10

ThiBeaux: Yes.

Li: Okay, we're going to start with a basic question. Could you please state your name, and when and where you were born?

01-00:00:17

ThiBeaux: Okay, my name is Davetta ThiBeaux, and I was born in San Francisco, California. A baby boomer. I was born March 12, 1948.

Li: [laughs] Was your family living in San Francisco then, at that time?

01-00:00:35

ThiBeaux: Yeah. My parents are transplants from the South, from Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma. So they migrated out here during World War II, to work in the shipyards and at the Oakland Army Base.

Li: Did both your parents work at the shipyards?

01-00:00:51

ThiBeaux: No, just my mother, when she was a young girl. As a teenager, she worked at the Oakland Army Base, her and her sister.

Li: Oh, wow. So did you go to school in San Francisco, growing up?

01-00:01:07

ThiBeaux: I pretty much grew up here in the Bay Area. So I went to school— elementary school and then my mother and step-father, who worked at Oakland Naval Supply Center, bought a house in Vallejo, California in 1959 because Archie Moore (former heavy weight boxing champ) was promoting TV ads about this new housing development called Country Club Crest in Vallejo.

The qualification for buying a home in Country Club Crest in 1959 was \$99 down and \$99 a month. And so my mom and step-dad, my brothers and sisters and me—a total of 11 children—all moved to the new home in Vallejo. Then because the school system was not equipped to handle the large migration of people moving to Vallejo the school district would only have classes called “half day school” until more schools were built. So that is how I ended up going to junior high school in San Francisco.

Li: Would you commute from Vallejo?

01-00:01:56

ThiBeaux: No, my dad, Dave Petite, took me to live with his mother—Mama Frances (my grandmother) and Papa Richard (grandpapa). My grandparents lived in the Filmore district, and I attended Marina Junior High School. Mama Frances also kept foster kids [laugh] and had a day care for small children.

Li: Oh, wow. What was that like? What was San Francisco like at that time?

01-00:02:16

ThiBeaux: Oh, you would have loved San Francisco. It was a very nice and clean city at that time in the sixties. You did not have the homeless population like you have now, because you had a lot of—oh, what do you call them? State institutions like Napa and Sonoma State mental hospitals. San Francisco was so very clean. It was like, if you ever watch the Perry Mason shows, it was like that, classy, orderly and clean. And as a woman you were not considered a well-dressed woman unless when you went downtown you wore a nice dress or suit, gloves and high heel shoes; and men wore suits or slacks and a nice sport jacket.

Li: Oh, really?

01-00:02:54

ThiBeaux: Uh-huh. Women wore gloves. This is if you were a woman; if you were a teenage girl you did not wear gloves, but instead a nice casual dress or skirt and blouse, sweater or car coat.

Li: Right.

01-00:03:01

ThiBeaux: Yes, women wore gloves, a hat, suit and pumps.

Li: Wow. So did you go to high school in San Francisco, then, as well?

01-00:03:10

ThiBeaux: No, I went one year to high school, Washington High School, and then I transferred back and stayed with my mother. So I ended up graduating from Vallejo Senior High School.

Li: And what year was that?

01-00:03:23

ThiBeaux: 1965.

Li: 1965, okay. And so what were your plans after high school?

01-00:03:30

ThiBeaux: Well, what they did in Vallejo in those days, they would have— Companies would come out and recruit high school graduates for jobs. So the telephone

company came out and recruited, so I worked one year for the phone company. Yeah. And then after that, I went to keypunch school and got a job working at the Oakland Army Base.

Li: Oh, okay. So what year did you start at the Oakland Army Base?

01-00:03:54

ThiBeaux: I started at the end of '66. So I worked '66 to '67 at the Oakland Army Base, as a keypunch operator.

Li: And did you learn the keypunch skills from the telephone company?

01-00:04:05

ThiBeaux: Mm-mm, I went to keypunch school at night in San Francisco.

Li: While you were working at the telephone company?

01-00:04:09

ThiBeaux: Mm-hm. I went to Heald's Business College in San Francisco. At that time, it was on, I think, Van Ness and Pine Street.

Li: Okay. And so what did a keypunch operator do?

01-00:04:20

ThiBeaux: Well, it was like, if you will, a typewriter. Like the old school typewriters. And then what happens is you'd have keypunch cards, that are the size of a dollar bill, but beige in color and made out of thick heavy bond paper. Well anyway, the keypunch operator would stack a bunch of keypunch cards into a hopper, and then from a manifest the keypunch operator would type whatever coded information was on the manifest. The coded information was a combination of numeric and alpha letters. But the way I understand it is that the keypunch cards were used to indicate what items were being shipped out, in terms of cargo, going to Vietnam.

Li: Okay.

01-00:05:20

ThiBeaux: Yeah. But they don't tell you that at first.

Li: Right. [laughs]

01-00:05:22

ThiBeaux: You learn that. The longer you work on the job as a keypunch operator, you learn about the military cargo information. Yes, so it was a really boring job, but anyway, it was a government job.

Li: Right. So were a lot of your friends going to Vietnam? Did you know people—

01-00:05:33

ThiBeaux:

Yes, some of my classmates from Vallejo High School went to Vietnam. In 1969 my best friend told me that two of our classmates were killed in the Vietnam War. Also, my brother Clarence who is one year younger than me, and lived with our dad, had a couple of classmates who went to Vietnam. But Clarence's best friend, Willie, when he returned from Vietnam was disabled. Willie was really all messed up—he lost an eye and had pieces of shrapnel in his stomach. In those days (1960s and 1970s) Letterman Hospital at the Presidio of San Francisco treated the Vietnam veterans, and so Willie was at Letterman Hospital for almost one year.

Li:

Oh, wow. So did you feel like you were part of the war effort, working at the Oakland Army Base?

01-00:06:15

ThiBeaux:

Kinda-sorta, because we would see a lot of GI's, a lot of military personnel, and soldiers coming through the Oakland Army Base. The soldiers came through the base because it was, I think, a point of disembarkation, de-embarkation, or whatever. So a lot of soldiers would leave from either the Oakland Army Base or Travis Air Force Base. So, yes, you would see a lot of soldiers. But yes, I felt like I was a part of the war effort, in terms of getting the necessary supplies over to Vietnam for the military troops.

Li:

And was the base pretty busy?

01-00:06:54

ThiBeaux:

Oh, it was very busy then. Because in those days, I had never known a bank to be open on a Saturday, but the Oakland Army Base was its own little community. The base had a barber shop, a bakery, and a night club called the Crosswinds, and also a bank that was open every Saturday of every month almost until the Vietnam War ended.

Li:

Because things were so busy?

01-00:07:21

ThiBeaux:

Yes, because things were so busy, and some soldiers wanted to get some money, or cash their paycheck before they were shipped to Vietnam.

Li:

Yeah. So were you working forty hours a week, or did you—

01-00:07:33

ThiBeaux:

I worked forty hours a week and sometimes overtime. I worked a swing shift as a keypunch operator. That was at that time. So that was actually my first tour at the Oakland Army Base.

Li:

And do you remember, were there protestors about the war at the army base?

01-00:07:53

ThiBeaux: Not at the army base. You didn't see a lot of protesters. But most of the protesters were actually downtown. So in those days, in the sixties and the seventies, the military had a building called the Induction Center at 1515 Clay Street. The Induction Center no longer exists anymore, but I think that is where the Elihu State Building is located. Anyway, at the Induction Center is where civilians would go for enlistment, or to take their physical examination for active military duty.

Li: Okay. So that's where they would have protests, is down there?

01-00:08:36

ThiBeaux: Yes! That's where they had protestors, and that's where some of the men and women, they would go down there and they'd have signs and pickets and have protest marches or demonstrations. And then one time they had some women that went down to the Induction Center and burned their bras and waved protest banners. Because you've got to remember, historically we are going into the seventies and especially young females are just beginning the women's liberation movement. So, for whatever reasons, civilians would always hold protest or demonstration rallies in front of the Induction Center Building at 1515 Clay Street, Oakland.

Li: So that's where all the activity would happen?

01-00:09:10

ThiBeaux: Yeah. Yeah. Definitely during the 1960s and 1970s.

Li: Must've been crazy being in the Bay Area in the late sixties.

01-00:09:15

ThiBeaux: Oh, it was— As I recall, historically, in the Bay Area it was an exciting time because you had hippie or flower children who were protesting or demonstrating at UC Berkeley about freedom of speech, equal rights and the Vietnam War. And over at San Francisco State University, students were protesting about their civil rights being violated and San Francisco's refusal to implement an ethnic studies department.

Also during that era folks had a lot of good clean fun activities to do. You did not have a lot of gangs. Well, there have always been gangs, I guess, throughout history, but you didn't have what you have now, like drive-by shootings and heinous crimes. So it was a lot of fun, just a lot of clean fun here in the Bay Area. And at that time, you had Playland at the beach, which was built I believe either in the 1920's or 1930's.

Li: Where was that?

01-00:09:59

ThiBeaux: That was over in San Francisco, at Ocean Beach. When we were kids— It was called Playland at the Beach, and had a roller coaster, a fun house, Ferris

wheel and a roller skating rink, bumper cars, carnival games. Playland was like Santa Cruz beach except it was on a smaller scale.

Li: And where was that? Near Fort Mason or—

01-00:10:20

ThiBeaux: Mm-mm. It was right at the beach, at the— What do you call that?

Li: Oh, the Cliff House area?

01-00:10:26

ThiBeaux: Yes. If you went all the way down Geary Street, and then you pass the Cliff House, and you would see it. It was like a big fair.

Li: Oh, wow.

01-00:10:35

ThiBeaux: Again, it wasn't as large as Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, but it was large enough.

Li: Same idea, just smaller scale?

01-00:10:42

ThiBeaux: Uh-huh. And then they used to have the laughing woman. And people would stand out there and you'd look at her for a couple minutes and you would laugh at her. Then they had this one, a ride that you would slide down. And it was like a round disc table. And you'd get on that and you had to see who could stay on there the longest. And it would be going around, and the next thing you know—*whoop!* You could slide off the disc table and land on the floor.

Li: And so when did that close down? Do you remember?

01-00:11:10

ThiBeaux: I think that closed down sometime in the seventies. I'm not for certain. But I know when my kids were coming up, it was not there. In the eighties.

Li: So then in 1967, you left the base. Where did you go from there?

01-00:11:27

ThiBeaux: God, this is like an autobiography, huh? Well, from there, where did I work? I worked for the state of California for a minute, doing keypunch. Because in those days, if you had keypunch skills, you were real marketable. It's the same as like computers. But it was different, a different concept, because you used the cards.

Li: So what made you leave the base? Was it just—

01-00:11:52

ThiBeaux: I think I just kind of got tired of seeing {inaudible} [mic noise] the vets coming back, and you'd hear the war stories. And then they were talking about body bags and stuff like that. So for me, it was that. In those days, I was kind of like really happy-go-lucky. I didn't have any kids, I was single and care-free. And so then I left there, and then I went and worked for the state of California, doing keypunch. And then I met my husband. And so then I married in 1968.

Li: Okay. And did you stay in Oakland, then, for this whole period?

01-00:12:33

ThiBeaux: I've been here pretty much all my life, except for two times when I left.

Li: So then you went back to the base—

01-00:12:47

ThiBeaux: Okay. So then what happened was I got married and I had my son, the little one up there on the right. My son is 38 years old. Do you want to see the pictures?

Li: Sure, yeah.

01-00:13:03

ThiBeaux: I married in 1968, and I have two children from that marriage. And so my husband worked at the bus company, for AC Transit. And so we lived in different parts of Oakland. Yes, we lived in a rented house in North Oakland and then we bought a house on 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue. And then we stayed there for almost two years; then we bought a house up in the hills. And then they had a bus strike. You probably weren't even born, AC Transit had a bus strike in 1974. Yes, that was the year my daughter was born. And so then we kind of had some hard financial times, so then we moved down to the flatlands again. And so then we separated. And so then I went into the service.

Li: Okay. So what did you join?

01-00:14:14

ThiBeaux: United States Army.

Li: Yeah, sure.

01-00:14:17

ThiBeaux: And the same year that my daughter was born—

Li: 1974?

01-00:14:21

ThiBeaux: Uh-huh. So then my husband, we kind of agreed that—he was okay with it—I was going to go in into the Army and get some GI benefits.

Li: So did you join the army?

01-00:14:34

ThiBeaux: Yes.

Li: Is that what you joined? Okay.

01-00:14:36

ThiBeaux: I was Regular Army.

Li: And you said your family had a military background.

01-00:14:39

ThiBeaux: Right. Yes, we had a military background.

Li: Your father was in the army?

01-00:14:44

ThiBeaux: My father was in the army. And then what influenced me to go in the army, I had a first cousin—she was really very beautiful—her name was Paulette. And I thought she had everything going for her. She was born in '41. And she went into the Army. And it changed her life, and she got to travel. And then she was telling me you could go in to the service with children, which that is true. At that time, a female soldier could have her children live with her at her duty station, so Paulette went in 1974—and then I went in in '76. I went in as she was getting out. So she got out on Disability. But in the mean time, it was a whole different experience for me.

Li: Yeah?

01-00:15:29

ThiBeaux: Yes. The husband had the kids, and then my mother helped out. And I first went to Fort McClellan, Alabama. Well, first, wait, let me back up. I first went down to the induction center, which was 1515 Clay. You go to the Induction Center for testing. So I was in at the tail end of the Vietnam War. I took the test like that December of '76, or November. The recruiter kept saying, "When are you going to go in?" I said, "Well, I don't know." AT that time the Army had what was called the deferred program. So I took the test in December 1976 and then got sworn into the Army in February of '76. And so I said, "Well—" I was dragging my feet and I'm saying, "Well, is this the right thing to do?" So he said, "Well, you won't ever regret it. You'll get benefits," and this and that. Because I was of that age when I realized that it's good to have looks—I'm not an ugly person—but it's also important to have brains. And then you've got to remember, too, that this was during the women's lib movement. I was a women's libber, but I was not on the extreme end. I wasn't one of those women that— When I went in the Army, I didn't want to be on the front line, none of that. And it wasn't important to me. Like women wanted to be CEOs of companies; that wasn't important to me. I was the part of the women's lib where equal pay for equal work. Okay. So

anyhow, to make a long story short, I left in April 1976 and went to Fort McClellan, Alabama, and I did my basic training at Fort McClellan.

Li: Was that the first time you'd been to the South?

01-00:17:30

ThiBeaux: Oh, no, no, no, no. No, my mother's people are from the South. So I'd been to Texas as a kid and I'd been to Louisiana as a kid, as a child and a young person. So that was not the first time I'd been to the South. And so with the basic training, though, it was— You want me to tell that part of the story?

Li: Yeah, I'd be curious to hear about basic training.

01-00:17:54

ThiBeaux: So the basic training part, it was different—Fort McClellan was basic training. So my cousin, she kind of prepared me a little bit. She said it wasn't all that bad. And so I've always been physically in shape, pretty active. So when I went to school, it was in the days when PE, physical education was required. You didn't get out of P.E. unless you had asthma, you had some physical ailment that a doctor would sign off. So I played tennis, basketball, all of that. And I always jogged, I always exercised. The Army paid my airfare to Alabama. Also, I had never been in a helicopter. So I had to leave out of San Francisco, so I went to Oakland. No, I went to—I'm sorry—Berkeley. They had a helicopter pad. Got on the helicopter, flew over to San Francisco. I'm saying, "Man! Wow!" Got on the plane and flew into Atlanta, GA, and at the Atlanta airport the Army had a bus to drive the two hours to Ft. McClellan, Anniston, Alabama. Now, you've got to remember, this is in the days when it was kind of like pro-military in the South. So when we got to the Atlanta airport, they have a USO section, and you just go in there and wait until all the females came from other states. Women were coming from different parts of the United States. The USO staff load us on Army buses—it was about three buses. And we women get on the bus, and it's about ten o'clock at night when we get to Fort McClellan. The three buses are met by this little short drill sergeant. Drill sergeants always wear those Smokey the Bandit hats, like Texas Ranger hats. Anyway, the drill sergeant gets out and he says—I never will forget this. So we get off the bus and we're walking kind of slow and the drill sergeant says, "What do you think this is?" He says, "This is not the Holiday Inn." He says, "Hurry it up, you have 15 minutes to eat, and then we're going to take you ladies to your barracks." So it's ten o'clock at night. So we go in there to the mess hall, or the dining hall. We go in there and anything you want to eat, they had. Hamburgers, sandwiches and hot dogs. But I mean for a snack, they had pie and cakes. So we're sitting up there, la-di-dah, and we're eating and talking, and they said fifteen minutes, right? So we're still eating and talking, right? So this female drill sergeant comes in, she says, "I said *fifteen minutes!*" She said, "This is not the Holiday Inn." She said, "Pack it up and move it out." [laughs] So that was our first experience.

That's when we knew the sergeants were not playing and we were not in the civilian world anymore.

Li: You're no longer in the real world; you're in the military.

01-00:21:02

ThiBeaux:

You are United States government property, [laughs] Uncle Sam's army. So we go outside and we got on the bus, and then they took us to our barracks. So it was late a night; we couldn't see a lot of stuff. So then they got us and then they did a little orientation. They were nice to us for about a week. So then they told us, "You can not write home." We couldn't write home for— Basic training, in those days, was two months. You could not write home for a couple of weeks, three weeks, couldn't receive any mail. No television, no telephone. Okay. So I was Charlie Company. So anyhow, so what happens is, after the week, the honeymoon was over, because they had to outfit you with your military uniform. We were getting up at six. By the second week the drill sergeant said, "You will be getting up at four o'clock in the morning." And so lo and behold, we got up at four o'clock in the morning. We ran. We started off running half a mile. Before we left basic training we were up to running about three miles, every morning? Before you have breakfast. Then you get back at six o'clock, then you go and have chow, or you have breakfast. And so then what they would do is feed us this delicious breakfast: bacon, eggs, sausages, cereal, biscuits, fruit, yogurt. The Army fed us women very well.

And so the drill sergeant during the first week at basic training would weigh all the ladies. In those days, I weighed between 145 and 150. And so when I got there I was like 150, which was good for my height. I've kind of declined now, but at that time, I was like five-five and a quarter. But they could always make it five-six, so that you could be comparable to your weight. So they said, "Okay, yeah, no problem." So I was eating bacon and stuff like that. So at the end of the second week the drill sergeant weighed me, they said, "Aw, trainee you're 155!" They said, "You've got to knock it down. For your age and height, you're supposed to be weighing 148; we'll go with 150." So I had to go on a lightweight diet. So what they would do is, in the hallway outside your company— A company's a big room and it had forty beds in it. And you were separated into a squad. So a company is forty people. A battalion is 200 people, whether it's a man or a woman, right? So 200 people is a battalion and then a company is forty people, and a squad is ten people. Okay. And then they divide you off by ten people. Okay. And they divide you off with your lockers, your dress lockers and your foot locker. So anyhow, what happened they weighed us again after we were there a week, and so they outfitted you with everything, like your class A's, your fatigues. In those days, you didn't wear the jungle ones you wear now; they were just plain green fatigues. You got your shoes, everything. So, again, during the second week they weighed us in again and they said, "Ooh, gal, you gained five pounds." So any lady five pounds or more above your normal weight the drill sergeant put you on a Balloon Platoon diet. Oh, my. They knew how to get you, right? So they

posted your Balloon Platoon diet in the hallway. So ladies walking in the hallways saw your name on the Balloon Platoon diet and would laugh. I said to myself, “Oh no. Uh-uh. I’m getting my name off that.” And you know, people would laugh and joke, but I took the Balloon Platoon diet seriously because it was embarrassing.

Li: Yeah, how embarrassing.

01-00:24:37

ThiBeaux: Some people were embarrassed and some were not. So I said, “I’m getting my name off of that.” So anyhow, but by you being active and running— We ran *everywhere* at Ft. McClellan. So after six weeks I lost 25 pounds. I left basic training weighing 135 pounds. The first three weeks, we were supposed to run *everywhere*. It was an experience. So the second week I’m there, I’m saying, “*Dawg!*” I said, “Why did I *do* this?” Right?

Li: Yeah.

01-00:24:58

ThiBeaux: So anyway, next thing the drill sergeants shows us how to make our beds military style [laughs] And they’re not kidding. We used to hear these stories and we ladies think somebody’s making it up. But when you made your bed, you had to pull it real tight, so if the drill sergeant came in for a bed inspection and they dropped a penny on it, it’s supposed to bounce off. If it didn’t, they tore your bed up. So what I would do is—because I had to lose these pounds, and then plus I wanted to lose some more pounds—so what I did was in the morning, I would just have maybe a piece of fruit. No bacon, though. A piece of fruit. And then at lunchtime, I would load up on yogurt or maybe a salad or a sandwich, and then I would eat at dinner. So after we had dinner one evening, we went upstairs to our room, and they had pulled four beds apart. The mattresses were on the floor. And they didn’t call you maggot, they called you a trainee. Okay. Because I guess somebody complained and said that’s really too degrading. So the drill sergeant said, “*Trainee*, you didn’t make this bed right.” So we went up in the room and we saw all our beds— Not *our* beds, but they saw some beds and they said, “We told you trainees—” And it was like if one did something, the whole company suffered the consequences. So anyhow, I made it through basic training. So what I started doing after a while is, to tune stuff out, I’d just daydream. I’d pretend I’m someplace else, right? [laughs] So I still have this T-shirt here someplace, right? They nicknamed me Space Cadet. I would say, “I don’t care,” right? And so this one girl, young woman— I was twenty-seven. The oldest trainee that we had, we had two that were thirty-four, and then we had one that was like eighteen. And I learned that women enlisted in the Army for various reasons. So one girl went in because—she was from Oregon—because she had broke up with her boyfriend. And then she was sorry she was in the Army. Then there was this one woman, she was thirty-four. She was a beautician by trade. She came from Michigan. And I remembered her well because she had kids like me. So

she had three daughters. And some kind of way, she and her husband were going through a divorce, her husband got custody of the kids. And it just kind of devastated her. So she went into the service. But she was a real nice person. And then there was this one woman, her name was Cynthia, an Army trainee like me who was from Tennessee. And Cynthia went in the Army because during World War II, her mother was an Army nurse. So it was sort of like a family tradition. Cynthia was a very nice and generous person. So when we started getting mail, she was also the first person that received a care package, which meant parents or relatives or whoever would send cookies and goodies to Army trainees. So Cynthia's mother sent her a big care package. Am I too long?

Li: No, no, no.

01-00:27:56

ThiBeaux:

Okay. So the care package that Cynthia's mother sent her had panty hose, little plastic bottles the size of aspirin bottles that had chocolate chip and gum drop candies inside the bottles. Cynthia's mom also sent cookies and banana nut bread, even book mark and newspaper stories. The amazing thing is that Cynthia would share her care package with several of the women in our company. Cynthia stood out because in the family she was the only and had two brothers. Cynthia came from a privileged family by she was humble and say, "Gloria," or so and so, "do you want this?" But because me and Cynthia were in the same squad she would say, "ThiBeaux, do you want this?" She shared with me a lot of things and I thought that she was so wonderful, and I learned how to share. I thought I was a sharing person, but she was *really* sharing. Cynthia would give away half of whatever her mother sent her. And we did not know, because we couldn't read a newspaper or nothing, no TV, we didn't know—we'd been there three or four weeks—we didn't know that Martha Mitchell, married to Mr. Mitchell— We didn't know Martha Mitchell had died. This was during the Nixon administration. And her husband, you know how the courts indicted him. And she was one that was going to blow the whistle, too. In basic training us Army trainees did not know that Martha Mitchell had died until Cynthia's mother sent her a newspaper clipping from a Tennessee newspaper. During my basic training experience what I loved most was the esprit de corps and camaraderie that had developed amongst us Army trainees. Because if something happens to your buddy, then you're supposed to help your buddy out. I also enjoyed physical training, PT, because that was easy. And then we had to learn how to shoot an M-16. And we had PT three times a day. So we'd have it morning, lunch, and ran everyplace, and then we would have it in the afternoon. Then we had to go out on the rifle range. Drill sergeants called formation to go back to rifle range and oh, I was late this one time. I had gotten— what do you call that? Bronchitis. And so I had gotten bronchitis, and was not feeling well, and I said, "I'm tired today." So you had to be downstairs at twelve-thirty, after you eat lunch. So we had to be back downstairs at twelve-thirty. So I said, "I ain't running today. I'm not running down the stairs." So when I open up the door, Drill Sergeant Joe said,

“Where’s Private ThiBeaux?” And I said, “I’m here, sir.” So he said, “Oh, you’re five minutes late.” He said, “Get down and knock them out.” That meant that you had to do push-ups. Yeah. So then they said, “Permission to recover.” So I was all pissed off. So that morning, I didn’t qualify. That afternoon, I guess because I was mad, I qualified. [Li laughs] So I didn’t have to go back to the rifle range on day two. You had to out there like three days. So I finished mine the first day. And in one of the foxholes, there was a snake and this girl jumped out of it. But it was hilarious, some parts of it. I need to write a book. I’m supposed to be working on writing my book. So about the fifth week of basic, all the women in Charlie Company go on a bivouac. So bivouac is like camping. I’d been camping with my family before, but on this one, this was fun. So we had tents and you had to rough it. First they told us that we were going to have to use a cat hole. But the campsite really had a latrine and a shower stall about a quarter mile from camp. But then if you couldn’t make it there, then you went out in the woods and did your business. So that was fun. And then we came back and then we had to learn military protocol. And then you had to know CPR and all of that, and you had a dummy and you had to turn its head. And so then this Drill Sergeant Joe, he told us, he said, “When you first come here,” he said, “You will hate this place.” He said, “But when you leave, you will love it.” And in the end, we did love it. We all cried, because all of us Army trainees had bonded with each other and after graduating from basic training everybody was going different places, like to eastern, western states, Alaska, or overseas.

Li: Yeah. Where were they sending you?

01-00:32:51

ThiBeaux: I was transportation. So they sent me to Germany. I got to go to Frankfurt.

Li: Oh, wow.

01-00:32:57

ThiBeaux: Yeah, I went to Frankfurt. And then some people got to stay stateside. I wanted to stay stateside, but you’ve got to be careful what you sign. I signed up for in my military skill, instead of duty station. And so then {inaudible} [mic noise] {about my kid?}. I’m sorry. So I was overseas without my kids. And so then I had to come back to the States.

Li: So how long were you in Frankfurt for?

01-00:33:31

ThiBeaux: I was in Frankfurt for almost a year.

Li: Okay. And then were you able to get transferred back to—

01-00:33:38

ThiBeaux: To the States? Yes, but only temporarily because my husband was sick.

Li: {inaudible}

01-00:33:40

ThiBeaux: Yes. Oh, wait. {inaudible} Women's Army Corps, that's what WAC stands for. So they gave us that name back in the forties, during World War II.

Li: So you were trained to transport.

01-00:33:58

ThiBeaux: Uh-huh. When I left Alabama, then I went to Fort Eustis, Virginia. I went to the U.S. Army school of transportation and was trained to be a troop movement specialist.

Li: Okay. So by the time you went back to the Oakland Army Base in the eighties, you had worked— You were on the other side. You had been in the military, you had worked in the military.

01-00:34:22

ThiBeaux: Mm-hm. So I understood. I thought I brought my glasses in here. I guess I didn't. Anyhow, I'll show you. This is how you looked when you first went in.

Li: So as you look through that, how did you end up back in Oakland after being in Frankfurt?

01-00:34:51

ThiBeaux: Because this is where my family was. And when my husband got sick, the American Red Cross notified me that my husband was very sick and I needed to return to California.

Li: So you left the military.

01-00:35:03

ThiBeaux: Mm-hm. And then what I decided to do was, I had the GI Bill, so I went to school on the GI Bill. Went to Laney College and San Francisco State.

Li: So what year did you leave the military, then?

01-00:35:15

ThiBeaux: I left in '77. I didn't even get to stay quite two years. The Army gave me an honorable discharge because of family hardship.

Li: Okay. And then what'd you study at Laney College?

01-00:35:23

ThiBeaux: I was a social science major. And then I thought I wanted to teach, so when I went to San Francisco State, I majored in communication studies.

Li: Oh, okay.

01-00:35:33

ThiBeaux:

Yeah. And this is the bivouac thing. But I'll show you {me?}. We got to go to church on Sundays. And this is the Palace of Athena emblem. I still have my uniform. Okay. So these are all the people that were over us during our basic training—during our two months. Okay, then these are our drill sergeants. Everybody that wears a hat like this. And so this was our drill sergeant. Yeah, Drill Sergeant Jane. And then this other drill sergeant was real funny. When we were on our camping trip, he ate a frog. Now, you've got to remember the mentality of some of soldiers. Some of them just go out of the Green Berets and all of that, so— [laughs] And so what we found out is that our drill sergeant Jane didn't really want to be a drill sergeant, but if you come down on orders, from Washington, D.C., you can't refuse it. Yeah. And then there was a tough drill sergeant and he'd been on two tours to Vietnam, so this was like a picnic to him. So what happens is some woman, I guess because it was such a transition from civilian life, so— We'd been there like two weeks. And so there was one young woman, she wanted to hurt herself. So they got all the trainees up at four o'clock, and after we had breakfast they called a special formation. And we were standing out there. And so the tough drill sergeant gets up and in front of all of the trainees and says, "Yeah," he says, "I want your attention." He says, "I want to tell you something." He was real stern, so you knew he wasn't playing. He said, "I hear there's somebody that wanted to hurt herself." So he's walking around, right? And so he says, "Well, let me tell you something." So he pulls out this machete. "I've been two tours to Vietnam." He says, "So if there's anybody that wants to hurt themselves, step right up and I'll help you out." Everybody was quiet. Let me tell you, after that, nobody wanted to hurt themselves. [laughs]

Li:

Oh, my.

01-00:38:09

ThiBeaux:

The Army had tactics. They had their ways, right? But it was so funny because you should've seen him. We're young, women? So our eyes were bugged. And he says, "So if somebody wants to hurt themselves," he said, "Well, just step right up. I'll help you out," right?

Li:

Oh, man.

01-00:38:30

ThiBeaux:

Oh, yeah. So let me see.

Li:

So just to sort of keep moving along, so from Laney College, how did you end up at Oakland Army Base again?

01-00:38:42

ThiBeaux:

Okay. Well, this is me; I just wanted to show you. This is me.

Li:

Okay. All right. So young!

01-00:38:51

ThiBeaux:

Mm-hm, I was *young*! Looked like I was twenty-seven, but I was 29. That's me. And then I'll just show you this. Oh, wait. Okay. This is {Cynthia?}. She was so sweet. And let me see. {inaudible} [under breath] Oh, okay. And then this was my best friend. Trisha. She was from Syracuse, New York. So she was my best buddy. And then she was my good friend, Gloria. But we were in different squads. So she says, "If you want to make it out of this, you've got to have a buddy." So my buddy was Trisha. And she was the youngest, so that's why we called her Baby Trisha, because she was the youngest. She was like eighteen years old, a recent high school graduate.

Li:

Oh, wow.

01-00:40:09

ThiBeaux:

Mm-hm. So she would always come up to me and she would say—she was so sweet—she would say, "Well, ThiBeaux, what do you think about this issue?" In the military, everybody called each other by their last names, because you could have a lot of Sallies or a lot of Sues and Janes. So she would say, "Well, ThiBeaux, what do you think about so-and-so? What's your opinion?" She was just really sweet. Yeah. And so then here's me.

Li:

Oh, wow.

01-00:40:36

ThiBeaux:

Uh-huh. And then I think this picture is so classic. And then this is me. Yeah. And this is before they had it integrated. I mean integrated with the guys.

Li:

Right. So women trained separately from the men?

01-00:40:55

ThiBeaux:

Yes, absolutely. And so there was this one woman—where is she?—I could not be with her at all. Anyhow, her name was Paree. Oh, here she is. Anyhow, what would happen is, whenever I would be standing next to her, we would get the giggles. And I'd almost get in trouble by standing next to her. And then this is us on the rifle range. And then this is me, way over here. And so when we got our little yearbooks and the other trainees said, "You're in here a lot, ThiBeaux." I said, "Yes, I can't help it." Oh, and then this is us when we went on our camping trip. Oh, and this is me. Yes. The reason why we're all happy is because we had passed the marching and drill ceremony test.

Li:

Oh.

01-00:42:20

ThiBeaux:

Yes. Left face, about face and all of that. And then this is me right here. {inaudible} my little {inaudible}. {Now, you can look at these some other time?}. So anyhow, so that's that.

Li:

So then let's move forward. So when you were at Laney College, your plan was to teach, you said.

01-00:42:41

ThiBeaux: Yes, I had done social science, and I was going through the EOP program, because I was working part-time and I was a full-time student, I was raising my kids. And so then what happened is my advisor, he had recommended international studies. But I had an instructor that he spoke so eloquently, I wanted to be a speech teacher. And so then what happened is when I got to—I went a half a semester at UC Berkeley. And all they had was rhetoric. The writing part, not the speech part. So then I transferred to San Francisco State. And that's how I got into speech communication.

Li: Okay. And how did you end up back at the base, then, in—

01-00:43:27

ThiBeaux: In '85?

Li: Yeah.

01-00:43:29

ThiBeaux: I needed a job! [laughs] Well, actually, to really be honest, I had been in school from—let's see—from '77 to '81—it was four years—'82. So I had done some substitute teaching and tutoring. And I don't know if they had done the CBEST teaching test thing, but I was going to have to go back to school and get a teaching credential. And then my grandmother told me, because my kids are getting older now, so she told me, she said— My nickname is Dave. So Granny said, "Dave," she said, "You know what? You have yours." She said, "You need to concentrate on your children." And that was true, because their dad had died in 1980 of a heart attack. So it was just me. I had extended family, in terms of my family being supportive, but it wouldn't be fair for me to expect them to just watch my kids while I just went to school, like I'm just a carefree, single, no parent student.

Li: Right.

01-00:44:33

ThiBeaux: So I needed a job. And so that's how I got into the government. And it wasn't that difficult at that time, so I got in. Started first at HUD, and then transferred over to Oakland Army Base.

Li: Okay, so you were a civilian employee.

01-00:44:50

ThiBeaux: I was a civilian employee. I was a civilian employee, and worked in morale support—I got a job first in supply, and then they had an opening, which was like a promotion, to GS-5, as a recreation specialist. So I worked in what was called army family community services.

Li: And what would that involve?

01-00:45:17

ThiBeaux: And what that involved is— I was just at the recreation part of it. But what it does is, it provides resource and supportive services to military families and their dependents.

Li: So how many people were living on the base? How many families?

01-00:45:33

ThiBeaux: At that time, I'd want to say maybe about a hundred. Maybe a hundred. Maybe at the max—I don't know, they might have some records—maybe 150. But it was a good hundred.

Li: And how long would people live on the base?

01-00:45:48

ThiBeaux: Usually, it depends on your tour. A tour of duty means two years, four years or whatever. And again, it's diverse. Military is diverse. So you'd have some families that would be there maybe two years. There was this one family, they'd been there four years. Then they had some other families, some African American families that would maybe just do two years and then they'd get transferred someplace else. And some of them would do four years.

Li: Okay.

01-00:46:25

ThiBeaux: Yeah. So our command sergeant major, he was there— And you don't know how people manage to pull this, right? But he had been there, I want to say, maybe six years.

Li: Oh, wow.

01-00:46:40

ThiBeaux: Uh-huh. He was originally from Seattle. And so what he ended up doing was, he had maybe another two years, and he was going to retire. So they extended him.

Li: Okay.

01-00:46:57

ThiBeaux: Yeah, so that's how he ended up being there six years. But usually it's two years. And if you're lucky, you can do four years.

Li: And so what kind of things would you be doing?

01-00:47:08

ThiBeaux: Well, in army community services, what they do is they had somebody that was a counselor. Because it's not an unknown secret that military guys do have, whether it's alcohol— They have some type of drug abuse problem. And so they would have a counselor on site. All of this comes under army

community services, army family community services. Then they would have somebody that would help you with your budget. Oh, and then they had the ID section unit whereby military personnel would take dependent pictures for military ID purposes. And then, also if, say, your husband was overseas and you needed to get special permission to go to the commissary. Because things were always cheaper on base than in civilian life. Then [mic noise] this was sort of like a quiet thing—you had some military families who did not live in military housing which was free on base, but instead lived on the economy in civilian housing, which caused the military family to have financial problems, and eventually the family had to get aid from the county, such as food stamps or something like that to help supplement their military income. Because the soldier and his family were living on the civilian economy.

Li: Right. So what kinds of things were you working on?

01-00:48:44

ThiBeaux: Well, my specific job was to work with the little children. [laughs] Not the little children, but instead I worked with military dependent youth. Some people refer to them as Army brats, and in the recreation side of morale support we dealt with youth five to 18 years of age. As recreation specialists we planned recreational activities like t-ball, bowling events, talent and fashion shows, and take the kids on field trips such as the zoo, Great America, and roller skating.

Li: About how many kids would be participating in these things?

01-00:49:41

ThiBeaux: I want to say we'd have anywhere from twenty-five to thirty-five, maybe forty kids, depending on how many military families were stationed at Oakland Army Base during a yearly basis.

Li: So you would come up with ideas and programs and implement them?

01-00:49:59

ThiBeaux: Yes, as a recreational specialist I would coordinate with the base librarian and have a homework and reading club for the youth which happened every day after school. Understand that the library was in the same building as the recreation center. So kids could use the library to do their homework and the activity room in the recreation center to play pool, arcade games, table tennis and bingo. On the weekends recreation would have movie night or pizza night on Friday nights or sleepovers, and on Saturday mornings sometimes we would have pancake breakfast.

And then we would plan Reno trips for the military soldier and spouse and single soldiers. We also planned bingo night for the military family, because it's morale support branch duty to have some activities that would include the dependent youth and the military person and their spouse and family.

Li: The whole family?

01-00:50:53

ThiBeaux: The whole family. Like bingo night, or ice cream social or a potluck night might include the whole family.

Li: What was the biggest challenge working with army kids? Was there anything specific about—

01-00:51:03

ThiBeaux: Mm-hm. Just like regular civilian kids, they would have— How's the best way to describe this? For lack of a better word, they would have emotional or behavior problems because their soldier parent was always getting a new duty station assignment every two or three years. Remember for the adult soldier and spouse military way of life was their livelihood, it was how they got money or a paycheck. So the soldier and spouse knew that every two or three or four years the soldier and his or her family would have to uproot and move someplace else. So if the military family left Oakland, it's not to say that the family is going to go up to Vallejo or Los Angeles. The family might go off to Arizona, they might go to Alabama or Georgia. So for the military kids being uprooted meant that they did not have stability. But it might be stability for the parents because they knew Uncle Sam was going—as long as they did everything by the book—they are going to get a paycheck. When the family gets to their new base, they're going to have housing, if they choose to live on the military, but they also have the choice to live on the economy. But military housing is free, and all the family is responsible for is paying their water bill, and keeping their housing area neat and clean.

Li: So that was a choice, and some people chose not to live on base, who could have.

01-00:52:26

ThiBeaux: Absolutely. Absolutely. But if the family lives on base they don't pay PG&E, they don't pay rent, they only pay their water bill and phone bill.

Li: So was there a section that was family housing that was on base?

01-00:52:38

ThiBeaux: Mm-hm, yeah. All that's torn down right now. I don't know if you'd be able to get pictures of it or whatever, but it's all torn down. And the military housing looked like—when I showed you in that book, it looked something like that.

Li: Like the barracks at your base {inaudible}

01-00:52:52

ThiBeaux: Mm-hm yes. It looked something like that, but really, more apartment-style. This almost looks like something that you'd see on college. But Oakland base housing looks like something that you'd see if you're driving down West

Oakland and you looked at Acorn Housing. But it was really nice. And kind of modern. Looked like it was built in the fifties or the sixties. And the Oakland Army Base had a theater.

Li: Oh, really? A movie theater?

01-00:53:19

ThiBeaux: Mm-hm. They had their own little community. They had a gym. The gym was for adults, as well as for the youth. In 1997 the base had a brand new gym, swimming pool, racquetball built. The base also had a church, PX, commissary, night club and pre-school.

Li: So the kids, they would go to school.

01-00:53:35

ThiBeaux: Yes, the kids would get bussed to school.

Li: Did they go to Oakland public schools?

01-00:53:38

ThiBeaux: They went to Oakland public schools.

Li: But then they would come back and have this life on the military base.

01-00:53:42

ThiBeaux: Yes. On the military base. And so that's why morale support tried to provide a positive quality of life for dependent youth. My work schedule was usually, say maybe twelve to eight, one to nine, something like that. Is it okay if I drink tea?

Li: Yeah, yeah, you're fine.

01-00:53:56

ThiBeaux: So it'd be something like that.

Li: Yeah. So what would an average day be like, then, for you?

01-00:54:02

ThiBeaux: An average day is when I would get to work, well, there were no children there because they were at school. Unless it's summertime. So the average day would be to come in to my office, do paperwork. I had a supervisor and then I'd have to report to him. And so he'd say, "Well, what activities are planned for today?" I would share my weekly and monthly calendar with my boss. Staff always planned activities at least two weeks in advance. So you'd come in and say, "Okay, well,—” Say it's the first of the month, and usually we might have a theme for my monthly calendar. For example, October in Halloween activities. Or it's March so it's t-ball signup day," blah-blah-blah-blah. Or, "Tonight we're going to have—bingo night." Or the kids are going to reading club at the library. I always just kind of touch base with my

supervisor, tell him what activities are planned, and do my paperwork. And then I would kind of set up for whatever activity is planned for the kids. So, say it was going to be arts and crafts, or maybe it was homework night. So you'd go in, you'd get some snacks, and we were able to get snacks from the commissary, so that wasn't a big deal because we were civilian employees of the Department of Defense and we were providing an enrichment program for the military dependent youth.

To be correct, the military bases, which include Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines, fall under the umbrella of the Department of Defense.

Li: But you were doing services for the military.

01-00:55:24

ThiBeaux: Correct, for military families who were under the category of Department of Defense and the U.S. Army.

Li: So did you have to answer to both military and civilian supervisors?

01-00:55:30

ThiBeaux: No, no, I mostly answered to civilian supervisors. And if it was something special, then you could answer to the military ranking.

Li: But do you feel like your military background helped at all, in terms of understanding these families better or—

01-00:55:43

ThiBeaux: I think it did. Yes, absolutely. I really do. I think it helped me to understand, in terms of whenever their kids would have behavior problems, I was able to kind of relate to kids, parents and homelife in terms of the drug abuse issues. I didn't have a drug problem; don't misunderstand. But in terms of kids trying to juggle living in the civilian world and the military world at the same time and yet be accepted by civilian teenager.

Li: Right. You could understand the strain?

01-00:56:08

ThiBeaux: I could understand the strain. And then here, a lot of the military youth are not from California. So you could understand, maybe they had to go through a culture shock. And they'd have arguments. I'm not going to, quote, label it "domestic problems," but they would have, I guess, spousal problems or whatever. And it could spill over and then the children had to deal with it or whatever, [mic noise] and so then they— Some of the kids had anger issues. Like I said, they have behavior problems. But we recreation specialists tried to make the recreation center a safe and fun place for the youth. Also if a youth was too emotional we referred the child to a counselor.

Li: Yeah. How'd you feel about the work you were doing there?

01-00:56:53

ThiBeaux: I loved it.

Li: Yeah?

01-00:56:56

ThiBeaux: I loved it. But it had been targeted for base closure which resulted in layoffs in every department on the base.

Li: Did the families move off the base before the base closed?

01-00:57:09

ThiBeaux: Oh, yes, everybody moved off. And then I think it officially closed— Let's see, in '92 I was working for Health and Human Services. I think it officially closed in '93, somewhere during that time period.

Li: And when did you stop working there?

01-00:57:30

ThiBeaux: I stopped working there in '88.

Li: In '88?

01-00:57:33

ThiBeaux: Right. Yes, I stopped working there in '88.

Li: So you said there was a sense that the base was like its own little community.

01-00:57:44

ThiBeaux: Its own little community. What they had is— The commissary which was your base grocery store. You had PX, which was the same as, for lack of a better word, like a JC Penney's. So you could go in there to the PX and buy things cheaper. And you could buy import items. So you'd go into the PX and buy watches and china. They had clothes and shoes. Presidio had the largest and best PX, then Oakland Army Base, but the Oakland PX has cameras like, say, Cannon, or CD players. During lunch break civilians would pop into the PX, buy snacks or whatever. The soldiers at the PX would BS with folks and everybody would just be laughing and having fun socializing. At the PX, or the Class Six store, which is a small store where the Army sells beer and wine to soldiers and government civilians. Then you had the club, The Crosswinds club, where soldiers and civilian government employees would go for lunch or happy hour.

Li: And that was like a bar?

01-00:58:56

ThiBeaux: Yes, it was a night club with a bar, it had a dance floor, so people would go in there for relaxation and social time. And you had a lot of people that decided they wanted to retire in this area. I mean military people. And so you'd go in

there and BS, have fun, have drinks. They'd have a happy hour. Those were in the days when they had good happy hours, so you'd go in there and you could have a happy hour with discount drinks and snacks. The Crosswinds Club was just a good, fun place. And we had a church. So I was detailed to work in the church.

Li: What denomination was the church? Or was it—

01-00:59:30

ThiBeaux: It was just nondenominational, just a Christian church. So say this was where the recreation center is, and the library, which was in the same building. And the recreation center also had a stage. So if you wanted to do a play, whatever, you had access to a stage. Well, if you walk out the back door and then walk across a small parking lot, then this is where the church or chapel with a small steeple was located.

Li: So right there?

01-00:60:15

ThiBeaux: Mm-hm. And then over on this side, then you had a patch of grass. And then across the street from the library and recreation center on this street was the movie theater and next to the theater was the Oakland Army Base Hotel.

Li: Oh, okay.

01-00:60:28

ThiBeaux: Uh-huh, all bases have hotels. Well, I don't know what it's like now, but in those days, they had all hotels. So in those days, you could pay six, seven, eight dollars a night for rooms, versus paying \$20 or \$25 at a civilian hotel.

Li: Wow.

01-00:60:40

ThiBeaux: That's cheap.

Li: Yeah.

01-00:60:41

ThiBeaux: That is cheap!

Li: So people would stay, then, on base after they got off work, and go have a drink or—

01-00:60:47

ThiBeaux: Yes, they'd go have a drink at the Crosswinds and some people who lived outside of Alameda County would sometimes stay over night at the Oakland Army Base Hotel.

Li: Do some shopping?

01-00:60:50

ThiBeaux: Yes, some folks would do some shopping, uh-huh. Because you've got to remember, if you're DOD—that's Department of Defense—you could shop at the base PX. Now, I can't recall for sure about the commissary, but I do know we could use the PX. So people would go by watches, or some unusual import item that they liked.

Li: Wow, so it was a fully—

01-00:61:18

ThiBeaux: It was a community. It was like a little village. It was a little village, yeah. Oh, and you had a baseball field, so the kids would play t-ball, football, and soccer. And the base had a bowling alley, a craft shop, automobile hobby shop, and a dispensary and a big cafeteria by Building #1.

Li: Oh, really?

01-00:61:34

ThiBeaux: Yes, the base had a bowling alley. I showed you the building where the recreation center and library was located, and the church was behind the recreation center. Well, a quarter of a block from the library is the bowling alley. It would be right here. And then across from the bowling alley was the dispensary.

Li: Oh, okay. And then where would the family housing be, relative to all these {inaudible}

01-00:62:24

ThiBeaux: Over here. Military family housing was about half a block from the movie theater.

Li: Okay, so nearby.

01-00:62:26

ThiBeaux: Uh-huh. Housing was walking distance to the library and recreation center, the church, and the Army Family Services building.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 08-26-2008.mp3

Li: All right, so August 26, tape number two. Robin Li speaking with Davetta ThiBeaux. [different pronunciation] Davetta ThiBeaux.

02-00:00:22

ThiBeaux: Davetta's fine.

Li: {inaudible} California. Davetta's fine, okay. All right, so we were talking about the base and the sense of community that was there.

02-00:00:29

ThiBeaux: Yeah, we also had a childcare center there, too.

Li: Okay. And so it sounds like for people who lived on the base, but also for people who worked on the base—

02-00:00:39

ThiBeaux: Yess. People who worked on the base were eligible to use the childcare. When you asked if I was supervised by a civilian, yes. And then the civilian supervisor had to report to a colonel that was in charge of a base department. For whatever reason, the way it works on a military base is that you have a civilian section supervisor, and then you also have a military person that oversees the whole department, which includes military personnel.

Li: Oh, I see. So the military was kind of the overarching group in charge of the whole base.

02-00:01:16

ThiBeaux: Correct.

Li: And so they would oversee the civilian operations {inaudible}

02-00:01:19

ThiBeaux: Absolutely, yes. But you still had to have both, because the Department of Defense employs civilians. So you'd have a civilian part, like you said, that was supervising civilians; but the overarching, in terms of hierarchy, was the military, personnel staff, such as your majors, colonels and generals.

Li: What military rank would've overseen—

02-00:01:43

ThiBeaux: We had a colonel.

Li: You had a colonel?

02-00:01:44

ThiBeaux: Uh-huh, lieutenant colonel that oversaw all of Army Family Services and Morale Support which includes the bowling alley, the gym, a recreation center, library and childcare center. See, the reason why it was called the morale support unit is because the morale support branch keeps up the morale, happiness, emotional stability of the troops, soldier and his family.

Li: Right. So this was kind of the late years of the Cold War. Was there a lot of military people coming in and out?

02-00:02:20

ThiBeaux: You still had military people coming in and out in the eighties, yeah. But it was not as much as it was in the sixties and the seventies.

Li: Yeah, I was going to ask you, how did the feeling of the base compare in the eighties, compared with the late sixties?

02-00:02:37

ThiBeaux: You didn't have that many military personnel stationed there, like you had during the 1960s and 1970s. Because in the 1960s and 1970s a lot of single soldiers were stationed at the base so in 1980s mostly a lot of families were stationed there because it is an easy duty station.

Li: Yeah. And how were relationships with Oakland, City of Oakland, and the army base? Would the Oakland police come on base if there was a problem?

02-00:03:06

ThiBeaux: Oh, no, we always had MPs. The base had their own military police and handled their own law enforcement regarding soldiers.

Li: So everything happened internally.

02-00:03:10

ThiBeaux: Everything was internal. Everything. Again, like I said, the Oakland Army Base was its own little world.

Li: Wow.

02-00:03:18

ThiBeaux: Yes. Now, just like whatever you see in a movie, if a military person was involved in some type of incident, we'll just say in downtown Oakland, that involved the police, the civilian police would get involved, but ultimately, the incident report would also be turned over to the military police. That's my understanding. Unless it was something real severe.

Li: Right, right. Okay.

02-00:03:51

ThiBeaux: Yes, the base had a good rapport with the city of Oakland. Because there was—I didn't know this, but the morale support belonged to the Oakland Chamber of Commerce. And because I worked in—I was invited to special events sponsored by the Oakland chamber of commerce.

Li: Oh, really?

02-00:04:06

ThiBeaux: Yeah. So because I worked in recreation, I was able to attend a ribbon cutting ceremony for American Eagle. American Eagle Airlines opened here in Oakland, at the Oakland airport, and they had a ribbon cutting ceremony in 1987. So I was able to go and represent Morale Support for the base.

Li: Oh, wow.

02-00:04:27

ThiBeaux: Yes, myself along with 20 other Oakland chamber members boarded the plane from Oakland and flew to Reno, Nevada. We had lunch and then got back on the plane and flew back to Oakland, all in one day. I think that is called a turn-around trip. It was fun.

Li: Oh, wow.

02-00:04:34

ThiBeaux: Yes, that was a great and exciting experience.

Li: So was your pay check, then, from the Chamber of Commerce? No. Who was—

02-00:04:42

ThiBeaux: No, no, no. What I'm saying is that I was an employee of Oakland Army Base, and the base was a member of the chamber of commerce. So for the airplane event I was a guest of the Oakland chamber of commerce and the plane trip was free.

Li: Oh, I see.

02-00:04:46

ThiBeaux: Let me clarify. The Oakland Army Base, or I should say morale support, had a membership with the chamber of commerce for Oakland, CA, and morale support for the Oakland Army Base paid annual membership dues to the chamber of commerce.

Li: Oh, wow. Was there anything else about the army base that I haven't asked about, during that time, that you could think of?

02-00:05:05

ThiBeaux: No, it's just that the base was a fun and exciting place at the time before it closed. It was a great time and the base was a great place to work. And again, like I said, civilians would be involved with some of the activities that morale support would sponsor. The guy above me, my supervisor, Cliff, coordinated the adult activities. Like bus trips to Reno. At that time, that was a big thing, bus trips to Reno. Or sometimes if they wanted to do something really special, they would do family bus trips to Disneyland or family ski trips.

Li: Oh, wow.

02-00:05:51

ThiBeaux: So we did activities like that.

Li: Oh, how nice.

02-00:05:52

ThiBeaux: Yeah. And then through our department, we would also, during the summer, we would do a field trip to Great America.

Li: Oh, really?

02-00:06:02

ThiBeaux: Mm-hm.

Li: How nice. And so were most of the kids teenagers, or was it a range of—

02-00:06:13

ThiBeaux: I would say most of the kids were teenagers. I'm going to show you some of the pictures so you'll get a sense of the age and diversity of the youth living at the Oakland Army Base when I worked in the morale support branch.

Li: Okay. All right. I'm going to stop the tape here.

[End of Interview]