Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

JULIUS MORGAN

Air Force, Cold War

2012

OH
1724

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Morgan, Julius (b. 1937) Oral History Interview, 2012.
Approximate length: 1 hour 48 minutes
Contact WVM Research Center for accessing to original recording.

Abstract:

This oral history interview with Julius Morgan covers his service with the Air Force, beginning in 1956 and ending in 1968. He joined the military when he was eighteen and served during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts and in Japan during the Cuban missile crisis.

Morgan discusses the reasons why he joined when he did. Morgan discusses his experience of basic training and his subsequent work as an airplane engine mechanic in various locations, including Japan, and the types of work he did on the planes. Morgan describes the differences between being employed in the military and employment in the private sector. He describes the circumstances around his leaving military service in 1968 and the adjustment he had to make with regard to family life. He mentions what he thinks about race relations in today's America.

Other stories/topics of note in the interview include why his family moved from Georgia to Akron, Ohio when he was small, what life was like growing up in Akron after World War II, the influence of a Baptist minister who stressed the importance of education in creating a successful life, how his wife felt about his joining and later leaving the Air Force, what it was like being a tall African-American in Japan, the lessons of camaraderie and equality he experienced in his military service, family influences that caused him to leave military service, how his military experience helped him navigate his way through some of the realities of private sector employment, and employment in data processing after he left the Air Force.

Biographical Sketch:

Morgan (b. 1937) served with the Air Force starting in 1956. He finished basic training at Lackland Air Force Base (Texas). He served in Japan. He left the military in 1968.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript, if possible.

Interviewed by Molly Graham, 2012.
Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2016
Reviewed by Neil Bartlett, 2017.
Abstract written by Neil Bartlett, 2017.

Interview Transcript

Graham: So this is an interview with Julius Morgan, who served with the Air Force during 1963.

Morgan: No, that was when I served in Japan. I entered the Air Force in 1956, and served until 1968.

Graham: Okay. The interview is being conducted at The Arbors, is that what you call this? [redacted] in Madison, Wisconsin. Today is July 17, 2012, and the interviewer is me, Molly Graham. And sometimes, I like to have people I interview sort of introduce themselves to the tape. So how would you describe yourself?

Morgan: I'm Julius Morgan. I'll be seventy-five years old on July 20. Born in Milledgeville, Georgia, 1937, raised in Ohio, and went to school in Ohio. Grade school, high school, and a year at the University of Akron. Joined the Air Force in 1956, and served until 1968. I got married in 1957 to Verona Morgan, and we were high school sweethearts. Well, even before that, we met each other in the summer orchestra. She played violin, I played violin. And we didn't start dating until I was a junior in high school. She was a sophomore. And then we dated throughout, and we got married in 1957. Now, did I repeat myself somewhere in there? Yeah, we got married in 1957. I joined the Air Force in '56, then we got married in '57. I stayed in the Air Force until '68. And at the time, I became disenchanted and got out. I just--After almost 13 years, I just got out.

I was separated from my family. I was down in Petersburg, Virginia, and my family was here in Madison. And it was a long haul to visit them, so I could see that I would be better off getting out of the Air Force. I could get a job. Getting a job was easy, because I was a computer technician. And I got started in computers in their early, in their infancy as a technician. And I learned programming. I was able to program, and then got out in December '68, and went to work for the state of Wisconsin in January '69.

That's what I did. I was a computer programmer until Verona got promoted and moved to Milwaukee, where I became director of economic development for Milwaukee Area Technical College. In that capacity, I worked primarily with the small business sector in Milwaukee. I provided technical assistance, services, access to resources for small business, start-ups, and growing businesses. We were primarily for minority businesses, but we served the entire small business community, because I felt that, uh, small business is small business. Even though our focus was on minority and female businesses. And that's what I did until I retired in 2009, somewhere around there. Yeah, 2009. I can't remember. But I worked for Milwaukee Area Technical College for that period. And that's primarily what I did.

Graham: Do you have memories of Georgia, when you were a young kid?

Morgan: Not really. I know that we lived across from a river, and we lived on a hill in Georgia. A big yard, because my dad had peach trees. Yeah, we had, I guess you would call them a peach orchard as such, because in the fall, people would come, and they would pick the peaches. And then they would pay Daddy by the box or whatever. And also, Daddy had

a garden. And he worked for one of the major armament companies in Georgia. I can't remember which one it was, but he worked at the plant at night, and worked his gardens and orchards during the day.

Graham: Why did you move to Ohio?

Morgan: My mother's family was in Akron, Ohio. And they sort of persuaded my mother that life would be better for us in Akron, because my mother moved interim to Atlanta. Mama moved to Atlanta. Daddy stayed in Milledgeville. And then Daddy moved to Atlanta, got a job in Atlanta. And then he had an offer to move to Detroit and work in the plant in Detroit. But our daddy's older sister lived in Akron, and we stopped in Akron. And just on a whim, Daddy went in for a job interview at B.F. Goodrich. And because he could read and could write and could sign, he was offered a job as a tire builder. And he decided to take the job in Akron rather than go on to Detroit. And that's where we ended up.

Graham: Do you remember what year that was?

Morgan: 1943.

Graham: So what was Akron, Ohio like in the 1940s?

Morgan: Jumpin' and jivin', that's just the best I could say. It was the headquarters of the major rubber companies. B.F. Goodrich, Firestone, General Tire, Goodyear, U.S. Hard Rubber, and Seiberling Rubber. That was the major six. Also, it was the base for Quaker Oats. Quaker Oats had a major plant there in Akron, and all their corporate offices were in Akron at that time. And also, headquarters for trucking. A lot of trucking in Akron. So tire building, rubber, transportation, and manufacturing, because you can consider Quaker Oats as a manufacturing process. It was a dirty town in the sense that the air was always filled with the pollutants from the plants that always had a foul odor. Because rubber manufacturing is not a pretty thing. But it was a good town, very high educational standards. I can remember, I had started school in Georgia. And when I got to Akron, I was a little bit ahead of those in the first grade. But the educational system was one of the best I have ever encountered. Elementary education, high school, and I attended the University of Akron for a year. And became disenchanted and decided to join the Air Force. At the time, I didn't find college to be my calling. So I joined the Air Force.

Graham: Did you have siblings growing up?

Morgan: Yes, two brothers, two sisters.

Graham: And where do you fall in the—

Morgan: I was the oldest of five. Well, the oldest of six. I had three sisters. One of my sisters died while she was young, we were younger. But yeah, two sisters, two brothers.

Graham: Was it a little bit of a culture shock, moving from the South in the—

Morgan: Yes, it was. It was a big culture shock. Because where we lived in Georgia, it was--I can't say it was country, but living in Milledgeville, it was country. It was very country. Because we had a lot of land and all. Then Mama moved to Atlanta, like I said. And then it was sort of like the city, but we lived on Lindsay Street in Atlanta. And it was sort of a little, I guess you could call it an enclave, primarily African American. At the time, I wasn't aware of segregation. But all of our neighbors were all African American. They all worked, you know. They owned their own homes. And they were, I guess you could classify them as middle class because they owned automobiles. And they went to church on Sunday, prayer meeting on Wednesday, choir rehearsal on Friday, and they went to church on Sunday. But it was primarily, totally African American, the community we lived in on Lindsay Street. I can remember that.

Graham: Then what about in Akron?

Morgan: Akron was integrated in a sense, because Akron had a north side, east side, west side, south side. And primarily the African Americans lived on the north side and on the west side. And then east side and south side were primarily European Americans. There were six high schools, and then they closed the high school that I was going to, which was West High School. And they moved all of us to either Central High School, Buchtel High School, or North High School, because of where we were located. And so I spent two years at West High School and two years at Central, where I graduated in 1955.

Graham: Have you ever gone back to these places, back to Akron—

Morgan: Yes. We go to Akron occasionally.

Graham: How have you kind of seen it change over the years?

Morgan: Akron, the total process, the city is primarily African American, and the suburbs are European American. The street we lived on when we first moved there, my dad bought a house and a court [??], and it was off the main street there, Hickory Street. And it was primarily integrated. There were European American families, primarily of Polish and Czechoslovakian ancestry. And then, the Europeans moved out as more African Americans moved in. And there were certain families, like the Bars, that owned land, and they had horses. They stayed. The Ewings stayed. There were certain families that just refused to move. They stayed, because that's where their roots were. But when we moved in, it went from primarily European American, then became primarily African American. As Europeans moved out, African Americans moved in.

Except for some of the families, like those that have roots, like the people that owned the store, the Chruzeskis [??], they stayed, because they owned the store. The Bars stayed because they had their horses and so forth. And there were others that stayed, because they had vested interest in staying. Mrs. Hamrick [??] stayed because her husband had built her son a state-of-the-art workshop, because Robert was good in woodworking. And there were those that stayed. And then more, you know, African Americans started moving in. You can say that the area we lived in wasn't poor, but it wasn't quite middle class. My dad made a good salary, because he worked in the rubber

plants. And most of the men worked in the rubber plants, you know. Mr. Mills, Mr. Freeman, Mr. Ware, Mr. Reeves, Mr. Bean. All these people worked in the rubber plants, because they were there during the war. And then, when the soldiers started coming back, they decided to move away from Akron. Because there was a big influx of African Americans from the South, because of jobs. The same thing happened to Cleveland. The same thing happened to Youngstown. African Americans moved in. European Americans moved out. And so they would move out, but they would come and work at the plants, but they would live in the suburbs. They lived in the suburbs. And their children went to schools in the suburbs. The last high school to integrate in Akron was Buchtel High School, and that was because it was on the far west side of Akron, near Copley, which was a, I guess you would call it a little small town. And that was completely European American.

Graham: So did you go to a segregated school?

Graham: Yes. I went to grade school at Crosby, which was integrated rather. And then slowly, it became more African American, and it became almost predominantly African Americans, because the government had built project houses there. And the primary tenants were African Americans. European Americans that lived there owned their homes. And so they stayed. But then, when African Americans started buying property, they would sell to African Americans, because they could get a better price for their houses. But those that lived in the projects were there on government largess, I guess you would call it, because some were veterans. Some were disabled. And they moved into the government housing. Projects, we called it. And there must have been maybe 200 of those type of units. They were separate units. We used to call them clapboard houses, because they weren't wood. They were prefab. They just plop, and then you can move in, you know. Put your fist through it, and that was it. But predominantly African American.

Graham: How does negotiating segregation impact your worldview? How has it kind of explained to you—

Morgan: Segregation?

Graham: Yeah.

Morgan: Segregation was never explained to me until I joined the Air Force. When I joined the Air Force, the first thing my cousin and I were told, and there were a lot of us. Guys from Cleveland, Youngstown, primarily African Americans. We were volunteers in the Air Force, and they separated us. And then they told us, "You're going to be in a special unit, because you come from deprived communities."

You know, deprived, I think it was the word they used. They might have used underprivileged or deprived. It meant that we had lived substandard lives. We didn't have all the things that-- But we did. I had a bicycle. I had a wagon. I had all the toys I ever needed, a basketball, a football, a ball glove. Everything that a European kid had, I had. And one of my best friends was a European American kid. His first name was Morgan. My last name was Morgan. And their last name was Readinger [??]. Morgan

and I were the same age. But Mrs. Readinger took a liking to me, because she said I was educated. And I didn't know what she meant by that. But I was getting good grades in school. I had manners, because my father and mother insisted upon us being mannerable. And I played well with her son. So I got a lot of his hand-me-downs. Like, he would wear a pair of jeans twice, and then he wouldn't wear them anymore. Well, I was the recipient of those. So I had plenty of quality clothes, because of Mrs. Readinger. And she took a very strong liking to me. Once I graduated from high school and started the university, I worked for a destruction company. Because we would go in and tear down and gut a building for rebuilding. And one of the primary founders of that company was the Bear [??] company, the Bear family. And Mrs. Bear took a liking to me, because she said I was educated. And I still didn't know what she meant. But any topic that she would broach, I could speak to her about it, because I read a lot. I stayed in the library a lot. That was my sanctuary, for two reasons (laughter). One, in the summer, it was air-conditioned. And number two, in the wintertime, it was heated, you know. And there were all these books there to read. And if you needed assistance, you could ask, and they would explain things to you. And I loved being in the Akron Public Library.

Graham: Yeah. Maybe you could now sort of walk me through the steps leading up to joining the Air Force. Like, what was going on in your life, and what kind of got you in the door there.

Morgan: Okay. I had always wanted to join the Air Force, ever since I could remember. I liked the color of the uniform and the fact that they flew airplanes. I always was in love with airplanes. And when I went to the University of Akron for a year, I was in Air Force ROTC. At the end of the year, my dad and I didn't get along too well because he thought I was spending too much time with Verona, currently my wife. He figured, well, like all fathers at the time, he's going to make her pregnant. He doesn't have a supporting job. I didn't want to work in the plants. I didn't want to work in the plants. You would go to work clean and come home smelling like rubber. And that smell just stayed in the house and everything. You wash your clothes, and the smell of rubber was always there. And so I decided that, at the end of my year at the university. And Daddy was really, really, you know, he and I just weren't getting along. I moved in with my cousin. His father and mother were divorced, so my aunt was Lillian. And then I had a cousin, Mergus [??], and Fred was my cousin. He and I were the same age. Well, I take that back. We're a year and four days apart in age. But we were like brothers.

And we had a mentor by the name of Roy Gary. He was a Baptist minister, but he was progressive, encouraging education, encouraging you to get an education, encouraging you to abstain from sex activities with your girlfriend, joining social, you know, the Y. They had a segregated Y in Akron, by the way. They had the European Y, and then the African American Y. And those things he encouraged us. Played Police Athletic League baseball, and get into social activities, and to stay away from, you know, the gambling guys, the guys that would slip away from school to drink, and stuff like that. Encouraging us to stay in school. Because his word was, "An education is the foundation for your life." And I think that was his term. [inaudible] Your education is the foundation for your life. If you build a sound educational foundation, you can go anywhere you want to go. They can cut your hands. They can cut your feet off. They

can cut your legs off. But as long as you've got your head and you can think, an education is the foundation for your life." So he was sort of a mentor for Fred and I.

Fred and I were at a junction in our life. What were we going to do? And I always wanted to join the Air Force. So I talked to him. I said, "Let's join the Air Force." And he said, "We'll think about it." And we went to work one day, and at noon lunch, we always used to go by the recruiting office. And we went in. And the guy gave us lunch, and we talked, and we signed up. And he wanted to know, "How soon do you want to leave?" I told him, "I could leave this afternoon, if you want." You know, and Fred said the same thing. And that's how we got into the Air Force.

Graham: What year was this?

Morgan: Pardon?

Graham: What year was this?

Morgan: 1956. I went in in 1956.

Graham: Okay, and how old were you?

Morgan: Eighteen. I hadn't turned 19 yet.

Graham: And how did Verona feel about you joining the Air Force?

Morgan: (sighs) She supported it, but like, you know, Verona and I had been going together, I think, by that time, I think three or four years, at least three years. And I had given her an engagement ring. The reason we didn't get married right away, I didn't see a means of supporting her, you know, working. And we talked about it, and she supported it, because I told her, "Look, it will bring stability to my life. It will give me an opportunity to organize my life, and it will give me discipline. And it will give me an opportunity to learn a skill. And I'll be able to support a wife, because I know that twice a month, I'll get a salary. And then, I'll get what we call rations, separate rations, which was support for your family." And so she went along with it. And we got married in 1957. So she was supportive of me being in the Air Force, and she was supportive until all of our kids were born. We've got four daughters. And we weren't moving too much. We were moving on average of every three years, you know.

And once we got to Madison, I think the mistake the Air Force made was sending me to Madison, because Verona fell in love with Madison. It was a unique city. It was a clean city. And the people here were educated people. And, you know, you didn't have what we call shoot 'em up, cut 'em up, and gut 'em up. Because in Akron, Friday night through Saturday to early Sunday morning, it was nothing but shooting, cussing, fighting, and drinking. And they didn't have that here in Madison. An excellent university, because she was at that time pursuing a college degree. And then she got a job at the telephone company, which was great. And then it gave her an opportunity to start a career. So she supported me being in the Air Force, and she supported me getting out of the Air Force.

I could have stayed in the Air Force several more years, and gotten a pension, but I didn't. I got out, because there was a tremendous opportunity here in Madison at the time, especially in computers. I was into computers. I was in data processing. And when I got out, I sent out 12 resumes and letters seeking employment. And of the 12, I got 11 responses.

And I interviewed with six companies here, including Rayovac. I interviewed with Rayovac first. At that time, it was First Wisconsin Bank. I interviewed with the bank. I interviewed with the city. I interviewed with the state. I interviewed with the county. And I interviewed with one other private employer. But I took the job with the state, the first job, because it was ironic. The guy that was the manager at the state used to work for me, because I was his NCOIC. That was Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge. And he had a cushy job. He would work three hours a day. He would show up in the morning at the first shift. At first, he would show up at the four o'clock, and he would show up at midnight. And his job was to update the changes in the computer systems that IBM would send in. And so all he did was get an hour on the computers, because we have two units. And that's what he did. And then he was gone.

Everyone thought he was working 24 hours a day, but he was only working approximately three hours a day. But he had worked for me in the Air Force. And then, when I got out, he was the applications programming manager for the state. And I could program in FORTRAN, and I could program in COBOL. And COBOL was the coming language at the time. I went to the Grace Harper School. In the Air Force, it was one of the first COBOL classes ever, as a staff sergeant in the Air Force. Because the Air Force was starting to bring in their own programmers.

All of our equipment was being programmed by contractors, and the Air Force found if they could train their own programmers, they had better control over their programmers. And we could be current, because the contractors, you know, they floated around. But when [??] the changes came down and they called [inaudible] and the [inaudible] came down, we could do them right away. Whereas we would have to wait for the contractors before. And sometimes, we could be as much as a month behind, and we didn't know, you know. And when I went to Fort Lee, Virginia, it was one of the most critical stations because it was on the route that the Russians would fly there to Cuba, as they took him [??] across. And they would fly through our sector to go to Cuba. So we had a very critical site. And the Russians are very smart. They were allowed five aircraft in a formation. But they would stack them suckers, you know. They may have four stacked, so instead of five, there were 20. And radar only bounces off the first airplane. It only hit the first airplane. It never hit those above, and that was one of the flaws in early radar. So they could send 20 flights into Cuba, and we would never know until they started peeling [??] off the land. It was too late then, because they were in Cuban air space.

Graham: What were they doing in Cuba?

Morgan: The Russians? They were in Cuba for years. They built Cuba up under Castro, building an army, rebuilding Cuba because it had gone through a revolution. And they were

rebuilding Cuba as a communist state. And so ninety miles off our coast, we had a communist nation. They'd refuel their warships in the Cuban harbors, you know, because they were in Cuban waters. And all we could do is sit there and run recon [inaudible] over them, and make sure that they stayed on course. Or the navy would see they strayed off course, and they would put them on course. And of course, they were doing recon with their ships, you know. They could do recon, coastal recon and stuff like that.

Graham: Can you describe what these early computers looked like that you worked on?

Morgan: Okay, sure. Have you ever been in First Wisconsin Bank?

Graham: Actually no.

Morgan: Okay, what is the largest building you've ever been in in Madison?

Graham: I've been in the capitol building.

Morgan: Okay. Our computers covered five floors. Huge. The master console was as big as this apartment. We had four sections in it. We had the input output section. We had the central computer section. We had the display section. And then we had the, oh, what was the fourth? Well, anyways, it was divided into four sections, and consequently had four operators and two master operators. The four operators were always at the console. The master operators would float back and forth to make sure everything was going well. And that computer would fit, like I said, on four floors. Have you been out to Truax Field?

Graham: No.

Morgan: Well, if you go out to Truax Field, you'll see the big cement building out there. That's where our computer was. And it fit over six floors, really. And that's how big our computer was.

Graham: What were its functions? What were you doing with the computers?

Morgan: We were doing airborne early warning and control. We were a control section. And there were all of these radar sites. Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Louis, the state of Iowa, part of Michigan, and all those sectors. And we had what we called radar sectors there. And they were scanning, you know, from either aircraft ships, subs, whatever, and they were sending in data as the movement of all ships, aircraft, anything that moved, trucks, whatever. And they would feed into these what we called subsects. And that would all come into our computer, and then we would control the data there. And then we had a room as big as this apartment that they had people sitting there. And they would either approve. "Okay, these are friendly, or these are unidentified." And they would either scramble fighters, or blow out [??] batteries, or whatever, to check them out, to see. So our job was to control the aircraft control flight and shipping across the United States and the West Coast and East Coast, and up through Canada. Because we had sites in

Canada, and none in Mexico. But we had sites in Canada and Alaska, and that was primarily to control and keep an eye on what Ivan was doing.

Graham: Okay. This is part of your duties while you were still—

Morgan: In the Air Force. Keep our eye on Ivan. And we called the Russians Ivan.

Graham: All right, so going back to 1956, when you just signed up, what happens next?

Morgan: I went to basic training in Texas.

Graham: What was that like?

Morgan: It was hell. What do you think it was like?[laughs] The minute we stepped off the bus until our fourth week of training, there was somebody in your face and on your butt, literally screaming and hollering. And marching, marching, marching, doing formations, learning how to make your bunk, learning how to organize your footlocker, learning how to shine your shoes, and just learning. They'd tear you down as a civilian, and build you back up as an Air Force person. And it was pure hell. They'd tell you five o'clock breakfast. Eleven forty-five, we had lunch. And at five forty five, we had supper. And everywhere you went, you marched. And it was always somebody in your butt or in your face. And after the fourth week, then at that time, you had been really broken down and reborn.

Because you would respond, respond, respond. No question, you know. You were now a military person. You were now militarized. And that's what it was like. That was the first four weeks. And then the second seven weeks, you learned use of firearms, advanced combat techniques. Even in the Air Force, they taught that. And how to be a good soldier, good troop.

And they were also screening you and testing you for a career field, you know, as to what your specialty would be with the Air Force. And it depended on two things, your Air Force qualification scores, and there were five categories: Electronics, mechanical, transportation, food service, and supply. And you fit in one of those categories.

And I went into Air Force aircraft maintenance. I left Texas. I went to Chanute Field, Illinois, and went through reciprocating engine school. That was piston-driven gasoline, you know, aircraft, multi-engine aircraft. I went to school eighteen weeks for that. And from there, I went to Otis Air Force Base, Massachusetts. And I worked on airborne early warning control, aircraft [inaudible]. The super constellation with the big dome on top and the big dome on the bottom. And I was in what they called an airborne early morning control outfit. And my job was to work on airplanes. Yeah. I was an aircraft engine mechanic.

Graham: Was basic training in these different schools—

Morgan: Yes. In Texas. They're still operational. Lackland is still the gateway to the Air Force. That's basic training.

Graham: Were you with other African Americans? Was it segregated?

Morgan: No, no, no, no, no. No. Once you got to Lackland, when I got there in '56, they were integrating. But they segregated us in the barracks. African Americans on this second floor, European Americans on the first floor. And that started changing even when I became primitive [??] party. My first assignment was-- Are you not comfortable in that chair?

Graham: No, I'm good.

Morgan: Okay. Otis Air Base, African Americans on the second floor, European Americans on the lower floor. And usually, there was only one African American to a room. And usually, there were two to three European Americans, because there were more of them, you know. And we may have empty rooms upstairs, but they wouldn't move European Americans to the second floor.

We were under the control of First Air Force out of New York at Otis, and we had a general inspection. Aircraft, everything. They checked everything. Operation readiness, they called them, you know. Everything. And one [inaudible] was the condition of the barracks. And the barracks, you know, like I said, upstairs and downstairs. There were fourteen stairs, and they go up from the lower level to the second level. And when the commanding general come through, he found that-- African Americans, as I said, were on the second floor. And he'd come up, and he would always come up to the seventh step. And then the eighth step up to the top was always--We always waxed our stairs, hand waxed them. And we always hand-waxed our floors. And what we did, we would open the barracks door at the end of the barracks, so the light would come and reflect off the floor.

And the floor looked fantastic, where the European guys didn't do that. We did that, because we were on the second floor. And we would use blankets to buff our floors, so that you didn't have the circular motions of the buffer on the floor. So our floors, when we buffed them, we buffed them with blankets. And they looked uniform. You never saw the circular motion of where the buffer was.

And it was the same in our latrines. Our latrine, we waxed the floors in our latrines. We polished the brass on the sinks and the toilets, and even the bolts that held the toilets to the floor. They were always shining, because we used Brasso on them. And our second floors would always pass inspection. And I can remember when the commanding general came in our barracks, and they housed you by specialty. If you were in this barracks, you were an aircraft mechanic. You had engines or airplane. And he came in, and he stopped at the seventh and eighth step. And our barracks was the third barracks he had come through. And he looked. He said, "Seven, eight. Seven, eight." And he told our squadron commander, "Colonel--" I heard him say this, because I was bay chief. He says, "You integrate your barracks." He says, "I could fail your squadron on inspection, but I noticed that the second floor of all of your barracks are superior." And he said, "The first floors are acceptable or passing." And he says, "I also notice that--" We were colored troops. "That the colored troops are always upstairs, and the white troops are

downstairs." He says, "I'll be back in two weeks, and I hope to see a change in these barracks."

Graham: So what were those two weeks like?

Morgan: Those two weeks were hell. I didn't want to move downstairs. None of the brothers wanted to move downstairs. So what happened, they would come through, and the lowest ranking brother would have to move downstairs. So they would move. And the same with the white guys. They didn't want to move upstairs, because they would get their butt whipped if they didn't keep their rooms in shape like ours. And they would move the lowest ranking guys upstairs. And once they moved up, we got along. You know, we worked together, you know. And we also fought each other.

But when it came time to fix an airplane, that's it, you know. That became our mission, that bird and the twenty eight guys that flew on it. And that's the way it was. We'd fight after work, and eat. But we'd go eat chow together. We had two separate dayrooms, because they liked country music and we liked jazz and rock and roll. Yeah, the dayrooms were separate. That was about it. And the dayrooms were recreation rooms.

They were getting recreation barracks, and there were always two recreation barracks in each squadron. One for African Americans, and one for European Americans. But nobody would stop a European American from coming to our dayroom, or an African American from going to a European American dayroom. Because you had buddies that were, you know--I had a lot of European American buddies. And it was vice-versa. But they had the two there, because of the cultural difference and the lifestyle difference. Like I said, we liked jazz and rock and roll. We played whist. We played pinochle. We played dominos. And they shot pool. But we had two pool tables. But our pool tables, we shot dice on, you know. Very seldom did we use our pool table to play pool, you know. Our pool table was primarily for gambling. We would cover them, and we would shoot dice or whatever.

Graham: So after training, what was your first assignment? Or what was going on next?

Morgan: I went to tech school. That was at [inaudible] Field, Illinois. To learn to be an aircraft engine mechanic. And I was a recep engine mechanic, which was internal combustion engines. And I went to school twenty one weeks to learn how to be an aircraft engine mechanic. And from there, my first permanent assignment was Otis Air Base, Massachusetts.

Graham: And does Verona get to come with you?

Morgan: I wasn't married at the time. We got married after I finished tech school and got my permanent party assignment. I finished all my training in February of '57, and we got married in June of '57. So it was what they call a permanent party. Your pipeline until you get a permanent assignment. So you have two statuses. Pipeline, that's all the time you're in training. And then permanent party, when you get your first permanent assignment.

Graham: So what was your wedding like?

Morgan: Big [laughs]. It was a big wedding. There's a picture right there-- It was a big wedding. That year, '57, it was one of the big weddings of the year there for African American community. Yeah. Her dad and mom went all out.

Graham: So you had a big wedding.

Morgan: Yes, we had a big wedding. It was one of the biggest weddings of the year. We had twelve groomsmen and twelve bridesmaids. And it was the hottest day of the year. I mean, it was really, really hot. And it was a big wedding, a huge wedding. The chapel-- We got married in Wesley Temple Methodist Church with one of the biggest and most elaborate African American temples in the city of Akron. But it was huge. And the reception was huge.

Graham: Did you always know that you were going to marry Verona?

Morgan: I did. It's interesting that you would ask that question. The minute I saw Verona, and she was in eighth grade, and I was in ninth grade. I knew that she was the one that I would marry. I knew that. Once I saw her, I only dated two other young ladies, and then, you know, I always would find a reason to break up with them. And then, finally, I got an opportunity to meet Verona, formally meet her. Her sister Micah [??] and I were in the same class. We graduated at the same time. But Verona was very shy. I would always tease her. But I would send her flowers. I did. I sent her flowers when I was in school. And I always bought her candy and things like that, and gifts. Because I knew then that she was the one that I was going to marry. I knew — no doubt in my military mind — that she would be the mother of my kids.

Graham: And it was just a feeling?

Morgan: It was a feeling I had. It was a feeling. The first time I saw her, like I said, she was in eighth grade and I was in ninth grade. I knew then that she was the one that I was going to marry and have children with.

Graham: And so what's it been like, fifty five years later?

Morgan: You want one word or two words?

Graham: However many.

Morgan: Absolutely fantastic.

Graham: That's amazing.

Morgan: Yeah. We have our ups and we have our downs. We may disagree, but at the end, we still have each other. She's the apple of my eye.

Graham: Oh, that's good. So you were in Massachusetts. Maybe just walk me through your assignments and your military experiences. If you want to take a break at any point, we can.

Morgan: No, no. I was an aircraft engine mechanic at Otis Air Base, working on [inaudible] early morning patrol aircraft. I was a flight line mechanic, and I worked on aircraft that would come back from missions with problems, or when aircraft would get ready to go on missions. We would be on standby until they were airborne and an hour out, and then we would come back to the shack. Our job primarily was, as long as there was airplanes out there in the air-- And we had six stations. So we had six aircraft always in the air, and six aircraft on standby. And we rotated shifts. We had three shifts that we worked. Morning shift, evening shift, and night shift. And we would overlap. The morning shift would overlap with the evening shift, and the evening shift overlapped on the midnight shift. And our job was to be there in case there was a problem.

And then, there were guys that worked strictly eight to four, or eight to five. And their job was to, when we get the engines coming in, and just basic eighteen cylinder. And then they would add all the accessories. You know, the generators, the alternators, the fuel pumps, and all of that equipment to it. And they would build it up and put all the caulking [??] on it. And then it became what they called a QEC, quick engine change. An aircraft could come in with an engine problem. It would take us ten minutes to drop the prop. And then it would take us fifteen minutes to craft [??] the old engine and get the new engine up. And while we were connecting all the connections, the engine mechanics were making the connections. The prop people were putting the new prop on, and all that. And so in between forty five minutes and an hour, we would have a brand new engine on that aircraft, ready to go.

Graham: I'm wondering how--Sometimes when there's something you want to be when you grow up, or something you're sort of attracted to do, and once you do it, it's maybe not how you imagined. So did that take place, where you're kind of like, "Oh, I'm not doing how I imagined." Or was it just as fulfilling as you had thought?

Morgan: I wanted to be a farmer all my life. And if you go back through my first grade all the way probably through the ninth grade, what do you want to be? What will be your occupation, if you went to college and if you didn't go to college?

And my answer would always be, "I want to be a farmer." And somehow or another, that sort of changed. My dad had a farm, also, in what we called Copley, where they farmed about forty acres. So we always had fresh vegetables in Akron. But I wanted to be a farmer. But it wasn't what I thought it was. I always thought a farmer was a guy with a straw hat on his head, pipe in his mouth, driving his tractor, you know, with his dog sitting on the--Farming is hard work. It's four o'clock in the morning until six o'clock at night, you know. And I didn't realize how hard farming was. Like I said, you sit at the table, you know. Your wife would make a fantastic meal. And you would eat all the farm fresh vegetables and the farm fresh meat and all of that. But somehow or another, that sort of changed.

I always knew that I was going to do at least four years in the Air Force, because that's what I wanted. But I wanted to graduate from college. But that didn't happen, because my dad and I just didn't get along. So once, you know, I moved out of the house, when I moved in with my cousin, we were working on this demolition job. And it was hard work, you know. You'd start at seven in the morning, and you'd work until 11:45. And you'd get forty five minutes for lunch. And then you'd work from one o'clock until five o'clock. And I mean, you were, demolition. Big hammers, knocking down walls, and hauling out debris, and loading them in the back of the truck. And taking the truck and driving it to the dump. And my God, is this what life is like? You know, there's got to be more to it than that. You know, that's not what we see on television. That's not what I envision life to be. Once I found out I wasn't going to be a farmer, you know, so-- Like I said, I always wanted to join the Air Force, and I liked their uniform, and so I told my cousin, "Let's join the Air Force." He said, "Okay." Instead of going to lunch, we signed up.

Graham: So that decade you were involved, what are some of the highlights, or low points?

Morgan: In my life?

Graham: That decade you were in the Air Force.

Morgan: Great. I never had--I was in almost 13 years, and the worst time I had in the Air Force was basic training. And after that, it was just routine, you know. And I went to tech school. And it was just like getting up in the morning. The only difference between being a civilian and then being in the military is that you went through all the military rigmarole. You had inspections. You had parades. You had duties like NCO, non-commissioned officer of the day. Which is, when the base shut down, they had an officer of the day and a noncommissioned officer of the day. And they were sort of the keepers of the base at night. What we called it, they had the keys. And they were responsible for anything that happened on the base, working with the military police and the downtown police, and making sure there was order. Because we had a lot of troops that go downtown.

And so it was just a job in a sense, except for there was the extra duties and all of the, you know, the military bullshit. Excuse my word, but that's what it was. Military bullshit, you know. You have to polish your shoes, always have polished shoes. Your room had to always be in inspection order in case the old man wanted to go through and look. That means your floors were always waxed and polished. Your bed was always made. And then there were certain days we made three styles of bed. White-collar bed was the formal inspection. That was when your blanket was up and you had twelve inches at the top where the sheet was. And then the upper sheet was showing. And then your hospital corners for the bottom sheet, and your pillow sitting in the middle.

And the old saying that the old man must bounce a quarter off, most of the time that was true. I mean, he would come in. He would take a quarter, throw it down, and if it came back up, that was good. If it didn't, he would take your rack [??] — we called them racks — throw it all on the floor, including your footlocker. And when you come back from work that night, you knew you had a job to do. And that was making it right.

We called that bullshit. But it was a good life. I liked it, the camaraderie, the fact that tomorrow you knew what was going to happen, as if everything was snafu, you know. If everything was snafu, you know, you'd go to work. You'd go to chow. You'd go to work. You'd go to noon chow. Go back to work. You go to supper chow. You get a shower, put on some civilian clothes. And you go downtown and act crazy. Then around twelve o'clock or one o'clock you come back, get a shower, go to bed. Get up in the morning, take another shower, and go to work. And that was it. That was the routine.

And it was kind of comforting, because you knew what to expect the next day, unless all chaos broke loose. You know, if chaos broke out, if something happened in Europe, it would affect every military base that the United States had. Because you went into what they called operational readiness. And that means that everywhere you went, you had a specific place to be and a specific time with a specific amount of gear and a specific type of gear.

Graham: So can you give me an example of that happening?

Morgan: Sure. During the Cuban crisis, we were in Japan. And like I said, I was in an area fuel and recon outfit. We sent two tankers to Florida. Our tankers left, and then we left. We called them trash haulers, transports or trash haulers. And we put all of our gear on the trash hauler, and we got to Florida before our birds did. Because we flew nonstop, and they also flew nonstop. But we were flying higher and faster, because we were on C-130s, and our B-50s were a little bit slower.

And when we got there, we were already set up to go to work. We had all the spare parts we needed. That included four engines. We had four engines that were there to service two airplanes, in case we had to change one. We had two new props, and all the equipment. Alternators, generators, starters, you know, all of the parts, and all set up, ready for the birds when they got in. And the first thing we did once we got them in in flight. Even those commercial aircraft. If there was a problem, they'd write it up. And then it's given to the crew chief, who's there, because the crew chief came in with us. And then he would say, "Well, number four engine, we have so and so and so going wrong." We had a hydraulic leak. We had a [inaudible] or something, because we'd go to a certain RPM, and we'd get a straight line, or we'd get a jagged line. And we knew what that meant, you know. And then we would run them on the ground. I had a run-up card. Still got it here somewhere. And we would run tests on the ground. And then we'd know what to do to fix it.

And then we would do the maintenance. And then once we did the maintenance--As long as the tail faced the taxi strip in between, the airplane wasn't ready. Soon as it was ready, we would turn it around into a face, so that when it came time to taxi out, you know, he would taxi out. And when they faced them, they would go tail to tail. And then they turned them around, and the front of the aircraft faced the taxiway. They knew it was ready for flight. And everything was signed off. Everything you did, it was written down, and the corrective action taken, and necessary. We had a library called our technical order books, and we would haul those. We would have them right there with us. Because when we went out, we would pull what we called the maintenance wagon.

And we had what we called, you've seen the flight line tugs, where these little yellow kidneys [??], where they tow aircraft with. We towed our maintenance shack right with us. So we had everything we needed right there to do the job.

Graham: What year did you go to Japan?

Morgan: 1960.

Graham: Is this the first time you had been overseas?

Morgan: Yes.

Graham: And was being in Japan different for a tall African American man than it would have been for someone else?

Morgan: Not when we got there, because, you know, there were GIs in Japan during the Second World War. And there were a lot of African American troops, you know, because most of the time, I think until Truman became president, all the outfits were segregated. So when you went overseas and you went as a unit, you went as an all-black unit with all the support you needed, or an all-European unit with the support you needed. Well, the Air Force then-- And after the Korean War, that all changed.

In the Air Force, we never went over as a unit. There come a call in for a thousand engine mechanics, and so all over the country where there were engine mechanics, and those that had never been or whatever, who had the longest time, they were sent. So they pulled them from all over the country. And that's the way we went overseas, singularly, after that.

You know, you would get your orders. You would get them, get your pay envelope. You would get your travel pay, and you would travel. You had to be at a certain spot at a certain time, and you were there. And then you would fly military overseas. They flew us by military transport to our units overseas, the units we were going to be in overseas.

So you no longer moved as a unit. You moved as a single person in the Air Force. Now, Marine Corps was quite different. They moved as a unit. They had their own transports, and if they were short transports, then the Air Force would supplement. We would supplement transportation for them. But we hauled most of their equipment. We hauled their equipment, yeah. And that's where they find that there's a bond between jarheads, marines, because of the way their hair was cut. You can tell a marine a mile away because his hair was always cut this way, like he had a bowl on it. And then they shaved down here. And we called them jarheads. And you could always tell… And that's how the jarheads and the Air Force guys got together, because we were dependent on each other. They provided protection, and we provided the supply route. We were their supply people. And there was never a movement as a unit on an overseas assignment, unless they were moving a fighter. Usually, if a fighter squadron would go, then they would go as a unit. But that was because all of their birds went. And then so all of their support went with them. And the fighter pilots would fly, and then the trash haulers would haul all the supplies and people and everything. And they would get there two

days, maybe a day or two before the fighters got in, you know. And that's the way they'd transport. That's the way they'd move. But unless there was some kind of disturbance or whatever, you got your orders and you went singularly. So if they moved a unit, it was because of something going on.

Graham: So what kinds of things went wrong with the engines that you would have to fix, or with the airplanes?

Morgan: The spark plugs, mag needles, carburation, starters, alternators burning out, generators burning out, carburetors going bad, fuel pumps going bad, engines blowing up. I've seen them come in with a cylinder blown, hanging halfway through the [inaudible]. They completely pulled away from the power case. You name it, we had it. But the small stuff was like spark plugs or mixtures, setting mixtures. Because we had, and a carburetor, you know. If you get to a higher altitude, we had what you call a high altitude compensator valve that's set in the carburetor. And as they got higher, you know, the air got thinner. Then the compensator would make sure that the fuel air ratio was proper to keep the engine from amplifying [??] or whatever. And usually that would go bad, and we'd have to replace that, or replace the carburetor. We'd replace fuel pumps, generators, starters, the typical things. Spark plugs. We'd replace a cylinder. Mag needle, we'd replace mag needles. Timing mags. You know, typical engine work, like they would do-- The same thing you would do in a car garage, except for on a bigger scale.

Graham: Did this impact what kind of flyer you were? I'm a very nervous flyer. So, okay. Are you a good flyer?

Morgan: I'm a very good flyer. I believe in the guys on the ground. You should never be a nervous flyer. You know why? That woman or man that's working on that airplane, their pride is in that work. And they'll say, "Never on my watch will anything go wrong with that airplane." And they make that pledge every time that engine starts. And if you watch, you'll see a guy-- to the bird. Because saying, you know? Or won't go-- to the bird. Never. I'm never afraid, never nervous about flying, because there's a tremendous amount of pride in people that work on those aircraft.

Graham: I wanted to ask earlier, I've interviewed a few veterans. Quite a bit, actually, since I started here. And over and over again, I hear just about pride in one's country, and how laying your life on the line is really nothing when you're doing this for your country.

Morgan: For the country, and the family. I do it for my family and the country.

Graham: But I'm wondering if it's different for you serving a country that hasn't been that fair to African Americans. No?

Morgan: I would rather live in the United States of America than any other country in the world. I would put my life on the line today. If they called me today, I would put my life out there for the United States of America. With all of its faults, all of its whatever, it's still the best country in the world to live in. Beyond a doubt. Beyond a doubt.

Graham: So when did things start to change for you, around ’67, ’68, where you’re sort of thinking, I’m going to get out?

Morgan: Verona. I got transferred from Truax Field to Fort Lee, Virginia, and she didn’t want to come. She didn’t want to come to Virginia. And I had a year left on the current tour I was on. And I told her. I said, you know, “It’s only a year. And what we’ll do, we’ll re-enlist. Then I’ll apply for Japan or somewhere.” She says, “I’m not going to travel or move anymore, because of the kids.” They were getting at the age where they’re developing friendships. They were in school. And she didn’t want to disrupt that, you know.

So I wasn’t going to be an absentee father. I knew I could get a job. We had bought a house here in June of ’68. Yeah, June of ’68. On Bonner Lane. So I knew that this is where we were going to live. But I figured, well, you know, I only have seven years to go, and we could do that standing on our head. And she said, “Nope. I’m not moving. I’m not moving.”

And I got down to Virginia, and it was kind of tough being separated from your family, you know. I could make all the phone calls I wanted, because, you know, I’d just tap into the machine and feed the number in. And I could talk forever. You know, as long as the line was open. And I could call all over the world, right there where we were. But it’s the physical separation, you know. You could hear their voice every day, three or four times a day. But it’s not like--I’ve always said that the loneliest time of the day is five o’clock to seven or eight o’clock, because everybody has somewhere to go and something to do between five o’clock and eight o’clock. It’s family time. It’s suppertime. It’s family time. And then you sit down and hash the day over. And then, you know-- And when you’re in the military, you don’t have that. And sure, you had chow. And after you finished chow, what are you going to do? Go to the barracks and shoot pool in the dayroom, or sit around and watch television, or play cards, or get into a dispute with somebody and--You knew you weren’t going to fight, because, you know, that was an offense. Are you uncomfortable there?

Graham: No, I’m good. I’m just making sure this is still going.

Morgan: Oh, because you-- You argue or dispute things, and hash things over. But, you know, but it wasn’t like being with your family. These were guys, these were comrades. These were the guys that you know that, if push come to shove, they had your back. They had your back. No matter what, you know. You could be a white guy from Alabama, and an African American from Chicago. Sure, you had your differences, but when the whistle blew, we were troops. We were troops. They may go to one town and we go to another town, but if the whistle sounds, we all were troops. I mean, you came running. And then you joined together, because the mission is primary. The mission. It’s always the mission. If you ask a troop, it’s the mission. It’s the mission. Everything else is minutiae. It’s the mission.

Graham: I’m wondering about now how you left, and if there was sort of pressure to stay in, because of what was going to go on in Vietnam.

Morgan: Was I pressured to stay in?

Graham: Was it hard to get out, especially when right around the corner there was going to be a draft and things like that?

Morgan: Yes. There was pressure in the sense that they offered--I had always drawn down my two bonuses for re-enlisting. But because I was in a specialty field, computer maintenance 3055 Bureau 573, which was a computer maintenance technician supervisor, there was an extreme shortage of them. Because the ones went to troops [??] spent four years. That's four years of computer experience, actual hands on computer experience. I don't care. The commies[??] were picking them up, because they didn't have to invest that much in training. You know, they would take them over a college graduate. Even a computer science graduate, because we had the experience, you know. I could sit down and write a COBOL program. This is Verona. A similar program.

Hello? Hello? Yeah. No problem. Okay. Pardon? Nothing. I was just checking to see how you're doing, and to see whether your bathroom was clean. Okay. All right. Bye-bye.

Graham: What is she up to?

Morgan: She's out shopping. She doesn't like to be confined to the house. Even when we lived in Milwaukee, by ten o'clock, she was out and gone. Especially after she retired. Yeah, she has to be out and about. And I don't mind, you know. What is she going to do? Here, I think she's seen different things and [inaudible] and so forth. Okay. You were going to ask me about, what did you ask me?

Graham: About getting out while many people were coming in.

Morgan: Oh, getting out. Yes. They had special bonuses for certain career fields. And my field was one of them. And even though I had drawn the maximum amount of bonuses for re-enlistment, because I had two re-enlistment bonuses, they offered me a special bonus because I was in a super-critical career field. And that was electronic computer maintenance.

And it was tempting, but my family was more tempting. And I made it very clear to the first sergeant that as bad as I wanted to re-enlist, and I did. I wanted to do twenty. My family came first. And what we were going to do, I said, "Sergeant, you know I've been around long enough to know that you can't, there's nothing you can do about rotations and stuff like that." And I said, "My wife is saying that either I come home, or she's gone." And I wasn't going to let her take our four kids and try to raise them alone. And they'd just get her values and not both of our values, you know. I didn't want them to wonder where was their daddy, or what was their daddy doing, or why doesn't our daddy come home, you know. So I got out.

Graham: Would you have done it the same if you had it to do over again?

Morgan: Under the same circumstances, yes. Under the same circumstances, yes. I would do it the same. My family is important to me.

Graham: So what was that transition like, to civilian life?

Morgan: I figured that question would come. It was rough. Verona had been accustomed to making all of the decisions in the house. She paid all the bills. She decided what to buy, what not to buy. And she was the commander in chief of the house. And the house was the way she wanted it.

And all of a sudden, on December 9, the ogre came home, you know. She was at, one shoe here, the other shoe there. Sock here, sock there. And I disrupted the order of the house, you know. I would use the towels she had there for decorative towels. I would use that one if I couldn't find another, you know. All the typical things that a man do to, you know, when he's in his home.

And it took me a while to find out that the man is the disruptive factor in the household, for a lot of reasons. One, in most cases, he's out in the world, so to speak, mingling with people, interacting with people, various, different types of people, different types of circumstances. And he's being involved in many stimuli that the female, unless she's out there doing the same thing. And it's different for a married woman than for a single woman. But for a single man, life is the same whether--Married life for a man, it's the same whether he's single or married, or whatever. But for a woman, it's different, you know. Single women catch hell out there. I know they do.

Where married women, they catch hell only from their male counterpart, because the male view the female as competition. And also, she's taking a job that another man could possibly have. You see what I'm saying? So it was, I guess, I know, but me, I'm a bull in a china shop, you know. If you don't open the door, I knock gently at the door. And then I knock more forcefully at the door. I will kick the window in. You know what I mean? And if I go into a place and I know that I'm being disrespected, I will let you know. And if you can't get the message then, I'm in your face. You see what I'm saying? And I've always been that way. I can be your best friend, or I can be a plague on your life. And most people I meet, I get along very well with. I get on very well with people, because I'm a people person.

Graham: But if the right buttons are pushed, or you're disrespected--

Morgan: I'm into it. But the transition from military to civilian life was a lot different because in military life, they told you what the uniform of the day was. Today's uniform will be fatigues, rogans [??], fatigue cap, et cetera, et cetera. Or today's uniform, the uniform of the day will be Class B, or Class A, et cetera, et cetera. In civilian life, you know, you go to work one day in a suit and a tie and shined shoes and everything, and everybody's walking around in a sport shirt and a pair of jeans. That threw me for a loop, you know. And especially in information management systems, they are the most casual dressers on the staff. You can go into a corporation, and you can tell the DP person, simply by the way he or she is dressed. And that floored me, you know, because when I went to work in the Air Force, everybody was dressed the same. But when I went to work-- And

I knew the hierarchy, because they displayed the hierarchy on their collar or on their sleeve.

But in civilian life, that wasn't the case. You may see a guy or a woman, and you think, well, maybe she's a secretary. But she's the CEO of the organization. It took me a long time, at least six months, to adjust to just that factor, to learn the hierarchy. Who was who and what was their role, and how my position fit into the scheme of things. So it was a hell of an adjustment, not only professionally, because I had a job when I got out. But for me to adapt to that job was really different, you know. And it took me a couple of weeks to learn the lay of the land, and then secondly, how I would fit in that land, what my role was, you know. And it took me a while to find out that there was definitely a pecking order in civilian life, far more strict than it was in the military, you know.

Graham: Do you think it's because there wasn't that bigger purpose, like you talked about before, where the mission was the same?

Morgan: Right. Competition. In the military, it's the mission. In civilian life, it's strictly competition. It's competition. What am I going to do to get his or her job? How do I undermine him or her to get that job? Or, how do I get the job that he or she is seeking, without going through the process? Because you can do that in civilian life. You know what I mean? Or you can be the biggest dummy in the world in civilian life. It's not what you know. It's who you know. And I found that out really quick, you know. It's not what you know. It's who you know.

So it became incumbent upon me to learn the pecking order. You know, who ultimately had their hand on the switch. Not the people walking around with a switch, but who the person that had the switch that when they turned it on, things moved, and when they turned it off, things stopped. You know what I mean?

And also, you had to learn that in civilian life, you know, people have their moods, and they have their idiosyncrasies. And something as minor as saying, "Could you not smoke in here?" would create havoc in civilian life. But a GI would say, "Okay man, I'll go find another butt can." You know what I mean? And I found that civilians were different. They weren't mission or goal-oriented. They were paycheck-oriented, you know. How much money did they hire you on your salary [??]? What raise [??] did they hire him at? What? They hired him as a management information specialist three? I was hired as MIS 2, or MIS 1. And they're hiring you to MIS 3? What has he got that I haven't got? I've got a college degree. I looked at his personnel record. He's only got a high school diploma. You know.

Graham: Do you think you would have been as aware or sensitive to this if you didn't have the 13 years in the Air Force that you did?

Morgan: (Pause) Yes. I would have been more in tune with it had I not spent 13 years, because I knew what, like I said, I knew my day was going to be like tomorrow, unless all hell broke loose, or something happened, like if an aircraft crashed. Or if, when we were in Japan, they strayed into the wrong airspace. And we knew that unless our fighters got

there in time, that we were going to have a lot of work to do, and maybe some casualties. And there were casualties and stuff like that, but nobody would talk about them. You know, they were happening on a regular basis. And this was in the 1960s. But nobody was allowed to talk about it. You talk to guys now that were over there at that time. They don't talk about it, because it's sort of personal to them, in a sense. And it's not divulging the, uh, scope of the mission.

Graham: So were you not affected by the draft when Vietnam came around, or how did that impact you?

Morgan: No.

Graham: How come?

Morgan: I was exempt from the draft because I was a student. I was a university student. And I joined the Air Force between my freshman and sophomore year. So I was on a student deferment. So I wasn't impacted by the draft at all. Hmm-mm.

Graham: And then, so how did the rest of your career and family life and things evolve from there?

Morgan: If my Air Force career, you know, it went along well. But I was an oddball. I was always the odd man out, because where everybody else was hearing one beat and marching left, right, left, I was hearing-- right, left, right, left, right, left, right, hey, right, left. And that was me. I was always a half a step out. I was always half a note behind, or three notes ahead. And that caused a lot of problems. I was a freethinker. I thought for myself, you know. And I would ask, "Why do we have to do that? Why am I, a trained technician and higher specialist, have to go out Saturday morning from 7:45 to 11:45 and pick up rocks out of the grass? Why is that?" Or, why am I, a highly skilled specialist, going out and moving all the big rocks from this side of the base to that side of the base, and they're bringing their rocks over to our side of the base? You know, explain it to me and I'll do it willingly.

Graham: Was it explained to you?

Morgan: No.

Graham: Why do you think it was?

Morgan: Because it's not, what is the saying? It's not for me to question why, but for me to do or die. That's the motto. And you ask any military guy. It's not for me to question why, but for me to do or die. And that was why. If you had one more stripe than I did, you were the boss. You may be dumber than okra, but you had one more stripe than I did, and you were the boss. And we had plenty of proofs of that, where we would go TDY, which is temporary duty. And our birds would go down. And they'd send the dumbest NCO they had down there. And then consequently, the troops would get written up. And this asshole who didn't know his ass from a hole in the ground, you know, he would come back because he had written everybody up. And because he was an NCO. He had more

stripes than anybody else. He was right. It wasn't a democracy. It was anarchy, I guess you would call it, you know.

It always flowed from the top. It always came down. And also, consequently, if you're lower of the pile, you're getting more of the shit that flows down, and that's the way it goes. Excuse my word, but that's the way it is. But…a good life. Every young man and every young woman should experience the military life. And the reason for that is they'll learn structure. They will become disciplined. They will become thinkers. They will become better citizens. And they will learn the lesson of camaraderie. They will learn camaraderie. You may be a woman. I may be a man. But we're in the same uniform, so don't mess with her, because she is one of us. She is ours. Like we are hers, she is ours. Don't mess with her, because she is one of us. Equal basis. Equal basis.

Graham: Is this something you taught your children—

Morgan: That's right. You'll see that in Carolyn. And you'll see it in Deirdre. You'll see it especially in Marian. And you will see it definitely in Dr. Adrian.

Graham: So has that been nice for you, as you get older and when you retired, to see your children sort of--

Morgan: That's right. See, Marian is in a relationship, I guess, same-sex relationship. And it's interesting to see she and her partner interact. Adrian is married. That's her picture there that's on the wall, and married to Don, who's very bright, very intelligent, but quiet. And to see how she and Don interact with one another. And if you saw them apart, you would think [inaudible]. But somehow or another, they fit, you know. And then there's Carolyn. And you know Carolyn. We call her our flower child, you know. Always the joke in the house was, "Earth to Carolyn. Earth to Carolyn." That was our, you know. And then there's Deirdre, who was, you know, she, oh God, how do you explain Deirdre? She is…It's Deirdre's way or the highway. And she'll come into this room right now, and she'll want to know, "What are you doing? Who's this lady? What are you talking about?" You know. Or she'll come in. I'll be sitting here watching television. Come in. "Turn the TV off. Let's talk." You know, that's Deirdre.

But they all have different personalities, but their base is their, we say, they don't say they're English. They say, "We are Morgans. We are Morgans." And that bothers me, because they are not Morgans. They are Morgan English. They will say, "We are Morgans." And I'll tell them, "You are Morgan English. What about your mother?" "Yeah, but you know how Mommy is." You know. And Verona's a very proper lady. She should have been born into royalty, because she would make this country proud as far as royalty is concerned, you know.

Graham: One of the things you said earlier when we were talking was working at the rubber factory, and how that smell really bothered you. And this is something I'm just fascinated by, is how closely connected memories are with smells. So are there certain associations you have, like what did it smell like when you were in the Air Force? Or what smells kind of bring you back to certain parts of your life?

Morgan: Gasoline, exhaust fumes, dining halls, garbage trucks, disposal dumps. Those smells are familiar. Oil, the smell of oil, the smell of hydraulic fluid. You know, those kinds of things associated with aircraft. Exhaust fumes, especially the exhaust fumes, you know. You should be able to tell from the smell of the exhaust fumes whether that engine is properly tuned, whether it rained [??], the proper grade of fuel in it, whether they're using the proper grade of oil in it, whether the engine is tuned properly, whether they have the proper plugs in it. Simply because of the odors coming from the exhaust.

Ninety percent of our troubleshooting was looking at the flames coming out of the exhaust, and smelling the exhaust. Smelling the smell that come from the exhaust and idle. And you could tell if it was running too rich or running too [??], or whether or not all of the plugs were firing properly, whether the timing mags were timed properly, whether the carburetor was synced properly. Because of the odors coming out of the tailpipe, or the flame coming out of the tailpipe. We used to watch takeoffs at night, just to see the flames coming out of the exhaust. If you had a nice blue flame coming out of it, and then at the tail just a little yellow. If it had a nice blue flame with a little yellow at the end, you knew that engine was perfectly tuned. The carburetor was tuned and everything. And the further in the red and yellow got, you could tell whether it was running too rich. And if you didn't see any yellow or red, you knew that it was running too lean. But they couldn't tell in the cockpit because, you know, they just pushed the throttles forward. And we were looking for a certain amount of [inaudible] pressure, certain amount of RPMs, and a certain amount of torque, you know. But we looked at the exhaust to tell whether or not that engine was running properly.

Graham: Right. When you sort of smell—

Morgan: So you can smell, right. Go right back, yeah.

Graham: So now that you're in this position when you can look back on your life and the things you've done, what things have stood out to you? Or what sort of memories float to the top?

Morgan: Meeting and marrying Verona was number one. Number two was graduating from high school. Number three was joining the Air Force. And I guess coming to Wisconsin would be the number five, because it is where we decided to set our roots and call it home. And of course, the birth of my four daughters. They were very special events. Each was a very special event for me. Yeah.

Graham: How do you think your life would have been different if the Air Force wasn't an option, or you didn't enlist?

Morgan: I would have been either dead or in jail, one of the two. And I say that without any reservations, because I was wild. I was a wild guy. Yeah.

Graham: I'm wondering what sort of things stayed with you from your experience and your training. Do you still make the bed, or buff the floors, or require that kind of routine?

Morgan: I try to make sure that everything is picked up that is mine, make sure that it's in its place. I now sleep in the chair because of my back and stuff, but whenever I made my bed, I always made sure that the hospital corners were square. And make sure that my shoes were properly aligned and under the bed. I very seldom put my shoes in the closet. I put them under the bed, in order, like I did in the military, you know. And the closet, the way I set my closet up, yeah.

Graham: How have you seen the world change over the last 75 years?

Morgan: Even though everybody talk about the chaos and the calamities and all of that, I have seen, to me, it has gotten better, simply because of all the new innovations that we have. Because of instead of taking three days to go from the East Coast to the West Coast, you can go in five hours now. I find that the people are somewhat, even though a lot of people say they are-- I find that people are very, very friendly, and very-- But they're so engrossed in their own world, just trying to survive. And if you can tap into that, you'll find that they're no different than you are.

They're carrying the same bag of stuff that you are, but just maybe a different color or flavor. I find that they say that the races are-- No, I think that the races are coming closer together, because people are coming to the realization, we are America. And we are a nation of many, many, I call them talents and graces. We're a nation of many talents and graces. And it takes all of these many talents and these many graces to make this country great. You may be a historian, and I may be a computer geek. But together, you can tell the story, and I can help you write that story. Because I can provide for you all the things that you need to write that story. So we operate just like a hand and an arm, or a glove and a hand.

Graham: Right. I couldn't do this if you didn't have a story to tell.

Morgan: That's right. And what would you be doing in your life? Finding something to do, or sitting in a dull, boring job, looking at the clock, waiting for five o'clock to come. And then wondering, "Well, I've got to go home and cook supper, and I've got to wash the dishes. And I've got to take the dog out to poop, and oh God, I've got to do this. I've got to do that. And when does that lazy husband of mine get up off the sofa and do something?" And he's lying down on the sofa. "Why doesn't she come and sit down and talk to me?"

Graham: I'm kind of getting to the end of my questions, but I'm wondering if there's things I'm missing, or questions I didn't ask.

Morgan: No, I think you covered the whole gamut.

Graham: What would you want people who listen to this interview to know?

Morgan: I was one wild and crazy guy. But I'm just like everybody else. I'm a father. I'm a husband. I'm an American. I love this country. I love my family. I'm a Christian, but I'm what they call a backdoor Christian. I only go to church on special occasions. Yeah.

Graham: It's okay. Well, if you think of things you want to add, or stories you forgot to tell, or something else pops up, it's not hard for me to come over here and do a follow-up. Or if I think of questions I didn't ask, we can—

Morgan: Yeah, I'm available.

Graham: Well I'll turn this off, and if you want to get together again--

Morgan: Just give me a call. Yeah.

Graham: Okay.

[End of Morgan.OH1724] [End of interview]