

WORLD WAR II ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS SPENCER RESEARCH LIBRARY, KANSAS COLLECTION

Interviewee: Major Harvey Bayless (retired)

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Location: Bayless residence, Overland Park, Kansas

Interviewer: Deborah Dandridge, Field Archivist

BAYLESS INTERVIEW NO. 1

Tape 1, side 1 begins.

DEBORAH DANDRIDGE: --third 2011. And this is an interview with Mr. Harvey—Major Harvey Bayless in Overland Park, Kansas, in his home. Thank you very much, Mr. Bayless, for your willingness to participate in this interview. We'll begin with some very general questions here. Carol Burns is also our program assistant, she's also here. Okay. Before you joined the military, during World War II, where were you living and what were you doing?

HARVEY BAYLESS: I was drafted in the military in May of 1943. At that time I was working as a radar mechanic in Boston, Massachusetts. We had one of—we had a single African American team servicing the SCR-270 radar, which picked up the Japanese over in Pearl Harbor, but nobody paid any attention to it. And I got drafted from there and I went into military service.

DANDRIDGE: How did you happen to get to Boston in that capacity that you were working in?

BAYLESS: Well, when I got out of high school at sixteen, I went to a technical institute at Wilberforce studying radio technology. And—it was a two year course, but I only stayed there a little over a year because once I got eighteen I had enough and six months experience radio technology. I joined the Army Signal Corps as a radio mechanic. And because I had some formal training in radio technology, they sent me to a radar school. At that time we only had one African American team, we had two engineers and three technicians. And I went to school there at Lexa(??) Signal Depot.

DANDRIDGE: So where were you born?

BAYLESS: I was born in Frankfurt, Ohio. Frankfurt, Ohio is a small community, about nine hundred people. It's twelve miles north of Chillicothe, Ohio, which was the first capital of Ohio or about forty miles southwest of Columbus, little town. I was born and brought up there, I went to school, high school there.

DANDRIDGE: When the war broke out, after Pearl Harbor, what was the general view in your community? How did they view the war?

BAYLESS: I can't really discuss that because I was in a technical school. At that time, I presume, everybody was willing to serve, find some way to be of benefit or be of service to the nation.

DANDRIDGE: How did you view the outbreak of the war?

BAYLESS: That's a loaded question. I was—I had a job and I had gone through this—But, again, my job was predicated on the fact that I had taken formal training in radio technology and also I had gone to this radar school to become a radar mechanic, to service radar equipment along the coast of the United States, so it was a job. I would have been contented at that time to just stay on that job.

DANDRIDGE: So did you have any other views toward the war itself?

BAYLESS: No, you didn't, you knew that down the road that they would be calling on individuals to help. Now, if I had been a Caucasian, our work was so important that practically everybody, civilians, were given exemptions to service this equipment. But, again, if I went into service in the military, it was not an integrated military. So when I got drafted they said, We're going to send you to a group that's being formed to service communications equipment for the black fighter group, and I joined them up in Oscoda, Michigan in June of 1943.

DANDRIDGE: What were race relations like in the community you grew up or the place where you were in Boston at that time?

BAYLESS: Well, that's a good question. Race, in a little town in Ohio, it's where you are. Southern Ohio is more prejudiced than Northern Ohio. But again, my father, he ran a lumber yard, he supervised a group of whites in the lumber yard and he was part of the business community, see? But again, that didn't mean that we went—I never joined the Boy Scouts 'cause the Boy Scouts was tied in with the churches and we went to an African American Episcopal church, we didn't go to the white churches, but we went to an integrated school. And when I went to Lexa Signal Depot to go to radar school, I ran into one little problem there, I—we had to go a distance of twelve miles from where I lived in Lexington to the air depot. In Lexington the city buses were integrated, but if you took a Greyhound bus outside the city it was segregated. And I'll never forget one day there wasn't a seat and I sat beside a southern person from Mississippi and he told the bus driver, "This can't happen." So they brought the police there and they beat me up. But, again, the idea was there, this fellow's probably a trouble maker so they'll say, We'll take care of the damage to your body, we just wanted to get you out of the area, you don't fit. But, again, that was a job at that time there was no other place I could go. So I agreed to accept what they called damages to my body and stay in Lexington 'cause that was the only school there was. I had to be realistic. And we had an African American crew, but once we finished our training they finally decided to send us to Boston, and when we went to Boston they integrated. They just said we don't have an all-black, two engineers, three technicians, we're just going to put you up with the teams that were there, white teams, and I felt comfortable.

DANDRIDGE: So, go back to this—why did you, why did they attack you?

BAYLESS: Well, I would, the situation was in going interstate blacks were supposed to fill the bus from the back forward. There wasn't any seats, so when I got on the seat the only seat was in the middle of the bus, adjacent to this white Southerner and I sat down, I'm paying for a seat. I'm not trying to change the concept in the area. When you go into an area like this, I'm not a trailblazer, I'm just-- _____(??) survivor so I'm going to be treated as if I'm any individual.

DANDRIDGE: So when they attacked you, then what did they do? Did they take you off the bus?

BAYLESS: Yeah, wasn't nothing but taking off the bus, they carried me out of the bus. I had been, you know, blood was flowing from my face and my body. In fact the—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Who attacked you?

BAYLESS: Police. They're statement was that I was attacking them, with a billy club; here I am, he's hitting me with a billy club and my head is ricocheting(??) from the base of the bus?

CAROL BURNS: Were you in uniform?

BAYLESS: No I was a civilian.

DANDRIDGE: This is before you were drafted.

BAYLESS: Yes. But, again, thanks we had Judge—You've heard of Judge Hastie, William Hastie?

DANDRIDGE: Yes, yes.

BAYLESS: All right. This individual in our team, one of our engineers was from Philadelphia and he knew Judge Hastie. So he contacted Judge Hastie and at that time before he decided to leave the Department of Defense, he was pointing out that we've got to enforce the—military leaders have got to step in and force equal rights when it was stated. So they went out of their way to, first, try to get me out of the community and, second, to say, Okay we'll take care of the damage. I never did really—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) When they say "take care of the damage" what does that mean?

BAYLESS: I was in the hospital for a day or two.

DANDRIDGE: So they paid for your medical _____(??)?

BAYLESS: (overlapping) Yes, yes.

DANDRIDGE: Okay. So were there any positive dimensions to race relations where you were or where—

BAYLESS: Well I had—There's always positive if you look for it. I met a fellow named Harvey Wally, a Caucasian, from upstate New York. I didn't know that I was going to be in upstate New York, but we got to be quite friends. But I really find that when you're in a southern community the relationships normally don't exist. You see this when you go into a place and you want to try on a hat or get a pair of shoes or something, your services are such—Or even go to the library; in Lexington, if you wanted to get a book, you had to go to black section and order the book and they'd ship it to you, but you couldn't go in and browse.

DANDRIDGE: Where did you live while you were in Lexington?

BAYLESS: I lived on the street in the black area. I was about couple of blocks—couple of doors down from Phyllis Wheatley YWCA and I ate meals there. But, again, I'm just trying to co-exist. At that time I was only eighteen years old, though I felt like I was quite mature for eighteen years old from the stand point of being involved in affairs—You know, you go into community, the first thing I did when I went to Lexington, I talked to the porter and I said, "Where is a good place for a person to get a room?" I went to—I knew that he would probably know the black community. But I'm going to tell you another story. When I got drafted they shipped us from—we went to Rome Air Depot in Rome, New York and they sent us, by mistake, to a white signal company in Columbia, South Carolina. All right, when we got down to Columbia we said, Bayless and Neal(??), another gentleman with me, reporting for duty. And they said, Well, we'll be there in fifteen or twenty minutes. Well then nobody showed up in fifteen or twenty minutes and I called again about an hour and a half later, and they said, We were there we didn't see you. They said, Would you stand in front of the post box, post office box outside. So we did. And when they came back, they thought they were going to be picking up two white soldiers, it was two blacks. They said, Oh, we made a mistake, said, Stay where you are, and they went back. That was—they had a troop carrier, they went back and got a troop carrier that had a canvas over it, cover it so that—and they took us out to the signal company.

DANDRIDGE: Cause they didn't want you to be seen?

BAYLESS: Didn't want to be seen. But when we got there, the commander, who was from Columbus, Ohio, he says, he gave us exam. "You guys are real talented we'll try to get you into this, there's a black signal corps being formed." And he says, "All you have to do is take your basic training here," and he assigned us to a black chemical warfare group and we took our basic training. And when we weren't training we would visit the two black women, female—what's the—Allen and then there's another black school there, in Columbia, there's two black female schools and we enjoyed it.

DANDRIDGE: Uh, yeah—

BAYLESS: We took our, when we got our six weeks training and then they shipped us from there up to Oscoda, Michigan where we joined the 1000th(??) Signal.

DANDRIDGE: So when you—

BAYLESS: (interjecting) That's all part of my story here.

DANDRIDGE: Okay. Well, let's kind of get into some of this—When you were drafted where did you respond to your draft notice? Do you remember?

BAYLESS: Sure. Fort Knox—no, wait a minute, isn't that awful—

DANDRIDGE: Well that's okay; we can just get that from your essay.

BAYLESS: Well where's my essay? Isn't that awful?

DANDRIDGE: That's okay. And while you're looking for that, what was it like when you first put on your uniform?

BAYLESS: Well, I've got a story on that one.

DANDRIDGE: All right. Let's hear that story. But that's okay.

BAYLESS: Okay. We went to a, it was right outside of Lexington—out at _____(??)—Well—

DANDRIDGE: What was it like when you put that uniform on?

BAYLESS: Let me give you an example. I was making about three thousand dollars a year back in 1943, which was a lot of money.

DANDRIDGE: (overlapping) That was good money.

BAYLESS: So when I found out I was going to go into service, I went to my tailor and had a gabardine, dress gabardines for enlisting in(??). So the first day I reported to duty, they said this fellow was out of uniform. So they took my uniform and put epaulets on it and one of the officers was wearing it the next day.

DANDRIDGE: But it was your uniform.

BAYLESS: Well, it was.

BURNS: It was too nice for you.

BAYLESS: Well they said you've got to have whatever they give you issue clothing.

DANDRIDGE: So that no longer belonged to you?

BAYLESS: Well I was supposed to turn in everything I had and put on the military uniform.

DANDRIDGE: Well, was the officer white or black that was wearing it?

BAYLESS: Um, white officer, at that time 'cause we were Fort Kno—Fort—isn't that awful? I've got a mental block.

DANDRIDGE: That's all right. When you were going through your first training, what was it like? What did you—Do you remember what it was like? How did you feel about it?

BAYLESS: Well I feel that—You know, I'd been away from home almost a year and a half at eighteen so I had become very independent. So, really, in a sense—And I'd been working with military organizations with this radar—so I felt comfortable. I felt that any system they had I'd either be able to beat it or be able to be smart enough. And some of the exams I—at one time I, the reason I got field commission is I had one of the highest, they would give everybody exams to determine how smart you are and I loved exams, see, so I always scored very high.

DANDRIDGE: And that's how come you assigned to what were you saying?

BAYLESS: Well, it wasn't—They were going to assign me, as an African American, to this black signal company. We had black officers and it was ninety-seven enlisted men and three officers.

DANDRIDGE: When you were going through your training camp, who were some of your other friends and—who were your friends?

BAYLESS: Didn't have any friends.

DANDRIDGE: Did you meet some new people that were—

BAYLESS: Not that I remember.

DANDRIDGE: Okay.

BAYLESS: You know, what I'm saying—if they weren't going to help me or if they weren't—I was just there to take the basic training so I didn't fraternize.

DANDRIDGE: What sort of things did you like or dislike about your training?

BAYLESS: Oh, it was just—All this basic training's the same; you have to learn to march, you have to learn to shoot—I'd never shot a rifle and my father never got out for(??) hunting, but when you leave home at

sixteen, you're not very mature from the standpoint of involvements. But I learned quickly. I became a sharp shooter on the range.

DANDRIDGE: Did you like it?

BAYLESS: I didn't like it. I never did—I figure that—I never did a lot of hunting, when I did hunting I was using a bow and arrow. How many people use bow and arrows to hunt? Very few. I wanted to give the animals an opportunity to escape.

DANDRIDGE: Yeah, but if you're good at the bow thing they're not escaping.

BAYLESS: Well, that's true. Could be. So we ended up in Oscoda, Michigan. At that time the 96th Service Group and the 332nd—the 332nd had been moved out of Tuskegee Army Flying School. They went to Detroit and they stayed in Detroit about a month or two at Selfridge Field. Then they moved up to Oscoda for gunnery training. Now, Oscoda was one of the few places that would accept—(mic noises)

Pause in recording.

BAYLESS: Oscoda, Michigan and the Oscoda Army Air Base, we went for gunnery training and then just prepared to go overseas. But it was rural community and they had a lot of these super active African Americans, they would bus girls out of Detroit—two hundred mile on weekends for parties. So, you know, they didn't have a chance to take advantage of the local girls in the community, Caucasian, cause this was—

DANDRIDGE: Because it was not—they didn't want you to.

BAYLESS: That's right. Well they made it available so that everybody wants to bus in the girl. Yeah, Detroit was loaded. Well, so, it fit the bill.

DANDRIDGE: And, okay—So, how did you get involved with the Tuskegee Airmen?

BAYLESS: Well, you see—As I say, again, down in Osc—at Tuskegee, when they set up the 332nd Fighter Group, they also established the 96th Service Group. The Air Force says, We do not want—we do not want white enlisted me servicing the planes. So, with four fighter squadrons in the group, they decided to set up a service group, which at that time the service group consisted of two service squadrons to do a hundred—R(??) overhaul, major service of the aircraft and they had a communications group, which was mine(??), and then they had a quartermaster group, and a trucking group, and then an ordinance group. All this was to provide support to the 332nd Fighter Group.

DANDRIDGE: So from—

BAYLESS: We all went overseas together.

DANDRIDGE: So did you ever go to Tuskegee itself?

BAYLESS: Never. Never been there in my life and I—Now I know they have a museum there.

DANDRIDGE: Right, National Park.

BAYLESS: Yeah, I had an opportunity; I just didn't go.

DANDRIDGE: So you never went to Alabama?

BAYLESS: Never. No, don't say I never—as a civilian engineer, I put in a lot of AC&W facilities, and when I would go to Alabama because at that time I had a very important job, they considered me white so they let me go in the Admiral Sims and the other hotels that blacks normally wouldn't be able to go into.

DANDRIDGE: This was after World War II?

BAYLESS: Yes, because they realized that I was essential to them getting the project against some other locality.

DANDRIDGE: So, we're back in Detroit—right?

BAYLESS: No. We're back in Michigan.

DANDRIDGE: Back in Michigan, right. Back in Michigan and, so, when did you discover you were going to go overseas?

BAYLESS: Right—we were notified around the fifteenth of October, around the middle of October that we would be going overseas. At that time the problem was the Air Force was having trouble trying to place this group. At one time they were going to take the 332nd Fighter Group and move it to Brazil; and Brazil says, We really don't need blacks here, we've got enough. And then they were going to move it into Africa and, I hate to say this but some of the African states, even states like Liberia, said, We've got enough. So nobody was anxious. We ended up going to Africa with the 99th Fighter Squadron. And then after that it was—the group came along later and it joined the 99th when they had moved into Italy.

DANDRIDGE: So, you did embark for overseas, though?

BAYLESS: We left from Patrick Henry(??) on January 3, 1944. And we went on this Liberty ship; took us thirty-three days.

DANDRIDGE: What was that ship like?

BAYLESS: Liberty ships—a Liberty ship would be about seventy-five hundred ton and it would have—it could accommodate maybe eight hundred, a thousand troops. And you just, you're just packed, oh it was loaded.

DANDRIDGE: So did you have separate sleeping quarters?

BAYLESS: No, what you mean separate sleeping quarters? I was an enlisted man. You had bunks and you started on the floor and there was about five bunks up to the top of the ceiling and then there were bunks on either side. Now officers were able to have a, some quarters. Even on that ship they would probably put eight officers into a room.

DANDRIDGE: Did you get seasick or anything?

BAYLESS: I got—No I didn't normally get seasick. I just—A good example, when we went on the ship, and this is something personal, I found—One individual says, you purchase decks of cards at the PX there, I purchased about a half a dozen decks of cards. And I got on this ship, I loved to play, I loved to gamble, so I started running a gambling show. Wasn't nothing to do. And I ended up with maybe three or four thousand dollars with two bodyguards, you know. 'Cause the only thing we did it was stories like this that in the morning we'd eat around 8:30 and then we'd eat again around 4:30. Well, the food was bad and there wasn't that much of it, so I'd wake up—I'd hire somebody to stand in line for me and, then, when I woke up around 5:30, 6:00, I took his place in line and then I was always in line first and the moment I'd finish going through line, I'd get my books out and wash my mess kit and get ready for the evening meal. Wasn't nothing to do. Stood there in line. Finally got so bad that the chaplain and the mess sergeant said, Look, that sets a bad example, so they said, We're going to have the line, the back of the line's going to go in first to eat today. And, lo and behold, the chaplain convinced me to get to the back of the line. So, suddenly I'm coming in from the back of the line. They can't win. It makes an interesting story. You know even when I was on the ship, you only had a little musette bag and you had to wear your same clothes. Well my clothes got so full of oil and dirt, my commanding officer says, "Bayless you've got to wash your clothes." Well I came up with the bright idea that, I'd just throw my pants over, with a rope, and let the ocean wash them. Well what happened—the fish came up and ate part of my leg. So when I pulled my pants up the legs were gone, part of 'em. So I had to make shorts out of 'em. I was out of uniform. But—

DANDRIDGE: Did you get penalized for it?

BAYLESS: Well, they needed me. At that time I was a technician third grade and then in 1000th Signal(??) I was the top signal—I was top service, Communication Service Rep. You know, I had gotten promoted from a private up to a T/3. And that was the high—There was a T/3 for operations and T/3 for maintenance.

DANDRIDGE: While you were—How long did you stay on that boat?

BAYLESS: Thirty-three days. And on the boat, I've got this in my story here, the Germans decided that our ship—The engine went down, and this is about a day or so out of Gibraltar. And the commander of the convoy said, "I'll leave you a destroyer escort for four or five hours while you're getting the ship—see if you can get the ship engine running. Otherwise I'm going to leave you to your mercy." Because at that time the Germans would look for stragglers because they had—there were, many of them were there in Spain and they would attack the convoys either by using airplanes or by submarine. But we were able to get the ship engine started. And that—funny thing, everybody started to pray; I never seen so many Christians in my life.

DANDRIDGE: So, then what happened after—

BAYLESS: Well we landed in Taranto, Italy, Southern Italy, and then we went to a place called Montecorvino. Now when I landed in Taranto, for the first time in my life, I had never seen a blood red orange. You know, oranges that is—you know, they had pecan trees and so on and that good ol' Italian wine. But the only thing I didn't like was the, I can't take, even today, what is that—isn't that awful, I'm getting some blanks today—I—you cook with it—

BURNS: Oil, olive oil?

BAYLESS: No, it's a—

DANDRIDGE: Is it an oil?

BAYLESS: No, it's a—

DANDRIDGE: Garlic?

BAYLESS: Garlic. Can't take garlic. I told my wife this is why I stayed away from Italian girls.

DANDRIDGE: Cause of the garlic. All righty. So what was Italy like when you got there?

BAYLESS: Oh they, the British had sunk a lot of the German—I mean the Italian fleet there at Taranto, that was one of their major bases. And we just went to, we ended up on the Tyrrhenian side of Italy, a place called Montecorvino, and we were stationed at an airfield, Montecorvino Air Field, which they had taken from the Germans. Germans had—we invaded Italy in September of 1943 and this was one of their major airfields and they gave it up, it was a lot of old German planes that had been destroyed on the ground. And we were in an old English—old Italian castle and we serviced our equipment there. And we would leave there and go to Naples and we had part of the 332nd at Montecorvino and the other was at Capodichino, which is a field right outside of Naples. And I always remember Naples because it was the worst city in the world, you could smell it about ten or twelve miles out, it was, you know, just filthy. You know, they didn't take it—during the war it was—

DANDRIDGE: How were the people?

BAYLESS: The Italian people were nice. They were nice. They realized that Americans were occupiers, like the Germans, and they wanted the exist(??).

DANDRIDGE: Did you ever go to restaurants there or—

BAYLESS: What restaurants—what do you mean by that? In the big cities we would get leave and go to—I went to Rome, the eternal city, one time on a three or four day pass. And I never smoked so I would take my cigarettes and when I was in Montecorvino I would take them and the smaller city called Salerno, and I would sell them on the white market. Not the black market, the white market, cause I'm the black, I'm selling them on the white market.

DANDRIDGE: All righty, that's very clever. Very clever. So, not to get into trivia here—

BAYLESS: (interjecting) We'll see.

DANDRIDGE: Did you continue with your winnings from your gambling or did you—

BAYLESS: I got easy. I finally got to the point I got so good that I found people who were better than I was and I started becoming a conduit. I would—Everything I'd won on the ship, I lost in about a day or two after I got on—There was people who were better gamblers than me.

DANDRIDGE: (laughs) Okay.

BAYLESS: I'm serious.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, all right.

BAYLESS: I don't gamble at all now, even though we go to Las Vegas a lot.

DANDRIDGE: Um-hm, okay you gave that one up. So anything else about your—about Italy that you remember?

BAYLESS: Well, I always—we went to see the ruins of Pompeii, I was always very interesting. At that time they had done some major excavation and it was very interesting to see how the Mount Vesuvius—In fact, while we were there in March, the twentieth, Mount Vesuvius erupted and we lost some of our planes to the flying particles in the air. And even though we had the liquid cool engines, it would damage the engines.

DANDRIDGE: Wow. So what kind of work did you have to do while you in Italy?

BAYLESS: Well, basically, we just serviced the—we only had one—With all the Air Force planes, like P-30s, P-51s, where am I here? All of these, one thing in common with the exception of the bomber, we only had—we had an SCR-522 transceiver, which was good for about fifty miles. Again, though, we had to take care of the control car, so we had ground based equipment, which is more powerful, but the average SCR-522 was only good for about fifty mile line of sight. So when we went on a five or six hundred mission the aircraft, the fighter aircraft, the only way they could communicate back to the base was to communicate with the bombers which had long range radio, and then they could communicate with us. Once you left the fifty mile area, you were out of communication.

DANDRIDGE: So where were the Tuskegee Airmen themselves?

BAYLESS: Well, they were at the field. We would have—We were with the 12th Air Force, we had—The 99th Squadron had gone over and it was at Capodichino and the other three squadrons started out in Montecorvino but, ultimately, two of them moved up to Capodichino where the 99th Fighter Squadron. And then in May 19—we were flying the P-39s, which was really a pretty sad aircraft.

DANDRIDGE: Were only those aircraft assigned to the Tuskegee Airmen?

BAYLESS: No, they were assigned to other groups. When they went over, they were assigned costal patrol, that was—

DANDRIDGE: That's what the Tuskegee Airmen were doing?

BAYLESS: Yeah, yeah, costal patrol. So we really didn't get a chance to—

DANDRIDGE: What did they do in costal patrol?

BAYLESS: Well you—If a convoy was coming in, knowing that the Germans may try to attack it, what you did you had planes on the ground that were alerted that the Germans were going to try and attack this ship or this convoy and then we would go out to try and intercept them.

DANDRIDGE: So did you go on these missions?

BAYLESS: No, they're a fighter group; only one pilot in a plane. We had to make arrangements for the communications and that's about the—But there were other individuals, we had crew chiefs that got up early in the morning that made certain that the plane was fueled and _____(??), and all the other things that were required, parachutes and so on.

DANDRIDGE: And so what was your main task?

BAYLESS: My main task was servicing the radios.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, which was crucial.

BAYLESS: Well, it was, yes, if you want to communicate. And control tower, you know, going back. We also had communication responsibility to our area(??) headquarters, and there we used ground-based transmitters, which are more powerful. So we had to report to the 15th Air Force.

DANDRIDGE: So, did you ever communicate directly with any of the Tuskegee Airmen during your work time or you just did your own—

BAYLESS: No, no, why—The average, when a Tuskegee Airman took off in his plane, there was only four channels in the—This was a four channel unit; one channel was emergency, and one channel was in case you get direction. You only had two channels. And he was supposed to be radio silence, 'cause the German ground communications would be able to determine if somebody was communicating. In fact, one of the problems when we first went over—I'm just speaking—was that they were talking so much that they were alerting the Germans they were coming—the pilots—You know, you're supposed to have radio silence except in emergency.

DANDRIDGE: So they were very silent. So, after Italy—anything after Italy?

BAYLESS: No, there wasn't anything after Italy. When the war was over, we all—

DANDRIDGE: You stayed in Italy throughout the—

BAYLESS: We had no choice. You were in Italy until the war was over. And at that time they were alerting us that we were being shipped to the Pacific. The only people that didn't get shipped would be individuals who were married with so many points. Being a single person I would have been—I was a prime candidate to go to the Pacific theatre.

DANDRIDGE: So you were in Italy for, what, two, three years?

BAYLESS: I was in Italy from February of '44 until October '45.

DANDRIDGE: So in terms of your being there, what did you enjoy most about your work there as a soldier?

BAYLESS: Um, well, we had a job to do and we got—I always tell everyone that we got the same food, we got the same equipment, and same support—the 15th Air Force treated all of the groups alike.

DANDRIDGE: So you had the same everything?

BAYLESS: Yes.

DANDRIDGE: Now did you all—did you ever fraternize with any of the white soldiers?

BAYLESS: Um, not directly. We would go to—For example, I got a field commission so I had to go down to Very(??) and at that time it was reluctance of the Air Force to commission blacks in the field. So we had four blacks that got commission and there was only about a dozen individuals who applied to try and become an officer. I was just twenty years old and I had to put a good, positive spin by telling them that I was supervising about thirty people in communications maintenance, that I knew my job, and we were keeping the airplanes flying. We were the wind beneath their wings.

DANDRIDGE: So you became a commissioned—

BAYLESS: I got a field commission. Only four blacks commissioned in all of the Air Force during World War II; I was one of the four.

DANDRIDGE: Wow, so that was quite an honor.

BAYLESS: Well, it was good. The way I look at it is that they would not allow enlisted men to have mattresses and—I had one of those little canvas cots. And, you know, even though I stopped gambling, I was still well off. (chuckles) But I couldn't buy, you know, as a result once I got to be a commissioned officers, I got quite a few more benefits. And another thing too, they brought the Wings Over Jordan, this is my—a group, you've probably heard of the Wings Over Jordan? Well they came over and stayed at our group for about a couple of weeks and while I was there I was escorting one of the young ladies; I had a jeep. She said, "You know I think I could really go for you, but you're an enlisted man." She says her mom says, Only associate with officers. Well, while she was there, I got my commission, and she saw that and she said, "That's it."

DANDRIDGE: So you started associating.

BAYLESS: No, I said, "I'm going to be more selective now. (DANDRIDGE and BURNS laugh)

DANDRIDGE: So, were there anything else about your experiences in Italy? Any controversy coming within the ranks? Any issues that came up that you're—

BAYLESS: Well—There were other issues. For example, I indicate that one time—this is hearsay now—that one of the bombers landed at the—Everybody had their own base; the bombers had a base, we had seven fighter groups in the 15th Air Force and one was black, that was the last one that got there, the 15th, that was the 332nd. Well the, one of the bomber groups was forced to land at the, at Ramitelli and he, one of the crew members says, "I'm not going to sleep with those black people." He didn't realize it's February and it's cold there. So they threw him a blanket and he got cold, so during the middle of the night, he said, "Well maybe I will try it out once." So, in essence, there was not a lot of—And the only thing you run into, for example, black enlisted and white enlisted would go to a rest center in Rome; we were all together. But the black officers and the white officers were not; when they went to a rest center they sent 'em to different places. The whites went to the isle of Capri and blacks went to some

nondescript place there on the coast of Italy. But the Italians they treated everybody, I would say—I think a lot of—you’ve probably heard of this, Brooks, used to be—first black senator—

DANDRIDGE: (in background) From Massachusetts?

BAYLESS: (continuing) —he married an Italian. He was in the 92nd Fighter Group, 92nd Infantry Division.

DANDRIDGE: Did he meet his wife there?

BAYLESS: He met his wife there, yeah. So there was a few of the fellows, but we never really socialized a lot with the—We had a job twenty-four hours a day, you really—you weren’t in a position to fraternize. Seven days a week, any individual—And, especially, I was in charge of the operation, I had to set a good example, and I would have done it anyways. You know, I didn’t chase the Italian women; I didn’t drink the Italian wine; I didn’t eat Italian food, if I could help it.

DANDRIDGE: (in background) With the garlic, _____(??).

BAYLESS: I was a perfect person. (BURNS chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: So you were—So how did you leave Italy, was that after the war?

BAYLESS: When the war was over, at that time, I’d gotten my commission so I came back as a commissioned officer. And, there, they put four of us in a cabin together. I came back and landed at Patrick Henry again.

DANDRIDGE: And, so, were you discharged from there?

BAYLESS: No, at that time I didn’t have enough points. So I left there and they sent me to an airbase in South Carolina.

BURNS: What does that mean you don’t have enough points?

BAYLESS: Well at that time—even at that time you had to have time and service. I’d only—I got in 1943 in May and you had to have, they count points in—overseas they give you more credit for that, but I didn’t have enough points to be able to get out of service.

DANDRIDGE: Did you want to get out?

BAYLESS: Well at that time I didn’t have pros or cons. I had a civilian job, they told me when I left my civilian job that they would try to find a job or equal when I came back. I took them up on that but I realized that that’s based upon the fact that they may not be there. And, even that, when I got out of service in March of 1946 I applied for my job in Boston and they said, No that’s been taken over by

Rome Depot, in Rome, New York. So I went to Rome and said, "Can I get a job?" They said, Well we'll only give you a job as a junior radio mechanic. At that time, I was a senior mechanic when I left, but we'd get the same pay. And, so—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Same pay as a senior?

BAYLESS: Well—

DANDRIDGE: Same pay as when you left?

BAYLESS: Yes, yes. So I didn't have any job. I don't know if you realize or not, when the war was over, the nation hadn't started to retrofit to private industry and, even when they did, there wasn't a lot of jobs for minorities. I made up my mind early that I did not want to live in the South. I felt like, if I lived in the South, I wouldn't last too long. Somewhere along the line I'd run into something that would turn me off and I'd go berserk or something. Even—Rome, New York was not like Boston but it was a northern city and I was treated very fairly there.

DANDRIDGE: So—

BAYLESS: Then I went back to work there and then I went into the joint—I got in the GI Bill, I went to Syracuse University. I stayed there for about a year and then I ran out of money.

DANDRIDGE: What were you studying while you were at Syracuse?

BAYLESS: Engineering. So then after I got out of the—after one year, I, um, I decided that even though they were giving me some income from the GI Bill, paying my books, it wasn't adequate. So I went back to work at the airbase as—at that time I'd been promoted to a senior aircraft mechanic. And went to evening school; I went to evening school for about three years.

Tape 1, side 1 ends; side 2 begins.

DANDRIDGE: What were you saying?

BAYLESS: I studied—well at that time, I had to switch my program; I majored from engineering to physics. Engineering physics. At that time I was still a technician, so I got an engineering rating once I—

Pause in recording.

BURNS: Okay, let's see trucking group, what was the fifth one?

BAYLESS: Here we go, right here, squadrons, 366th Air Service Squadron, 367, 1000th Signal, 1051st Quartermaster Trucking, 1901st Quartermaster trucking, 1902, 1762 Ordinance.

BURNS: Okay, that's the one.

BAYLESS: Okay?

BURNS: And I was wondering, in your time in the military, in the service did you ever have an opportunity to—oh, I guess, make any improvements or innovations to the communications or the equipment?

BAYLESS: Uh, only on procedures. When I got in the Sargent Signal Company, you always heard this story that in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. So when I went in there I found that, even the officers, no one was—because I, when I was in Lexington in this radar school, it took four months to get out of the radar school because we found out that we didn't have a diesel mechanic to go with us, so we had to go out and scrounge for an African American diesel mechanic, so I stayed in the program and helped instruct and develop mock-ups and so on, so when I went in the service, I knew every piece of equipment the Air Force had—or the Army had, communications, intimately, I was the instructor and so on. So went up to the 1000 Signal, the first job I got was some sergeant over at communications maintenance told me, he said, "I want you to build a parts supply using an eighty-two." Well what happened in eighty-two, the part supplier required about three or four amps and the eighty-two only had about, put out about a hundred and twenty-five mils. So I went to the commanding officer and he said, "What's wrong with that?" So they were all dumb or not knowledgeable. So I ended up in about three months running the whole maintenance facility. And I found out the way I was able to do it, we had a lot of individuals come in, primarily from the South, that really had no training but they could handle things by rote. I'd give them a test, piece of test equipment like a meter for testing tubes and I said—put a line there, and I said, "Push the tube in, if it hits that line it's good, if it isn't you throw it away." Like somebody peeling apples or something, either good or bad. And I tried to make use of the skill because I couldn't change people, couldn't get rid of them. So they're use, you have to—but find out what he can do that'll make it succeed. So I felt pretty good at that.

DANDRIDGE: (in background) I should say so.

BAYLESS: The only trouble is, I was always very egotistical, you know. I figured that I was smarter than anybody in my, in maintenance. And they all knew that, see. And I hate to say it's just one of those things. Facts of life.

BURNS: If you're good at your job, what you do—

BAYLESS: Sure. Yeah. So I didn't have too much problem with commanding officers, the others because they deferred to me. And I'm only, now, twenty years old; nineteen when I was in the, started out.

DANDRIDGE: How old were you when you left the military?

BAYLESS: Oh I was only twenty-one, going on twenty-two. But a good, classic(??) example we were up at Oscoda, Michigan. We went up there and we had a high-power(??) transmitter, four hundred watt transmitter that was communicating from Oscoda down to Selfridge Air Force Base and the transmitter went out and the commanding officer called our company commander and says, "You're 1000 Signal? Go over there and fix that set." Well the commander come along and says, "Does anybody know anything about trans—high-power transmitters?" And the only person in the organization was me. And I knew about those, I knew how to service them, so I went over and the first day I got the transmitter, it wasn't neutralized properly, got it neutralized and I found out it didn't have a lightening arrester attached to it. So I hooked up a lightening arrester, two days later we had a big storm and lightening hit the station and it knocked the operator out, had to send him to the hospital, and they had an inspection board. And they said, Private Bayless, (??) a private, he took care—His fine work caused us to be able to maintain communications and keep going. And, you see, what happened was that looked good for the commander. At that time I was really not only—I was walking on water.

BURNS: Was that in Michigan, you say?

BAYLESS: Yes.

BURNS: Did anything like that ever occur while you were overseas in Italy or over in Africa?

BAYLESS: In Italy, I was not in Africa.

BURNS: Oh, I thought you said—

BAYLESS: No. In Italy our primary job was to—Good example, the Air Force was using radar for the first time, the airborne radar where they were able, in those bombing missions over Germany—A lot of Germany the climate is such that, in the winter months, you can't really see the ground. So you have to—if you don't have radar, they had these Norton bombsight but they couldn't see the ground, so they weren't able to conduct bombing raids. When they got the radar they were able to do this. Well, they didn't have enough radar, they only used the lead aircraft—in a bombing squadron there's a lead bomber and then there's, maybe, five or six bombers, when he drops his bombs they drop theirs. So that was the bomber—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) And they're behind him?

BAYLESS: (continuing) Yeah, that's right. They dropped their—So, as a result, what happened was the Germans started attacking these bombers and because the bombers were located in Southern Italy, even to go from where they were before the width(??) of the Alps was but two hundred-fifty miles and then they would go into Germany. Well what happened was many of them would be shot at or damaged so they—the United States decided, We're going to put an emergency airfield in Northern Italy with the British; the British were on the, they were on the Adriatic side and the American army was on the Tyrrhenian side. So we put an emergency airfield at a place called Falconara, which was about two

hundred miles north of where the planes were and I was part of the emergency group. Well they said, they went to the 1000 Signal, Does anybody know radar? Without regard(??) ground radar tied into airborne, but I knew the principles of radar. So they said, We want you, when these planes are damaged, we've got to take that radar equipment and take it down to Southern Italy. So they would have a C-47 aircraft ready, day and night, and we used to have to use mine detectors to go out because this was an emergency field that we'd taken over from the Germans and they mined all their fields, so— And we would take the radar out, any time day or night, plane would land and take the radar down to Southern Italy. In the planes at that time were equipped with racks and cable but not the equipment. The plane would stay there for service but the radar was taken out immediately because they needed it for the next flight. So I—felt like that was a very important job and of all the people prepared to know how to handle radar, I was the only person with the 1000 Signal that had any radar experience.

DANDRIDGE: Wow. Very crucial.

BAYLESS: Well, I fit.

BURNS: I was going to ask you about, as a historian for the Heartland Chapter—

BAYLESS: Yeah, Heart of America Chapter.

BURNS: Heart of America, I'm sorry.

BAYLESS: Sure.

BURNS: I looked on the webpage and I was trying to figure out, when did you start as a historian there?

BAYLESS: Nineteen ninety-six.

BURNS: Oh, okay. I didn't see that information.

BAYLESS: They didn't have an historian. They didn't have one.

BURNS: So, you volunteered for the mission?

BAYLESS: Yeah, I didn't show you that, but I have a—every year I have a big yearbook that I put out.

DANDRIDGE: Okay, what do you mean by yearbook?

BAYLESS: Well, we put out—For example we have a—well I should bring up one from my basement files.

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh, I would love to see that basement file.

BURNS: You just had a meeting over, what was it? May something—

BAYLESS: Yeah, we had it in April—no May we had the general—Vincent—I forget his name, isn't that awful. He was the commanding general of the, over in Fort—I'm off base today, help me out, over in Junction City.

BURNS: Fort Riley?

BAYLESS: Fort Riley.

BURNS: Oh yeah, I saw that in the paper.

BAYLESS: Yeah. Vincent Brook.

BURNS: That's it.

BAYLESS: You know I hate to say this but my mind is—sometimes I have to work on it.

DANDRIDGE: Everybody does, trust me. I—go on, did you want to ask some more questions?

BURNS: I was just curious in your capacity as a historian, have you started a chapter on that or a book or like you have one of these—

BAYLESS: Sure.

BURNS: You've done that all ready?

BAYLESS: Sure.

BURNS: And is it available?

BAYLESS: I'll show you a sample.

BURNS: Also I was looking on—

BAYLESS: (laughing) I'm—You googled me, you saw a lot on Harvey Bayless in Google.

BURNS: I did.

BAYLESS: How about that.

BURNS: And I noticed that you—they have a—is it just audio recordings over at the Jackson County—

DANDRIDGE: Historical Society.

BURNS: Yeah, it's in Independence?

BAYLESS: No, I—what about that?

BURNS: Or did they have collections of your photographs or your works or anything like that as well?

BAYLESS: Not to my knowledge. I've spoken to the Historical Society.

BURNS: Yeah, it looks like they had some recordings.

DANDRIDGE: Oh his speech?

BURNS: Um-hm.

DANDRIDGE: Tell me when you were discharged from the military, what was that like? What was the discharge like?

BAYLESS: Just, they sent me to—isn't that awful? Again—

DANDRIDGE: (interjecting) Doesn't make any difference.

BAYLESS: (continuing) They sent me to Illia(??), Indiana to a military base and I got discharged. That was it. And, you know, they also said, We'll give you twenty dollars a month—twenty dollars week for a year. Oh, it was twenty dollars a month, yeah. And that was about the size of it. There wasn't any—you were on your own. They had not really completed the concept on the GI Bill. And the average African American, I felt—I understood their situation because companies were getting ready to retool and rehire, but they hadn't hired that many blacks to start out with. You go into a plant you find that there are a lot of white females but not any black females. They felt like they should stay home and take care of the white female's kids. But there was not—work was just not available except for the post office and other jobs.

DANDRIDGE: So when you got out, where did you search for work? I'm sorry, I—

BAYLESS: I didn't—I immediately went back to the people in Boston saying, "I'm out, I've completed my service, you indicated I was furloughed from my job." And they said, Well your job's been transferred to Rome. So I went back to Rome and Rome that time had a major project where they were taking these B-29 bombers and retrofitting for general and everyone else, so I went back as a radio mechanic, aircraft mechanic.

DANDRIDGE: Were there other African Americans along with you in that same capacity?

BAYLESS: There was o—a friend of mine name Leon Leal(??), he was with me all the time I was in service. But when I went up there there was really no other African Americans. There were African Americans at the base, but, you see, during the war the Air Force had to take blacks at the same proportion that they took whites, so they had these air base squadrons and every air base squadron was a group of blacks because they had a low stamin(??) score and they just picked up cigarette butts and did menial work around the base. So a lot of air base squadrons—well practically all of them—it got so bad that Judge Hastings and some of the others saying, Look, they came up with some white air base squadrons, where they had low scores of whites. So in the Air Force, with exception of the Tuskegee Airmen there wasn't any—and the 96th Service Group, that was the only technical groups in the whole Air Force.

DANDRIDGE: So you went—You were in Rome and then where did you go from there when you were in your work?

BAYLESS: Well all right, well the second part in the—I guess you know Harry Truman integrated the armed forces July 26, 1948 and I had stayed in the reserves, so I joined—at that time I was working Rome Air Development Center, I joined a reserve group there and then 1951 I got recalled. That's what I'm working on now, recalled and spent two years in Hawaii.

DANDRIDGE: When you got recalled what does that mean?

BAYLESS: Well, basically the—When the Chinese entered the Korean War in 1950, the United States decided we got to mobilize, we don't have enough troops, so they called a lot of reserve troops back. Lot of the African Americans, the Tuskegee Airmen, had been let go from service and they called them back. Now at that time I was lucky I was at Rome Air Development Center and at the Rome Air Development Center I was the only black officer and about couple hundred—but what ____(??) decided they needed—because I was also a communications officer and radar officer, they said, Okay we need these type of people over, fighting there in Korea. So they were going to send—they transferred me, I was supposed to go to the 1808th Wing in Japan. But what happened was, on my way—I stopped in Hawaii and the radar wasn't working. They signed me there, while I was waiting to transfer to—and I found out that I, that the individual, that the problem of the radar was that the automatic frequency control wasn't working properly. They had a CPS-1, CPS-5 and I go out and contact the people at Rome Air Development, people who designed that and they sent me a kit to service it. So, suddenly here's a one-eyed man, you know? 614th(??) AC&W, you know. In fact I didn't pick that ____(??), then—that was in September of 1951, well in—by December they decided that the AC&W group was running this for air traffic control, the planes coming in and out of Hawaii and they decided to send the unit back to the States and they said, Anybody been in the organization for ninety days would go back the States otherwise you'd go to Korea. Well in the meanwhile I went down to the Pacific headquarters, and I was only a first lieutenant and they had a rule that you had to be at least a captain to be in headquarters but they looked at some of my resume and they said, This is our man. So Lieutenant Bayless joined the headquarters of Pacific Division. (chuckles)

DANDRIDGE: Wow.

BAYLESS: As communications staff officer.

DANDRIDGE: And that was still in Hawaii?

BAYLESS: Didn't want to leave, I didn't want to leave from heaven.

BURNS: How long were you there?

BAYLESS: I got out in 19—May of 194—53. I was there for two years.

DANDRIDGE: What was it like there in Hawaii?

BAYLESS: Perfect, perfect.

DANDRIDGE: Where did you live?

BAYLESS: We lived in Kanioli(??), which is a local community. And we joined the local church; we were United Methodist and the minister next—In Hawaii the missionaries what they did, the Baptists took the immigrants from, who came in from China and another group took the immigrants who came in from Japan, because they need a lot of work in those pineapple fields and sugar cane. And the Methodists had another group, so we joined the Methodist, which had both Hally(??), which Hally is white, and a Japanese minister. The Hally minister lived next door to us, so we got along real well.

DANDRIDGE: When you say "we," were you married by then?

BAYLESS: Yeah, I was married, yeah I got married.

DANDRIDGE: When did you get married?

BAYLESS: Got married January—December 3, 1945.

DANDRIDGE: Were you still in the military then?

BAYLESS: Yes, I hadn't got out of service; I didn't get out of service until March '46.

DANDRIDGE: So how did you meet your wife?

BAYLESS: Well I told you, where I met my wife was—I was at this—in this radar school. You couldn't get into radar unless you had a secret clearance. Well I had to wait for secret clearance like everyone, took

me a couple of months, and then they sent me down to a field radio school which is right around the corner from where Mamie lived. She'd come by there every day with her mother and the guy's say, "Boy that's a nice looking little girl," he says, "Boy, I bet you can't get a date with her." Well he didn't realize I'd met her and made a date to go to see a movie, so—And we, I lived cater-corner from her on Upper Street, I'd rented a house, a room from a mortician and his wife and—It was nice, I was able to go down, on the corner they had the YWCA and Mamie was still in high school. I was a—You know, in fact her parents felt that, even though, I was only eighteen, she was sixteen, I was too old for her; you know from the stand point of—I was mature, I was on my own and so on. So we started going together and then when the war was over she went to Washington to work as a, in the government as a clerk typist and I proposed and we got married.

DANDRIDGE: So she was in Hawaii with you?

BAYLESS: Yes, _____(??) we had a young child. A son called Roderick.

DANDRIDGE: That's right. So how did you happen to leave Hawaii?

BAYLESS: After two years I didn't want to stay in. I had a choice I could go back to my civilian job and that time I ran into a problem. At Syracuse I had about fifty-eight hours towards a bachelor's degree. They said, Well you can work up an arrangement, we'll give you an associate degree at sixty hours, if you want, in technology and then continue on for your bachelor's degree because you're going evening work, you know, in evening division. So I just went ahead and took it. So I got my associate degree in 1954 and I got my bachelor's degree in '56. All right, I got another thing. The government was saying, Well, I'm doing engineering work, but we don't consider you an engineer, but you can take an equivalence exam, they had a very thorough exam like—you've heard of professional engineer's exam?

DANDRIDGE: Um-hm.

BAYLESS: And I passed that. At that time I was the first person to pass the exam. Exams have always been a good point of mine. You know what I attribute that to?

DANDRIDGE: Uh-huh.

BAYLESS: Speed reading. Speed reading.

BURNS: Really. How'd you get into speed reading?

BAYLESS: I got into speed reading early. I found out that—at one time I was reading about twenty-one, twenty-two hundred words a minute with 90 percent comprehension. And a lot of stuff you read, you've got to be able to read it and understand it and make a decision on it. See, so many people take exams the decision process is such that, you know—

DANDRIDGE: It slows them down.

BAYLESS: Slows them down, yeah. And most exams are set up for time. So I've been pretty lucky.

DANDRIDGE: So throughout the fifties and the sixties, where did you work, after leaving Hawaii?

BAYLESS: Well, I worked with—When I came back from Hawaii, I didn't have—I was having some problems with the people at the Center, Rome Air Development Center, so they _____ (??) new route(??) called Rome Air Depot and they were setting up a radar program and as much as I had radar technology before I even got in, I took over a radar division and I put in all the ground radars in the United States. We had three programs the ML and ST; one was a mobile technic—semi-mobile—and the other was a fixed, so at that time I ended up supervising about a dozen engineers putting radar all along the United States. I worked with the center here at Richards-Gebaur back in the fifties.

DANDRIDGE: So how did you get to Kansas?

BAYLESS: All right. In 1959 they decided that they were going to have an Air Force group called Air—Engineering Installation, Air Force Engineering Installation Agency, for communications. And I was one of the people that helped set the organization up in Rome and then in 1970 they decided that they wanted to combine with the group out of Scott Air Force Base that was doing operations at Richards-Gebaur and they transferred me out here. Cause at that time I was GS-14, which wasn't bad.

DANDRIDGE: Very nice, very nice.

BAYLESS: So.

DANDRIDGE: So you remained here?

BAYLESS: Well, what happened was when they moved the Scott Air Force Base in 1978, I was fifty-four, I waited until I got fifty-five and I left the government the moment I got fifty-five and I setup my own consulting business. And then I started working for companies like 3M and DuPont.

DANDRIDGE: But that was all in this area?

BAYLESS: No I—they—What happened was that most of the company's would have—we were doing some work here on development of new technology for fire suppression. And this company had gotten the contract with 3M and I was the lead engineer, the test engineer, so—I only worked about five or six months out of the year. I got good pay and then I would go to Las Vegas and donate it to the cards(??). I start—I didn't stop working until I got to eighty—I stopped in 2004.

DANDRIDGE: You maintained your consulting firm?

BAYLESS: Well, you know, finally it got to the point where my wife got macular degeneration and she had to give up her job of driving, so she said, "I need a driver." You seen *Driving Miss Daisy*?

DANDRIDGE: You've become that, okay.

BURNS: Driving Miss Mamie.

BAYLESS: That's right, that's right. Otherwise I'd still be working.

BURNS: But since that time that you retired have you been—have you been able to talk to school children or—

BAYLESS: Well, I belong to a group called—you've probably Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers and what they do—You want a little bit more of that drink?

BURNS: I'll get me a little bit more, thank you.

BAYLESS: They got out to—that's good. They go out to some of the schools and places. But, you know, the funny thing, it's a sad point, there's not a lot—the most blacks we have in our organization are from Africa, African natives. But we—I spoke at Central Missouri State, they have an aviation program and I worked with them on that program out there.

DANDRIDGE: In terms of your, in terms of your personal life, how many children did you—

BAYLESS: I have two children.

DANDRIDGE: And did any of them go to KU?

BAYLESS: Sure, my daughter, Kathleen, graduate '83.

DANDRIDGE: Why did she decide to go to KU?

BAYLESS: It's a good school and she—In fact at one time—You want to know the, you know my son—a lot of places, a lot of eastern—they feel there's no other school but eastern schools; if you're not part of the Ivy League or close to it, it doesn't count. See, but KU was a good school; course she had a lot of fun there and I didn't expect her to be Phi Beta Kappa, even though she graduated National Honor Society in high school. But she, uh—

DANDRIDGE: How do you feel about your participation in the war?

BAYLESS: Well, I—I'm anti-war now, so—The way I look at it, the war has helped a lot of minorities have been able to get—It's just like this Brooks, General Brooks; his father was a general, his brother was a

general, gave him a vehicle to really arrive at a place where they wouldn't have been able to. But the way I see it now, is that the need for high technology, science and technology is such that the average African American student—the instructors aren't too knowledgeable to start off with and I just feel like this is no—I don't see any easy way out of where blacks are going to be able to compete. Well, for example, in the West coast all the better colleges, a lot of Caucasians have trouble because the Asians get their top students, they spend all their time studying and they're smart as a whip, so they're competitive. And when you take scores and all your schools you have to have scores to get in or training in and most blacks to my knowledge haven't—we work on trying to get them into aviation, but I've always looked at aviation as a skill more or less, you know, I just—I'm not knocking pilots cause we had—but the, it's like you learn to drive a car or something once you go through the technique it's rote.

DANDRIDGE: How do you view what you gained or what you did not gain from your military experience in World War II?

BAYLESS: You learn discipline and you learn to work as a team. All my life I've been a staff officer and I always felt good about that. It wouldn't—I had to be pretty—in this 1842nd Engineering Group, we had about three hundred engineers and there's only one black engineer and I always had a problem working with new bosses coming in and trying to fit in. You know we'd play golf together, we would—when we were in Rome, we'd got out to the—we had a horse track there, I'd—You know Harvey was a guy that fit in and to the point that they felt like they needed me.

DANDRIDGE: And you did that quite deliberately.

BAYLESS: Yeah, well deliberately well you've got to face it you got to—there's times that people I had trouble with, but by and large I had to recognize my position and realize that you're dealing with the people that—you want them to bring out the best in themselves, you know. It's—and that's what I tried to do. Even now, some of—my son calls me an Oreo ____ (??) and I don't—We go to a predominately white church and we've been going to this white church for forty years now, we're one of the old members and I talk with the minister and I says, "Why aren't we having—I've brought in some minorities but they don't seem to fit." The first thing they say is the music isn't right, the preaching isn't right, and we don't feel comfortable, and I can't fight that.

DANDRIDGE: Is there anything about your military experience or your experience during World War II, anything else you'd like to add?

BAYLESS: No.

DANDRIDGE: Well we thank you very much, now, for your time.

BAYLESS: I was going to bring—you still want to look at the—Can I show you that?

DANDRIDGE: Yes sir, we are certainly going to do that.

BAYLESS: (overlapping) While you're doing that, I'll bring up a copy, a sample of my historical material.

DANDRIDGE: Thank you so much. Thank you for your time, we appreciate it.

BAYLESS: Okay.

Tape 1 ends.

End of interview.

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