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University of Baltimore
1420 N. Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Wilson Thornton Jr.

The University of Baltimore is launching a two-year investigation called "'68 Riots and Rebirth," a project centered around the events that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., their effects on the development of our city. UB administration and faculty members in the law school and in the undergraduate departments of history and community studies are planning a series of projects and events to commemorate the 40th anniversary of this pivotal event. We are currently working with the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History, The Jewish Museum of Maryland, Maryland Public Television and the Enoch Pratt Free Libraries to pursue funding for projects that may include conferences, a television documentary and a library traveling exhibit.

Your potential participation in an oral history project would contribute to the very foundation of this project – the memories of Baltimoreans who lived through the riots and saw the changes that came about in response to them. Your life story can fill in the limited knowledge we learn from newspaper accounts and the television footage.

If you choose to participate in the project you would be interviewed by students from the University of Baltimore who are currently taking "The New South and Civil Rights." Their work in this course will inform their questions, but your memories will determine the direction of the interviews.

If you agree to serve as an oral history informant in this project, you will meet with a team of undergraduate students on three different occasions. On the first meeting, the students will take a still photograph of you. In addition, if you have a photo of yourself in or around 1968, we would greatly appreciate it if we could borrow it, scan it, and return it. We would reserve the rights to reproduce those photos and use them in the documentary, conferences, exhibit or publications.

The students may conduct the interviews at a location of your choice, or you may meet them at the University of Baltimore Langsdale Library for your interviews. During the interviews, your recollections will be recorded in two forms: audio and video. The students will be responsible for operating the equipment. You can expect the interviews to last for a minimum of 30 minutes each.

The general topics for the three interviews will be:

- 1) Your life before 1968
- 2) Your experiences of the events of April 1968
- 3) What you see as changes that came about as a result of the riots

You will be interviewed three times to give you a chance to process the questions and make sure you are giving the fullest narrative possible. Sometimes talking about events that occurred decades ago will unearth forgotten memories. Undoubtedly, some of those remembrances will be negative. We greatly appreciate your willingness to take the risk of exploring a potentially painful past so that your life experiences will be recorded.

After the interviews the students will transcribe your oral history. They will provide you with a copy of the transcription for your review before the transcription is published. The transcription, video and audio records will be archived in the Langsdale Library Special Collections and will be accessible to the public. Your name will be attached to these documents. The University of Baltimore may use your image and/or your words in any future documentaries, exhibits, conferences or publications. Participants in the oral history project agree to waive their confidentiality.


If at any time you are uncomfortable with participation in the study, you are free to drop out. Participation is strictly voluntary. While your participation is requested and highly valued, you are free to decide whether or not to continue participation at all times. You may decline to have your name published with your reminiscences

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact me at 410-837-5296. Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth M. Nix, Ph.D.
Visiting Assistant Professor
History and Community Studies
The University of Baltimore

I have read and understand the information provided above, and consent to participate in the study. I have also been given a copy of the informed consent for my records.



Rhonda Sheppard/ Kaely Roe/Valerie Wiggins
Interview with Sgt. Major. William Thornton
December 1 , 2006
Baltimore MD

Rhonda: Good Evening., I first want to start by saying we really appreciate you taking out the time to come to speak with us. We were all very excited to come and to actually meet somebody who was actually involved in the 1968 riots. I mean it's truly a pleasure for us to be here and we just want to thank you very, very much. I'm going to discussing how things were before the riots. First of all how old were you before the riots took place?

Thornton: Do the math, I was born in 1932 the riots took place in April of 1968.

Rhonda: Were you married?

Thornton: I was married.

Rhonda: And children?

Thornton: Two children.

Rhonda: Two children? What were the ages of your children?

Thornton: I'm not sure but they were both under 12.

Rhonda: Did you know Dr. King Personally?

Thornton: No.

Rhonda: Had you ever met him?

Thornton: No.

Rhonda: Okay, how was Baltimore City before the riots? Was it still segregated?

Thornton: To a degree but I wouldn't say segregated as...as huh as... I would refer more to cultural division. I would say that the blacks lived in the community, Caucasians had their community but they were divided by cultural sections at the same time. You know we had the Canton, Fells Point, the Highlandtown, the Park Heights and the other areas around Baltimore City.

Rhonda: So there was no white fountain, black fountain, white waiting room, black waiting room? It was all mostly voluntarily.....people just kinda.....

Thornton: No, Right well prior to that there was, in the steel mills, I did work in the

steel mills and we did have separate accommodations in the steel mills. Separate bathrooms, separate restaurants stuff like that. Separate locker rooms.

Rhonda: And the steel mills?

Thornton: Bethlehem Steel.

Rhonda: And did you, even though things were not segregated officially, did you ever experience any racial discrimination.

Thornton: Prior to 1968?

Rhonda: Yes.

Thornton: Sure!! Definitely!!

Rhonda: What type of experiences did you have?

Thornton: Well like I said the experiences that I had at work, in the work place. There was discriminatory factors in the stores. Like Hecht's, (inaudible) stores like that. There were, huh, upstairs and downstairs and we had to use bargain basements and stuff like that. You probably remember. Heard talk about that?

Rhonda: Actually, no. Umm, you had a brother that was in the National Guard?

Thornton: Yes.

Rhonda: And did he participate in the riots?

Thornton: Yes.

Rhonda: One thing we were really interested in learning more about is the Cambridge riots.

Thornton: Okay.

Rhonda: What could you tell us about the Cambridge riots?

Thornton: Well my unit, B-Company 121st engineer battalion was at annual training in somewhere Virginia. And I don't remember whether we completed the annual training period or whether they..., During the split week my unit was redirected to pack up and bring all of our engineering equipment back to Winchester street armory which was built for the colored troops and, and move toward Cambridge. And that's what we did, we brought all of the heavy equipment back and then we traveled light to Cambridge, MD, cross the bridge to Cambridge, MD. We, was housed at an elementary school somewhere down off route 50 down behind the packinghouses. At that time, being a part of the 121st engineer battalion there were three or four other units in that battalion, company size units in the battalion which were not housed with us. We were segregated from them.

Our job mostly was as reactionary. In other words if there was a outburst of violence or anything like that, we would mount the trucks and go out there and try to patrol the area, see if we could just by presence, sort of squashed the, disturbance and get people back into there homes. There was, I think at the time, a curfew. Now we wasn't the first unit in Cambridge. We relieved other units there. Right, and huh...that's about it except for incidents and stuff that we experienced.

Rhonda: What type of incidents did you experience?

Thornton: Well I would say on the second week, in the middle of the second week my commander told me to take the troops on some R&R. R&R is rest and relaxation. And there's a hospital just on the right hand side of the, Route 50 bridge (inaudible) going across the river. And..there's a public beach there that the community used. And, what I did, I went downtown that day, and, I bought all the troops swimming trunks. That afternoon we went to the beach. I guess after about 35 to 40 minutes playing around on the beach company side unit, the, somebody says "Hey Sgt. Thornton, police are hear." Police came up and said "what are you doing on the beach?" I said well we're swimming, ya know, it's obvious what we're doing. "Well you can't do that here." So I told the, I told one of the troops to get the commander. And I talk to, continued to talk with the officers, and when the commander drove up he said "what's wrong officer? What's going on?" Well you guys can use...so and so can't use this beach. You know you colored people or what ever was said at the time. Don't think he used the N word I don't think he would be that stupid. Anyway, the commander, Captain Joe Mills at the time said "Officer well, the battalion commander directed us to give the troops R & R and huh, this is why we're here. He said "well you can't use this beach." And commander Mills politely explained to the officer, he said "if you don't want us to tear this town apart officer, you better leave us alone." And the officer drove away. That was the end of that.

Another incident I remember distinctly when, Gen. Gillstone who was the interim commander of Maryland National Guard at that time flew in to talk to the two activists, Brown and Gloria Richardson and also the undertaker's son who was a part of that movement at that time. And she told him, "Gen. Gillstone we have nothing to discuss." You know and he asked her why, she said "your National Guard here is segregated, there's nothing for us to discuss." He turned around to the battalion Commander Colonel Downs and said, "Is that right?" Colonel Downs held his head down and said "yes sir." And Gen. Gillstone said "get this shit straight right now." And at that time, I hate to be graphic about this thing but...those were the words that was used. He said "get this shit straightened out right now" And then, at that point the Maryland National Guard was sort of integrated. Huh, in other words we were one on one with patrols, one on one on the corners we divided the reactionary force and that's where I met Courtney Heart. Joe Langley who was a Sgt. at the time. The Jones boys, remember General Jones? He was a Lieutenant at the time and his brother was a Lieutenant. And my position at that time was like field first. And in those days, every ? had a field first. We had a first Sergeant and then we had a Sergeant that took care of the field duties. The first Sergeant took care of the administrative duties at that time and my job was field first that's why I was out in the field all the time. And I experienced some of those things. So after that my brother he was on duty on the north end, south end of the trout tight river. There was a hotel there I believe and, and he was mated with a white soldier. And at that point

that was the first integration I had experienced in the Maryland National Guard.

Rhonda: And it stayed that way after the riots?

Thornton: It stayed that way after the riots. In some units. In some units right. And then....after that integration was very slow but it was happening.

Valerie: What rank were you?

Thornton: At that time I'm going to say I was a Sergeant First Class. The rank structure at that time was different from the rank structure we have today. In fact we didn't have, we didn't have Sergeant Majors at battalion level I don't think. I think the oldest First Sergeant was usually considered the Sergeant Major Battalion but he wore First Sergeant Rank. The highest rank at that time I can remember is an E8. And huh, Sergeant...I was just one step below E8 as a Sergeant First Class. I was an E7 Sergeant First class, I remember that rank.

Valerie: How much time had you had in the Guard at that point?

Thornton: Well I had been in the Guard since 1949. Of course I had spent two years on active duty during the Korean conflict.

Kaely Roe: "After Cambridge, where did you go next?"

Sgt.Maj. Thornton: "After Cambridge we came home. Then I left the engineer unit and transferred to a Special Forces unit, the Green Beret. I stayed in that unit until 1984."

"When did you get called to go into Baltimore?"

"In the '68 riots? The Friday night that Martin Luther King was shot we were called to duty. There was an alert put out and we were called up to total report right away. We went back to the Rule Armory and we were housed there. Just about everybody showed up. We left there and convoyed over to the Pikesville Armory and we drew all our weapons, ammunition, we drew our canisters of gas and everything and then we convoyed right down Pennsylvania Ave to Pennsylvania and Biddle Street. When we got there the fire fighters were putting out fires. People were looting, running up and down the street with boxes of Kotex. They were cutting the firemen's hoses... When we got down to that corner the firemen said "Yea, we're glad to see you guys; they were giving us a fit." We stationed the area, quieted the area down, we stayed there maybe a couple of hours, and then we moved back up Pennsylvania avenue and Pressman street. I think I disseminated my troops in the area. There were furniture stores in the area and we spent the rest of the night out there right on the corner of Pennsylvania Ave and Pressman street. Of course the curfew was imposed at that time so there were very few people on the street. We left there and we went to William Lemmel school on Hillen Street. We spent the night there, showered up and everything, and from there we went to Mondawmin Mall. Our troops were stationed in a parameter defense around Mondawmin. We didn't lose one window at Mondawmin. Not a window, did we lose. We were only threatened at one time when we got some intel that some students from

Douglass high school had decided that they were going to penetrate our ranks and get to Mondawmin. Mondawmin was closed at that time, no retail or anything going on at that time. We had full control of the mall at that time. I can remember having a good time in there because we had access to the supermarket and all those other stores and we were eating like kings. We didn't lose one window at Mondawmin. This was Good Friday I think and on Easter we allowed Mondawmin to open, and we just kept patrol on the traffic and the activity in the mall. And from there, we went back to Pikesville Amory. The '68 riots and the '63 riots were two different situations. In '63 we were on state active duty. In '68 we were federalized by the federal government and we were under the umbrella 82nd Airborne Division. We took over the city. We had all the parks and most of the schools. We took care of the telephone company buildings so that they wouldn't breach communications. But people were out on the street looting just for the fun of it at the time. Some of them were out there just for no cause at all, just to be out on the street. They were two different situations/

In Cambridge, they were actually shooting. They were riding around through town firing pistols and stuff. When we hear something like that the reactionary force, we just see if we can go out and just show a presence."

"What were your interactions like with the rioters?"

"I found Cambridge to be very strange because during the day, most people worked together. They were like sisters and brothers eating out of the same plate. And then it seems like about five o'clock in the afternoon a curtain came down between the town and they were black and white, or colored and white. And then the next morning, people would swear to the lord, we get along great down hear. But then in the afternoon, in the hot summer, when people were out and standing on the corners, it was just a little activity. In the '68 riots, people seemed more purposeful; they seemed to be aggravated by the death of Martin Luther King Jr. Our purpose in the '68 riots was to protect the lives and property of the people of Baltimore. "

Kaely: "How did the rioters and the white firemen treat you as a black National Guardsman?"

Thornton: "Well I was always a Sergeant Major, and I don't know if you know anything about Sergeant Majors but (laughs) nobody bothers a Sergeant Major. Nobody."

Kaely: Were you involved in any civil rights stuff before the riots began?

Thornton: No because the civil rights movement in Baltimore was sort of clandestine if you remember. It wasn't covert it was sort of under cover. And folks that were participating in the civil rights movement other than the NAACP, we had some other groups out there CORE, Congress of Racial Equality and some other movements going on at the time but they were sort of clandestine. Not violent or anything like that but they weren't as covert as they should've been I would think.

Rhonda: What did your wife do at the time?

Thornton: During the 68' riots?

Rhonda: Hmm Huh.

Thornton: Stayed home took care of the kids.

Rhonda: And your children, were the schools segregated?

Thornton: Well, that goes back to the culture, schools were, I don't know if they were segregated at that time by design, they were segregated at that time by design. I'm going to say that, yeah. And the children went to an elementary school in the black community.

Rhonda: Did you find that your children had any problems? Did they have any racial experiences that they expressed to you?

Thornton: In schools at that time?

Rhonda: Well in schools or just in general.

Thornton: No, I don't think so. My son had some problems later in life, I don't know whether it was... schools were fully integrated by that time.

Rhonda: I know a lot of people, well programs that I talked about, one of the things they would say when they were younger they noticed that things were segregated but they didn't know why. I was wondering if that was the same case for your children. Did they ever inquire "well why is this like this or why can't we go here?"

Thornton: No I don't....No, I don't remember them asking me any questions like you know?

Rhonda: Have you ever traveled to the south before?

Thornton: Sure.

Rhonda: What was the difference?

Thornton: The south was segregated.

Rhonda: I mean but you know.

Thornton: Even in the military, the military was segregated. I went in the service in 1950. We were in an all black unit. And the only white person in my company, any of the units, was the company commander. And, I experienced segregation at Fort Benin. At Fort Gordan Gorgia, Camp Hook, Louisiana, huh, Fort Hood, Texas, Fort Jackson, South Carolina and a lot of stops along the way. I did experience segregation, I'm talking about the separate water fountains, the separate pee exits, the separate USO clubs and we experienced that here in the Maryland National Guard up until the mid late 50's.

Rhonda: And when you were in the south in the other, what type of like, what... can you give us specific incidents like something, not just separate.. is there anything.. incidents that happened, anything someone said when you were down there that you probably would not have experienced up here in Baltimore?

Thornton: Sure, I noticed that when we were...I was at a transportation company and our job was to move troops and supplies from huh...from National Guard Units...huh, National Guard Bases to ports of embarkation. The troops that are being activated we moved them, all there equipment supplies and everything...but anyway, I remember a lot of armories we couldn't go into in the south. If we were moving to a town to move the armory or the troops, we couldn't go into the armory. And, we couldn't use the bathroom facilities. They would hand us a boxed lunch out the door. I can remember like I say...having to sit outside the PX to sit and eat our ice cream and stuff like that because we couldn't go in. I remember in Fort Benin, Georgia in the consolidated mess hall we had two lines going to the serving line. A white line and a black line and when we got to the serving line we would pair off and we go back over to the colored section to eat.

Valerie: But you would go through the same serving line?

Thornton: Same serving line yeah...that didn't make sense.

Rhonda: Is there anything that you experience, like something you saw where another person being discriminated against and you wanted to intervene?

Thornton: Well, I experienced...I was stationed at Fort Bragg, NC, at a place called, let me see if I can remember the name. It was between Don and Lovington, NC on highway 421. We had a small base outside of Fort Bragg and, a friend of mine and myself, we would like to catch the bus and go in to Don because we like to dance and I did too. And we would...We over stayed our time one night and we had to catch the local bus coming back from Benson, NC back to Dunn and Lovington, NC and, there was a lot of textile workers getting on the bus in the morning. This was like about 3:30/4:00 in the morning. And they were getting on the bus and every time the bus would stop more textile workers would get on until the bus filled up back to us. Well at that time in NC we had to sit at the back of the bus. Well we were sitting about two seats from the long seat in the back and the huh, bus driver got up and said "hey, you niggas move back a seat." John Purdy and myself we got up and move back. We were both Corporals at that time. More people got on..."Hey, you niggas move back a seat." We moved back a seat. More people got on..."Hey, you niggas move back a seat." Well at that time we were on the long seat in the back. When the bus stopped again, those people were not going to sit on that long seat beside us. So the bus driver said "hey, you niggas get off the bus." We said, "not out in the middle of nowhere." "If you niggas want trouble your gonna get it." So John kept tellin' him...and me being from East Baltimore I wasn't use to that crap. You know? So I start slangin' a few MF's you know. So John Purdy started "come on, come on, let's get off the bus." So we got off the bus, so I asked the bus driver I say, "Well how about our money, giving us our fare back so we can catch another bus?" "You not gon' get no damn money you better get off the bus if you don't want no trouble." So we got off the bus and we hitchhiked back. We got in that morning and our commander was a black Second Lieutenant, huh, Lorenzo Felder he just died not too long ago. Colonel Bus Felder they used to call him, remember that? He was the lieutenant and he was active commander at the time. And we explained to him what happened and went to the bus company but naturally the bus company, the driver denied it. You know, we were never on the bus. That was one incident.

I can remember, coming home on leave from Fort Bragg or anywhere else. We would catch the train at the station right over here...Pennsylvania Station and when we got to Washington, DC we had to get off the train and go back to the last car. We could not ride that ...now if the train was from Baltimore to DC there was no problem but between Washington and Richmond there was a problem. So we had to ride the back of the train all the way down to Raleigh or where ever we were getting off at in NC. Yeah, I can remember that. Those are some of the experiences that I personally had. Other than that you know? I never really had a problem with segregated units because I didn't have to compete with the state and all of the white troops for rank. All I had to do was be better than the guys in the black unit and I made sure of that...huh that I was the top soldier in the huh, all black unit. So anyways it was an advantage for me. I realized that early... I didn't have to compete with the state, all I had to do was be better than the guys in my unit.

Valerie Wiggins: What grade was your brother during the riots?

SGM Thornton: Master Sergeant, Leroy. He was a Master Sergeant, he was First Sergeant.

VW: He received the same respect at that time?

SGM: Oh yeah, First Sergeant, yeah.

VW: Did you witness any of the um black guardsmen being treated differently?

SGM: I can't say that see because when uh, I think it was General York, when he came through with the 82nd Division, they were mostly black. And of course the 82nd Division being the 82nd Division, they commanded the respect they always had and we didn't have any problems.

The outlying regions of Baltimore City at that time was around the Park Heights, Park Circle, around the Liberty Road area, around Highland town and places like that, but everything in the middle was mostly black, black community with white, I would say, white or Caucasian retailers, Oriental retailers, stuff like that you know, Chinese stores on the corners, liquor stores on the corners, grocery stores on the corners stuff. Most of those people did not live in the city. I would say that during the Pennsylvania Avenue Era, when those people when they start rehabilitating Pennsylvania Avenue, rehabbing Pennsylvania Ave that corridor, most of those folk were moving into the Park Heights and the Reisterstown area, which forced the Jewish community to move out further. We were pretty well rooted in Cold Spring, Rogers Avenue, Northern Parkway, Pimlico area, at that time.

Rhonda Sheppard: A question I did have about the riots, was it anything remotely close to how like it was with the Rodney King incident how they went after innocent people?

SGM: No, no we didn't have anything like that. Not in Baltimore, no. Definitely not, no. Because the riots happened in the black community. And the Caucasians were not coming into the black community to beat a Rodney King. That wasn't going to happen, no.

RS: What was Pennsylvania Avenue back before most of the riots?

SGM: Pennsylvania Ave I would say Gay Street in East Baltimore, you know Gay Street was a retail corridor, you remember that? From Fayette Street all the way up to around Egar Street, near Epsteins, the Ervins Market you had the retail markets and all that stuff. They were heavily looted. The, I know Pennsylvania Avenue was looted, some stores along the Liberty Road corridor was looted, up around Park Heights Ave, Reisterstown Road a lot of those stores were looted. South Baltimore was a different story, South Baltimore had spots of black in there, other than Cherry Hill and nobody bothered with Cherry Hill.

VW: I'm going to ask you a little bit of things from after the riots. Like, how did participating in the riots effect, did that have any effect at all on how you felt the rest of your time in the National Guard?

SGM: Well, during the '63 riots I was in a segregated unit and then of course we slowly transformed into a, we were then a black company in a white battalion. Then I left that company and went to Special Forces. Well in Special Forces, the blacks were a minority there, but we held the highest rank. (laughs) So I didn't have a problem there either. And if soldiers had a problem with the black soldiers, we had 3 black Sergeant Majors back then in the Special Forces. I don't know if you knew that only had 1, 2 white Sergeant Majors, 3 black Sergeant Majors. If the soldiers had a problem with that they didn't exhibit it because. Special Forces was a little different we had to look out for each other. We lived out of each other's pockets. The training was much more rigorous. We went on a lot of airborne operations stuff like that. We flew Panama and all those jungles and stuff together. And you had to get along. Now when we left training, weekend training, we went back to our community and that was different there because we were dealing with different cultures. In Special Forces, I didn't experience that as much as other troops may have in other units.

VW: You said you were with Special Forces until 1984, is that when you retired then?

SGM: No, that's when I came to the brigade, the 58th Brigade. I got there, well at that time I had just finished the Sergeant Major's Academy. I had just graduated the Sergeant Majors Academy. The needed a Sergeant Major at the 58th Brigade. And I went to the 58th Brigade as the Brigade Sergeant Major. Then I was the first Sergeant Major of the 3rd Brigade, because the 58th Brigade transformed into the 3rd Brigade, of the 29th Division. So I was the first Sergeant Major of the 3rd Brigade. I'm thinking that I was the first black Sergeant Major of the 58th Brigade, and then the first black Sergeant Major of the 3rd Brigade. I stayed in the 3rd Brigade until 1987 when the State Command Sergeant Majors position opened. General Baker and a couple of other ones encouraged me to apply it and I applied for it. Of course, General Langley and General Fretterd selected me as the State Sergeant Major. I stayed State Sergeant Major until 1993 then I retired.

VW: Were you the first black State Sergeant Major?

SGM: The very first black State Sergeant Major, one of the first few black State Sergeant Majors in the country. I can only remember at least, I can only remember 3 of them, New Jersey had one, Sergeant Major Smith, Sergeant Major in Washington, DC and Sergeant Major of California. That's actually four.

VW: Looking back on everything, now that you've relived your time in the '68 riots, how

does it feel to look back at it now?

SGM: Well know what I know now I would have joined the Air Force. (laughing) Seriously about that, I would have joined the Air Force. Of course, I don't know how well I would have excelled at the rank that I did in the Air Force. I love the adventure and I love traveling all over the world. I did some crazy thing you know. I've jumped into Panama, Puerto Rico, not Panama, but Puerto Rico; I jumped into Canada in 70 degree below zero weather. I've landed in trees, in water, (RS: I hope it wasn't the 70 degree below when you jumped in the water!) no that was snow. I like the idea of killing snakes and eating snakes and stuff like that. I really did.

VW: That's the SF mentality.

SGM: I really enjoyed that. I probably would have done the same thing again, but I don't know that whether things would have changed, would have been any different had I joined the Air Force. I know some experience a lot of the same things. I've heard some experience, I attended a seminar at Morgan a couple of years ago they had a panel of Tuskegee Airmen guys that actually flew missions over Italy and France during World War II and they experienced segregation. These guys were top notch pilots. Some of the stories they told were horrifying as far as segregation was concerned. I hope I answered your question.

VW: You did. You had also mentioned that your son later on after the riots had some experiences was that segregation?

SGM: Oh in school, no. We moved from Federal Street in 1970. Well in 1960 we started looking, because I was outgrowing my home. See I had a two bedroom home on Federal Street and I had my son and daughter in the same room. She was a little tiny girl. So we decided to buy another home and rent that house out. We moved up, we wanted to move into Harford County into Joppatown where I am now. When we first went up to Joppatown, in the townhouse apartments right there at Trimble Road and Joppa Farm Road. We sat in a room, I guess about two hours before anybody would come over and talk to us. My son kept asking, "Dad, why are they calling all these other people and not us?" At the end of the day when the room was empty, one of the salesmen came up and told us, "Look I'm sorry, it's in the courts. There's nothing we can do right now." Then I had to explain to him why we couldn't move into Joppatown at that time. Well we came back to Baltimore then in 1969 when the law was passed that you could move anywhere, you could live where you wanted. Donald Grempler Insurance called my wife and I, told us we better come back up we can sell you a home. We went back to Harford Country looked at some homes. We bought the home I'm in now off Joppa Farm Road right off the corner of Garnett. We went to look at the house and all the neighbors had gathered around front of the house. But the guy who was selling the house was a retired warrant officer and he wanted to move back to Monmouth, NJ. We struck a conversation, me being a sergeant major and him being a warrant officer, we hit it off, you know. His name was Dan. I'll never forget his name was Dan. And the neighbors were saying, "Dan, don't sell them the house. Don't sell them the house. We'll buy the house then we can sell it to whoever we want." Dan says, "No, I can't do that. Besides they have \$8,000." (laughs) We had \$8,000 to put down. The house only cost \$24,000. At that time the house was only 5 years old. The house was built in '65 and this was like '69 we negotiated the house and '70 we moved in the house. Then my son had some problems at Edgewood High

School. I don't know that it was racially motivated or boys being boys, but they were getting in fights. You know where Day's Automobile place is on the corner of Mountain Road and 40. Well Larry, the Day's son, Larry the big time auto dealership now. He owns all those trailer dealership, the RV dealership, the claw arm? One of the son's he has a claw arm. Well that's the one my son went to school with, Larry. He and my son used to get in fights all the time. And now they the best of friends! I don't know that it was racially motivated or not, but we had some problems in school. But it all worked out. Our son finally graduated and he moved on. He went in the service. He joined the 82nd Airborne and did some of the same things I did.

VW: Wow. Have you been involved in civil rights since the riots?

SGM: Well, I'm a lifetime member of the NAACP. We haven't had anything close to the riots since then. We were getting ready at one time, I don't know. It wasn't publicized, but we were getting ready for another Rodney King event. We were in the planning stages of it. Just in case something should happen in Baltimore at the last Rodney King trial. And Baltimore was getting ready for it. I was in the meetings at the time since I was the State Sergeant Major. Baltimore City was bracing for something like that. We were prepared for it. It certainly wasn't something publicized. No one else knew about it but the people involved.

VW: Do you think that the National Guard being involved with the riots as fast as they did, helped quell it from becoming anything worse?

SGM: I'm going to say it certainly helped, because it was out of control. The local authorities couldn't handle it and that's the reason the National Guard was called in. Anytime a situation like that happens, the local authority's responsibility to take control and when they can't handle it, the onus of the Governor to send those troops in. In both cases, that's what happened. The '68 riots, this thing was nationwide. It wasn't just a local out burst of public disorder. It was a full blown riot across the nation. That's why the federal government stepped in and said let's put this thing down.

VW: The book that they did, *Into The Cauldron*, did you participate in, were you interviewed for that?

SGM: I was interviewed for that book, but some of the statements are inaccurate. The writer or the author of the book had actually mistaken me for another sergeant. And the sergeant he had mistaken me for was William Alston. Do you remember William Alston? Well he had mistaken me for was William Alston. Some of the comments he claimed that I made, I think one of the comments was that I was supposed to ran over some black guy coming down Reisterstown Road in a jeep. And told him, "Nigger get out of the way" or something like that "or I'll run over your ass," something like that. That was Bill Alston, that wasn't me. I would never have said something like that. But I was interviewed along with all the other sergeant majors, myself, 2 other black and 1 white sergeant major were all interviewed at the same time.

VW: Well thank you again for your time. We'll be in touch with you and get all the information back to you. We really appreciate you taking your Friday evening out to help us with our project.

SGM: No problem. I do have other things to do. (laughs)

VW: Do you have anything else that you want to add to this?

SGM: No. I just hope that everything I said, you know I'm going back 30 some years now or further. I just hope everything is accurate, my memory is as good as I want it to be.

VW: Well as always it's a great pleasure talking to you and your stories are fantastic. Thank you!