

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Vance Coleman
Brigadier General, Artillery Officer, Korean War
2000

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Coleman, Vance, (1930-). Oral history interview, 2000.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (150 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassettes (150 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video: 1 videocassette (150 min.), color, ½ inch.

Abstract

Vance Coleman, a Milwaukee, Wis. native, discusses his Korean War service with the 623rd Field Artillery and his experiences as a black soldier in the recently integrated Army. Coleman talks about Quartermaster School at Fort Lee (Virginia) and his assignment to Germany including his duties as a clerk, recreation activities, and attitudes of Germans toward Americans. He details Officer Candidate School at Fort Sill (Oklahoma) where he was the only black graduate of his class and his initial assignment with the 31st Infantry in Alabama although he was later reassigned due to his race. Coleman describes his duties as an artillery officer in Korea, artillery firing and maintenance processes, and problems caused by Korean weather such as frostbite and the danger of freezing to death. He touches upon his experience in a military hospital, duties with the First Cavalry in Japan and use of the GI Bill. Coleman comments on joining the Reserves, taking courses from the War College, current decline in enlistment numbers, benefits of service, and treatment of blacks in the military.

Biographical Sketch

Coleman (b. May 22, 1930) served with the Army during the Korean War. He served with the 623rd Field Artillery, 1st Cavalry, and as of the 84th Division Reserves. Coleman is the first African American Brigadier General from Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Dr. James McIntosh, 2002.

Transcribed by Jessica Wendorff, 2001

Transcription edited by Abigail Miller, 2002.

McIntosh: I'm speaking to Vance Coleman. And it's 12 of May 2000. So you were born when, sir?

Coleman: I was born May 22, 1930. Almost 70 years ago.

McIntosh: In Milwaukee?

Coleman: No. I was born in Dermont, Arkansas.

McIntosh: Oh, that's right. You grew up in Milwaukee?

Coleman: Grew up in Milwaukee, yeah.

McIntosh: Got it. I remember reading that too. Entered in military service when?

Coleman: December 1947.

McIntosh: December?

Coleman: December, yes.

McIntosh: And a volunteer?

Coleman: Volunteer, absolutely.

McIntosh: Good. Where did they send you?

Coleman: Lets see. Processed at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, and took basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

McIntosh: That's the cavalry unit?

Coleman: Yeah well, it was tankers. It was tank unit, but we took infantry basic.

McIntosh: Twelve weeks?

Coleman: Yeah, it was 12 weeks. That's right. It was 12 weeks of basic.

McIntosh: So did they head you in any direction after that particular type of -- they didn't give you an MOS right after basic, did they?

Coleman: No, no --I think, as I recall, prior to completion of basic, we were counseled individually and said, These are the things you are qualified for. Where do you want to go? At that point I elected the quartermaster school at Fort Lee, Virginia. I had enough of the infantry.

McIntosh: You didn't like that marching?

Coleman: No, no.

McIntosh: I never have met anybody that has. So at quartermaster school what type of things did they teach you then?

Coleman: At quartermaster school the function primarily, the focus primarily was on clerical duties. As I recall, the course that I took initially was one of company -- skills that were required for company clerk. During that time, we had to compute the payroll. So -- let's see -- you typed a morning report and computed the payroll and you typed the payroll, among other things. Those were the primary ones at that I recall.

McIntosh: How long were you there before they sent you up to take responsibility?

Coleman: I think, as I recall, that was a 12-week course also.

McIntosh: From there what?

Coleman: From there I went to Fort Dix, New Jersey, for a very short while until -- let's see. I got pulled for overseas duty in Europe.

McIntosh: Fort Dix is a embarkation point?

Coleman: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: Everybody goes to Europe from Fort Dix?

Coleman: Right.

McIntosh: So where in Europe did they send you?

Coleman: Let's see. I went to Kinsden, Germany. It was a training center, European training base really.

McIntosh: Your duties there were as a Quartermaster?

Coleman: My duties there was as a personnel clerk. We had a centralized -- the Army was still integrated then. That was a training center for all the black troops. We had a centralized messing facility, supplies, personnel, pay, the whole nine yards, and I was assigned to the payroll section.

McIntosh: And so you were in Germany very long?

Coleman: I think about two years.

McIntosh: How was that duty in Germany?

Coleman: It was pretty good duty.

McIntosh: [unintelligible]?

Coleman: It was good. It was good really -- you know -- the experience that you got. Got a chance to visit a lot of places.

McIntosh: I would think the opportunities to see things would be terrific?

Coleman: The one place I didn't go was Burches Garden. I had one opportunity to do that, and I missed it. I was participating in athletics, and so I didn't always get a chance to go where I wanted to go depending upon when the athletics were --

McIntosh: The team needed you; right?

Coleman: Right. Wherever the team went, right.

McIntosh: That's good. At that time the base was pretty solid and the food and all this was pretty standard and pretty good?

Coleman: Yeah, we had --

McIntosh: This is right after the war, so I know there was some shortages.

Coleman: Yeah but, Generally we had a good unit. The cadre there was good and well-molded. We had -- a headquarters first Sergeant it was A, No. 1 who really made it work, made it run. He was well-liked, respected. And, he spoke. We acted.

McIntosh: That's how it's supposed to be, isn't it?

Coleman: That's right.

McIntosh: Right, okay. How about the German? Did you learn to speak German?

Coleman: I learned very little German. I learned -- at one point I could sing, *You Can't be True Dear to the* [unintelligible], the entire song in German at one point along the way. That was one of their drinking songs.

McIntosh: Oh I see

Coleman: I got to know the local population, go to the local guesthouses and drink beer and sing.

McIntosh: The Germans seemed to be reasonable people at that time after the war?

Coleman: Most of them were. Most of them were. I recall one incident one fellow who had no legs and --

McIntosh: He was bitter?

Coleman: He was very bitter, very, very bitter. We respected that. When he came around, we just disappeared. Because he blamed the Americans for everything and I guess --

McIntosh: Of course.

Coleman: Right.

McIntosh: So your duties didn't change?

Coleman: Well, they did to an extent. They became more broad based. There was more responsibility, differing responsibility.

McIntosh: Got a promotion?

Coleman: Got a promotion.

McIntosh: That's always good.

Coleman: Yes.

McIntosh: Little more dough?

Coleman: Right.

McIntosh: After you left Germany, then what?

Coleman: I left Germany to attend OCS. I came back. I was scheduled to go to Fort Riley, Kansas. For some reason there were an awful lot of guys signing up. Maybe it was because of Korea, because Korea had started up. Fort Riley -- the class was full, and they then reopened Fort Benning and Fort Sill, so I had an option of Fort Benning or Fort Sill or Fort Riley. So those infantry guys walked, artillery rides and I'll take Fort Sill.

McIntosh: That's an easy choice.

Coleman: It was an easy choice for me, right, right.

McIntosh: And Fort Sill, is this a big class? I am not familiar enough to know.

Coleman: Fort Sill is the home of the field artillery. However, our class -- I think we started with something like 37 people, not an awful lot.

McIntosh: How long did it take you to graduate?

Coleman: 22 weeks.

McIntosh: 22 weeks.

Coleman: 22 weeks at Fort Sill.

McIntosh: Very intensive training?

Coleman: Very intense, very intense. You learn to reach your limits and reach for more.

McIntosh: They pushed very hard?

Coleman: Very, pushed very hard.

McIntosh: In what way?

Coleman: I think at the time going through that I understood what was going on. After completion then I realized what really did is what the Army's supposed to do is take that raw piece of material, that's you, and rebuild you. That's what they did. If you can't take it, it shows, and you go.

McIntosh: Physical, intense too?

Coleman: Very physical, very.

McIntosh: A lot more running?

Coleman: Yes.

McIntosh: How so?

Coleman: There was an awful a lot of physical exercise. But you appreciate that too, afterwards.

McIntosh: Oh, yeah, I remember that too.

Coleman: Afterwards hundred something degree heat and you're running four miles. That was tough.

McIntosh: I was going to say Oklahoma is a pretty hot place?

Coleman: Yes, yes. But it was good.

McIntosh: It was, yeah. You mean instruction was good?

Coleman: Outstanding, outstanding.

McIntosh: Gosh, you really learn a lot in 22 weeks.

Coleman: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: Boy, I'll tell you.

Coleman: Sometimes you don't realize how much you've learned until it's behind you. Then you really realize.

McIntosh: This is an integrated class?

Coleman: This is an integrated class, right.

McIntosh: One of the first in the school?

Coleman: Yeah, first. As a matter of fact, it was an integration of one.

McIntosh: You were it?

Coleman: I was it. Actually, we started with three. There were three African Americans. One guy was married, and the pressure got to him. And he left. And the other guy was eliminated.

McIntosh: I would think being married at that time would be just terribly difficult.

Coleman: Yes.

McIntosh: You didn't have a lot of time. And any time you had off you were tired.

Coleman: That's right. Lights came on, got the laundry, and that was it.

McIntosh: You were single then?

Coleman: Yes, yes. That helped a lot.

McIntosh: They -- Ok you got that bar on your shoulder -- got a job for you, where to?

Coleman: First assignment was with the 31st Infantry Division, Dixie Division, out of Alabama. They call it master guard units for Korean. And I reported -- I forget -- I reported in the afternoon to headquarters, and there was stunned silence.

McIntosh: Why?

Coleman: Didn't know what to do with me. [Laugh] So I was told to go back to quarters to they call me. I hadn't gotten any quarters yet. I went to -- DOQ was across street from the officer's club. So I went to the DOQ there. I went to the wrong one. DOQ was down there somewhere.

McIntosh: Oh, my.

Coleman: So I said, Okay. I was a little hungry, so I went across to the pub and got a bite to eat. Can't go there either. Anyway --

McIntosh: Looking back, it's hard to believe, you know, I have lived through all that. It's another story.

Coleman: So I ended up getting reassigned to a transportation company. And I couldn't believe -- I can't believe -- I was just changing orders from combat unit to a transportation company. I served there about a year and a half. In the process I got married. Oh, no, before that, I volunteered for Korea. And I got vaccines not needed at this time. I got married, and once I got married, I got orders for Korea. Got assigned to -- there again, I got assigned to a National Guard unit. The 623 Artillery Field Infantry out of Kentucky, Georgia, and Alabama. But well received, of the military commanders and [unintelligible] military member from Kentucky. And the senior officer told me he was from Alabama. No, Patrick was from Alabama, and Tony was from Georgia. All the NCOs were from those three states, but they were good, but there was a top gun was O'Mere for sergeant. O'Mere didn't care who you were, you were soldiers. But the chief firing officer was the CNCO of guns. Black was from Kentucky who picked up where I left off at OCS and taught me the real Field Artillery.

McIntosh: Oh.

Coleman: That was a good assignment.

McIntosh: You were there how long?

Coleman: Ten months.

McIntosh: Ten months.

Coleman: I was there ten months. I think a couple months before I was supposed to rotate on the rotation system I was ended by Field Artillery.

McIntosh: We had that.

Coleman: There was another fellow, Phil, and I who kind of teamed up together in that unit. Jim Davis, Jim Davis is from Chapel Hill, South Carolina. And we almost became

inseparable. Whenever things got tough, incoming fire, one of the things I learned is that troops are like everybody else. They get scared. If you can demonstrate something other than that bravado. They respond to that. We had, we had, we got to the point if we were getting incoming fire, we would always ask, Give us charge. Let us fire back. 'Cause these guys -- instead of cowering in the hole scared, you're fighting back. Big difference. Big difference. That's what Jim and I did. We would kind of walk down with the guys out there. We'd get out in the open with them. Also then, one night I got hit and evacuated away to Japan, stayed there about four months.

McIntosh: Shrapnel?

Coleman: Yeah, shrapnel. Wasn't serious, just enough for evacuation --

McIntosh: Right. When did you go to Korea?

Coleman: I think it was September of '52, fall of '52.

McIntosh: I went in September of '50.

Coleman: Is that right? That's when it was hot.

McIntosh: Yeah [unintelligible] hospital too.

Coleman: That's when it was hot.

McIntosh: So taking care of bloody wounds I hadn't seen before. It was exciting.

Coleman: Yeah, when I was in the hospital back in Japan -- boy -- up on Pork Chop Hill, guys got slaughtered. They needed help and from anybody that could help them. It was just bad.

McIntosh: During that time we were taking casualties from when they were on attack like that. It would take us three days before we would get them all cleaned up. Just could -- never stopped, never stopped. Tell you the truth I felt bad, felt bad. So your assignment in Korea was --

Coleman: I went in traditionally the youngest guy there gets the Forward Observer position. That's where I went. Met some -- we had some-- in fact, one from Wisconsin, one from Michigan, one from Illinois. Where was the other guy from Ohio, I think.

McIntosh: What position were you in?

Coleman: 6113 was a separate battalion. Yeah, we bounced back and forth in support of the First Marine Division and the Second Division.

McIntosh: Tell me about your outfit. What are you talking about? How many guns and so forth?

Coleman: Oh, we had -- in the battalion there were 18 155 howitzers. In the battery there were six, 130 some men, and the equipment was -- let's see -- we had prime move some of the howitzers that we -- at that point were two-and-a-half-ton trucks.

McIntosh: Two-and-a-half-ton trucks pulled a 155?

Coleman: I'm sorry, that's 105. The M5 person that was [unintelligible] -- anyway it was a track vehicle, track vehicle was prime mover 155.

McIntosh: Yesterday I talked to a guy who drove a 105 Howitzer --

Coleman: Oh, okay.

McIntosh: -- and they pulled those with six fives.

Coleman: That's right, right. We had a track, an M5 -- an M5track vehicle. It included in that. It also took the crew and somewhat basic load of ammunition.

McIntosh: You had 18 guns in your -- ?

Coleman: No, we had six. In the battery there was six, 18 in the battalion.

McIntosh: Tell me about the shell now. I've got -- describe this 105. What are we looking at?

Coleman: It's about -- casing -- I'd say it's probably about three feet long, about two and a half feet long. It loaded with a tray.

McIntosh: You couldn't pick one of those up?

Coleman: Oh, no. There is a four-man loading crew.

McIntosh: But it was heavier than a man could pick up?

Coleman: Yes. You could pick it up, but you couldn't load it.

McIntosh: I see. Unload it, put it on a tray?

Coleman: Put it on a tray, two men pick it up, and slam it. And a fourth man put the powder, separate loading ammunition.

McIntosh: Four guys ran one of those guns?

Coleman: Four guys -- no, no. The gun crew is more than that was just to load it. Let's see one, two, three, four people to load it. Then you had a gunner and an assist gun, six. There were eight people. While you are firing there are two guys preparing the ammunition. One preparing the projectile itself. There is a metal plug on the top. You have to take the metal plug out and put the proper fuse in it, whatever the fire list calls for.

McIntosh: They come with a metal plug that you remove --

Coleman: Yes, remove.

McIntosh: -- put a fuse in there?

Coleman: Put a fuse in there, right.

McIntosh: Does it contact the fuse?

Coleman: Some of it contact, their timed -- at that point anyway.

McIntosh: There weren't proximity?

Coleman: There were some. There were some proximity, some timed, and some contact.

McIntosh: What kind of shells are they, all kinds?

Coleman: All kinds, high explosive, white phosphorus, anti-tank.

McIntosh: Uh-huh. That must be a pretty tough anti-tank weapons, my gosh.

Coleman: Yeah, it's a --

McIntosh: Go all the way through and come out the other side with that thing.

Coleman: Those guys, our guys did things with those, with those weapons the artillery school never dreamed of. They didn't teach it there because they never dreamed it could handle it. But they just got so good, the accuracy, the accuracy and the rate of fire.

McIntosh: Oh, you mean the rate of fire was better than the manual said?

Coleman: Yes, yes. They were just good.

McIntosh: I bet it can get pretty hot though?

Coleman: Got pretty hot, yeah.

McIntosh: worry about bending at the other end?

Coleman: Well, you know, we'd depending on what situations kind of developed--

McIntosh: You can continue to fire without cleaning it, or did you have to stop and do something?

Coleman: No, no. That's part of it. With that one, after every round fired, we didn't actually clean it, but we had to swab the tube.

McIntosh: They did swab between each round?

Coleman: Between each round. If it had some burning debris in there. The powder, separate loading, the powder could explode by debris if you didn't clean it out.

McIntosh: Then the round could explode before you were ready?

Coleman: Right.

McIntosh: Okay. Well, so kind of like that, the shot in a minute's time, how many rounds did they get out?

Coleman: Those guys --

McIntosh: About six?

Coleman: At least, yeah.

McIntosh: That's a big weapon?

Coleman: It is. Of course the new ones now -- of course it's all automated.

McIntosh: Yeah, the technology gets faster and faster. It's hard to keep up. You sat generally how far behind them, the automatic? Ten miles?

Coleman: Oh, no.

McIntosh: Not that far?

Coleman: No, about 2,000 yards. The reason for that was the closer we were to the gun, the deeper in we could fire.

McIntosh: Of course.

Coleman: And you know the Korean -- not the Koreans -- the Chinese knew that, and they're supplying the critical supply points and all that. They try to stick them just out of range.

McIntosh: They found out -- where your guns where they would adjust the footing?

Coleman: Right. We outsmarted them. We did -- we had about once a month I think was the frequency. We had what we referred to as the turkey shoot, what the Army referred to as the turkey shoot, to identify all those targets. And then we'd move up in the evening, at night. Early in the morning we had the targets already planned in our firing data. And early in the morning we would just fire away with maybe 1,000 yards behind the line. We hit a lot of targets. But then we had to do it quickly and get out of there too because it was close enough --

McIntosh: It could come back the other way also?

Coleman: Yes, yes. So we would fire and run.

McIntosh: Strategic withdrawal?

Coleman: Yes.

McIntosh: Ok, now you're the first artillery man I've talked to with a big gun?

Coleman: Is that right.

McIntosh: Yes. That's why all these questions related -- I want to compare it with the other ones.

Coleman: Our guys, our guys pride themselves in being able to fire as fast as the 105s or faster. And some of our firing positions -- of course it was to the secret -- some of our firing positions, one in particular, we were sitting with support on the Seventh Division, Seventh Division artillery, and our 155. We were in front of the 105's.

McIntosh: Oh, no. [unintelligible]

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did you ever have to worry about Chinese overriding you?

Coleman: Yeah. There was one time -- when was that -- there was always the threat. There was always the threat.

McIntosh: Right.

Coleman: At one point -- oh, man I don't know when it was. But anyway, -- it was caught and -- strong possibility. So we, you know, we started [unintelligible] and all that. I think about the second night after the words, we quarreled about it. We argued and

quarreled about it. We argued and quarreled about the 3 Chinese prisoners. That was the only time.

McIntosh: The Chinese are pretty tough to deal with.

Coleman: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: when going through a minefield. They didn't need mine detectors. They usually just send a platoon though.

Coleman: Clear.

McIntosh: [unintelligible] mine detectors [unintelligible] set up platoons then everybody could follow them. That usually exploded right in front -- that's a different concept --

Coleman: That's one way.

McIntosh: That's a different concept than we're taught here in the United States. Did you have any trouble getting food, mail, and all that stuff?

Coleman: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: Any problems?

Coleman: We did, but it was, it was -- we understood. It was no big deal.

McIntosh: And how about the cold weather, did that affect your guns?

Coleman: It could, but we didn't let it.

McIntosh: How did you keep them warm?

Coleman: We didn't keep them warm necessarily. We just made sure they didn't lock, didn't freeze. We just kept of move them.

McIntosh: But at night they weren't used through--

Coleman: Every weapon had at least two people, at least two people guarding it at night. We changed off.

McIntosh: There were two on?

Coleman: Yeah. There were two on.

McIntosh: You never had to oil them or anything simple like that, did you?

Coleman: Oh, yeah, we had to oil, Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Every day.

McIntosh: Oh, see now I didn't know this.

Coleman: Every day, the moving parts. All the wheels, all the moving parts.

McIntosh: This requires a lot more maintenance than I realized.

Coleman: One of the first things we learned in OCS on the weapons in the training, if you're not using them, you're maintaining them. They required an awful lot of care.

McIntosh: Sand or things like that, is that a problem?

Coleman: That's a problem. It became a problem. It could be a problem.

McIntosh: [unintelligible]

Coleman: Yeah, those guys, they're very creative. Its how do I keep my weapon so it's operational all the time.

McIntosh: I'm sure the crew took great pride in their particular weapon.

Coleman: You better believe it, yeah.

McIntosh: That helped make sure that they --

Coleman: The competition was always there.

McIntosh: How would they compete with another gun crew? By accuracy, was that the--

Coleman: By speed and accuracy, speed, accuracy, and inspection. We still had -- unless we were in constant battle, we still had an inspection every day. We didn't have a line-up inspection. It was a merit. But the inspection every day, the area, the weapons, how well organized we are, how fast they could get -- you know.

McIntosh: [unintelligible]

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Your specific job with the field artillery was to do what?

Coleman: My specific job -- let's see. Well, I left that field position I think I was assistant executive officer. I ended up being a commander before I left. I was out of the administrative chain -- specific job was to make sure that we were ready to fire or ready to go whenever needed.

McIntosh: You were in control of all 18 guns?

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: So it was your decision as to how they trained them and pointed them and all that.

Coleman: Yes, it's -- go a head.

McIntosh: Because of the incoming information, then you plotted out your decision for the layout and so forth?

Coleman: The specific fire missions all came from higher headquarters saying exactly what you were going to shoot at. That came from higher headquarters. One of the things we did was that changing weather conditions changes the flight of the round.

McIntosh: Oh, really.

Coleman: Yeah, so we had to constantly update. A nice, mild, clear day I could say, Okay, Im going to shoot up here 180 degrees. In the course that 180 degrees is set fire command with a deflexion somewhere between 0 and 32 [unintelligible]. On a nice clear day if you fire, it's going to go straight. You've got wind from the southeast, it's going to affect it. At night the distance is going to affect it. We had tables, we had charts

End Tape 1 Side A

Coleman: That says, you know, if I have got a wind, a headwind of ten miles per hour, then I know it's going to fall this much short and it's going to fall this much left.

McIntosh: [unintelligible]

Coleman: That was five foot. Measured the distance, measure the distance to make sure. The way I did that, okay, we have to check our windage at least once a day, it would registered at least one piece. We would test that data with one piece, with one piece, one fill, one gun.

McIntosh: Did you use a tracer or something? What did you do?

Coleman: No, we spot it.

McIntosh: Oh, okay.

Coleman: The FOs spot it for you. As long as they're friendly FOs, we give a location where we are shooting and they adjust and tells us where its aimed. We could plot and see far off we are.

McIntosh: And forward officer is what the FO stands for?

Coleman: Forward observer.

McIntosh: Forward observer. This is one you've got moving?

Coleman: No, I got one in back of me.

McIntosh: Back where you're not supposed to be moving?

Coleman: Back in the safe area.

McIntosh: As a forward observer, was he alone or did he have a little squad?

Coleman: He had a party – of a – lets see – a radio driver, radio operator, I think about four, a party of four.

McIntosh: Now, did he communicate by land line or radio?

Coleman: Both, both. If you're in a position long enough, one of the that's going to happen is you're going to go into a new position. Each unit had a communication team, a product communications team, which consisted of wiremen. And one of the first things you do is when you hook up the wires to all the guns from the fire direction setting, you hook up to the photo observer if time permits, if you're going to be there for awhile. If you're only going to be there for two or three days, then it doesn't make any sense to wire -- then you're relying totally on radio.

McIntosh: Is there a concern that the lines will be cut by the enemy --

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: I suppose that would mean they're behind you?

Coleman: That would mean they're behind you. My guess is -- and I was fortunate enough to get there. Lot of my classmates -- a lot of my classmates were -- a half dozen or so - - a lot of my classmates were killed, that's where they were killed as forward observers because--

McIntosh: Being in a photo observer?

Coleman: Yeah, you're there with four or five people and they just [unintelligible] surrounded you in a dangerous valley.

McIntosh: You have no chance?

Coleman: The danger and all those guys, some of them fell asleep. There is the danger. You always have to keep security. And the way we did it, most of the time, at least two people remain awake there back-to-back. So you have coverage all over.

McIntosh: Oh, they sit back-to-back?

Coleman: Right.

McIntosh: Was that only an M1 or carbines or what?

Coleman: We had carbines. No wait a minute. Everybody didn't have a carbine. Lieutenants had carbines. Some of them had 25s, carbines, and M1s. We had -- we also had -- the M3 submachine guns.

McIntosh: Had the old .50 calibers on point; is that right?

Coleman: Mid-50s, Mid-50s on all the prime moves that went out. Usually what would happen once the forward observer, fighting cold and guys trying to keep warm and sometimes fall asleep, and they don't wake up.

McIntosh: Very difficult not to fall asleep in those situations?

Coleman: Yeah. You just got to stay cold if you want to stay awake. If you get warm, you fall asleep.

McIntosh: Did you use airplanes to help spot?

Coleman: Oh yes.

McIntosh: Did you have radio communications with them?

Coleman: Right.

McIntosh: I would think they would be of some value?

Coleman: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: They could see around the corner and you couldn't?

Coleman: That's right. That's right. They were critical.

McIntosh: Are these Army spotting planes those dinky little webbers or --

Coleman: There were Army matter of fact [unintelligible] occasionally they would ask for volunteers to do that. There were Army pilots and spotters.

McIntosh: Pretty good cooperation with them?

Coleman: Yeah. Most of the cases they were kind of cocky. Not taking the big risk here.

McIntosh: Well if they were low flying they were because those planes were easy to shoot down.

Coleman: They were easy targets, yeah. They were easy targets. We did have -- we knew the plane was there. We were told we were going to leave, so we didn't fire. And it was shot down. It was shot down. One of the guys got out, and the other one didn't. We saw the shoot so radioed them back. They plotted it. In fact out of station -- what we did -- this is like the middle of the afternoon the sun was shining -- what we did was put a wall of steel around this so the Chinese couldn't get to him, he was out in no-man's land. Water coming out of caves and everything. We just laid down a wall of steel to protect it. We were in support of Marines, 5th Marines put together a rescue party. We kept the Chinese away while the Marines went in and got them. We were really proud of that one.

McIntosh: Oh, yeah. That's great. That's great [unintelligible]. I have a patient at that hospital captured by the Chinese with a bunch of other friends. He escaped, wandered, kept wandering towards where he assumed American lines were and finally crossed [unintelligible]. They had put all these guys in a pile and shot them all. And he got shot in the chest. But he said during the walk came down and [unintelligible]. We get a hold of them down in Inchon and took an x-ray. And even though he had a bullet wound right here --

Coleman: That's all? Just had a wound?

McIntosh: A little wound here and a little bigger one out the back. He wandered for ten days all by himself --

Coleman: Wow.

McIntosh: -- and he had a million dollar wound --

Coleman: Wow.

McIntosh: No fluid or nothing in his chest?

Coleman: Nothing.

McIntosh: I have never seen --

Coleman: How many times has that happened?

McIntosh: I never saw any like that ever. Pretty interesting. Well, did you have trouble with trench foot? I guess that's the next thing, frozen feet.

Coleman: Yeah, I did. I'll never forget that one. We went out on one of those shoots I was talking about. We went out in the evening and stayed overnight and came back the next morning. It was extremely cold, extremely cold. That night, so the SNCO and I, we elected not to sleep. We out--

McIntosh: Right.

Coleman: This guy go to sleep, might not wake up. We just had to check and make sure nobody went away on us. And I don't think I'd be cold. The only thing I would do different, I guess, is perhaps that my feet were probably perspiring. And a three or four days later I told them I had no idea-- frostbite. And pretty painful.

McIntosh: Swollen?

Coleman: Yeah. Swollen.

McIntosh: Then you had trouble getting the shoe back on?

Coleman: That's right. That's right. You know that didn't bother me so much -- that's okay. I'm still functioning. I've got to get some bigger boots. That's all. [unintelligible]. But he was dead serious. He was dead serious. Well, I don't know what transpired between. About four or five days later I got called into the battalion commander's office. I said, Oh, shit, this is it. And he said "Coleman, there won't be any charges filed against you." Major McKurtey had transferred. This guy was -- he had been at the desk all his life. The Army is goofed up here. Probably been troops unit. And at all times to put him with troops in combat situations. He thought he was doing the right thing.

McIntosh: Right.

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: John Keegan, my favorite military author, he wrote that book *War Time*. [unintelligible].

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: He wrote a whole chapter on that.

Coleman: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: Things, -- the-- annoying things people do just to stick it to you. Nothing to do about the war at all.

Coleman: No.

McIntosh: Well, but weren't you -- all the troops expected to change socks every day or every other day?

Coleman: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: Tried to?

Coleman: Oh yeah, we had good discipline. Some people violated it but for the most part we had good NCOs. -- And -- some of the NCOs [unintelligible]. Some of those guys have been court-martialed -- at some point -- and I don't know how it happened -- but the United States prisoners that were in stockade were given the opportunity to volunteer for combat in Korea sentencing. We had a number of those guys. And about 12. And some -- I was thinking what went wrong back there. Wherever they were, what went wrong. These guys became section chiefs

McIntosh: Right.

Coleman: They had their own crew and their own gun, and they were good at it.

McIntosh: Who are these guys?

Coleman: And so I said something happened. Of course, when I got back, I found out why. They were chickens.

McIntosh: [unintelligible]

Coleman: I almost challenged I go out to the Texas Inn [unintelligible] court martial, I said you know I wouldn't file charges. He backed off. He backed off.

McIntosh: Good, he should have.

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: You had a lot of crossfire, your ship? [unintelligible] crossfire in addition to [unintelligible]?

Coleman: That was the armed forces, not the [unintelligible].

McIntosh: [unintelligible] keep their gloves on. One guy said it didn't make a damn bit of difference. It was so cold those gloves wouldn't have stopped my hands from freezing. Bitter weather 51 or 52 [unintelligible]. You had no treatment at all for your superficial wounds? They didn't take out the shrapnel or anything?

Coleman: Oh, yeah, the shrapnel, oh, yeah. I said it wasn't very serious. I ended up back in the hospital in –

McIntosh: Japan?

Coleman: Japan. In Japan. I don't know when it was.

McIntosh: Did they fly you over there, fly you from Korea over to Japan?

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: How long were you over there, a week?

Coleman: I ended up being there a little longer than that. The shrapnel, the shrapnel, the major wound for me was the eye.

McIntosh: Oh.

Coleman: The attached retina.

McIntosh: From the concussion?

Coleman: From the concussion, yeah.

McIntosh: Oh, my.

Coleman: And they had everything else under control and decided to work on the eye. And they gave me a shot, Neo-Synephrine, and I'm allergic to it and didn't know it. That almost took me out. I woke up. The doctor --

McIntosh: The treatment almost got you?

Coleman: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. They gave it to me on Death Valley. And I'm waiting and something -- all this pain like the top of my head is coming off. Just take my blood pressure. Then I remember yelling for the nurse, and apparently I looked like I needed something.

McIntosh: Something's gone wrong there.

Coleman: Yeah. I think four days later -- three or four days later I woke up strapped to the bed.

MacIntosh: You were out of it?

Coleman: Out of it.

McIntosh: That was pretty close.

Coleman: Doctor came in, and he said, I apologize, and said, Don't ever forget this Neo-Synephrine. Never let anybody give it to you because you're allergic to it. And they had me tied to the bed because any movement [unintelligible] choke. I was smart [unintelligible], so I stayed there. Right by the nurse's station it was hot. I wanted a shower. That was a mistake. Never did that again either. They got me out of the shower in time.

McIntosh: Oh, boy.

Coleman: The wound didn't keep me long. That kept me in there more.

McIntosh: Did you go back to your outfit?

Coleman: No, no. Because -- as a matter of fact, they said no more combat. No combat for 12 months for something like that. So I went back to First Cavalry Division within Japan [unintelligible]. I never -- Well I saw some of those guys again, some of them again. Because they have a reunion every year now down in Kentucky, Campbellsport, Kentucky. I wanted to -- I says what's the difference? I'm in Japan in the First Cavalry Division. I said, Well, rough road and that. I was doing the same thing in Japan as I was doing in Korea. The only thing that was missing was the fighting. I suppose there is less chance of concussion. If I went to Korea, I would have come home sooner.

McIntosh: How long did you stay in Japan for?

Coleman: I think four months.

McIntosh: Four months?

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Then back home?

Coleman: Back home, back to Fort Sill.

McIntosh: New duties or what?

Coleman: Yes.

McIntosh: Now what were you doing?

Coleman: First assignment was the battery commander, and I moved from battery commander to assistant battalion three.

McIntosh: You were the command portion then?

Coleman: Yes.

McIntosh: Then you must have gotten promoted?

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Getting up with the big boys then?

Coleman: Not quite the big boys then.

McIntosh: Major?

Coleman: No, Captain.

McIntosh: Captain. Not quite there yet?

Coleman: I didn't become major until I got out.

McIntosh: After the Korean War was over?

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did you stay in Fort Sill until the Korean War came to a --

Coleman: Fort Sill, Hawaii. Oh, yeah, until the Korean War was over. But my time wasn't up. I got assigned to tour duty in Hawaii. And I was released when I in Hawaii.

McIntosh: And you left the service?

Coleman: Yes. I left the service, became a civilian, went back to school.

McIntosh: Did you use the GI Bill?

Coleman: Absolutely.

McIntosh: Of course. We all did; right?

Coleman: Right.

McIntosh: What did you do with your GI Bill?

Coleman: Well, I completed my master's.

McIntosh: Where?

Coleman: At Madison, no I did my bachelors here, -- business college. I had some left, and later I went to U. Mass, masters. As a matter of fact, it took me two. That's right. Because I did it -- yeah, I guess it took me two years.

McIntosh: Great. That's terrific. Now you've entered civilian life.

Coleman: Yeah. That's when I went to work for American Wilderness Parks Division. Out on Finland Avenue, I worked there for three or four years or something.

McIntosh: Doing what?

Coleman: I was supervisor in the parts, inventory control. I left there and went to work for Milwaukee Urban League as director [Long pause on the tape] as assist director -- not assist director -- secretary to the redevelopment authority.

McIntosh: I see.

Coleman: And from there I went to deputy commissioner of the Department of City Development, went through reorganization, and that position was divided, eliminated. We had a whole new structure. I was appointed director of the housing authority for the City of Milwaukee. And I left there in 19--

McIntosh: Those are hard jobs, aren't they? Sounds like they have got a lot of politics here and that's tough to deal with?

Coleman: That's right. In fact, I didn't know what I was getting into to be honest with you. [laughter] Be done with the job, only it really didn't work that way I found out. It didn't work that way. You're right, a lot of politics. I left there in '87 -- yeah, 1987. I kind of retired and didn't do much for two or three years. Then I went to work for the Next Door Foundation on an interim basis. 'Cause the guy was sick, and I was going to be there six months until the guy came back. The doctor later told him he was on permanent disability, and he was going back. So I stayed there for about three years. Left there -- was just a few months ago, as a matter of fact.

McIntosh: Uh-huh.

Coleman: I said, Well -- then during this process my wife died. And here I am. Well, the Next Door Foundation filled a big void for me. It is a community-based organization with Head Start. And as a matter of fact, I think we started kindergarten. [unintelligible] one of the things was family-oriented.

McIntosh: You have children?

Coleman: Yes. I have four.

McIntosh: So all of a sudden you're a single parent of four children?

Coleman: I'm a single parent of four children. They're all adults. They're all gone.

McIntosh: Oh, that made it easier.

Coleman: Yeah. I'm the grandpa.

McIntosh: I know about those things?

Coleman: And Next Door filled that void for me. I left there and said there is no point, no point in me not working. No off by myself. God's blessed me with some talents and I mine as well use them. They started -- I got out and I had one individual approach me about [unintelligible] going to work for them. I say, No, don't want to work for anybody anymore. I will, however, have some consulting. One thing I am not going to do is go back to a 60-hour work week. I will go back to a 40-hour work week. Here are the things I can do [unintelligible] couple of clients. Frankly, I don't want anymore than that. Yesterday -- I played golf yesterday morning. Yesterday afternoon I worked in the yard. Today I'm working a couple of hours.

McIntosh: When did you go back into the reserves?

Coleman: 1972 I believe it was.

McIntosh: How did that come about? Did they seek you out, offer you something? Or did you have to inquire?

Coleman: No, they came to me. In fact, this Col. Somburg -- Mike Somburg -- knew I had been in the military, and we were talking. And he said, You know, "Come by and see me." So I went out there [unintelligible] Mike, met with him, and met some people there I liked. I thought this is a challenge. And I like the military anyway.

McIntosh: Sure.

Coleman: That's about it.

McIntosh: Any concerns? Did you have to take any training or do anything --

Coleman: Oh, yeah.

McIntosh: -- organizational wise?

Coleman: Yeah. One of the things -- and it was a good policy -- and we have to do the same, meet the same educational requirements that the active component does. I think that kind of validates where you are in life. In my opinion -- and so take the advance -- the officer's advance courses I have not taken, Commanding Your Own Staff. And the senior warranting officer's war policy course. You have to have commanding

staff to be able -- Commanding Your Own Staff to be selected for unit officers position, absolute requirement. The War College is kind of actually on an egg.

McIntosh: Where did you get that phrase?

Coleman: At the -- in the -- Pennsylvania. The War College.

McIntosh: Is that interesting? (Inaudible)?

Coleman: That was very interesting. Compare that to Commanding Your Own Staff where you worked your tail off, where you had to. A gentleman's course, which is okay.

McIntosh: Retired guys like you; right?

Coleman: Yeah. At that point it gets a little more you can make some judgements and accept --

McIntosh: Then you can start getting promoted up to the big time?

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: That was nice?

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Now your graduate status now would be called active reserve or inactive reserve?

Coleman: Inactive.

McIntosh: You don't receive any money from the U.S. Government for being in inactive reserve?

Coleman: No.

McIntosh: No money involved here?

Coleman: No.

McIntosh: Don't you take any summer encampments of any kind?

Coleman: No. Actually, I'm in actual retirement now. I am now going to retirement pay.

McIntosh: How many years?

Coleman: I had about thirty. Let's see. Typically in the military line is when you're over 35 years. It's over 35. I think I had about 35 and a half, 36 total.

McIntosh: That's a lot of time. Well, then you are 100 percent disability pay and 100 percent retirement pay?

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: That's good. That's a nice factor.

Coleman: Yes.

McIntosh: You didn't retire as a General?

Coleman: Yes.

McIntosh: You did?

Coleman: Yes.

McIntosh: That's really good.

Coleman: Yeah. You don't get -- you do not get as much as you would get retiring from active duty or --

McIntosh: Oh, you don't?

Coleman: No.

McIntosh: Because I know a lot of guys, they had high command, and when they retired, they retired at a lower pay.

Coleman: Yeah, there was a -- I forgot what they call that.

McIntosh: Screwing.

Coleman: Yeah, basically, right. Because there are some situations -- and I know one guy it happened to in Illinois where they get retirement pay for higher rank than they retired as. Think of the politics. Dan Ruscontousky's friend, as a matter of fact.

McIntosh: Big Dan from Illinois; right?

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: Who dealt stamps?

Coleman: Right, right. Didn't know there was money in stamps.

McIntosh: None of us did. I couldn't believe -- then I found out he was making thousands and thousands of dollars. He knew something we didn't know. Now you're in a comfortable situation, and you're head of the 84th Division Reserve Unit ready to go over to Fort Sill and open it up; is that what I read that magazine, that article?

Coleman: There were several different scenarios. One was to replace the training center at Fort Sill, one was to create a training center, to open an installation. Pretty much in World War II they opened different ones. And the other --

McIntosh: Wouldn't be at any particular place?

Coleman: No.

McIntosh: Wherever the Army says go there and set this up?

Coleman: Right, right. To test that about three or four years of planning before we took it in, what we did at Fort Hood, Texas. South Fort is well built-up with three corps there. North Fort Hood, which is maybe 20 miles away, still part of the installation, all they have is buildings. We went there and said, we have been mobilized and here is our station, start from scratch. That's what we did. Ran a complete training cycle through my first year -- my last year [unintelligible]. And they did that for a couple years after, so we can do that. Then the Army, as it usually does, missions changed. We knew we could do that. Of course, then the memory isn't there anymore. 'Cause the guys that were there, all like me and --

McIntosh: Sounds like we're getting to probably sleep better tonight knowing we're ready to go.

Coleman: Yeah.

McIntosh: What are we going to do about the lack of enlistments?

Coleman: I don't know. I wonder -- sometimes I wonder what's the problem. Why the lack of enlistments? Haven't heard anybody say anything yet other than what I have heard from a conservative talk show host, which in my opinion, is as far from the mark as you can be. Just no way. Whether you like Clinton or not, there is no way he can prevent enlistments or that kind of thing. In fact, the significant effect with the strain --

McIntosh: Is it money that keeps them out?

Coleman: I don't think so. They do very well.

McIntosh: Yeah, I thought the pay was not bad.

Coleman: I think the things I liked about the Army that aren't there anymore. And is that -- more regimentation, the discipline. These guys can pretty much do what they want

to do. What's the challenge for a good soldier now. I just don't see it. I just don't see it.

McIntosh: In other words, you think [unintelligible] were before?

Coleman: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: How about the wives? One theory was that the wives don't want to go overseas; is that valid or what?

Coleman: Well, you know, I think one of things that happened is that we keep talking -- we perhaps -- the news media talks about all the bad things, and people start believing it. And they start acting it out. In the past that's been an opportunity for wives to be able to do that, to be envied because they can do that.

McIntosh: I think for a young kid, 18 years old, out of high school, two years in the service would be invaluable to get a job. And I know that they will hire him faster than anybody else because they know he has responsibility.

Coleman: That's right. Best thing -- my son volunteered. Best thing that happened. When he came back well disciplined, and he still is. He thought he would make a career. He got married and had kids. And he said, Well, I don't think [unintelligible]. He's a deputy sheriff in Georgia, which is still a little bit of that military was there.

McIntosh: Right. Can't get away from that the military.

Coleman: He's thinking about going back to the reserves.

McIntosh: That's a way of life. It's an adjustment.

Coleman: It's good.

McIntosh: Clean yourself of all the nonsense you have to put up with, the application, and going. It gives you a degree of comfort.

Coleman: Absolutely.

McIntosh: You have a built-in retirement. It's a good deal.

Coleman: I go to PX occasionally on Sunday not too long ago. I was at the Post 16 [unintelligible] -- good reserves go there -- reserves, but they're enjoying every minute of it. I met the Lieutenant Colonel, is the White House fellow up in D.C. [unintelligible] three of them. And they're all loving it, young gung-ho guys. You look at that and makes you want to sleep well because you know what's there and people like that. And the wives were with them. I think it's those

End Tape 1 Side B

Coleman: of us who have never had the exposure, who don't know what it's about, and we judge it. You just keep saying it over and over and over again, and people start believing it.

McIntosh: You were brought up to be has a lot of everything for girl and boy.

Coleman: [unintelligible]

McIntosh: At age 18 they have to do something for their government. You know --

Coleman: You know, we'd have a lot less climate of violence.

McIntosh: Sure, sure. I just think young kids today don't appreciate the freedom we all contributed before them.

Coleman: You know, at least when they talk about women in the military -- I don't know how I feel about them. But one of the things that I saw is you're going to have some bad apples. But generally what I saw was the guys respecting those women and protecting them as though was their mother or their sister. That was good to see.

McIntosh: That's the attitude you want.

Coleman: Absolutely, absolutely.

McIntosh: Well, sir, we running out of tape here.

Coleman: Okay, fine.

McIntosh: Forget any stories to tell me?

Coleman: I don't think so.

McIntosh: How about the black situation in the service today; fair?

Coleman: Could be better.

McIntosh: Is it improving, I guess that's the question?

Coleman: In my opinion, it goes in spurts. I remember when General Whitman was chief of staff in the Army. He's got to be about five removed now. One of the things that General Whitman had was zero tolerance.

McIntosh: General Whitman?

Coleman: Wait -- he was senior officer promotion board --. He made sure that the Selection Board was diverse. He made sure that the process, he made sure -- and a photographer required.

McIntosh: Sure.

Coleman: You did not see any photograph until after the winnings had taken place. Then the photographs came back.

McIntosh: That's a good thing. That stops any pre-prejudice; right?

Coleman: Absolutely, that's right.

McIntosh: That's a good idea. I never thought of that.

Coleman: I remember sitting there one-on-one with the Promotion Board, and I don't know how many Black guys know names. But there was one. I said, Wow. [Laughter]

McIntosh: That's funny. I'll tell you something. I'll tell you a story. As part of my training in New Orleans in 1947 -- and I worked with Charity Hospital there, Charity Hospital in New Orleans. I don't know if you're familiar with it?

Coleman: I've been there a couple times.

McIntosh: Charity Hospital, 3,000 beds --

Coleman: Wow.

McIntosh: -- divided right down the center, black, white. So we would have duty, I was going to be a plastic surgeon, and we would have duties [unintelligible]. And we would have [unintelligible]. And when it came to surgery, of course, they had separate -- everything was separate, even the operating room. And so they had a case where the victim brought in had run out of blood on the light side. And whole blood whatever. I always tell the orderly, Get your ass on the other side and get me some of that whole blood, you know. We always had an old saying, After all, we're all pink on the inside.

Coleman: Yeah. [Laughter]

McIntosh: I used that, that statement for a book I wrote about my experience.

Coleman: Oh, really?

McIntosh: We always said that. That was a running joke since then. We're all pink on the inside. Bring me that blood, whole blood. I don't care where it comes from. We

didn't go -- We had to be very cautious about that, but we just knew it. Don't tell them anything, just go get it. Bring it over here.

Coleman: Need the blood.

McIntosh: Right. We're all pink on the inside. Of course those days are gone fortunately, but anyway --

Coleman: That reminds me, I got to call the blood bank.

McIntosh: There you go, okay.

Coleman: I always say, Call me. Don't wait for me to call you.

McIntosh: Thank you, sir.

Coleman: I enjoyed it.

[End of Interview]