Interview with Gene Blade

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DePue: Today is Friday, December 28th, 2012. My name is Mark DePue. I am the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and today I am in Springfield in the home of Colonel Gene Blade. How are you, sir?

Blade: I'm doing fine. Good to have you here today.

DePue: Well, I must say that you and I have known each other for a long time. We are fellow artillery men and were also fellow National Guardsmen for many, many years. So, it is quite a pleasure for me to talk to you. Yours is a little bit different from a lot of interviews, because it's going to be focused on what it was like to be in the National Guard, and that's an important story to get. Also, what it was like to be in the Army, on active duty, during the Cold War years in the late '50s, I think. When did you get out of active duty?

Blade: In 1958.

DePue: So we're basically talking about the years after the Korean War, until 1958, in that respect, as well but we always start with when and where you were born.

Blade: Well, I was born—so the records say— in North Henderson, Illinois. I was really born out in the country, northeast of Alexis, Illinois, but it was in North Henderson Township, I believe. Of course, I was born in the farm home there, as my folks were farming.

DePue: Was that unusual for the day, to be born in the farmhouse itself?

Blade: No. I would say, in the country in those days, in the farmland, probably 90% of the births were in the farm home. A midwife came in, generally, and took care of things.

DePue: Did your parents own that piece of land, where you were born?

Blade: No, they did not. They rented that from a fellow who owned the property. He lived in New Windsor.

DePue: Was it cash rent or share cropping?

Blade: Share crop.

DePue: What can you tell me about your father?

Blade: My father came to this country from Sweden in 1910, when he was seventeen years old. He arrived in November of that year, so he had just turned seventeen, because his birthday was in October. Him and his older brother, who was eighteen months older than him, came to this country on a ship.

[It] took several days, from the time they left home, until they arrived in the USA. Their mother was very worried about them. She was in bad health, worrying about them, because it was forty-five days from the time they left home until she got word that they arrived okay over here. Then she did recover from her illness.

DePue: What year did you say they came?

Blade: Nineteen-ten, but they left home, and then they went to some other…I do not know where they sailed from, but they were away from home for four or five days or more before they got on a ship to come over.

Their father was a very strict man, and she knew that her boys wanted to come to the USA. So, they worked for money, and she squirreled away part of that money, because my dad always talked about how his dad took the wages that he made. But their mother had squirreled away some of that money until they had enough money to come to this country. They did not have their dad's permission to leave; they just left. He was an Army man in Sweden. They lived in a military house in Sweden, as well, furnished by the government.

DePue: She was defying her husband, to a certain extent, by helping your dad and your uncle come over, then.

Blade: That is true. There were two other brothers that came several years after they did, independently. Those two brothers had gone back to see their parents in Sweden [at] different times, more than once, but my father and uncle never did go back to Sweden to see their parents. Fifty-two years after they left

Sweden, their mother flew to New York, and they met her in New York. She came to visit all four of her sons that were in the USA.

DePue: Well, that had to be quite the reunion.

Blade: Well, it was, it was. That was good for all of them and their mother. She was in her mid-eighties when she came here, in 1952, I believe it was.

DePue: Do you know why they wanted to come to the United States—Was it a lure of the country—or their reasons they wanted to be leaving?

Blade: The reason they came here was that all men had to serve time in the military, and they did not want participate in military training, which is kind of unusual, because both my brother and I retired from the military, but—

DePue: And your grandfather was in the military?

Blade: And my grandfather. But those two did not want to, so—

DePue: So, they were basically fleeing the draft?

Blade: I would say so, yes. I don't know now what age they had to do that, but it was somewhere between eighteen and twenty years old. Those days, there were only six years of grade school. So, that's all the grade school they went to, and then they had to start working.

My uncle went to his uncle, who owned a furniture manufacturing place in Sweden. My uncle went there to learn to be a cabinet maker. My father was just a labor worker, with farming and timber work and had the reputation that he could pull more logs out of the timber than anybody else, because he was such a hard driver and workaholic, which he always was, his whole life. He used to drive the horses really hard, dragging logs out of the timber.

DePue: How did they end up in Illinois? Did it take a while to get here?

Blade: They did get here because they had an aunt. Their mother's sister lived in New Windsor, Illinois, and that's how they came to Illinois. They arrived in New York and took the train to New Windsor, Illinois. Then they stayed there, with their aunt and uncle for short period of time.

DePue: What was your father's name?

Blade: Oscar, O-s-c-a-r. Another interesting thing, his first name is on a birth certificate as P-e-r, Per. I really don't know why that is, but others have had similar types of names, abbreviations like that. He never used that initial. He was just plain Oscar Blade, no middle initial.

DePue: Well, I've got to tell you, sir, Blade doesn't sound like a very Swedish name to me.

Blade: Well, it certainly isn't. The name really is Petterson, but…

DePue: With one "t"?

Blade: "T," two, Petterson, P-e-t-t-e-r-s-o-n or s-o-n. If it was Norwegian, it would be s-e-n, most likely, not always. But, when my grandfather joined the Swedish Army, the 1st sergeant says, "We got too damn many Pettersons. Your name is Bladh." That supposedly—I've been told—means something about leaf. I guess several people had their names changed, but they generally went to a name similar to something that related to earth or natural things, like a tree or a leaf or whatever.

DePue: Was that an official name change or just kind of a name that stuck?

Blade: That evidently was an official name change, because my cousins in Sweden, their last name is Bladh. I have a cousin in Sweden, and my brother in the U.S. had looked up a lot of the history on that. The ancestors before that…many times the son would be named after the father, so that's how you would get "Peterson" and "Nelson" and what have you. But they changed it to Blade when my dad and his brother came to this country. They then dropped the B-l-a-d-h, and they dropped the "h" and put an "e" on it to make it Blade.

DePue: Well, that answers my other question.

Blade: Okay.

DePue: Tell me a little more about your dad. How would you describe him?

Blade: Well, he was an extremely honest person and a very, very hard worker. As my mother had said about both my brother and I, that he would have probably been put in jail as a slave driver, because of the way he used to require us to work, when we were kids. I don't think it hurt either one of us probably made good work ethics, but he was a hard driver. He was always very competitive too, in what he did and had.

Farming-wise, he farmed with his uncle in New Windsor, to start with. They farmed three hundred and twenty acres, 160 acres of corn one year. They plowed all of that with a one bottom, twelve-inch walking plow each. They plowed all that in the spring. We figured up, one time, that they each walked about 1,100 miles, just plowing. His aunt would bring horse changes out for them, so they would have the chores done before daylight and then would do the chores at night, after that.

My dad liked to be, as I said, very competitive. Years ago, as a kid, the old timers would get together in New Windsor. My Dad had cultivated

twenty-one acres of corn, one time with a one-row, horse-drawn cultivator, which nobody up there had ever been able to do. The old-timers said he ran most of the time, behind the cultivator.

When he got to this country, he wanted to go to school, because he wanted to be an American. So, he never talked Swedish around the house. My uncle and other cousins, they all did talk Swedish. All the other brothers had a Swedish brogue, but my dad didn't, because he said, "I'm here to be an American," so he always was.

They had wrestling [pronouncing the word as "wrastling'] matches in New Windsor, and he used to wrestle a lot and was considered the best wrestler in those days, which certainly was probably just on the dirt or street someplace.

DePue: Distinguish it from wrestling. It was "wrastling" instead?

Blade: I suppose, probably. You're probably right.

He also used to pick corn by hand. Naturally, in those days, there weren't any machines. He was a very fast corn picker, could pick more than 100 bushel of corn a day. Later on…I guess we could tell the story now about his corn picking, perhaps. He had won the local corn picking contest and ended up being the state champion picking corn. Then later, they had a tri-state; he won that. Then, there was the national corn picking contest in Minnesota, and he went there. He won it by picking the most corn; however, he did not win the prize, because he didn't get all the shucks off the corn, which was deducted from the weight of the corn.

DePue: You need to describe a little bit the difference between corn picking and corn shucking.

Blade: Oh, well, I guess, yeah, today we talk about corn picking, but there they talked about corn shucking. They had husking pegs. They would go and grab an ear of corn and rip the…The shucking peg would be on their hand, and they would rip the shuck open. Then they could reach up and grab the ear of corn with the other hand, and then take that hand, that had the shucking peg on it, and bust the ear off, from how it was held onto the corn stalk, and then throw it in the wagon.

The horses would straddle the wagon, or straddle the one row of corn. It would have banked boards on the side, so you could sling it up there and hit that. Then, it would bounce into the wagon box, rather than flying over. They also would pick a couple of rows, each person would. My dad used to tell me that you want to pick as fast as you can to start with, and then snitch an ear or two out of the other guy's row of corn, so he grabs that, it's empty. That would delay him enough to get you ahead, so you can get more corn picked that way, so—

DePue: Well Colonel, I think you mentioned how honest your father was, a little bit earlier in this conversation. (laugh)

Blade: Well, I did, but I guess he would call that, "in the competitive spirit." (laugh)

DePue: If the umps aren't watching, it's okay?

Blade: Yeah.

DePue: Also, a bit about your mother.

Blade: Okay, my mother was, lived in Minnesota. I guess I should backtrack a little bit. My father's first wife passed away with typhoid fever when a child was born. My brother was four years old when his mother passed away. They had a sister who was born, but she only lived a couple or three days. She got typhoid fever, as well as the mother, and they both passed away. Then my Dad "batched" for a good number of years. My brother moved in to live with his grandparents in New Windsor, as my father farmed, rented a place that he farmed, northeast of New Windsor about three miles. So, that kind of would clear that up I guess a little bit.

Then, back to my mother. My mother's parents were Norwegian, and her grandparents came to this country from Norway, on her dad's side. But, her mother came to this country, as a small girl, from Norway. Her mother had passed away in Norway, so the housekeeper was the sister to her grandmother in Norway.

So, as the grandfather came over to this country, on her mother's side, he brought the housekeeper along with him. When she got over here, she had some brothers that lived in this country. She told my mother's grandfather that, if he didn't marry her, she was going to move in with her brothers in North Dakota. So he ended up, he married her. My grandmother was only six years old when she came to this country from Norway.

DePue: How did the two of them meet? What was your mother's name, first of all?

Blade: Oh, Stella. S-t-r-l-l-a. Irene is her middle name.

DePue: And her maiden name?

Blade: Brandvold. That's B-r-a-n-d-v-o-l-d. My mother always loved to take care of people. She went to eight years of country school. She used to work kind of as a maid and also as a midwife and sometimes worked as a maid at homes and one thing and another.

This family owned quite a bit of land and had several people helping them. My father then had gone to Minnesota to pick corn in the National Corn Picking Contest, which was held at the place where my mother worked as a

maid for the Phelps family. That's how they met, and then, later were married, probably a year after that, as they had corresponded by letters all of that time, until they were married.

DePue: Well, I'm trying to envision this scene. I assume, he goes in to have a home-cooked meal, and she's serving the meal. Is that how it went?

Blade: Yes, I think that's pretty much, as I recall. The family had bunk houses in the barn, is where the hired help stayed. But my mother stayed in the house and took care of the house part of it for the family. This family had a large family, as well. I believe there was thirteen in the family, where mother worked. You would have thought that the family would have taken care of themselves, but my mother worked there so—

DePue: Again, maybe my imagination is flying in too many different directions, but this brief encounter almost sounds like it was love at first sight between your mom and dad.

Blade: Yeah, well I often think about that myself. I should have asked more questions, but I think you are right, because they did not go back and forth to see each other until they were married, and matter of fact, my father then eventually sent for Mother to come to Moline, Illinois. So, they were married in Moline. My uncle, who came over with my father, stood up as the best man, and then his wife, my uncle's wife, stood up as the other person, bridesmaid, when they were married in Moline.

DePue: Was your dad quite a bit older than your mom?

Blade: Yes he was twelve years older than my mother was, yes. My mother was twenty-eight when they got married, and my dad would have been about thirty-nine or forty, right in there.

DePue: Twenty-eight, at that time was not young to be married. That was—

Blade: That's true. You know, in that timeframe, a lot of people probably got married, partially for convenience, as well as love, I think, in those days.

DePue: What year did they get married?

Blade: Nineteen thirty-three, in February of 1933. Another interesting story, my brother and I were just talking about this last Saturday. We talk every Saturday on the phone. I had sent him a picture of a Ville touring car that my father had driven to Minnesota in the spring of the year, prior to sowing oats, which generally was taking place in March or April. This had no side curtains on it. My brother said…I never will forget that trip. My true half-brother would have been about twelve years old. He said he wrapped [up] in a horse blanket in the back seat. Everybody had blankets and heavy coats on, and they drove from Alexis, Illinois to Waseca, Minnesota. He thinks that they

probably made that in one day and pretty certain that they had packed lunches, so they just kept driving.

The Ville automobiles used to be made in Moline. There was a manufacturing plant there that made Ville cars, and later on, naturally the family went busted, but Ville was a great car. We talked about…My dad evidently had a pulley on the back wheel, so that's how he would run the hammer mill to grind feed. We were trying to figure out how he got that accomplished, without the other wheel turning or what they had to do. But my brother didn't remember that, and naturally I sure wouldn't know that.

DePue: You mentioned before that, at the time your mom and dad got married, he was renting some property?

Blade: That's correct. He had just rented the farm then, and so they were just newly married, and that was their first year on that farm, yes.

DePue: What were his aspirations at the time?

Blade: He had been a farmer before and was farming before, northeast of New Windsor. Then his wife had passed away, and that really, he really was really very down after that. Then hard times came along and [the] Depression, one thing and another. He was only renting and just went busted. So, then he just worked by the month around different places and then was able to save enough money, so he could get started farming again. [It] didn't take a whole lot of things to get started to farm in those days.

DePue: Did he have some land, before the Depression hit, that he owned?

Blade: He did not own any land; he just rented a farm, yes.

DePue: Nineteen thirty-three is when you said they got married, right?

Blade: That's correct.

DePue: Which would have been about the depths of the Depression at that time.

Blade: That's true, but my father was married the first time in about 1920, I believe, 1919 or 1920, so, as soon as they were married, why then they were farming. See, he got here in 1910, and then he worked for his uncle in the summertime for a few years, and I don't know how many, but probably four or five.

In the wintertime, he would go to work in Moline at Moline Manufacturing, where they made Moline tractors. They would work close to where the foundry part of that was, which seemed to be the Swedes. [The Swedes] was noted for working in the foundry part of the plant and, as my dad said, would be the hottest area. But we seemed to be the harder workers, so

they could do that, work in the wintertime. Then they'd leave and come back the next winter.

DePue: I would think the other ethnic groups in the area would have been a lot of Germans, some Norwegians—

Blade: Probably, but Moline, in those days, was more Scandinavian than anything and more Swedes than, perhaps, any of the other ethnic groups.

DePue: Did your father have some aspirations to buy some land then, as well?

Blade: Well, he did. That was what his goal was, was to own some land, eventually, which eventually he did. He bought a farm in 1936, south of Cameron. I was two years old when we moved there, in the spring of '37. [He] bought a 160 acre farm and paid $59 an acre for it.

DePue: I was going to say, because of the Depression and all those people who were going bankrupt and being foreclosed, the land was probably pretty cheap, wasn't it?

Blade: Well, it was, like I said, $59 an acre, and it was. There was another farm that he would have liked to have bought that was really good flat land. He could have bought it for $175 an acre. Well, he could not get the money to get a hold of that. This one was noted as a cocklebur farm, and it was really ran down. A family had owned quite a bit of land in that area, at one time, by looking at the old plat books. But, this one was for sale, and he was able to buy that. So they did.

That took a lot of work to get that, raising hogs and cattle. In those days, there was no fertilizer, commercial fertilizer. It was haul the manure out, and spread that out on the fields, which was all done by hand, because there were no tractors with manure loaders on them, in those days. So, there was plenty of opportunity to get calluses on your hands and have a strong back. (laughs)

DePue: In 1936 meant your brother was getting plenty of work, but you were still pretty young at that time.

Blade: That's true. My brother graduated from Monmouth High School in 1939, and then he went to work on the farm that summer. Then, that fall, he went to Moline to become a carpenter. So, he was an apprenticed carpenter and worked with another uncle there, who was a carpenter. [He] worked for Axel Carlson Construction Company and lived in an apartment. He was working to become a full-fledged carpenter. Of course, then World War II came along, and my brother signed up with the Navy and went into the Navy in November, 1942 as a Navy pilot.

DePue: Wow. Going back to the farm, I know it's not good bottom land. What kind of farmland did you have?

Blade: Okay, it was kind of rolling land. There was some flat land on it, but there was 100 acres of tillable and sixty acres of pasture. We had stock cows and raised calves and also raised hogs then fed all the grain that the farm produced, but then also bought additional grain to feed out additional cattle that we bought.

DePue: Was cattle the primary cash crop for the family?

Blade: Cattle and hogs probably, yes.

DePue: Did the farm have electricity?

Blade: We got electricity in 1950, so I was between my sophomore and junior year in high school, is when we got electricity. In those days, the REA was the Rural Electric Company. If there wasn't enough population, I guess it wasn't practical for them to put in a power line there. So, that's one of the reasons we didn't have power.

My father wanted to be able to pay cash for things that he bought, although he didn't pay cash for the farm. He bought that, and, of course, on a farm loan…I believe the interest on his loan, on that farm was, as I recall, was somewhere around 2-3% interest, on a land mortgage, which is pretty reasonable. Although today, interest rates are pretty low too, but there's been a lot of years it hasn't been.

DePue: That sounds very low. I wonder if there was a government guarantee on that loan. Do you know?

Blade: I don't know. I do not know. I know he got the farm paid off in ten years. Of course, World War II was in there, in that timeframe, too.

DePue: How big a deal was it when the farm got electricity?

Blade: Well, I thought it was a pretty big deal. We went from outdoor plumbing to indoor plumbing. We had an outhouse prior to that, and of course, then we had indoor plumbing after that, which was pretty nice. It was awful cold going outside. (laughs)

DePue: Was there a direct connection between electricity and having indoor plumbing?

Blade: Well, we didn't have any power for running water, so we pumped water from outside. We had a well outside the house for cooking and drinking water. We had other wells scattered around on the farm. We had a well on every field on the farm to take care of the livestock, because you rotated crops in those days. Normally, in those types of those rotations, you'd go two years of corn, one

year of oats, and one year of hay and would rotate the crops that way. And then we would have hogs out on the field. Also the cattle would be on the pasture. There was a creek running though the farm for cattle drinking in the summertime.

DePue: I know that your dad had a car. Did he have tractors, any other mechanization on the farm?

Blade: We farmed with horses, but also he had a tractor. It was an International F20 on steel wheels, was the first tractor that we had. [It] pulled a two bottom plow and had a two row cultivator with that, although the first years, as a kid—my brother and I have talked about this—my dad still thought he ought to cultivate with horses, cultivate the corn, because the tractor would just wallow down too much corn, when you turned around to go back and cultivate two rows at a time, but—

DePue: Define "wallow down" for me.

Blade: Well, I guess that's when hogs kind of get in the mud and that and root around and lay on stuff and knock stuff down. Well, the corn stalks will stand up, and that was an old farm saying, that you would "knock down," Instead of saying, "knocking down the stalks of the corn," you would say, "wallowing down the corn." As you turn, horses can actually, I guess, would step on it. But that's just is an old saying that I guess I picked up. (both laugh)

DePue: Well, I just wanted to make sure that, not just me, but other people who might be listening fifty years from now, even farther removed from these farm practices. But that's why it's so fascinating to talk to guys like you.

Blade: That's a good question you had there, I think. I much never thought about it; [it's] just natural to say that, I guess.

DePue: Did your dad ever say, "You know, when I was a kid, I would be plowing this one row at a time?" Did you hear that kind of story from him?

Blade: Well, probably did, when I would complain about something like—

DePue: "You kids got it easy today."

Blade: Yeah, yeah. And the two row corn cultivator that you put on a tractor, you know, to lift up all the shovels on the back, you had to do that with your arm, to lift them up, and that was really tough to do.

The other thing, what "point rows" means, reminded me of that. "Point rows" is when something is at an angle. So, one row runs out, if the fence wasn't square or something. Well, they still got another row.

Well, one of the things that my father used to argue about, over the horses, over the tractor, was that when you got to point rows, you could cultivate all that out, with a one row walking cultivator, with the horses. Although the tractor we had, you would lift up one row, front shovels on the right side. Then you could lift up the shovels on the left side, with the other lever. Then the back ones lifted all the shovels at the same time. But the back one was extremely difficult to lift up. I would have to—as a young kid cultivating corn at nine years old—I would have to put the tractor in neutral, get off the seat and get turned around to grab that, pull it towards me to get that lifted up. It was hard to do. (both laugh)

DePue: How about a telephone? Did the family have a telephone on the farm?

Blade: Yes, we did. We had an old, crank phone. It was a party line and, those days, the phones normally would have, probably, from eight or nine people on a line, to maybe up to fifteen people on the same phone line.

You would wonder how everybody would know when it was their ring. Our number, for example, was 515 on 9. Well, nine meant that we were on the nine line. If you had a five, that meant that was a long ring; a one meant a short ring. So our phone, when it rang for us, it was a long and a short and a long. If your number was 4 on 9, [that] meant you got four shorts, or if you had 555 on 9, it meant that you got three long rings. So, that's how that was determined.

There was two batteries that were about a volt and a half. I'm not positive what the voltage was, but there was two batteries, with two posts on them, that went in the old, wood telephone that hooked on the wall.

DePue: How could you tell if somebody was listening in on the line?

Blade: On the side of the phone was a hook that held the receiver. You could lift that receiver, and there was a little click there as it got up to where you would talk. But, if you pulled that down just below that click, you could listen, and they wouldn't know you're on the line. That was a big habit of most of the…More of the women would listen to what was going on.

Sometimes some men would get on the phone and think they had people listening. They would cuss and carry on some words, thinking they'd get some of the women off the line, which perhaps that worked. (laughs)

DePue: Was your mom the kind who would listen in on other people's conversations?

Blade: Very rarely, but did occasionally. Perhaps, if somebody knew that a certain ring that somebody was ill at that house, or they were going to have a baby or something, why there would be a lot of people listening in, to see what was going on. In those days we had a doctor.

We lived two and a fourth miles from a small town of Cameron. [It] had a population of about 280. We had a doctor there that would make house calls, Doc Zimmerman. He was a very good doctor, very caring doctor. He was still there when I went to high school. That doctor was still making house calls, well into his eighties, a little, dried up man. But he was a busybody (laughs).

We also had a barber in that town. Talking about barber, the barbers generally didn't start cutting hair until after lunch, noontime, maybe mid-afternoon. They would cut hair until midnight. The reason would be nobody coming in in the mornings. But the farmers would. After they had all their chores done, at night, they would go to the barber shop to get their hair cut. My first haircuts were ten cents. That barber in Cameron was pretty successful. I have no idea what he bought his farm for, but he owned forty acres of flat land, and he did not inherit any money. He made that by cutting ten cent haircuts (laughs).

DePue: It adds up over time.

Blade: Oh it does, yeah.

DePue: Was the family religious?

Blade: Yes, we went to church almost every Sunday, never worked on Sunday. Both my parents were very religious and didn't think you should work on Sundays.

DePue: What was the denomination?

Blade: Lutheran. [A] lot of Swedes are Lutheran, I guess, both in Sweden, as well as here.

DePue: Do you remember the specific name of the Lutheran denomination? Was there a synod that you belonged to?

Blade: Oh, yeah, can't right off hand. [I] can't think what I wanted to say.

DePue: What language did they speak in the church?

Blade: The New Windsor Church was Swedish and American, early days they were. They had two services but later years, just one, because New Windsor was just a lot of Swedes in that whole area [a] lot of Petersons, Nelsons, and Swansons in that area, and my aunt was a Swanson.

DePue: Well, you said your dad was a real stickler about speaking English at home. Did you have an opportunity to learn any Swedish, growing up?

Blade: No, neither I nor my brother did. My mother, she could speak and write both Swedish and Norwegian, self-taught. Of course, from her background, her

parents and her grandparents, they talked Norwegian all the time. Norwegian and Swedish is close enough that my mother was able to pick that up. I have a cousin in Sweden that was learning English. He used to write to my mother, and my mother would write back to him and that was in English. But sometimes his questions would be in Swedish, but mother could understand that and could answer that both ways for him.

DePue: I'm just curious, was there a big enough difference between the culture of Norway and the culture of Sweden that there would be some joking around about that or some outright friction between the two groups?

Blade: Not to my knowledge. I was never exposed to anything.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about your education, growing up, the early years, to start with.

Gene Blade is the blond in the back row center for the 8th grade class in Shortsville School near Cameron, IL. Circa 1948

Blade: Okay. Well, I went to a one-room grade school, and I had to walk a mile and a quarter to there. We had one teacher, taught all eight grades. We never had less than eight kids in all eight grades, nor more than sixteen in all eight grades.

I was the only one in my grade all eight years, with the exception of one spring, a farmhand moved in on the first of March. [There was] some disagreement evidently with the landlord, and they moved out during the summer. So, I only had a kid in my grade for six weeks, about.

In those days, the farm kids would get out of school…We would start school after Labor Day, and we would get out towards the end of April, so we could help on the farm. Of course, when I got to high school, we went to the end of May, generally, or the first of June.

Some of the classes or grades would have, you know. We had one grade that had five kids in it, as an example. We had some grades there were no kids in. In the one-room school, each class had roughly, nearly an hour of classroom, or you'd go up front of the class, and there was chairs set up there

by the teacher's desk. She would write on the blackboard and ask you questions for your reading assignment or your math assignment or whatever it was, and you did your one hour of math and English and what have you, there.

Now maybe today, we only talked about math, and maybe tomorrow was only on English, and maybe the next day, we'd be on a science subject. Sometimes we'd have a little bit of both or all items at the same time. One of the, probably an advantage to help your education was that you could listen to the other grades that were ahead of you, and you would pick some of that up, as you got to the next class the next year.

DePue: What were you doing if you weren't up in front?

Blade: Well, you were doing study assignments. So, you were busy at your desk. The teachers were very strict, and you tended to business. There was no monkey business. Some kids may have tried it, but the teacher quickly got them in line.

We always had female teachers in my area. During the War, there was a shortage of teachers. One time, I had a teacher that had just graduated from high school and did a short, six week training to be a teacher at Western Illinois University and came back as a certified teacher. My English was never very good, but she didn't help me much. (chuckles) She would say, "Well, if you talk it, and it sounds all right, it's probably all right." That was about the extent of it. She was not a very good teacher, really, for any of us, but I always recall that one.

Now, in my first three grades, I had the same teacher. She was really a great teacher. All the kids liked her, and all learned a lot from her. I've often thought, in years since then…The closest house to us was a half a mile away from the school house. We had no phone in the school house. The teacher's husband was a feed salesman. He would bring her to school in the morning and come after school to pick her up. Fortunately, in all those eight years that I went to that country grade school, we never had a serious accident, anybody getting cut, broken arm or anything, but I've often thought about that. That was kind of tough. Somebody would have had to run a half a mile to get somebody.

DePue: You walked this whole time, when you're going to school?

Blade: Yes, I did, most all the time. We had some neighbors that sometimes—they were four years behind me—they sometimes would take their kids to school; they had twins. Sometimes I would ride with them. I would ride a bicycle, you know, probably, I don't know, fourth grade, I probably

….I worked, and I had enough money to buy a used bicycle off of some fellow that…We bought hay from them, and I saw that old bicycle up there, in the hay loft and asked him what he wanted for it. I don't remember

now, but I think it was somewhere probably around $15 or something that I gave him for that used bicycle.

DePue: That would have been real money back then.

Blade: Well, it was. How I made some money…That just reminded me of something we could add in here. During the War, why it was hard to get help. We lived a quarter of a mile from a cemetery; they never could get enough help to keep up the cemetery. So, there was a fence around the cemetery a water tank on the cemetery plus a well. [They] had a little shed to keep the lawn mowers in.

Well, I probably was, I would guess, about eight years old, I believe, thinking about the time frame. They came and asked my folks if I could herd the sheep from this other neighbor's barn and drive them to that cemetery in the mornings and then take them back and put them in the barn at night. Then I'd have to pump water for them in this little tank there. So that was agreed on. I made ten cents a day, taking care of those sheep. They took care of keeping the grass down on that cemetery, so— (laughs)

DePue: It's a symbiotic relationship there.

Blade: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Did you have to do any chores in school?

Blade: I did, yes. I guess my main job was feeding the hogs on the…We had a cement feeding floor, next to the corn crib. That was my early morning job, was to do that. I would have to clean that feeding floor off at night, and scoop all the cobs off from it. If it rained, and it was muddy, I'd have to scrape all the mud off with a scraper, and then scoop the corn out of the corn crib out onto the cement floor. That was fenced in, because it was a cattle feeding lot too. But the cattle couldn't get in there.

DePue: How often did you get to take a bath or a shower at home, when you were growing up?

Blade: Well, that's a good question too. You know, in those days—

DePue: I'm thinking, a little bit of pig manure on your boots, when you get to school…But it wouldn't have been any different for anybody else, probably.

Blade: Well, no, but most of the kids, we wore overshoes to school, and those things were taken off at the doorway of the school. All the families, the kids were pretty clean, really. But, we normally took a bath on Saturday night. That was kind of the deal.

One farmer used to laugh about…I always remember, he was kind of a storyteller, but a lot of truth to that. He said, "Well, come Saturday night,

everybody takes a bath, and then they go to town, so they can listen to the dogs all bark." When they'd go to town, they'd go shopping on Saturday night because, in those days, everybody worked a full six days of the week, pretty much, so.

The bath, we'd have to heat the bathwater on the cook stove. We had a stove called a Home Comfort Cook Stove. There was another one called Majestic. Majestic also made potbellied stoves, although we had a furnace, so we didn't have a pot belly stove in the room, as some of the homes did. Our school also had a furnace in it, because our other school had been hit by lightning about five years before I started first grade, so they'd built a new school. It had a basement and a furnace.

So, to heat the water, [they] would heat on a wood burning, cook stove in the kitchen. Then, it had a reservoir, they called it, on the edge of the stove. In the winter months, the stove was always going, so that the reservoir was there. That reservoir probably held about ten gallons of water. You could dip that out and put that in a round tub that was about three foot across and roughly a foot deep. That's where you'd either stand up and take your bath or that. The old story about throwing the baby out with the bathwater, well the baby was generally the last one to get the bath, and by then the water was kind of dirty, by the time everybody had taken a bath on it So that's where that story originated. (laugh)

DePue: How many people were in the Blade family when you were growing up, by the time you got to the 1940s, let's say?

Blade: Yeah, well then it was just my mother and father and I, just the three of us.

DePue: So, you got some fairly clean water by that time.

Blade: That's right. I had a good opportunity for clean water. (laughs)

DePue: One more question about going to school. When you were an older kid, did you have some responsibilities? You were expected to help the younger kids with their lessons?

Blade: No. No, we didn't. Others have asked that same question, but we never did. The teachers always had us…We always had enough work to do there. And, you know, we had farm work to do when we got home, so we didn't have homework to do. At least, I don't know as I ever had any homework to do in my grade school days, because we basically had an hour or thereabouts…I guess it's when we were down to eight kids and we had, like five kids in one class, why we had more time to be up there with the teacher. But, we still did all our work at school.

DePue: Do you think you got a decent education that way?

Blade: I probably didn't know any different, but we probably did, you know. There were some kids there that did very well in school and later on, and we…Of those kids I went to school with, some of them never went on to high school. Then, later years, why then was a requirement. They had to go to school until they was fifteen.

We had one kid that flunked every course in high school for two years, until he was old enough he didn't have to go. He came out of a family of thirteen and was, by far, the most successful one of the bunch. [He] had accumulated quite a bit of farmland and everything and had health issues and committed suicide when he was forty-nine years old. Amazing what he did. Other than that, we had a couple of kids that, some engineers, and we had one that had a PhD, that I know of. So, they had a good foundation, certainly had good discipline there.

DePue: Well, that certainly counts for a lot.

Blade: Yeah, it does, I think.

DePue: Do you remember? You would have been pretty young, but do you remember Pearl Harbor, when that happened?

Blade: My brother and I just talked about that on the phone two weeks ago, or a little more than that, when the seventh of December was here. I don't remember very much about that, but my brother was telling me that he had came home from Moline on the bus to Galesburg and was at our place. When he got to Galesburg, on Sunday, evidently that must have been on Saturday, the seventh. I don't know, maybe it was a Sunday.

DePue: Sunday was the seventh.

Blade: Yeah, when it happened. When he got to Galesburg, to get on the bus to go to Moline, he found out that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. Then, when he got to Moline, why then he found out more about it up there than he did in Galesburg. I guess there would have been some talk about that, as I recall, you know, a day or two after that.

I suppose the paper came out on Mondays, because we used to take two papers on the farm. One of them was the local, Galesburg paper, and then we also took the Drovers Journal, which was a Chicago paper. The reason we took that was that it always had all the livestock markets in it. That was a way to know what was going on, in reference to the prices of corn and livestock.

DePue: Now you mentioned your brother was a Navy pilot?

Blade: That is correct.

DePue: Joined in 1942?

Blade: Yes, and—

DePue: I'm guessing that Pearl Harbor, then, that had an impact on him. That's the reason he was more intrigued with going to the Navy and being a pilot. I'm just assuming here. I probably should just let you explain it.

Blade: We talked about that the other day. It was kind of interesting. He said that he thought it was better to join the Navy and be a pilot than it was to end up being drafted and being in the Army, as an infantry guy. So, that's what he did. My brother was very good at math, and then he did the Navy training and became a Navy pilot. He missed all of World War II, but he was an instructor, pilot instructor, all that time, while it was going on, after he completed all his naval and pilot training.

DePue: So, it's not correct to say he missed it. He spent it stateside as an instructor pilot.

Blade: Well, that's true. Then, he was working on some classified stuff, which we didn't know what that was, and he said he couldn't say anything. But, he was in California. There they were doing testing for jet planes, during World War II, at the end. That's what he was doing, which we didn't know that, until Korean broke out, what he was doing.

DePue: Were you paying much attention to what was going on in the war?

Blade: Oh, probably not a whole lot, really, when I look back. One thing we did to help raise money, I can remember, is we had a savings bond drive at the school. We sold stamps, little ten cent stamps to fill out a book, and I remember, I won the prize at school. I don't know what I won, but I know I'd go to the barbershop when my Dad was getting a haircut, or I'd go in the pool hall and go around to guys and get them to buy stamps, give me the money to buy the stamps to put in my book. That's how I got my bond bought. (laughs)

DePue: I know that, for some people, there would be food rationing, gas rationing, certainly, rubber rationing, some of the other commodities. Did that have an impact on you, as a farm family?

Blade: Farmers were kind of exempt from that; although, there were some limitations on that. We had some fuel stamps. You had to put a stamp in the window on your car, as to whether you were an A, B or C, I believe, but I couldn't tell you what those stood for now. I don't recall. But, we had the ability to…Farms were rationed somehow on the amount of fuel per acres or crops. I don't know how that was. I assume that; I don't know that, but I assume that was the case. But, we would put gas in the car and what have you. There also was sugar rationing and some of those things. I know, when the war broke out, why, we bought extra sugar and had it stored upstairs in the house, hundred pound bags of sugar for canning purposes, because we canned and cold packed the beef that we butchered and all of that, so—

DePue: Well, your dad left Sweden, kind of to avoid being drafted.

Blade: That's correct.

DePue: Your mom's family came from Norway. In World War II, Sweden is one of the bases for the Germans, where they got much of their iron ore and steel and things. Norway was an occupied country. Did either of your parents express any views about what was going on in the war?

Blade: No, not really, not to my knowledge, no, not about that. I mean, they talked about what my brother was doing, naturally, and some things like that, but nothing related to what you're referencing.

DePue: Was your big brother kind of a hero to you? Did you look up to him, because he was in the Navy?

Blade: I think, probably, two things influenced me to go military. One of them was my brother, [I] always looked up to that. The other was our neighbor, across the road on the farm, he was a bird colonel[1] in the Illinois Militia, and I always looked up to him.

DePue: Militia, during World War II era?

Blade: Yeah, yeah Illinois Militia. He was a bird colonel, and his headquarters was in the armory in Monmouth. He was like a brigade commander, as we would know today, but I guess he was probably called a regimental commander. There weren't too many in Illinois, bird colonels. I did know how many there were in the history of Illinois, during that timeframe, but I do not now and—

DePue: I know just a little about it. Of course I think it was 1940 when all of the National Guard was called up on to active duty. After that occurred, then the states organized their own state militias, which was, I guess…Was it pretty similar to what the National Guard would look like, except not quite as rigorous, in terms of their training and expectations?

Blade: Yeah, pretty much so. I know they were called out to flood duty, I think in 1943, to Beardstown. The Monmouth Militia was down there on that flood duty, and this man was the colonel in charge of that.

He used to come to the grade school, sometimes. I remember one time he brought a walkie talkie—you know how they are kind of shaped about twelve, fourteen inches long and four inches square—and had brought a couple of those and showed us kids how those worked for communications,

[1] In the U. S. military, a full-bird colonel is in charge of brigades. A full-bird colonel is one rank below a one-star general, or brigadier general, and one rank above a lieutenant colonel. (https://www.reference.com/government-politics/full-bird-colonel-c067c98872078573)

which was very impressive, you know, (laughs) because we still got the telephone hanging on the wall, you know. (laughs)

He had an olive drab car that he drove back and forth. I don't know if we had a general in the militia in those days, or a bird colonel was as far as they could go.

DePue: I think there was an adjutant general.

Blade: Well, yeah, there was adjutant general, but we did not have any United States Property or Fiscal Officer or nothing like that.

DePue: I don't even know if what you are talking, about these militia positions, if they were even paid or if it was just kind of a voluntary thing.

Blade: No, there was some money connected with that. I know that. He had a car, and it was a Nash. I remember that, and it was painted olive drab color— (laughs)

DePue: Did the family's financial situation improve during the war?

Blade: I don't know. It was pretty austere, but towards the end of the war, it was good to be farmers, because the price of hogs and cattle had gone up significantly, and that really helped things.

DePue: Did either of your parents work in any industry during that time?

Blade: No. No, well, always on the farm. Everything was pretty labor intense in those days.

DePue: One hundred and sixty acres, even on hardscrabble property, can keep a man busy, huh?

Blade: Oh yeah, it sure did then, yes. Yeah, my mother helped out some too. Most people were still putting up hay, by loose hay. I guess, at one of my high school class reunions, one of the persons there, she was the same age I was but lived twenty miles away from us. She came and visited her grandparents one time and came visited the school, when I was [in] first or second grade, and she was too. So, at this high school reunion, her husband was there, and she said, "We got a hold of my grandmother's diary," and she says, "Your name is in there." I said, "Well, that's interesting. What's my name in there about?" She says, "You and your dad were down, helping us put up hay, and you were driving the horses on the hay wagon. I was seven years old," she says.

I don't know if you're familiar with that, but for purposes here, you would rake the hay in windrows, similar to what it is today for baling purposes. Although, in those days, many rakes were not called a side delivery rake, which rakes the hay in windrows. You would have what they called a

dump rake or a bull rake, more of a dump rake. You would have to rake and lift it up, and then you'd drag it a little further and lift up another. So, you'd make several windrows, but then you'd have to come back and again. That's how things were raked up with those old rakes. You had a lever there to lift them up, which took a long time to get anything raked. Then we would straddle that with a team of horses, in this hay wagon.

Then the hay loader behind, kind of had crank shafts on it that worked the levers on these lift arms that would lift the hay up the slide and dump it on to the hayrack. Normally, one person would take the hay off from the loader, put it on the hayrack and spread it out. But he would throw it up to the front part. So, my job, in the front, was not only was keeping the horses going, I'd also kind of have to square it out on the corners of the hayrack, as we built that up. Of course, we had a ladder. They called a ladder in the front part of the hayrack that could fold down, but we would have it standing up, to help hold the hay on there. That probably was five foot high, I assume. As it got full, I'd be standing up there on that ladder, guiding that team of horses.

DePue: How old were you when you started driving the tractor?

Blade: Well, nine when I started driving the tractor. Now, the other thing that we did, when I started at seven…I'd driven a vehicle since I was seven. We had an old '35 Chevy pickup. When I was born, my folks no longer had that old Ville car I was talking about. They then had 1929 Chevy…car (laughs).

My brother and I was talking about that the other day, too. The seventh of December got us on a lot of subjects that day (laughs). But they had traded the '29 Chevy off. Then my Dad got a half ton Chevy pickup in 1935. Now, the seats were split, both on the seat part, as well as the back part. As we pulled up hay, loose hay, into the hay mow, many people had a horse that they pulled that up with. But, we only had two horses, and we were using them to load the hay.

So, we used the pickup. So, you would face the truck forward with that and then back up. There was always plenty of room—you didn't have to be real particular how you backed up—to pull the hay. That way you could watch the hay going up into the hay mow, with the fork. Then, when that got pulled back, you'd drive back. So, I was too short to reach the pedals, and I was too short to look up high enough.

So we took out the bottom half of the seat part and put it on the other half of the seat, then took the other half of the back part and put behind me. That way I could reach the pedals and drive and see where I was going. I started pulling hay up, when I was seven years old (laughs).

DePue: Because seven years old is probably too young to be handling the hay, once it gets high enough up and pull it into the—

Blade: Oh yeah, yeah. I was too young to be able to do that, wasn't strong enough. I could scatter it around a little bit on the front of that hayrack, as we loaded hay. Farmers, then, traded help a lot, you know, because my dad and I would be loading hay, and then they would bring out another team of horses and a wagon. We would back it up to the hay loader. Then, they would take that team in, with that wagon, to unload it. That's how. There would be maybe three or four farmers working together, having this all going, yeah.

DePue: Did you have a milk cow on the farm?

Blade: Yeah, we did. We generally milked about three cows. That was used for household use. Then we also had a cream separator, and what that does is separate the cream from the milk. That's another labor intense thing. You got to crank a handle, and it has a flywheel on it, and you really got to get that going until it's…Then, when you get it to a certain speed, why then, you can turn the spigot on. It has a bowl that holds about five gallons, sits on top of this machine. Then you open the spigot, and it goes through the separator part of that, and that separates the milk and the cream. One spout puts the milk out, and the other spout puts the cream out. Then we saved the cream, put that in a five gallon cream can, which we kept in the basement, because it was cooler in the basement.

Then, once a week, we would take that to Cameron and put it to the railroad station there. A train would stop and pick that up, and we would ship it Galva, Illinois, to the Peterson Creamery in Galva, Illinois. Then a few days later, why that cream can would come back to Cameron, and then we would have another cream can to go back to Galva again.

The grandson of the Peterson family that had the creamery up there was also in the Galva guard, as I found out many years later. We had a lot of stories to talk about that. (laughs)

DePue: What did you do with the milk then?

Blade: We fed the milk to hogs, after it was separated, because you took the butter fat out of that. We generally drank whole milk. We did not drink the milk that had been separated, because that wasn't quite as rich. Mother would use the cream sometimes to make butter. We churned our own butter. That used to be another one of my jobs, sometimes. Of course, my mother did all the baking and cooking, baked bread every week.

DePue Did you have chickens as well?

Blade: We did. We had chickens. We used to take the eggs to Cameron to the grocery store and would sell the eggs there. In turn, you would barter and take off whatever the eggs were from the price you paid for the groceries. There were no sales taxes in those days.

DePue: I've talked to quite a few people of similar circumstances, who grew up on a farm, and practically everybody was using those eggs for a little bit of cash crop. But, obviously, if you have got these small towns, of a couple hundred people, and lots and lots of farmers who bring in their produce, where does it go from there?

Blade: Well, sometimes we would have thirty dozen egg crates. We would take those to Galesburg and sell them there. We would buy several groceries in Galesburg, but on incidental stuff, we would…There used to be two grocery stores in the little town of 280. One of the stores was the post office and grocery store, and the other one was a grocery store and a hardware store.

DePue: As far as you know, a lot of that surplus would go to larger cities, Chicago or Rock Island or places like that?

Blade: Yes, we would take the eggs to Galesburg. I suppose people who lived closer to Monmouth would have taken eggs to Monmouth, because there was a person there that…And the person in Monmouth probably shipped eggs to Chicago.

DePue: Did you guys do your own butchering on the farm?

Blade: We did. I guess, as a young man, and again, I started carrying a rifle to hunt groundhogs with, because we could get twenty-five cents for groundhog ears. I used to do that with a rifle. I was a pretty good shot, as a very young man. , Nobody trained me; I just learned how to do that. So, when we butchered, I used to be the young guy to go around, would shoot the hog or the steer that we were butchering.

The farmers used to kid me about that, because there's a little part in the hair on the forehead of the hog and also on cattle. If you hit right in the middle, where all that hair splits, why they'll drop straight to the ground. But, if you are just a little bit off, right or left, they'll fall right or left when they drop to the ground, because they're killed instantly. If they didn't fall straight down, they would really get on me, just in kidding about I wasn't as good a shot as I should have been, or something to that effect.

DePue: Well, how far away was your target, when you're pulling the trigger?

Blade: Well, not very far away, generally, probably ten feet, in most cases, [they'd] be pretty close.

So, in reference to butchering, that reminded me of something else. You know, you would take advantage of everything that you butchered. Of the beef, why, we would cut the throat right away, on the beef animal, the jugular vein. Of course, the blood would run out. My mother would be out there with a pan or two to collect the blood. Then she would take that blood and pour that in a homemade sack that was about two and a half or three inches

diameter. Before she put the blood in there, she would mix flour in there and probably some other, butter maybe, and I don't know what else, but she would put that in there. She would have this in about foot long deals. Then she would boil that, until it was cooked. Then we would have that as sausage later on. It sounds kind of gross, but it was kind of good.

DePue: Blood sausage.

Blade: Yeah, then when she cooked that… That was in slices, just like salami or something like that. Then she would make a milk gravy. You would have that and the gravy, which was a pretty rich, protein food. We then would put that on mashed potatoes or that to eat, sometimes. When you look back, I mean, everything was used, almost.

Because the hides, we used to take the hides and take them to Galesburg. There was a fellow there that would buy the hides from the cattle, off from you. We would take them, and he would ship those to Chicago, because his place, where he bought the hides, was right next to my uncle's garage that he had in Galesburg. It was rather interesting. In the summertime, it was kind of a pretty raunchy odor in that place, in the basement (laughs). That was right on the square in Galesburg, on the southwest corner of the square.

DePue: Was butchering cattle quite a bit different operation than the hogs?

Blade: No, not really. The hogs, what we did there is, we would shoot them, again. We did not collect the blood out of the hogs, but—

DePue: Is there a reason for that, that you know of?

Blade: No, I don't, probably not enough blood in them, just compared to the cattle. The other thing we had to be very careful of, is the cattle go pretty much berserk around the blood business. So, when we would butcher, that was never out in the lot, because both hogs and cattle would kind of react to that fresh blood. It could be dangerous to be around that. I was always told that, so we always were never out in the main feed lot doing that.

DePue: Was butchering day a day when the neighbors would get together to work on it?

Blade: Yes. Yeah, we would take…For hogs, for example, you would have a big fifty-five gallon barrel. You'd get the hogs to someplace [where] you'd have a block and tackle. You would slit the tendons on the hooves, between the hooves and the elbow of the hog, the same thing on cattle.

There used to be a farmer's conservative. Again, there would be a piece of hedge that was hewed out and have a little notch on the end, so the legs wouldn't fall off that notch, where you'd cut the notch and put the

tendons over. You'd do that on both hogs and cattle. Then you would have a block and tackle, up in the building, and you would pull them up, and then you could stand up and do the butchering of them.

Now the hogs, to get the hair off from them, you would have a fifty-five gallon barrel of this hot water. You would build a fire and had a barrel of water setting on it, then you had that propped up with some home-made outfit to hold the water above the fire. You would put that water in that boiling hot, scalding water, and then you'd dip the hog down in there, after you'd killed it, naturally. Then that's how you would scrape all the hair off from there. [It] went pretty slick, really. You had a special tool to do that. It was kind of concaved.

DePue: All this is while the hog innards are still in the hog?

Blade: Yes, that's correct. You scraped all the hide off first, or all the hair off the hog first, even the tail, scrape the hair off the tail, because some people would use that to make soup out of. You'd have pickled pigs' feet off of there. But after it's all skinned, then you would turn around and split him open and take the innards out. That sometimes, then the innards was fed to the hogs. So, they would eat that, live tankage, I guess you would say, yeah.

DePue: I would have thought that they used some of the intestines for sausage or things like that?

Blade: We never did, but some did. Some people did, but we never did. Nobody in our neighborhood did that, because we used to go around and butcher for different people, you know. Normally, we would only butcher at one person's place at a time. As far as I know, I think that was nearly always done on Saturday, because I know I was always home from school, and I had my job there. (laughs)

DePue: In other words, you needed all hands on butchering day.

Blade: Yeah, and you could butcher, you know, you could do a hog and a beef the same day, but the cattle…We would skin the cattle; you skin them. But they would be lifted up, as well.

DePue: Was it women's work to butcher the chickens?

Blade: Most cases, yeah, yeah, yeah, I think so; I want to think about it. All the cases that I can recall, it was all the women did that. Then there used to be lard rendering. Does that ring a bell?

DePue: Yep.

Blade: Well that was another thing that…Animals in those days was always fat or nearly always. So then, all the fat was cut off. Then you'd put that in these

rendering buckets or tubs and put a big fire under them and render the lard out. Then there'd be those cracklings, is what they would call that.

DePue: That was what was left over?

Blade: That was what's left over, because the grease, it turns white after it's been rendered and gets cool, but there's always pieces, chips, that end up. You call that cracklings.

DePue: Is that something you could eat?

Blade: Yeah, I guess you could. I guess we probably…I don't know. We ate some of those but never very much of it. But it was pretty greasy. They were in about three-quarter inch chunks, I guess. The lard had all been rendered out, but there was some still left in them, yeah. I'd forgot about that a long time ago.

DePue: Well, it's certainly a different lifestyle than we're used to today.

Blade: Oh yeah.

DePue: That's why I ask so many questions about it, because it is so different.

Blade: Oh, it is; it is.

DePue: When did you start high school?

Blade: Well, in the fall of 1948, and that was the year….That spring is when they closed all the grade schools. I assume, in most all, at least in west central Illinois, that's when that was accomplished. Then they started busing kids to high school in Monmouth, which was ten miles away for me.

DePue: What you're talking about is the state coming in and saying that we need to consolidate all these one-room school houses and get to a level where they can, what, have enough kids in each one of the grades, so they can go through the, what, the structure we would understand today?

Blade: Yes, that's correct.

DePue: Do you remember any discussion about the families themselves, how they reacted to that decision?

Blade: Well, a little bit. Some of the things…They drew up lines, and of course, the people on the road that I lived on was kind of unusual when that happened.

Originally, I was supposed to go to Galesburg High School. They drew the line. One mile west of us was the line between Galesburg and Monmouth. Now, if you just went like a straight line until you got to Knox County—because I was in Warren County—you probably would have had to have

driven, I would guess maybe six miles to get to the Knox County line. That really upset the farmers, to think that they had got drug into paying taxes to Knox County. They thought they ought to have been paying to Warren County. So, if your land joined somebody else's land that, so you could go by joining land all the way to Warren County school, then you could petition to get out of there.

So, my first year in high school, my dad had to pay tuition for me to go to Monmouth High School. But the farmers knew that they were going to get that thing petitioned and change that. So the people on the east side of my road, they went to Galesburg, and they never did petition out, because the wife was a Knox College graduate and a die-hard Knox College person. So, their kids went to Knox County and Galesburg and no problem.

Well, my brother went to Monmouth High School, because it was in Warren County. So, we petitioned our farm out of that consolidated school. Others did, all around us, to kind of halfway get it straightened out. A lot of anti-friction to the guy across the road that wouldn't petition out. There one time was when the people caught in that couldn't get out of there.

DePue: Was there any nostalgia of some people that they're losing all those one-room schools?

Blade: Oh, I guess there was some people that didn't like that really, and their kids are going to have to ride buses to school and what have you.

DePue: Was it mainly because they'd have to be on buses and be a lot farther away from home?

Blade: And safety factors. They didn't like the buses because of that. Now, I had a car. I bought a car, a Model A was my first car. I didn't have a driver's license, because in 1948 I guess I would have been thirteen years old and owned a car. As long as I behaved myself, there wasn't any problem with me driving that. I used to drive that then, a mile and a half, almost two miles. I did drive two miles west to where the school bus came, as far east as it came was two miles west of us. So, I drove my car over there and got on the school bus, as a freshmen, and rode the school bus.

Now my sophomore year, farm boys, kids could get license earlier, get them at fifteen, I think. So I was almost fifteen, so I would drive to school then. They paid my dad for me to drive to Monmouth High School, rather than ride the bus, because of extra miles to pick me up.

DePue: So they didn't actually have to stop near the farm to pick you up?

Blade: That's right, because the way the roads were and dirt roads and that, a bus would have had to drive about four miles out of the way, just to pick me up.

DePue: Did you have any favorite classes, once you got to high school?

Blade: Well, I suppose farm boys would like the FFA [Future Farmers of America] and Ag [agriculture], I guess. Nearly all the boys were in Future Farmers of America, and they were all in Ag. I don't know of a farm boy that wasn't in Ag class, really. We learned some techniques in there, as well.

DePue: How about extracurricular activities? Did you do any of that?

Blade: I did when I was a senior, but not before that. I always had too much work at home. You don't need to be doing that. My father did not want me playing football, because you get injured, bother your whole life, was that philosophy, which, looking back on it, I'm glad it went that way. (laughs) I did go out for track when I was a senior and did very well at it.

DePue: Now, I know you were working hard at home. Did you have any other jobs?

Blade: Not during school time, I didn't, yeah, no. In the summertime, that's how I bought my car was, I used to tie the wires on bales on a baler for one of the neighbors, more than one of them, I guess. I used to get half a cent a bale for doing that.

DePue: This would have been in the summer, but June of 1950, about the middle of your high school career, is the timeframe that North Korea invaded South Korea. Were you paying a little bit more attention to what was going in the world at that time?

Blade: Well, particularly so, I think. My brother was home on leave when that broke out. He was in Korea three days later. We got a telegram, right away, and of course, I think we had electricity then, pretty reasonably sure we did, in 1950. When did that break out in '50?

DePue June of 1950.

Blade: Yeah, yeah. That's about the time that we got electricity, about June. So anyway, he went over there. So, of course, consequently, we were well aware of what was going on then. Some of the high school kids belonged to the National Guard, later on there. The Guard left in—

DePue: Fifty-two, I think.

Blade: Fifty-one, I think the Monmouth unit. Some of them went in '51 in Monmouth.

DePue: Okay, so a year into the war—

Blade: Yeah, yeah, we had one of the kids in my class…I'd signed up to join the Guard but couldn't get in, because they were full. One of the kids in my class did go with the Guard. He'd got in earlier.

DePue: Your brother, Navy pilot, first year of the Korean War, what was he flying?

Blade: I'm not positive, really.

DePue: Was it a fighter?

Blade: Yes it was, and they were bombing railroad tracks, one thing and another.

DePue: Well, versus what your family experienced in World War II, your folks had to be pretty nervous about your brother there?

Blade: Oh yes, yes; that's right. He was married then, too. My brother was married in '46, so they was married.

DePue: Did they have any kids at the time?

Blade: Yes, he did. He had a daughter at that time. Later, had another daughter, but yeah. He was only over there for, I think, ninety days, something like that, not very long. He flew several missions, and after so many missions, you got to come home.

DePue: Oh, okay. You mentioned, yourself, that you were interested in joining the National Guard, why?

Blade: Well then, yeah. I guess that comes back to the neighbor being in the militia and my brother, I guess. Some of the other, younger guys that were a little older than I, were in the Guard, you know. And we had some neighbors that were in the Guard, prior to World War II. Matter of fact, one of the hired men across the road, who was a good friend of my brother's, was in the guard and had to go early with the Monmouth unit. They went down to Camp Forest in Tennessee, I think.

DePue: What did you intend to do with your life, in the last year or two in high school?

Blade: Probably be a farmer, I would guess.

DePue: You say, you would guess. You just don't recall?

Blade: Well, I mean, that was just more or less implied that that's what you were going to do, is farm, I guess. I had no desire to go to college at that point.

DePue: Were you looking forward to farming?

Blade: Yeah, I think so. I—

DePue: At that time, were you thinking, I need to get a piece of land of my own, or are you thinking I need to help my dad?

Blade: Well probably, help my father, I would assume. He'd talked about buying some more farmland.

DePue: He still had 160 acres?

Blade: Still had 160. [He] never did have any more than160. Then, when I graduated from high school, I went to work in the factory. But, I think everything was around farming really, mostly.

DePue: What factory did you start working in?

Blade: Admiral Corporation, which made refrigerators and stoves.

DePue: Was that in Galesburg?

Blade: In Galesburg, yes.

DePue: I assume you're spending an awful lot of time helping your dad out, at the same time?

Blade: Well, I did. After, you know, I would come home and always had chores to do and one thing and another, when I was working at the factory. And, of course, Saturdays I didn't work at the factory, so I worked at home, you know, or worked on the farm.

DePue: What year did you graduate from high school?

Blade: Fifty-two.

DePue: Did you think, at that time, that you wanted to join the military? That would have been, still, in the middle of the Korean War.

Blade: Yeah, yep, I would say, yes, still did. Along about then, when I got out, I thought I'd like to get in the Navy, because my brother was in the Navy. I was going to do that. Then I went and talked to the recruiters in Galesburg.

You had to go to Chicago to take a physical. About the time I was to go take a physical, why then, they changed the law, and you had to be a college graduate to get in the Navy program, into the pilot program. Now, some of my high school friends joined the Navy, just as sailors, with no….but my objective at that time was, I wanted to be a pilot, like my brother was, I guess. Later on, I did pay to get my own license to fly.

DePue: Did it ever occur to you, especially as a fighter pilot or something like that. That's a little bit more dangerous line of business?

Blade: I think that, when you're a youth like that, you don't much think about danger. (laughs)

DePue: What was your mom thinking about it, though? Was she telling you anything?

Blade: Well, I don't think so, really. I think my mother probably was concerned about that, but probably wouldn't have fought that too much, really.

DePue: Well, what did you end up doing, military-wise, then?

Blade: Well, as soon as the Guard unit came back from Korea, they opened enlistments up again, I was the first one to join the unit in Monmouth; I had the lowest service number. When they came back, many of them got out of the unit. So, there were a lot of opportunities and vacancies in the unit.

DePue: What do you mean, you had the lowest service number?

Blade: Well, when you enlisted, you were given a service number. Each unit was given "x" number, a certain block of service numbers. So, being I was the first one in, I got the lowest service number of that. That's how that worked.

DePue: Something like, in the military, your identification number that you had?

Blade: That's right.

DePue So, what would pass for a Social Security number now?

Blade: That's correct. Later on, we went to Social Security numbers.

DePue Okay, Colonel, do you remember what your service number was?

Blade: Yeah, 263995481. (laughs)

DePue: And each unit was assigned a block of these numbers?

Blade: Um hum. Yep.

DePue: What was the unit that you joined?

Blade: That was Headquarters, Headquarters and Service Battery, 1st Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Battalion. That was a 155 howitzers, is what they had.

DePue: When you say, "1-5-5," 155 millimeter?

Blade: Yeah, 155 millimeter.

DePue: Towed?

Blade: Towed.

DePue: Headquarters and Service Battery, 1st Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment?

Blade: Battalion.

DePue: First Battalion.

Blade: One Hundred Twenty-Third Field Artillery Battalion, yeah. It wasn't a regiment.

DePue: What three letter batteries, were in that battalion then?

Blade: Three, A, B, C, Alpha, Bravo, Charlie.

DePue: Was there a 2nd Battalion?

Blade: Yes, there was. Second Battalion was in Rock Island, although, that was, let's see—I think that was still a field artillery, then. Later on they were anti-aircraft battalion, up there. But I believe they were field artillery. You see, we used to have—and you know this too, I think— we had three field artillery battalions, prior to World War II, one of them being in St. Louis. The others were Rock Island and Monmouth, I think.

DePue: Was the 2nd Battalion, did it have Delta, Echo and Fox Trot Battery, or did they have their A, B and C batteries, as well?

Blade: They would have been A, B and C also.

DePue: So that's a little bit different from the regimental system in World War II, it sounds like, or an infantry regiment, for example?

Blade: Yeah, probably was. When they first came back, we were the 210th, instead of the 1, 2, 3.

DePue: When you joined?

Blade: I think that was just when that changed. That changed back to the 1. 2. 3 where the 210th is what we were. When they first came back, they designated that. Does that sound…You wrote the history book on that.

DePue: Yeah, I'd have to go look at the book.

Blade: I would too.

DePue: This is why I'm prying so much, because only people who lived through this experience are probably remotely interested in these kinds of things. But the lineage of these units is important to the people who were in them.

Blade: I need to look back at your book to see if I've got any other information around here. I just run into this the other day. I got a little notebook with some things, because [at] my first camp, I was a radio operator for the Headquarters Battery commander. I don't know if that's in there or not, but I know I have some chain of command things in there. I'd have to take a look. I may or may not be able to answer that. (laughs)

DePue: Was this unit primarily Korean War veterans and a smattering of World War II vets on top of that?

Blade: Yeah, very few World War II. We had a few, the officers, and we had a few of the NCOs were World War II vets.

DePue: What's so different today, then, in terms of what the National Guard gets for training, versus then? That's something that I'd like to explore.

Blade: Oh, okay.

DePue: What kind of training did you get when you first joined? Did you go to basic training, for example?

Blade: No, I didn't. We drilled two hours every Monday night, in Monmouth. When I first signed up, there was some others that signed up very shortly after me. They issued us uniforms, showed us how to put the uniform on and one thing and another and how the boots need to go on. Your belt went on from left to right and stuff like that. We had a master sergeant, which was the highest rank enlisted in those days, was an E7. There was no E8s and 9s until '58 is when that happened, I think.

Sergeant Higgins, who happened to be in my brother's high school class, was the master sergeant. He was in charge of the training, basic training, for us. We started off, right, left, right, marching and all the marching commands and those kind of things. Then, we got to the weapons, and we had to take the weapons apart and put them together, know all the parts. Same thing with the machine guns and those kind of things. After so many weeks, then, we graduated from that.

Then, when we went to that first summer camp…I'm not positive I'm right on this next number, but I think I'm close. [It] seems to me like we had about eighty-four enlisted people, when we went to first camp. There were some howitzers up there. I don't know how many we took from each firing battery, but they grouped us together. Lloyd Anderson and I were cannoneers and firing the 155. His dad was a sergeant first class, section chief, and we fired the 155 at camp. I don't know how many rounds we fired or any of that,

but we were a very small battalion. The next year, we were much larger and a lot more man power, a lot of people had signed up.

DePue: But I thought you mentioned that you were in Headquarters Battery?

Blade: I was, but—

DePue But they didn't have any howitzers assigned to headquarters?

Blade: No, but there wasn't enough people to run the firing battery, either.

So, they consolidated us all, and we all went to one battery. I assume—and I don't know now; didn't know then, probably. We probably all went to A Battery, and we fired A Battery today. Then, maybe, we went to B Battery the next day and C Battery the next day.

DePue: As far you were concerned, it was fine to be out there working on the gun line?

Blade: Yeah, I guess so and a little side story, it's kind of funny, but it wasn't very funny. They put me on range guard one day. You knew, I think Sergeant Major Foley, who was Corporal Foley then. He was second command of the radio operation, and I was a radio operator for the battery commander. I also had to pull guard duty and KP and those other kinds of activities that new people pulled. So, they put me as a range guard out by the impact area, and there was a gate there, just a one-armed gate. Nobody could go through that, while live fire was going on.

Well, they took me out there, early in the morning. I had a little pint of milk and a couple of peanut butter, jelly sandwiches and maybe an apple or something, but not very much. They said they'd be back to get me that evening. Well, I'm out there. Starts getting dark, and there wasn't any more firing going on. I'm still out there, and thought, well, they'll come get me. It gets dark, and I'm still out there. And about 10:00 that night, here comes Foley and Eggers to come out to get me.

Now, the rest of the story is, they had all gone to town, was in a bar someplace having a good time. And all at once, they said, "My god, we left Blade, Private Blade out there on guard post."

They came back to post, changed clothes, get a jeep, and came out to the range and picked me up out there on the range. It's about 10:00 at night, when they came and got me. So, I've always kidded those guys a lot, about how they took care of their troops. (laughs)

DePue: Well, that story illustrates another thing. It illustrates the nature of training going to summer camp, because you still had time in the evening to get dressed in civilian clothes and go to town?

Blade: Yes, we did. In those early days, as some of the senior officers used to talk about, when they started getting more serious about intense training in the Guard, is they've taken all the fun out of Guard.

But, in those days, the weekends were always free to…You'd have a parade Saturday morning. Saturday afternoon, you would go to town and come back Sunday evening and then, get back to work, maybe bivouac one night during the two week training. That was it. So, the guys, most of the time, you could go to town about every night, and they would.

DePue: Were there night firing exercises or primarily firing in the daylight?

Blade: Everything was daylight, with the exception, when you'd be out one night. They'd shoot a little bit of illumination and what have you.

DePue: Where was the summer camp location?

Blade: Camp Ripley, Minnesota then. We drove up there, and I drove. Corporal Foley and I was in a jeep together and drove up there.

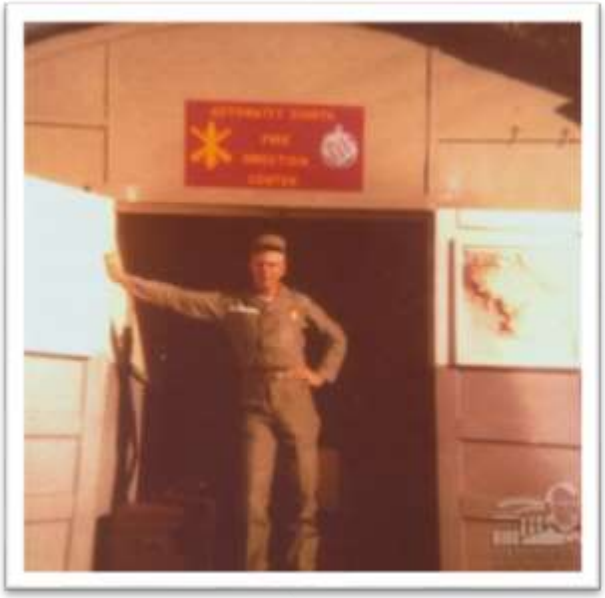
DePue: Foley, that's a name I recognize, as well. What was his rank at the time, private?

Blade: Corporal. He stayed in California, but he was activated during Korea, both him and Kenny Eggers, both of them were corporals. Kenny was in the wire section, and Foley was in the radio section. Kenney's brother, Charlie, was the com chief, as a master sergeant.

Gossett was the first sergeant. You wouldn't have known him, because he got out the next year. Charlie Egger became the first sergeant, and his other brother, who's older than Kenny, was Donnie Egger, and he took a direct commission as a second lieutenant. So the second camp I went to, he was a second lieutenant.

DePue: What was your specific assignment?

Blade: First year, I was in the radio section but the driver for the battery commander, Captain Dave Fleming.



Sergeant Blade stands outside his unit's Fire Direction Center Quonset hut at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, 1958. Schofield Barracks was the home of the 25th Infantry Division.

DePue: Did you like that, your early experience in the Guard.

Blade: I did; I liked that. Then, that first year when I came back, then they moved me over to the wire section. So, I was a wire team leader my second year at camp, as a corporal.

DePue: What does the wire section do?

Blade: Well, in those days, we ran wire that has a coating on it from the OPs to the fire direction centers.

DePue: OP, observation post.

Blade: Observation post, yes. We also ran some wires within the batteries. Most of the batteries took care of their own, from the battery centers to the phones on the guns, but sometimes we did that as, well out of Headquarters Battery.

DePue: That sounds like it could be hard work.

Blade: Yeah it was, stringing that wire. We had big reels of wire. I don't remember how much was on them now, but we laid that. Then, of course, if some other vehicle or some other unit run across the wires, then they wouldn't have any communications, because they relied a lot on wire communications in those days, because the radios were not always that good. You'd have to repair the wire a lot of times.

DePue: Do you think that training you received, the first couple years in the National Guard, was pretty good?

Blade: Real good, I think. When I look back on it, that Sergeant Higgins did an excellent job in training us. I can relate to that, down the road a little bit, when I get on active duty, to talk about that.

He was really good. He wasn't really harsh with us or anything. Nearly all of us were farm boys. Farm boys just seem to pay attention to

what's going on, because their parents made them work pretty hard. Particularly in my case, there wasn't any reason to get out of line.

DePue: Why, I would think the nature of your experiences make it more conducive to fit into a field environment for the National Guard, working with machinery, working with tools, things like that?

Blade: Yes, it sure did. I guess, before we went to camp, we went to Monmouth Park to train…The only time we got paid was for Monday night, the two hour drill. But we got one day's pay for that. We also would be down there a lot of times on Wednesday nights, cleaning equipment or doing something like that, on our own gratis. I look back to think that the mothers or the wives or the girlfriends would be down there on Wednesday nights and, in some cases, the little kids running around, and the guys were cleaning equipment or getting ready for the next drill or something like that.

DePue: You mentioned you got a day's pay for two hours on Monday nights. What do you mean a "day's pay"?

Blade: Military pay. For two hour drill, we got one day military pay for that.

DePue: You mean, you're a private, so you're getting paid the equivalent of what a private would get for one day?

Blade: Yep. Take thirty times that, and that would be equal to the month's pay. My net pay, my first camp, was $34 for two weeks. There must have been some taxes came out, because it used to be $68 a month, but I believe it was '72 or something like that, a month, my first year. But some taxes or something must have come out of that.

DePue: Well, that had to help a little bit, supplementing pay you were getting otherwise?

Blade: Well, that's true. I was working at the factory when I joined the Guard. My supervisor in the factory was a sergeant in the Galesburg unit. So, we went to camp the same time. Camp Ripley, that year, coincided with when the plant shut down for vacation. So we didn't have to miss any work. But that just happened. I'm sure that wasn't programmed that way, because everybody didn't work at the factory.

DePue: You mentioned wives and girlfriends. Did you have one of those in 1954?

Blade: Yeah, I did. We got married in 1954, after I came back from camp.

DePue: You say, "We". Who's "we?"

Blade: Well, Marilyn and I. As Marilyn always said, my first priority was the Guard, (laughs) which related to that story all right.

DePue: What's Marilyn's maiden name?

Blade: Dugan, and her father was a barber.

DePue: Well, that's why you know so much about barbering.

Blade: Yeah.

DePue: He wasn't the barber who was buying land on the side, was he?

Blade: No, no. He was a sportsman, did a lot of hunting and fishing.

DePue: How did you meet Marilyn?

Blade: Well, we were in high school together. She was one class behind me, but we were in an English class together, I guess. Other than that, that was the only class I think we had together. I don't know, we had a junior/senior prom or something like that, and I guess then we started dating after that. I was a senior, and she was a junior.

DePue: That was two years later you got married, then?

Blade: Yes.

DePue: What did she think about your National Guard experience?

Blade: Well, I guess she probably thought that was all right, at the time, you know.

DePue: As long as the pay checks came?

Blade: Well, (laughs) probably. In those days, we only got paid every three months.

DePue: Oh, really?

Blade: Yeah, that went that way into the '60s before we got away from getting paid every three months. Maybe [it] might be even have got into the '70s, maybe.

DePue: I know that in 1956, you decided to make a change in your life. What was it that happened in 1956 that caused you to think about going on active duty?

Blade: Well, in those days, you could be a member of the Guard, but when your draft number came up, why they would draft you. There was an opportunity to go on active duty, out of the Guard. You could go on active duty with your rank, initially.

DePue: What was your rank in '56?

Blade: I was a sergeant.

DePue: E-5, sergeant

Blade: E-5. I was a wire chief then. The neighbor was on the draft board, and he told me one day, he says, "Gene, your number is about ready to come up on the draft, so you need to be thinking about something." You know, because he was aware of what I was just talking about, applying for active duty. So, I go to the unit in Monmouth and told them what was going on, and I need to apply for active duty. So, they applied for active duty or put my paperwork in. You would be accepted. They accepted everybody, out of the Guard and in the Reserve as well.

So, I left on Christmas Day. The twenty-sixth of December of '56, I had to report to Fort Leonard Wood. One of the fellows that was in high school with me went with the Guard to Korea and then turned around and got out of the Guard and went back on active duty again. He was home on leave in Monmouth. We all were friends from high school days and the Guard. He was going to Fort Chaffey. So, he said, "Well, Gene, why don't you just ride with me to Fort Leonard Wood, and I'll drop you off?"

So, we left at midnight on Christmas night, the twenty-fifth, and drove down to Fort Leonard Wood. I stopped off in a motel and slept for a little while, then reported that afternoon to Fort Leonard Wood.

DePue: On Christmas Day?

Blade: Day after. I left home on Christmas Day or midnight that night, yeah. Yeah, that's when we had to report in, so kind of unusual, nevertheless. It is unusual when you look back at it, but that's what it was. So [I] reported in there, and there were several others. I always remember a cadre room in the end of one of them old barracks, down there.

There was a David Bonk, a Sergeant David Bonk from Minnesota National Guard, farm boy. We were the two ranking members. We were put in the cadre room at the upstairs of the barracks. So, we had to put out the details for the guys to…There had to be a CQ [charge of quarters] awake all night. Somebody had to fire the furnaces to keep the barracks warm, so we had to assign that duty out. They gave us a little money down there. I think they called that a "flying ten." I think we got $10, about the first or second day we were there and that little bit of end processing.

Then, about…I guess we were there about a week, right after New Year's, when we loaded on a troop train and shipped to Fort Carson. David Bonk was not on there, for some reason. I really don't know what happened to him.

DePue: What did you do for that first week?

Blade: Mostly processing, and we they issued us clothes. We got all our clothes and boots and all of that stuff and we did—

DePue: So, no training or anything like that?

Blade: No, it was all in processing. We did a physical. I had a physical before I left home, but I also got another physical there. We got shots and issued clothing and stuff like that.

DePue: Were these mostly National Guardsmen that you were with?

Blade: Guardsmen and Reservists and also draftees, a lot of draftees in there. Wasn't too many of us. At Fort Leonard Wood, it was just very few of us. I believe there were only three of us that were out of the National Guard. The other fellow was a corporal. He was out of one of the Dakotas. I don't even remember his name. I remember David Bonk's name, because I guess we had to do a lot of things together or something.

DePue: It's so different from what you typically would envision for what basic training is supposed to be. But I guess you haven't gotten to basic training yet.

Blade: We hadn't got there yet.

DePue: Let's get to the next step, then.

Blade: We loaded on a troop train. There were troop trains during World War II that were specifically for that. They had probably been used in World War I, because they were old, dusty and dirty. There was fifteen cars on this one. It had two eating cars on it, in the center. We filled the train up.

There's an active Army major and an active Army lieutenant and a corporal on there—I don't know where he came from, if he was a Guardsman or Reservist or what. I don't know that now—and myself. So, I was the NCOIC in charge of the troop train. The officers, when they got on the train, they were both intoxicated. They stayed in their room the entire time and were intoxicated when we got off the train three days later at Fort Carson, Colorado.

DePue: How many people on this train?

Blade: Well, there was fifteen cars of troops on there, and I assume there were probably fifty to a car. I don't know. I had a sleeper, a bunk, and the porter come and waited on me. But I had to make sure that people got to the meals. I had to make them get…But all the rest of them were just in regular seats on the train, except I had a Pullman, where I was at.

DePue: So, if I can get this right here, in your National Guard experience, you were in charge of what, five or ten people?

Blade: Prior to that?

DePue: Yeah.

Blade: Well, as a section chief, maybe fifteen, somewhere in there.

DePue: So, now you're in charge of a couple, 300?

Blade: Well, yeah probably. It could have been 700. There was a lot of people on there. You know, it was fifteen cars, and I think a train would be fifty people to a car. They're all double seats.

DePue: Hopefully, they were fairly cooperative. How many times did the train stop, on the way to Fort Carson?

Blade: Well, we stopped at Kansas City. I'll never forget that. We stopped there, and, of course, these young recruits, jumping off the train and hollering at them, and trying to keep them, so they'd all get back on the train. As far as I know, everybody got back on the train, but that was a very big challenge, to make sure and get them back on the train. They weren't supposed to get off the train, but they did.

DePue: Did you have a roster of the people who were supposed to be on that train?

Blade: No, the officers had that. I did not have a roster. No, did not. The other corporal was pretty inexperienced too, I think, because he kind of looked to me for directions so—

DePue: What did you think about being stuck to be in charge of this? It had to come as something of a surprise to you?

Blade: It was a surprise, a big surprise. I had never had any responsibilities like that before but lived up to the challenge the best I could (laughs). When we got to Fort Carson, they loaded us all on, as the army calls them, cattle cars. They were no more than flatbed, semi-trailers with sides, about four foot side boards, on them. We got on those, and it was snowing to beat the band. From there we went to…Each semi, I guess, took us to a barracks, and we got off at that particular barracks. I don't know how that…But that's how that was. Then we did some more processing there.

DePue: Is that where you were greeted by a drill sergeant?

Blade: Yes, it was, after the first day, I guess. We got there towards in the evening, -- in the afternoon some time.

DePue: This would have been January, it sounds like?

Blade: It would have been January, yeah, early January, I think, probably about the fifth, maybe the fourth or fifth of January, I would guess. I know, New Year's Eve, we couldn't do anything out of line New Year's Eve, but we were at Fort Leonard Wood on New Year's Eve. But, boy we were out of there. The next couple days, we were gone on the train. It was two nights and three days on the train, going out there.

DePue: Do you remember that drill sergeant when you got to Fort Carson?

Blade: Well, I do. Leading up to that then. [They] put us out to a unit, a kind of a repo company that people are waiting on orders and one thing or another, there. When I got there, the first day why there was fifteen of us sergeants that were in either Guard or Reserve. We were all the same rank.

So, this Army corporal was in charge of our squad, or I guess we were about half a platoon or two squads or whatever. They formed us all up, at the end of the day, and marched us down to classification and assignment building. They told us there was some work down there. We was going to half to do some work. I was already a little bit skeptical, and I….This corporal was a big fellow.

So, we get down there, and I kind of get to the back of the line. It was an odd number and everybody else lined up in pairs when they got in there. I guess he told them to do that, but somehow I thought I was going to be at the end of the line. He paired them off, and he says, "Well, Smith, here's a broom, and Jones there's a mop. You two go clean such and such buildings on this floor," [He] paired them all of with a broom and a mop and told them to go clean that.

When he got to me, why he says, "Well, Blade, here's a broom and a mop, and you go up there in that far corner and clean that up." I says, "You know, if you want that clean, you'd better go up there and clean that yourself, because I don't work for a corporal." [That] really upset him, of course. All the rest of the sergeants was like a bunch of mice. They never stood up for me. They was just looking to see what was going on.

So, bottom line was, I wouldn't go move, and he wouldn't do it either. So, he said, "We're going to go see the company commander." So, we went to see the company commander. He couldn't make a decision either. So we ended up going to see the battalion commander. Why we didn't go see the first sergeant, sergeant major, I don't know.

We go into the battalion commander's office and the company commander told him what was going on. And the battalion commander said that, "Blade's right. He's a sergeant. He ought to be in charge, not the corporal." So, that poor corporal did get to clean that room. Went back down there, and I was the guy marched them all back. I was in charge.

Well, the rest of the Sergeants then, they was all looking for good deals from me. But, either the next day or the day after that, they moved me out of there and sent me over to the, I guess, training company or training battalion. I was basic training instructor then, so I'm probably…I jumped something there. I didn't either. I did, partially.

When we first got there, then we turned around and we did the…I n those days, it was eight weeks of basic training. We did the last week of basic training, which we had to go on the rifle range, and we had to go and shoot the machine guns. We did all of those kind of things. If we passed, we kept our rank. If we didn't, we went back to an E-2. I got through there in great shape and had the highest score of our group.

As soon as that was over with, which was about one week, then they sent me over to this repo company. Then I was there and got into that with the battalion commander and everything. I think, the very next day I was gone. They sent me over to basic training then.

DePue: So, if you hadn't passed all of those tests, going to the rifle range and the machine gun range and things like that, you would have gone through basic training, like any new recruit would have gone through?

Blade: I would have been back to week one basic training. [There] wasn't very many of us [who] passed that, a very small number.

DePue: Then your early military experience on active duty was quite unique, as well?

Blade: Well, it was. I think, as I said earlier, that Sergeant Higgins, had he not done such a good job training us, I never would have gotten through that, without having to go all the way through basic training again. I mean, I just…Everything we had to do, I just knew how to do it and already had done it, I guess.

DePue: From what you've said, you've become a trainer yourself.

Blade: That's correct now. What they did with me very shortly thereafter, we worked a little bit with the basic training .Then I started out with a few of them, on their first week of their basic training. But, I didn't do that more than a day or two. Then, they put me in charge of… I was an NCO [non-commissioned officer], and then we had an officer in charge of the transition range. What do we call that range, where they shoot the live fire over you at night, and you have to crawl on your belly?

DePue: I never had that experience.

Blade: Well—

DePue: But you were in charge of that range?

Blade: Yeah, I was, for the basic training. So the various basic training, they'd come out to that range, and they'd go through there in the daytime first and train. You know, we'd run them through there, and they'd shoot the machine guns. Then, they'd bring them back. In their basic training, they would do live fire over them. It was live fire in the daylight, too, but at night, they'd see them tracers, you know, every fifth one was a tracer. Of course, they had to go through that. So, that's basically what I did then, for the basic training, pretty much so. That was my main job, more or less.

Now I was also an NCOIC [non-commissioned officer in charge] of a barracks, as well, and I had a lot of basic trainees in there. They'd have to polish their boots and make their beds and do all them kind of things.

DePue: How much training did you yourself get to one, run this range where there's live fire rounds being shot over the top of people, and if they panic they get killed, I would assume, and two, being in charge of a barracks full of brand new recruits? I would think you would have to take some training yourself to learn what you need to do with those recruits.

Blade: I didn't have any training to take care of them troops. Now, the transition range—if that's what we call that—I did that during that week of what we were doing, when we went out there. You know, testing us like the eighth week of basic training. I went through that, and at the time, I got through that thing, lickety-split. Of course, my theory was to get through there as fast as I could (laughs) and get to the trench on the other end. That's human nature.

So, when I went out there and was NCOIC of that range, probably went out there with one day, with training on that and a night or something, probably. From then on, it was a major in there on that range and myself, .and we did that. Now see, I'm only doing this for about four or five weeks, maybe a little more than that, because at the end of February or early March, I came home on leave, on orders to go to Hawaii.

DePue: I guess what surprises me is that it seems so unorganized and unstructured, because I'm sure that after you departed, they would have found somebody else to stick in there for a short period of time, as well?

Blade: I'm sure they did. I'm sure that's what they did, yeah. Of course, you know, this was over fifty years ago.

DePue: And you weren't in the position to question or argue or complain about it, were you?

Blade: No, I was just a farm boy, pretty cooperative, you know.

DePue: Were you surprised by the way this all unfolded?

Blade: Well, I think I was pretty proud, I guess, to think that I was in charge of these things, and things were going well enough. But a lot of other people around, I guess, to help indoctrinate that.

The barracks, when I was doing that, I had a little trouble with a one of the recruits, who was a grandson of the Brown Shoe Company in St. Louis. When we had inspection on a Saturday morning, he falls out in patent leather boots. I don't know if I hardly knew what a patent leather boot was, let alone to see one. So consequently, that looked pretty sharp, shining boots you know, because you see patent leather on ladies' shoes, back in those days, but I never saw anything on men's shoes, let alone a pair of military boots with that. But [I] pulled his pass, and then he was pretty irate about that. So, he was going to kill me. [He] put the word out that he was going to kill me for pulling his pass. He tried to leave post anyway.

In those days, at Fort Carson, they checked everybody's pass to leave post. That was normal routine. [In] later years, that's been much more lax. But, we called ahead and told all the gates, you know, what this kid was trying to do, because his pass had been pulled. So he tried it. Well, they brought him back, and of course, he was pretty irate with me. So, he came in my room at night, and I was aware of what he was thinking about. He had a pipe in his hand, and I had loosened all my blankets and acted like I was really sleeping hard. He stood there for a long time with that pipe in his hand, and finally he walked out of my room.

The next day, he wanted permission to talk to me. He told me he would never cause any more trouble; he'd do anything I wanted. He says, "You're trying to get me straightened out." I often wondered whatever happened to him, but he was no problem from then on.

DePue: And it sounds like he pretty much figured all of this out himself, didn't he?

Blade: Yeah, yeah, I think so, yeah. We didn't have any psychiatrists or anybody for him to talk to.

DePue: Well, it doesn't sound like you had a big confrontation after he was standing over your bunk either.

Blade: No, no he didn't. He decided in his own mind, right there that he was going to go back and go to bed. I was prepared but— (laughs)

DePue: Were you kind of watching out of the corner of your eye with him holding this—

Blade: Oh yeah, I was. Like I said, I was acting like I was asleep, but I wasn't. I was laying on my back watching all that. You could hear the door open, coming in, somebody coming in. I guess you're conscious of what's about to happen or thinking about.

DePue: What were you going to do, if he started to swing at you?

Blade: Well, my blankets were all loose, so those were going to try to totally cover him and neutralize him. (laughs)

DePue: You were going to neutralize him? (both laugh)

Blade: Yeah.

DePue: How long were you at Fort Carson?

Blade: Well, probably until about the end of February or early March, something like that. Then I had orders to go to Hawaii, and, of my group—

DePue: I take it Marilyn was back in Illinois during this?

Blade: She was. And there was forty of us on orders and many of them were basic training people, but there may have been some more military people. Forty of us were on orders, and as I always say, thirty-nine of them got to go to Korea, and I had to go to Hawaii. That's the way it worked out.

Now, during that same timeframe, Marilyn's sister's husband's uncle was a bird colonel at Fort MacArthur in California. One day I get a phone call. He had called there, and so I had to go report to the Battalion Office, commander's office. Then they called and talked with him. He talked to me and asked me if I had to go overseas, where I would like to go. I told him I'd like to go to Hawaii. Now, he always said, after that, he had nothing to do with that. I don't know if he did or he didn't, but anyway, it looked kind of funny, suspicious, but we don't know if that's true or not.

DePue: You said most of the people, though, headed to Korea?

Blade: Of the forty of us on order, thirty-nine went to Korea, and I went to Hawaii. Now, I've got a wire MOS [military occupation specialty code] at this point.

DePue: Well, this is early in 1955, correct?

Blade: No, '57.

DePue: Okay, early '57. I'm sorry. So, this is several years after the end of the Korean War.

Blade: Not too far after, you know, three, four years.

DePue: But, by that time, there was just as many people heading to Germany as there were to Korea, certainly.

Blade: Oh yeah, probably more, probably more going to Germany, yeah.

DePue: Any idea why that particular class was destined to go to Korea?

Blade: I have no idea, and that really wasn't a class. I mean, I don't know how forty of us was…Well, I mean, we was all ranks, I guess. I don't know about that, but the bulk of them were recruits or E-1s, E-2s.

DePue: In the short time you're at Fort Leonard Wood, and you get a lot of responsibility and end up being in charge of the train. Then you get to Fort Carson; you have the same kind of experiences. Was there any conversation at that time about, perhaps, you should become an officer?

Blade: That was when I was at Fort Leonard Wood. They asked me there, because they gave us another test, AFQT [armed forces qualifying test] test, or whatever, I think that's what they called it. I scored high. I wasn't the only one that they talked about, but I was…they called me and talked about that. I didn't think I knew enough about that to want to do that, at that time.

DePue: Really?

Blade: Really, and a little more to that, back when I was in the Guard in Monmouth, they talked to me—Sergeant Jeb, who you knew—talked to me about, I ought to take the Ten Series, which was a correspondence course you could take and become a lieutenant, second lieutenant. But there again, that's what I told him at the time, that I just didn't think I knew enough to be that. So I didn't want to do that. After I got on active duty, I could have got along alright. (both laugh)

DePue: You mean, if you'd become an officer?

Blade: Yeah, after some that I saw, you know.

DePue: Well, we've been at this for a little bit over two hours, and this is—

Blade: Have we? Oh my…

DePue: … this is probably a logical place for us to stop. We can pick it up next time, talking about your experiences in Hawaii, on active duty then.

Blade: Okay.

DePue: So, thank you very much, Colonel. It's been fun. I took quite a bit of time talking about growing up on the farm, because that's something we're very interested in, as well, about agriculture, and the way it was practiced, and the way it's practiced in Illinois. So, thank you again.

Blade: Most welcome, and a lot of farm boys were in the military in those days.

Interview with Gene Blade
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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday, January 18, 2013. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and I'm here today with Colonel Gene Blade, in the residence of Colonel Blade. Good afternoon, Sir.

Blade: Good afternoon. Glad to have you here.

DePue: Well, we'll see if we can get it right this time. We had a technical problem, which I always hate, but it looks like we're sailing smooth. So, speaking of sailing, when we finished the last interview, you were just finishing up your training, prior to going to Hawaii in the first place. So, why don't you pick it up from there for us?

Blade: Okay, you're talking about the training at Fort Ord?

DePue: I thought you were at Fort Carson.

Blade: I was. Okay, I'm with you now. We then drove our personal car, my personal car, to Hawaii, because in those days, as a Sergeant E-5—

DePue: To Hawaii?

Blade: No, to Oakland, California, so that we could put the car on a ship and ship it.

DePue: Okay.

Blade: But in those days, there were only seven enlisted grades. E-7 was the highest, and they considered E-5, E-6 and E-7, which I was an E-5. That was considered the top three graders, so you got a lot of privileges that the others did not. One of those was you could go with your wife and your automobile, at government expense, to overseas deployment. So, that's why that situation was.

DePue: You got to the Oakland area, you say?

Blade: Yeah, then we reported in to Fort Mason, which was at San Francisco—a small post, which is no longer there—and processed for about a week or so. We did the processing at Oakland Army terminal. Then we were ready to depart and go to Hawaii.

Now, most of the people went over on a troop ship, but my MOS was for a wireman. They wanted to get me over there in a hurry, I guess, as a wireman so, wire team chief, so they put us on a luxury liner, because it was quite some time before another troop ship would have gone over there. I believe there was four or five other military couples on this luxury liner, going to Hawaii. We were fortunate enough to be one of those.

DePue: I know that you were only married a couple of years. Does this get to pass as a honeymoon for the two of you?

Blade: Well, I think it could be considered that, paid for by the government. (both laugh) But it was a very nice trip. We didn't spend a whole lot of time on the lower level. During the day, there was a lot of activities. That ship also had a swimming pool on a upper deck and, matter of fact, I got a sunburn on my head, up there watching everybody swim and probably did some swimming myself, as well.

DePue: Now you mentioned your car. Is the car loaded up on the ship, as well?

Blade: No, the car is on another ship, and it is not on that ship, but it arrived a short time after we got to Hawaii. We didn't have to wait very long for it.

DePue: Were you also able to ship over your household goods?

Blade: We shipped some hold baggage over, and having not been married a whole lot of time, we had stored all of our furniture at my folks' home on the farm.

DePue: What was Marilyn's attitude about having to go to Hawaii, of all places?

Blade: Well, I think we were both excited about that, really. I think, as I may have mentioned before, there was forty of us on orders, and thirty-nine of them got to go to Korea, and I had to go to Hawaii. So, I guess we lucked out of that one.

DePue: I do recall that discussion. Okay, tell me about the arrival in Hawaii itself.

Blade: We arrived, like I said, on Palm Sunday, and the military was there to meet the ship. This other couple and I got very well acquainted going over, as he was a warrant officer with thirty plus years in and took a reduction in rank, back to a master sergeant, so that they could do their last tour in Hawaii. He ended up being a sergeant major of the 21st infantry battle group.

DePue: Do you remember the name of the ship that you went over, the luxury liner?

Blade: The luxury liner was the SS Leilani.

DePue: Leilani

Blade: Uh huh, and that was spelled L-e-i-l-a-n-i.

DePue: Well, it sounds like a good Hawaiian name.

Blade: It is, definitely, yes. It was part of the Mason Line, I believe, was the big owners of those ships, yes.

Gene & Marilyn Blade celebrate when leaving Hawaii in August, 1958. They returned on the SS Leilani, a commercial ocean liner.

DePue: When was it that you actually got to Hawaii?

Blade: Palm Sunday in April 1957, which I believe was the fourteenth. I wouldn't say I was quite right on the date, but awful close.

DePue: Well, just remembering that it was Palm Sunday—that would stick in your mind. Did you get to go to religious services that day?

Blade: No, we did not. We got in…didn't get in first thing in the morning. We got in midmorning, and then the military met us there. Marilyn and I and this other couple, First Sergeant Perkins, and his wife. June was her name, first name. We then went to—Schofield Barracks, and there they put us up in enlisted

quarters. We stayed there then until, naturally, on Monday we started processing in. We stayed in those quarters until our car came in.

Then, Marilyn and June were downtown in Honolulu, and they found an apartment there for us, because we got on the housing list, but we were way down the list. As I was ready to ship out, to come back home two years later, why our name came up on the housing list.

DePue: I would guess that, if you're a young sergeant today looking for an affordable housing arrangement in Honolulu, you're out of luck. What was it like at that time?

Blade: Well, fortunately, we were able to get an upstairs, studio apartment, across the street from Fort DeRussy, right down Waikiki beach. I'm not for certain what we paid per month, but I believe it was $65 a month, at that time. Marilyn and June had found that apartment for us.

In those days, we had to meet reveille and retreat, at the military installation. So, we used to catch the bus at Fort DeRussy, at 4:00 in the morning. It took about an hour to get out to Schofield Barracks. The military furnished transportation for everyone in the military, assigned in 25th Division at Schofield, bus trips to and from the base every day.

Now, in the mornings, there was more than one leaving, and in the evenings, there was…generally after retreat, there was a group of buses that left from the various quads at Schofield. But then, there was also was a second bus that left around 7:30 in the evening, if you had extra duty or something like that to bring you back to Fort DeRussy.

DePue: It still sounds like it's a pretty long day for you.

Blade: Oh it is, very long days, yes. We had a lot of training and everybody had to stand, like I said, retreat and reveille.

DePue: In gorgeous Hawaiian weather every day.

Blade: It certainly was; although, it was rainy season when we first got there. Rainy season was finishing, more or less. In those days, they used to guarantee people air fare over there. If it got below sixty-eight degrees any day, why that day was considered to be a free day (both laugh).

DePue: Sixty-eight degrees, holy cow. Tell me what unit you were assigned to.

Blade: I was assigned to Echo Battery of the Eighth Field Artillery Battalion, in the Division Artillery. They had just changed that over to the Pentomic Division. The 105 Battalion had five batteries, and the Pentomic Division had five battle groups. So, there was one battery assigned to each battle group, as direct support of the 105s. Then the other battalion, which was the 21st Field

Artillery Battalion, had the eight inch 155s [155 mm howitzers] and the Honest Johns [rockets of that era] in it. That was the general support.

DePue: Being assigned to Echo Battery, does that mean you're assigned to that fifth battle group?

Blade: That was the 5th Battery, firing battery, and we were assigned the largest numbered battle group. That battle group was the 35th.

DePue: That was the name of it, the 35th Battle Group?

Blade: Yes. They had a nickname, but I'm not positive what that is, now.

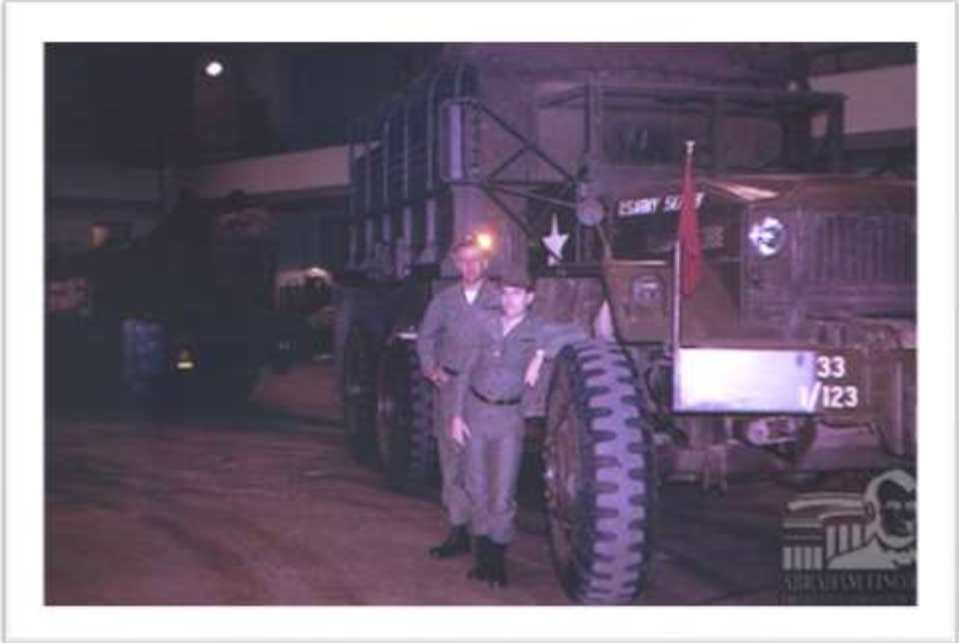
DePue: For people who are familiar with the way the military is organized, but they don't necessarily know a lot about the military's organizational history, this whole arrangement would baffle them, I would think. Tell us more about the whole concept behind the Pentomic Division.

Blade: Previously, there were more than one 105 Battalions. They consolidated all of those into one 105 Battalion.

DePue: Now, when you say 105 Battalion, tell us what you mean.

Blade: 105 howitzers.

DePue: 105 millimeter howitzers?



Capt. Blade & Lt. McIntyre "A" Battery Commander & EO, stand next to the prime mover for an 8" howitzer (in the rear) in 1968.The unit changed flags from being "A" Battery, 1st BN 123rd FA, 33rd Division to "C" Battery, 2nd BN, 123rd FA and 47th Infantry Division and turned in their 8" guns for 105 mm howitzers.

Blade: Yes, 105 millimeter howitzers. In those days, most of those firing batteries previously had six howitzers per battery. We had eight howitzers per battery. So, the battalion had forty 105 howitzers within the battalion. Earlier, I believe, most of the battalions had three batteries, with six howitzers each in them, if I'm not mistaken, prior to that.

DePue: This was all part of the 25th Infantry Division, correct?

Blade: That is correct.

DePue: At that time, the 25th Division was strictly what they would call a light division or a dismounted division?

Blade: That's right. It was not a mobile division; that's right.

DePue: Nor airborne or air assault?

Blade: No, no, mechanized I should have said, instead of mobile, but yes.

DePue: Well, you're probably wondering, because I know this subject pretty well myself, but most people who might listen to it might be perplexed by the whole thing. But, the Pentomic Division concept is something that has intrigued me. Do you know the rationale behind reorganizing the Army around these battle groups, rather than the old regimental structure they had for World War II or what we had for brigades, beyond this point?

Blade: Well, not really. Troop-wise, as I recall, I think we had about 18,000 in the division, which [was] a pretty good size troop structure. I'm not certain what the old regiments had. Some of them, I think, were up as high as 23,000, if I'm not mistaken. You would know that better than I. But it was just a different concept, I guess. Let the battle groups fight the smaller battles, and they was equipped to have all the resources that the division did, only in a much small scale.

DePue: So they could, theoretically, operate independently, if they needed to.

Blade: Yes. Like we were Echo Battery, but also then, we had an engineering company with us, too. That would have been E Company of an engineering battalion, which there happened to be one them located right across the street from us. I've since ran into a fellow that was company commander of one of those engineer companies, across the street from us. Didn't know him at the time, but we've had a lot of good conversations about that.

DePue: What was your specific assignment in Echo Battery?

Blade: Well, that was rather interesting, too. As I said earlier, I went over with a wire team chief MOS. Originally, they thought I was going to arrive over there in January, and I didn't get there until April. So, they had filled that with

someone else, within the battalion to be the commo [communications equipment] person.

So, they took me up at battalion headquarters, right off the start, and asked me if I would be willing to transfer to fire direction center, which I'd never had anything to do with FDC before, other than I knew what it was. They assigned me as an intelligence sergeant, but they told me that the team chief for the fire direction center was going to be rotating out, later that year, and they wanted me to fill in that position when he left. So, I agreed to do that, as long as they gave me an equal, fair time to learn the job, which was rather challenging, but worked out very well for me.

DePue: When you first arrived, did anybody identify, "Hey, this guy's got a National Guard background?"

Blade: That is true. When I first reported in to Echo Battery,-that particular da, -why the 1st sergeant, I told him that I would like to go to NCO Academy. He looked at me kind of puzzled, and he says, "Are you sure you want to do that?" I told him that I did, and the reason was that I wanted to get up to speed as quick as I could, with the active component.

So, two weeks later, I reported in to NCO Academy at 25th Division. That lasted a month. I came out honor graduate, and after I got back to the Unit, why no one ever talked about getting the National Guard person stripes, because, even that two week time frame ahead of that, they all talked about, if they could get me busted, they could get my stripes. In those days, promotions were extremely slow, because they had RIFted [applied reductions in force] several officers, prior to that. So, that just fell in line, and I went to NCO Academy and came back. Why, no more problem there.

DePue: So, you arrived in Hawaii a sergeant E-5?

Blade: That is correct.

DePue: And they were trying to bust you down to a corporal or specialist?

Blade: Yes, corporal I suppose. Specialist, I don't believe the specialist came in, just a little bit later than when I first got there.

DePue: Can you imagine being officers, or even enlisted, being RIFted, but that's basically—

Blade: Reduction in force.

DePue: So, people who are given the boot, but in a ceremonial way, perhaps?

Blade: There were many that had been captains, majors, lieutenant colonels. We even one fellow who had been a bird colonel. He was reverted back to a sergeant E-

5 supply sergeant in one of the other batteries. What they did then, the officers, they RIFt them back to whatever their highest NCO rank was, prior to taking their commissions.

DePue: You might not know the answer to this, but I'll ask you anyway, since you're sitting here. Nineteen Fifty-Three, the Korean War ends. So, why is it that 1957, this reduction in force is going on at that time?

Blade: Well, that had happened a little bit before I got there, but as they were reducing the military, in a certain extent, they had too many officers that were staying on active duty, apparently, and/or some that weren't totally up to snuff, I guess, perhaps.

The other thing that was a little different…Now, as I said earlier, they combined these three 105 battalions into one 105 battalion, and those RIFts in the 25th Division, then, were not taking place army-wide. Each division artillery, they had to reduce their own strength. Same way with the infantry; regiments had to reduce that strength.

DePue: It sounds like moves like that would especially focus on reduction in some of the officer and the senior NCO grades.

Blade: That's right; it did, yes. Now, the NCOs, I don't particularly recall any of them being reduced or them talking about it. However, they may not have talked about that. I don't know. But the officers, we had had an S-2 sergeant at battalion, who was an E-7 before and a lieutenant colonel, reverted back. He had a hard time dealing with that. He still thought he was a lieutenant colonel, but he hated to take orders. We'll talk about that a little bit later, we could, about a deal with him.

Our S-3 was a reservist that stayed on active duty, a Major Marsh. He was a very sharp major S-3. He and I seemed to hit it off very good, right off the start, because there was very, very few National Guard people in the battalion. As a matter of fact, I only know of one other that came in after me, from the guard unit. The other one was a 1st sergeant that we acquired, later, who had been in the Puerto Rico Guard and had stayed on active duty, after Korea, as a 1st sergeant.

DePue: My organizational history is a little bit vague, but it seems to me this is the timeframe that Eisenhower is president at the time, and this is the timeframe that the military was increasingly emphasizing the nuclear and the strategic effect of having a nuclear-based force, which I think, implied that they could have a smaller conventional force, as well. Does any of that sound familiar to you?

Kind of way above your pay grade, but—

Blade: No it really does, because I think, as we mentioned earlier, we thought the divisions were around 23,000 before, and then they were down to 18,000, thereabouts. I think this may have shrunk that a little more, because they had a reduction in force for the enlisted, a little. While I was there, probably a few months later, they had two of them.

The first one, as I recall, if their AFQT test—and that was an intelligence test, more or less. Many of these folks were draftees, many from [the] World War II timeframe, as well as Korea. If that score was below seventy, total, then they were RIFted out of the military. The first RIFt that they had was somewhere, as I recall, somewhere in the vicinity of 1,500 to 2,000, they reduced out of the 25th Division, which was a significant amount.

DePue: Yeah, that's substantial.

Blade: A the same time, there was a discussion—which, again, was far above my pay grade—that they were talking about some officers that did not have college degrees. Well, they snooped into that, and they found out that there was some of them that was left over from World War II that did not have high school educations, although they were very effect. So, I never heard any more about that.

Then, they came along with another RIFt, probably two or three months after that. Then they'd raised that level from—I don't know what the next level was—eighty or ninety, but whatever it was, then they reduced some more out. As you could see that, a lot of those people you really felt sorry for them, because they'd been in there, and that's the only life they knew. They were good, always on time, worked hard and everything, but didn't have a real high IQ. But they still served the purpose

DePue: If they'd been around in 1939 or 1940, those are the types of people that the army built around, when they started into World War II.

Blade: Yeah, very true. The other thing the army did, in those days, was took care of their people. By that, I mean we had Sergeant Moszkowski, who was one of those type that got in. He was in Hawaii when the Japanese strafed Schofield Barracks in 1941. He was absolutely a nervous wreck, and the only thing he did was pulled KP or worked in the supply room. What they did in those days, kept those people, until they got their twenty years in, and gave them a retirement and discharged them.

We also had a Sergeant Hucks, who was in World War II in Europe and was underneath a tank, a German tank, in a foxhole. The German tank had pulled on top of the foxhole and sat there and fired for three days. He was absolutely a nervous wreck, as well, nice people. He too was a permanent in the supply room. He always had saliva dripping out of his mouth, but again, a

good worker, did a great job folding sheets and things like that. (laughs) [It] kept him busy.

DePue: What position did you come back, after you got out of the NCO Academy?

Blade: Then I…It would have been the end of May, I finished NCO Academy. Then, the first two weeks of June, they sent me to an intelligence school, as I was assigned as an intelligence sergeant. We learned how to read map photos and things of that type and various collection methods, at that level. By the first of July, we shipped out to the big island of Hawaii. There, we did field exercises and army training tests and things of that type. Then, the last, we were over there for eight weeks. During the middle of that, they provided R&R [rest and relaxation] for us, to go back to Hawaii.

That was graded-on performance, is how they did that. The people who really did an outstanding job, why they would get to go back, over a weekend. In most cases, they would either fly them back, or you would get to go back one way or the other on a LST [landing ship, tank]. You'd get, maybe, a three-day pass is what it amounted to. It didn't take but a day or two to go from an LST from the big island to the Island of Oahu.

DePue: It's a little bit classier to go on an aircraft, instead of going on one of those Word War II vintage LSTs?

Blade: Oh yeah, you're certainly right about that. (laughs)

DePue: Were you still the intelligence sergeant for the FDC?

Blade: I still was, at that time. The FDC chief went back on R&R, during the middle of that eight week timeframe. He had a new baby that was just a month or two old. When he got home, the baby was on the bed, all messy and starving and squalling. His wife had ran off with some other folks, and [he] couldn't find her. So, he never came back over there, because he left then on emergency leave and took the baby back to the mainland. He did, eventually, come back to the unit, after probably a month or six weeks. So, I immediately was put in [as] fire direction chief, at that point.

DePue: Why don't you tell us exactly what the fire direction center does, for those folks who don't know?

Blade: Well, what the fire direction center's mission is, to put steel on the target. To do that, you have to fire it three, five, seven, ten, fifteen miles away, and hit the target. So, it makes a big arch, from the time it leaves a weapon until it lands on the target. You have to calculate the weather conditions, the wind conditions and the amount of charge you put behind the projectile to get it to go there.

With that, it takes a lot of computations. In those days, we used slide rules and what we called a rizzo fan, which would measure the direction the fire went. In the military, you talk about an azimuth, where here we talk about, in civilian life, is directions east, north, west and south. We talk about putting that in degrees, where there, we put that in mils. Instead of 360 degrees in a circle, we have 6,400 mils in a circle. So, it gets down to pretty fine calculations.

Generally you do some test firing first, to get all the weapons calibrated with the weather conditions, and calculate that into your range K-factors, as we call it, to compensate for the wind and the weather and put steel on the target.

DePue: You guys were the brains of the artillery team?

Blade: I guess you would call it that, yes. You're generally back a little ways from the weapons. You don't have to be up next to them. You have wire communications with both them and the OP, which is the observation point position, which is the fellow way up front, very vulnerable to where he wants the steel to land and ammunition [to] land on the target, I guess.

DePue: It sounds like a fairly complicated job. So, how does the intelligence sergeant, who doesn't necessarily have all the requisite training to know to do these things, suddenly end up being the FDC chief?

Blade: Well, I think that's on-the-job training, (laughter) as the military calls that. And one thing about the military, when they assign you a job, why, if you don't already know it, you quickly try to figure out how to do it, because you never tell your boss, whatever rank he is, that you can't do something, because that just doesn't go, in the military. So, you figure out a way how to do it.

DePue: I know from previously talking to you, that you, not too much later after this, you were actually teaching fire direction.

Blade: That is correct. We were still firing World War II ammunition, so we never really had a shortage of ammunition. We had plenty of ammunition to practice firing with, and we did a lot of firing there. You know, and I think, looking back, you and I would go to a Guard camp, why I think if you had, maybe 300 rounds at a Guard camp, why that was all you had. It was not unusual for us to shoot 300 or 400 rounds a day. We did this under all kinds of different conditions and maneuvers and what have you. So, we had a good feeling of that.

DePue: You mean, conditions, you mean day or night, rain or—

Blade: Day and night and putting the trails and loose dirt and lava and digging. Have a dozer come in and put a low ground position and camouflage. [We] just had really excellent training, during that time.

One of the things I remember we worked on was, there we could see where the target was, because at Apocaloha training area in Hawaii was in between the two mountains of Manaloha and Mauna Kea. We were at an elevation of around 6,000 or 7,000 feet above sea level. When we had finished all the tests and what have you, why, we were still out doing firing exercises. I was involved when we were trying to figure out how we could get seven rounds of the 105 in the air, before the first one landed in the impact area.

So, we would fire the first one at high angle, which takes a long time, a minute or more of a 105, with charge seven, to get to the ground. Then, the next one, we would crank her down a little bit lower, so it'd get there a little quicker. Now these wouldn't all hit precisely the same target, but they would be close enough, so the visual eye would think they were all in line. We never changed the deflection, deflection meaning right and left of the tube. We just changed the elevation, so the lengths would be different.

We had perfected that. We would have the ammunition all loaded, and we'd have the powder bags in it, and everybody knew what the elevation was going to be cranked on the howitzer. We would start slamming rounds in there and pulling the lanyard, which hits the firing pin. We could get seven rounds in the air, before the first one hit. That was quite a novelty, everybody thought, and we had ammunition to do that with. (laughs)

DePue: Well, Colonel, it sounds like you really took to this job.

Blade: Well, I did. I enjoyed what I was doing, I guess. You know, I had to learn it, so I wanted to be the best I could at that. So then, the last two weeks of that training period, then we were evaluating the National Guard units.

DePue: Were these Hawaiian National Guard Units you were working with?

Blade: Yes, they were. They were from more than just on the one island. I mean, many of them were on the Island of Oahu, which was the highest populated. And there wasn't only artillery there. The infantry was there too and the mortars and what have you. But I evaluated the artillery unit. [That] was my thing, and I evaluated the FDC.

DePue: When was it that you actually were teaching fire direction? As I understand, at the Divarty [division artillery] level

Blade: That's a little later. I just got one more little story here to tell.

DePue: Okay, go ahead.

Blade: When I talk about getting the seven rounds in the air…When I finished evaluating one of the batteries in the Hawaiian Guard, the battery commander, name was Tom Ito, and all the Guard was really impressed how he could get seven rounds in the air. So, anyway, after the tests were over, we did a

demonstration for them. I showed them how to do all that. So, they were really impressed, as I said, with that.

Then, in 1980, I'm at Fort Lee, Virginia, and I run into a Colonel Tom Ito, who had just been assigned the USPFO [United States Property and Fiscal Officers] for Hawaii. I had just been assigned the USPFO from Illinois. At break time, we kept looking at each other and decided we knew each other. It had been twenty-two years since we'd seen each other. Now, we were both full colonels. (laughs)

DePue: Wow.

Blade: So, I got a little off the subject there, but I had to tie that in.

DePue: But you did have an opportunity to work at the Divarty level?

Blade: Yes, so when we came back from that exercise, then the units did some other…cleaned equipment, was busy cleaning equipment and getting ready for the holidays, I guess. We're [at the] end of August here. September, we're—

DePue: This is still of 1957.

Blade: Still '57. I got involved in some other things, I guess. One thing the division was good about, every Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, when we on Schofield, was recreational. So you would play basketball or volleyball, or you could go play baseball or go on the rifle range and shoot, just a lot of activities. So, we did that during that timeframe. Then, along about December, we were really getting busy training, start training again for the next year's training.

Then the S-3 had talked to me, and he wanted to move me up to Battalion FDC to head up Fire Direction Center there. At this time, they were doing a consolidation of FDC there, as far as for the eight-inch 155 and the Honest John. We were going to do a firing exercise for the civilian VIPs of the city. I ended up being the head of that FDC and putting all that together and doing the adjustment of the fire. This impressed the S3 [the battalion operations and training officer] at Division Artillery, as well as at the battalion. So, that's how I ended up being assigned then to Headquarters Battery.

After that exercise was over, in December, I'm reasonably sure, then I think, along about January timeframe, they decided they needed to have training in various parts. Then I became…For a month long, I was the instructor for Fire Direction for all of Division Artillery. That would last nearly about seven hours a day. For a month we would do that.

DePue: You were moving up very quickly, it seems.

Blade: I did. You know, I've thought about that many times, again after you and I were talking, but I was a young fellow, a guardsman, and knew the active guys would have loved to have my stripes. I wasn't going to let them outdo me, and I just got involved in a lot of things. I guess they would see…Most people aren't…wasn't as energetic as this young kid was. That's how I got in those things, I guess.

DePue: You talked about this timeframe, when you're putting on this exhibit, 155s, eight-inch, Honest John [free-flight rocket, capable of delivering a nuclear warhead]. This 155 millimeter howitzer, was that a towed howitzer?

Blade: Yes, towed howitzer. All these were towed weapons, yes.

DePue: Was that the Long Tom that we remembered from World War II era?

Blade: We did not have the Long Tom. We just had the Short Tube [a highly accurate weapon] 155.

DePue: Eight inch. Was that the World War II vintage?

Blade: Yes, it was. You know the one with the tandem duals on the back, yeah.

DePue: At least when I was in the artillery, that gun had the best reputation for accuracy. Was that the case you found?

Blade: Oh, it still was, yes.

DePue: And then, Honest John. You need to explain what Honest John means.

Blade: Okay, that's a rocket. The Honest John was fairly new at that time, back in 1957. And the Honest John, we fired that out into the ocean. We had put floating targets out there, and the Honest John…I'm not positive now. That's been a long time ago. I think that thing would go thirty some miles, if I'm not mistaken, the Honest John.

But, we used cement warheads in it, for the weight. They put cement in it to balance the weight. So, none of those were live rounds that we fired. They were all dummy rounds.

DePue: In combat, what had the warhead been, high explosive?

Blade: Would have been high explosive. You know, we had the atomic round, nuclear round, for the eight-inch, but we never worked with anything with nuclear round, in reference to the Honest John.

DePue: I think we're going to get into a discussion of the eight-inch atomic round, here in a little bit, but I've got a few more questions, between those times. So, there was 1958, when you moved to be the Headquarters Battery FDC chief?

Blade: That's correct.

DePue: What was your rank then?

Blade: I'm still an E-5. Somewhere along that timeframe, they put me in for promotion. We went before boards, and we did a board there at Battalion, Divarty and then Division, and then it went to USARPAC at Fort Shafter in Hawaii, was USARPAC, U.S. Army Pacific Headquarters.

When I got there, the bird colonel asked what my date of rank was. When I told him, he said…He really lost his temper and cancelled the board, before we even got into the interviews. He said nobody with that short a time of rank, data rank, should not be promoted. So, they held all the boards over again, and the guy that I beat out of the first board had eighteen years' time in grade as an E5. They gave him the promotion to E-6.

DePue: When you say, "all the boards," the boards were at what levels, again?

Blade: We started out, they had a board at Battalion, Division Artillery and then at Division, and then it went all the way to Fort Shafter for USARPAC Headquarters.

DePue: Fort Shafter, I'm not familiar with that one. But this is on Hawaii?

Blade: On Oahu, the Island of Oahu, yes.

DePue: So, you're stuck being an E-5 for a while more?

Blade: Well, that's true, although, by age, I was the youngest E-5 in the 25th Division, at one time. It was somewhere along this time, because there was a lot of discussion about this young…They used to call me the young sergeant. I was

Sergeant Blade stands outside his unit's Fire Direction Center Quonset hut at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii in 1958. Schofield Barracks was home of the 25th Infantry Division.

twenty-two year old. (chuckles)

DePue: Well sir, what were they calling you behind your back?

Blade: I have no idea. (both laugh)

DePue: One of the things that, oftentimes, units are looking for a soldier of the year, NCO of the year. Did you go through anything like that?

Blade: Yeah, I was nominated. They had a top NCO in Army, Navy, Marines and Coast Guard, there. Once a month, every month, there was a top NCO in each of those. I was selected as the Army's top NCO from Schofield Barracks one month. Then, the next week after that, you would go visit each of the other installations, the Army, Navy and the Air Force.

We were all supposed to go to the Navy and get on a submarine called the Steeple Jack. The day before we were to go on the Steeple Jack, they were out practicing some dives, and a destroyer hit the Steeple Jack and split it in the middle, and it sank. We were very, very fortunate they practiced the day before. (both laugh)

DePue: Well, hey, I would think that's not a career enhancing move, either for the destroyer commander or the submarine commander.

Blade: No, it certainly wasn't. There was a lot of investigations that arrived out of that, later. The two halves sunk, but one of the chiefs disobeyed an order from one of the officers and opened up a hatch, and they got…I don't believe there was any lives lost.

DePue: Wow.

Blade: He opened up that hatch, and there was—I'm just round number—forty some was in there, in that hatch that was split, that half. They all got out. So, they was going to court martial him for disobeying an order, but I think that got reversed. [I'm] pretty sure it did.

DePue: Because, if he hadn't, they would have lost forty lives?

Blade: Yeah, they would have. That's right.

DePue: It must have sunk in pretty shallow water, then.

Blade: You know, I don't know about that. It was somewhere close to Pearl Harbor. I do know that.

DePue: You're moving up so quickly. I got to believe that people were talking to you about becoming an officer.

Blade: I had an opportunity for a direct commission, I guess, more or less. There was two of us at division level that went through several boards, again, along in this time frame. Two of us could have got a direct commission. When I say, direct commission, I think we would have had to come back to the states, due to some schooling, most likely. But I was selected as one of those two, and I turned it down. My Father was ill, getting ill at the farm, and I was anxious to get back out and go farming again.

DePue: Well, there are a few things I want to talk to you about, before we get to that point in your career. This is an accompanied tour. What was Marilyn doing, because it sounds like you were in the field an awful lot of the time?

Blade: I was, and Marilyn, she was a buyer for the photo and jewelry for the Marine PX at Pearl Harbor. She made more money than I did. In those days, I think the fiscal year ended with the calendar year, way back in those days. I was making $240 a month. I believe, the first of January in '58, I got a big promotion in pay, to $280 a month. Marilyn was making, like, $300 or $310 a month, as a buyer at the Marine PX at Pearl Harbor.

DePue: Were you getting a housing allowance?

Blade: Yes, we did, but I do not remember how much that was.

DePue: And were you still living off-base, or after there for a few months, did you get on-base housing?

Blade: No. The waiting list, when we got ready to come home, my name came up to get on-base housing. So, we lived downtown in Waikiki.

DePue: So, thank God that you had some kind of housing allowance and probably ate a lot of your meals on Army money, huh?

Blade: Yes, and we had to pay for our meals, naturally, if we drew rations, you know, or pay for that. But I don't remember how much it was a day, but it wasn't very much, compared to today's standards.

DePue: Do you remember the holidays in Hawaii, either Thanksgiving or Christmas, because you're away from the family, now, for the first time, probably?

Blade: Yes. We had Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners were at the military base, and everybody brought their wives and kids to that. We really had a tremendous feast. Of course, we had no children, just Marilyn and I.

I always remember, Christmas dinner, why, one of the other sergeants, the sergeant of the guard, was assigned for sergeant of the guard on Christmas Day. I told him that I would trade that, do that, so he could be with his family. Then, in turn, I believe that I originally was scheduled for New Year's. So,

consequently, we traded…That's how we traded out. So, New Year's he got to pull my duty, and I got to go have a good time. (laughs)

DePue: So you've got to be more explicit. What did you do on New Year's Eve?

Blade: I honestly don't know, (laughs) most likely nothing, yeah. We did belong to the NCO Club. In those days, you had no choice. You had to belong to the NCO Club, although we belonged to the one at Schofield. But there was also…Fort DeRussy had a club down there, so we could go there, as well.

DePue: Was this a pretty nice club?

Blade: The one at Fort DeRussy was really old barracks and was not real nice, no. The one at Schofield was much nicer.

DePue: Were you there enough and seeing the other services, especially the Navy, perhaps, to see if Navy life was better than Army life in a lot of respects, or vice versa?

Blade: Well, not really. We would see those folks around but never really got that much acquainted with them. Except, we did get acquainted with another couple, a Navy couple. He was a Chief, and one day, one weekend, we used to…They lived downtown, Honolulu, as well. Then, the other couple I talked to you about that went over with us on the Leilani, we would get together, sometimes on the weekends, on Sundays, for dinner or that.

That chief invited us out to Pearl Harbor one time, and we ate on a destroyer. I never realized how much horsepower those chiefs had. They are really far more powerful than any NCO in the Army. They had chief's quarters, a special mess for chief's quarters, and he naturally was an E-7. E-6s could not go in there, strictly E-7s. [It] had to be the chief, so, very impressive.

DePue: We keep talking about E-5, E-6, E-7. That's the enlisted rank, and that's the number of promotions. So, everybody starts out as an E-1. You're next-to-nothing as an E-1, but E-7, in both the Army and the Navy, at the time, was the pinnacle?

Blade: That's correct, yes.

DePue: Now, we got E-9s.

Blade: Yes, well they had 8s and 9s, later. In '58 is when the 8s and 9s came in.

DePue: Oh, okay.

Blade: Yeah, but he was…I don't know if he was still a 7 or not, because some E-7s went to E-9 immediately, when they switched. Others went to E-8s, depending

a lot on what their rank was, how long they'd been in the rank, and what the various jobs was, because, like the command sergeant major, you could have been a first sergeant, and if you were the senior first sergeant in that area, you could have become the command sergeant major. So, you would have jumped from and E-7 to an E-9.

DePue: This is a point that's always confused me. What did they call and E-6 in '56 and '57?

Blade: Sergeant first class.

DePue: And that now is what would call an E-7.

Blade: That's correct.

DePue: Was there no staff sergeant rank at that time?

Blade: Yes. As an E-5, I had a rocker. Underneath the three stripes, there was a rocker under there. That was an E-5. They did not have three stripers without a rocker underneath it. Now, nowadays, when a corporal has two stripes, PFC one stripe, and a sergeant E-5 has three stripes, with no rocker underneath.

DePue: Well, I had never heard that. That's significant, big confusion then. So, you get from a corporal with two stripes, and then, again, when you get started, you get promoted to E-5, and you get a third stripe and a rocker.

Blade: Um hmm, that's correct.

DePue: Anybody who doesn't know that and is looking at these old pictures would be making the wrong assumption altogether, wouldn't they?

Blade: Well, they have a good chance to do that. You're right. Then, the E-6 had two rockers, and the E-7 had three rockers. Then, when we went to the E-8s and 9s, then we turned around and started having the little diamond in the middle for the first sergeant. Then we have the other crest in there for the…and then, I think, do we not have the sergeant major at Army level? Doesn't he have two diamonds, or something in there now?

DePue: He might. That's even since I've retired.

Blade: I'm not positive about that.

DePue: Was that something that the NCO rank got excited about, when they added the E-8 and E-9 positions and changed the way it worked?

Blade: Yes, there was a lot of discussion amongst the NCOs then, about that. So, they were going to get to be an E-8 or E-9. It was quite a significant jump in pay, as well.

DePue: This is kind of jumping back. I know you talked about the RIFts that were going on, both for officers and enlisted, it sounds like. But, I know I'm also supposed to ask you about a dumbbell discharge.

Blade: Earlier I had talked there about…When we released the people that had the AFQ IQ test, that's what they called the dumbbell discharge.

DePue: So, we've covered that already. Well, let's move on to what I'm fascinated about, in terms of your personal story. That's your role in the eight-inch howitzer and testing for the nuclear spotter round. Tell us that whole process.

Blade: Okay. So, we beefed up the FDC to twenty-seven people in the Fire Direction Center, and I'm the Chief of that. That goes back to this S-3 of the Battalion [who] was impressed with my FDC capabilities and having taught this for a month.

DePue: This is S3, being the Operations Officer for a battalion?

Blade: Yes, the Eighth Field Artillery Battalion. Also, in conjunction with when we put on that firepower demonstration, which you've heard of them doing at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, years ago. They don't do that today, because it costs too much money. But, we had put on a firepower demonstration for all the VIPs in Honolulu and around. Businesspeople came out to see that. We set up bleachers, and we had various targets. Then we had a PA system set up, and we had troops out there, putting these bleachers up.

As I recall, the bleachers held about 800 people. The reason I say that is we had a draftee in the unit that was a time study person. They were going to have all of these people—I forget now the numbers—to go set these bleachers up, and how many men it was going to take and how long it was going to take. This PFC went and told this colonel, he says, "You have way too many people. It won't take near that long. It will only take us this long to set those eight hundred people bleachers up. The officer didn't know what to say, but the PFC was correct. They sent all these people out there, and they got it finished in a matter of hours, instead of days (laughs), those bleachers, which was a lot of discussion in those days. Most people had never heard of a time study expert.

Now, back to me. So, after this firepower demonstration, I was selected by Division Artillery to be the chief enlisted computer person for all of this, and that went off. We went out and practiced, zeroed in all the targets. So, we put on the firepower demonstration. Everything hit the targets, because we'd done that the day before, you know. That made a nice impression with the public, and, of course, the S3 at Division Artillery at the Battalion thought I was a pretty nice guy that made all that happen.

So then, we start in on…They decided the nuclear spotter round should be tried overseas. So, they were going to fire the first nuclear spotter round,

out of an eight-inch howitzer, in the Island of Hawaii. Those had probably been accomplished at Los Alamos or someplace, previously. I'm unaware of that.

We have twenty-seven people in the Fire Direction Center, and we have all of these slide rules and all kinds of calculations to go on, because in meteorology, meaning weather, how that's going to affect this shell. We had practiced that for quite some time, and then we went to the big island again in 1958 to do this, put this demonstration on and also take some ATT tests, as well, Army training tests, with the weapons.

Maxwell D. Taylor was chief of staff of the Army. We had practiced; everything was going swell. Just before we were getting ready to do the actual test for Maxwell D. Taylor, I end up sick in the hospital, on the Island of Hawaii, with pneumonia. They went to talk to the two lieutenants that were also assigned to this FDC. They didn't know how to correlate all of this calculations from three different OPs and the timing and everything. So, they confessed that I was the only one who knew how to do all of that.

So then, the division artillery commander, the battalion commander and the S3 and they all come to the hospital to see me, to see if I had any ideas of how they could do that. I told them that, if they'd take me out in an ambulance, perhaps…If the doctor would release me, I could go out—because it took about two hours to calculate all of this—that I could do that, and then they could take me back to the hospital. So, that's what was decided.

When I went out there with the ambulance and got out of the ambulance, why Maxwell D. Taylor, Chief of Staff of the Army, shook my hand. I felt like ten foot high, I guess, with that. We did the calculations, and we beat the time, and the thing on target was perfect. So, [Taylor] shook my hand again, and I got back in the ambulance and went back to the hospital.

Now, this spotter round, we would fire that way off to the right or left deflection, first, and do all the testing, as we would talk about figuring in the range. Then, the actual test, we would go to the left, swing it, for example, to the left then, and shoot it at a different range. Then, as it would land, or go off, we'd see a poof of smoke. It was only a spotter round, and that was used for…If it had been real case, where we did…the test round would have been the spotter round, which would have been a poof there. Then, when we made the shift to the other direction that would have been an actual nuclear round, not just a spotter round.

DePue: Is all of that so you're not revealing your hand to the enemy, where they might be, where you might fire a nuclear round against them?

Blade: That is correct. That's why you use a diversion, off as far away as you can from where you're going to put the actual round, was the objective.

DePue: Anybody who's listening to this and has the standard understanding of what a nuclear weapon would be, are thinking to themselves, "Wait a minute, they're firing a nuclear round from a howitzer? That can't possibly far enough from me to be safe."

Blade: I believe, and I'm not positive, I think that maximum range for that is somewhere around 12,000 miles, not 12,000, twelve miles, I believe, ten to twelve miles. Does that sound right in your artillery days?

DePue: For an eight-inch? Well, I think, when I came along, it was closer to twenty miles.

Blade: That's with a different tube in it.

DePue: Well, probably so and different charges, because of the metallurgy for the tube.

Blade: Yeah, but that was the…I believe, at that time, was about twelve miles, I think. We put maximum charge in that, for distance.

DePue: But, when you first heard about this notion, did that go through your mind? Wait a minute, we're going to be firing a round that could have, eventually, a nuclear warhead on it?

Blade: Yeah, it sure did, and I can relay that we were all very concerned about that. We did a lot of effort, and the officers did, talking to the troops that this was all spotter round and all training. There was no nuclear round going out there. The first day that we go out to shoot the spotter round, we are all lined up, got the round loaded, ready to pull the lanyard, and I gave the command to fire from the FDC, because we had the FDC right by the weapon. This was the first time we were doing this.

The minute they pulled the lanyard, an earthquake hit, exactly at the same time. Everybody landed on the ground, and the trees shook around, and (laughs) then we realized what had happened. That was quite an experience. I'll never forget that, and I'm sure a lot of others wouldn't either, because they all thought the eight-inch howitzer had blown up, initially. (laughs)

DePue: Was it your understanding? If this was for real, and you guys did fire a nuclear round, that would be something that the blast effects wouldn't extend that far out?

Blade: We were told that they would not. That's correct.

DePue: I like the way you say that; we were told that. (both laugh)

Blade: Everybody was concerned, to a certain extent, about that. I guess, my later years, when I went to training for the prefix 5, which is nuclear deployment

officer, then I realized it was okay, if the wind wasn't blowing too far, (both laugh) too fast.

DePue: Well, that's a great comfort.

Blade: Yes, yes.

DePue: What other stories about your experiences and your time in Hawaii would you like to share with us?

Blade: Well, I guess, after we had done this exercise in '58 then, we were over on the island earlier in the year, in '58.

DePue: You say, "The island." This is the big island?

Blade: Big Island of Hawaii, yeah, the Pohakuloa training area is what they called that.

DePue: Say that again.

Blade: Pohakuloa. I would have to look up the spelling on that, but that's located between the two mountains, Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea, as I mentioned earlier. When we were over there in '58, after this exercise, again, the Guard came over, and we, again…We were only over there this time for one month, with the exception of some, and I was one of the exceptions.

We stayed over to evaluate the National Guard, again, for an additional two weeks. We were just a small cadre this next time that stayed. We had dropped a smoke round out of a helicopter at about 8,500 feet, where a Guard Battery was at, to see what they'd do, representing a simulated firing. Well, the smoke round caught the grass on fire, and we had to go put a fire out at 8,500 feet, in the mountains.

We're all young people. They loaded us in a deuce and a halfs [two and a half ton trucks] and got everybody they could mustered, to go up there to beat this fire out, with sacks and shovels. That was quite an experience.

The minute we jumped out of the trucks to run up the hill, it's probably eighty-five degrees and all this smoke. Remember, at 8,500, there's not near as much oxygen up there, and the fire starts coming towards us and my group. The people all got scared, and I said, "We'll run through the fire, because it's already burned on the other side, because we cannot outrun it." because the wind was blowing it towards us. So, I led the way through there, and everybody came through after me. They sure talked to me about that afterwards, about how afraid they were to run through that fire. But that was the thing to do. That was one experience, I guess.

DePue: I would think, because the depth of the fire wasn't that great.

Blade: That's correct; it was not, yeah. That little wall of fire was only, maybe five feet at the most, you know, but a lot of smoke. So, they could catch their breath after that.

The other thing about catching pneumonia, I guess, that I should have probably mentioned, is that there the temperature would be eighty, eighty-five degrees in the daytime, and during the night, when the sun went down behind the clouds, and we were up there at 6,000-7,000 feet, where the barracks were at, it would freeze a half inch of ice every night. It would get down to twenty degrees. And in the mornings, at six o'clock, why, it would be twenty degrees. By eight o'clock, when the sun was up, we was be back up to sixty or something already.

DePue: So that's how you ended up getting pneumonia, because of those wild temperature shifts?

Blade: Well, that's what they thought. I don't know if it was or not.

DePue: Well see, it proves the old adage though, doesn't it Colonel, that the Army can find the most god awful place to train, that even in paradise, they can find that place, huh?

Blade: Well, I think that's pretty true. It only rained there once a year, in between these two mountains, and there was a lot of lava ash there. Your boots would be dust, up over six, eight inches thick in places. I forget now how many tires we cut on the lava ash, because it's like glass. It was not unusual to hear tires blowing out, where they would make a turn, hit the edge of a lava flow, and it would blow a tire out, with just like a glass cut in it. Different training exercise, very good though.

Then they had some dust pockets, I guess, was kind of unusual. This had been like you see ashes from a furnace, but these areas would be, maybe eighty or two hundred feet in a circle. It looked just like powder out there, and it was like powder. If people would drive a truck, deuce and half, in there, it might sink four, five, six feet, and they couldn't get out. They would have to pull them out, because it would just sink like quicksand. It was just like floury dust, and that's where there had been a lava flow, sometime or another, out of there. That was the center of the burn. There was thousands of acres up there that was just nothing but lava fields, former lava fields.

DePue: Before you got the news about your father's condition, were you thinking that, "Boy, this is the life for me. I want to stay in the regulars?"

Blade: Well, I certainly had given that some consideration, I guess. But I really don't know how serious I was about. I certainly enjoyed what I was doing. I liked that and I'd thought about that, I know.

DePue: How about Marilyn? Had she taken to the life of an Army wife?

Blade: Well, I guess so. I guess…We enjoyed when we were over there. We had a good time, the two of us, and I'm sure we talked about that. But, I honestly don't know how serious we were about that.

DePue: And you mentioned before, you hadn't had any children by this time.

Blade: That's correct; we had not.

DePue: Well then, tell me about getting the news about your father and how that changed your plans, perhaps?

Blade: Well, that's when, I guess, [it] was just right about the time of the nuclear spotter round firing. I was on the big island, and he'd gotten overheated. My father was quite a bit older. He was forty years old when I was born. So, he was in his sixties, then, and just wasn't doing real well. That's when I decided that I would get back out of the service and go to the farm.

DePue: Did that fit into your plans, you think?

Blade: Well, I suppose, being a farm boy, you always kind of think you're going to be a farmer, perhaps. So, I think that probably fit into that, I guess, really.

DePue: When you did go back to the farm, what was the condition of that farm? Was it as you remembered, when you were working on it before?

Blade: Yep, yes it was, pretty much. They'd changed a little bit in that timeframe, I guess.

DePue: As I recall, when we talked about this last time we met, you described it as not necessarily the…It's not prime farm land; it's land you have to work a little bit harder.

Blade: That's right. It was a 160 acre farm, with 100 acres of tillable and sixty acres of pasture. We raised hogs and cattle and would feed all of the crop that was grown there, plus buy some more, in addition to that and raised our own calves and hogs and chickens.

DePue: When you first got back there, were you looking to expand the operation?

Blade: Well, yes. I think so. [I] always was looking at that. I guess, when I first got back, then my folks moved to Monmouth, and we naturally moved on the farm, when I got out of the Army. Then, I had also been working at the factory, before I went in the Army. So, I worked nights at the factory and farmed in the daytime. .

DePue: How about your National Guard experience? Did you go back to the Guard, as well?

Blade: As soon as I got back, I was released from the active duty. I joined the Guard right away. The battalion commander was a Colonel Sharp, who was a lieutenant colonel. He called me up to his office and told me I only had one more promotion, or only had…My next promotion was going to be a second lieutenant. He was not going to promote me as an enlisted person. I signed up to go to Illinois OCS, which was Officers' Candidate School. Illinois Guard had recently started that, so I would be going to class number three, which started, then, at summer camp in 1959, which was my first summer camp after coming back to the Guard from Hawaii.

DePue: You came back, took over the family farm, got yourself another job in the evenings at a local manufacturer, and joined the Illinois National Guard again. What was your rationale, the reason for going back to work at the factory?

Blade: Well, that was extra income, because, you know, I had borrowed some money to buy all the machinery out at the farm and the livestock and what have you.

DePue: You bought out your Dad?

Blade: Yes, I did. So, that cost me—doesn't sound like much money today, but that was $16,000 it cost me to buy the machinery and the hogs and the cattle on the farm.

DePue: Well, maybe it's none of my business, but I'm wondering, to many families that would been the inheritance, that you wouldn't have been expected to buy out your Dad?

Blade: Well, I had a brother that was…he was in the Navy at time. I think you need to be fair about things, I guess. So, that wasn't the case in my case.

DePue: So, you got the factory job to earn some extra pay?

Blade: Yeah, now I had been in the factory before. I worked there before, when I went on active duty. So I took a military leave of absence, which the Admiral Corporation provided, which was nice.

DePue: And what's the rationale behind joining the National Guard again?

Blade: I guess I liked the military, so that's why I went back to the Guard.

DePue: It wasn't about the money for you?

Blade: I don't believe so. I think it was more I really enjoyed the National Guard and the friendship and relationships with all the people there.

DePue: You're away from home as much on this new arrangement as you were when you were in the Army, aren't you?

Blade: Most likely, more. I worked third shift at the factory. We used to start at 11:00 at night, and we would be off at 7:00 in the morning. So, we'd work eight hours; that was a pure eight hour shift. There was no lunch hour there. We got twenty minutes for lunch hour, but we got paid for lunch hour.

DePue: When were you sleeping?

Blade: Well, I ran on about four hours sleep. I've always had a lot of energy, fortunately, (laughs) maybe. But, generally we go to bed about 6:00 in the evening and get up at 10:00. Then I was on the go until 6:00 the following evening. Did that, so…I had a lot of energy.

DePue: What did Marilyn think about this new lifestyle, living on the farm, with you gone almost all the time?

Blade: (laughs) Yeah, well, I don't know. We raised two kids out there on the farm. We did that, I guess, from 1959, took over the farm. Then, in 1964, November '64, I bought a tire business. Now, during that time…I ought to back up a little bit more, on the farm.

I worked at the factory from 1959 until 1962, and then I was able to rent some more farm land. So, then I quit the factory and farmed full time, quit the third shift. That was starting to wear on me anyway, three years of that. Another fellow and I both farmed, worked at the factory on the same shift. We were neighbors. We only lived two miles apart, and our wives used to get together in the evenings, because we were both sleeping. So, they would get together with the kids, and that worked out pretty well for them, I guess, keeping each other company.

DePue: Well, there's a different perspective. You're neighbors; you only live two miles apart. (both laugh)

Blade: Yeah, that's true, yes. We also then, the two of us—again we each had too much energy probably—we also started doing custom work. Here we are, both working third shift in the factory, and we're both farming, and we're also doing custom work. I quit in '62. In the spring of '62, I quit the factory. We had bought a two-row, self-propelled picker/sheller in 1960, in the fall of 1960 and did custom work with that.

DePue: What do you mean, custom work?

Blade: Well, other people didn't have a machine to do the harvesting, because this would pick the corn and shell it. Today, everybody doesn't even know what a corn picker is. But, in those days, this would pick the corn and shell it and put it in the bin.

DePue: So, you're only doing that, though, when you're harvesting?

Blade: That's correct. We also did baling, on halves, for people, because the two of us had rented some more pasture, and we had bought some stock cows, because they had a big drought in Texas, and we bought a bunch of stock cows to raise calves with. We baled a lot of hay, and we'd bale for farmers, for half. So, like I said, we were really run pretty…We didn't have to worry about weight in those days. (both laugh)

DePue: I'm wondering what you did when you were at the factory.

Blade: Part of the time I was a spray painter. [I] spray painted refrigerators, both of us did. Then, we ended up…They shifted some things around at the factory, did some modernization, so then we were both on a clean-up, and we used to clean up the paint booths at night, on third shift, and clean up all the equipment for the new shift, when they came in in the mornings.

DePue: You've talked a little bit about what you were doing in the Guard, but what unit did you join; where was it based?

Blade: Oh, when I came back, I joined the unit in Monmouth, which was Headquarters Battery for the First Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Battalion.

DePue: First Battalion, 123rd?

DePue: Yes, and they had 155 howitzers, then.

Blade: Were they the same type of 155s you had in Hawaii?

DePue: Yes, that's correct, yes. The firing batteries…They had three firing batteries. One of them was in Galesburg, one in Galva, and one in Macomb. Headquarters Battery was in Monmouth, and Service Battery was Headquarters and Service together, but then they moved Service Battery and split it off and made Service Battery in Macomb.

Blade: So, this was definitely not the pentomic design that you had in Hawaii.

DePue: No, you know, they talked about doing that for the Guard, but the Guard's always behind the regular active duty. It never materialized, because the regular Army did away with that. I don't know what year they did that, but the Guard never, ever got there.

Blade: Now, we had another reorganization, very short in here. About 1960, we no longer had 155s in the battalion. They switched then, and we had the eight-inch in Galesburg. Macomb was the Honest John Battery. Then Galva was not party of the 1-2-3 Battalion, First Battalion of the 123rd Field Artillery.

Galva, I believe, at that time, either changed to some other type of equipment, or they became part of Rock Island. I'm not for certain. Galva and Kewanee have switched, through the years. As you well know, when you

were writing the legend of all of that, (laughs) they've done a lot of switching between artillery and transportation and chemical and what have you, up there.

DePue: I didn't know that the Illinois National Guard ever had Honest John, though.

Blade: Yeah, we did, in Macomb. Meyers didn't tell you about that?

DePue: Well, he might have, and I've just forgotten. We're talking about Lou Meyers, who was the former chief of staff.

Blade: Yeah, yes he was the battery commander of the Honest John. Now, I'm the only one, I believe, that at that time, had been around the eight-inch howitzer, towed type, because when we went to camp…Now, I'm jumping ahead of myself. We ought to finish me up with OCS.

DePue: Yeah, I did want to talk to you more about OCS and how that worked, because I'm curious of whether you went to OCS and regular drills, at the same time.

Blade: We did. I went to drill, and, in those days, we would drill on Monday nights, Monmouth did, many units. We drilled for two hours a night, and we got a full day's pay for that, military pay, commensurate with what your rank was. Then, it wasn't too long, somewhere along that timeframe, we started having four hour drills, a little longer drills. Then, I used to go to drills, and then I'd go to work immediately, working third shift, and then back to the farm, you know. So I put in—

DePue: You were going to drill in the timeframe you told me, before you were supposed to be sleeping.

Blade: That's correct, and that was on Sundays. Sunday night, we used to go in early, four hours of work then. We'd report in at 3:00 in the morning to get the preparation going. In four hours, we could get all the paint put in the paint machines and what have you. The other farm guy and I wouldn't always go in for that overtime on the four hours.

Matter of fact, we were a little bit ornery, perhaps. We would never go in then, unless…The other workers used to get on us about double dipping and making all that extra money. We'd tell them that if they didn't shut up, we'd take the overtime away from them, because we had the seniority on them. Sooner or later, every four or five months, they'd get to picking on us too much, so we'd sign up and take the overtime away from them. They'd sure quiet down in a hurry. (both laugh)

DePue: Then the whole cycle would begin again, huh?

Blade: Then it'd all begin again, yeah.

DePue: So, when were you going to the OCS training sessions?

Blade: OCS was weekends. So, we would report in at noon on Saturday and be released about 4:00 Sunday afternoon, at Camp Lincoln in Springfield. There was a young man from close to Galva, Jerry Beecraft from Roseville, and myself would ride together to OCS in Springfield.

DePue: Did you like that OCS training you were getting?

Blade: I got along fine in OCS training. I'd been through the NCO Academy—

DePue: This is a pretty diplomatic comment that you just made.

Blade: (laughs) I had the least demerits in OCS, and I had the least command positions of my class in OCS. We started out with eighty-two; we graduated forty-one, and I had three demerits.

We reported into OCS at camp, Ripley, Minnesota, and we rode up with the unit for their annual training, and then everybody reported to the barracks at the south end of Camp Ripley, Minnesota and started training. Of course, the tack officers got on us quite a little bit. That was no problem for me. My particular tack officer had no active duty, so he was not too hard to outfox on many things. (laughs)

Then, after the two weeks training, we washed out some people, then, and we came back to Springfield. Then we would meet once a month, one weekend a month, down here. Then, early June of 1960, we graduate from OCS in Springfield. Then, we went with our units to camp, in that same year.

DePue: So, during the time you're going to OCS, you only went to one camp and it was the camp associated with the officer candidate school?

Blade: That's correct.

DePue: I don't want to make any assumptions here. What did you think of the quality of the training and the experience that the state OCS gave you?

Blade: Well, I thought it was really, real good, really. They had a lot of subjects we studied, and they were all from infantry based out of Fort Benning, of course. But I thought it was as good as could be expected, yes.

DePue: Was it more academic oriented or field training exercise oriented?

Blade: Camp, the two weeks at Camp Ripley was all, nearly all, field exercises and drill marching and what-have-you. Here, at Springfield, was all academic, and we had some homework to do too that we had to bring when we went back to the monthly courses.

DePue: My own experience of going through these officer candidate programs, once you actually get the field environment, the big challenge is often times land navigation. I would think as an artillery man, you might have had a little bit of a leg up in that respect.

Blade: I did. We had map reading, and many of them got lost, but in the artillery, that was no problem for me. I guess I'd had a lot of map reading anyway, but like you said, artillery had an advantage there.

DePue: Any other comments about the OCS experience?

Blade: Well, I might just mention one other thing. Like I said, I had the least demerits, and I had the least command responsibilities, because they expected everybody to be a squad leader and a platoon leader and a platoon sergeant and a squad sergeant, you know. [I] came in a first sergeant, and company commander was the top position to have.

I was made, I guess, platoon sergeant one day, when we were here in Springfield. For some reason, I never had any command positions at Camp Ripley. So, I had really a good voice. I'd been a basic training NCO on active duty, so I could really belt out the voice.

I immediately took the platoon and all the tack officers from the other two platoons. There was three platoons here. The other two platoon tack officers of mine all got in between me and the platoon, to try to outshout me, but they weren't successful at that. I immediately gave everybody, like, a column left or a column right. So, I've got three rows of ranked people, marching, and all the tack officers are in between me. Then they filtered themselves in between the ranks.

When they all got in between the ranks and shouting, so that they couldn't hear me, I started giving the "rear march, rear march." They're all caught in the middle of this platoon with M-1s swinging over their head, and they didn't have time to holler any more. They'd forgot how to do that.

The commandant of the school, who was Major Bishop at the time, hollered for me to halt that platoon immediately. So, I did, and he told his executive officer to put someone else in charge. He wanted to see me in his office immediately. I thought, I'm going to get kicked out of OCS, just as big as you please. He took me up there, and he said, "That was the best display of leadership we've seen in the OCS. You'll have no more command positions." And I didn't. From then on, I was just a man in the back of the ranks (both laugh).

DePue: Well, it sounded to me, when you're telling that story, that you could have been possibly, really ticking off these other instructors, in the process.

Blade: Probably did. (both laugh)

DePue: So, you enjoyed yourself as well, it sounds like.

Blade: I did. So then, my class—I've jumped way ahead—we had a fifty-year reunion two years ago, which was pretty nice. Seventeen were there, at the reunion. That was a nice experience.

DePue: That was pretty good.

Blade: I felt good about OCS, and it was a good training exercise.

DePue: What happened to you after you got the commission, as far as the National Guard was concerned?

Blade: Then I was assigned to "A" Battery, which was "A" Battery, then in Galesburg. We just had an "A" Battery and a "B" Battery, because they then had the eight-inch howitzers. They had not gone to camp yet, with the eight inch howitzer, or the battalion had not.

Colonel Sharp was no longer the battalion commander. He had retired, and then we had a new battalion commander. So, we get to camp, and, of course, everybody's a little bit concerned about this eight inch outfit. Having been around that, I knew some tricks about laying that eight-inch howitzer. During the first few days we were at camp, why the battery commander, he was breaking in a new jeep driver. Henry Colclasure really had quite a war record. He was one few that had made…I believe there's 120 some people that made five major combat jumps in World War II, and he was one of those. He had quite a war record, really.

DePue: Which division was he with, 82nd?

Blade: No. I don't know if it was 82nd or a 101st, but General Gavin was the one he was in, same one.

DePue: What was this Henry—

Blade: Henry Colclasure, Henry R. Colclasure, I believe.

DePue: Colclasure.

Blade: Yes. He's since passed away, passed away in about '95, 1995, I think.

DePue: The reason you went to Galesburg was because you had experience with the eight inch already or because they wanted to move you to a different unit?

Blade: Two reasons was, there was no other officer over there. This Henry Colclasure was a rough, tough guy to get along with, and he had ran off all the lieutenants. Every year, they'd go to camp and come back, and the lieutenants would ask to get out. They'd either get out or go on someplace else, because

he was a hard charger on driving those people. However, none of those guys had much experience, the lieutenants didn't. He expected a lot out of everybody.

So, I go over there at the first part of June, and we go to camp pretty shortly after. They quickly realized I knew a lot about eight inch howitzers and FDC and what have you. Colclasure's out breaking in his new jeep driver, and they get to a corner, and the jeep driver says, "Left?" Colclasure says, "Right." Well, the jeep driver turns left and flips Colclasure out of the jeep, and he lands on his knee and bangs it all up. Colclasure was meaning for him to turn right, but he just said "right" to the driver, so the driver thought left was the way to turn..

DePue: He thought "right" meant correct.

Blade: Yeah, so boom, out goes Colclasure. The 1st sergeant is Chuck Miller, and he has an infected tooth and ended up infecting his jaw. He ends up in the hospital. So, we're missing a 1st sergeant, and we're missing the battery commander, and there's no other officers in there. That's all we have, the two of us, or I'm the only officer.

So, we got along fine. By knowing many tricks about the eight-inch howitzer and laying that…We used engineering tape. You lay a straight line, and you lay that on the azimuth, during the RSOP, before the weapons get there. All you have to do, then, is drive down that line, with the left front wheel of the ten ton truck that's pulling the eight-inch howitzer.

Then you do some measurements, with a tape measure, and you put [in] a stake. When the bumper hits the stake, the telescope…What do I want to say? It's on the eight-inch howitzer. You do all the turning of instruments—it's in the right location. So, if you're laid within 30 mils of being correct, in range, you have maximum shifts to the right and left, without doing anything with the weapon, as far as moving it. So, you unhook it and spread the trails, dig them in, and you're ready to fire.

Well, that impressed even the evaluators for some reason. I was just fortunate to have had that experience. But, we did very well with the eight-inch. Then headquarters in Chicago, they also got an eight-inch howitzer, as well. But they were going to get theirs the next year. So, some of them were observing with us that year, so good training.

Just go on from there. [I've] got to tell a couple of stories here. We did very well. We passed the ATTRTEP for that unit, and we got high marks, real high marks, that year. The battalion commander, when we would come in after the field on training exercises…You know how you're always evaluated? He used to get on the other two battery commanders, Headquarters Battery and the others. He says, "Blade always ends up having higher grades than you

guys do every day. Why is that? You know, he's just a lieutenant. He's not supposed to know this stuff, you know." Anyways, it was Sergeant Miller, Robert, who you may have known or maybe not. He may have been gone before you got in.

Now, to tell you the Paul Harvey version of that story—which really, very, very few ever know—is that the senior evaluator was one of the battery commanders in the battalion, when I was in the 8th Field Artillery. So, we knew each other, but nobody knew that we knew each other.

DePue: So, you're was just a wink and a nod at each other, huh?

Blade: Yes, that's correct. And he might have slipped a tip to me, now and then. When we were going to the field the next day, why what we used to do was… You had to go in civilian…and Class A [dress uniforms] used to go to the PX, at Camp Ripley. That was the way the Guard used to be. So, if you was going to go to the PX at night, after you'd been in the field all day, you could not go down there in your fatigues. You had to be in Class A's.

So, we would take a vehicle and go in Class A's, down there to the PX at Ripley. Well, right east of the PX, you could just take a road there, and you're down over a bluff. So, we would do that. We would go to the PX, park behind it, get back in the vehicle, and we'd drop over that little bluff. Then we'd turn around and go wherever we were going to go for the next day's field exercise. We'd already lay out where we were going to put all the positions. Then we'd come back that back road, go back to the unit. Nobody knew, but we had re-conned that ahead of time. Of course, that impressed the evaluators a lot. That's part of winning the game.

DePue: When I was doing this, you were always doing the reconnaissance, as the executive officer, in pitch darkness.

Blade: That's correct. (both laugh)

DePue: Well, that's not fair, what you're doing then.

Blade: Well, we were doing things in the daylight those times. We were not—

DePue: Yeah, because I know that the field training for the National Guard, there in those years, was almost exclusively something going on in the daytime, except for a couple of days?

Blade: That's correct. Yeah, we would spend no more than two nights in the field, in those days. That's right. So, we were not moving during the nights. Later years in the Guard, we started moving in the night, longer terms and what-have-you.

DePue: Changes the ball game entirely, when you move it at night.

Blade: Yeah, it sure does. Again, when we started doing that, I was a battery commander, when we were doing the night stuff, many years later, with the 105s in those days.

DePue: Well, once again though, sir, it sounds like you're having a ball doing this Army training.

Blade: I did; I loved that. I sure did, yeah.

DePue: I got a couple of other questions, during this timeframe, before you went to the tire store business. You're involved with Guard training, and it sounds like you're really loving that experience. One of them was the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. What did the Guard do? What did you personally do, when that was going on?

Blade: That battalion, nothing changed with us. We still did the normal drills and went to the regular training. The other units in the state doubled up, and they drilled twice as often. For some reason, our battalion, SRF, Special Reserve Force, I think, is what that stood for, SRF. Like members of the…You and I remember days of the 66th Brigade, which was a downstate brigade, headquartered in Decatur, in those days. Like the 3rd Infantry Battalion at St. Louis and the 2nd Battalion at Urbana, they were SRF Units, and they trained double.

DePue: Were they technically on alert, then?

Blade: Well, trained up so they could be, I would assume. That probably is correct, yes.

DePue: Did the Cuban Missile Crisis…Was that something that caught your attention then?

Blade: Well it did, I think, because my brother was then made the Operations Officer of the Caribbean Fleet, in the Navy. So, he was stationed in Puerto Rico, during that time.

DePue: That's pretty close to the center of gravity, then.

Blade: Yeah it is. Yes

DePue: This is very much an aside, and this is strictly your personal opinion, but you had worked with those nuclear artillery rounds in Hawaii. Now, we're flirting, in 1962, with all out nuclear war. What did you think about the whole notion of basing so much of our strategy on nuclear weapons and this notion of MAD, mutually assured destruction?

Blade: Well, I guess I was certainly very concerned about that, I guess, and often wondered and talked about that some, as if we were happened to get

mobilized out of this situation, you know. What it would be like and, of course, we had the eight-inch battery in Galesburg, until 1968. I became the battery commander there, I believe in 1964. I was the exec until then.

DePue: Were you occasionally training during these early '60 years, in gas masks?

Blade: Yes we were. We did gas mask training at annual training. We'd go through the gas chambers and what have you. We did some training in reference to pulling the ponchos and that over you, in case of a nuclear strike, you know, and to keep away from a little bit of radiation and what have you.

DePue: I would think the summer camp of 1963, people are paying a lot more attention to those drills at that time.

Blade: Well, I think they were, really. I think there was a lot more, but not…I guess later on, when I went to the advance course, as a nuclear deployment officer training, I thought, we should have done a lot more training about that earlier. Of course, that's almost ten years difference, at that time. We did a little bit of training but not near as serious as I thought we should have done, looking back at that.

DePue: The other historical marker I wanted to ask you about. I don't know if it had any impact on your military experience, but that was the assassination of John F. Kennedy, in November of '63.

Blade: No. When Martin Luther King was…a big problem with the Guard, but [the] assassination [of Kennedy] then had no major impact of any great significance.

DePue: How about you, just as an American citizen, understanding your president had been assassinated.

Blade: Oh, well yes, it certainly made an impact. I know exactly where I was at that day, when I heard the news.

DePue: Can you tell us about that?

Blade: Well, yes, as I was farming, and I was at Aledo, at an auction. I was buying some hogs there that day. [I] bought 100 pigs that day to bring home to feed out. I was feeding a lot of cattle on the farm at the time, and that was a day I always remembered. Also, that same day, my aunt's husband passed away that same day, as well.

DePue: I want to finish today with your decision to get out of farming. Maybe you stayed in farming, but you also got into the tire business. Talk about that decision.

Blade: Okay. When I started farming, the first year I farmed was not a very profitable year, because, when I bought the hogs and that in the spring of the year, hogs were selling at $22 a hundred pounds. The pigs that I raised and sold that fall, which was about ten months later, for example, was selling for $10 and $11 a hundred [pounds]. So, similar things happened to the cattle market, so I immediately fell behind the power ball there.

DePue: What happened?

Blade: Well, just the way the market fell. There was an abundance, evidently, of supply and demand, and we had way too much livestock on the market.

DePue: There wasn't something going on in the overseas markets or governmental policy or anything like that?

Blade: Not that I really recall. But I know the price of hogs and cattle dropped significantly in that timeframe. That would have been in the fall of '59, spring of '59, was like twenty-two bucks, and the fall was eleven, ten to eleven for hogs. So, that didn't help me out a whole lot. Of course, working at the factory and farming and trying to pay off something that slid the wrong direction didn't work out real well.

Then, as we were moving along there farming, I guess, one day this tire dealer in Monmouth had…When I first got out of the army, he tried to…We were in there one day, my dad and I, and he was trying to sell me this tire business. Keisters, who was a competitor, he was doing about $200,000 a year in business, but he wanted to sell me $20,000 worth of sky, plus whatever the value of his equipment was.

DePue: Twenty thousand dollars' worth of sky?

Blade: Well, goodwill, in other words. He'd built up all these customers, coming in, and he thought that was worth $20,000 to have in the business. That was kind of customary. That was an old selling thing. You'd call it "selling you sky" because of what he'd built up in business.

I said, well I wasn't interested in doing that. My dad and I met him in the hotel in Monmouth—there used to be a big hotel in Monmouth---and my dad didn't think I ought to be buying that goodwill that he had, and I didn't either. I told him that, if I ever decide to get in the tire business, I believed I could earn that, without having to do that. So, that was the end of that.

So, now, I'd been farming and wasn't making much money and working very, very hard, trying to keep everything going and just decided…And my back was starting to bother me some, with all the hard work I was doing. I had a five-bottom tractor, which was the biggest tractor there was in those days, and I was farming about 800 acres. This other guy

and I together, I think, was farming 840 acres. We both decided that we were going to quit farming.

So, he bought a nursing home in Galesburg, and I bought the tire shop in Monmouth. I'm in the tractor pull business, and I go in there to get the fluid pumped out of the tires, to get in a tractor pull at Monmouth. I'd pulled in some tractor pulls in Abingdon and other small towns.

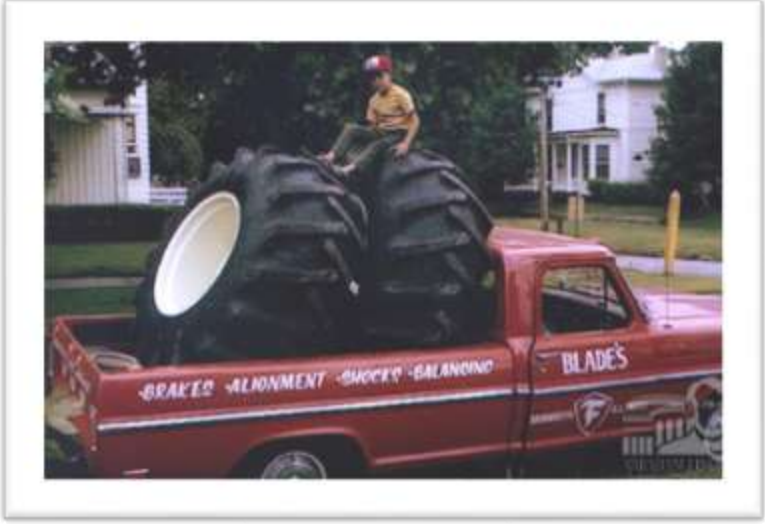
DePue: This was just a sporting event?

Blade: Just a sport, yeah, and you'd maybe get...[It] cost you $10 to get in, and if you won first prize, you'd probably get $50. Most likely, you might not get anything, but (laughs) nevertheless. So, this lady's husband had passed away, and she wanted to sell the business and wanted to know if I wasn't interested in buying it. She didn't know anything about this guy that was just kitty corner across the street there, a little ways, that he had tried to sell me his business, about six years ahead of that.

I was very interested in her offer. We ended up, we bought that business. Marilyn and I thought that was a good move, and so we sold out, had a farm sale in January 1965, and I'd bought the business, the first of November of '64. She let us make some payments on that. We got into the tire business. They had done $66,000 the year before. We did $99,000 the first year, pretty significant amount of money.

DePue: Were your customers primarily farmers and agricultural businesses or everything?

Blade: Well, more or less, we were pretty well diversified. As I developed it a little bit, we got things at about a third. We did about a third in passenger tire business, about a third in big truck business, and we did about a third in farm tire business. That's a significant jump in business in one year. How'd that happen?



Gene's five year old son, Douglas, sits atop heavy-duty tires ready to be delivered to a farmer from Blade's Tire Shop in Monmouth, Illinois, 1968.

Well, this other fellow and I, when we were working at the factory and farming, we

bought a four row, self-propelled picker/sheller combine in 1961, a four row. We had the first four row in the country. All the farmers thought, "My land." They would wait, so we could come in there, so they could tell somebody how they picked so many acres of corn in such a quick time. You know how farmers are.

We could do 100 acres in twenty-four hours. We used to start on Monday morning. I wasn't working. I had quit the factory in '62, so…. He was still working in the factory. I would run the extra hours on that machine, so we could keep it running continuously, from Monday through Saturday night. That just was a good amount of business.

When I sold that and went into the tire business, all these people knew us in three counties around. We had the first four row picker/sheller in a three county area. So, the fellows that worked there for me, when I first came in there, said they just couldn't believe the people that was coming in there to see us, you know. Well, that's 1965 and we did $99,000. I don't remember what we did the next year in business, but we did a **major** impact the next year, because dual wheels were coming out then

M &W Dual Wheel Company, the number one agricultural dual wheel company in Illinois. They were at Gibson City. So, the salesman came over to see me and thought…because the other guy didn't buy any dual wheels off from him. The big dealer that was doing $200,000 a year, didn't buy any dual wheels. Well, I knew all about dual wheels, being a farmer. But it was so new, yet that hardly anybody had any. So, he thought…He told this at a sales meeting at Gibson City. He said he went over to see this other young guy that was in the tire business and thought ,well, maybe we might could sell him [Blade] two pair or maybe, at the very most, five.

As he came in there to talk to him [Blade], I gave him a list. I wanted a semi load of these, so he turned around—I didn't know this at the time—but he turned around and called the company to see if they would ship a trailer load of wheels over there to this young tire dealer, because, if they agreed, well maybe they could maybe redistribute them over there. So, go ahead. Bottom line, I sold three trailer loads of dual wheels that first year, just inundated the market around there. In doing so, I talked them into letting me have the franchise for five counties on dual wheels.

I ended up being the second largest dual wheeler dealer in the state of Illinois, and I got a commission, then, off from the other franchises. My competitor, across the street, he wouldn't buy any dual wheels off of me. He went to Galesburg, bought them off of a dealer over there. That got them from me. So, we'd truck them over there and deliver them, and he'd turn around and drive over there and pick them up and haul them back. He sold very, very few, because we could beat him on the price pretty easily.

DePue: This was the same guy who was trying to sell you "sky" a few years before?

Blade: That is correct. In the fall of that year, of 1966, he sells out the business, because we had really knocked the daylights out of him in business, almost took over the farm tire business. That was a good start, to make that happen (laughs).

DePue: Well, that sounds like a pretty good place for us to stop today, and our third session will be picking up your story, what you were doing then in the Guard in those years after that and, especially, the story about how you ended up working full-time for the Guard and becoming the USPF&O and what that meant.

Blade: Okay.

DePue: Look forward to that session. Thank you very much today, sir.

Blade: Yeah, thank you

Interview with Gene Blade
VRC-A-L-2012-046.03

Interview # 3: Feb 1, 2013
Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Friday, February 1, 2013. The year is flying by, it seems. I'm in the home of Colonel Gene Blade. Good afternoon, sir.

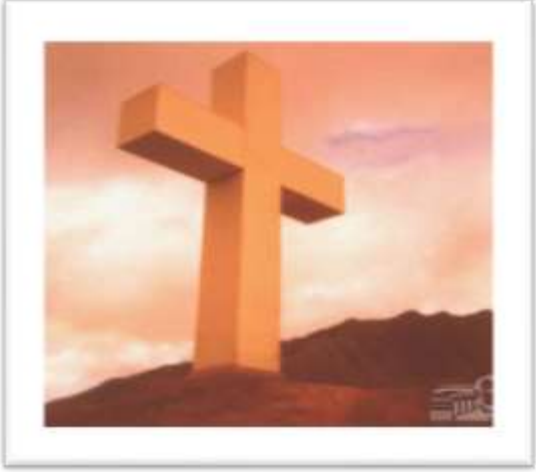
Blade: Good afternoon, beautiful day.

DePue: It is. If you like it cold, it's a great day.

Blade: Six above, this morning.

DePue: You bet. Last time, we talked about your military career, primarily in active duty. But we spent a considerable amount of time on your National Guard experience, coming back home, as well. But, I know you wanted to pick up on a couple of things that were significant to you—and, I think, to history here—about the time you were in Hawaii.

Blade: Okay, I was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division. There is a monument there, a huge cross that's about thirty-five feet high and five foot square. It's made out of half inch steel. That was put up at the end of World War II, because that is where the planes came over, during Pearl Harbor attack and attacked Schofield Barracks, at the time.



The cross at Kolekole Pass on Oahu Island marked the spot where Japanese aircraft flew over on their way to attacking Schofield Barracks on December 7th, 1941. The cross was erected after the attack. In 1957, Sergeant Blake was in charge of repainting it.

We had a man in our unit that happened to be at Schofield and was on his way to or from church that day, when the planes came over and strafed some of the buildings at Schofield Barracks, which still had bullet marks when I was there. I have a picture of this cross. They saw in my records that I was a spray painter, so I was in charge of the painting of the cross. We had others that was in charge of the scaffolding to put up around this cross and others that cleaned all the old paint off down to the metal again. That pretty much covers that.

DePue: That's significant in terms of having some connection with Pearl Harbor and the attack.

Blade: Well, it was, and that was just a nice monument there. I've been back to Hawaii two or three times since then. We always drive out to look at that cross, because it's just a good marker, where the planes came through the mountain pass to strike Schofield Barracks.

DePue: Is that on public or private land? Do you know?

Blade: It's right along the highway that goes along there, so it would be on public land.

DePue: You also were talking about calibration. I think, for our field artillery friends, it might be fun for you to explain how calibration was done, back then, in Hawaii.

Blade: Yes.

DePue: First of all, what is calibration?

Blade: Well, calibration is where you measure the velocity of the weapons. The reason you calibrate the weapons in the artillery batteries, as well as battalion, as the weapons' tubes get more worn, why the projectile doesn't go quite as far, because some of the gasses naturally escape around the edges. Therefore, you calibrate those, and then you try to put all the long shooters in one battery and the short shooters in another battery, so you can converge all the fire on a target, then you know how to add range k-factors into the fire direction computations.

In those days, it was a little difficult to do that, because you also had elevations at ground zero or other things to figure. So, we used to take the weapons, and we'd line them all up on the beach, on the ocean, because then we were at zero elevation. That was rather easy to do that. Then we also set up observation posts out there that we could measure the weapons when they fired, how long it took to get to the range and do the survey and everything else. That was our way of doing that, which was pretty accurate, until the modern days. [It] is all done electronically.

DePue: Well, just listening to you talk about that, it occurred to me that, for field artillerymen—and you can correct me if you see it differently—but, for field artillerymen, there is a right way, and there's a wrong way. There isn't a way in between. It's about precision, as much as you can possibly get. Would you agree with that statement?

Blade: Oh absolutely. When we first did that, I was assigned in the 105 Battalion, but later on, we took the 155s and the 8-inch out there, as well, to do that calibration. We lined them all up in a straight line, surveyed, and all the points were surveyed. I don't recall now, but I want to say that I believe we had the hubs five meters apart from our survey point. So we had really a very good accuracy at the time.

DePue: And certainly all of the experience you had in the Fire Direction Center and had to compute the data. And, indeed, in that case, there is only one correct answer, right?

Blade: That is correct, yes.

DePue: So, where's all this leading? Well, my question for you then, sir, is, does this affect the way you look at life and doing your job ever after?

Blade: (laughs) Well, I suppose it probably does, I guess. I'm not quite as meticulous as some people on details, but I always try to pull all the effort I can to make sure everything is right and on time.

DePue: The next question—and this goes back to your Hawaii time, as well—has something completely different than field artillery. You had mentioned, when we finished last time, about activity in some sports, while you were there.

Blade: Oh, yes, I did. I played on the 25th Infantry Division basketball team. We started out at a battery level, because, in those days, instead of having PT tests and that, we used to have recreational day. So, every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, after Motor Stables, at 1400 [2:00], we would either play volleyball, softball, basketball or flag football. Everybody had to participate in doing one of those sports.

Our basketball team, at the battery level, was unusual in the fact that we had two All-Americans in our battery. One of them was a sergeant, and the other was a lieutenant. One was from New York, and the other one was an all-American from the State of Washington. I remember him more so; Morris Buckwalter was his name. He later played for the pro team, after his two years of active duty, as a second lieutenant. He played for the Utah Stars, and then, later I went out to Portland, Oregon in 1991, and he, then, was the General Manager for the Portland Trailblazers. So, we got together and had a little reminiscing time.

Joe Martin was the other person that played for one of the New York pro teams, after his time in the Army, as well. We went from battery team to battalion team to DIVARTY team to division team. We won every game we played, except the last game we played for the Pacific Theater Championship.

A group of Marines from Wake Island came to the Hawaiian Islands, and we played for the championship basketball team. We were ahead at 121 to122. Morris Buckwalter shot a basket, with about six seconds left. The basket didn't go it. It bounced over my head. I was playing guard. Then, another kid grabbed it and slung it at the other end, and it went into the basket. So, we got beat by 123 to122 (laughs).

DePue: That's a huge score.

Blade: It was a huge score, but really, there were some great players on those teams, not including myself. I was the shortest guy on the team.

DePue: Would it be fair to say that, during that time, the Army placed a lot of emphasis on these sports teams that they had?

Blade: Yeah, they did, really, sports teams, rifle teams. They had a football team and all of those sports. That was part of the recreation and PT test. We had more fun at the PT tests then than we do today. There was no test, but we had to participate.

DePue: Well, now we're going to jump ahead and get to your National Guard experience. I wanted to ask you about when you went back to A Battery, I believe. I believe this is in 1960. Tell us about the significant award that the battery received.

Blade: Okay. In 1960, I was just newly commissioned a second lieutenant and was assigned A Battery. The battery commander had banged up his knee and was in the hospital, during the annual training period. And the first sergeant had trouble with his infected tooth, and he ended up in the hospital, as well.

Gene Blade's Illinois OCS graduation photo in June, 1960. He was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in the Illinois Army National Guard.

DePue: Battery Commander, is that the same guy who was the airborne trooper, paratrooper?

Blade: Yes, Henry Colclasure. He was a paratrooper in World War II. I think I told the rest of the story about that.

DePue: Right, right.

Blade: He was a great battery commander and had a great war record from World War II. But we did extremely well that camp in all the tests that we took, we came out superior and beat everyone else. In those days--which is still true today--they have an Eisenhower Trophy that goes to the top company size unit in every state every year. We won that that year to include drill attendance, which we always had 100% drill attendance in those days. Our IG inspections and maintenance inspections, mess inspections, everything, we just excelled. Just had the right bunch of people together at the right time.

DePue: Well, maybe it's because you got there, sir.

Blade: I was just a little spoke there was all (both laugh). Yeah, great bunch of people.

DePue: What would the trophy look like?

Blade: The unit ends up with a very small one, and I honestly don't remember what it looks like.

DePue: Okay. Well, when we left off last time, we were about 1964 and I think that's the timeframe that you took over as a battery commander?

Blade: That's correct at Galesburg, yes.

DePue: How did that come to pass?

Blade: Well, there was only two of us in the battery. The battery commander was Colclasure and myself as the lieutenant. Some of the other batteries had as many as five in but for some reason, we only had the two of us. Colclasure got transferred to Chicago to one of the units, so that he could become a major. Then I moved into the unit as a commander, and then they moved in Bob Fitch as an executive officer.

DePue: So, you still only have two officers, when you're authorized five?

Blade: Well I did, but very shortly thereafter, we soon filled up. Colonel Stroop was the battalion commander of the 2-123 at Rock Island at the time. His son then came there as a 2nd lieutenant. Then Woody Accord was another lieutenant colonel and exec in that Battalion at the time. His son came to the unit, as well. That was Woody Accord, Jr. And Harold Snodgrass' son had also gone to ROTC and then was commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant. Harold Snodgrass was a major in the battalion, the S3. So, I had all the colonels' and majors' sons in my unit, as 2nd lieutenants. (both laugh)

DePue: Well, that's both good and bad. Isn't it?

Blade: Well, it was. They were all a good bunch of guys, and we had a lot of fun. I guess I also had another lieutenant in there, too, at one time, was Klaus Miller, who also was in Colonel Stroop's battalion, as a captain. He was also the chief of police in Rock Island, and I had his son too, as a lieutenant in there. So, I guess I kind of had to watch out for those lieutenants [in] two ways, to train them and also make certain that I wasn't too rough on them, because there was attributes there from their fathers.

DePue: I would think from Miller, especially (both laugh). How much were you involved in the recruiting, to fill up the unit recruiting-wise?

Blade: Oh, in the battalion there?

DePue: No, when you were the commander at Galesburg?

Blade: Oh, Galesburg. Well, in those days, we didn't have recruiters. We did it ourselves. I used to go out in front of the battery at night, and I'd say, you know we're short one man or two men, or whatever it is, and I got a $5 bill for the first person that brings in a recruit. We would always have somebody the next night.

Something else we did there—and people knew—if we had a young man that was unemployed for some unknown reason, we'd have him come out and stand by me at the closing formation. I'd say, "You know, here's Private Jones. He's out of a job. If any of you know how you can get him a job, why, please do so." So, the next week, he'd be all smiles, because somebody would have found a job for him, and we'd always have that recruit the next drill, as well.

DePue: Well, I don't normally do this, but I was a commander at both the battery and the battalion level. But the world was different when we were trying to recruit. Was it easy to recruit in the early '60s?

Blade: Yes, I would say it was, because we still had the draft going on, for one thing. The other thing was that we were in local communities, so we knew about everybody there. I guess, if we would talk some fellow into coming in the Guard, we would always look after him, to be sure that it was as good as we told him it was.

Those days were fun in the Guard. Maybe we'd be at a drill on Monday night, but maybe Wednesday night, we would all be on a bowling team, and maybe on Saturday afternoon, many would be on a softball team. And the families were involved, the wives and the kids. Wednesday nights, for example, at the armories, if we weren't on a bowling team, we'd be at the armory getting ready for the next drill, and the wives and the small kids were all there. So, we were really, truly a Guard family in those days.

DePue: Does that mean that you didn't have weekend drills, that you had Monday evening drills?

Blade: In those early days, we had evening drills, one night a week and then with the two weeks of annual training. Those drills, when I first started, were only two hours long. Later they changed it to four hours long. Then, the next change was, during the summer months we had weekend training and no Monday night drills or night drills at all. But in the wintertime, we would revert it back. I believe we only did that, probably, about one year, and then we went to all weekend training.

DePue: When did that change occur?

Blade: I would say that, probably in the '60s, early '60s, I believe. We might have been to four hour training before that, but that's when we started the other, in the '60s.

DePue: Did you have a chance, personally, to go to any schools? I'm thinking especially the artillery advance course would have been something that the regular Army would have expected you to be doing.

Blade: Yes, my early days, I did the basic course by correspondence. Most all of us did that; although, they opened up some schools for a short period of time, and they had a basic course that, maybe, was a month or two long, at Fort Sill. At that time, I had a hard time getting off to do that. Then later, they had an advance course. I believe it was, maybe, two or three months long. As I recall, only two people that I knew of from the battalion went to that. Others just didn't go to those schools. In most cases, they never made it any further than captain, because of school requirements.

Captain Blade in the field at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma while he served as a battalion S-2 intelligence officer for Headquarters Battery, 2nd BN, 123rd Field Artillery in July, 1973.

DePue: I take it you were one of the people who went to the active duties advanced course?

Blade: I did, and that was a little later. I guess I was, as a Firestone dealer, in that Firestone and Goodyear Tire Companies decided they were going to put dealerships, their company-owned stores, in towns of population of 10,000 and larger. They already had them in towns of 25,000, in most cases. I could see the handwriting on the wall.

Then, one day, Goodyear came by and offered me a deal for ten years at $500 a month, if I'd sell out to them. I agreed to do that, then they backed out on that and offered me less. So, I turned that down. Then Firestone came and offered me a deal that I could go to work for them, as a regional salesperson, and they would give me a percentage of the profit, over a certain level, for five years. My wife and I talked about that and thought, well, I probably ought to do that.

Blade's Firestone service truck outside Blade's Firestone Store in Monmouth, IL in the late 1960s. Gene Blade built a new store in the late '60s, between his duties as battery commander and the owner of a thriving tire business.

As soon as we did that, I decided it was a good time to try something that I really liked. That was the military, so I put in for the long, advanced course at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. I then was the first Guardsman to get in a long field artillery advanced course in twenty years. The last time a Guardsman got into the long advance course was 1951, and I got in in 1971.

DePue: First Illinois Guardsman?

Blade: Total National Guard, nationwide. Because, before, we were considered reserve components, and we were kind of separate from the regular Army. But, when Secretary Laird became Secretary of Defense, in 1971, he decided we'd have the total force concept and that the Guard and Reserves should be part of the others, as far as training. So, Sergeant Jebb and I called Marion Browse, who then secretary to the chief of the National Guard Bureau in Washington, and Marion Browse was from Monmouth, at the unit that I was—

DePue: Wait a minute, just a second here, sir. So, here's this captain, who just picks up the phone and calls out to Washington, D.C. to talk to the…you say chief of the National Guard Bureau?

Blade: Secretary to the chief of the National Guard Bureau. He's a bird colonel, Title 10, active duty.

DePue: Not too many people have the opportunity to make that phone call. (laughs)

Blade: Well, a little more to that was the fact that Sergeant Jebb made the phone call, because he used to be the administrative warrant officer in the Monmouth Unit when Marion Browse was a captain in the unit, after Korea. So, he had a personal relationship there. That's why we made a direct call. I used him as a conduit to call him. In doing so, we told him the state had turned down my request, because they said there was no money.

So, then we told Marion Browse that being that Secretary Laird had talked about the total force, [we] thought it would be awful nice if a man from his old battery, in Monmouth, was the first Guardsman to go on active duty to the long advance course. He thought that was a great idea, told them to send the request in again, and it would be approved because he would obtain the funding to fund me to go to that ten month long advance course.

DePue: So, did you send the request in directly, or did you still go through National Guard channels to do it?

Blade: We still did it through the battalion, then to the state, yes.

DePue: See, I know enough about the way military bureaucracies, or any bureaucracy works, to think that there might have been someone, somewhere at the state level who kind of got upset that you were going around them to talk directly to Browse.

Blade: Well, I think that, perhaps, was so, but it never got back to me that that happened. I think, maybe we overwhelmed them, when it came backwards from Washington.

DePue: Any others schools that you were able to go to, on the active duty side?

Blade: Many more after that, but that was a very good school. In fact, they also did quite a bit of infantry training and armored training in that class, and that was the first time that they decided to do that. After we graduated, in ten months, we got credit for many other armored and infantry schools, and we could do those, either by going to Fort Benning on a two week period, or we could do them by correspondence. I went to Fort Benning for two weeks, and that was all that was required. Then I got a graduation certificate for completing the infantry advance course. I did correspondence for the armored course, and I also, then, was a graduate of that.

Then, I was qualified as what they called SCAT—Special Combined Arms Trained. There's very, very few…to my knowledge, there was only 120

people that had completed that, as what I was told a few years later. Whether that's correct or not, I don't know.

DePue: As a trailblazer, especially when you went to the field artillery advanced course, how did the active duty brethren treat you?

Blade: Well, I was definitely an outsider, without a doubt. At the same time, the RIFt [reduction in force] was going on, then, in 1971, because, although Vietnam was still going on, there was a reduction in force. We lost thirty officers out of our class, before graduation, which I thought was kind of a bad deal. They booted them out, when there was less than a month left in the school.

So, we started with a 140, and I think we graduated about 110 in that course. We only lost a couple through the year, but that thirty was all reduction in force. That basically had to do with their previous OERs, is what put those fellows out.

DePue: Were you able to take an accompanied tour there, or did the family have to stay back in Illinois?

Blade: No, it was longer than six months, so it was an accompanied tour. They shipped our whole baggage out there. We rented a home there, and our kids went to school out there, not at Fort Sill, but in Lawton, Oklahoma. It was kind of a nice change of pace for us. We certainly enjoyed that.

I was a section leader in that class. I don't know how I got to be a section leader, necessarily, because data rank wise, I outranked many of them in data rank. We had two majors in the class, and one of them was the president, I guess, or they called him, the class. The other one was his assistant. Then we had two group leaders, both captains, and then I was one of the section leaders, which we had three sections in each of the groups.

DePue: Would it be fair to say that you were one of the older people in the class?

Blade: I was, without a doubt. I was the oldest, by age, yes. Another interesting thing at the time, all group and section leaders, we met once a month at the Officers' Club for lunch. We met with the deputy commandant, who was a brigadier general, one star. Carruthers was his name. Then, one day, we had a speaker there that came, another general. That was a brigadier general, Max Thurman, who later became the deputy vice chief of the Army. I want to talk about him much later in our interview.

But, after our meeting…We generally would meet at noon for lunch, and normally we would sometimes go from 1:30 to 2:00 in the afternoon, talking about various issues with the class, because they were very interested in input and suggestions and one thing and another. But that particular day, General Thurman was extremely interested in talking with me, because I was the first Guardsman in that course. So, we stayed and chatted for…I don't

know now, but it seemed to me, I bet, an hour or hour and a half afterwards. He was so interested in the National Guard and how I got there and my background and opportunities and that.

In our discussions, then, I was surprised, because sometime later, close to graduation time, a message came in from General Thurman that suggested that I ought to consider going to ORSA training, which is Operations, Research, and Systems Analyst training. That was held at Fort Lee, Virginia. That had a lot to do with a lot of math and what have you. I was pretty good at that in Fire Direction Center, but I did not put in for the course. It would have been approved, had I done that, but I didn't.

Then, at the end of the school, I had put in to go to the Field Artillery Survey School, and I probably had just graduated. A short time before graduation, I got a call from a Colonel Lane who was a training officer at State Headquarters in Springfield for the National Guard. He'd offered me a job to come back and work for the state in facilities. Firestone—at the same time I had taken a military leave of absence from Firestone—and they had offered me a job for $27,000 a year, and I would move to Akron, Ohio, and I would have been traveling almost five days a week, someplace, helping out dealerships and one thing and another.

A week later, General Patton called me, who was the adjutant general of the Illinois Guard, and offered me the job again and told me that he thought that I ought to seriously consider that job. The pay was $10,800 a year. But Marilyn and I talked that over. Our kids were in the third and seventh grade and thought that, you know, that probably had more value in me being home around them than it did [with] me being off, traveling on the road every day, out of Akron, Ohio. So, I took the job at Springfield. They cancelled me out of the survey school. We came back to Springfield, and I started to work in the facilities division, the 10th of May, 1972.

DePue: You're working now full time for the National Guard?

Blade: Full time for the National Guard, as a state employee.

DePue: I'm going to come back to that, but I want to drop back to your battery commander and your Firestone days. I've got quite a few questions there. Tell me about what it was like, being a battery commander and taking your unit to annual training.

Blade: One thing, in those days, we had…a lot of the people were from your own community, although I was in business in Monmouth, and I was a battery commander in Galesburg, which was about 16 miles away.

The interesting thing there, is a battery commander…the local sheriff, one day…one of my men got in trouble and got in jail, was put in jail in Warren County. The sheriff came and told me that they would let him out of

jail, so he could go to summer camp, because they all knew that Guard training was pretty important in those days, and he'd been prior military service. So, I said, "Well, that was awful nice. What do I have to do?" And he says, "Well, just like signing for a piece of clothing in the military supply sergeant's, you're going to have to come in and sign for him." And he said, "I'll give you the hand receipt, when you bring him back, after annual training." (both laugh). So, we did.

That young man's family, mother and father, came to see me in the tire business. They were so appreciative of me doing that, taking him there. They also came back after I brought him back home again. How he ended up jail was, he just, in his car, tried to outrun the police. And got away with it, until he missed a corner. So, he really wasn't a bad guy, but nevertheless, that was an interesting time.

DePue: It was probably fun, racing from the police, until he actually got caught, huh?

Blade: That's correct. (laughs)

DePue: Anyway, go back to the annual training experience.

Blade: Okay. When we would get to camp, then, I guess…did I talk about the winter training or other?

DePue: Well, we've talked before, in the last session, a little bit about what it meant to go to annual training, and back in the early days, it was going out in the daytime and coming back. But I don't know that you mentioned going to a winter camp or how that kind of training might have changed, especially as a battery commander.

Blade: Well, going as a battery commander, we did a lot of training at the home stations, on the drills, even when I was first was battery commander. We had some four hour drills, at that time. We would go out to the local park, which was by Lake Story. There was some land there that was available. We would do some training there, and then also, sometimes, we had another farmer that…His son used to be in the Guard, and we would go out to his farm, which was only about three miles out of town. We could drive the trucks in the pasture and one thing and another and do a lot of training.

I guess the FDC fellows…I just saw one of those guys about two months ago. [He] was ribbing me about how I used to make them unload the tent and have it all set up in five minutes. He said, "That used to really disgust us." But, he said that was a good thing, because, if you didn't do that, you never did get the tent put up a timely manner. That training was really good. The Guard really was very serious about their training, I think, and could do very well in keeping up with the active component. [It was] just great training.

DePue: That's not necessarily how the active component saw it; is it?

Blade: Well, no it wasn't, necessarily. But, you know, when they would come and send evaluators to us, sometimes they was rather surprised at that. I believe….I don't remember if I told you, the last time, about….I was a lieutenant then, and we had a major evaluator. We were doing Fire Direction things for the eight-inch howitzer, at that time. I told them how to calculate that, and the Major says, "Well, that's wrong." He said "You ought to do it some other way." I said, "Well, you know, if you'd look in 6-40— which was the bible for FDC—I said, on page such and such, paragraph such and such, you'd see that what I'm doing is the proper way to do that. He went and got the book and looked at that and was amazed that a 2nd lieutenant knew that. [I] never did tell him that I used to be a fire direction instructor, but— (both laugh)

DePue I think you did mention that story.

Blade: I thought, perhaps, I did.

DePue: Was your battery better? Now, this is where you try to take your own pride out of this picture, sir, but was your battery ahead of what a lot of other batteries or other battalions would have been?

Blade: Well, yes, I think so. At that particular one score, we outscored all the rest of the batteries, and we had the highest score of all reserve components on the eight-inch howitzer that one year. We got back a letter on that, and that was a good feather in everybody's hat. We were not manned at 100%, necessarily, either. But the guys really worked, mostly farm kids in those days. They weren't afraid to work, and we got the job accomplished. The active component people were amazed at how well we could do on some of those things.

DePue: I want to get you into the later 1960s. The preface of all this is, the Vietnam War is now heating up.

Blade: Okay.

DePue: How did that change what was going on in the battery? I'm especially thinking about the type of people who ended up in the National Guard at that time?

Blade: Okay, good question. Those days, we had no trouble recruiting. People came, and we would put them on the list, perhaps. Early days, we would talk to them and that. We also would have people, sometimes their parents would come along and try to do some encouragement to get us to take their son or daughter in there. But we would be a little selective, who we brought in, in those days, because otherwise the draft would get them, and they would have to go to the draft.

DePue: Who was making the decision of who you select?

Blade: Well, that was kind of between commander and the 1st sergeants and the senior NCOs. In those days, the senior leadership knew somebody or something about these young men, so we were pretty selective about who we took.

DePue: Were you getting a lot of pressure, not just from families, but from state legislators and judges and—

Blade: I never did, with that. I did get some NCAA from the organization, about not taking blacks in. But I brought those people in when we tested the people, gave them their AFQT test. When they would see those scores, why, that would pretty much negate their complaints about that, and I would have no more problems about that, because if one scored high enough, we would take them. We had no discrimination at all, but they thought we did.

DePue: Now, this is Galesburg?

Blade: That's Galesburg; that's correct.

DePue: What's the African American population at that time, in Galesburg?

Blade: Rather small. I don't recall the percentages, but it was probably 2% or 3%, rather small.

One other thing, I might add here,—a little story here. I did have a fellow come in one time. The dad came in and tried to—when I was in the tire shop and also was a battery commander—wanted to offer me a big bonus on some tractor tires, if I would take his son. I told him, "No way." And I didn't want to sell him any tires either. I just didn't want to deal with people like that. The rest of that story is that his son ended up going in the military, went to OCS, got his commission and stayed in and retired as a major. So, I've often thought that was quite a coincidence. (laughs)

DePue: Did he make it to Vietnam?

Blade: Yes, he did. He did. His son went to Vietnam. But then, a little later on, the adjutant general sent out a letter. They made us date stamp some things, so we could no longer do preferences on people, because we had to send a copy of that waiting list into Springfield. That kind of curtailed that.

DePue: You mean you had to take the one who had been on the list the longest?

Blade: Yes, that's correct. Then we had to go into sequence of that.

DePue: But, by that time, if they have to be in the list long enough, they're going to be gone anyway, because they were drafted.

Blade: Well, that's very true, and that really didn't work very effective. It never caused a problem for us. One thing that I did, right ahead of that, was that we swore in a whole bunch of folks, the last day of a calendar year. So, we had to turn those lists in, the first of the year. Well, we pretty well had an extra supply of people sworn in there. We were over strength for a while.

DePue: I think, at that time, if you were drafted into the regular service, it was a two year commitment. What was it if you went into the National Guard?

Blade: I believe, at that time, it was a six year commitment.

DePue: And that's six years going to drill?

Blade: That's correct, yes. That's correct. Years previous, in the '50s, you would sign up then, [it] was normally an eight year obligation, but you could serve six, and then you went to IR, let's see, I can't remember what that stands for.

DePue: Individual Ready Reserve, IRR?

Blade: Yeah, that's what it was, Individual Ready Reserve, that's right, IRR, yeah.

DePue: Did you ever have any concerns, during the Vietnam War, that your unit or you, particularly, or the National Guard, in general, would have been mobilized?

Blade: Well, we always used to talk about that during training to kind of help motivate the troops and that. They also had SRF units in those days, but we in the artillery battalion was never of the SRFs, Special Ready Reserve Force, although some of the southern Illinois units, infantry units, were SRF units. The unit at Quincy was mobilized during Vietnam, and one of the lieutenants there was in my OCS class.

DePue: There was only a handful of National Guard Reserve Units that were mobilized. I think, maybe, on one or two hands you could count them.

Blade: Yes, I think you're right, yes, yeah.

DePue: What was the morale of the soldiers like during that time frame, when so many of them were there, only because they didn't want to go to Vietnam?

Blade: Well, the morale was pretty good because, if they didn't attend drill, we were able to send them on active duty. So, that was a pretty good motivator. (both laugh)

DePue: But once they got to the unit, were they just like any other troop that you had?

Blade: Yes, pretty much so. One thing I did, as the battery commander— I believe I'm right on my number; I'm awful close—I think I sent as high as thirty-eight

people to Fire Direction Basic Training, FDC, because, to help motivate the troops, when they came back, why they were working on the howitzers. The ones that did a superior job on the howitzers…

If someone in FDC goofed off a little bit, they ended up on the howitzer battery, and the other person got to work in FDC. That helped us to do extremely well at unit testing at the annual training, because I had so many people qualified as fire direction center, because that's the hardest one to train up people for. You can train most anybody to work on the howitzers and be a cook or one of those other jobs.

DePue: During those days, did the battery also include forward observers, or was that at the battalion level?

Blade: That was at battalion level, yes.

DePue: Here's a peculiar question for you, but it's a question based on knowledge of the days. Did you have a problem with haircuts or appearance?

Blade: Yes, that was a major problem. Particularly…That was in the early '70s, is when we really had problems with that. That was just a hard, hard task to do. We had some people [who] got into some troubles with that, with local commanders in the military, as well some of the civilians, by cutting their hair at annual training or cutting it as they got on the bus to go to annual training.

DePue: They got into trouble because they did do that or—

Blade: Because they manhandled people and cut their hair; that's correct.

In Southern Illinois, I know of a particular situation. We never had that happen, but we did have trouble trying to get the hair cut on people.

DePue: Do you remember that story behind that trouble in Southern Illinois?

Blade: Well, the battalion commander got involved and had people catch people just before they got on the bus, and they got a real quick haircut. Then they put them on the bus to go to annual training. That caused trouble at Springfield, and, of course, the politicians got after the adjutant general, and then, of course, the adjutant general had to get after the battalion commander, and it went on down the line, to wherever the incident happened at.

DePue: So, these soldiers who felt they had been misused, had contacted a politician someplace?

Blade: That's right. Their parents contacted their local politician for being misused and abused. (both laugh)

DePue: Nineteen sixty-eight, it's a pretty significant year in American history. Being in the Guard, you guys were in a unique position, because you're not going to Vietnam; you're a haven for a lot of people going to Vietnam, and then, April 4th, Martin Luther King is assassinated. There's riots across the country, in a lot of major cities, to include Chicago. Was your unit mobilized for that?

Blade: No, I was battery commander in Galesburg at the time. We were put on duty, and we stayed in the armory. We had to pull shades down, so nobody could look in the windows. They didn't want us meeting with the news media. We were standby. I was the taskforce commander, in case something happened in Peoria. Fortunately, it did not.

So we spent, I suppose, ten days or so, locked up in the armory. The only time we would send anybody out…I believe we even had the food delivered to the armory. We ordered the food from a grocery store. Matter of fact, when I think about it, an A&P store was next to the armory. I'm pretty certain we just got our food right there. They probably carried it over and delivered it, because we did not want to be seen outside in the uniform, because there may have been a bunch who were anti-military at the time, and that would have certainly caused some problems.

I did talk to a reporter, at the time. He was with the *Galesburg Register Mail*. [His] name slips me now, Mike Lawrence. At your Christmas function, he and I reminisced a little bit about that. Although he didn't particularly remember our particular conversation. But we talked about the training in those days.

DePue: Did the troops stay overnight in the armory, as well?

Blade: Yes, yeah, everybody was closed up inside the armory, because there was so much animosity, many places at that time, and particularly in the colleges, And Galesburg had Knox College there. So, no, we were locked inside.

DePue: This is not an enviable time to be the battery commander. You got kids in the building for ten days solid, and you have to keep them occupied.

Blade: Well, that's true. The Galesburg Armory was pretty crowded, too, because all the vehicles were stored in there, as well. We didn't have a whole lot of room for recreation and that, but we did a lot of riot training, while we were in there. We probably did some military training, as well, classroom type, yes.

DePue: Did you get outside in the parking lot or parks, or you stayed in the building?

Blade: No, we stayed in the building. Like I said, we covered all the windows up with paper and that, so nobody could see out or anything. The only communication we had was the telephone.

DePue: What was the pay status for those soldiers?

Blade: You know, I'm not certain what it was, but that was before the State of Illinois paid equal to people's rank. In those days…I want to say it was somewhere around $4 to $8 a day for the troops.

DePue: So, it wasn't tied to any kind of military training. It was just something the state had to pick up?

Blade: The state had to pick that up. In later years, the state passed laws so that people were paid commensurate with their military rank. Like myself, I don't remember what I was paid, either, but I would have gotten more money than the rest of them, as a commander.

DePue: Well just a few months later, August of 1968, the Democratic National Convention. Of course, most people are aware what happened at that time. Chicago was chaos. Did you get mobilized for that one?

Blade: No, we did not. Our unit did not get mobilized for that, but General Phipps, who later became our adjutant general, he was one of the task force commanders at the 1968 Convention in Chicago. Also, the former battery commander was involved in that, as well, in Chicago. They had some pretty hairy stories there, because there was a lot of riots going on and Molotov cocktails and things of that type.

DePue: What was your personal view of the Vietnam War and riots and Chicago at the Democratic Convention, because that's very much what the riots were about, about the war?

Blade: Well, it was. I guess, as I mentioned earlier the last interview, that I saw people going to Vietnam in the '50s. When they'd screw up, we'd send somebody over there as an NCO, as an adviser. It just didn't look to me like, in personal opinion, that it was a thing that we ought to be doing. I didn't have a good overview of really knowing the total objective, I guess, perhaps. But it was not too popular in those days, for sure.

DePue: How about your reaction to watching what was going on in Chicago, during those riots?

Blade: I thought that was a bad situation, as well. I guess I was fortunate that I wasn't in it, myself. But I really wondered about the leadership, what was going on, why we couldn't control all of that, of course.. But, we just couldn't.

DePue: Did the unit do any other mobilizations for weather incidents or anything else?

Blade: We had…In 1965, we were on flood duty. My unit was at Gulfport, and that was a big flood. It broke a lot of levees. We walked the levees, and at one time, the river was coming up an inch an hour.

DePue: Was this the Mississippi?

Blade: Mississippi River, across from Burlington, Iowa. It ended up, eventually broke the levee there and broke some other levees. I, along with the 1st sergeant and the other master sergeant, were up on a bridge. We were on the railroad tracks. The Highway 34 Bridge was underneath the railroad tracks. The Department of Transportation built a big wood plug to put in there, so that, if one of the other levees busted, why it wouldn't bother the railroad. They would use the railroad, because the railroad is probably elevated twenty-some feet above the ground level there. That would offer a levee in itself.

When we were on top of that, at about 600 -800 feet in front of that was another levee. We saw a levee bust in the distance, probably half a mile away. And all this water came gushing. When it hit that other levee, that was like 600-800 feet away from us, it just wiped it out immediately. All this water came towards where we were at. I jumped off the bridge. The two sergeants were down in the two Jeeps that we had below. I jumped across the pavement, and the water hit my leg that was hanging behind, almost knocked me down, but not quite.

The sergeant said, "What are we going to do?" and I says, "Drive into that." He drove the Jeep right into a wall of water that was probably three or four feet high at the time. Picked the Jeep up, and it just took it down the highway. The other Jeep that I got in, was the second one. We done the same thing, and it bumped us into it. The first Jeep hit a dump truck, a state dump truck and upset the dump truck. I know the good Lord was looking after us, because there was a curve in the highway, and it blew the building up in front of us.

The water seemed to level out, and the two Jeeps settled down on the pavement. The guys had the accelerators to the floor, but we weren't doing much. When the water let down, away we went. We had no brakes left, because they were so wet. We had the troops were south of there, probably about four miles. We radioed ahead and got them on a deuce and a halves and got them out of there. At the same time, we had some empty deuce and a halves, about five miles away. We had them coming down there to evacuate people that were in the houses and one thing and another, along that area.

Probably, a day later, the water was about eleven feet deep in that particular area, where we were. The Mississippi River, from Gladstone, IL to Burlington, Iowa there was across, probably was close to three miles wide and eleven foot deep. Farmers had had grain in their grain bins. The water got in there, and the bins busted, because the soybeans and the corn expanded.

We saved two drunks that night, too. The water had washed their cars in the ditch, and they couldn't walk. So, that's why I guess they were driving, but we pulled them out, left the vehicles and saved them. That was quite an experience. (laughs)

DePue: For a guy who had a lot of years in the military, that might have been about as close to a really hairy experience as you had, sounds like.

Blade: Yes, I would say that's true, yes. That was quite an experience.

DePue: I'm sure it caught your attention, when you ran into that wall of water.

Blade: Yeah, it did. I'll never forget that. We were just pure lucky to survive that. The rest of the people stayed up on the bridge, and above that. Of course, it washed that whole deal out. As water went down, six weeks later or so, that big cement bridge sunk in the ground. It was all the way down in the ground and maybe only about, no more than three feet of it was sticking above the highway. That's how big a dig in, it had dug in underneath that bridge, with the water flowing through there.

DePue: It makes you respect Mother Nature, doesn't it?

Blade: Well, it does. It took out about 1,500 feet of the rail, as well, where the rails were raised up on the tracks. It washed a big swath out of that. Of course, all that water that went through there really ruined some of the farmland, as well, because it put a lot of sand out there, on top of that, as well. [It] filled the draining ditches.

DePue: One other question that deals with the tenor of the time, so to speak. I think it was May of 1970, Kent State. Of course, in that case, you've got a National Guard Unit that finds itself confronted by angry students, because of the invasion of Cambodia, at the time, and ends up firing on the students. Your thoughts when you heard that news?

Blade: Well, I guess, immediately, my thoughts were that we were going to have to get involved with that, maybe in some of our local colleges, as well. We had done a significant amount of training.

At annual training, we generally devoted about one day to riot training, in which there we would throw sugar water on top of the troops, and we would have aggressors, so to speak, like college students. They would be hollering and everything, and they'd be throwing this stuff on the military guys. We would throw this sugar water on them at Camp Ripley, Minnesota. That sticky stuff was like syrup, and the mosquitoes, they loved that. You've never seen so many mosquitoes fly onto the people. It was great training, but not very nice. Pretty miserable training, I think, for the people that got soaked with that sugar water.

We had a lot of bayonet training, as well, for that, particularly after that incident of the shooting. Why then, of course, we really stepped up the training about not making certain that we didn't kill somebody, if we got called into that.

DePue: Were you sympathetic to the situation the Guardsmen had found themselves in or critical of their lack of discipline? What was your feeling?

Blade: Well, I was pretty sympathetic for them, really, because having watched all the training, on both sides of the fence there, which we did, I really felt sorry for them, because they were really very aggravated and everything. The military people are very disciplined, and overall they didn't think too much of those college kids, protesting all of this, because they felt, you know, this is a great country and a free country. They'd kind of got out of bounds, I think, was more or less the sentiment, particularly mine, yes.

DePue: Well, let's change gears again. You had already started talking about what caused you to make that decision to go full time with the National Guard. So, I want you to get into the specifics. What exactly was the job you were doing, and where was the job?

Blade: You mean in reference to the military?

DePue: Yeah, the full time facilities position.

Blade: Okay. Well, when it came to the facilities, then I was put in as a supply and service branch chief. At the time, there was a Lieutenant Colonel Charles Welch, who was originally from Galesburg, was the facilities officer chief, and Major Myers, he and I were both in the artillery together.

DePue: Lou Myers.

Blade: Lou Myers, He was a major at the time, and he was an assistant to Charlie Welch, as a state employee. A short time thereafter, I came aboard. They advertised that job as a federal person, and then we had a federal facilities officer. He received that job. We also had a retired lieutenant colonel, Grady Hamilton. His job was kind of looking after the armories that needed to have a new boiler or boiler repair. And we had one secretary. Then we had another retired colonel, Ray Bella, who used to be a bird colonel in that 129 Infantry at Joliet. He looked after the Chicago Armories and visited them. Because of their size, we needed somebody, strictly for facilities, to look after them to ensure that everything was going okay.

DePue: Was this job in Springfield?

Blade: This job was in Springfield.

DePue: So, the family moved to Springfield?

Blade: The family moved to Springfield, yes.

DePue: That's a lot bigger town than Galesburg.

Blade: Yes, it was. Monmouth was where we really…. But yes, it was, much bigger. We had knew some people here, so we rented a home here to start with, to figure out where we were going to live and what have you. It was quite a cut in pay, because I was making $1100 a month in the military at Fort Sill, and here I was $10,800 a year, whatever that is, $800 and some a month, I guess. (laughs)

DePue: Were you thinking, at that time, this is going to be my career; this is going to be something I want to stay with?

Blade: Well, I think so, because I really liked the military, and I liked the Guard and thought that, perhaps, I could get aboard full-time on the federal side, sooner or later.

DePue: Now you've confused me to a certain extent, because you've talked about both state positions and federal positions. Which side of the fence were you on, and what's the difference?

Blade: Okay, I was on the state side, as a regular state employee. The federal people were federal civil service people. They were paid out of the federal budget. Mine was pure state money. In those days, we had more state positions paid for by the state than we do have today. That's significantly changed in the last forty years.

DePue: Most people, they think about the National Guard and the guard unit that's in their local community, there's maybe two or three full-time people there. Would they have been federal employees, at that time?

Blade: Yes, they would have been, except for the janitors, they would have been, yes. Normally most of the armories in those days only had a couple of people, unless it was larger than a company-size unit. Then there would be more. But then, in later years, we had a recruiter in many of the armories, and then, later, a training NCO and a full-time administrative officer. So, many of them then had three.

DePue: When you started the position, you said they were civil servants. They're not being paid as in the military itself?

Blade: No., They're federal civil service technicians, and they're GS or WS. WS were maintenance workers that worked in the maintenance shops at battalion headquarters. All the rest were GS employees. Most of the ones in the units then were GS-5 or GS-7, which today, I don't know what the pay is today. But in those days, pay was probably less than $10,000 a year for a GS-7.

DePue: Now, I'm answering questions that I essentially know the answers to, but this is a point of confusion for anybody who is not a part of this system. These GS employees, who were working for the Guard, whether at an armory or at the

state headquarters, are they wearing uniforms? Are they still subject to the same discipline and regulations as somebody in the Army?

Blade: They are wearing their uniforms, and they are pretty much subject to military requirements, as far as dress and work ethic and what have you, yes. Now, the state employees could be working at that same armory. They were in civilian clothes, and the only time they would be in a military uniform would be during the weekend drill. Then they'd have to be in military uniform. One advantage that the state employees had, perhaps, is that they could go on to military schools and that and readily get two weeks off or use leave time, vacation time or whatever, to go to the schools.

DePue: You said you started as a state employee, correct?

Blade: That is correct.

DePue: Were you also a member of a unit, as a drilling Guardsman?

Blade: I was a member of the Rock Island Unit at the time. I was a battalion S-2.

DePue: You were a captain, still, at that time.

Blade: I was a captain, yes.

DePue: So, that's a lot of miles, back and forth, to get to Rock Island, it sounds like?

Blade: Well it is, I guess. However, it seemed like that sometimes they would want me in Springfield. When they'd have a weekend drill in Springfield, why the assistant adjutant general would want me down here to help work on a budget or something else. If there was not a big requirement going on in the battalion, I would be down here on a weekend drill, rather than at Rock Island. Although, sometimes in those days, we would go to Fort McCoy in the spring of the year. Sometimes we would go up there on Friday or something like that. So, I would take off here and go to Camp McCoy for the weekend.

DePue: What specifically were you doing then, in your full time job?

Blade: I was a chief of supply and services. What that had to do was…All the armories have cleaning supplies, brooms and mops and floor materials, paint and things of that type. I was responsible for all of that, as well as accountability for all the equipment that was in the armories' office equipment, not military equipment.

We used to have to do an inventory of all of that stuff in every armory, once year. We used to have to inventory everything that cost $2.50, original purchase price, on up. I wrote a letter to the state and told them the economics of that. We should just call that expendables. Well, I was successful in getting that re-written, I guess, and changed it, but the only changed it up to $25. So,

it got away from counting the pencil sharpeners and some things, little postal scales and stuff of that type. The dollar value of those is what the value was they paid for them.

Well, some of those things had been in those armories for forty or fifty years, but they were still on the books, and you had to account for them. Of course, people would move those things around a little bit in the armory. So, when we would do an inventory, once year, we'd always write where it was at, because they next time we were there, well, it wasn't in that room, and we would find it someplace else. So, that was rather an interesting thing.

The other thing that I did, in reference to supplies, they would order paint. Well, I started snooping around, and it was amazing, the paint that they'd ordered wasn't on the walls. You'd go in the armory, there weren't any rooms painted. They were buying latex paint. We would get the receipts and see that, so I instigated a bulk purchase plan, in which we bought all the stuff and had it put in a warehouse in Springfield, and then we delivered that to the battalion headquarters. Then, let the company size units come there and get the supplies that they had ordered, because we sent a delivery list out to that battalion, which A, B, and C Company was supposed to get.

But, I ordered oil based paint. Now, why did I order oil base paint? Well, the reason I did that was, it has an odor to it. I decided that, if we did that, the wives wouldn't like that smelly stuff put on their kitchen, in the house. We were amazed at how much more paint we started getting on all the walls in the armories, because the paint wasn't disappearing. That way, we had accountability for the mops and brooms and what have you, as to, when we were around doing the inventory of all the property, we also started inventorying all the brooms and the mops. It was amazing how that all significantly changed.

Well, the bottom line of that, we saved 66% of our dollars, within two years after we started the bulk purchase, because that stuff started staying in the armories. So, in turn, Governor Walker had a program, and I was picked as one of the top fifty state employees for saving money, I guess, for the state in, a percentage way. (both laugh)

DePue: Did the armory janitors answer to you guys at the facilities office?

Blade: Yes, indirectly they did. They worked for the custodian. We had a custodian in each of the armories, and that normally was…Either the commander of the unit was the custodian or someone else that was selected from Springfield and/or the current AST.

The AST is the full-time administrative person at the armory, who is a federal employee, but he also was the custodian. I believe we paid $50 a month to a custodian of an armory. They were only a part-time, and they took

care of all the bills, like the power bill came in, to pay the utilities or the water bill and that. Or, if they needed work on the furnace or whatever, they would call us at facilities, and we'd either send somebody out there to do a contract, or we'd have them call a local plumber of electrician or whatever the case may be.

DePue: What does AST stand for?

Blade: Well Administrative Technician, it must have been, Administrative Supply Technician [AST], that's what that was. How did I recall that? That was a miracle. (laughs)

DePue: I've been impressed by your memory so far, sir

Blade: That was a miracle.

DePue: Not something you've had to recall for a few years, huh?

Blade: Haven't had anybody ask me that for a long time.

DePue: I know you're an officer. Obviously, most officers are interested in making promotions. That's in part that's going to allow you to stay in the military. Were you starting to get some pressure to get some kind of a college education?

Blade: Well, I don't know as anybody pressured me, but in my own mind, I guess, I've always kind of had the philosophy, you want to be the best you can be. Being as I was full time on the state side in the Guard, and I wanted to stay in the Guard, I knew that, to get promotions, I needed to get all the education I could.

We had Sangamon State here in Springfield, which today, is the University of Illinois at Springfield. I took a CLEP exam there. I took that very shortly after I got to Springfield, I went out there, because I knew I wanted to get a college degree. Fortunately, I got two years of college credit, passed that CLEP exam, and automatically got two years of college credit. So, I could start then as a junior at Sangamon State.

So, I went to night school out there, started in right away. One semester, I carried twelve hours, but I also went to Command General Staff College one night a week, too. I just about had too many classes then. So, I backed off a little bit. But, I did get my college degree in 1977. But then, I went back and got it specialized, so I got a degree in economics. Before, I just got a regular college degree.

DePue: An undergraduate degree in economics?

Blade: Yes.

DePue: When did you start going to school out there?

Blade: Would have been the fall of '72.

DePue: So pretty shortly after you got your full-time position, then?

Blade: Yes, well, yes, yes. I took the CLEP exam, as soon as they offered that there, and took that, yes.

DePue: Well, the reason I'm asking is because I think the school got its start in 1970. It was started with this notion that it was going to be cutting edge. So, they were going to look at a completely different way of doing education, at that particular level. Some pretty radical ideas, like there would be no regular grading system, that you could bring your dog and eat your meals in the classrooms and things like that. I've heard some of the stories, at least. What did you think of the education you got out there? Did you see any of that kind of stuff?

Blade: I did, when I went out to the main campus; however, many of the classes that I took were right down in the Leland Building, I believe, on Fifth Street there, between Fifth and Sixth. So, I would leave work and walk over there, because we'd get off work at 4:30, and they would have classes starting at 5:00. I would do that a lot of times.

But, when I did go out to the campus, yes, I did see some dogs in classes, a time or two and people eating. And, of course, the haircuts were much different and what have you, yes. It was a totally different environment than what I'd been at Fort Sill. (both laugh)

DePue Did you think you got a good education, that way?

Blade: Well, it fit me anyway. It worked out well for me, yes.

DePue: Okay.

Blade: And I didn't sign up for grades. You could either signup and get grades, or you could sign-up pass and fail. I signed up pass and fail, because I was also doing, like I said, Command General Staff College. I started that a very short time after that, one night a week, and I was doing other extra drills. Sometimes we'd have extra drills, so I just had a lot of things going on. I really did a lot of things in that ten-year window, there.

DePue: Well, and doing the pass/fail approach would be one measure of how different and innovative they were and how they were structuring education, I would think.

Blade: Yes, that's true.

DePue: Nineteen seventy-seven, I think, that was the year you got your degree. It sounds like it might have been an important year in a couple of other respects. Was that when General Phipps became adjutant general?

Blade: Yes, it was, 1977. Maybe we could back up a little bit. I'd just like to back up. When Governor Walker was elected, and he took over as governor in 1973. Governor Ogilvie was our previous governor. So, when I first started, he was the governor, but I had never seen him, in particular, in any meetings. The Guard always took care of the inaugurations and was responsible for those. So, General Patton was the adjutant general—

DePue: Are you talking about Walker's inauguration now?

Blade: Yeah, Governor Walker's inauguration, which was in January 1973. Governor Walker walked the state during his campaign, and, of course, he liked to do things way far out. So, General Patton told me that I was in charge of the inauguration, taking care of all of that.

Naturally, I had never done anything like that before or had never been exposed to something like that. So, that was pretty new to me, but I certainly looked at some records they had in Springfield of some of the previous ones and really boned up on that. The other thing that you had to do was meet with the new people that were coming aboard, because the Republicans had been in.

So now, all the Democrats were coming in. The fellows that worked on helping get the governor elected, they were all going to get some pretty good jobs. Well, many of them were working as kind of liaisons between the incoming governor and me, as far as setting up the armory and setting up the Inauguration Day and all the VIPs that would be coming in and how we would take care of all of them.

To include, they also had a military ball, with dances and bands and all kinds of equipment. I had to look after that, be in charge of that, and to include another special dinner, over at the governor's mansion. So, there were a lot of things going on, and little old me, pretty naïve, had a lot of things to do. No one else from the Guard was working on all the preparation, just me.

DePue: You'd only been there for six months or so?

Blade: That's correct. (both laugh)

DePue: They were throwing you as meat to the lions.

Blade: They threw me to the wolves. I often thought about that. I don't know if I surprised them or impressed them. (both laugh) Just to talk a little bit about the governor's mansion. They had also sent all the furniture out to be

refurbished, and they had redone the governor's mansion, and it wasn't totally finished. They also had me looking after some of that, as well.

They were still doing carpeting in there and bringing in chairs that had been refinished. There's a big walnut table in there that…You've probably been in there for luncheons or dinners or something. I always remember; it's forty-one feet long. The people at the mansion told me that, "Boy, nobody could mess that table up, and what are you going to do? How are you going to protect the hot stuff from spilling on that table and everything?"

Of course, as a farm boy, you quickly figured out that. I said, "Well, we'll just get some half inch Styrofoam. We'll cover that whole table with half inch Styrofoam, and then we'll put the tablecloth on top of it. The Styrofoam will be secure enough to not upset the coffee. If it does, it won't get on the table." That's what we did. Anyway, made that all work, and then we had to put chairs and one thing and another. Governor Walker wanted to sit outside, right in front of the Lincoln statue, there.

DePue: That had not been done before, as I recall.

Blade: As far as I know, it had not been accomplished before. They wanted 3,000 chairs out there. Well, where do you get 3,000 chairs? Well, we had many thousands of chairs in all the armories. So, I sent deuce and a halves. We used military deuce and a halves. We sent them out, in some cases, and in some cases, we took a state truck and picked up chairs, until we accumulated 3,000 of them.

Then people from the depot, the USPFO depot, they took a day's leave and put on civilian clothes, many of the workers, to set those chairs up that next morning. And it was cold as all get-out, but they had a set pattern on how those all lined up. I'm out taking care of that. We set chairs up in the armory. I don't remember the numbers we put there.

DePue: Is this the armory, right across from the Capitol Building, downtown?

Blade: Yes, the armory across the Capitol Building. We had to identify…Many chairs in the front rows had names on them. Of course, coordinating that with the other people. Then, we had chairs up on the stage, as well, in that armory. Those chairs, we had white sleeves that slid over the chairs, so they really looked kind of nice, but they were just regular chairs. Those all had names on them.

There where we had escorts, and the officers, then, had their military uniforms on the day of inauguration, and they were up there. We had some colonels up there, and then, lieutenant colonels and majors. If you were a full colonel in those days, you were dealing with a senior senator or a big contributor to the Democrat Party, in this case.

There was a lot of prima donnas that had to be pleased (laughs). All the colonels and everybody came to me for direction, because I was the focal point for all of that. We had TV towers set up on the drill floor in the armory and some up in the balconies. We had some special seats in the balconies, as well. It was quite an ordeal, but it went off very well.

DePue: So, was that your first exposure to politics and working with people in the governor's office, for example?

Blade: It was, and as I looked back, that was absolutely an excellent opportunity. I was extremely pleased that I had that job, because many of those connections I used for years and years later. [I] still have some of those yet today.

DePue: What would have happened? This is January, and he did have an outdoor inauguration ceremony. What were you going to do if it snowed or rained?

Blade: Well, then we were going to come in the armory, but it had to be awful bad, because, when Thompson's inauguration—I'll talked about that when we get there—we had some pretty severe conditions at that time and how we accommodated that. But, anyway, that's pretty much…the weather cooperated, but if hadn't have been, we would have had to been in the armory, and we'd had to do a whole bunch of different things. We did have a contingency for that. There'd have been a lot of people that could not have got in there, to attend the inauguration.

DePue: Well, we went to that story, and when I asked you about General Phipps becoming the adjutant general, was there a reason behind it? I mean, that connection with the people at the state level, or is this some territory you wanted to go back and cover?

Blade: You lost me temporarily, there.

DePue: Well, I wanted to know if there's a connection between General Phipps and that experience.

Blade: There is, because I got a couple/three other things to talk a little bit about Walker, because it kind of ties in with the Guard a little bit. One thing, Governor Walker was really very much involved with the Guard, in the fact that he would come to the…He spoke at NGAI, National Guard Association of Illinois. He also came by the armory a couple of times, during the workday, and shook hands with the employees. I don't never remember another governor, since then, every doing that, to my knowledge.

DePue: He was a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, and he had some service right at the end of World War II and into the Korean War era, I think.

Blade: Yeah, okay. Yes, that's right. That, perhaps, helped that. So, the other thing, then, when he came aboard, he had promised to have town hall meetings in all

counties in Illinois. So, some of those were held in armories, but not all of them.

There seemed to be a fellow from the Guard that had to be involved in every one of them, and that was me. So, with the governor's office, I traveled to every one of those town meetings that he had. And he didn't have that many, until he quit them. But, I many times, would take a truck or drive to an armory, and I would get, pick up chairs there and take them over in a state vehicle, state truck, over to a place that he would have this town hall meeting.

DePue: You emphasize state vehicle. Is that because you don't want to be using military equipment to do state business?

Blade: Yeah, because that would not be authorized, and Colonel Bishop, the USPFO, would not have allowed that, so, yeah. When we used other vehicles previously, we had to call that a state active duty mission, when we were bringing in extra chairs. I guess that's for the incoming commander-in-chief, perhaps, was the justification for that.

So, leading up to these town hall meetings, the most scary one and the last one that they had was at Northwest Armory in Chicago. Governor Walker had a meeting, a short distance away from there, four of five blocks. I had taken a lot of chairs out of the Northwest Armory, over there and set up. The meeting all started pretty well. That's a big Puerto Rican area and Hispanics, a lot of Hispanics in that area.

DePue: Is that the one that's near Humboldt Park?

Blade: That is correct. That used to be all blacks in that area. When the Hispanics came in, the blacks left. So, as the meeting starts, everything is going very well. It's about 800, as I recall, about 800 chairs were pulled into this hall that we had the meeting [in] that day. I do not remember what the governor said, but he said something that absolutely upset that crowd. They immediately started getting up out of chairs, and they were going right towards the governor.

The security people took him outside, rapidly, and he was gone. And here I am, in there, with all the rest of the state people with Governor Walker. They just evaporated, too. Here I am, in there, with all these people that's very disgruntled. I guess, somehow, they all finally left, and I hauled all the chairs out and loaded them and took them back over to the Northwest Armory and went home or stayed in Chicago, probably, for the night. But that was an experience. That was a near riot in there, I know that. (chuckles)…Like I said, I don't remember what set it off, but something did, something that he said. As far as I know, he never had any more town hall meetings that I was involved in, I know that.

DePue: That might have been the last one?

Blade: I think it might have been the last one, quite an experience.

DePue: Well, I know this much about Governor Walker, his relationship with the state legislature was awful, and his relationship with Mayor Daley was worse than awful.

Blade: Yes, Neil Hartigan was his lieutenant governor. I don't know if you remember that name, no?

DePue: I've actually interviewed Neil Hartigan.

Blade: Is that right? Well, I haven't dealt with him for years, but just when you threw that up, that's totally a thing I forgot about. But, this really didn't happen until Governor Thompson's in, that I was dealing with him, I guess, probably. I got to think about it. I'm a little bit off track here. I had a meeting in Chicago, with the Broadway Armory, and—the.name slips me… the mayor ahead of Mayor Byrnes—

DePue: Bilandic?

Blade: Bilandic, I believe, is right, yeah. I think that's right. I need to think just a….This transpired into Thompson's era. Well, it couldn't have, I don't believe. Was Bilandic in there, when Walker was the governor?

DePue: No, that would have been Richard J. Daley. Daley died, right after he got out of office.

Blade: Yeah, that is correct, yeah. You're right. Thank you. So, anyway, the next one, I'll wait. Neil Hartigan, something struck a bell there. But that happened during Thompson's time, so I'll get to that, when we get there.

I believe that that was….one more thing here. Well, no, that's all. That's all, basically, with Walker. Like I said, he was a good supporter of the Guard, came around and visited everybody in the office a couple of times, and he spoke at NGAI, and that was about it. Friendly to the Guard.

DePue: Does that get us up to the General Phipps timeframe, then?

Blade: That gets us to Governor Thompson and General Phipps, yeah.

DePue: I'll throw in a little bit here on Walker. He was not a popular governor, in part, because his whole message was anti-Dailey, anti-Democratic machine, and he's a Democrat, so he didn't have any success in the legislature, didn't have any success working with Daley's people. The '76 election came along, and the Daley machine ran their own challenger in the primary, and that would have been Michael Howlett, I believe.

Blade: That's right. I think so.

DePue: Howlett beat him in the primary. So, now you've got Howlett running against the young upstart, by the name of Jim Thompson, who had the distinction of sending former Governor Otto Kerner to jail, a few years before. Obviously, Thompson wins that election in '76. So, I'll turn it back over to you, with that introduction.

Blade: Okay. Governor Thompson, then, is elected the new governor, and he comes aboard in January, 1977. I'm in charge of the inauguration, again, fortunately, and now I how to do that, pretty much. (laughs)

DePue: So, you're happy this time, to be in charge of the inauguration?

Blade: Well, I feel far more confident of what I'm doing, than I did before. His people were very good to work with. Some of them [are] still friends today, which these are good things to have those internal connections, I guess, with the governor and the party, particularly.

So, Governor Thompson had told several of the high school kids that their bands could be in competition, to come down and play at his inauguration. So, the inauguration transpires, and it's snowing, and it's about ten below zero, when he's inaugurated.

We have all the chairs all set up in the armory and everything, to do that. We can't do it. It's too bad of weather, and we're bringing everybody in. We had standing room only, except for some special handicapped VIPs, in the armory. I have no idea how many people were in there, but lots of them.

Then, as those people cleared out, we started putting [in] the marching bands. We had a school bus drive up to the north side of the armory and we'd let them out. They'd come in the holding area there. It's snowing and sloppy inside, all the snow blowing in and the wind. It's just a mess there, on the north side of the drill floor. Then, they would go out and play music, towards the stage. We had chairs and all things set up there. Then they would go and get in the south end of the armory and wait on the bus that pulled around to pick them up, on the south side. Another bus is unloading and another bus is playing the band. So, we had three high school bands in the armory at one time, one getting ready, one playing and one getting ready to get on the bus. I don't know how many bands we had, but it was a busy day. You've never seen so much slop in an armory in your life.

Then, you know, this all leads up to the inauguration. We've got to get all them chairs back in there, again, and get all of that set up. There used to be a room in the armory that also was the governor's room. It had [a] special couch and chairs, pretty fancy. So, we'd get the governor escorted in there, and then he had to go through a certain way to get up on the stage, make the speeches and what have you.

Then that night, we had to clear all the chairs out of there again, because then one of the balls was held in the armory, at night. [It was the] same thing for Walker. Then, one over at the governor's mansion. I can't remember where the other one was, both times, because we had another location, but I don't recall where that was, for sure.

DePue: Do you recall any of the names of the people in the young Thompson administration that you would have been working with directly?

Blade: Oh, Art Quern, who became the deputy governor. He had worked for Governor Rockefeller in New York, prior to that. He was an E-4 in the New York National Guard. I guess you know, he wasn't here the first inauguration, but Terry Bedgood was. Terry Bedgood later worked in the bureau of the budget and then became a deputy to Art Quern, who was the deputy governor. Let's see, Lynn Rainey, who ended up being the front man for Governor Ryan, was also in on that, on the early stages. Those guys are still all around, except Art Quern. He was killed in an airplane wreck.

DePue: So, again, you're getting connections with all these people, right within the inner circle of the governor's office, it sounds like?

Blade: That's right, yes. Jim Edgar, he was a state rep and later became head of the legislative liaison for Governor Thompson. Terry Bedgood was one of his assistants, at one time. Terry Logsdon was another one. He's still around town here, too. There's others. Those are some of the key guys that I worked with. So then, in June of that year, why then—

DePue: That would have been June of '77?

Blade: Seventy-seven. Then General Phipps becomes the adjutant general, and he's replaced General Patton. I might add, one little quick story, just before…Thompson's the governor, but we had…Bob Adams was a major, and he was head of recruiting for the Illinois Guard. But, in those days, we didn't have federal cars for the recruiters to use. So, we needed state cars, but the state didn't have any money. So, I met with the state's maintenance group, and they had some cars that agencies had turned in, because they needed a lot of repairs, and the state didn't want to spend the money on them.

So, we got permission to pick up those cars, on the state's side. Me in charge of supplies of service, I could sign for General Patton and get those signatures, without him being aware of that. I didn't mean that to be disguising anything, but I signed for these sixteen cars. Then we took those cars to some of the maintenance units in the armories to let them do the repairs on. They would do that as training for the weekend. That was part of their training, repairing those cars. We could buy the commodity parts for the cars out of the state budget, but we didn't have enough money to run them through the state garage, due to their charging. So, I had worked, coordinated

and worked all this out with Walker's people. But, General Patton didn't know about this. I kept this pretty quiet.

Bob Adams told me he'd really love to get some cars. Well, I told Bob, I says, "I'm going to tell you something, but you got to be quiet about it." And I said, "You can't tell anybody; I'm just telling you." I says, "I've got sixteen of those cars, and they're going to be yours pretty shortly." So, "Okay, I won't tell anybody."

This is the last day that Patton's in office, and I believe, I'm the only guy that knows he's…General Phipps didn't even know he was going to be the adjutant general the next day, but I did.

DePue: Wait a minute. How did you know?

Blade: Well, back working with Terry Bedgood and Terry Logsdon, and they…There were some other things that—

DePue: So, they would tell you and swear you to secrecy?

Blade: Yeah. So, I tell Adams this. So, Adams turns around. He couldn't keep it. He turned around and told the chief of staff, Colonel Thane, that I had all these cars. So, what's Thane do? He runs in and tells Patton and takes Adams with him.

So, I'm upstairs. I was on the third floor, and I get a call to report down to General Patton's office, immediately. I go down there, and he says something to the effect, "What's this I hear? You've picked up sixteen state cars for Bob Adams for recruiting?"

Well, Bob Adams' face was as red as an artillery man's scarf when he hears I got called in, over him letting that secret out. I said, "Well, yes sir. You've given me permission to sign for you, so that's what I did." He says, "Well, how are you going to fund all that?" I says, "You just turn the budget over to me, and I'll take care of that." (both laugh) So, he really didn't say any more to me, particularly, and Thane and Adams, he was really…Afterwards he told me, "I've never seen a captain so sure of what he was doing, as you was doing, as a captain." He said, "Talking to a General." But, I never did tell Bob Adams that I knew what was going to happen that night (laughs).

So, anyway, we got the cars in recruiting, and everything went along fine. I just wanted to throw that little bit in there. Today, the recruiting cars are all federal.

DePue: Well, if you don't mind me saying this, sir, by this time in your career, having hung around all these politicians and political aides, you've learned how to work the system and get things done.

Blade: Well, I think that all helped for sure. I would never have been able to do that ordinarily, if I hadn't of had those connections to get the cars. That's right, yeah.

So, moving on then, I guess, to General Phipps then coming aboard. You want to keep going on this or. —

DePue: Oh, absolutely. Tell us a little bit about who General Phipps was, the kind of personality, the talents he brought to the job as adjutant general.

Blade: Okay. Just a little bit of history here, when Governor Ogilvie was governor, there were several folks who wanted to be the adjutant general. They could never agree on anything. So finally, Governor Ogilvie said…He had a meeting with the ones that wanted to be the adjutant general, I believe, personally. So I was told. This came from General Phipps. He then says, "We're going to select an adjutant general today, and you people are going to help me do that. We're going to vote on who you want and who you don't want. Whoever gets the most votes is going to be the adjutant general, and the number two guy is going to be the assistant adjutant general."

That's how General Patton got to be adjutant general, because General Boyle had passed away before him. General Phipps became the assistant adjutant general, because I guess he got the second number of votes. (both laugh) So, that's how that happened.

Now, General Phipps is from Mattoon. He had a great military experience. He was a Silver Star recipient. He was in the family of shoe stores, Phipps Shoes. I think, at one time, they had about nineteen shoe stores, in various communities, over in the central and eastern part of the state of Illinois. So, he had a good business background, and he had an older brother that did a lot of things in politics.

General Phipps understood politics, and he also had a great business mind, of how things worked in the business. [He] was just well suited for the job. He'd been one the task force officers in the '68 riots, and he'd been a brigade commander and a company commander. When he came back from Korea, why, he took a reduction rank, from a major to a captain, I believe, to be the commander of the Mattoon unit and then worked his way back up to brigadier general in the Guard. So, that's a little bit of his background.

DePue: I know, because I've talked to a couple people you've mentioned here, that as this particular point in Illinois National Guard history…I'll let you verify whether this characterization is correct or not. The condition of the armories was atrocious.

Blade: That is correct, yes.

DePue: I believe one of the things that is significant about the timeframe that Phipps was adjutant general, that you guys worked hard on correcting that problem. That's one of the things I want you to talk about, here.

Blade: Okay. Well, as I kind of briefly mentioned, General Phipps had a great understanding of the political system, as well as the National Guard. So, when he was appointed the adjutant general, why then, myself and Max Willingham had not had a pay raise for five years, as state employees. We were both making $11,000 a year, at that time. General Phipps made me an administrative assistant, and I got a $6,000 a year raise. Then also, Max Willingham got a nice raise too, and he was assigned another job, as well.

Then, leading up to that, I guess, .prior to General Phipps getting aboard, Major Myers and I would sometimes, at night, go downtown with the politicians and talk to them about some things that they wanted to know about the Illinois National Guard, because General Patton, when they would ask him a question, he would always tell them, "I'll have you a written answer in forty-eight hours." And that was the end of the testimony. He never would testify before them, other than always send them a written letter. I guess his point there was that he wanted that in writing.

DePue: What do you mean by "going downtown at night?"

Blade: Oh, well, we would go to some of the political restaurants or bars or—

DePue: You mean where the work really happens?

Blade: Yeah…or the Capitol Building. Norb Andy's was a good place to go or go downtown and maybe meet with some of the staff people there, because I had got some connections from Governor Walker's timeframe, so, therefore, we had some ins to talk to some people.

As a good example of one thing that transpired there, the furniture had to be ordered for the new armory that we moved into, out at Camp Lincoln, in 1978. So, this is all transpiring in '77, when Phipps comes aboard. But, that is in the '78 budget, because that takes effect the first of July, and Phipps comes aboard the first part of June.

DePue: This is the state budget?

Blade: State budget, in '77. So, we put all of that off, all the office furniture, in that '78 budget, back in '77. But, General Patton then found out what was in the budget for all that furniture, and he says, "We'll just move all the old furniture from here out there, and we're not buying that. Take that out of the budget." Myers and I are over there, and we got all that back in the budget. But, they understood where we were coming from, and the politicians understood what the situation was, so that stayed in.

When the ‘78 budget came around, why we got all new furniture, in the new building at Camp Lincoln. That was just an example of one thing that we did, behind the scenes, and made work. But it was tough.

Then, I guess, moving along here a bit, when General Phipps is in office, now, and Governor Thompson, as soon as he got in, or a short time thereafter, he wanted to close eight armories, to save money, because people had told him how run down they were, which they were. I was busy working up an economic analysis on those eight armories and the benefits that they had to the communities. Then [I] also developed a twenty-five year, long range program of replacement armories and also new facilities, as well as repairing some of them.

In doing as such, there was some other things involved in this, and I’m leading up to how we got things laid out. Many states had an armory board, and these things were developed in the ‘20s and ‘30s, to build new armories in the state. But the state didn’t have to budget for them. These armory boards turned around and sold bonds. Then the state made quarterly payments to that armory board.

Well General Phipps, Major Myers and myself developed a cost analysis on this program. We then were able to obtain funds on the state side to help pay off that armory board. Then, all our armories were owned, cash free, [this] stopped the cash flow. Now, to do all of this, we had to have some additional help. General Phipps had a good idea, that we ought to have an armed services committee, at state level, which Illinois had never, ever had. I don’t know any state that does.

DePue: Are you talking about that the legislature would have such a thing?

Blade: Yes. That is correct. Also, as soon as General Phipps comes aboard, then we’ve never had a legislative liaison. So, Thompson wanted every department to have a legislative liaison. Well, we really wanted one from the Guard, so that worked out good. I was the natural guy for that, because, having had the inaugurations and that, I’ve got the power to go in there. So, put me in coach. I’ve got my helmet on.

DePue: Well, I shouldn’t interrupt you but—

Blade: No, do that.

DePue: I’m curious here. Those positions, historically, have been patronage kind of jobs, where the governor’s office would throw somebody in, who wouldn’t necessarily have any knowledge or experience in whatever department he went to or she went to. Oftentimes, they have an atrocious reputation, within the agencies they go to. Obviously, in your case, it was a completely different scenario.

Blade: That's totally true, and I think today…I don't know if that's true today, but I know, many years since then, the politicians have put political hacks in those jobs. They haven't come out of the Guard. I think, in my case, I had good connections, politically, with setting up the inaugurations and had built good relationships with those people. So, that was just kind of a natural. I automatically fit two sides, right away and had no argument anyplace.

DePue: Before this, there was no such thing as a legislative liaison, working for the adjutant general?

Blade: No, we never had one, no. The only connections we ever had was the bureau of the budget. When Walker was the governor, the Bureau of the Budget, we'd meet with them, but nothing else, nobody working anything, politically.

DePue: I'll let you pick up your narrative here, then.

Blade: Yeah, so anyway, I just finished, I guess, talking about the armory board. We, then, got that paid off. General Phipps had this idea of an armed services committee. So, we set up a House and Senate Armed Services Committee.t That was a first for Illinois. We thought that this way, we could work through the senior leadership of both the House and the Senate, get them on our team, and we were very successful. We got Senator George Sangmeister and Senator Bill Mahar, along with Representative Pechous, and, I believe, the other one was Mitchler, but I'm not positive, but I think so. But these fellows—

DePue: Bob Mitchler, Senator Bob Mitchler

Blade: He was a Senator, not a House. That's why I think I've got the wrong name there. I'll maybe think of that. I might have it someplace. Anyway, these four people, then, we would meet with them quarterly and talk about what our needs were and give them some ideas of what we could do to help the communities. We got to see how they're going to give us the money to help an armory in a community, but then we're going to tell them how that community is going to help the governor. You always got to do a little give and take on those situations.

DePue: Is the focus of this relationship almost exclusively on armories facilities maintenance, or is it also talking about the normal functions, what a National Guard unit would be doing? The training, what they could bring for mobilization purposes, those kind of issues?

Blade: Yes, we did. We talked [about] all the things we could do, as a state mission for the Guard, as well as what would happen if a federal mission were to come about, as well, and how these armories could be better utilized in those communities to help the governor look good and help us, as the National Guard, in recruiting. It was just a win/win situation, all the way around.

I had developed a booklet—I don't know if I can find it. I think I still have one—that talks about the economic benefit to those eight areas. I also used to go around, then, right in this timeframe and after. I would go around to communities and meet with the mayors and chambers of commerce, and they'd get a group in. I would talk to them and tell them about what the Guard could do for that community, how many dollars was coming into that community and those things, so we could help generate interest to help general recruits, the whole thing. It was all encompassing.

I think I've got a little story up here someplace, out of one of the newspapers where I was at one day. It pretty well summarizes what I was doing in that area.

Now, as I said, we had a Democrat and a Republican senator. We had one of each and the same thing in the House. We also then had, I believe, eight people on this board. In that, we had a female Guard person, we had a male Guard person and we had a businessperson and a community leader. I think there were eight people on that board. We would meet quarterly. In the summer months, after the legislature was out of session, we would meet in Chicago. When they were in session, we would meet in Springfield. So, we did a good job at communicating with that. That really worked very well for us, and that helped us get a lot of things.

Then, on another thing, along about this same timeframe, we started to take VIPs to camp, from the various communities that had armories. We would have them meet, maybe, at a central location, Peoria, Chicago, Rockford, Springfield, and some two or three places in southern Illinois, Mt. Vernon. We would take them in a plane. As they got off the plane, General Phipps was shaking their hand, and a picture was taken. There would be an escort to take them out, to their town unit, wherever it was at.

They would have lunch that day with them, and they would observe the training that that unit was doing. We would also take pictures, out there, of them and that unit. Then, at the end of the day, they would come back. We would get the photographs already in 8 x 10s, and General Phipps would sign them. He would be there, shaking their hand, as they were getting back there on the plane.

We really had built some great camaraderie there, as well as some of the state senators and representatives would go along, as well. That's when that started, maybe '78 or somewhere in there, '79. Right along with that, we started, in 1980, flying VIPs to Washington, D. C.

DePue: Who's paying the bills for both of these events? Is it okay for civilians to be riding on military aircraft and—

Blade: We had to write to Washington to get permission to do that, and we got permission to do that, C130s or whatever, handling them, and the same thing for Washington. Those things have just now been stopped, right now, because of the budget sequester coming up. We started that in 1980, KC135 tanker. We would fly that out and pick up VIPs from various areas, and then we would—

DePue: Were you going to the National Guard Bureau Headquarters? What was the purpose of taking them out to Washington, D. C.?

Blade: We would go out there, and we would meet in the buildings close to the State Capitol, the Federal Capitol Building, like the office building was one of them.

DePue: The Senate and the House Office Buildings.

Blade: Yeah, we'd be in there, and there was another building we used to go in, once in a while, too. We would do this on the first day we would fly in. We'd meet them there that evening for hors d'oeuvres, and then we would take some of the Guard guys would go out there, as well. We try to train the Guard guys that would go out, what to talk about.

DePue: You're talking to the—

Blade: Senators and congressmen.

DePue: Okay.

Blade: Senators and congressmen. Good question, I kind of slipped over that. Also, the chief of the Guard Bureau would be there and also the director of the Army Guard and the Air Guard. Normally, those three would be there, as well. Then we'd do those hors d'oeuvres. There'd be some cocktails around and this nice reception.

We generally would get somebody to donate the money to pay for that, some businesses. Ace Hardware, here in Springfield, used to be a pretty good one. The other fellow's names slips me. Anyway, we'd generally take a couple of them along. Likewise, we'd get some out of Chicago, because we'd be scattered all over the state, here. Then, after that was done, the next morning we would have a breakfast over at the NGAUS [National Guard Association of the United States].

Then, they were all invited over there. We'd have a good turnout at that, too, with the politicians. Every breakfast, then, we would talk to the group—because we'd generally have a better turnout there than we would in the evenings—we would talk about what our needs were for the next year, in reference to budgets for armories and training purposes and maybe military equipment. The Guard Bureau would give a briefing there, as well.

Those went very well. Sometimes we would go back and get people on a tour, into the Pentagon, or we'd get a briefing out at the Air Guard at Andrews Air Force Base. These were very, very productive meetings. Like I said, we started those in 1980, and we ran them every year through 1994, when I retired, and that was the end of them.

DePue: How much of what you've been talking about, here, was your initiative, as that legislative liaison?

LTC Lou Myers, Major General John Phipps (adjutant general) and LTC General Blade meet with Governor Jim Thompson in February, 1979, during the legislature's budget discussion talks. They were given a hand receipt for Abraham Lincoln's rocking chair. Blade was the Guard's legislative liaison at this time.

Blade: Probably a considerable amount, really. General Phipps was very supportive of all of this. Not that he didn't have some ideas, too, as well as Major Myers. But, it was pretty much the three of us. I was more the leader in the group, because I had the personal connections. Not that they didn't have some connections, as well.

DePue: Would you describe Phipps as a savvy person, as far as the political scene was concerned?

Blade: Yes, very much so, yes.

DePue: I wanted to go back a little bit, because we prefaced this whole conversation you've been having here by making the statement that the armories were in bad shape. Why?

Blade: When General Patton was there, and I'm not saying this to be picking on him, but he didn't work the legislature any. Consequently, we didn't get nobody telling them what we needed. Consequently, the budgets came down…one year, we had a budget of $25,000, to maintain all the armories. Well, that particular year, the boiler blew up in the Mt. Vernon Armory. That alone cost us $40,000. How'd we do that? We had to put in a supplemental appropriation.

The other thing [was] the money…they had stretched the dollar so far that they just wasn't working any more. So, we did a good job in telling our story and that, but we really never got the money really rolling again, until about 1979, when we were working on the 1980 budget.

DePue: So, I know General Boyle…I can't remember his first name—

Blade: Leo.

DePue: He'd been adjutant general since the World War II era. I think it might have been your colleague, Colonel Myers, Lou Myers, who said that there hadn't been an increase in the armory budget for decades, basically.

Blade: That is true. The budget, at one time, I could be wrong, but, maybe, was about $250,000. General Boyle used to think he could get "atta boys" because he'd say, "Well, I've got about $25,000 we're not going to use. I'll turn it back." Consequently…State budgets are performance-based budgets, whether we want to realize that or not.

State government and federal government, as well, try to spend every dollar they got budgeted and more. So, that's true. Colonel Myers is absolutely right. Those budgets was less and less and less. We had nobody fighting for us, particularly in later years.

DePue: Until Phipps and Blade and Myers showed up, it sounds like.

Blade: Yeah, that's true, yes.

DePue: How did General Phipps manage to increase the budget, then? I mean, just the year-end budget that you're talking about to support the armories?

Blade: Well, the very first year, he was appointed in June, and we had a hearing on the military budget. Phipps, for some reason, was out of town, and Myers and I…Phipps is just aboard, and here we are, over there, testifying about the budget. Well, Myers and I probably knew more about the total state budget than anybody, from some of our previous activities. So, we're over there to testify.

Today, I don't know how long we were over there, but when they saw the two of us, we must have been in there close to two hours, answering questions about the budget and why we needed it, because the House and Senate had never had anybody over there to talk to them before. So, they got a good education, the best we could give in an unprepared manner, but we answered the questions. That's kind of how that transpired. And, like I said, we had $25,000 that one year.

Then, come along another thing that I did was, I set up a budget meeting with the Bureau of the Budget to meet with us at the Monmouth

Armory. That was my old home stomping grounds and, more or less, Myers' as well. But, he didn't go up there, because I did. I had invited the news media, the radio stations, the newspaper and the Mayor and the bankers. State Representative, Clarence Neff was from that area, and he went up there with me, or we met up there, as well.

That armory roof was leaking. One of my old phrases was that, you know, I would ask the Bureau of the Budget, I said, "You see this here, how the water has leaked in and got all over those chairs?" I said, "If you belonged to a country club, and you went in to play golf where you were going to change clothes, would you want to go in here and do that?" Well, you know the answer was no. "Well, why should we be expected to do that, when we're providing the security for both state and national activities?" That always seemed to get people's attention and was a pretty good argument, in most cases.

That particular day, I got up and told a story about what our budget needs were. This was just an example of one of the fifty-two armories we had in the state of Illinois. These two Bureau of the Budget guys were there, and they're kind of thinking they're pretty hotshots, I guess. So, the banker in Monmouth is a West Point graduate and got out of the military as a major. He's the president of the bank, and he buys some state bonds.

Those two budget guys, kind of, were pretty naïve to what was going on. They were kind of ticked off to think that I had all the news media around. That just really burned them up. Well, then we had this question and answer period. Those people, the mayor and some of them, started zinging in on the Bureau of the Budget people. Now, the Mayor, he's president of the Small Mayors Association for the State of Illinois. All these small towns, like Pontiac, Bloomington and all of them, he's connected with those mayors.

So, anyway, one particular thing came out of that conversation. The banker, West Point fellow, finally told them two guys, he says, "You know, I bought a lot of state bonds." "But," he says, "If you two guys are any representation of the way the state is, I'm never buying another state bond." Of course, both of them was too mouthy.

Anyway, Clarence Neff was…We walked out of there, and I told Clarence Neff, I says, "Boy, you were awful quiet in there, towards those state employees." I said, "I'm surprised you didn't fire them on the spot." Clarence says, "Well, Gene, just be patient." Well, in less than a month, those two guys were no longer working for the Bureau of the Budget. (both laugh)

But we were pretty successful about that, in that area. I guess, when I talk about the Mayors' Association, the Elgin Armory was going to be closed, and Mayor Verbick was the Mayor of Elgin, in those times. He also was a big supporter of Jim Thompson.

Through Mayor Burstead, I got to Mayor Verbick in Elgin and met with him, personally. I had this booklet that talks about those eight armories. We got him to talk to Governor Thompson about those armories, plus, now I'm working on his staff, about those armories. Those armories did not get closed, right away. We did close the Madison Street Armory; it was one of them.

DePue: That's the Chicago Armory?

Blade: Yeah, it was the Chicago Armory, but it needed to be closed for other reasons, as well. So, anyway, that's how we kind of got started in getting support for that. Then, I guess, along that same line, the other thing we did was…

To help this situation, I was meeting with these communities and that. At Dixon, Illinois, for example, they ran a bond referendum for $2 million to try to get a new community center. Well, it got defeated big time. Colonel Dixon used to be in the Guard, and his dad, at one time, was a lieutenant governor, I believe, for the State of Illinois. His sister was on the park board at Dixon.

So, I went up and met with them. I said, "You know, we could work out a cooperative agreement with the community. If you would put money into this armory, we could work out this agreement that you could utilize that armory, Monday through Fridays and rehab the basketball, make a recreational facility in there, redo the kitchen and various things."

Anyway, so they did. They run another bond issue through, very small compared to what the other one was. They went in and refinished the armory. We put a big divide in the middle of the armory, with a big drop canvass curtain, so they could run two basketball courts at the same time. We took the day rooms…It's one of the only WPA armories that has a fireplace in it. They redid that, and they had the seniors coming in there for senior citizen activities, and they had a fireplace in there, working. They rehabbed the kitchen. Some of them, they had some meals on wheels out of there. We just had a great thing going.

We did a similar thing at Pontiac Armory. There, the Huddleston Foundation had a lot of money—money that we could get a hold of, I should say, instead of a lot of money. We set up a similar thing there, as well. Then, I talked earlier about the lieutenant governor… Now his name slips me—

DePue: Hartigan.

Blade: Hartigan. [We] met with him, in Chicago, and Mayor Verbick about what we could do in Chicago, at one of those armories, by rehabbing an armor. We could still use it, Monday-Fridays. So, we selected the Broadway Armory, because that was where Lieutenant Governor Hartigan was from, was that area. So, with Congressman Hyde, I got a hold—

DePue: Do you mean Henry Hyde?

Blade: Huh?

DePue: This is Henry Hyde?

Blade: Henry Hyde. I got a hold of him, through Air Guard connections. Then, he got a hold of some other mayors, along with Mayor Verbick, and we had mayors from Philadelphia and New York and various other big cities that all met in Chicago, at the Broadway Armory.

We made a presentation to them about how they could help the armories in the various states by using park district money to do that. We, then, turned around, and through Henry Hyde and Congressman Yates from Chicago, they sponsored a bill—at [the] Washington level—that provided money, park district money, grants to large cities to rehab some armories. That's how we rehabbed the Broadway Armory in Chicago.

DePue: That sounds like that occurred prior to the time that Thompson was governor, because Hartigan was Walker's lieutenant governor.

Blade: He was not lieutenant governor at the time. This was after that. This was when we had our own House and service group people here. But, connections with Lieutenant Governor Hartigan, before, was my connection to get that going. So, yeah, part of it.

DePue: Well, you were a busy guy, then.

Blade: Well, I was. I was doing a lot of things. I was administrative assistant at the time, but it was a lot of fun doing that. We had a lot of good, positive things happening for the Guard at that time, I think.

DePue: The story that I thought for sure you would have gotten to by now is the story where there is some discussion about a budget for particular year—I don't know which year—and it was difficult for General Phipps, I believe, to convince them that we needed to increase the budget.

Blade: Well, I hadn't go to that yet.

DePue: I'm sorry. (both laugh)

Blade: Anyway, we're getting pretty close to that. So, I guess, after talking about the Dixon and Pontiac Armories and the Broadway Armory. I guess the Broadway Armory, we no longer have that anymore, as I understand. We turned that into a very nice, big park district. I'm not positive of the dollars that came into that. John Johnston was administrative assistant when we got the money in, and they worked that issue. It seems to me, it was somewhere in

around the million dollar ballpark. They totally redid the real floor and fixed up the offices and put senior citizen centers in there and what have you.

Then, in later years, when we built a new armory, we included a senior citizens center and exercise equipment in the Beardstown Armory. Some of those ideas came out of what we'd done previously, but that was several years later, more or less. I guess that also happened during General Phipps' time too, when I think about it.

DePue: We've got about, maybe, at most, ten minutes left for today, before we've got to finish up. We'll pick up the rest of the story, next time. So, is there something that you can kind of, logically, finish off with today?

Blade: Yes, we can. I think the question that you asked, I guess, just two quick stories. How long did you say I had?

DePue: About ten minutes.

Blade: Yeah, okay, I can do that. Clarence Neff was a good supporter of ours. He was a representative from West Central Illinois and a good personal family friend of ours for years. I dealt with Clarence a lot. We used to do—in this same timeframe, here, that General Phipps and Myers and I set up—we would have breakfast, out at Camp Lincoln. We would do that in the armory. We would serve it just like it was a military-style meal. All the state reps and senators just loved to come out there, because they felt like they were in the army for a day.

We'd tell them how they could help the Guard. We would give them a program, and we'd have vehicles parked around there, showing off our equipment a little bit. Those things, we'd do that early in the morning, about like, 7:00. We'd have a good attendance there. The senior officers would go to that meeting.

Clarence, he was always kind of our leader on that side, rather than the House Armed Services Committee. They were also there, but Clarence would also…was the local connection to carry the mail for us.

Then the state budget, in 1929, was a two-year budget of $4.3 million. In 1979, our budget for one year was only $4.2 million. We were the only state agency in fifty years that had not at least doubled our budget. So, trying to jump our budget for the 1980 budget, it was $6.8 million. That's quite a jump for a state, by percentages, in particular, and some of them look at that.

I had made that presentation for that budget, and I'm close to becoming a USPFO in November, coming up. That's my last term, here. So, in May 1980, we had got to a stalemate with the Bureau of the Budget, and that just wasn't going to go anywhere. So, Dr. Mandeville had told the governor that we just were not backing down. I had talked with Terry

Bedgood, [explaining] that General Phipps and I needed to meet with the governor to talk about that budget, and [I] had told Dr. Mandeville that, too.

DePue: This is Thompson's budget director.

Blade: Thompson's Budget Director, yeah, Dr. Mandeville. In May 1980, why, we got a call at noon. Phipps had gone home for lunch. I called him and says, "Hey, we got to be at the governor's office at 1:00 to talk about the budget." So, we go over there at 1:00, meet with the governor…It's the governor, Dr. Mandeville, General Phipps and myself, and that's it.

So, [the] conversation goes that, "Well, Gene, you tell them what you need." Phipps said that. So, I tell them what the budget is and why we need it and went through a nice story about that. Thompson is very listening. Dr. Mandeville listened. He already knows what the budget is, of course. So, Governor Thompson asked Phipps, he says, "What can I do to get you to give in on cutting your budget back to a previous year?" General Phipps said, "Sir, you'll have to give me a direct order to do that." Governor Thompson says, "I don't know how to give a general a direct order. Therefore, Dr. Mandeville, will you get with Gene, and the two of you, work out that $6.8 million dollar budget?" That's how we got it. (both laugh) That's probably a good place to stop, maybe.

DePue: Well, we've got plenty more to talk about, in terms of your years as USPFO, to include an explanation of what the heck a USPFO is. I look forward to getting together with you the next time, colonel.

Blade: Okay, very good. Thank you.

DePue: You bet.

Interview with Gene Blade
VRC-A-L-2012-046.04
Interview # 4: February 4, 2013
Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Thursday, February 14, 2013. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today is my fourth session with Colonel Gene Blade. Good afternoon, colonel.

Blade: Good afternoon. Beautiful day today.

DePue: It is. For February, it's a great day.

Blade: Fifty-two degrees.

DePue: We're at your home, here in Springfield. I appreciate you allowing us to do it here, very comfortable. We've been talking quite a bit. In the last session we got into the Illinois National Guard. A lot of the discussion centered around what you and a couple of others, General Phipps and Colonel Lou Myers, especially, were going to fix a lot of the armories that had been allowed to deteriorate over time.

I wanted to start today with that transition, where you describe becoming the United States Property and Fiscal Officer for the State of Illinois. We need to start with what the heck is the USPFO in the first place?

Blade: Okay, I do have one item, I think, we should have covered the previous time, if I may?

DePue: Absolutely.

Blade: That was, when we established…General Phipps and myself and Lou Myers, we established a trust fund. When an old armory was no longer needed, and we built a new armory, we sold the old armory and put that money into a kitty. That was set up so that we could not have to go through the legislature, in future times, when we built another armory. We already had the 25% funding, there, to match the 75% federal funds.

When I left that job, as administrative assistant to General Phipps, we had that established. In a short few years, we had that up to about $7 million. Our goal was to get that to $25 million. Then, we could build $100 million worth of new armories in the State of Illinois.

However, since then, some governors have zeroed out that fund and used it for other purposes, which denied the National Guard the opportunity to build new armories.

Colonel Gene Blade in his Class A (formal) uniform, in the early 1980s, while he served as Illinois' USPFO (United States property and financial officer.)

DePue: You mean governors in the State of Illinois would raid funds for their own personal or political purposes?

Blade: For political purposes, but, yes. (laughs)

DePue: Well, anybody who knows anything about Illinois politics won't be surprised at that at all.

Blade: Well, that's true, very true.

DePue: Are you willing to put a name to the governor, where that started?

Blade: Well, I'm not really certain. I believe that was probably Governor Blagojevich that started that.

DePue: So, that's fairly recent?

Blade: Well, yes, pretty much so, because Governor Thompson was there when we established that. And, as far as I know, Governor Edgar didn't bother that fund any.

DePue: Well, let's get back to the PF&O position.

Blade: Okay. Going back to the 1900s or early…when they established the National Guard, more so, it's called the National Guard.

DePue: I think that was 1903 in the Dick Act.

Blade: That's correct. They had a quartermaster officer. But, both the quartermaster officer and the adjutant general were appointed by the governor. So, therefore, there was kind of a conflict of interest. That never really surfaced until World War I.

Then they went to get some of the equipment that the Guard had, and they found out that all the dump trucks, in many cases, were junk, along with the caterpillars and some other things, to pull the artillery pieces. They came to find out that, during snow removal or some emergency things, they needed dump trucks and caterpillars to get some work done, so they just used those of the National Guard. The quartermaster officer wasn't going to get in the way of that, of the federal property, so, therefore, they used it.

Well, World War I comes along, and that property wasn't in the condition to use for World War I, much of it. So, consequently, in 1921, they established the United States property and distribution officer. It was that way until, basically, 1954, when the NGB [National Guard Bureau] decided that this officer needed to be a federal officer, as a bird colonel in the Army—in those days in the Army. In 1946 and 1947, along in there, they changed that to Army and Air Force both, but that's how that originally started, more or less. The USPFOs are then totally accountable for all the federal properties.

DePue: So, as an explanation as what might be different from the National Guard, the equipment that the unit might have is actually federal property that flows through the USPFO, and that position is accountable for it?

Blade: That is correct.

DePue: Well, how about all the other officers? Aren't they also federal officers?

Blade: Well, they are federalized during active duty times for federal missions, they are, but the USPFO, then, has an unlimited contracting warrant and is responsible for those federal funds. If he tasks another National Guard person, that is, a federal technician, he can make him a contracting officer, accountable to the USPFO, which is done sometimes on some construction contracts.

DePue: So, as the USPFO, who's your boss then?

Blade: Chief of the National Guard Bureau is the boss.

DePue: What happened to the adjutant general of the state?

Blade: You work in coordination with the adjutant general. Since I have retired, now all the USPFO evaluations and efficiency reports are accomplished by the chief of the National Guard Bureau and his vice chief. The vice chief is a rater, and the chief of the National Guard Bureau is the senior rater on all efficiency reports.

DePue: So, while you were USPFO, your ratings weren't done by the adjutant general?

Blade: When I was there, he was the rating officer, and the senior rater was the chief of the National Guard Bureau. But, while I was the chairman of the USPFO advisory council, I tried to work to get that changed; however, we didn't get it accomplished. But, we got the seed planted, and it did get changed later.

DePue: Why were you advocating to change it?

Blade: Because that was not fair. It put USPFOs, in some cases, in a position to accommodate to the adjutant general, what his wishes were. If he didn't provide the money for his desires, then he would take it out on him in the officer efficiency report. That could result in an USPFO being released from active duty.

DePue: Did that have any practical experience with your own case?

Blade: None with mine, no.

DePue: Had you heard from some other USPFOs?

Blade: Yes, I had and knew that was in existence, yes. Perhaps, you know, sometimes the newer USPFOs, they would appoint them, do that as a courtesy thing to give them three or four years of active duty experience before their retirement. Well, consequently, they were about out of the system and could easily compromise their position to help out the adjutant general. They would maybe be out of office by the time somebody caught up with what they were doing.

DePue: In the case of your relationship, or any USPFO's relationship with the adjutant general, I would assume you would have known them very well and vice-versa, correct?

Blade: That is correct, yes.

DePue: How well did the chief of the National Guard Bureau know the USPFO out in Illinois when there are fifty-four of you guys?

Blade: Well, there was a little bit of a process that goes through there. The governor would nominate who the USPFO should be, in my day. Naturally that would take the AG's blessing, as well. That letter, then, would go to the chief of the National Guard Bureau.

When General Webber was the chief, which was prior to my coming aboard, he put some requirements on there that they had to be a college graduate, because before they would put them in there if they were the buddy system, in some cases, unfortunately.

But, when my turn came along why, all the current USPFOs, when General Webber was there, they either had to complete a college degree or be working on it, or the AG needed to appoint a new USPFO, because he was

very strict about those school qualifications, as well as military schools, as well.

DePue: You came from this experience of working a lot with the state legislators, with the governor's office. Was that something that you continued to do in this new position?

Blade: There's some limitations, that you can't get too much involved in some of those political arenas. If you needed to get involved with that, you needed permission from the chief of the National Guard Bureau. I'll be talking about some things later today that those things occurred. I could talk a little bit more about this USPFO appointment and the responsibilities here, if desired?

DePue: Yeah, please.

Blade: And I'm going to read some things here.

DePue: What are you reading from?

Blade: This is a *United States Property and Fiscal Officer Handbook*. There are many, many pages here, but I'm just going to—

DePue: Is that something that the National Guard Bureau drafted, or is this Illinois' version of it?

Blade: No, this is something the National Guard drafted, and it's part of the United States Code. That's where it's from. I'll just kind of hit the highlights out of this.

[reading] "Each United States property and fiscal officer shall receipt and account for all federal funds and property of the United States in the possession of the National Guard, for which he is property and fiscal officer responsible. He makes returns and reports concerning those funds and that property, as required by the secretary concerned. When he ceases to hold that assignment, the property and fiscal officer resumes his status as an officer of the National Guard."

I will add here that that is the only time that an Army or Air Force Colonel is in dual status. He is always a National Guard person, but he's also a Title 10, active duty Army or Air Force person. That is dual status. So, if he no longer is USPFO, he can revert back to his Guard status without any problem, unless there's reason for cause or something of that effect.

[continues reading] "The secretaries shall prescribe a maximum grade commensurate with the function and the responsibilities of the office but not above full Colonel 06. The property and fiscal officer of the United States and the National Guard of each state or territory, Puerto Rico and Canal Zone, and the District of Columbia, the secretary of the Army and the secretary of the

Air Force prescribe joint regulations necessary to carry out the subsections and responsibilities of that office."

So, we then have permission to sign for the secretary of the Army and the secretary of the Air Force, which is a very unusual…There's no other position like it in the federal government, other than this particular one, and there are fifty-four of these positions.

DePue: Which might take a little bit of explanation, because there are only fifty states.

Blade: That's correct, and that's where you come into the other territories, Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and—

DePue: Guam is another one.

Blade: Guam, yeah and—

DePue: District of Columbia.

Blade: District of Columbia, yeah. "The property and fiscal officer may entrust money to the officer of the National Guard to make disbursements, as his agent. Both the officer of whom money is entrusted and the property and disbursing officer, entrusting the money to him, are pecuniary responsible for that money to the United States. The agent officer is subject for misconduct as an agent and the liabilities and penalties prescribed by law in like cases for that property and fiscal officer, to whom he is acting." I think that really kind of hits the thing without getting in the greater detail of that so. . .

DePue: We talked about your relationship with the legislators, and you said that you had to be very careful in that respect, basically had a back way. But it just occurred to me, you're dealing with federal money.

Blade: That's correct.

DePue: So, would the same thing be true of working with Illinois state congressmen and senators?

Blade: That is correct. The only thing you can really get involved there with is, if a congressman or state representative or state senator wants to talk to you about some money or federal property, then I would have to go to the chief of the National Guard Bureau and request that I attend that meeting, and that would have to be signed by that political officer, whoever that may be.

DePue: Was the same thing true for the adjutant general, both at the state and federal level?

Blade: No, the adjutant general is appointed by the governor. The federal level doesn't have any jurisdiction over him, as long as he's on the state payroll and

doing state business. If he gets involved in the federal stuff, then there's a little different situation there.

A good example of that may be, when I was an USPFO, General Phipps was losing his federal recognition because he was coming up on age 64, and he was on an extension. I have a letter here that I had contacted the legal person at the Guard Bureau. If there is no assistant adjutant general, and if the adjutant general, say he was killed or something, then who's to quickly take over? Well, that would be the USPFO would have dual jurisdiction until a new adjutant general was appointed or somebody directed as acting into that position.

DePue: Under the system that we've got, is it authorized, is it allowed for the adjutant general to lobby his congressmen and his senators, for example, wanting to get some new armories constructed in the state? Is that appropriate?

Blade: It is for the adjutant general to do that. Yes, that is correct.

DePue: If you were discovered to be doing that, what would happen to you?

Blade: Well, probably get reprimanded over that, because that is a no-no. You know, unless one of the other situations…If that particular senator or congressman wanted to talk to me about that, particularly, then he could turn around and request that through the Guard Bureau. Then, I would be allowed to talk to him, not lobby him, but I could give some facts to him.

DePue: I don't know that we've ever laid out how you became the USPFO.

Blade: Well, probably we didn't. As I said, when General Webber became chief of the bureau, he changed those requirements. There's a pamphlet that gives the requirements to be a USPFO. He put in there several schools that they had to complete, and they also had to be a college graduate. So, at that time, when I came up, there was only about three of us. It's hard to believe, but there was only about three of us that was in the position that could become the USPFO, that met the college requirements.

DePue: What timeframe are we talking about?

Blade: Nineteen seventy-nine, '80. I came aboard in 1980, but we were looking at it ahead of time. So, those requirements also had some other military schools, etcetera, and other qualifications. When we looked at that, I really didn't have a competitor, because I had the same college level as the others did, but I had way more schools than what they did, military schools, and far more experience.

Then the Guard Bureau has to buy off on that person too. Today it's much more strict. The research is done a little bit differently. Today they send in two or three people that are qualified, because a lot more people have

college degrees today than they did thirty-five years ago. Then the bureau evaluates those two or three, and if the Bureau says they're all three, why, then the adjutant general can select the one that he wanted to, out of the three. But they'll put them in priorities, as to what they ought to be.

DePue: Was this a position you were actively—what's the right word—wanting?

Blade: Well, the fifth of July, 1979, General Phipps came in my office—and I'm the administrative assistant—and he says, "Gene, we've got some vacancies going to be coming up in the next two or three years." And he said, "I have three of them that you would be considered for." And he said, "Would you be interested in being the assistant adjutant general for Army, the chief of staff or the USPFO?" Right away, I answered that. I says, "I would take the USPFO job as my number one choice." And that's how that transpired.

DePue: Why?

Blade: Well, because, for retirement purposes, that was one thing that gave me more active duty points. The other thing, that job just looked very interesting to me. I had done some things for the State of Illinois. I was a contracting officer for the State of Illinois. That was a requirement for that job, as well, so I had some experience there. I'd worked the state budgets for the National Guard for the past, I guess probably, eight or nine years, and I was just familiar with those things. So I had a lot of things under my belt that fit that.

DePue: For somebody from the outside and probably most everybody in the Illinois National Guard or in the National Guard period, they would think that really the really sexy jobs are to be the assistant adjutant general or the chief of staff.

Blade: Well, that's probably true, yes. I think you're absolutely right, yeah.

DePue: What would be the second most powerful job in a state National Guard?

Blade: It is the USPFO, because he has the gold, and the others have to live by the golden rule, I guess (both laugh).

DePue: Well said. Now, if I was to ask the assistant adjutant general, would they give me the same answer?

Blade: Well, but they only have half of the Guard, only the Army side or the Air side. (both laugh)

DePue: There you go. Well, I know you have other things you want to say, but let me start this way. You become the adjutant general in 1980.

Blade: USPFO.

DePue: Excuse me, USPFO in 1980. By the end of that year, we've got a new president, Ronald Reagan, and suddenly the federal government is spending a lot more money on the military in general. What I'd like to have you do, now, is kind of turn it over to you and let you talk about what things were going on in those first three years as USPFO, but to keep it in that context, that we've got a new president who's aggressively rebuilding the military force.

Blade: As I just came aboard in 1980, because I came aboard just a few days before the election, Colonel Bishop was still there for a few days, maybe ten days, then he left to become the USPFO of the Virgin Islands.

DePue: What was his first name?

Blade: Tom, Thomas B. Bishop. He'd been my commandant when I went to OCS, so I knew him very well. His brother was in my OCS class, as well. Our lockers were next to each other, so we always had a good relationship. The Guard was very short of money in all areas, and they really had to watch everything. Not that you don't always have to watch all funding, but it was very tight to do anything extra.

Just to tell just one little story that kind of explains that. Bill Mackert was a logistics officer at the Guard Bureau, and when Governor Reagan got elected as president, he decided that, with all the political talk that he had, that he was going to beef up the military. So he said, "I'll just double the logistics budget for the Guard Bureau," which he did.

Well, as soon as Reagan got sworn in office, why, it wasn't very long until some people came from his office in to see the Guard Bureau and talked to Bill Mackert and asked how much money he had in the logistics budget. He told them, and they says, "I want you to double that." So he doubled it again. Things went pretty much that way all the way through the Guard.

Today, I'm not certain how many dollars the Guard is, but when I retired in '94, the Guard budget—Army and Air—was $18 billion, and it was pretty well divided, $9 billion on each side. Prior to that, I would say, when I first became the USPFO and when I retired as a USPFO, I would say that we had a total expenditure of about $48 million, when I first took over. When I left, we had an expenditure of about $200 million. That excluded major construction projects, MILCON [military construction] projects.

DePue: You mentioned that the logistics budget kind of quadrupled right at the beginning of the Reagan years. Is that what was used to purchase military equipment?

Blade: Purchase and repair, both, yes.

DePue: Was the practice before that, more, often times, the Army gets done wearing out the equipment, and it's passed on to the National Guard and Reserve units?

Blade: That is correct. And we were really in bad shape. A lot of vehicles were really old. We still had some old deuce and a halves and three quarter-ton trucks and some old M151 Jeeps and one thing and another.

DePue: Did the Guard start getting modern equipment, right from the factories, after that?

Blade: Not necessarily. We did a little later on, but initially the Army started getting some getting new equipment, and we got some of the hand down. But that hand down was [in] better shape than some that we had, in reference to age and what have you.

DePue: How about the helicopters and aircraft, the same thing in that case?

Blade: Pretty much true there, as well. The flying stuff, you got to keep them a little higher maintenance level. We started the C ratings, you know. Vehicles had to be a…C-1 was the best shape, or a C-3 was pretty poor shape. So, most of what we had was probably C-3. [It] was usable, but we didn't have enough of it, and it would work a short time. We got that upgraded pretty rapidly, with the infusion of extra money.

DePue: Do you some other anecdotes from these early years as USPFO?

Blade: Well, I guess I was just going to lead in to some others things that I was involved with, in the Illinois Guard, with USPFO, which helped build that up. It comes back to the money, really.

DePue: I got to work on saying it right. I'm putting the "and" in the wrong place, aren't I?

Blade: Oh.

DePue: P and FO

Blade: USPFO, United States Property and Fiscal Officer.

DePue: Go ahead.

Blade: Well, I guess the other thing…I'm just going to hit some programs that came about and how they came about, I guess, more or less. I guess the first thing [is] that the USPFO has an unlimited contracting warrant. Why does he have an unlimited contracting warrant for federal funds? The fact that, if we're mobilized and if we had an instant mobilization, somebody needs to, in every state, be there to have contracts into the billions of dollars.

I had to go to several contracting schools to achieve that unlimited warrant, which was a requirement for the office. There, as I said earlier, I had some experience in doing that. In state, however, there are lots of differences there.

Another thing then came up was, I guess, the office… We'd moved to Camp Lincoln, and we had a new armory there, but they didn't have any office systems furniture in there. We still had one desk, and next door would be somebody else's desk. So there was a lot of distractions and productivity in the office. I wanted to get office systems furniture, so I talked to GSA about that, General Service Administration. They had a new program going, and they said you had to have justification to show efficiencies of why you needed office systems furniture.

When I was battalion commander, I had a fellow that was a professor at university in economics. He was at Illinois State; however, since then he moved, and he was at the University of North Carolina. So, I went to see him, and we set up some criteria to do that. To make a long story short, we started counting the number of documents that people were using in the office and how long, how many they could do in an eight-hour period per day.

That was part of the study, and so I got permission from GSA to do the study. We did the study, and then we put in the office system furniture, and we did the study again, to show the efficiency. It was absolutely amazing, what we had done there and how that improved.

As an example, why I wanted to do that, one day one of the gals in the office had a telephone call. They had just repossessed their car, because her husband had gone out and got intoxicated and was thrown in jail and no longer had an extra payment coming in. I was off to the side, observing what was going on. I could hear the telephone conversation and, within minutes after that, there was nineteen other people on the telephones, telling people about that. I thought, no wonder we don't get the production that we should have. That was kind of what really led me up to getting after the program. (chuckles) You can just visualize that happening.

DePue: Well yeah, you're fighting human nature on that one, sir.

Blade: Oh, yeah. So, the study came back. It was extremely positive. I don't remember the results, but it showed out that we would pay back very rapidly on that. So, twenty-three other USPFO offices in the country used that same study and put in office systems furniture. Most all offices have that today.

DePue: How would you describe office systems furniture versus regular furniture, I guess?

Blade: Regular furniture, like we just had, everything was open bay, one big open bay, like a warehouse. Somebody would say something, why twenty people

around them could hear what was going on and [were] distracted from their work. So this put up partitions in there. Everybody then had a much lesser work space, maybe only sixty or so square feet of their work area, but they were pretty much private, what was going on there.

DePue: This is the birth of cubicles in the Illinois National Guard.

Blade: That is correct. (both laugh) Now another thing we had going on was the Marseilles Training Area, which we didn't have that yet. We had it, but we didn't have it. As I think I mentioned earlier, how we acquired that. But we didn't have any federal dollars to go there to do anything with. That had not been pursued so—

DePue: I don't think we have discussed how the state acquired the land for Marseilles.

Blade: Oh, I thought I'd talked about Lou Myers and I working that issue.

DePue: Well, maybe you have. I don't recall that.

Blade: Okay. There was some sandy soil in central northern Illinois, along the Illinois River. We needed an additional training area for weekend training facility. Lou Myers had started to work on that, and I got involved in that, as well. When Governor Walker was in, why he was supposed to sign the papers to acquire that, which we were going to acquire that at a rather small fee.

DePue: Was it marginal farmland at the time?

Blade: It was marginal farmland, and there would be a sand pit on there. It ended up there was a sand quarry on there, as well. Governor Walker did not get the paper signed in thirty days, and consequently that canceled the contract. We had to renegotiate it. It ended up, it cost us about three times as much money as it would have otherwise.

Then we had acquired that as a weekend training site, but about all we could do was take vehicles in there and troops on the weekend and do land maneuvers in the brush, was about the extent of things. It had about three farmhouses on it, which were in bad shape, as well. We wanted to get federal money there, but we had never been able to get the federal money there, because this was all fairly new.

Mickey Walker was the assistant director of the Army Guard at the time, and we were having NGAI in Illinois, so General Phipps said, "We'll get Mickey Walker out here to NGAI, as a speaker, and I, in turn, will sign a letter for him to be the chief of the National Guard Bureau and get the Governor's signature on that, as well." Which, that transpired.

I'm the USPFO now, so [Raymond] Rees, as number two man or director of the Army Guard, myself, General Phipps and Lou Myers, after the

NGAI meeting in Peoria, we get a helicopter and fly to Marseilles and look at the facility and tell him we need some federal money approved for barracks and armory and a maintenance facility and other things, because General Phipps has told him he's going to sign this letter for him to be the chief of the Guard Bureau.

Then we fly on to Riverside in Chicago, which is forty-three acres of federal property, maintenance facility in Chicago, and we wanted to build a new armory there. [We] showed him what that property was and what we needed there. So, the result of all of was that Mickey Walker becomes the chief of the National Guard Bureau, and we start getting money for Marseilles Training Area and also for getting money for a new armory in Chicago at Riverside.

DePue: When you say money, you're talking about to construct new facilities, a lot of new buildings.

Blade: That is correct.

DePue: So that's a lot of money.

Blade: That was a lot of money. I don't remember now how many million it was, but he started paying attention to that. Mickey Walker certainly understood that, because Camp Shelby in Mississippi is where he came from. He knows what that training area was like. He blessed that a lot of times. That kind of got us started to get the Marseilles Training Area going, and it's been developed a lot more, since, today.

DePue: So, I'm going to be crude in how I describe this. You talked before about how the PFO was restricted, prohibited from doing politicking, either in the state legislature or the U.S. Congress. But, apparently, didn't restrict you from doing politicking in the National Guard Bureau office and the headquarters and talking to the chief of the National Guard Bureau?

Blade: The chief of the Guard Bureau is my boss, so, you know, it's up to me to keep him informed on what ought to be done. (both laugh)

DePue: Very good. Well, it's all very descriptive, how things do get done, how things do happen.

Blade: That's right. That's why I wanted to tell that story. Then, moving on a little bit here and tying in with this, one thing that hadn't been accomplished in Illinois, in which there's always a requirement at the federal level, is to get small business involved into things. I had some experience with SBA (Small Business Administration) many years prior, when I was a Firestone tire dealer. I had gone to Chicago with a banker at one time to talk to SBA about getting some money. So, I understood the operation fairly well.

I decided, as USPFO, that I was going to go meet with the SBA director for the State of Illinois, because we needed to do some small business contracting on the federal side. Talking with them, then, they would help tell me who a contractor was to do a specific job. I started doing that, met with them every year in Chicago.

In 1990, I was a SBU Contracting Officer of the Year for the Department of the Army and Air Force. That was because we had so many small business contracts. I used to do most of the federal business at O'Hare Air Guard base, I would do through small business, because other states that didn't have a big city like that, didn't have the opportunity to do that. So, in turn, the National Guard then could meet their requirement for small business contracts.

DePue: The SBU, is that what you said?

Blade: Yes, the Small Business Contract, Utilization, SBU, Small Business, SBU.

DePue: Small Business Utilization Officer of the Year?

Blade: Yeah, yes. I was really doing that to help the Guard Bureau meet their criteria. I think one year, I believe I had nine…The year I won that, I had $9 million with Small Business Administration. I believe the Guard Bureau's objective that year was $18 million, so we carried a big load of that. Anyway, that helped out, little different. And we had major installations going on at O'Hare in Chicago.

DePue: This would be on the Air Guard side?

Blade: On the Air Guard side. I forgot what I was going to say here, I guess. The contracting, if you do a small business contracting in Springfield, Illinois or Peoria, Illinois, it causes a lot of friction with the bigger contracts in that area, because they're denied the opportunity to bid on those contracts. That's why I did all of those in Chicago. Chicago's so busy and so large that that doesn't make an impact at all.

DePue: Was there a specific dollar figure at which you were required to go out and get multiple bids?

Blade: Well yes, you always have to get multiple bids. You even compete these small business contracts against one another. However, in some cases, you can award them direct under other means. That is, you work them and help train them. That's part of the reason for doing small businesses is [to] help training them. So, if someone is starting out on that, you could look at their qualifications and justify hiring a small company to do that.

DePue: What kind of things are we talking about here?

Blade: Well, if we had, like a little drive…This is using a home example. If your driveway was cracked or something. You need to put in a new driveway, maybe only a $2,000 to $5,000 job or something, you could directly hire one of those people to do that, and you would help them, show them how the contract and documents were put together and those things.

DePue: So a lot of this dealt with armory and facility maintenance?

Blade: Not with armories, because that's all done on the state side. If the maintenance shop at an armory location…As an example, Rock Island had a maintenance shop, Macomb and many battalion areas had one. Then, there would be federal funds involved in there. We, most times, would let the state do the contracting, and we would participate, because those would be maybe 25% state money, 75% federal money.

DePue: Well, you're talking about a bureaucratic system that's probably more complicated than most people would think. Why is a maintenance facility different than an armory, in terms of the relationship between the state and federal?

Blade: That's a very good question. The armory has to do with training, and there's really no equipment involved other than the armory itself. The maintenance facility, there they're working on federal vehicles, all federal vehicles. And the people who work on them are federal civil service work grade technicians. Therefore, that requires federal funding to maintain that facility. If we were reworking armory trucks inside the armory, then that would be a different situation, but we don't have that.

I probably ought to just bring up the cooperative funding agreement. I had it at the end, because that's kind of when I got involved in rewriting the Cooperative Funding Agreements for the National Guard Bureau. When I was the chairman of the United States Property and Fiscal Board—

DePue: Is that for all fifty-four USPFOs?

Blade: Yes, yes. We established this in 1985 that we needed to have a voice, direct with the chief of the Bureau, to keep him better informed of what was going on, out in the units. So in 1993, I became the chairman of the USPFO Advisory Council. General Conway was the chief of the Guard Bureau. Prior to that, I was on that board, prior to being chairman of it. General Temple had said he wanted to update the cooperative funding agreement, which involved the Army Guard and the Air Guard, both. But he was not able to get that accomplished, because some of the state adjutant generals didn't fully understand what it could do for them and got it blocked.

So, General Conaway told me that, when I'm chairman. He says, "You know, I want to get that accomplished, while I'm the chief of the National Guard Bureau," [He] told me that. So I said, "So you're tasking me to make

certain we get that accomplished?" And he said, "Yes." And I says, "We've got a deal." I said, "I'll appoint myself as chairman of that group." I said, "I just ask you to take care of keeping the adjutant generals off my back, and we'll get that accomplished, and I want to pick my own board." He jumped up out of his chair; we shook hands, and away we went.

DePue: What year would that be?

Blade: That would have been in '93. I appointed some other USPFOs on that committee. I think about five of them, perhaps. We would fly into various airports that was easy to get to, access.

Colonel Blade presents a plaque to Colonel Russ Delaney for appreciation of the superb job Delany did as chief of the Comptroller Division at the National Guard Bureau, during the USPFO Advisory Council meeting in 1993.

As an example, I think the first meeting we flew into Kansas City, because one of the USPFOs was from there, so we could all get to Kansas City pretty easy. Another time, we flew into St. Louis. We flew into Washington another time. We got so well organized and moved so fast that nobody had time to get us blocked. We had the annual training meeting, which all the USPFOs and the various directors and adjutant generals attend.

It was brought up at the meeting that we were going to have a new cooperative funding agreement team. Immediately three of the USPFOs said they didn't want that to happen. So they told General Conaway they were going to start their own task force to oppose that. General Conaway called me right away and told me that. He didn't say anything about it, just let them go ahead with it, to get that established.

He told me who the three of them were. Well, one of them was our own adjutant general. The other one was the adjutant general from Ohio, and the third one was the adjutant general from Maine. I told General Conaway, "Tell them who's heading that up." So he did. Illinois' adjutant general says, "He knows far more about that than I do. I'll get off the committee." The Ohio adjutant general also knew me very well, and he says, "I don't want on there either." He says, "I'll get off the committee." So, I only briefed the adjutant

general from Maine, and he thought it was a terrific idea. So, we eliminated that, off the start. (laughs)

DePue: I'm still unclear, though, on what cooperative funding agreement does.

Blade: Okay, we have many aspects that the state hires people, as an example, for some jobs at a training site, Marseilles Training Site, as an example. We would support that, maybe on a fifty-fifty, 50% federal funds, 50% state funds. It's looking after a site that is state property, but yet we do training on that facility. [It's] a little bit different than an armory. So that's how that would work.

Then, when we build a new armory, that is a 75%/25%, 25% state money, 75% federal money. Then, if we're going to change that armory, expand it and make it a readiness center for mobilization purposes, then that is funded 100%, and we would expand that armory. Let's just say that original armory, maybe, was going to be a 100,000 square feet. But we need to add the readiness center on to that, which gives us a bigger supply room, vehicle storage and what have you. So now, we really have an 87.5% federal/12.5% state funded thing. So we expanded these things to fit more things.

This old program did about $600 million a year, Guard-wide, on cooperative funding agreements. To add a little bit to clarify some things, if we had a security guard that was securing that equipment in an installation, then that would be funded 100% by the state. And we would reimburse the state 100% of that money. So that was just another example, because they were secure, strictly on our equipment. That's just a brief overview but that tells a little bit of the training area and a little bit of how the funding works. [The] training area is the same thing.

Bottom line, after we got this rewritten and everything, the one at the Guard Bureau used to work as my contracting officer, Paul Gerbers, Captain Paul Gerbers. We had enlisted him to do part of the re-write of all this, because he was a legal expert on contracting, really knew that forwards and backwards. Then we solicited one of the people in the Guard Bureau, the comptroller of the Guard Bureau, to be on that committee too. Then we also got some Air Guard people on there. They were the ones who did the nuts and the bolts of it.

My committee, then, we were the overseers of that and had the input into that. That got changed, and the bottom line is today that it may already be there. Close to $2 billion a year goes into that, because we really got into some other federal regulations and found other opportunities to get federal money in to support the Guard, a very successful program.

Okay, I got a little bit ahead of myself there, in a way, but we needed to talk about that. Next coming along, I guess, is another thing that we kind of

initially…One of the new things that I put into effect was a Indefinite Delivery Architect and Engineer Contract. Why did I think we ought to have that?

Well, as an example, prior to me becoming the USPFO, they had a tornado hit O'Hare, hit Chicago, and they had to do some emergency contracts. They hired a construction guy to fix up some things, but they didn't have an architect engineer firm to look at things. So, they did some repairs on a hangar, but they failed to make certain it met the code criteria and would last, which it didn't. So, we had to redo that. I just thought we ought to have…that way, in an emergency, get an architect engineer firm to immediately look at something in an emergency. Then they could help overlook the contractor. So that's what we did.

All the states went to that program, over time, and today they have that a little bit differently. You still can do that in the state, but they have some indefinite delivery contracts at the federal level. However, it's hard to get them out to the state in an emergency or something like that, pretty rapidly.

Okay, moving on to another project, I believe. This was a major project, particularly for Illinois, and it was for the National Guard. The National Guard had never totally developed a whole new Air Guard Base. We'd always moved in on an airport and took over something from World War II or did a lot of ad hoc committee things or installations to that.

You need to have the ducks lined up right to get something done, and the Airport Manager of Peoria, Ron Burling, was a real sharp person. I hadn't been a USPFO too long, and we were going to do something. We needed some help at Peoria to put in a road for an ammunition facility up there. Ron Burling kind of got in my…Maybe we shouldn't be using names here, you think?

DePue: Well, we can redact some of this if we need to, but that's up to you. I don't know what the sensitivity would be with this.

Blade: He and I were very positive on these things, so anyway…We'll leave it in there. He and I worked very well together, and we got this road put in to put in the future storage facility, because that fell in line with the missions for the aircraft that they had in the Air Guard in Peoria at the time.

The facilities at Peoria Air Guard were old facilities that had been there, kind of hand-me-down stuff and an old hangar. Everything was in pretty bad shape. The mayor of Peoria becomes the assistant secretary of the Air Force for facilities, with a lot political clout, because Bob Michels is a Congressman, and he's the House minority leader. Art Szold runs the clothing business in Peoria and some other places. In World War II, his TAC Officer was Senator Barry Goldwater, who was an officer in the Air Force, so there's

that connection there. The chief of staff of the Air Force is also a Bradley University graduate. So those folks all got together and decided the opportunity was right to build a new Air Guard base in Peoria. So first of all, they met with the assistant adjutant general of Illinois, and he turned it down.

DePue: This is the Air Guard guy?

Blade: Yes, yes.

DePue: We're talking about mid-'80s timeframe?

Blade: We're talking 1984.

DePue: Do you care to share the name of the assistant adjutant general and the adjutant general?

Blade: That was Mock Eslinger. So then, they went to the adjutant general, who was General Holesinger, to do that. He did not want to build a new Air Guard Base at Peoria either.

DePue: These are both Air Guardsmen?

Blade: That's correct. Then Ron Burling calls me up one day and wanted to know if I would come up to his office. He wanted to talk to me. I said, "Fine." So I go up there to meet with him. He told me what had been going on, and he said, "We really got things lined up right. We got the right people in the right jobs, but we can't get on first base, because of the. . ." He says, "How can we do that?" He says, "Can we do that through your office?"

And I said, "Well yes, I think we can, in this situation. The reason is that the Air Guard is all 100% federally funded through the Air Force." So, therefore, that could come under my umbrella, to kind of help put some ideas out there and guide this thing through.

So, those people then went to Washington and met with Bob Michels and Senator Dole, I guess, because he was the head of the Senate. They had the assistant secretary of the Air Force now. They had him there as their former mayor and Art Szold and Barry Goldwater. Barry Goldwater was pro-military, and he'd been an officer in the Air Force in World War II. Art Szold had been a lieutenant, after he got through. Barry Goldwater was TAC officer, and he's the candidate. So there's a lot of combinations there.

DePue: There's one piece I don't understand in this. What would have been the objection of the two Air Guard generals in Illinois to having a new facility in Peoria?

Blade: I really think the bottom line was, they didn't know how to go about doing that, just didn't have the vision to do that, really, because, after this thing all

got going and a lot of things, why then, they thought it was a pretty good idea. I really think that was the problem.

DePue: Did it ever end up being their idea?

Blade: No, no, I don't think so. (laughs) After this got accomplished, then the chief of the National Guard Bureau came out, General Conaway. He met with the Rotary Club in Peoria. The Rotary Club in Peoria is one of the largest in the United States—I don't know if you knew that—but they have about 500 or 600 members or 700. General Holesinger was invited to that meeting, and so was I. It was announced there that day. General Conaway was there too and also General Davis, who was a two-star over the Illinois Air Guard, because they had a commander over the Guard, as well as the adjutant general. So that's when it was announced.

Next [thing] we needed to do was get some contracts in place and get some other things. I turn around and get involved. They needed to understand some money issues. Probably one of the most interesting meetings I've ever been in, they wanted to bring me to Washington to talk about money for all of this project in Peoria. So, we ended up in Senator Dole's office. It was Senator Dole, Senator Barry Goldwater, Senator Dixon from Illinois, Congressman Bob Michels and myself. We talked about how we were going to go about the funding and take care of the contracts and the whole works at Peoria.

Senator Dixon and Congressman Michels told me that they expected all of these contracts to be awarded at Peoria, and if they couldn't be, they at least needed to be awarded in the state of Illinois, for this new Air Guard base. The reason I was there was for some input on that. I said, "Well, the first thing we have to do is a feasibility study to justify all of this. Once we get that done, then we'll move on from there, get the money and justification." So, I told them that the only firm that I knew of that could handle that feasibility study was a firm in Kentucky. I really had to let the contract out to that firm to start with. From then on, I'd get all the rest of them in Illinois. So that's what we did.

We had several firms put in for it. GRW was head and shoulders above everybody. So again, I told them that. And I said, "Any letters you get complaining about that, I will answer them for you, and you can just sign your signature on it." Which I did. (laughs)

They accomplished that in a very short period of time. [In] less than ninety days, we had a feasibility study that showed us we needed to move out of that old facility. It wasn't able to…Maintenance-wise it was too small. Everything was wrong for it. And that's what we did. Then we came up with the dollars we needed. Then asked me, the political people asked me how—

Michels and Dixon—how we were going to award that in Peoria, to one firm? I said, "Oh, no." I said, "I'm going to split that up." And I'd already looked and figured that out. We awarded that to eleven architect/engineer contracts. There were twelve architect/engineer firms in Peoria at that time, so I got them all but one. (laughs)

DePue: This is because there's several buildings and—

Blade: A lot of them, yeah

DePue: ….and the structure?

Blade: This project ended up being almost $70 million. So, I might add that everything went really well. We had a meeting then, I guess, before I put these out on the street. We invited all the A&E firms from Peoria into a meeting, and I told them what was coming up and what was going on and how we were going to do it. I told them, "Don't put in for all eleven of them, because you're not going to get them. We're going to divide this up. But put in for the one—you can put in for three or four—but only the ones you're best qualified at." So that's what transpired. That's how we made that part of it work.

Then, I guess, just a little bit of the impact of that, we also, at the same time, before we could start doing any work there, we had to get that land transferred from the airport over to the Guard. And doing as such, that Corps of Engineers get involved then and Omaha District. So, as we started to get that land transferred over—because then the Air Force will have a lease on that land, and that's why the USPFO can do it, because we're dealing all federal. There's no state moneys in this thing; it's all federal. That's why things are working fairly well. The Corps of Engineers said, well, they couldn't do that; it would be a couple of years before they could get that accomplished. So. I call up—

DePue: To get what accomplished?

Blade: All the paperwork done to the land transfer.

DePue: Just to transfer the land?

Blade: Yes. Well, they got to come out and do surveys, so they say.

DePue: Okay.

Blade: So, I turn around, and I have this indefinite delivery contract. I used that to turn around and hire some firms to come in to do the survey of this. In conjunction with this, I got a hold of Bob Michel and Senator Dixon and had a meeting in their local office. [I] told them what we were having trouble with and that they needed to get involved and help me speed that up. I would get the contractors to do the survey and what-have-you. So, all the Corps had to

do was paperwork. We had attorneys to help do that. So we got all that accomplished in about ninety days, surprisingly.

Then, before we could start moving the dirt and everything there—this was the preparation of things—we had to move a radar control tower up there. Again, we ran into a problem. They said, "Well it would take a couple of years before they could get all the contracts done and get that tower moved and everything.

So again, I contact Congressman Michel's office and said, "We need to have a meeting in Washington and meet with FAA, because the FAA in Chicago is stonewalling me." (chuckles) Phil Smithmeyer, I always remember his name. I said, "Phil, you'd better get behind the program, because if you don't, you're going to get instructions to get behind the program." "By God, I'm in charge of this office, and I'll run it. You don't need to run it." Something along that line. I said, "Fine."

[I] get a hold of Bob Michels and go to Washington. He sends a letter to the bureau, telling them that I need to join him in Washington, and we're going to meet with the FAA. So we go over here and meet with the FAA.

I've got my uniform on, and the head of the FAA looks at me. He says, "Blade." He says, "You know, I knew a Blade when I was in the Navy, before I retired." And I said, "There was only one other Blade in the Navy, and that was my brother." And he said, "Oh my land!" So that really smoothed that off, right off the bat. Needless to say, we got that tower moved very rapidly into Peoria. They met that. Phil Smithmeyer and I became very good friends after that and have, yet to this day. (laughs)

DePue: Phil Smith?

Blade: Smithmeyer.

DePue: Well sir, I got one other question here for you. During this whole process, are you walking a fine line between not actually lobbying, when you're working with the federal legislators?

Blade: They are always asking me, when they have any questions. That's the only time I have anything going on with them, because they're the ones driving the secretary of the Air Force and that. They're driving to get this thing done.

DePue: But part of the discussion was the initial decision to get it in the first place, and you're talking to federal officers, as well. Then, together, you're going to the congressmen and the senators, it sounded like.

Blade: That is correct, but they're requesting my presence to get things moving, so that's coming that way.

DePue: But again, this is all under the rubric of how you get things done.

Blade: Well, that's true. It is, and that comes back to my early experiences in my career as to figuring out how things get accomplished. So that's why I'm just talking about this a little bit here, that's going on, yes. Okay.

Moving on there I think…I don't know how we're doing on time. I [need] to get to moving here, I guess. I guess then, just a little bit more of the scope of the work up there. That 391 acres was pretty rough land. We filled in some ravines at fifty-five feet deep. Today, the hangar sits on one of those fifty-five foot deep ravines. One side of it does, and the other side sits on firm ground.

We moved over two million cubic yards of dirt from the other side of a creek that runs through there. We took a hill down forty feet, over there on the other side, to move that dirt over to the level where the Air Guard sits today. We made good utilization of things. There was a lot of environmental studies and one thing and another involved there, as well.

That was some more contracting challenges, but we got through those in great shape and no need of getting into any of the details I see at that time. One thing, about the dirt contract, was about an $11 million contract to move all of that dirt.

The Peoria newspaper put a big article in the paper, front page, something to the effect, "Blade Takes Contract Away from Indiana Firm and Gave it to a Peoria Firm." Well, that certainly wasn't very popular. I immediately got a call out of Bob Michels' office, wanting to know what-in-the-world was going on there. So, I explained why that was. There wasn't any justification for the Indiana firm to get that anyway, because it was all bid legal and everything. But the newspaper was trying to sell newspapers, I guess.

I did go meet with the newspaper, and I asked them about the…I was really hot under the collar about that, but I know that most news things kind of last about three days. But I asked them to see the… When World War II broke out, how big the headline was on the Peoria paper. If it was bigger than mine, I had no comment. But if my headline was bigger than theirs, I did have beef. Mine was larger, (laughs) so I won my argument.

Okay, moving on. Peoria—that was part of it—and I told you the other day a little bit about when I was in the field artillery advance course that Colonel Max Thurman, who later became vice chief of staff for the Army…I was in the Pentagon one day, and I met him in the hall. He recognized me, and naturally I recognized him. He says, "Where're you going?" I said, "Well, I'm going to the field officers' mess." And he says, "So am I; come with me." So we go there.

He tells me that he's got an idea of making five medevac units in the National Guard and wanted to know what I thought about that. I said I thought it was a great idea. I says, "I got a place to put one of those, at Peoria, at the old Air Guard Base." I said, "That'd just be a great place to put this." So, over lunch, we discussed this. To make a long story short, that's what transpired, and that's how the helicopter training facility got into there, as well as the chinooks into there, was basically that meeting with General Max Thurman. Again, of course, Congressman Michels got involved into that and the Guard Bureau.

Ground breaking ceremony for the new Air National Guard base at Peoria in August, 1987. From left to right are Congressman Bob Michel, unknown, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Facilities, Richard Carver (Peoria), Congressman Lane Evans, Mayor Archie "Doc" Yeley (Bartonville), Mayor Jim Maloof, Colonel Kenneth Peterson, General Dick Eslinger and Colonel Blade.

We had Colonel Becker, who was the Army aviation fellow, said we got to do a feasibility study. I couldn't get any money out of the Army Guard to do a feasibility study for the helicopters, because Illinois already had two helicopter installations, and Illinois didn't need a third one. But we thought we did. So I gave that feasibility study that we did for the Air Guard…I told Phil, "There's a guideline," Phil Becker. There's the guideline to do your feasibility study, as to why we need to put that in there. That's what happened.

So, after he finished the study, why General Temple was chief of the Guard Bureau at the time, Air Guard, Army Guard, and he was chief of the Bureau. So we went in to brief him, at that time. I led the briefing of him and told him why we needed it, the connection with Max Thurmond. He thought that was a great idea and blessed it, and that's—without getting into lots of details—is how we got the Army aviation there.

Another function of the USPFO, working on federal property, this time I'm bringing in Army aviation, instead of the other, but I'm making good utilization of a property that the Illinois Guard would have lost. It just helps keep the Illinois Guard big and strong.

DePue: Was this during a time, the ‘80s into the early ‘90s, that the size of the National Guard, in general, was growing, and the size of the Illinois Guard was growing?

Blade: That’s right; it helped us grow some, yes. That is correct. This was a new initiative. This was a big asset for the state, as well, because we did not end up with the Army medevac unit there. That was the ultimate goal, to get that. Max Thurmond got cancer and died. Consequently, we were already moving so far forward with this, that we ended up getting the chinooks there.

Then, of course, we got the flight simulator. That was the big thing we hung onto. We brought in…Again, why is the USPFO involved in this? We brought in other Guard states for federal training of the helicopters, there, rather than sending them off and the Army having to keep something someplace else for us. We also trained some Army helicopter pilots there, as well, or brought them up to currency. We tied in all the states that joined Illinois, involved into that training facility, there.

Then, at the same time, then we were going to be changing new aircraft at Peoria, because they had the A-37s, and they were going to go to foreign military sales, most of them going to South America. We had to get those fixed up and ready for foreign military sales, because they’d always totally rehabbed those, maintenance-wise and what have you. So, again then, the airport had some empty hangars. So, we turned around and did a contract. The Army provided the federal people, overseeing the rehab of those aircraft for foreign military sales, and we brought some Illinois Army Guard mechanics and that in, to help refurbish those A-37 aircraft.

DePue: Were they under contract, or were they on federal time, when you say you brought some—

Blade: They were under federal; yeah, that was under federal. They were GS Civil Service employees, and there were also some active people out of some of the Army depots involved, armament depots, as well.

Then, moving on here, we had the Lincoln Challenge Program, which you’re familiar with. One day, as a USPFO, I get a call from Lynn Martin. She is secretary of labor for, I guess, President Reagan, at the time. Lynn Martin and I worked very close when I was a legislative liaison for the National Guard. She was originally from Rockford. She’d been a congresswoman from there, but they’d tapped her for this job.

In the meantime, we are in the process of closing, through BRAC [base realignment and closure], Chanute Air Force Base. They want to utilize that for some things. So, we’re talking about bringing in 30,000 high school junior dropouts—this is part of the *Reagan Team Initiative*—and [she] wanted to know what I thought about that. I said, “Well, it sounds like a good idea,

but we need to do a lot of discussion on that." She says, "Why don't you come out to Washington D.C. to see me about that. I want to talk about that with you." So, I again tell her to get a hold of the National Guard Bureau, and I'll come out.

So, in the meantime, I turn around and go out to Washington and meet with her. We set up how we're going to fund this thing. Now, part of this funding, then, is under this Cooperative Funding Agreement that I talked about. We initially set that up 40% state money, 60% federal money. Today there's more than that that goes in it.

DePue: Can you take this a step back and explain what Lincoln's Challenge was attempting to do?

Blade: Oh yeah, good idea. I jumped over that. There was problems in all the states in the United States, with high school junior dropouts. Many of them were very smart, but due to broken homes and divorces and one thing and another, these poor kids didn't have a chance. Many of them were very smart, but they just ended up in the streets, in trouble, and they were going to be a—

DePue: To include police records and stuff?

Blade: Yeah, police records, drugs and everything else. So, they had decided, in Washington, that they needed to do a program for that. They were talking about bringing kids from all over the United States and putting 30,000 of them into Chanute and give them, kind of like, boot training in the military, basic training and calisthenics and showing them what they ought to eat and physical fitness training and also training to where they could get a GED and test them and one thing and another. That part of it was pretty much decided.

However, they quickly ran into problems that parents in California, as an example, a long ways away, didn't want their dropout child coming all the way to Illinois to be in a barracks here, someplace and get into more trouble. So that was kind of the start of that. In meeting with Lynn Martin then, they'd already decided that perhaps. After we'd met, I guess, they decided they couldn't do 30,000. [It] ended up, we did 500, got started at Illinois. We were the first state and the pilot state to start the program. As I said, that was going to be funded 40% state and 60% federal.

Well, Governor Edgar's office, at the time said, "We can't wait that long on the federal money. We've got to have that federal money up front." The federal won't put the money up front. So, I ended up, I went to Chicago to meet with the Federal Reserve. We had some conversations about many ideas, and finally we decided we would transfer $4 million down here to the Marine Bank, which was the Bunn Marine Bank in those days. I had met with them, as well. That was agreeable with them, and they would pay us normal loan dollars on that money to the Federal Reserve.

As soon as the state cut the check, they then would contact my office to tell me that the checks had been cut, printed and signed. Then, I would certify that we could reimburse the state. Before the checks ever left the state, the checks were printed, put in the envelope, but they weren't mailed yet. So, in theory, twenty minutes after the checks had been cut, the state had their money. That's how that worked, and that was a good program. All the states that have a Lincoln Challenge program do that today, that same program. It was a new challenge in those days.

DePue: Why Rantoul as the location?

Blade: Well, that was a…BRAC had closed that military facility. BRAC is base realignment and closure, B-R-A-C. All that facility was sitting over there, not being utilized. The city of Rantoul was looking for something to get some money there. So, the bottom line today is that the state has been deeded twenty-five acres of Chanute Air Force Base to the State of Illinois and has $38 million dollars programmed to build a new training facility for this Lincoln Challenge Program.

DePue: It seems to be a great success.

Blade: It is a great success. They have graduated very close to 12,000 students, since 1993.

DePue: When you say graduate, that means they've completed the program, or they've gotten the GED or both?

Blade: They've completed the program, and they have a GED. They graduate 50% or little better out of that. There is some great success stories out of there. One of the other fellows could certainly get into those, but today, there's a doctor that went through that program, and we have some lawyers. Many of them joined the military after that. [It's] just a great program.

Let's see, that's pretty much the highlights that I've hit on, I guess. I do have a couple other little things.

DePue: I do want to ask you a couple of questions, and maybe this is outside of the realm of your responsibility. The 1980s was another period of time for the American military, because of, let's just say, training levels were intensified. A lot more money went to training activities. Let's start with this. We've talked about the nature of drills and what was happening at annual trainings in the early part of your career. By the early 1980s, that process changed, didn't it? You started having weekend drills, and the nature of training at annual training started to change quite a bit too, as I understand.

Blade: Yeah, that's correct. We started going to active military installations, in some cases, in addition to the Fort McCoys, yes. Is that what you're meaning?

DePue: Yeah, why don't we start with the weekend drill periods?

Blade: That had to be in the '60s sometime or early '70s.

DePue: So that had been in effect for quite a while?

Blade: Yes.

DePue: The one significant thing that I recall—and this happened about the time I joined the National Guard in '81—was no longer were you going to go on to the field in the day time and come in at night and have that long weekend. Now, you're going to go out and stay in the field for an extended period of time, do daylight training, do night training. In our case, as field artillery men, we were firing night missions. It was similar to going to the field when you are on active duty. Was that about the early '80s?

Blade: That was in the late '70s, early '80s that we started doing that. They wanted to go to the nine days…I think you had to spend nine days in the field, day and night. Prior to that, we used to do, maybe, three days and two nights in the field, back in my early days. You always had the weekends off. Of course, if we were to go to Camp Ripley, Minnesota, taking that as an example. It's out in the middle of nowhere, but the businesses around there looked forward to that, because there was three months of people coming in from all these other states, would go to the local restaurants and bars and what have you. That was a good income, in addition to all the tourists and fisherman that went up there every year.

But once they started this nine day business, why that all stopped. As many of them said, "They took the fun out of the Guard." (both laugh)

DePue: Well, I was going to say it was something of a significant culture change for these guys; was it not?

Blade: It was, definitely, particularly for the older fellows. Along that same timeframe, we really lost some senior NCOs. One of the problems, I think, in the Guard was that our junior NCOs just didn't have the right training or background to really function as good NCOs and that. Some of the senior officers—and I think I was part of that—is guilty.

We had been NCOs, many of us, before, and we turned around and did part of their work, which we shouldn't have, but we did, just to keep things running. I guess, when I was a battalion commander, we recognized that. John Hamilton was a battalion commander ahead of me, and he had got with the Reserves in Peoria and had a basic training NCO school, in which he had just that unit, 1-2-3 Infantry, only. They were in that process only about two or three months, when I became the battalion commander. I thought, boy, that was a great program. I could really see some great things with that. Then I talked with General Phipps about how good that was.

We tried to get some funding for the Illinois Guard to do that, expand that program. Well, that didn't work. They wouldn't approve it at the Guard Bureau level, so then I told General Phipps, "Let's you and I go to Washington. We'll go out there, and we'll talk to General Webber." He's a former Marine, way back. He was a very aggressive fellow. [We] told him what we wanted to do, and we could use my battalion to run an advance course.

So we started the ANOC and the BNOC training courses. That ended up being at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. That was the thing that helped all of that transition go into effect, there, because we really had a lot of recruiting problems there too, in that particular timeframe, as well.

DePue: ANOC and BNOC [basic and advanced non-commissioned officer course].

Blade: Yes, uh huh.

DePue: Was that a factor of the USPFO? Was that important, or was this something that was more going on in the training arenas?

Blade: I did this while I was a state employee and battalion commander. Of course, the federal that, federal funds funded that.

DePue: You were not a battalion commander while you were an USPFO?

Blade: No, I was not.

DePue: That would have not been—

Blade: You can't be. You cannot be on any State Guard boards, no promotion boards, selection boards or nothing, when you're the USPFO. [You] cannot do anything involved that could cause a conflict of interest.

DePue: This same timeframe, the late '70s, early '80s, was the birth of some of the national training centers that the Army, especially, was building across the country, Fort Irwin in California being the prime example, where brigade size units would rotate through there. Eventually that became something even National Guard units would be sent to, for an annual training or a period of time. Were you involved in any of that?

Blade: No, I was not. That was after my timeframe there, from being battalion commander.

DePue: The timeframe you served as USPFO was what years?

Blade: From 1980 until 1994, almost through 1994.

DePue: So, all the way through the Reagan years and in through the Bush years. Tell us what it was like, being in that position when Desert Shield and Desert Storm hits, and they start—for the first time in anybody's memory —start mobilizing Guard and Reserve Units.

Blade: Yeah, that took a lot of effort, because we were plowing some new ground. I guess Korean was the last time we'd been involved in something like that, and there was hardly anybody around, or anybody that was around was not involved in anything at [the] senior level of mobilization.

So, we had a lot of meetings, nationally, in my office, as USPFO, with that. And, you know, getting people ready, getting the training ready was one thing, but my responsibilities there were the funding and also, like, logistics for fuel and food and all of those kind of situations. That was a good experience. As I showed you a little book earlier, we put together a pamphlet about that, which if that were to happen again, why here was some guidelines that maybe they could go along with that. [I] did that while I was on the USPFO Advisory Board.

DePue: A pamphlet dealing with how to mobilize effectively?

Blade: Yeah, for the USPFO offices, yes.

DePue: What were your personal thoughts, seeing that happen? Let's kind of take a step back. I'm trying to get my timelines straight. Nineteen eighty nine, the Berlin Wall comes down. By 1991, this is kind of about the same time period, right after Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the Soviet Union comes apart.

Blade: That's correct. That's kind of in this same timeframe.

DePue: Now, you spent your whole life and career in the military, gearing toward fighting the Soviet horde.

Blade: Well, that's true. All our schools were geared up to that, (laughs) coming and defending Germany and what have you. That's correct.

DePue: Were you surprised when that happened?

Blade: Yes, I was, I guess, really. But, you know, one thing, we certainly took a long time to get everything lined up to do that. We had Desert Shield for, I don't know, three of four months, I think, getting things lined up and equipment. We then were moving some equipment, federal equipment, around in the Guard, taking some out of Illinois Guard, moving some other equipment in and upgrading some equipment. A lot of our equipment had been upgraded, prior to that, because Reagan was in there and was pushing that hard, to get that going on.

DePue: But the Iraq War itself lasted what, two or three days, and it was over.

Blade: A hundred hours and that was over, I think, yeah, something like that. We did a lot of things there in the Illinois Guard, I guess, and all the offices, as well.

We had a lot of message traffic that was…All at once, we had a lot of secret message traffic going on, which my office…We had the data processing, and that's where all the secret stuff came in, over the machines. My employees there had to have top secret clearances and what have you. I remember, one person put in for an application to look to be qualified to run the machines and that but had a little doubt on the FBI security clearance. So, the FBI came in and talked to me and says, "Well, sir, you can…If you sign this, you can override this recommendation, if you want to." [To] which I said, "No way." I would never override anything. Anybody was a little bit shady about security, why I was not going to get involved in that.

That was just another added responsibility to that job. There was just a lot of message traffic at that time, and you know, we were just maybe on the very edges of a little bit of email, but it was handled much differently, yet at that time, than what we're all accustomed to today.

DePue: Shortly after our great success in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and then the Soviet Union comes apart. President Bush starts talking about a "Peace Dividend," which translates into some cutbacks in the military. Do you remember any kind of an impact, because of that, during the last couple years of your tenure?

Blade: No, that really had not taken effect, while I was still there. I retired at the end of the fiscal year of '94, and the '95 budget was coming into effect the first of October.

DePue: Retired, as completely then?

Blade: Completely, that is correct.

DePue: I can't remember when General Holsinger retired himself—

Blade: Nineteen ninety-one.

DePue: So this is certainly relevant. Every time something like that occurs, there is always a lot of rumors flying around the National Guard—it doesn't matter what state you're in—of who the new adjutant general's going to be. Did you ever have an aspirations to being the adjutant general?

Blade: Well, I did. I guess I could back that up a little bit and talk about another. In 1987, the deputy director of the Army Guard was open in Washington, and I was encouraged to put in for that, from the Washington level. Many of the USPFOs did. So, I put in for that. Billy Navas was selected for the job. He was out of the Puerto Rico Guard, and he had been a brigade commander but was not an USPFO or any full-time person. He was M-day person. He was a

brigade commander there. John Bozeman, who's a personal friend of mine that I got acquainted with back in the '70s, sat on the selection board. He was regular Army, a lawyer. I came in number two. Billy Navas was number one selection, and I was number two. Now, that's how it ended up, but we really came out of that board number, tied, of all the people that put in for that.

I got a recommendation from the governor on that, as well as a couple other senior officers in Illinois wrote a letter for me. I think General Inisuez did, and I believe General Weller did, as well, and General Phipps also wrote a letter for me. Secretary Marsh was secretary of the Army. He'd been secretary of the Army longer than any other secretary had been, at that time. Maybe [that's] still true today. He said, "I know Colonel Navas, but I don't know Colonel Blade, so therefore, we're going to select Billy Navas." So, that's what happened.

General Temple was the chief of the bureau at that time, in 1987, and he and I were both in Phoenix, Nevada at a conference. He and I went to lunch that day. He said, "Why don't you join me for lunch." So I did, and he says, "I just want to let you know how that turned out and how it transpired." And, as I told him, "I didn't have any problem with that." I said, "He could have known me just as easy as he knew Billy Navas." So I didn't get that job.

Then, when the adjutant general, when General Holsinger retired, then I put in for that job, and many people encouraged me to. For me, I only had about three years left to go before retirement time. So it kind of made sense, all the way around. I thought I could further some initiatives that General Phipps wanted to get done—all of us in those days—that had kind of gone dormant again. So I did put in for that, but I was not successful on that. There was a lot of politics that got involved into that and one thing and another. From my position there, I couldn't do a whole lot of doing anything about the politics, because the minute I tried to do that, I might of got into other trouble and lost the job I had.

DePue The politics at that time… You said 1991?

Blade: That is correct.

DePue: So, Governor Edgar, a Republican, would have been governor at the time. Is that one of the positions, where you have to be well known within Republican or Democrat circles to get the nod?

Blade: Well, it helps. Really, the person that time [that] was behind that was…Bill Cellini was pushing that. Some Guard guys had really got a hold of that and was totally behind that, politically, and that was—

DePue: That being?

Blade: The selection process for the adjutant general. Those were Bill Cellini, Hap Northern and…Who's the judge now, the federal judge, that's a Reserve two-star general?

DePue: Are you talking about Judge Mills?

Blade: Judge Mills.

DePue: And they were advocating for Dick Austin, instead?

Blade: No, they were advocating for Don Lynn.

DePue: Oh, okay, I'm sorry.

Blade: Yeah, Don Lynn, yeah. And…Go ahead.

DePue: How disappointing was it, then, when you didn't get the nod?

Blade: Not particularly. I guess I've always had the feeling that, if you don't get something, that's all right. Don't worry about it, because five years down the road, you look back and think that's the best thing that ever happened to you.

DePue: Is that the way you look at it now?

Blade: Yeah, still do; always have. It's always been pretty true.

DePue: What were your feelings when you got to '94? Did you **have** to retire at the time, or is that a decision you made?

Blade: No, at age sixty, you have to retire, as a USPFO. The only exception to that is if the replacement were to happen to be killed or [for] medical, physical reasons, wasn't ready to go in there, something. Three times I know of that happening—while I was a USPFO—in other states. One of them had a heart attack, I guess, the week before he was to go in there. Another one had an auto accident and was killed. I guess both the other cases were auto accidents that happened less than a month before they were to take over.

DePue: One other question here. I know from our conversation after we finished the last session, you were involved also in the sale of the Chicago Avenue Armory. That was probably 1992, when it was actually…Well, it was probably before that time.

Blade: Yeah, a little bit of history—I was thinking about that the other day. I was and I wasn't. I guess, when I was on the state side, one of the hospitals offered us $25 million to buy the air rights over the Chicago Avenue Armory. We, of course, didn't pursue that or sell that, anyway, at the time, which we probably should have. That would have given us a lot of money, but that really didn't

go. There was an organization in Chicago called Streeterville Organization. They were the ones behind that.

DePue: Streeterville?

Blade: Yeah, it's just a name. Originally, that area in Chicago, going way back, was Streeterville. I expect that's probably, maybe back to the 1700s. I don't know where they picked that name up.

DePue: Well, I'll kind lay out a little bit more background. I don't know if you have much to say, but the Chicago Avenue Armory is a historic armory right downtown, only about three blocks away from the Hancock Building, which is one of the main highlights of the downtown area. It's a block and a half off of Michigan Avenue. It's a block and a half off of Lake Michigan itself, right off of Lake Shore Drive. It's prime territory, and it had been this historic armory where CAV units had always drilled. Back in the glory days of World War I and that era, they'd have polo games in the armory floor, and the elites of Chicago society would go there. Otto Kerner was a cavalryman, before World War II, one of those guys playing the polo games there.

Blade: He was part of the Black Horse unit.

DePue The Black Horse Troop. That was the ceremonial unit, up in Chicago.

Blade: That is correct. I knew Otto Kerner when I was in the Guard, and he was a general in the Guard. That has some Monmouth connection, as well, because Angus Irey was originally from Monmouth. That's where I first got in the Guard. He went to high school in Monmouth, and his brother was my battery commander, at one time, younger brother.

Angus Irey worked for the Post Office in Monmouth and got transferred to Chicago with the Postal Service and was in the Guard. He and Otto Kerner…He [Irey] too was in the Black Horse Unit, originally, in Chicago. It used to cost you money, I don't remember how much money, to join the Black Horse Unit, but you would get promoted pretty well in the Guard in those days.

That was an elite group. When they would go to camp, in those days…The Guard, in those days—and this is before my time—they didn't have evaluators coming around evaluating them. So, consequently, they would go to Guard, the enlisted people. The junior officers would do the training, and the senior officers would go play golf and have a good time. (both laugh)

DePue: Thus the origin of some of the reputation the regulars had for the Guard, huh?

Blade: That's right, unfortunately, but that's true.

DePue: Anyway, that's all kind of setting up a discussion about what happened now with the Illinois National Guard deciding to hand over the armory at Chicago Avenue.

Blade: Oh, okay. To move out of it, you mean? Yeah.

DePue: Right.

Blade: I really was not involved in that at all, because there wasn't any federal money connected with that armory. So, as a USPFO…That happened after I left the state side, so I was out of that arena. I was involved when the polo went in there and the contracts on the polo and the armory rental funds and all that, early stages, but not when we disbanded the Chicago Avenue Armory.

DePue: Well, I thought you knew some details about the sale of it to the City of Chicago, was it?

Blade: Yeah. No, I'm really not—

DePue: The dollar figure of $1, I think, is what it was sold for, and now it's a museum of contemporary art or modern art, one of the two.

Blade: Well, that's only the one end of it, the head house on the west end of it is that, museum of art. The other armory part's been torn down. Now—

DePue: Yeah, the armory building itself is totally gone, I mean, the entire building.

Blade: That's correct, but there was a little end on it, that's still there. Because I just was in Chicago, and I looked over there and saw that. Now, that armory, a little bit of other history about the armory, which you may already know, that was about a five story armory.

After World War I, some of the senior officers had seen some chalets, chateaus over in France. They had designed that mess hall, redid that mess hall there. They cleaned that up when Otto Kerner was the governor, because of his Guard connections and his being assigned in that armory. That mess hall was designed after that, and on the end of that were real nice suites. I used to stay in those suites when I would go up to Chicago. There was a nice bedroom and everything in there.

DePue: Guardsmen like to use the parking ramp that was underneath the armory, because it was a block away from the best shopping in Illinois, and it was free parking.

Blade: Yes, that is very true. The polo was totally out of there, at one time, but then they moved the polo back into that armory. We hauled dirt in there and did all of that when General Patton was the adjutant general. They put political force

on him to haul that dirt in and set the polos in there. I was involved in the rental of that armory and set up the contract for the polo folks.

DePue: So private groups were coming in to play polo there?

Blade: Yes, they were. Also some handicapped ones, as well. Yeah, there were some millionaires behind those programs.

DePue: Well, we're getting close to being able to wrap this up. What have you been doing in your retirement, because you've been anything but lazy and laying around at home. You've been pretty busy, from what I can tell.

Blade: Well, I guess I have to say once a guardsman always a guardsman. I guess, I retired in '94. I had many job opportunities when I retired. I think I had twenty-seven different firms that contacted me about going to work for them. I had a good opportunity, a full-time job, to go to work for Caterpillar, but I didn't want to work full-time. That would have been a very high paying, lucrative job. I ended up deciding I just wanted to work part-time. I worked for an engineering firm, here in Springfield, Hanson Engineers, part-time as a special consultant.

My degree is in economics, and we had moved to Oquawka, Illinois, which is on the Mississippi River. I saw those small communities needed some economic development. So, I did some consulting with the communities, both in west central Illinois and eastern Iowa, to try to start up economic development.

One kind of a major project that I got involved in was the Tri-State Port Authority, in which we have thirty-five counties in Iowa, Missouri and Illinois to join this port authority. We established the headquarters of that being in Quincy, Illinois. Governor Ryan started putting $5 million a year into a revolving fund account, to where it would grow up to $25 million. About 18% of all the commodities in the United States are shipped on the inland waterway, at about 2% of the cost. That was another thing I got involved with that was outside of doing things with Hanson's. I did establish a couple of communities with economic development, in addition to that, a couple of counties and worked things there, and, go ahead.

DePue: I think you've been involved with BRAC, as well, maybe the second round of BRAC?

Blade: Yeah, that was my next thing I was going to talk about.

DePue: Go ahead.

Blade: I guess I always had a lot of love for the military and still do today, very interested in that. So, Rock Island/Quad Cities, with the Rock Island Arsenal, having done some things for them when I was retired, trying to bring extra

military units into Illinois and locating some of them at Rock Island Arsenal, the BRAC was coming along. Having been through the previous BRACs that had been around while I was a USPFO, I was pretty familiar with them. That's how we moved the O'Hare Guard Unit from under a BRAC disguise to Scott Air Force Base, to help retain Scott.

DePue: Under a BRAC disguise?

Blade: That's correct. The BRAC had already met to what facilities, active installations, they were going to close, and the Chicago Guard unit, [there] was nothing said about it, other than the previous presidents had tried to move that guard unit out of O'Hare, because the City of Chicago did not want to the Guard unit there. So, when General Holesinger was the adjutant general—and he was the former commander of the 126th in Chicago—we had a new lease coming up on that armory, to get it signed again, because the old lease was running out.

The USPFO had to sign all federal leases of property. He, as the adjutant general, had to sign, as a state. We go to Chicago and meet with the City of Chicago and O'Hare Airport. The leases were all drawn up, and we had legal people look at them, and we signed those leases. I told General Holesinger that lease wasn't worth the paper it was written on, because that could be broken very easily, because, going back to when Jimmy Carter was going to be president, the major federal contracting offices were on O'Hare Air Field. Jimmy Carter had already gave them a pink slip. They were going to move that out of there, and they were going to close the Air Guard base there, too. They were really after it, to get her closed.

But, we would call all the politicians, and we would just really do a major effort to keep that there. Well, this is back, up to early '90, somewhere in there is when we signed that lease. That was, I think, a thirty-five years lease, if I'm not mistaken. [It] must have been '98, because I think it was a thirty-five year lease. Then, we'd already had BRAC '88 and BRAC '93 and maybe—

DePue: BRAC '91.

Blade: No.

DePue: And there was a '93 version, as well, I believe.

Blade: Yeah and an 88 and maybe….So, we knew another one was coming that was going to be in '95. We had a meeting in Rock Island Arsenal with some of those folks, talking about BRAC. It had been discussed, the Guard was going to get involved. So then, I turned around and got a hold of Ray LaHood and told him we needed to get some things involved, BRAC. Bottom line was, I got involved with that, with the Guard, as well as for Peoria and Springfield.

Then, Scott Air Force Base and the State of Illinois, we ended up raising money, hiring consultants from Washington to help us maintain our military installations in Illinois. That was another project. After that was over with, the governor's office asked me to serve on a post-BRAC committee. I've been on that ever since. They've recently added a whole new board, and I'm on it again. I tried to get off, but they really begged me to get on there. So I told them I'd do that.

DePue: What is the Springfield Military Advisory Committee?

Blade: This came along in the same process, during this BRAC. We decided that we needed to have that here in Springfield, and Mayor Davlin was very involved in that. We decided we'd start a military advisory group, to make sure we keep the Air Guard base here in Springfield.

I met with the new Mayor Huston the other day, and we're getting ready to have a meeting this next month and getting ready to gather information now. We started that to help prevent BRAC messing with us again, here at the 183rd

DePue: Was there some discussion in the '95 discussions about closing the Air Guard Facility here or just taking away the aircraft? Am I confusing some things?

Blade: No, you're not. They were more after the 126th. The reason we moved the 126th down there was that that would help stabilize…I should have talked in a little more detail about that.

Senator Dixon introduced a BRAC amendment to the BRAC. That included moving the Air Guard out of Chicago. There wasn't a whole lot of publicity on that. It fell underneath the BRAC disguise, but it was added in afterwards. Senator Dixon was the one who did that. The Mayor of Chicago wanted to move that Air Guard Base out of there, so they could turn around and lease property at O'Hare to other organizations and sell it and get tax revenue off of that. They could make a lot of money off the tax revenue, off of that property that the Air Guard and the Air Force Reserve had at O'Hare.

DePue: But the 126th moved down to Scott Air force base, correct?

Blade: That's correct. This whole big scheme of things was to move it to Scott Air Force Base to help stabilize Scott and keep it there. You get more military installations there, the harder it is for them to close it. That's why that happened. They've done a good job of Scott. When I first became the USPFO, there were eleven generals at Scott Air Force base. Today, there are thirty-three generals at Scott Air Force Base, and there's soon to be thirty-five generals at Scott Air Force Base.

DePue: One of them is a four star; is it not?

Blade: Yes, there is at least one four star down there, quite a few three stars down there. Those are different functions, some of those. Today, the three star down there is an Army three star. The predecessor to that was a three star admiral.

DePue: But what's the connection between that movement, down to Scott, and what's going on in the Springfield airport and our own facility in the unit here, the 186?

Blade: Okay, during the last BRAC then, we lost the aircraft out here, because the Air Force is cutting down. Due to drones, we don't need as many fighter aircraft, so they think. Therefore, we lost the F-16s out here. In turn, we have worked a lot of lobbying and everything else, and we've picked up quite a few missions. So, in total manpower, we've lost about 160 folks out here. We've retained and gained a little bit of payroll, due to higher paying positions.

We are repairing engines out here for single engine jets, mostly for the Air Guard, but we're also maybe going to do a few for the Marine Corps, as well. Then we have a new warfighting headquarters here so that, if there are problems that can be controlled right here through electronics. We're in the process of finishing those facilities now and probably will have that finished by the first of September.

DePue: Well, fasten your seatbelts, because we're probably on the cusp of another serious downsizing in the military, now that we're basically out of Iraq, and it looks like we'll be out of Afghanistan in the rotations that require the National Guard and Reserve to be fairly robust to support that. Do you see the Guard losing strength and losing its involvement on the world scene?

Blade: Well, there's a lot of discussions going on that. I guess I've been in several of those discussions. There's many pay grades way above me, but one of the main things that we're really working at, in reference to the Guard, is, I think we've proved our justification for the National Guard in Afghanistan and Iraq, as to what we're capable of doing and what a big asset we are to the country.

With the budgetary situations the way that they are, we are working economic things to show how cheap it is, not cheap, less costly, to keep the National Guard, than it is the active component. That is the theme we're going after. One thing, with the Guard person, all you have to worry about taking care of is that individual. On the active component, you have the whole family to take care of. So, in most cases, you have four people to take care of, all their medical and everything else. Medical alone, they have to budget $10,000 per individual. In the Guard, that figure is not even $10,000, because all they have is the annual training period, and most of them have civilian jobs or federal civil service jobs, so that insurance is covered that way. That's just one little dimension of this.

Right now, we're gathering data, and Doctor Ayers and I are working on some economic studies now for the state. Originally now, we're working on for the 183rd here. I have had a discussion with Western Illinois University to help us out some on that, because they can have the college students do the…That's part of their training, and we can get that done for little or nothing, because we don't have much money. The state does not have any money to hire any consultants this time. So, what we're doing is establishing a nonprofit organization. That's how we're going to raise money to look after the facilities in the state of Illinois.

DePue: Well sir, it sounds like you still got some thumbs in the pie here, to a certain extent.

Blade: Well, I do, I guess. I enjoy doing that. As long they want me to do that, I guess I will.

DePue: Let's get to finishing up here with a couple of just very general questions. Looking back at your career, what would you think you're most proud of, in terms of accomplishments?

Blade: That's a good question, I guess. I guess my objective when I first got in the Guard was… I guess my motivation there, my brother was in the Navy, and I just kind of looked up to that. We had a farm neighbor, across the road, was in the military militia for the State of Illinois. I guess that kind of impressed me, and I just thought that being and NCO was good. But, after I'd been on active duty and saw some 2nd lieutenants, I just thought I was going to go to OCS. I ought to do that, because I wanted to see if I couldn't do something about controlling that and thought, if I got to be a captain, that would be very good.

Well, as time went on, I guess I raised my goals and objectives. I think, if I had that to do all over again, I'd probably do about the same cycle again. I would definitely be in the military, full-time probably, rather that the Guard, depending on what the situation was.

DePue: Do you think you accomplished more during the time you were USPFO or during those years when you and Phipps and Myers were doing a lot to work on the National Guard armories?

Blade: I think that the days that the three of us were working, we really turned the Illinois National Guard around and got it going in the right direction. I believe it was good for me to move on to the next job, because I was able to take some of those initiatives and boost things on the federal side. I don't mean this for any credit myself, but we would never have had another new Air Guard Base, I don't believe, if I hadn't been involved where I was. I don't mean that for any personal benefit, just being at the right place at the right time with the right background.

DePue: I'd like to have you reflect on the Guard that you got into in the late '50s and early '60s and the National Guard, as you understand it today. How is it different?

Blade: Things have changed so much, and there's so much technology today. Those days were very labor intense in the military, I guess. It took a lot of people to get something accomplished. With the technology today and the weapon systems and everything, it takes far more expertise, education and training for the sophistication of the equipment.

In those days, particularly the National Guard, was loaded with farmers. Today, there is far less farmers than there was then, because farmers weren't afraid to work and what have you. But today, if you just have people just as labor, you couldn't get a lot of jobs accomplished in the military. It takes the computer and the technology to make that happen, the weapons' systems.

DePue: Do you think the quality of the soldier has improved over the last few decades?

Blade: Well, yes they have, I think, because the requirements for physical fitness and all of that are much more strenuous. I think that's good, really, and it's good for their health; it's good for the country. [It] sets a good example for the country.

DePue: Early in your career, you had a couple of situations, bumping in to active duty who had attitudes about people in the Guard. Do you think those attitudes still exist today, some resentment from the active duty guys, who are looking down their noses and the Guard and Reserve troops?

Blade: I would think that there probably is some still there. I believe that probably is. That's at both levels, at the senior officer level, as well as the lower enlisted levels. During my timeframe, that was much tougher at the enlisted level, NCO level, than it was. For a Guardsman, it was pretty tough. I related some of those stories to you earlier. If you really worked hard and excelled, they'd leave you alone. I guess that was a good motivational thing. Still, at the officer level today there's some, because you can tell that. At the Air National Guard and the Air Force today, more so than the Army, you can see that, the way the manning is and where the airplanes are going or trying to go.

DePue: Going back to the active duty side.

Blade: Going on the active side, that's right, rather than the Guard.

DePue: Besides me coming and asking you, why did you agree to do this interview?

Blade: Well (chuckles), I just think it's vital that we have a little bit of history, living history, so to speak, about the military, because if we don't, it will soon be

forgotten. I guess they look back at the Illinois Guard and the strength, you know. In 1948, the Illinois Guard was at 22,000 strength, and they wouldn't fund any more troops in Illinois, and we've slid back. We're one of the biggest, fifth largest state in the states, but we're not the fifth largest when it comes to Guard troops. We need to do many things to get it back to that, to being the fifth largest Guard state.

DePue: Any final comments for us, sir?

Blade: Well, I've certainly enjoyed this. You've done a great job in asking questions. I think you're doing something that's really needed. Keep it up.

DePue: Thank you very much.

Blade: Yes, thank you.

[end 4th interview]