

Sgt. Maj. Nathaniel James, USMC (Retired)
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Interviewer: L.J. Kimball
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L.J. Kimball: Interview with Sgt. Maj. Nathaniel James, USMC, Retired, 20 August 1999, 119 Robin Hood Drive. Interviewer L.J. Kimball. Tape one, side one.

Sgt. Maj. James, can you tell us where you were born?

Sgt. Maj. James: I was born in, ah, Charleston, West Virginia.

L.J. Kimball: OK, when?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, November 18, 1941.

L.J. Kimball: What about your mother and father?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, they were both from West Virginia. My father was a coal miner. Ah, he was, ah, killed in the coal mines, a mining accident when I was about nine years old.

L.J. Kimball: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Sgt. Maj. James: I have two, ah, two brothers and one sister, of which I'm the oldest.

L.J. Kimball: Was it kind of difficult getting by after your father was killed in the coal mine?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, ah, my mother was the, ah, sole provider for the family. Ah, my father had bought a home just prior to him, ah, having a mining accident which made it a little better for us. But, ah, it's always difficult, ah, I think, for boys to be raised without a father even though a mother can give you a lot of things. I think, ah, what you get from a father you can't get from a mother.

L.J. Kimball: Yes. Was it kind of tight economically?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, it was a time, it was a time that we came through, that, ah, as far as being a black . . . ah, those times were always hard because my . . . the, the wages that you earned during those times were extremely low. And I can remember that, ah, the small jobs that I had that, ah, the wages that you earned were, were extremely low, but, ah, you learned to provide for yourself and the discipline of all that is that I think it made you a better person.

L.J. Kimball: What did your mother do?

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Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, my mother was a, ah, hairdresser. Ah, she worked in a beauty salon, ah, at the end of her career. But, ah, initially, she worked, ah, as a maid. Ah, then she moved to working, ah, in a department store. Then finally as she started off working in the salon as cleaning lady, she eventually, ah, worked hard enough in there and became part of the salon itself.

L.J. Kimball: So, you kids had go out and work yourselves to keep everything together?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, ah, not so much go out and work a lot. We did part-time jobs as the other kids did to earn monies and so forth, and all those things helped you, ah, get through school and was put towards help you get through school. But, ah, being the oldest and not having a father at home, I was sort of there to oversee the house and, ah, help with the kids as we grew up. And then, ah, as I got older, ah, I went out to where I started working and doing other things.

L.J. Kimball: Did you find that throughout your childhood you had everything that you needed basically and never went hungry and had clothes on your back?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, as I grew up I never thought of us as being, ah, poor folks because, ah, we always went to school. We had, ah, clothes to go to church. Ah, we had, ah, there was always food in the house. I never looked at my . . . us as not being equal to other folks or being a class of people, say middle class or upper middle class, like that, because, ah, we were a happy family. Ah, we were a close-knit family, so that part of my life I think, ah, gave value to who I am now because I never thought of people as being wealthy or poor. I thought about, ah, what you needed today. If you had that today, then you. . . you were fortunate.

L.J. Kimball: You lived in Charleston all your childhood?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, it . . . initially we. . . when we, we were at Cabin Creek, West Virginia. Then after my father. . . that's where my father was a miner. Ah, in Cabin Creek, West Virginia. And then when he passed, ah, we moved to Charleston when I was about nine. Ah, my mother moved down that way with her brother because that's basically where he had bought the home. The home was being built at the same time he passed away.

L.J. Kimball: And you graduated from high school in Charleston?

Sgt. Maj. James: Graduated from high school in Dunbar, West Virginia. Ah, that's just outside of Charleston. Ah, right next to West Virginia State College.

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L.J. Kimball: What was it like being black in West Virginia at this time when you were growing up?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, really, ah, when I think in terms of integration in West Virginia, ah . . . We lived in a community that there were whites and blacks and integration in West Virginia, I think, ah, I tell most people all the time, especially in our area, went over probably better than it did in probably other areas. There was no, ah, protest in regards to integration. I always went to, ah, state, ah, state school. And then when Dunbar integrated, ah, there was already two other students who were already there. And as we integrated, there, of course, there was some resistance in regards to how younger folks felt. But, ah, integration programming itself went very smooth. There was no protesting and demonstration as you saw across the country in different other places.

L.J. Kimball: Still talking about the period up to the time you graduated from high school, did you feel a definite prejudice against you for being black during this time?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, I . . . I didn't look at it as being prejudiced so much as that I thought that folks that grew up in that era had a feeling that they lived in a certain area. Ah, we lived in predominantly a black area, even though there were whites that were in the community and outside the community. But I think as you grew up in that era, your parents tended . . . they were . . . you were taught what you should do, what you should say, how you should act and that was accepted for our time. That was accepted, was life during that time that, ah, you knew your boundaries of where you should go, how you should act when you were in certain places. Ah, but I didn't think of that as segregation. I thought that was just a way of life. It wasn't until I became a little older that I understood that that was actually racism and segregation in that respect.

L.J. Kimball: While you were growing up, again, were there separate sections or separate restaurants you had to eat in, or separate sections in the theater, and parts of the bus you had to ride in, that sort of thing?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I didn't have a lot of the segregation as far as buses because in West Virginia, the part of West Virginia that I lived in, ah, from the time I got there, there wasn't a lot of segregation as far as buses, even though there was segregation downtown in regards to say, ah, bus stations. There were certain places in the bus station that, ah, ah, that you wait in. Ah, the lunch counters and so forth, there was separate. Ah, those things, ah, you were taught as a youngster that you stayed away from because there was problems so you tend not to go out and eat out. I've often told my wife, ah, a lot of times, that I had

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became, ah . . . It wasn't until I actually went into the military that I even thought about eating out because of that. Ah, we never thought about going to, ah, ah, Burger King and, ah, Woolworth's and those places to eat because it was thought of as problem places and you just stayed away from them. So you never thought about going down to eat there.

L.J. Kimball: You said you went to a state school before you went to Dunbar?

Sgt. Maj. James: Oh, actually I went to a part of West Virginia state college had a high school. And the school was right off campus and that was the school that I was attending when they integrated at Dunbar High School.

L.J. Kimball: So that school was all black?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes it was.

L.J. Kimball: OK.

Sgt. Maj. James: But I can't say it was all black. Because we had, ah, one. . . one, ah, ah, white student that lived in the community that was . . . Well, we didn't look at him as being white but he was a . . . he was white, but he played on our basketball team. So he. . . but he was the only, ah, white that went to our school.

L.J. Kimball: Did you join the Marine Corps right after you graduated or did you do something else first?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I went to West Virginia State College for a year and a half before I came into the Marine Corps. I had planned to, ah . . . In Dunbar everybody that sort of got out of high school either went to West Virginia State College part-time or full-time. And I . . . it was my intent to, ah, my . . . one thought to what I wanted to be was a barber. There was a barber college that was there on campus. But when I got out of school, high school, the barber college had closed and I decided to go, ah, to college to major in industrial arts. And I was in my second year of college when my . . . my mother had to have an operation. Ah, and I had been working during the summer for tuition to go to school and I had to use that, ah, tuition for, ah, her operation. And then the embarrassment of not being able to go back to college, ah, at the end of the summer with, ah, . . . You know grants and those sort of things weren't a big thing for minorities back in those days. Ah, and I decided that I would go into the military.

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L.J. Kimball: And so it's a economic motivation?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: Why the Marine Corps?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, I had, ah, a brother that was in the Navy and I had a brother that was in the Army. And in my home town there was only one other guy that had been in the Marine Corps and I was, ah, sort of like a community hero, I guess. Because I was a, ah, Golden Glove boxer, and, ah, I had a reputation for being a tough guy and, ah, myself and a friend of mine decided that, ah, we'd join the Marine Corps sort of like on a dare. And, ah, and initially when I started . . . when I went to join the Marine Corps I was . . . you had to be five, four and I was . . . when I got measured that morning I was short of that mark. And after I took exam, ah, I talked to the recruiter and he asked me if I had been measured in the afternoon, which I had. And he sent me back down to be measured for the standard early in the morning. And I guess your vertebrae's a little bit stiffer in the morning and that's how I eventually came into the Marine Corps. Because he had planned for me to go in the Navy to be a Corpsman and wear the Marine Corps uniform. But, ah, I was definitely going in the military and I was going to be gone before, ah, school opened up, ah, after summer.

L.J. Kimball: When did you graduate from high school?

Sgt. Maj. James: I graduated from high school in '59.

L.J. Kimball: And you joined the Marine Corps in?

Sgt. Maj. James: '61.

L.J. Kimball: Where did you enlist?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I enlisted, ah, actually, ah, in, ah, Charleston, West Virginia. Ah, at a recruiter's there in Charleston.

L.J. Kimball: And, after you put your name on the dotted line, did they immediately send you off to Boot Camp or did you wait for a while before?

Sgt. Maj. James: No, ah, I was really pressed to go because school was getting ready to start and I just didn't want to be at home, ah, for college, when college started. Because

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all of my friends were going to college and I wanted to not be there. Ah, ah, I just didn't want to give them explanations why I couldn't go to college or why I wasn't going to college, so . . . I really pressed the recruiter to, ah, recruit me and put me on the bus and leave town.

L.J. Kimball: So, right after you were enlisted, you left town for Boot Camp?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: And what's your date of entry in the Marine Corps?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I got, ah, to Parris Island, ah, 1 September.

L.J. Kimball: 1961?

Sgt. Maj. James: '61.

L.J. Kimball: OK. You and I were contemporaries. I joined the Navy in 1961.

Sgt. Maj. James: Is that right?

L.J. Kimball: Then after four years, went in the Marine Corps. Um, Parris Island?

Sgt. Maj. James: Parris Island.

L.J. Kimball: How long was the training at Parris Island when you were there?

Sgt. Maj. James: I think Parris Island. . . the training there was, ah, twelve weeks then. Ah, as I remember it, it was around twelve weeks, but later on we added, ah . . . Because you would leave Parris Island then and you would come here to Camp Lejeune and do your Infantry training. Which basically now you do all of your Infantry training and everything there at Parris Island.

L.J. Kimball: What Battalion were you in at Parris Island?

Sgt. Maj. James: Second Battalion. I was a . . . later on I was a Drill Instructor in the same Battalion, the same building that I was a recruit in.

L.J. Kimball: What'd you think of Parris Island?

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Sgt. Maj. James: Well, Parris Island to me was a different kind of place. I didn't think places like that actually existed. Ah, ah, it was really, ah, a lesson in mind control. Ah, I think it taught you a lot of discipline and, as you went through the initiation, ah, you were just struggling to survive. But afterwards, ah, as you grew in the Corps, you realized that, ah, this was probably the . . . one of the solid parts of your life. If you had to do it all over again, that you would like to do it again.

L.J. Kimball: When you were in Boot Camp, up until the point you graduated, did you ever say oops, you made a mistake or this is what you were looking for?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, I thought I had made a mistake the day that I got off the bus. Ah, the friend of mine who was, ah. . . His name was Harvey. His brother had been in the Marine Corps, so he knew a lot of things about what was going on. I had no idea about, ah, what was going on so he was trying to brief me up. He was a smoker and I was non-smoker. So he smoked constantly coming down as we came down on the bus and got in Yemassee and all these places to be picked up. But he was constantly briefing me as to what was going on, what was going to happen. Ah, but, ah, I had no idea in him describing how it would be until I actually stepped off the bus and met those guys in big hats. And, ah, then it was, ah, I thought this, ah, maybe, ah, this not . . . this was not the place to be. But as we, ah, grew and learned to work together and did, ah, so many things together, then you, ah, begin to understand how the system works and, ah, what you had to do to survive and make it work.

L.J. Kimball: Were the DI's laying hands on the recruits in those days?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, ah, to answer that, yes they were. There was a lot of, ah . . . I can't say there was a lot of abuse. I think there was, ah, a lot of lessons that came out of . . . and I didn't see *physical* abuse. I thought there was, ah, pushing and shoving and that sort of thing to, to teach lessons. There was a lot of lessons learned out of what went on, but, ah, that's the way I understood it. That, ah, this is what you have to do. This is part of the initiation to be, ah, to wear the Eagle, Globe and Anchor and that's the way I looked at it.

L.J. Kimball: Did you feel while you were at Boot Camp you were treated any differently because you were black?

Sgt. Maj. James: No, I . . . I really didn't. I didn't . . . I didn't look at it as a difference in recruit training in regards to black and white. I didn't see that difference really until I got out of recruit training.

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L.J. Kimball: What specialization, what MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] did you put in for when you left Boot Camp?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, when I . . . I put in for Supply and I put in for, ah, ah, to be a Tanker and to be a . . .to work in the PX.

L.J. Kimball: And what did they decide you were going to do?

Sgt. Maj. James: They gave me a Supply MOS initially, ah, when I got out of recrui . . . ah, of, ah, recruit training. And I found out later on that during that time, that this had a lot of . . . the reason for that had to do a lot with that most blacks in that era went to support type MOS's. Because traditionally in forty-two that we were in supporting MOS's, ah, and in the Artillery and Food Service and those fields. So during this era there was still a lot of typing people into those jobs. You had a lot of minorities that were in Food Service, a lot that were in Supply, a lot that were Tankers, a lot that were in Artillery, ah, and Ammo Companies and so forth because that was how we came in the Corps. And people figure that it's proven that they can do this kind of work so you sort of got into that kind of work.

L.J. Kimball: Do you think there was kind of a perception on the part of the Marine Corps at that time that traditionally blacks should be in Support Units? That maybe that was the limit to your capabilities, that you couldn't serve in the Infantry?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I think that that might of been. I think people really thought that and felt that. But you had been proven and tested in one area and you find that the military when you prove and test something and it, it works. They tend to stay along those lines. And I think that, ah, even though some of, ah, the minorities had been proving themselves, that they were combat worthy, a lot of people felt that maybe, ah, that was because that had to happen. Ah, the capabilities of, ah, these folks may not be, ah, smart enough to do what we need to do. And I . . . I . . . I say smart enough, I think some of the integration part of it is they just weren't trusted that they would stand and they would have the backs of the other Marines, that they could all work together.

L.J. Kimball: So when you left Parris Island did you go to Supply School?

Sgt. Maj. James: I left there. Ah, when I left there actually I went to my Infantry training here at, ah, Camp Lejeune.

L.J. Kimball: OK, what'd they call it then?

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Sgt. Maj. James: They called it ITR [Infantry Training Regiment] then.

L.J. Kimball: All right. And now we're over at Camp Geiger?

Sgt. Maj. James: We're over at Camp Geiger. Finished there. Then when I left there, ah, my first tour was on Okinawa.

L.J. Kimball: So you didn't get to go to Supply School?

Sgt. Maj. James: No. Not . . . I went straight to Okinawa.

L.J. Kimball: When did you finish at ITR?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I actually finished just before Christmas. I got out of recruit training just before Christmas. And I came home, ah, for Christmas on leave and then, ah, during that time, we went, ah. . . I had orders to go to Okinawa. We came back here and left on the draft going overseas. The whole group of us left here, went out to the west coast together, and left on the west coast on a ship. We went over to Okinawa by boat.

L.J. Kimball: OK. From time to time I'll ask you dates so we can keep the chronology straight.

Sgt. Maj. James: OK.

L.J. Kimball: When did you graduate from Parris Island?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, where. . . I can't really give you the date . . . I've got my Boot Camp picture hanging up on the wall which probably has a date, the date on it. But I really . . . if you ask me a date, I would. . . I would tell you that it was in, ah, ah, November of, ah, '61.

L.J. Kimball: OK. And around December you came up to Lejeune to join the draft?

Sgt. Maj. James: In November I came here, ah, finished up my ITR training and then after ITR training, I came home on Christmas leave. Then it was after Christmas leave that I came back here to go out on the draft.

L.J. Kimball: OK. Was this draft a Replacement Battalion?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yeah. Replacement Battalion. That's how it went over.

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L.J. Kimball: So you didn't have any unit assignment, you just went over as a replacement?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: Do you remember what ship that you were on when you went to Okinawa?

Sgt. Maj. James: I don't remember the name of the ship. Ah, ah, and a lot. . . I talk to a lot of people that they have instant recall the first ship they were on. I remember my, ah, initiation, ah, and, ah, crossing over, and all those sort of things. But I just don't remember the name of the ship and so on. But call it I probably remember it. But I just don't remember it.

L.J. Kimball: You didn't know what your unit assignment was going to be until you got to Okinawa?

Sgt. Maj. James: 'Til I got to Okinawa.

L.J. Kimball: OK. And where did you report in Okinawa? Do you recall?

Sgt. Maj. James: It was at Sukiran [also: Zukeran] and the place that I worked was . . . the name of the place was Tengan, and, ah, the unit was, ah, Force Logistic Support Unit was the name of the . . .

L.J. Kimball: Force Logistic Support Unit.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: And what exactly were you supporting at this?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, we supported all of, ah, the infantry units and so forth that was there. We issued all the clothing. We, ah, issued all the food, ah, to all the units that was there on Okinawa. Ah, people came into our warehouses to draw food. They drew all their clothing. Ah, there were units in the field that, ah, we had trucks we'd go to the field, issue clothes right in the field during that time.

L.J. Kimball: So you were assigned to Camp Butler as opposed to the FMF?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: They still hadn't sent you to Supply School but they put you right into it.

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Sgt. Maj. James: Yes. Yes.

L.J. Kimball: . . . Supply.

Sgt. Maj. James: I didn't go to Supply School 'til I came back from Okinawa.

L.J. Kimball: OK. When did you come back?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I came back from Okinawa, ah, . . . It was a year, ah. . . I'm trying to think exactly what, ah . . . in '62 that I came back. And I came here to go to, ah, Supply School. And, ah, went to Basic Warehousing Course.

L.J. Kimball: That was beginning in '63 when you did that?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: And the school was over at Camp Johnson?

Sgt. Maj. James: Over at Camp Johnson.

L.J. Kimball: They didn't call it Camp Johnson then, what'd they call it?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, ah, well it didn't become Camp Johnson until '74, so. . . But it was still Montford Point then.

L.J. Kimball: They called it Montford Point, and, but . . . you know they change the name on the gate every once in a while. If you recall for the historical record, the schools over there . . . was it Marine Corps Service Support Schools or Montford Point Schools or what . . . ?

Sgt. Maj. James: They were Service Support Schools. They, ah. . . and I was a young Marine and during those times the name of schools and so forth didn't mean anything to me except getting up in the morning, how you want to get there, how much you had to learn, and, ah, if you were going to get . . . go on liberty next . . . that afternoon. Ah, and, ah, a lot of Marines or folks that go through it now feel the same way as far as the history over there. Ah, they will leave there and not know what the history was and, because nobody imposed that. Because they lived one day at a time of survival.

L.J. Kimball: Was, I guess they called it FSR in those days, was it at Camp Geiger then?

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Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: And you finished Basic Warehousing School?

Sgt. Maj. James: Finished Basic Warehousing School, ah, and, ah, went to Albany, Georgia.

L.J. Kimball: When was that? When you were in Albany?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I was in Albany from, ah, '63 up through, ah, '66.

L.J. Kimball: What rank were you then?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I got there . . . I made . . . I became a PFC on Okinawa. When I got there I was a, ah, PFC and I made Meritorious Lance Corporal and Corporal at, ah, Albany.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: At, ah, Supply Depot.

L.J. Kimball: And you left Albany in '66?

Sgt. Maj. James: '66.

L.J. Kimball: And you went where after that?

Sgt. Maj. James: I went to, ah, Philadelphia. To, ah, 1100 South Broad, ah, to, ah, work in the Supply Unit there which, ah, controlled all the publications and so forth for the Marine Corps.

L.J. Kimball: There was no longer a . . . Depot there at that time was there? Wasn't it just kind of a headquarters administration facility?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, where?

L.J. Kimball: Philadelphia.

Sgt. Maj. James: No. There wasn't a Depot there. It was, ah, I forget what you call it, but it was, ah. . . They handled all the publications for all the Marine Corps, distributed all the publications from one big large building that was right downtown Philadelphia. Of course the Navy Yard was, ah, at the end of

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Broad Street, and, ah, ah, we used to live down on the Navy Yard and we would, ah, ride, ah, the buses up to, ah, ah, 1100 South Broad and then eventually what they did was move everybody out in . . . in town. You got to live out in town. Ah, they paid you the extra money to live out there.

L.J. Kimball: Didn't they close 1100 South Broad a few years after that?

Sgt. Maj. James: A few years after that they closed that and they moved all that back to Albany, Georgia.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm. OK. Whenever Mrs. James comes in the story here, you can tell me that.

Sgt. Maj. James: OK. All right.

L.J. Kimball: You're at 1100 South Broad, . . . beginning in 1966. You say you're a Lance Corporal then?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, no. When I got to, ah . . . I made, ah, ah, Lance Corporal and Corporal before I left Albany, Georgia. When I got to 1100 South Broad I was a Corporal and I made Meritorious Sergeant.

L.J. Kimball: Was Corporal meritorious also?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: OK. You made Meritorious Sergeant at South Broad?

Sgt. Maj. James: I made, ah, Meritorious Lance Corporal on Mess Duty at Albany, Georgia. And then I went before four promotion boards to make Meritorious Corporal at, ah, at Albany, Georgia. And then when I got transferred to, ah, ah, the, ah, 1100 South Broad, I made Meritorious Sergeant before going, ah, to, ah, Vietnam. I left going to Vietnam from there.

L.J. Kimball: When did you go to Vietnam?

Sgt. Maj. James: I went to Vietnam in, ah, '67.

L.J. Kimball: What unit were you assigned to in Vietnam?

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Sgt. Maj. James: Well, actually I went. . . I went to a Support Unit. I went to, ah, ah, ah, FS, ah . . . It was FS, ah, U then. Ah, at, ah, Phubai. And, ah, then we supplied all of the supplies for everybody in the I Corps at Phubai.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: So, we used to run, ah, courier runs, ah, all the way north as far as Camp Carroll. Ah, so we would load up vehicles and then we'd get support to get on the road and we would take supplies north or to wherever a unit that was . . . whether was hot or whatever. We would fly, we would take, ah . . . Couriers would take, ah, supplies and so forth into, ah, the, ah, airport areas. We would fly . . . wherever it needs to go. We used to make it.

L.J. Kimball: These convoys . . . was that what they called the Rough Riders?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, they call it all kinds of names, but, ah . . . we. . . My only thought was that we knew that, ah, we got a . . . a requisition in for "x" amount of stuff that had to be go . . . had . . . had to be there at a particular time. And one of those folks was on a rotation basis would take those assignments and go. And, you know, we encountered sniper fire and all that kind of things on the road. We lost vehicles and all that sort of thing. Ah, and we went all the way far north as, ah, Camp Carroll, Dongha, Khesan, and all those places.

L.J. Kimball: When did you get in Vietnam?

Sgt. Maj. James: I actually got in Vietnam in, ah, ah, it was, ah, March of '67.

Tape One, Side Two

L.J. Kimball: And you had your thirteen month tour?

Sgt. Maj. James: Had a thirteen month tour and, ah, I came back from Vietnam in, ah, '68. Had nine days leave and went right to the Drill Field.

L.J. Kimball: Parris Island?

Sgt. Maj. James: Parris Island.

L.J. Kimball: OK. This . . . was . . .

Sgt. Maj. James: '68 towards the end of, ah, the Vietnam era. Ah, we still had folks that were going. Everybody that came on the Drill Field during that era, ah, had . . . had

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had Vietnam experience. And I guess that was because they felt that those. . .
(pause in tape)

L.J. Kimball: You were saying that all the DI's on the grinder then were . . . had been . . .

Sgt. Maj. James: Had had. . . had combat experience and they felt that those folks really knew what the mission was and which . . . how we had prepared to get there. And, so, ah, we went, ah, came on the drilling force . . . Drill Field right in the middle of, ah, McNamara's Project One Hundred Thousand [another ill-conceived product of the "Great Society"] and that era where, ah, we still resented it, that probably 85 to 90 percent of those folks that, ah, that was recruited, ah, went back to, ah, Vietnam.

L.J. Kimball: I'd like you to reflect on that time because I've got very bad memories of the lower group 4-B's that came over and joined us in Vietnam.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: I guess you had to deal with these folks on the Drill Field?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well the thing about it is our instruction was, you know, if he could breathe, his body was warm, ah, and he could follow instructions, that we could make him a Marine. And it was our job to . . . to give him the temperament to . . . if you say "move it", he moved it, if you tell him to do it, he did it. And that was the prerequisite for getting him through. And we had a lot of folks that couldn't read, ah, couldn't write, ah, that, ah . . . We just did what we needed to do to, ah, get 'em in the Corps.

L.J. Kimball: And I would imagine that you were under considerable pressure to get as many people as possible into the Corps.

Sgt. Maj. James: In a short as possible, see, because Drill Instructors don't have time. Some of 'em would gradu . . . get ready to graduate the Platoon and already had another one for two weeks. Ah, there was a lot of people couldn't stand really the stress and the pace of the Drill Field during that time. Because it was very, ah, ah, ah, vigorous pace, ah, of, ah, training, and, ah, we pushed hard every day.

L.J. Kimball: Do you recall, were there any specific guidance or instructions given to you to reduce the attrition rate and get as many people as possible in the Corps?

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Sgt. Maj. James: Well the thing about that . . . you . . . there was nothing actually wrote . . . printed and said that this was what you were gonna do, but you knew as a Drill Instructor that, ah, if you wanted to get a . . . drop a recruit or, ah, put him back out on the street, that he seemed to come back or he was in another platoon or he was in another battalion, so you got the feeling that the guy that you dropped, you was gonna get another one that was worse. So you, you had a mindset that may as well keep what you had because you more loyalty with that group . . . the original group that you had.

L.J. Kimball: Were you kind of taken aback by the quality of the some of the recruits that were going to Parris Island?

Sgt. Maj. James: Oh, absolutely. Ah, ah, we came from . . . We were a proud bunch of guys that, ah, felt that the standards of the Marine Corps was high. And then, ah. . . But those guys that fought the system didn't last. It's just like, ah, you telling me that you want to build a . . . a airplane a specific way but, ah, the contract has already been set and you decide that, ah, we're gonna cut corners and do it a different way. Well, you wound up getting fired. You won't have a job. And all those things impacted on your career. Ah, of course I never went to Parris Island with the thought that it would *enhance* my career because all I ever wanted to be in the Marine Corps was a Gunnery Sergeant.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: And then, ah, when I got to Parris Island, ah, I was in the zone to make Staff Sergeant and then I made Meritorious Gunnery Sergeant while I was at Parris Island.

L.J. Kimball: So you made Staff and then Meritorious Gunnery Sergeant on Parris Island?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes. But I was there for five and a half years one push at Parris Island.

L.J. Kimball: And when you first arrived at Parris Island, they sent you to a DI School first?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, yes.

L.J. Kimball: OK. You're there for five and a half years. When you left, what year was it then?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, when I left, ah, ah, Parris Island, it was seventy . . . '73 and I left there going to OCS to train officer candidates.

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L.J. Kimball: OK. Had you met Mrs. James by then?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, yes. We . . . we got married. I met her at Parris Island and we were married at Parris Island.

L.J. Kimball: Was she a Marine or. . . ?

Sgt. Maj. James: No. She was a local girl.

L.J. Kimball: So you met her out in town?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: OK. And in '73 you went to OSC at Quantico.

Sgt. Maj. James: I went to OSC at Quantico. Ah, we ran officer candidates, ah, for a year and a half. Ah, which gave me seven years straight drill field time. Ah, at that. . . that time I was a Gunnery Sergeant and believed I could run through concrete and all I knew was work. It. . . it gave me a feeling that, ah, if I. . . if I wasn't juggling four or five things to do things that I didn't have a sense of accomplishment from it.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, the mindset that, ah, that you get from doing these things, ah, makes you feel like you're invincible. Ah, I think a lot of people that spend that much time on the Drill Field never really adjust back to the regular Marine Corps because they get so into being precise about things that you do, ah, wanting things so detailed. Ah, but it wound you down a little bit from recruit training at Parris Island to, ah, and going to OCS because drilling officers a little bit different from drilling . . . ah, the enlisted men because during that era we were teaching him to be a follower and the officer would really . . . was, ah, was geared towards, ah, leadership. Ah, but I don't think that probably . . . but during that era, if you had a young man that was physically strong and was a team player, he probably could get through a OCS before you realized what his leadership ability was.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: Because the Marine Corps had a mindset then that if you were strong, played a lot of football, you were a team player, that you probably had leadership

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ability. And those things made you a leader. Ah, a lot of folks I think slipped by that probably we didn't think would probably be good leaders but, ah, I think some of the folks that dealt with that had a bigger vision of that than I did.

L.J. Kimball: How long was Boot Camp when you were a DI?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, on the Drill Field?

L.J. Kimball: Yeah.

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, we were at ten weeks. . . . During, ah, during the Vietnam era, we cut back to where we had a ten week cycle because we needed to run folks through faster. Ah, and we had platoons that were sometimes eighty up to a hundred people. Ah, and then as time went by and that era went by you know platoons got back down to where they were normal sizes where we had forty-five, fifty people. But it wasn't nothing to have a platoon that was a hundred people that you ran for a cycle of, ah, ten weeks and you had another platoon before you graduated that.

L.J. Kimball: I'm sure you've seen Jack Webb in the movie, *The DI*?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes, many times.

L.J. Kimball: What'd you think of that?

Sgt. Maj. James: I thought the perception of Webb's arrogance and so forth probably was a good portrayal of the Drill Instructor. Ah, I think his decisiveness and how he, ah, was straight up and down, ah, direct, all those things are true as far as the Drill Instructor. But, ah, I think the movie was made to make it believable and folks would enjoy it. Ah, I think there was more lessons learned out of the real life of being a Drill Instructor than the movie.

L.J. Kimball: Well, as far as the movie concurring to the reality of Parris Island, did it show the boot experiences being easier or harder than it actually was?

Sgt. Maj. James: I really think the boot experience was harder, ah, and if the . . . most persons that went though it would tell you it was probably harder than the movie. I thought it was a lot harder than that because, ah, when you restrict, ah, people's movements and, ah, their thoughts and, ah, when you do things, ah, ah, it makes it a lot different.

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L.J. Kimball: You're at OCS and you're dealing with officer candidates now. Did you see or perceive a difference between the officer candidates and the boots down at Parris Island?

Sgt. Maj. James: Oh, absolutely. Ah, number one, during that era, there was some of the things that drove those guys, because during that era, everybody that fell out of the OCS program became an enlisted man and came to Parris Island. Ah, but the perception of how you built. . . built, ah, an officer was a lot different. The Drill Instructor himself did not have the absolute control of the recruit that he did at Parris Island. Drill Instructors during that era had absolute authority. And when I say that I mean you had a series commander, but basically he was fairly green and he lived by what you told him and what you wanted to get done. And he basically knew that his career was geared around the way you did things and if he had a really good g. . . group of guys that took care of him, it enhanced his career. So, ah . . .

L.J. Kimball: And how long were you in OCS?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, a year and a half.

L.J. Kimball: Were there women officer candidates up there or was it all male?

Sgt. Maj. James: No. We had all, ah, male candidates because, ah, we did, ah, the Platoon Leadership Class where you would come and you'd do eight weeks out of college and then in your senior year you'd come back and do your other, ah, eight weeks, ah, of training. And then we had certain programs that we ran during the summer that was the whole course.

L.J. Kimball: OK. So, the Marine officer candidate course at the time, it was eight weeks during PLC?

Sgt. Maj. James: PLC.

L.J. Kimball: And then eight weeks at . . . at Quantico at OCS?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: Where'd you go after OCS?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I went back to Okinawa.

L.J. Kimball: And what year was that?

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Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I went back to Okinawa in, ah, '73.

L.J. Kimball: And who were you with in Okinawa?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I went back to a, ah, Supply Unit. Ah, and I don't remember exactly what unit but it was at, ah . . . I was a Gunnery Sergeant and . . . and, ah . . . I was at, ah, Camp Courtney, ah, which was, ah. . . We worked off from where, ah, my other unit was, but, ah . . . I was at Camp Courtney, worked in a warehouse, ah, did supply type things just like normally, but now I was a Warehouse Chief.

L.J. Kimball: What was the name of that unit, do you recall?

Sgt. Maj. James: I don't recall the name of the unit.

L.J. Kimball: Courtney . . . wasn't the . . . MEF [Marine Expeditionary Force] and 3rd Division Headquarters at Courtney?

Sgt. Maj. James: I think MEF was there. Division may have been there, but I . . . I can't remember the Support Unit itself that was there that did the supply things, ah, as far as the name of it.

L.J. Kimball: Once again, our careers are kind of parallel because I was at Okinawa with the 9th Marines at Camp Schwab.

Sgt. Maj. James: Is that right?

L.J. Kimball: OK. You spent your year there on Okinawa?

Sgt. Maj. James: Spent a year on Okinawa and then I came back to, ah, Parris Island.

L.J. Kimball: And what year was that?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, this was, ah, '75 I believe, or seventy . . . last part of '74.

L.J. Kimball: What'd you do on Parris Island this tour?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, I . . . I came back to work in . . . in Supply. And, ah, I worked in Supply for about six months and then, ah, ah, I wound up being the, ah. . . They took me out of Supply and I wound up becoming the, ah, Group Inspector for, ah,

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ah, the H&S Battalion which prepared units for CG's Inspections and all that sort of thing. Ah, they figured I was . . . that I could help them, ah, with their, ah, ah, get ready for IG's and, ah, IG Inspections and get troops, ah, more drilled and so forth because of my Drill Field background.

L.J. Kimball: How long did you stay at Parris Island?

Sgt. Maj. James: I stayed at Parris Island, ah, a year and a half that tour. And then, ah, I came . . . I got orders in '77 to come to Camp Lejeune. This was my first real tour at Camp Lejeune. And I used to tell everybody that I wanted to, ah, be stationed anywhere but Camp Lejeune. And, ah, I just never had a big desire to come to Camp Lejeune. But, ah, I came to Camp Lejeune and, ah, because at this time at Parris Island, during the time I went back, I picked up Master Sergeant. And during my turn on the Drill Field I picked up Meritorious Gunnery Sergeant. So I was promoted to Master Sergeant, but I redesignated to First Sergeant. So I had made, ah, Gunny on the ten and I had made Master Sergeant on the thirteen years. And I redesignated to First Sergeant and, ah, when I left, ah, ah, Parris Island coming back, I . . . I came to Camp Lejeune as a First Sergeant. And I went to DS. . . DSSG, ah, and I was, ah . . . I had H&S Battalion. I was a First Sergeant in the H&S Battalion.

L.J. Kimball: H & S Battalion at FSSG?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: OK.

Sgt. Maj. James: DSSG.

L.J. Kimball: DSSG?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: That's what they called it?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: And that became FSSG [Force Service Support Group]?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

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L.J. Kimball: A year and a half seems like a strange length for a tour . . . That wasn't a normal tour, was it?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, for?

L.J. Kimball: Parris Island.

Sgt. Maj. James: Parris Island. See what happened was, ah, ah, once I got promoted to E-8 and redesignated, that cut my tour as far as a billet. They had to have a job for me at Parris Island or put me someplace because I was so far up on the list. So, ah, what they . . . the monitor had to do was he either had to move me out of the job that I were in. . . that I was in and station me at Parris Island or he had to move me someplace else. So that's why I moved to Lejeune because that's where they had a billet for me.

L.J. Kimball: I'd heard stories about Lejeune myself at this particular point, that it had a certain reputation. Do you recall what reputation Camp Lejeune had, why you didn't want to go there?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, ah, you know that, ah, ah, liberty wasn't that great. Ah, ah, the minorities lived in certain areas. The segregation portion of Camp Lejeune was a bad thing with me because even when I went into, ah, Albany, Georgia, ah . . . We went into Albany, Georgia, right during the time when Martin Luther King and so forth had, ah, ah, the city and the buses and all that. That was a big thing during. . . My thought was after going through that as a younger Marine, I just didn't want to get back into an environment where you had to confront things because my career was growing. I didn't want con . . . confrontals to. . . that would offset my career and I had. . . had been in such absolute authority of doing things, that I didn't want that cut. I had . . . I was enjoying, ah, receiving jobs that I enjoyed doing and I didn't want to be restricted to where my family couldn't move around or I couldn't go out and, ah, eat a steak or do a lot of things. And I . . . I had a perception that I couldn't do that here.

L.J. Kimball: Now, this perceived segregation, this existed outside the Camp?

Sgt. Maj. James: Outside the camp.

L.J. Kimball: It wasn't in the Camp itself?

Sgt. Maj. James: No. It was outside the gate.

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L.J. Kimball: And when you got here, did you tell me where you went when you came here?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: . . . Battalion Sergeant Major.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes. At DSSG.

L.J. Kimball: And. . . where were you located at that time?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, we were right around the circle. I was in, ah, the DSSG. But we, ah, in . . . in actuality it was. . . it was more or less like a Engineering Battalion, that I was in.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: And, ah, engineers did all kinds of things, ah, ah, you know we went off to, ah, Cuba each year and, ah, renovated, ah, buildings and so forth out there. Ah, and we did all the engineer type things. We had an engineer shop that renovated buildings and all that kind of stuff. And the H&S folks that I had really were the nucleus of all of that. So you . . . you had your stronger guys that actually ran the H&S Battalion. Ah, because you had all the nucleus of all your senior officers that were actually in the H&S Battalions. You needed somebody that can really, ah, ramrod and get things done because now you had, ah, the First Sergeant that had that Battalion. He. . . ah, ah. . . those companies and so forth, he had a lot of senior staff and CO's that he had to really, ah, ah, put his thumb on and get 'em to do a lot of things. They didn't like to come to do PT [Physical Training]. They didn't like to do a lot of other things.

L.J. Kimball: Didn't want to fire for qualification.

Sgt. Maj. James: There you go. And they didn't want to do PFT's [Physical Fitness Test] and all that kind of stuff because the boss up in Head Shed said, well, ah, don't send him this time, you know. You had to be firm to, ah, to get a lot of that stuff done so they needed somebody who could really ramrod those sort of things.

L.J. Kimball: You said you were around the circle. What circle was this?

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Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, the main circle. We were right off of, ah, the main circle there, like. When you go down Holcomb Boulevard around the circle, if you going down to right now where, ah, ah, Building Two is down there, we were right there on the left. That's where, ah, engineers were during that time. And they had a Medical Battalion, ah, ah, Medical . . . Med Battalion is in those buildings right now. Eventually, ah, as they moved out of Med Battalion moved in . . . in that area.

L.J. Kimball: Was French Creek there then?

Sgt. Maj. James: French Creek was being built.

L.J. Kimball: OK. Did your unit eventually move over to French Creek?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes. Well, what happened was, ah, during that time that I was in Second, ah, FSSG, I made Sergeant Major. So I left there and went to the Marine Corps Air Station and was, ah, ah, had Helicopter Squadron for . . .

L.J. Kimball: OK. So you went. . . you went from H & S Battalion DSSG and that became Second FSSG?

Sgt. Maj. James: Eventually it become Second FSSG.

L.J. Kimball: But the time that you were in it, it was not FSSG?

Sgt. Maj. James: No. It was not.

L.J. Kimball: So you went from DSSG and you became Sergeant Major. Then you went over to the Air Station?

Sgt. Maj. James: Went to the Air Station and had a Helicopter Squadron, 365.

L.J. Kimball: And when was that, that you went over there?

Sgt. Maj. James: I went over there in, ah. . . I made Sergeant Major in '82.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: And, ah, I went over there and stayed there, ah, until, ah . . . I believe it was '85 that I left there and went back to Okinawa. And when I went to Okinawa I

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worked for my first general which was, ah, General Huey (?) which was at MAB, at Camp Courtney.

L.J. Kimball: What year was this you were at Camp Courtney?

Sgt. Maj. James: I was at Camp Courtney, ah, in '86 through '87.

L.J. Kimball: OK. I beat you there by two years I think.

Sgt. Maj. James: (Laughs)

L.J. Kimball: '86 and '87? But it was still a one year tour though?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: They didn't have . . .

Sgt. Maj. James: I got there in '86 and left in '87.

L.J. Kimball: OK. And then. . . where'd you do to?

Sgt. Maj. James: Then when I came back, ah, from, ah, there, I went to Second FSSG.

L.J. Kimball: At French Creek?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, at French Creek. And I had, ah, I was a Sergeant Major of, ah, of, ah 8th Com [8th Communications Battalion].

L.J. Kimball: OK.

Sgt. Maj. James: And then, ah, I moved from 8th Com to H&S Battalion. I went to Desert Storm with, ah, ah, ah, H&S Battalion and then eventually was the Sergeant Major of, ah, Second FSSG.

L.J. Kimball: OK. You went to Desert Storm with H&S Battalion, Second FSSG?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: And when you came back from Desert Storm, you became a Sergeant Major of FSSG?

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Sgt. Maj. James: Yes. For a short period of time because, ah, we came back in '91 and, ah, I eventually retired in '91.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm. So did I.

Sgt. Maj. James: So I retired in September of . . .

L.J. Kimball: '91.

Sgt. Maj. James: '91.

L.J. Kimball: You retired at French Creek or did you have your ceremony in front of Building One?

Sgt. Maj. James: No. I . . . I . . . right there at Soifert Field. French Creek.

L.J. Kimball: French Creek. OK. That's where the football games were played?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes. That's exactly right.

L.J. Kimball: All right. Well, let's go back to your first experience with Camp Lejeune. You're up here at Basic Warehousing School then. At that point, did you . . . start to perceive a certain, different treatment of black Marines?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, it was actually after I had gotten out of recruit training that I realized that, ah, ah, ah. . . When you looked around there wasn't a lot of black staff NCO's as well as black officers.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: So eventually my mind smartened me up that that . . . there had to be a reason for that. Ah, because really I was still mentally conditioned to do whatever I was told to do.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, and I didn't really question, ah, ah, if it was racially motivated or whatever until, ah, there was a time in Marine Corps when this black power thing came about where people were dapping and, ah, started to grow hair longer and all that sort of thing. This is when, ah . . . there were groups that was in the dorm . . . in the barracks and so forth that were making people

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aware of . . . that there was suppression. . . that there was . . . that you wasn't being promoted because, ah, you were black. But, see, I never thought that because I was one of the guys that were being promoted right along. I was always ahead of my peers.

L.J. Kimball: Right.

Sgt. Maj. James: So I didn't feel that because, ah, I was just eat up with working, and . . . and not so much working to advance but working because I enjoyed working and doing what I was doing.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: So I didn't . . . I didn't really feel that perception. I could stand back and see what was going on 'til those things came along and there was a lot of pressure to stop these things. And that's when I actually started seeing it, ah, there was things that was not the way I actually perceived them.

L.J. Kimball: This first perception, did you get this while you were at school over here at Camp Lejeune, or was that later on in your career?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I think actually it was during the time that, ah, I felt it. . . I felt it really more for not so much here at. . . at Camp Lejeune even though, ah, ah. . . Once I had got to Camp Lejeune I had to become a older Marine. Ah, see I . . . I was a, ah, a Gunnery Sergeant that had a couple of kids then and I was into going to work, coming home, taking care of the family and we had enough money to where we could go out, have a steak, and live and, ah, we weren't so much concerned with other folks. We were wrapped up in family and, ah, going to work and, ah, surviving.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: So, ah, a lot of the things where people felt that there were racially motivated was going on around it . . . I just didn't have a great interest in that because I really was concerned with, ah, the kids going to school, ah, the wife being able to have a dress if she needed one, ah, if the cars was running so I could get to work. And I was wrapped up in that kind of . . . that . . . that part of my life. And I was on. . . on such a fast track that you get in a routine and live in it where you don't see the other things. And I had gotten away from really looking at a lot of it.

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L.J. Kimball: Back to your first experience again at Camp Lejeune. I guess you were probably a PFC when you were going through Basic Warehousing School?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: Ah, you had liberty I'm sure at that point. You got out in Jacksonville. What'd you think about Jacksonville?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, during that time we didn't have cars. And, ah, we walked out the gate just like the young Marines do at, ah, at, ah, Camp Johnson now. You couldn't go that far and you didn't have a lot of money to spend and so we moved around in groups. But the thing that we noticed different was that in moving around in groups there . . . we didn't move around a lot in integrated groups. We moved around in, ah. . . Whites moved around in groups. Blacks moved around in groups. And, ah, you sort of, ah. . . . If you went to Jacksonville, you went down across the tracks because that's where you were steered to. Because that's where blacks predominantly pulled their liberty. Or, unless you went off to a . . . if you got a ride that you could get off to King. . . Kingston or New Bern or someplace and there was certain clubs that you went to that was predominantly black or white.

L.J. Kimball: The other side of the tracks, in Jacksonville, what was over there?

Sgt. Maj. James: You had a lot of, ah, you know, ah, it was, ah . . . It was just your liberty port. It was just like on Okinawa, ah, during the time that I went to Okinawa. If you got in a taxi cab, nobody asked you where you were going. They knew that you were going to the four corners. They knew you were going to Koza. They didn't ask you where you were going. It was the only place on Okinawa that you could pull liberty.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: So if you got in a cab, it took you directly to Koza. In Koza there was, ah, restaurants that catered to your kind of food. Ah, there were tailor shops that made your kind of clothes that you wore. So that was the same right across the tracks in Jacksonville.

L.J. Kimball: Is this Kerr Street?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, ah, Kerr Street and the main street. Well, Kerr Street's the cross street.

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L.J. Kimball: Right.

Sgt. Maj. James: But it runs into Kerr Street. But when you get to the corner of Kerr and the main street that came down which is what you call Court Street.

L.J. Kimball: Uh-huh.

Sgt. Maj. James: They had a lot of, ah, clothing type stores that, ah, had, ah, you know, the dashiky type shirts and all those kind of things that blacks wore. There were places that sold fish, any kind of food that you ate. So you were comfortable in that area because, ah, ah, the barber shops . . . There were four or five barber shops, oh, once a week you had to get a haircut so you went to there to get a haircut, ah. Of course out here on Bell Fork Road there was a Tick Tock that was there.

L.J. Kimball: Where was that located?

Sgt. Maj. James: The Tick Tock was located right there where the large church is now. When you, ah . . .

L.J. Kimball: OK, you take a left off Country Club?

Sgt. Maj. James: No. No, no. Like, you leave out of here and you go across 17. As soon as you cross 17 you're on Bell Fork Road.

L.J. Kimball: OK.

Sgt. Maj. James: So, as soon as you . . . onto Bell Fork Road right there where the large church is on the right, that's where the Tick Tock was.

Tape Two, Side One

L.J. Kimball: Is it closer to US 17, or to Hargett?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, that's not the same church though. Ah, when you talk. . . the one that you come off Hargett, ah. . .

L.J. Kimball: You go left.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

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L.J. Kimball: Down Hargett.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes. Ah, once you turn, ah, ah . . . The other place that was up . . . up the street from the Tick Tock was Vanessa's. Ah, those two clubs were the only two clubs that was out here in this area.

L.J. Kimball: OK. Are both of them torn down now?

Sgt. Maj. James: The Tick Tock is torn down but the club that used to be Vanessa's is Steve's now.

L.J. Kimball: OK. I know where that is.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yeah. So when you get to Steve's the church is right down the street from Steve's. That's what. . . That piece of land is where the Tick Tock . . . where the Tick Tock sits.

L.J. Kimball: Yeah. That's further south.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yeah. The Tick Tock sit right there. Where that large church is.

L.J. Kimball: Just before you get up to 17.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: All right. Ah. Bell Fork was a predominantly black area?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, Bell Fork, ah, actually was because, ah, when you, ah, get into Bell Fork homes just down there, it's predominantly a . . . a lot of the original Montford Pointers had settled into that area. Ah, when they started, ah, giving loans and grants to build houses that subdivision there was mainly, predominantly military folks.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: So they bought into those. And that was buying a piece of the pie . . . (pause in tape)

L.J. Kimball: Tape two, side one. OK. Bell Fork homes was principally black military and you told me about Vanessa's and the Tick Tock which were clubs, I presume.

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Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm. Both clubs.

L.J. Kimball: What was on the other side of the tracks? Do you remember any of the clubs that were down there?

Sgt. Maj. James: Don't, ah, remember a lot of clubs that were . . . were . . . were down there because what happened was, ah, there were . . . they changed names so much. Now like, ah, Little's Barber Shop has been there for years and years and Mr. Little, ah, he is . . . his shop is still there.

L.J. Kimball: Is that the shop across from the railroad station?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes, exactly right. Mr. Little worked at Montford Point. He cut hair. He cut the Marines' hair at Montford Point and, ah, matter of fact, we've given him letters of appreciation and that sort of thing because he is part of that history, that he cut hair at Montford Point. Ah, most of those original Montford Pointers came through there. Probably the twenty thousand, he probably cut over half of 'em's hair. And, ah. . .

L.J. Kimball: Before we leave Mr. Little, he sounds like somebody I would like to talk to, with his recollections and . . .

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, I'll tell you what. He's. . . he's there at the barber shop every day.

L.J. Kimball: OK.

Sgt. Maj. James: So, ah, he's, ah, he's there and it's right across from where the railroad, ah, ah, place is there. And, ah, he's, ah, still healthy. I don't know how old he is but he's gotta be, ah, in his eighties.

L.J. Kimball: Was there anything in Georgetown then for the blacks?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, no place that I can remember pulling liberty there. But it was another predominantly black area which is still predominantly black. Ah, but there was all kind of small clubs. There were little liquor houses and, ah, people that wasn't clubs but people sell sandwiches and so forth out the house that people went to that, ah, had little parties and things. All that sort of things was a way of making a living. You didn't have a club, but you ran a house that people came and played cards. They gambled, they shot dice and, ah, pulled liberty at places like that.

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L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm. Was there anything on Court Street, north of the tracks there, that catered to blacks or was that kind of a white area?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, well, ah. . .

L.J. Kimball: Again, we're talking about the time you're . . .

Sgt. Maj. James: As you came . . . as you came down Court Street there was a lot of places but they got to where they were minority areas the closer you got down towards the track because all along that . . . along the streets it was all kind of clubs and so forth. And for years and years you know that, ah, Court Street area had all kind of little businesses and so forth that eventually they became integrated as you walked at night. But predominantly across the tracks in that area was a predominantly black area and it still is. Ah, of course, a lot of those buildings now are ran down. There's really nothing down there because that's the upgraded downtown.

L.J. Kimball: You've gone to school there at Camp Geiger. Was there anything in the Second Front for you?

Sgt. Maj. James: Not really. Ah, people, ah . . . you found that, ah, most of the, ah, the blacks that was there, they pulled, ah, liberty off in, ah, different places and different groups. Ah, and, ah, they went in groups because they felt safer in numbers.

L.J. Kimball: But there wasn't anything in the Second Front area? That was predominantly a white area?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes it was.

L.J. Kimball: When you traveled around in groups like that, you probably ran into white groups. Was there any kind of confrontations in those days?

Sgt. Maj. James: There was. A lot of times there was. But I think . . . I don't think it was . . . it was motivated because it was black and white. I think it was motivated a lot because the only time as the evening go on people drink more and their tolerance wore . . . for each other was . . . was worn down some. Ah, but, ah, I just feel like that the alcohol and a lot of it contribute to most of the. . . the disputes that you had.

L.J. Kimball: The next time you came back to Lejeune, you were a Gunnery Sergeant?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

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L.J. Kimball: And, Jacksonville had probably changed a lot.

Sgt. Maj. James: Changed immensely because now you had a lot of integrated subdivisions. Ah, the subdivisions people were living in, ah, were a lot nicer. And the community realized that, ah, the black dollar, ah, meant a great deal. It . . . what you had to do with us, ah, do something on . . . for people on the merit of. . . of. . . of what they did. Ah, I went to restaurants during that time. We were going out, we were eating. People were courteous to you. Ah, the movies were all integrated. Ah, the subdivisions, ah, depending on what you could afford, were open to most folks. A lot of . . . the only difference I found that as you looked for houses, people sort of steered you to certain areas to live. But, ah, if you was bright enough and smart enough, you could probably live anyplace. But, ah, I found that realtors tend to steer you towards where they felt that you should live, or . . . or they thought you sh . . . belonged. Ah, but, I think, ah . . . That has actually worn off. I think there may be some of that now, but, ah, I think predominantly you can live anyplace you desire and I . . . I think the playing field is a lot level now. And, that, ah, ah, I . . . I don't think the world is gonna be forever equal, but I . . . I do think people are learning from . . . from the past.

L.J. Kimball: You didn't experience any of the segregation you thought might exist when you came here as a Gunnery Sergeant?

Sgt. Maj. James: No I didn't. I was. . . I was very surprised. The things that I thought was here, a lot of that had . . . had vanished. Ah, and, ah, we, ah, we just, ah, the place grew on us. Ah, you could, ah, come home. You could leave your tricycle in the yard. Ah, there wasn't a lot of, ah, crime. The crime rate, ah, was low. Ah, for a long time I didn't lock the house up or anything. Ah, it was just. . . it's an enjoyable area to live in.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm. Back again when you were a PFC and went out on liberty in Jacksonville. . . . Integration theoretically had occurred at that point. Did you find when you were out in town that there were certain restaurants or theaters or whatever that you . . .

Sgt. Maj. James: Oh, absolutely.

L.J. Kimball: . . . you were not permitted, or well not permitted, but they discouraged you from going into?

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Sgt. Maj. James: Oh, yes. Ah, well, you can't say you weren't permitted, but . . . you. . . you. . . People just sort of steered you away from those. And a lot of places, especially when you was moving around at night, you just didn't feel comfortable going to some of the other places. Ah, you felt comfortable being down where you could set down, talk . . . people talk the same language and you could relax. You hear the type of music that you enjoy. And, ah, ah, nobody really thought about going anyplace else. You didn't have very much time and where you wanted to go, you want to have a good time, so you need to get there as soon as you could get there.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm. When you came back to Lejeune as a Gunnery Sergeant, New River Mall was there?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: Was it there when you were here as a PFC?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, if it was I never recalled ever going to it. I think, ah, New River Mall and New River area was, ah, ah, being built and it was sort of a nice place then, because, ah, ah, the, ah, Bell Fork home subdivision and all those places were there. And the other things were being constructed in the Mall. Western Boulevard hadn't even . . . hadn't even perceived that yet.

L.J. Kimball: You're getting at a point now, you came back here as a Gunnery Sergeant. You're a senior Staff NCO and in your position you're looking after your young Marines and you have a feeling for how their careers are progressing, and what they're doing that they shouldn't be, and when they're not being looked after. Was there any perception in your mind at this time that . . . the young black Marines were being treated differently than the white Marines?

Sgt. Maj. James: I didn't really see that here at Lejeune during that era when I came back as a Gunnery Sergeant. My . . . my thought as, ah, that, ah, in taking care of Marines, ah, and this was a time that, you know, after being on the Drill Field, that, ah, people referred to not black and white, but, ah, green and dark green Marines, you know. But we all Marines and we were in this together and then after being in combat and, ah, so forth, you had a perception of, ah, taking care of people, ah, regardless of who they were. And I think, ah, in the sense of fair play, I . . . I think that earned . . . ah, that bridged the gap between blacks and whites that those folks that were in positions of authority that were black and a lot of the senior . . . the Staff NCO's that came back from Vietnam had now made . . . made rank and they were . . . They stayed for the long haul

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where a lot of . . . I think that a lot of the white Staff NCO's got out. But a lot of the blacks Staff NCO's stayed in because it was a sense of security. It was a good living. Ah, and it was a better wage than it was outside. And so therefore if you enjoyed what you was doing and you were getting paid for it, you were. . . And had a family, you were happy.

L.J. Kimball: Did you have occasion that some of your young black Marines might come and confide with you to suggest that they weren't being treated fairly?

Sgt. Maj. James: Oh, absolutely. Ah, and, ah, it was your responsibility to. . . to deal with that. And I think, ah, that was the strength of a lot of the black Staff NCO's that you look around now. That they had a sense of responsibility to fix those things that they thought was broke as they come along that other people had, in my case, had fixed for me. I think in terms of, ah, ah, Charlie Skinner who was a Sergeant Major when I was a young Corporal and didn't have uniform and he bought it himself. But he was a white Marine. And, ah, I had a sense of giving back to Marines and taking care of them because of that same reason. And I think of him a lot now. Ah, his sense of fairness wasn't that I was a black Marine but I was a Marine that had potential, that would, ah. . . had potential to grow.

L.J. Kimball: Now before you joined the Marine Corps you say you boxed Golden Gloves. Did you box in the Marine Corps?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, yes I did. Ah, ah, I boxed aboard ship. Ah, I boxed during the time I was on Okinawa as a, ah, young Marine. Ah, but what happened with my boxing career, I really had intended to turn pro. But I was a small boxer. I boxed, ah, ban. . . flyaway, bantam weight and light weight. And it was during the time that, ah, that Kid Peret and, ah, some of the other boxers had actually got injured and killed in the ring. I start having migraine headaches and my mother really encouraged me not to turn pro. Ah, and I stayed in the Marine Corps and didn't get out and turn pro. Ah, the guy that I thought, ah, that I was a lot better than he was turned pro and, ah, he eventually died from getting banged around so much. And so that was probably one of the best moves that I actually made. I really thought I had the talent to be a pro boxer. Ah, but, ah, my m. . . just following my mother's guidance because she was the strongest figure in my life that, ah, I . . . A lot of things that she said to me I never questioned because she was my mother and said this. You don't need that. The Marine Corps is good for you, has been good for you, has enabled you to make a living, ah, ah, support a family. Ah, you need . . . that's where you need to be. And I took that, ah, and moved along.

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L.J. Kimball: What year was it you hung up your gloves?

Sgt. Maj. James: Actually, um, when I think back, ah, ah, when I really gave up boxing in itself, it's, ah . . . when I didn't think about actually boxing anymore was, ah, in the early sixties. Ah, somewhere around '64, '65 because I was on the, ah, boxing team on Okinawa. Ah, during that time, you know, we . . . it was big matches between Navy, Army and the Marine Corps. Just like it was Army, Navy football. There was a lot of competition between the, ah. . . the, the, ah, the brother services and if you had the best boxing team, the best football team, the best basketball team, that said that you were better. And so there was a lot of training that went into that. You know, there was a lot of big jocks in the Marine Corps. That's all. . . that's all they did. And there was guys like, ah, Percy Price and Green and Brown and all those guys that were. . . . That's all they did was box and, you know, I was, ah . . . Joe Lewis and all those guys had all us young guys eat up boxing and I thought I could knock down big trees and all that kind of stuff. But I. . . and I was real fast. I really thought that, ah, that one day that I. . . I would make a living being a boxer.

L.J. Kimball: What was the heaviest weight class you fought in?

Sgt. Maj. James: Heaviest weight class I actually fought. . . fought in was, ah, ah, actually light weight. Ah, I got up to where I couldn't make light weight anymore and, ah, and, ah, I really boxed a couple matches at, ah, as a middle weight. But, ah, as far as tournaments and so forth, I was . . . I was a light weight. That's the heaviest I boxed at competition.

L.J. Kimball: You must . . . have gained a few pounds since you were a light weight.

Sgt. Maj. James: Oh yeah. I'm a heavy weight now. (laughs)

L.J. Kimball: When you say you bantam weight. . .

Sgt. Maj. James: (laughs)

L.J. Kimball: . . . You must have. . .

Sgt. Maj. James: Yeah.

L.J. Kimball: . . . you must have grown a few inches.

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Sgt. Maj. James: Yeah, yeah. Well I haven't really grown up. I just got wider and then, you know, I started, ah, lifting weights and build upper body strength and you just can't get rid of the grid of . . . of all that, ah, as you. . . as you start getting older.

L.J. Kimball: Where did you live when you came to Camp Lejeune as a Gunnery Sergeant?

Sgt. Maj. James: As a Gunnery Sergeant when I came, ah, to, ah, Camp Lejeune, I lived on the base.

L.J. Kimball: Whereabout?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, lived right there on Oklahoma Court.

L.J. Kimball: That's Berkley Manor?

Sgt. Maj. James: Berkley Manor.

L.J. Kimball: OK. And when you came back to Camp Lejeune again, where did you live?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, as a Gunnery Sergeant, ah, I was here Okla. . . I was here at Camp Lejeune. And then, ah, we moved up . . . When we moved off base we bought this house right here.

L.J. Kimball: Right here?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: That was 1980 something?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, 1982.

L.J. Kimball: 1982. Was the Sherwood Forest pretty much done by then? Or were they still working . . .

Sgt. Maj. James: Oh, yes. Sherwood Forest, all the houses was done in here except probably about five.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm. Then you've lived here ever since then?

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Sgt. Maj. James: I've lived here ever since then. When we moved here, ah, we was the first actually, ah, I won't say the first but we were the only blacks in the neighborhood when I moved here. And then, ah, there was another black couple that was renting but we were the only ones that had bought into here. And then eventually, ah, there were more folks come in and, ah, the neighborhood became more integrated. And, ah, I just have enjoyed right here in this neighborhood. It was quiet. Ah, our kids weren't. . . weren't. . . ah, were in high school when we moved to here. And matter of fact, ah, ah, my son was getting ready to graduate from high school and he went right into Marine Corps. He stayed in the Marine Corps four years.

L.J. Kimball: Looking back over your career in the Marine Corps, what differences have you seen since the beginning, good or bad?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, you say changes in the Marine Corps. I think society has changed a lot and it has caused the Marine Corps to change. I think youngsters are a lot smarter because of technology and because of that they question more. When we were youngsters and were told to sweep down, we'd start looking for the broom. Now he'll ask you why does he have to sweep down, it's not his turn, and so on. You got more dialogue and more intelligent and questioned things. I don't know if that's for better or worse but they handle more technical things now. The young guy that was in the Infantry when I was a young man had a rifle and a whole bunch of ammunition, that was basically all he needed. Now a young man of the same age has more intelligence, handles weapons and technology that costs taxpayers a lot of money.

L.J. Kimball: Do have a feeling whether or not today's Marines are tougher?

Sgt. Maj. James: I don't think they're tougher. They still have an attitude of toughness but Marines in my era had to be a lot tougher because we had less equipment, he had less than anyone else, he had to do with less. That was our motto, we do more with less because they had less and couldn't ask for more because we were always thinking we would be disbanded. So the attitude of being tougher and meaner in those days, I think we really were. I think the branches of services are becoming equal. I think the attitude of toughness in training may be a little bit harder in the Marine Corps, but I think all in all the branches of the service are becoming equal in the way they function. It's just a matter of . . . a mental attitude of toughness. I think we still do things that are . . . that are tougher than other branches of the service but when you think in terms of the division between the Army and the Marine Corps when I . . . I was a Marine I think that division has come closer together of being more like each

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other. Ah, I think Army Airborne does things that's equal almost to recon now and, ah, ah, the toughness is that we are better and I think they gear programs up to shape 'em to make 'em harder to seem better. Ah, I think the ground wars and combat as we fought 'em long ago will never be fought that . . . that way no more. We have. . . we have technical wars now.

L.J. Kimball: What do you think, or if your thoughts on the matter has changed at all, about women Marines?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, young women these days are a lot smarter. They've gotten smarter just as the young men have got smart. . . smarter. Ah, I think, ah, when you think in terms of young women in the Marine Corps, I think women, American women, are a lot tougher and a lot stronger now. It's the mindset of being equal has driven to them to take on tougher jobs. Ah, and because of that they have proven themselves in the workplace.

L.J. Kimball: You and I both during our careers have seen a lot of good women Marines but we've also seen some that didn't measure up and we've seen some that received preferential treatment because they were women and they looked good. I'm sure you saw that some earlier on in your career and hopefully it went away as you stayed in.

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, I don't blame that on women though. I . . . I . . . I think. . . I blame that on males themselves. I think, ah, we as males have always used our best assets to get ahead. I think women are doing the same thing. If we're weak enough to take on the feminine side to let them get ahead, then I say more power to them. Ah, but I think that that goes on. But I think people have learned to use whatever their strength is to advance. Women have a bigger advantage than do men. Ah, and we all know why. But, ah, I really think that, ah, ah, during my time when I was coming through the Marine Corps that, ah, I found that, ah, units that had female, ah, women Marines in them, that everybody tend to know. . . tended to know exactly when she was eligible for promotion. And sometime they try to promote 'em before they were eligible because of the visibility. And they, ah, smart women are smart enough to use their assets to get ahead.

L.J. Kimball: Do you think the Marine Corps has been diminished at all by the fact that we brought women in?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, I really think that there's probably, ah, a job for women in the Marine Corps. I . . . I . . . just don't think the physical makeup of women is, ah, is

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geared towards combat. Ah, and those folks that believe that, I . . . I think they're fooling themselves. I think, ah, even when we went to Desert Storm, that was one of the biggest fears that they had, was that we would get back off those airplanes and there would be women on the runway, ah, coming down the, ah, getting off that would be maimed and . . . and without limbs. . . and be maimed for life. I think America was not ready to. . . to accept that. And I think that that was a . . . a big part of why there was so much bombing. We had so many women that were there. That America wouldn't accept that. And I . . . and I really think that we as Americans, especially men, have set women at a place that's so different than we are, that we're not really ready to accept women on the ground side by side, with a rifle, taking a hit. I think that time and place in . . . in the Armed Forces is just not here yet.

L.J. Kimball: Looking over your career in the Marine Corps, do you remember any occasions, where you met some of the great names of the Marines Corps or any remarkable personalities or Generals? Anything like that?

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, when I look back, ah, at people that have a great influence on me as a Marine, ah, there was a couple of people that. . . that come to mind. Ah, when I was at Parris Island and had just made Meritorious Gunnery Sergeant, I got to meet Col. Peterson. And Col. Peterson was, ah, at Headquarters Marine Corps. He came down to look at, ah, race equality.

L.J. Kimball: That's Frank Peterson, the aviator?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes. Ah, the perception was that African Americans could not swim. Probably rightfully so because they didn't have public swimming pools and all these things that made them swimmers. And the perception that they were afraid of water. But, ah, the analogy that he made right away when he got there, he says I can't believe, you can't make me believe, as a black man, that I can swim if I look around and I see no black instructors. And he says I'm sure that . . . throughout the whole Marine Corps there is *a* black instructor that's qualified to be here that can motivate these folks to feel like that if he can do it, I can do it.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: Regardless of whether he's a black Marine or whatever, but, ah, that was one of the things that, ah, ah, that sticks out in my mind when I think in terms of people. Ah, that, ah, when I made Meritorious Gunnery Sergeant he came to Parris Island. We had an opportunity to have breakfast with him and, ah, to

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set down and talk down with him as being the first aviator, was a big thing to me. The other guy that I actually look . . . look as my mentor was, ah, [Sergeant Major] Edward R. Huff himself. I was fortunate enough to be able to set down with him on many, many occasions at his home and talk about, ah, history of the African American Marine, ah, the roots of that. And I was really astounded that I was, ah, probably a Staff Sergeant and a Gunnery Sergeant before I knew what twenty thousand of those folks endured that I might be a Marine. And so the unwritten history of that endeared me to be part of the Montford Point Marine Association. And, ah, ah, that was one of the big things for me. Of course I didn't know Johnson himself, but Johnson and . . . and Huff himself were thought to be the same person because of being married to identical twins, so . . . So all these things and learning that and then still knowing Miss Huff has been, ah, very special to me.

L.J. Kimball: We've obviously undergone different experiences in the Marine Corps. There are things because I wasn't walking in your shoes, I never really understood. But I remember reading the transcript of Johnson and Huff's oral histories which are on file at Headquarters Marine Corps, and I don't remember which gentleman it was, if it was Huff or Johnson and this was before people were called African Americans, but he said most of his career when he was growing up he was a Negro. He was very proud of being a Negro because that described him as a race. Then one morning he got up and people were calling themselves Blacks and he said where'd this come from, you know. I don't want to be a Black. I want to be a Negro. And I thought about that for a while. For most of the time during my career, including all the literature,

Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm. African . . .

L.J. Kimball: . . . everything. . . what we called African Americans now we called Blacks then. And I got very used to that. Some women Marine's probably going to hit me one of these days because I call her a woman Marine. That what they were during the time we were in the Marine Corps, they were women Marines.

Sgt. Maj. James: During my time we called 'em BAMs.

L.J. Kimball: Yeah, BAMs and a few other things too.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes, yes.

L.J. Kimball: But, ah, a Marine these days not used to being distinguished. She's a Marine. But one day, they decided to begin calling Blacks African-Americans. How do you feel about that?

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Sgt. Maj. James: Well, it . . . if you notice, I use the phrase blacks because that's my generation.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: I think, ah, those folks that was Negroes, it deals with the generation.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, the next group of youngsters may want to call themselves something else. But to identify and fit in you have to make changes for that. I don't have a different feel one way or the other. It's just like, ah, my wife is named Judy. Ah, that's an accepted name. But there's, ah, youngsters now that name their kids in regards to African descent and so forth because that's a trend, ah, as part of their roots. And as we grow up, ah, generations of folks will have different names for different things. So, as you grow and have to fit in, I don't any, ah, I don't have any difficulty with making a change.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm. Let me go ahead and turn this tape over. You mentioned that Sgt. Maj. Huff had great influence on you in getting you interested in black Marine history and Montford Point.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: When did you become a member of the Montford Point Association?

Sgt. Maj. James: I came, ah. . . I became a member of the Montford Point Marine Association here, ah, in the mid-eighties. Ah, and Huff himself wasn't the driving force that caused me to join Montford Point but it was a Sgt. Maj. William Simms that was the group Sgt. Maj. at that time. And, ah, his vision was that, ah, this organization was thought of as a social group and he wanted it to be known that it was a veteran organization. And in order for it to gain credibility that active duty folks that were younger with a larger vision would have to join it to perpetuate the legacy. And so he brought a group of folks together and he brought these folks to guys like Ed Huff and, ah, Agrippa Smith and Mike Woods and original Montford Pointers who were here in the area. And they began teaching them more about the legacy of Montford Point. And I always say that the one that was, ah, the point that I remember most of all that I was here at Camp Johnson when Montford Point was rededicated. . . redesignated Camp Johnson. And I was sitting at the Tick Tock that day and . . . and not having enough foresight to know that I should have been there that day. So,

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each year when we have the rededication, that weighs very heavy on my mind because I had the opportunity to be there but I wasn't, and, ah, it drives me to make sure that those folks . . . ah, young Marines, ah, black or white, that have the opportunity to be part of history, not going back to the era of being at Montford Point, but that they are Marines. And what it took to become a Marine and those people who went through so much diversity to be a Marine, what they struggled through to get there.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm. So you joined the association in the eighties?

Sgt. Maj. James: In the eighties. '85.

L.J. Kimball: I know you eventually became the local chapter president.

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, local chapter president. I'm now the national president.

L.J. Kimball: OK. And presumably you became local chapter president first?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: And what year was that?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, I've been the local, ah, chapter president since, ah, '93.

L.J. Kimball: OK. Is it a requirement to be the national president that you have to be a local chapter president?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes. You have to serve, ah, ah, at least to be a, ah, chapter president before you can be a national president.

L.J. Kimball: When did you become the national president.

Sgt. Maj. James: This, ah, last, ah, convention. It's only been a little over a month now.

L.J. Kimball: How many folks are in the Montford Point Marine Association now?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, actually within the Association is probably about 2,500 folks that's . . . that's on roll. Ah, we. . . there is a lot of original Montford Pointers that we preserve the legacy that they themselves are not members. But that's one of my goals is to recruit as many of those original Montford Pointers because we. . . as they're passing more now . . . The average of Montford Pointers, ah, 75

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years old now. So as they pass, we, ah, the ceremonial aspect of their funerals and their widows, we want to be part of that.

L.J. Kimball: What about the local chapter? How many folks are in that?

Sgt. Maj. James: The local chapter right now has close to two hundred folks. We are the largest chapter of twenty-three active chapters.

L.J. Kimball: Does your job as the national president involve a lot of work on your part, a lot of hours?

Sgt. Maj. James: Actually, people say it's a lot of work. My job is to motivate those presidents and local chapters to create growth and to preserve the legacy of . . . of, ah, the original Montford Pointers. Ah, that's first. But our mission has changed in that we, ah, create scholarships for youth, ah, help the needy, involved with the veterans, and. . . and sick and the shut-in and hospitals. Also giving guidance to young Marines who are having some difficulty in leadership situations.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm. As national president, how many hours a week or a month or a day do you have to devote to that job?

Sgt. Maj. James: Really and truly and I tell my wife this all the time, ah, being that I am still the chapter president as well as the national president, that most of my awake time is devoted somewhat in dealing with Montford Point. Ah, being that my wife is the vice president of the Ladies' Auxiliary local, ah, whenever we have down time, we either looking at the next event we're going to or the next event we're planning or a vision of what we gonna move to. And our time. . . we spend a lot of time together and we spend a lot of time in planning that.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm. Montford Point has intrigued me as the history of Camp Lejeune and history of Onslow County do. There's a few questions that I haven't been able to resolve. To every Montford Point era Marine or somebody that worked at Montford Point that has some kind of historical interest, I've asked these questions and haven't found an answer. Being aware that you're not a Montford Point era Marine, but in your talkings with Huff and some of the other Marines, you may have heard, that there was a road named after Corporal Fraser in 1943. Are you aware of that?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yeah, I. . . I've heard Mike Woods talk about Fraser Road.

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L.J. Kimball: And I asked him. I can't fault some of these older veterans, trying to remember things that happened fifty years ago. He couldn't remember. It's one of those intriguing little things that you'd like to know. Corporal Gilbert Fraser, Jr. was in the 51st Defense Battalion and he was the first and possibly the only black Marine at Montford Point that was killed during training. He got killed over at the amphibious mockup on the Inter-Coastal Waterway. And the news release that was issued from Headquarters Marine Corps said that the Commanding Officer had designated, and apparently this was approved, that the road leading from Area 3 of Montford Point Camp to the Base Artillery Activity would henceforth be known as Corporal Fraser Road. I can't find any map from that era, or current, or recollections, or base records, of any road ever being designated Fraser Road. Do you have any idea where Fraser Road was?

Sgt. Maj. James: I have no idea where Fraser Road was, but I have heard people talk about Fraser Road. I've had all those guys come back and the base has changed so much, and the renovation of the base, if they can't find a prominent terrain feature, it's difficult for them to get oriented. And the only prominent terrain feature is the chapel, because it's in the very same place. And maybe the building down at the end. They know where the water tower used to be, but the rest of the place has changed so much.

L.J. Kimball: We know where Area 3 is so if we only knew where the Artillery Activity was, we could draw a line between the two. But, I haven't been able to find anyone who knows where the Artillery Activity was.

Sgt. Maj. James: The only person in the area who was in the artillery and might know is Joe Walker, who was in the 51st or 52nd Defense Battalion. He's up in Winston-Salem.

L.J. Kimball: With regard to other areas occupied by Montford Marines, when the 51st expanded beyond the limits of Montford Point and over to Camp Knox, there was a small facility on the other side of Scales Creek known as Area "E." It has long since been torn down. I would like to know exactly where in Camp Knox they were billeted, and if they occupied Area "E."

Sgt. Maj. James: I wasn't aware of the existence of an Area "E."

L.J. Kimball: Another bit of Montford history I've been trying to track down is a song called "Take Me Away from Jacksonville." It was written by a famous band leader of the day, Bobby Troup, and became the unofficial anthem of the camp. Do

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you know anyone who's familiar with song, or possibly has a copy of the music?

Sgt. Maj. James: I've heard the song before and there's a guy that has a copy of it. Ah, course you know Bobby Troop just died last year. Ah.

L.J. Kimball: Did he?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: No, I didn't know that.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: Was he black or white?

Sgt. Maj. James: He was white.

L.J. Kimball: White. OK then. When you say . . .

Sgt. Maj. James: He . . . he just died just, ah, just before the last convention. It's been. . . it's only been about, ah, eight or nine months ago that he actually died.

L.J. Kimball: Do you know where the black military housing was over off Piney Green?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, the exact area that it was in. I don't know the exact area that all the housing was in, but, ah, the person that could tell you exactly where it was, would be Beula Huff. Sgt. Maj. Huff's wife. Cuz she lived there. I've often heard her refer to the area that they lived in out there.

L.J. Kimball: OK. I think Mike Woods was telling me about this, black structures remaining in Camp Lejeune and originally constructed just for black Marines.

Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm.

L.J. Kimball: He mentioned, I don't know if it was a Mr. Little or Mr. Cherry, a barber that still works in downtown Jacksonville.

Sgt. Maj. James: Mr. Little works downtown but Mr. Cherry was a food service guy.

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L.J. Kimball: I guess it was Mr. Little. I was asking him, where the black kids went to school before integration.

Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm.

L.J. Kimball: And, ah. . .

Sgt. Maj. James: You know those are the kind of questions you probably have I've never really in my mind, ah, say where. But I'm. . . I'm sure that probably the schools that they had that was in the black communities wherever the other black kids went was probably where they went. I don't know exactly where that was.

L.J. Kimball: I did some research and can show you where the black housing was over in Piney Green and a lot of the other black structures. Do you recall reading an article in the paper last year addressing that subject? It was in the "Proud Past" section.

Sgt. Maj. James: Oh yeah, I've read that.

L.J. Kimball: This is a copy of that article. The buildings were built during the era of segregation of the Marine Corps at Camp Lejeune. Part of my research on that was talking to Mike Woods over the telephone. In fact, Mike and I had an interview scheduled last week, but he didn't make it. He seemed to be very much interested in talking to me and relating his experiences but apparently it slipped his mind.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yeah, he's. . . he's having problems with his memory and so forth now.

L.J. Kimball: I'll probably call him back and see if we can arrange another visit. I know he's got a lot of interesting stories that are would benefit from. We also talked about Club 51. Do you know where that was?

Sgt. Maj. James: I might get some of these things here blowed up so we can put 'em into M100.

L.J. Kimball: You can have that if you like. That's not the best copy, but it happened to be the spare copy I had lying around so I thought I'd pass along to you if you'd like that. And some of the lines might even cut off at the bottom. But if you'd like another copy or a better copy, I'd be glad to give you one. Ah, I found out where Club 51 was located. It is frequently mentioned in the literature as a place where the black Marines went, named after the 51st Defense Battalion of course.

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Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm. Where was that?

L.J. Kimball: Well, the turn off Piney Green, where the black housing was.

Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm.

L.J. Kimball: The 51 Club building is now the Rice Bowl. The Rice Bowl's on your left as you turn off Piney Green.

Sgt. Maj. James: Oh, is that right?

L.J. Kimball: Let's see. Sgt. Maj. Johnson back in the early days was on a street naming detail at Montford Point. And he walked around and . . . He was a well-read man. He gave the recommendation to the Base Commander, said let's name this road Pushkin after the Russian poet, and Dumas after the French writer, and Tubman after Harriet Tubman, and also Fraser Road. He said in his transcript, "and those roads still exist today." This transcript couldn't have been made more than ten or fifteen years ago. There are no roads at Montford Point by those names. And of course that begs the question, what the heck happened to those roads?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yeah.

L.J. Kimball: Ah, unless . . .

Sgt. Maj. James: Well, after he named them he didn't the signs up. (laughs)

L.J. Kimball: Because I've never seen any maps or any records mentioning Dumas and Pushkin and Harriet Tubman and roads like that. Kind of makes you wonder, like Fraser Road. We have a press release from Headquarters Marine Corps. You would think that someplace in the records somewhere on a map of, you know, 1943, '44, '45 map of Montford Point that you would find Fraser Road existing at least for a while before it's changed to something else.

Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm.

L.J. Kimball: So that's a question I always ask also.

Sgt. Maj. James: OK.

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L.J. Kimball: I was an Infantry officer. And Infantry officers like to get the lay of the land. I dropped my anchor and decided to reside in Onslow County. I had to know everything about the terrain, the history of the culture and Camp Lejeune, being a former Marine, was very close to me. And I realized like with a lot of aspects of our history, there were a lot of things unknown about Camp Lejeune. You'd ask people where the black beach house was. Nobody knew where the black beach house was. Where did the black messmen live? They had separate quarters at the old club. Where was the black housing? On Piney Green. Where were the black recreational facilities during Montford Point? Where did the black Staff NCO's live? The black Labor. . .er, what they called the Colored Labor Battalion.

Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm.

L.J. Kimball: There was a Colored Labor Battalion facility that was built aboard Camp Lejeune. Did you know that?

Sgt. Maj. James: No. I didn't.

L.J. Kimball: Well, one of the reasons I knew that is because . . . at one time I was the Battalion Commander of the Base Support Battalion. And my barracks were built where the barracks of the Colored Labor Battalion was. My mess hall, my Battalion mess hall, won the first WPT Hill award for the finest mess hall in the Marine Corps. That was the black, Colored Battalion Mess Hall. And the two buildings that are in back . . . do you know where the Thrift Club is?

Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm.

L.J. Kimball: The Thrift Shop. Those little white buildings?

Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm.

L.J. Kimball: That was the admin building for the Colored Labor Battalion. And something else that's interesting, because the Marine Corps was segregated both by sex and color in those days, that where they had women, they named the roads after women. Where they had blacks, they named the roads after blacks. And that's particularly clear over in Stone's Bay which was where the black Marines were housed during qualification.

Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm.

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L.J. Kimball: The roads are named George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington. Louis Road, in the middle of industrial area was named after Joe Louis because in those days that's all the further the camp extended and that was the Colored Labor Battalion. That's why they named the road after a famous black at that time.

Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm.

L.J. Kimball: So you can see how that kind of intrigues you when start . . .

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: . . . hearing about these things, you want to find out more about it. And basically . . . this is what this article is about. Like that. The Staff NCO beach house was the black beach house when it was built. And the bus station aboard Camp Lejeune used to have white and colored sections too, just like the town. But I . . . I don't think things like that should be lost without somebody . . .

Sgt. Maj. James: Yeah.

L.J. Kimball: . . . writing them down . . . for future reference. That was just a digression to show you why, among other reasons, I'm interested in certain aspects of the history and trying to find out some answers. And, it occurred to me that . . . one of the things other than walking around and interviewing black Marines . . .

Sgt. Maj. James: Mmm-hmm.

L.J. Kimball: . . . other than just talking to them, I could do would be to pass a note to the president, which coincidentally happens to be you, which says at your next meeting, would you please ask if anybody knows the answer to these questions.

Sgt. Maj. James: Yeah.

L.J. Kimball: I suppose one of the last things I wanted to ask you was who would you recommend that I talk to in the area? Where I can sit down and talk to them face to face about Montford Point.

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Sgt. Maj. James: The guy that you should probably talk to more than anybody else is, ah, Agrippa Smith.

L.J. Kimball: OK.

Sgt. Maj. James: In this area.

L.J. Kimball: Do you have a number for him?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yeah, let me pull it up from my, ah, computer. I may not have his phone number but I know I got his address. (pause in tape) In Jacksonville in. . . in, ah, July of next year.

L.J. Kimball: The national convention. . .

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: . . . will be here in Jacksonville.

Sgt. Maj. James: Which would means that people from all across the country, ah, Montford Point Marines will assemble here. And there'll probably be at least 400 or so of 'em from out of town that will assemble. That the ones that have, ah, developed a kinship and so forth for the organization that come together and look for comrades and so forth. They always come. And this convention supposed to be one. . . has the makings of being one of our largest ones.

L.J. Kimball: OK. A couple of other quick questions. Do you have, you don't have to show it to me, but do you have memorabilia from your early days in the Marine Corps? Photographs of young PFC James, ah. . .

Sgt. Maj. James: Yes.

L.J. Kimball: . . .pungi sticks from Vietnam, or anything like that?

Sgt. Maj. James: Ah, matter of fact I still have my, ah, the shoes that I had made, ah, from, ah, the sandals that I had made in Vietnam, ah, from car tires and . . .

L.J. Kimball: Ho Chi Min sandals?

Sgt. Maj. James: Yeah, I still have those. So, ah, I still have, ah, probably a few of the old, ah, ah, grenades with the sticks on 'em. I still have some of those. Ah, and

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you're not really, ah, ah, ah. . . the significance of all the . . . when you're assembling and carrying them around, it doesn't mean anything and I . . . the same thing I tell these original Montford Pointers. Ah, they'll pass away and the grandchild that will. . . picks up the stuff will throw that stuff away. It has no significance to 'em. A picture of grandpa or whatever is fine, but the dogtags that are round that looks like, you know, with a little hole in it, now that means nothing to 'em. But they're rare. Ah, Mr. King showed me a . . . his platoon book when he came through Boot Camp which he was in the Second Platoon. Ah, still in real good shape. The first one I've ever . . . I ever saw. Was blue. Has a picture of the chapel over on the Base and, ah, ah, [Colonel] Samuel Woods [the first CO of Montford Point Camp] and all. And that's the first picture I saw of Samuel Woods that he had a hat on. The old ones was without a cover. And, ah, all things like that, that, ah, you get to look at and you say, you know, you just say Jesus Christ. And I talked to his sister to make sure she didn't throw all that stuff away.

L.J. Kimball: The obvious reason I ask is once again it personalizes history. If we decide to use something from James in there it's more meaningful if you have a picture there too. Here's PFC James at, ah, Parris Island or PFC James or Gunnery Sergeant James in his first tour of Camp Lejeune. We'd just like to know that those things exist in case somebody has an interest and come over to take a picture of it.

Sgt. Maj. James: I said I had a pic. . . one of old, old pictures.

L.J. Kimball: OK.

Sgt. Maj. James: I had that made on, ah, Okinawa.

L.J. Kimball: Mmm-hmm.

Sgt. Maj. James: And this is a pictures of Gunnery Sergeant, my wife and I. She ran, ah, five hundred miles and this is Maj. Williams. . . Williams presenting her with the trophy. It . . . it sets in the room here. I got all kinds of pictures.

L.J. Kimball: Yeah. Well, good. The other question I have is. . . Do you mind if I take a picture before I go here?

Sgt. Maj. James: OK.

(end of tape)