Interview of Wendell Freeland
Interviewed by Todd DePastino with Kevin Farkas
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Transcribed by: Kevin Wagner

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WF: I lived there. I went to public schools, colored schools in Baltimore City. Then, when I was about 8, we moved to McCullough Street, which is only a block over. You have to understand Baltimore, for Negros, was a very narrow corridor, from Druid Hill Park down to Eutaw Street, which was the beginning of downtown. It was a narrow corridor which, on the east side, was bordered with Eutaw Place, and on the west side by Fulton Avenue. And it went some 25 blocks from the park to downtown. Why it's important to know about the corridor is because going outside of the corridor was dangerous. I never had a bike. We had ball-bearing skates which we got from Dirty Ida's. It's kind of interesting because her store on Lawrence Street was the only one that had ball bearings. Ball bearings were very important. We used to hitch rides on the ice truck and the other trucks. Of course, some of the streets will built by the WPA during the Roosevelt administration, and they were difficult to skate on because they were bricks. Not like the Belgian Block you have in Pittsburgh, but like the bricks you have some places. I finished elementary school at Henry Highland Garnett elementary school, school number re103. Henry Highland Garnett should be important to most people in Pittsburgh. Of course, he's not important to anybody in Pittsburgh, but he did live here and was a minister here. He also was a scientist of some note. From there, when I graduated the sixth grade, I went to Booker T. Washington Junior High School. And from Booker T. Washington Junior High school, I was graduated from that on the night that Louis beat Schmeling in 1938. I remember that because my middle name is Grimke, so therefore, I'd be Wendell Grimke Freeland. There was no way the principal was going to have to recite all of those letters, and he asked if he could just call me Wendell Freeland. We had commencement early, and raced home to listen to the fight. The good fight. And then that was it. And when I finished there, I went to Fredrick Douglass High School. You see, you have to understand that in Baltimore, we had a colored school system. We had a colored school principal, colored school, actually, superintendent, who was a Mr. Wood. I lived, when I was at 103, on Gold Street. We used to have the Gold Bowl on January 1. Not many cars in our neighborhood, so therefore you'd just go to the parked car under the tree and make a turn. The interesting thing about where I lived is that I was on the wrong side of the tracks of the wrong side of the tracks. You see all the Negro community was on the wrong side of the tracks; I was, in a sense, less desirable than the people on the right side. One of the symbols of that was: there was an elementary school, I think it was 120, which had as its principal George B. Murphy, who was a member of the Murphy clan, which

owned the Afro-American newspaper. He was the principal there. So all the kids from "Sugar Hill" we called it, the streets McCullough, and Madison, and Druid Hill, which were higher than the 2200 block, went to that school. They walked right past my house to go to there, and not to 104. When I got to Booker T. Washington Junior High School, we were all put together. At that time, when I went to school in the 30s, there was a school in East Baltimore. For basketball fans, there would be many college players and pro players who went to Dunbar. That was the other school in Baltimore for Negroes. And it was a Junior-Senior High School. Later it became a high school, separate. There was also a vocation school which was, I can't tell you the number of it, but many of the people who did not go to the high school went there. High school was divided into three categories: academic, history, and secretarial. Academic and history were the same, but I can't remember the people who were in one category went to, and they were the minority, took algebra. That was as far as we went in mathematics. Those of us who were not in that class didn't take even advanced algebra. We took history, and of course English. I was a very good English student, and when I graduated in 1941, I won the prize for the highest grades in English: $5. I remember the principal, Harry Pratt, reciting that it was unusual for a boy to be the best English student. I had the best English teacher I've ever known. She was Josie Stevens. Josie Goodrich Stevens, later married again. She was wonderful. She introduced me to many things that I did not get in high school, per se. I remember reading *The Prophet*. Schools are so different today. The kinds of writers I met as a freshman in college, they now meet in the 10th grade, maybe even the 9th grade. They meet Homer, they meet Aristophanes. I didn't meet them until I went to college. I planned to go to Coppin Normal School, which was a school that all bright Negros went to, and become a schoolteacher, elementary school teacher. It was a 4-year college, 4-year class but it was a Normal school. Fortunately, I heard about an examination at Howard University, a competitive examination, and one of the things about it, the night before, Friday, I was in the Mask and Wig club. I had hurt my leg or something. I was hobbling. But I wasn't hobbling, I was just pretending that if I didn't do well on the test, it was because of my knee or my leg. It was a technique for success. I won, I had the highest mark in the country, I believe, and I won a full scholarship for tuition and room rent at Howard, which was an excellent school. I went there in 1941.

WF: My mother was a maid, my father was a janitor. He was called a porter, but he was in an apartment building in Baltimore. Neither one of them had finished high school. My mother had gone to night school, not in Baltimore, in Jersey City, I believe. Both of my parents were from families from Calvert County, Maryland. My father was born there, my mother was born in Baltimore City. I note "City" because Baltimore City is a separate entity, surrounded by Baltimore County. But it's very difficult when you go in the Army and you go elsewhere, and you have forms to fill out, and they ask you what county you're from and you say "none." That's like Harry Truman in World War I saying "Harry," and then finally took an initial and said, "'S.' for nothing." My mother worked

for white people, Gentiles and Jews. Most of them were Jews. She brought home so many things. I can remember cherry herring. Of course, that was later in my days. But she brought home books – Dickens's *Bleak House* – books that I didn't get in high school. Today, many parents who work for white people, or work for Negroes as far as that's concerned, resent the fact that they're domestics and don't bring anything home. Except, maybe, totes. But they don't bring any of the culture. One of the, well I'll mention two of the people for whom my mother worked. Because she was a day worker, she would not give up her old people who hired her for $2 a day and car fare. She began to work after my sister was born during the Depression and my father came home with a $9 paycheck. She said, "Harvey, I'm going to work." She worked until she was 90-something. She worked for W. Calvin Chestnut, who was a Gentile, and a judge of the United States district court for Maryland. I didn't learn til later, he was the judge who determined in favor of the black teachers, the equalization of salaries, the case brought by Charles Huston and Thurgood Marshall. It surprised me because he seemed to be a very conservative man. But I was able to talk to him from time to time, because I always wanted to be a lawyer. The other, and probably more important in our lives, was Ada Cohen. She was of the Cohen-Mills, Moses Cohen Hospital – you may know something about – in North Carolina. She was very wealthy, she was Jewish, she was a friend of Gertrude Stein, and was the leading collector of Picasso and Matisse in America. She and her sister Clara Belle. Clara Belle was dead when I first met Miss Cohen. She gave my mother many things and she wanted to give her some kind of coat, and my mother said, "No, no, wait til you come back from Ashville." She died, and she left enough money for my mother and father to buy a house. I can't tell you when she died, but, again, she knew my sister had some musical talent. We had a piano which my parents bought. But since they were frugal and since I was older than my sister and my sister wasn't old enough to play the big piano, I had to take lessons. I didn't learn very much. I learned, you know, C. D. and all those things. But that's about it. My sister had some talent and Ada Cohen had a friend who had been in Europe and who left Europe under Hitler, she had her teacher, Ms. Schwartz, teach my sister. My sister and I talk about it now because of the fact that she says Ms. Schwartz would rap her hands with her pointer when she was at the piano. But these were two of the most important people. Actually, my mother worked for a Kaufmann whose daughter was a nurse and who had been a friend of Ada Cohen. My guess is Ada Cohen was a lesbian from all of her friends in Europe and her friends in the United States. She brought them, the Kaufmann family, from Europe to the United States. Again they were Jewish and they were fleeing from Hitler. My sister is 4.5 years younger than I. She lives in Baltimore, she lives in the county now. She has three daughters, one of whom was recently promoted to president of one of the subsidiaries of Lockheed Martin. Or Lockheed Mariette. I don't know whether it's Mariette or Martin. They change the name every 5 minutes it seems to me. Another daughter works in California for Disney, and the 3rd daughter is a publicist – had been the editor at Ebony, but Ebony

wanted her to move from New York, and she would not. She has a number of clients including Prince, whatever his name is. She lives in New York with her husband and a girl child, Carrie. My sister married Harry Cole, it was the second marriage for both. Harry Cole was a black man who became the first black man to serve on the Court of Appeals in Maryland, which is the highest court in Maryland. We used to joke – he died probably in '99…. I remember because I had a stroke in '98, and as I discussed my symptoms, my family in Baltimore thought it was TIA, and it was not, but Harry had one then, and he had diabetes problems and other problems. We joked about the fact that he served as chief judge on one occasion. That was the occasion of Mandell who, coming before the court for reinstatement to the bar after he was convicted. And the Democrats on the bench – Harry was a Republican – had to disqualify themselves, those who were senior to him. So he was chief judge for a day. He was very influential in having a successor named, Bell, and Bell became chief judge, may still be the chief judge, of the Court of Appeals in Maryland. That's pretty much of my sister's life. My wife and I met in '45. I was back at Tuskegee at the time. Her boyfriend, who was a friend of mine, asked me to pick her up for, they had a date that night. So I walked to his house to where she lived and walked her back. I did not steal her from him in spite of the fact that many people assert it's a fact. When the war was over, Bobby, who was her friend who introduced me to her, married his high school sweetheart. I was feeling very concerned about Jane's state of mind because her boyfriend had married someone else. So I used to go out with her and things like that. She worked for the Afro-American newspaper. She finished college when she was only 17. She finished well before in Ohio and worked for the Afro-American immediately after finishing.

WF: Well I joined the Air Corps quite by coincidence. Or accident, I suppose. As you know, originally there were no Negroes in the Army Air Corps. It was determined based upon a study at the war college in 1925 that Negroes did not have the capacity to fly or the capacity to be involved in combat. That they were natural cowards. You must remember that in 1925, and really in 1940, that the majority of the people in the military moving up into high positions were from the South, because they were the ones that went to West Point and the Naval Academy. Because the plantations were gone, and what would a young Southerner with no great shakes want to be? Well he would want to go into the Army. Free education, and that's what happened. With the 1925 War College, these men were then the bosses of the military in 1941 when we went to war. That's except for George Catlett Marshall, who deserves a special place in history. Certainly for me, he deserves a special place in history. I was drafted in 1943. When I went to the reception center which was at Camp Lee, Virginia, I was asked what was my serial number. I knew it, it was 33735473. Well this distinguished me from most of the inductees at that place at that time. So he said, "Okay, you'll go to the Sergeant." Well I told him that I'd finished high school and attended some college. Then, I became important enough to go to see a lieutenant. Of course, all the people I was talking to were white. The new enlisted men

were colored, but the cadre was white. The lieutenant said, "Well young man, we have an opportunity for you to join the Army Air Corps." Of course, I wanted to be a success. I had no idea anything. I didn't particularly want to be in the infantry, though when I was drafted at the reception in Baltimore, I pointed out that I had ROTC infantry, and that kept me out of the Navy because I didn't want to be a mess man. A mess boy as they called them. In the Navy, that was the place for Negroes to be in WWII. The lieutenant said, "We'd like for you to go into the Air Corps." And I said, "All the guys from Howard who went into the Air Corps went to Keesler Field, Mississippi. And I did not believe that it was in Mississippi. Well actually I did know because there were a bunch of rotten eggs in the United States Congress that were from Mississippi. Rankin was one and Bilbo was the other in my recollection. And our president, Mordecai W. Johnson, would go to the Congress and mince no words but still get the money because Howard was a federally endowed program. So anyway, the guy said, "Oh, no, we've got places in New Jersey and Michigan, and elsewhere." And I believed him. So one Friday afternoon, I was told to pack up and I got on the Choo-Choo train with a Norfolk and Western engine. It headed into west, made a left turn and didn't stop until it got to the Gulf of Mexico. I was in Mississippi. And I was there, at Keesler Field. There were a number of tests: written, psychological, physical. I can remember only 2 parts of the test. The written parts. One was in mathematics and for some reason there were some guys in with me who had Master's in mathematics. And I had never had advanced algebra. So they taught me at least the various functions of trigonometry. So, when we compared notes after that part of the examination, I had finished the first 6 questions, which were the six functions of trigonometry, and they hadn't even gotten to that part – they were still back on the algebra. The other part of it is, as you know in most examinations, the usually have reading comprehension at the end because they want to test your stamina. Your intellectual stamina. And there was an article about laminar flow. I had no idea what laminar flow was, but laminar flow is the key to the success of the P-51 Mustang. I learned many years later, or maybe not many years later. And I remember that because I remember laminar flow. And I did well enough to be qualified to go to Tuskegee. When I got to Tuskegee, I went to Tuskegee Institute. Tuskegee Institute was, when the military set up a base at Tuskegee Air Force base, which was not far from Tuskegee Institute. Tuskegee Institute was a Negro college. Its reputation was mainly based upon the fact that George Washington Carver was there. It had no great academic record as far as I knew. Under the training record for Negro airmen, you spent 5 months at Tuskegee Institute, at what was called the College Training Detachment, where you were supposed to get the equivalent of two years of college. I was told I had a high stanine in bombardiering and navigating, and therefore would be treated separately from the guys who were pilots and others. So I went to class and the mathematics prof said he would teach us about the tangent function of trigonometry. To describe it, you have your right triangle, and the straight up is the altitude. The target over here is to your right – if you're

flying in that direction of course – and hypotenuse is the angle of the bomb because the bomb is in a plane that is moving 200 miles per hour, 300 miles per hour, however fast, so the bomb is still going this way, but because of wind and other factors its going down here. So we had two days of that, and I was told that's all the college training detachment you'll have, we'll now go into orientation flights, which we did at Tuskegee. Tuskegee Institute had a civil air patrol entity, and there were Negroes who were the instructors there. They were civilians, not in the military at all. Chief Anderson, is the one most remembered, I think Moten is another one. I went to Tuskegee 3 or 4 years ago in October to the dedication of the Tuskegee memorial there and of the new hangar at Moten Field. So, since I wasn't going to class, I went to orientation. Orientation was a Piper Cub. A Piper Cub is held together by baling wire and chewing gum. It will never fall, I didn't know anything like that at the time. So we were rattling across the grass on what used to be a cornfield, I suppose, and the guy says, "It's all yours." And that scares the hell out of you. But, I pulled back on the stick. Of course, fortunately, he was operating the plane, so we didn't crash. When we landed, he pointed out that the things on the floor on my right side was a rudder, it was also on the left, and he said, "It's not a brake." Well I said, "I don't know anything about brakes." I couldn't drive a car. Cars weren't in the Freeland family; the Freeland family wasn't into cars. The long and short of it is, finished the 10 hours of flight training. Some of the flight orientation, it was flight training. We learned then that the military believed that all those who had done well in the examinations at Keesler Field and other places in the country could fly. But you'd have to do it the Army way, which was a very fast way, an interesting way. I left Tuskegee Institute and went to Tuskegee Air Base. There, I went to pre-flight, as did all the pilots. For those of you who know something about the 322nd pursuit group, which is subject of the movie *Red Tails* by George Lucas, all of the training for pilots was done at Tuskegee Institute. Pre-flight, for all of us, was done at Tuskegee. There we learned some things, a couple of things most remarkable to me at least. One of those things is aircraft identification. And it shows you the Army way of teaching. You had a facsimile shadow of a Messerschmitt 109, a German fighter plane, coming at you from 1,000 feet away, and you can only see it in a second. But what you do, as I now learned, and I should have known if I had been interested in a field other than history and political science, is that the eye only takes a picture. And therefore, the brain translates the picture, and you can see then, you can identify it as a 109 1,000 feet away going 2- 300 miles an hour. That's the thing I remember most. Of course, we had Morse code. We had training in the morning, examination after that, and you do the same thing in the afternoon. So you learned. You could learn to be impossible not to get 100, or at least for most of us. Most of us there had had some college. All of us believed then that we were the best and the brightest. And I point out that, interesting, is that "the best and the brightest" is used most often because of the author of a book book about the Kennedy Administration, Halberstam. He called them "The best and the brightest," but they had no sense of

history. We did have a sense of history. Not only that, I remembered the invasion of Ethiopia by Mussolini. At our church, we had one of the Negro flyers, who had been in Ethiopia, coming into the church with [a] papier-mâché airplane, and raising money for the Ethiopians. And of course, I knew about Hitler and the Rhineland and about Czechoslovakia. I never forgot Czechoslovakia, even today, I think about it. I've never been there, but it was crucial in both leading up to World War II and also in convincing me that the Soviet Union was bad.

WF: Of course, in my cadet days, I did talk to white officers, but I was a cadet, and I did not talk to the white cadet who were at the bases where I was. It was [chuckles] segregated, completely. And I suppose I'll be talking about what happened at Freeman Field before we're over, and there is a book by Norman Gould Cousins, *Guard of Honor*, which does reflect upon the white officers' attitudes, and frustrations, and maybe even some of the fears. But I never knew any of them. I never knew any white officer in the 477 Bombardment group except for my immediate commanding officer Anthony Chiappe, who was a captain from New Jersey. And I used to know the town, but that's about all I knew about him. I think his middle initial was "N," but that's all. But I was telling you about what happened after we finished pre-flight. Bombardiers and navigators had to go to gunnery school. The same school the gunners went to. For us it was Tindall Field, Florida, which is on the west side of Florida, and 6- weeks of training there in gunnery. Two moments of interest there. One is the fact that, well again there were 25 of us in the class, Negroes, and when we went to the theater, the movie house, it was segregated. Of course, at Tuskegee it was not segregated. Now, incidentally, at Tuskegee, I don't know where the white officers lived either. They lived somewhere, but I never knew where they lived, even when I came back as an officer, I still didn't know where they lived. But there was no intercourse between us. Anyway, some of us objected to going to a segregated theater. I was from Baltimore, and we had only Negro theaters that we went to, but one is used to living in a ghetto. Whereas in Tuskegee, we were all Negroes, we all went to the theater and it cost 15 cents. But at Tindall Field, there was a theater, a post theater, and the provisions were for segregation. And, of course, there were men there other than the 25 of us, there were Negroes there, maybe in the quartermaster, something or the other. And whether they were in training or what, they were there. That was only exceeded to the segregated patterns. We did not. Our group was a little bit different. So, the command, in its rather unique way, said, "Okay, all gunnery students," all gunnery students, not just the Negro gunnery students, "will go to the movies in their area where they live, in a hangar or some sort of recreation room, and you'll look at the movies there." So they showed the movies at the post theater, then they took the reel to one place or another, and we saw whatever movies we had to see. The second thing, a moment [chuckles] at Tindall Field, Florida and sometimes I wonder if I had been white, whether I'd've been washed out. If I'd just been a gunnery person, if I had been training for gunnery, to be a gunner, I probably would have washed out. One of the things we had to

do was to disassemble and reassemble a .50 caliber machine gun, blindfolded, with gloves on, in 2 minutes. So, I did it, and the instructor said, "Are you satisfied?" And I said, "Yes, sir." And he touched it, and it fell apart. I forgot to lock it, and so he gave me a chance to correct it. To do it again. And I did pass. We finished gunnery school, of course in those days, if you were in stenographic school you'd have gone back to Tuskegee, so back to Tuskegee we went. And there were 38 of us at that time. I said 25, but I think it was 38, and since we were all qualified to go to Bombardiering School and navigation school, our first opportunity to go to one of the schools was to go to Hondo Field which is near San Antonio, Texas, which is navigation school. For baseball fans, there was the "Hondo Hurricane." A center-fielder, I believe, for the New York Giants back in the 40s and 50s. Maybe the 50s. We got there and we were late getting there. That is, the class had begun. There were white students there and we were, of course, separate in our own barracks. We had to go to class extra times to catch up, and we worked our tails off, really. We ended up scrubbing our floors after midnight, in the dark, with flashlights, because we wanted to make it. We were castigated, of course, for staying up after we were supposed to be in bed, but we did it because we were trying to catch up. We were a couple of weeks behind, and a couple of weeks behind in a course of how many weeks, I don't know, it was 13 maybe. I forget. It's pretty rough. Anyway, they had 38 of us, and they only had room for 25. So, they picked 13 of us – we called ourselves "The 13 Bastards" – who were least senior of the 38, and we were shipped back to Tuskegee. It's kind of funny. Tuskegee was dry. San Antonio was wet, very wet. So, we bought all the booze our money could provide, including, I think it was called "private stock" but I'm not really sure. It was flavored in wood chips and guaranteed to be less than 30 days old. [Chuckles] It was pretty rotten stuff. Anyway, one of the incidents we had there at the San Antonio train station was we all had 1st class accommodations, that is the 25 of us. For the military, 1st class accommodations meant 2 down and 1 up, in a Pullman. Well, none of us had really been in a Pullman I don't think, but we had 1st class accommodations. We met and, of course, we were herded off to the Negro section of the train. And we resisted, the 25 of us. Pete Hewlett was our senior person. He was a big guy. He became a physician in Long Island. He was my dear friend. One of my dearest friends in the military. He was always around for me; I was a little guy, and he was my keeper. And sometimes my savior. Anyway, we insisted on seeing the stationmaster. We saw the stationmaster and showed him our tickets and – this train was not going to leave unless we were on it. Because we were supposed to be on it and our tickets were for it. So, he did make accommodations for us. Again, when you talk about things like this – when I think about things – I don't remind myself of all of them, at all times. But we were different, and we would stand up for our rights. Even when we didn't know we had rights. But we were tested as far as we could. So, we were on a civilian train, and we were headed back to New Orleans, and then from New Orleans to Tuskegee. Well, a civilian train in those days had to go on the sidings every time there was a military train.

So we went across Texas; it took us about 10 years. By which time, we had drunk everything, even the private stock [laughs]. So, we got to New Orleans dry of booze and spent a night or two there because nobody knew where we were. Then, we got on a train and went back to Tuskegee. And, […] while we were in New Orleans, a friend of mine – one of my classmates – William McDowell Jones, whose father was a bishop of […] well I can't tell you what it was. Certainly was not Baptist because they don't have bishops. But it was a Methodist church – whether it was A.M.E. or A.M. Zion – and they had a place in Mississippi, which was a resort for the ministers and parishioners, I suppose. I actually went to Mississippi with Bill Jones, to see his father. And we came back. We used to call Bill Jones, the younger, "Bish," because of his father. Anyway, we finally got on a choo-choo train and went to Tuskegee, and when we got there, they didn't know what the hell we were doing there. Finally, they accepted us – that we were for real – and there we were at Tuskegee again. And we were pretty ticked off, I can tell you that. Because we thought that we would not be able to get our commission and get our wings, and that we'd be gunners or something like that. But fortunately, or unfortunately as the case may be, we were sent to Midland, Texas. Midland Air Force Base in Texas. That's where George W. Bush was from, they tell me. I think he was born in Connecticut, but he forgot it. We went to Midland. The town of Midland, was where the oil field owners lived. Odessa was where the workers lived. And there we went to Bombardiering School. We learned about the Norden bombsight. I can't tell you the planes we flew. I think it was an AT-10, training plane, it was a twin-engine plane, and a single fin and rudder. And, we flew over Texas. And we bombed Texas. Not too long ago, in fact last June, the former Attorney General and now Judge Gonzales – was a judge before he became Attorney General and made council to the president – spoke at the Allegheny County Bar Association program up in Seven Springs. A program they have every year. And he said he was from Lubbock. I was on the panel to quiz him. And I told him that I used to bomb Lubbock, but, fortunately, I was a lousy bombardier, and so Lubbock still remained. Of course, I then chewed him out on a lot of things because I was the civil rights person to discuss the civil rights cases before the court. Anyway, we used to fly triangular missions. There were three of us on each plane. One man would navigate – a dead reckoning – and the other would be up in the nose to go on the bombing mission. And then the third guy was in charge of taking pictures of the bombing mission. There were shacks, I don't know how big they were, but when the bomb landed, it flashed […] and one of us was responsible for taking a picture. But we had one guy, Frank Wilson, he couldn't hit the ground. And I think everybody in our group must have flown with him at least once, and his bombs were so far off, we used to put our hand over the camera. Of course, the instructors knew that, so we had to walk tours for Frank. Frank finally washed out, then he went to San Angelo. I don't know whether he finished. Frank was the son of a man who was a dean at Lincoln University, which was a Negro college in the eastern part of the state, and he later went to Howard University and I think he was the dean of a

chapel there. Frank's vocabulary was picturesque. He wrote a letter to me which my mother opened because he wrote it to my home – he was still in the Army, I was not – and it began with an "m---f" there and language my mother had never heard me use, and never did hear me use. Anyway, at gunnery school, I suppose the two things I remember about gunnery school – well I remember more than two – but one of them was Lieutenant Broadway from Alabama. It's hard to explain a bombing mission. The plane at the "I" point, the initial point, is controlled by the bombardier, by what he does with his instruments. But what happens is when a bombardier gets from the weatherman and people on the ground certain information; we get information about how high we're gonna fly, so we're not gonna fly higher than 13,000 [feet] because then you need oxygen. So, we're gonna fly at 10,000. Well, the temperature at 10,000 is gonna be such-and-such. You're given the weather, the wind directions, the vectors. And, what you have to do, first of all, with the instruments, is calibrate them to that temperature, that altitude. So, your airspeed is not a true airspeed until your instruments are calibrated. And, of course, it's not ground speed, because you have to convert your TAS – True Air Speed – to ground speed. All of those things are based upon the information that you put into what had to be one of the very first computers. And the Norden bombsight. I go like this [gestures] because that's what you do. You look in the glass eye thing, and you're making adjustments because the hairlines for the target are still moving, so you have to make the adjustments to correct for all of the factors that you put into the machine. Because maybe, those factors are not are not exactly right. And even though you converted them to true air speed, and true altitude, and you've converted your temperature. All of those things you have converted by putting them in the machine. So Broadway, he's my instructor, and I've got my eye in the Norden bombsight and my fingers going like so-and-so, saying "Do this," or, "Do that." And I'd say, "Yeah, okay, I'm doing it." Well he chewed me out because I didn't say "sir." Well, I didn't have time to say, "sir." But anyway, he decided to set me up for a check-ride with the Lieutenant Colonel, who was the deputy commander of our group. And that time, boy I could hit Berlin on every shot. Though, of course, I knew we would never fly to Berlin, never bomb Germans. But, what the check-ride instructor had done is, after the first guy got in, he knocked off all the information. See, the first guy put the basic information in, the second guy only had to adjust with the Norden bombsight. He knocked it off. So, the second guy went up, and we did not communicate, and the bombsight doesn't work at all until you get the basic information. If you don't have the basic information, you're up there futzing around. So, for some strange reason, though I was really probably not a good bombardier student, I decided to check the basic information in the machine, found out it wasn't there, put the basic information in, and the instructor was flabbergasted. I had three flights that night. And he said, "Come on, let's have another one." It was about 3 o'clock in the morning. [He said] "Go at 500 feet," well at 500 feet the bombsight does no good. Basically looking at your big toe, that's the best way, because you were

traveling so fast and such a low altitude. There, I had my trigger on, and all of a sudden I think I'm on the shack, and really, I'm on some farmer's barn. I see the windmill. And so, I hit the trigger, so the bomb wouldn't hit his windmill, and finished that night.

WF: As we went through bombardiering school, most of our instructors had been engineering instructors in civilian life. They were all white. We had one instructor who had only been in the military. He taught bombsight maintenance. And I can't tell you what bombsight maintenance is. It presumes that lights are out and you have gloves and all of the electricity is gone so you've gotta adjust everything to make it work. Well, as he explained it, I understood it. I could do it completely, I could tell him what was right and what was wrong. But, I would then say, "But I don't understand." So, he racked me up, that is to say he made me stand at attention and stiff. He thought that I was taking advantage of him because he was not a civilian instructor. And, I was not. What the guys, my classmates, explained to me – and this is what I didn't know, because I was not involved in something like this – one gear goes this way and other gear that messes with it goes the other way. And this was a simple problem because we've got a bombsight which is full of gears. I didn't know how one gear affected the other. So, evidently, the guys told him that I was not making fun of him, because basically, I made 100 on every test. You had to make 100, well some guys made 90. Except on weather, I only made 70. I never knew a damn thing about weather. Didn't want to know. But, the long and short of it was, I was on a night mission, and I came back to the mess hall for breakfast, and there he was, my instructor, apologizing to me. This was a most unusual thing. Because I didn't understand, and he thought I was taking advantage of him. The next item of interest again, and I'm not telling you about my bombing missions except my successful one. But we were coming up on graduation, January of '45.

We had no relationship with white cadets. But I knew that, I think we were maybe the first blacks at Midland, I don't know, but I knew the white cadets had their party at Midland. The Midland Hotel, which was the biggest thing in town. So I talked to our, not our commandant of cadets but our attack commander, who was in charge of our thirty guys or whatever number we were. And I said I wanted to go to the party in Midland. I had never been in Midland, never been in Odessa. Basically, I stayed on base everywhere I went, except for two times at Tindall Field I went to Panama City, Florida. But, other than that, I always stayed on the base. I did that mainly because of my complexion. Also, I was not socially adaptable, I didn't know what a girl was. I did know what a girl was but I had never spoken to one, except to my sister, probably. And they only dance I ever went to at Howard University was the Sadie Hawkins dance. I couldn't dance, and I can't dance today. But anyway, he said, "No, you're having your party over in the WAC area." There were Negro WACs there, and I had never been to the WAC area. I had very strong views about that. I believed that the military had the WAC area there to serve service. The cadets. That is, to provide them with pleasure, sexual pleasure and otherwise. I

objected to that. I didn't share those views with many people; but, one, I was afraid of women, but second, and more important in my thinking was that this was something to keep us happy. And I didn't want to be happy. I was a civilian. And I wanted to excel in my programs. But I didn't want to be happy doing it, I never was happy. Anyway, he said, "Well, I told the attack officer," – who was from Cleveland, Ohio, doesn't matter what his name was. He was a fairly decent guy. We called him "Dusty Blankets," because in west Texas, [there was] nothing but dust, and if he came by and hit the bed and if dust came up, you had to walk tours. Walk on Saturday. Anyway, […] I said, "I don't know how to get to the WAC area, I've never been there," and he said, "Okay, we'll march over." I was glad with that because I was always the last guy, one of the last guys in the line. So I figured I could peel off and get out of going over to the WAC area. Well, we'd been drinking beer at our place and what he decided to do was make me the guide on, that's the guy in front, who's separate from everybody else, and in the military, sometimes he carries a banner. So, there I was in front of the group as we marched to the WAC area. Well, I'd been drinking some beer because that's all we had, and one of the WACs saw me and said, "Come on in the kitchen." I went into the kitchen and she had some rum. I got drunker than hell that night. Left, and couldn't find my way back to my damn barracks. I was a top bunk guy, and it was [chuckles] it was pretty bad. Anyway, that was my graduation party. Then, once I was graduated, in January of '45 –

KF: Was that a commissioning time?

WF: Yes.

TD: That's when you got your commission.

WF: Yes. Right. And my wings. I brought my wings today to show you. We called them "silver wings." I don't think they really were, but they looked like they're silver. They're not blue or red. And what happened was, I was sent to Godman Field, Kentucky. First of all, I had a leave. Went on leave to Baltimore to see my family. I think that's when I had my picture taken, you know. And I swear I looked like I was 5 years old. I still look at it and, you know, maybe I was 5 years old. But, visited my family, went to New York, met "Bish" Jones. We drank, went to all the clubs. See, when you're in the air force, even as an air force cadet, we got paid half again as much as anybody else. So, as an officer, I was paid $150 a month, and I got $75 for flying time. So, $225. And there was an expression: when the Air Corps comes to town, the price of everything goes up. Anyway, went back home and went back to Godman Field. Godman Field is in Kentucky, just south of Louisville, and it is separated from Fort Knox by a highway. A regulated United States highway. Can't tell you what route it is. And I was there. I was in Squadron E of the Replacement Squadron, of the 477th bombardment group. We did certain things there. We had a high, I can't tell you what it was, a high chair, very high, and we would go around hitting the target with the Norden bombsight, and plunking down a piece of

colored pencil. I flew some missions with Mitch Higginbotham. I mention Mitch, he is a dear friend of mine. He is a Tuskegee airman from Sewickley. He now lives in California. Mitch's story is a very interesting story. He was a pilot of a B-25, which was a twin-engine plane, and most of the planes that were flying then in civilian life were twin-engines. He went to a predecessor of US Airways, and they said, "We don't hire Negroes." So, he got a job at the airport because he loved planes. I think by now you should know I had no love of planes. I did not know a damn thing about planes. I was not in there because as a child I would look up at the sky and say, "Oh, how wonderful it would be up there." I never looked up at that sky. Never wanted to be a pilot, never wanted to be a bombardier. Never wanted to fly. My motive was really to excel. I believed people like Josie Stevens, people at Fredrick Douglass high school, my profs at Howard, all of them taught me that if anyone gave it to me, I would be able to get it. And that was my only motivation. I could just as easily have been a private if they had made me a private. But I didn't want to be a private, flopping around, feeding some white people. Anyway, so I was there for a while, and then a part of the 477 was transferred from Godman Field to Freeman Field, Indiana. Near Seymour, Indiana. Many years later, I went to a town in Indiana to speak for the National Urban League. When I was on the National Urban League board. I said, "This is my first trip to Indiana since 1945, and I won't tell you about the first one." But I'm gonna tell you because you're going to ask about it.

TD: Could you way what the 477th Bomb Group was?

WF: The 477th Bomb Group was composed of Negro pilots, bombardiers, navigators, gunners, aircraft mechanics, and the like. It was established because the trainees and the fighter pilot trainees, who became part of the 332nd and did other things, they had so many of them. There were so many Negroes who wanted to fly. And they went in, and then they had all these pilots. Some of them were too big to be in the fighters.

KF: Physically too big?

WF: Physically too big, yeah. I'll tell ya, one of the guys who was in my group was Archie Harris. Archie was one of the first Negroes in the "Big 10," and he washed out because he was too big. Oh, he was muscles. There was another guy from Pittsburgh who was very muscular, but was too big. See, a bombardier, you've got to crawl down that chute and get up in that little room. You've gotta be somebody small like me. Or, you know, not just like me, but you can't be as big. Archie, I think he was a discus champion, or shot put, and played tackle. He washed out because he was too big.
Anyway, at Godman Field, we lived at BOQs, Bachelors Officers Quarters. And the white officers, the command, all lived at Fort Knox. Selway, our immediate commanding officer, Colonel Selway, made a deal to take his officers, his white officers over to live in Fort Knox, to go to the bars in Fort Knox, to go to the club in Fort Knox, to go to the

swimming pools in Fort Knox, play tennis in Fort Knox. We were at Godman Field. Now, we had an officer's club. It was about twice, three times as big as this room. It had a pool table, poker table, and a bar. That was our officer's club. Well, of course, none of us knew about country clubs; we were Negroes in 1945. There may have been a few people in Atlanta, Georgia who knew about a country club because there was one outside of Atlanta. A country club for Negroes. But, we didn't know anything about clubs. This was our club. I would go there, probably every night, and I would lose my money. I couldn't play pool, because at Howard, at Cook Hall we had a pool table, we had 3 pool tables it seems to me. But if you weren't very good, you never learned, because you had 15 balls in a cue, and if you were a new man on the pool, you had to break them. Well, you'd break and boy the next guy ran 15 balls while you were up there contemplating your navel. So, I never learned how to play pool. I learned here at YMCA, Centre Avenue when I came here to live. Anyway, when the 477th was transferred to Freeman Field, Indiana, the command decided that there would be a separation of officers, so they established what was then "The Officer's Club" and it was called "The White Officer's Club." What was then the "Non-Commissioned Officer's Club," became the "Colored Officer's Club." Well, there were some of us there at Godman Field who was in the replacement group, our squadron, who thought that was wrong. I know a couple of guys from Howard who were seniors when I was a freshman, some of the guys were there with whom I talked. Coleman Young, who later became mayor of Detroit, was one of our bombardiers. We knew that Army regulations provided that there should be no discrimination with officer personnel by race, creed, or color. Now, you should remember that the Army regulations antedated our participation in World War II, and there were very few Negro officers. Whether they were accommodated in some fashion, or accommodated themselves, I don't know. But there were not enough to make it an issue.

We decided because of that Army regulation that Selway, who was the commanding officer, was wrong. And we would test it. So we went on a choo-choo train to Freeman Field, Indiana. We got off, went to our BOQ, and then individually went to The Officer's Club. Now there's something written about the Freeman Field Mutiny, and it was a mutiny, but we had to avoid the flavor of mutiny. So, everything from now on, is about myself, when I talk about what was done. I went to the White Officer's Club, presumed. I was greeted by a white officer, I think a Lieutenant Colonel, who told me not to go in. I said, "Thank you, sir," and went in. I went into the foyer, and sat in a chair, found a magazine. As I've always remembered it, it was a *Newsweek Magazine*, because until that time I had never seen a *Newsweek Magazine*. I was a *Time Magazine* reader. Which I was until [Henry?] Luce came up with a publication in 1945 or -46 and then I became no magazine reader. But anyway, I didn't go into the bar if there was a bar. I saw some people standing around. I sat, read the magazine for a while, and then decided, having established a beachhead, and I left. And when I left, the same officer, or another officer, said, "Consider yourself under arrest in quarters." Since we were officers, we

were not put in the guard house right away. On that occasion, there were 69 of us. And there were three of us who were of note; one was Bill Terry, who was from Los Angeles. He was a pilot as I recall. And I don't know what the devil Shirley Clinton was. He was another guy, he became a pediatrician in Baltimore, Maryland. And the third guy was Marsden Thompson, and I can't tell you about him. But, they were court-martialed, because they either jostled or were accused of jostling the white officer at the door. And, just to bring you up to date, Terry went to law school in California. He was convicted of jostling. Clinton and Thompson were not, they were acquitted. Terry was convicted. He went to law school, took the bar examination, but was never allowed to practice law. He taught in colleges, he taught business law and other courses in colleges. Never allowed to practice law in California until, I'd say 1998, Clinton pardoned him. At the instance of Augustus Hawkins, who was a Congressman, from California, from Los Angeles. And it seems to me Hawkins must have decided this was going to be one of the last things he did, because soon thereafter, he was not longer.

Going back to the night of the 69 of us. We went back to our BOQs, and, "arrest in quarters" meant staying in that area. And not going beyond that area. You could go out and play volleyball just a few feet away, but not up and down the road. Then we were released from arrest in quarters, and the command ordered us to attend a meeting. This was in a large, large room. I don't know if it was a hangar or not, I've forgotten it, but there were many, many chairs. And the command passed out base regulation. Selway was not there, but the command through Lieutenant Colonels told us that base regulations preempted army regulations. That every officer was deemed to know all base regulations upon entering a base. And the command wanted us to sign that we had read and understood these base regulations. Base regulations provided, among other things, that certain facilities, certain BOQs, were to be used only by trainee personnel, and certain facilities to be used by instructor personnel. That included BOQs, tennis courts, swimming pools, mess halls, and the like. Should not be strange to you that all trainee personnel, including flight surgeons, were Negros, and all instructor personnel were white. A number of questions were asked by men at that time: "May I sign it and say that I've read it but I don't understand it?" "May I sign it and say I've read it, but I don't agree with it?" They were told, "Yes, you may do that. That'll be sufficient." Well, there was a larger group of us who didn't do that. And when the command found out there was a group, it arranged for hearings before certain officers, for each of us. Anthony "Anchiappe" [*upon attempting to research the spelling of Anthony's last name and listening to the clip several times, I have come to the conclusion that Mr. Freeland misremembered his last name, which appears to be Chiappe*], our immediate commanding officer, who was white – I remember his coming into my BOQ and telling me, I don't know whether he told anybody else, whether he told other guys. He said, "Don't do anything wrong. Sign, go along with the program." And I said, "Thank you."

First time he spoke to me as far as I can remember. I do remember leaning over at my lavatory, washing my hands and face.

Then, I will tell you about me, I can't tell you about the others. I went to the headquarters, and there was 4 officers, white officers, of course: couple lieutenant colonels. And then a Negro quartermaster officer, Pugsley was his name. He was sitting at the end. I was asked by the white colonel, he probably was the executive officer of the group, to sign the document that I had not signed in the meeting. And I remained mute, I have to put this in: nobody believes I could ever remain mute. But I did. Actually, I did. One time I was Harpo Marx at a party, and I had my horn. I remained mute for 3 hours. Of course, I had [been] drinking, I was drinking bourbon in those days. And so I enjoyed that. But, I remained mute then, too. Then, he gave me another piece of paper, asked me to sign it. Then he gave me a blank piece of paper, and that's not a base regulation. He handed it to me, he got down from his high spot and handed it to me. And, I didn't do anything. So then, one of the officers got up and read the Article of War that provides that the failure to obey a direct order from your commanding officer is punishable by death or such other punishment at the court martial may direct. Those are frightening words. I was 20 years old. They're frightening words even today. And then, "I, Captain Anthony Anchiappe [sic], US Air Corps [words of continuation], order you to sign that piece of paper." I did nothing. I was then arrested again, told I was on arrest in quarters. So, I went back to my BOQ. On that night, there were 101 of us who refused to sign. We would tip our caps as we left, so the next guy knew he would not be alone. So, that was our form of mutiny.

Several days later, we were under arrest in quarters, we were at Freeman Field, Indiana, in our own BOQs. We were told, "Pack enough clothes for two weeks." Well enough clothes for two weeks was probably all the clothes we had, because we got an allowance for clothing when we became officers. So, we had those things. Great coats, I think they were made of beaver. The overcoats. I wish I had remained the same size all my life; I could still be wearing that – keep me warm. But anyway, we went out in formation, and there was Selway. In his full "bird-ship." "Bird" is the colonel, the wings, he wears a bird. Chicken. And we called them "chicken colonels." And he said, "We've failed our country and our command." He was in front of his command car. As I recall, there was someone who stood up on his command car and took a picture of us. And that picture may have been in the Negro press, but I know it was in PM, which was a publication of Marshall Field in New York City. A liberal newspaper, Max Lerner, Pogo was the comic strip, Walter Kelly. A paper I read before the Army and after the Army. Anyway, we were then, after being castigated by the command, herded off to C-47s, transport planes, and got in the planes, and flown back to Godman Field, Kentucky. Where we were greeted by MPs with submachine guns held at the ready. Herded into buses, which were prisoner buses; they took the handles off. And I can remember being

at the back of the bus [laughs], it's kind of ironic being in the back of the bus. But being in the back of the bus, and looking out the back and there's these white MPs with their guns, following us. We were criminals. We went back to our old BOQs, and there we were. The area was cordoned off, search lights were put up for night. White, I don't know if they were MPs or just servicemen, marched around us. And, there we were, waiting for our court martial. Most of us got private counsel, the NAACP, and also military counsel. I don't remember my military counsel, may have been Nichols [sp?], who later became a lawyer in Philadelphia, and represented many guys in courts martial. The inspector general came in, an inspector general staff came in, and again we were interviewed. Again, it was always "I." I seem to remember that my IG was a colonel, had gone to Cornell. I may be wrong. But, I remember he asked me questions either about someone who had gone to Howard, or someone who had gone to Cornell, and if I knew them. Well, you know, thousands of people going to both institutions, that's a stupid question. But, one hears those questions all the time. The command really wanted us to be court martialed. If you Google "477th" you'll see Selway wanted us to be shot. And I think he had the support of our general. We were in the 1st Air Force; Hunter Air Base in New York was our command place. There was no one in our group who was more than a captain, and I don't think there was even a captain. Well, maybe one or two. Because most of the men who were captains, even first lieutenants, felt that we might be successful. But, that they could exceed to the colonelship, or colonelcy. Most of us believed, I know I believed, that they wouldn't have two Negro colonels in the Air Force at the same time. How times have changed. So, we didn't know what was gonna happen. But we thought they'd bring back B. O. Davis.

Let me give you a time frame. I think the first time I was arrested, a couple of days later, Roosevelt died. I thought I was going to hell in a breadbasket. Because I was for Henry A. Wallace in the Democratic Convention of '44. Though, I couldn't vote. I'll never forget, I listened to it on the radio, never forget the Maryland delegation switching from Wallace to Truman on the second or third ballot. Sort of beginning the move that Roosevelt wanted, because he had said, "Clear it with Sidney," who was Sidney Hillman of the Lady Garments Workers Union and was big in the Democratic Party. Anyway, I was pretty depressed at that time. It's kind of stupid of me now, when one thinks about it, that Truman integrated the services. And it was Harry S. Truman who went to bat for Negroes more than Franklin Delano Roosevelt did, but not as much as Eleanor Roosevelt did, because she was the one largely responsible for the Tuskegee Airmen experiment. Anyway, after about 30 days, we were released from arrest in quarters. We were not court martialed, no one of us was court martialed. We received an administrative reprimand, 101 of us. We used to meet in the mess hall and we all had conducted our meetings there, or our conversations there. We played basketball, we played volleyball. And I could hunt and peck; I really couldn't type. But I was one of the typists. We had to have individual responses to the administrative reprimand. I remember there were 99 of us – Hiram Little

from Atlanta, and a navigator named Heard, I think, chose not to respond. In our answer to the administrative reprimand, which was excise from our records, according to some. I've not been able to find it. I can't find anything now. Or, even the past 10 years, 15 years looking for some things, I haven't been able to find them. But we responded. We not only outlined our grievances at Freeman Field, Indiana, and our grievances at Godman Field, but we pointed out that our group, 477 Bombardment Group, had a table of[?] organization. Full colonel, so many lieutenant colonels, so many majors, so many captains, so many first lieutenants. What the command had done systematically over the years was to bring in white officers as first lieutenants, make them captains within a couple of months, and then majors, and ship them out. And these were T.O.s that we should have had. So, that was it. But, we had outsted Selway. I do not know who at the War Department, because it was before there was a Department of Defense, I think it was McCloy – and I'm not sure, you'll have to look that up – who was the one who intervened on our behalf. Assistant Secretary of War, or maybe even an advisor. My recollection is pretty hazy, but I think Hasty may have been an advisor to the military at the time. Bill Hasty, William Hasty, who was the first Negro to become a judge of a Court of Appeals, the 3rd Circuit. Which is Philadelphia, and covers Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, and the Virgin Islands. So, I remember typing this thing up, B. O. Davis came back, and the 477th Bombardment Group became the 477th mixed group. Something I never told you so far: because of my knowledge of what we now call racism and my attitude, I knew instinctively that we would never be sent to bomb the Germans. Even at the outposts of Germany, because obviously we're not as big as B-17 or -24, and we'd never get to Ploesti oil fields, and we would never get to Berlin. But I knew we, Negroes, would never be sent to bomb Germany.

The Germans were white. Now, of course, Germans were ostracized during World War I, but in World War II, the Japanese bore the brunt of racism, as we all know because of the Internment, but also because of the pictures. Japanese caricatures, which were at every Army base. But by the time we were finished, the war in Europe was about over. B. O. had come back, brought all of his staff, so nobody exceeded to leadership or great leadership in the 477th. But, Selway was gone and all of his minions, gone. And in recent years, I've read that our activity at Freeman Field was the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. I suppose I never looked at it that way. That really when I went to the Officer's Club it was a sit-in, but I never considered it that. I considered what I did, what we did, to be important. It was something that I never raised particularly, but when there were demonstrations and the like, and I would stay at home after World War II in the 50s and 60's, I knew what I had done. I had marched, not just Freeman Field Indiana problems, but in Washington when I went back to Howard. Marched in parades, once a month we had a parade for a Negro who was lynched. We had more FBI agents looking at us than we had members in the parade. But I knew that I had played a part in the Civil Rights Movement. I didn't think of it as a civil rights movement. But in getting Truman

to desegregate the Armed Forces, as he did. I did not stay with the 477th after Davis was there. I was sent off on detached duty to Walterboro, South Carolina, which was training base for fighter pilots before they went to Europe. One weekend I took it upon myself to go to Baltimore. Maybe it was the weekend I met Jane, I don't know. No, it was a different weekend. We could always go somewhere for 24 hours, V.O.C.O., "Verbal Order Commanding Officer." You didn't have to show them papers, you just say, "V.O.C.O Commanding Officer." And, when I was in Baltimore, they came around to the BOQ and said, "Anybody want to go back to Tuskegee for pilot training?" Well my friend, Victor Ransom, was my roommate. I think he went to MIT, he was one of the brightest guys I knew. He had Buick. [Chuckles] Vick Ransom said, "Oh I think Freeland wants to go." We always called ourselves by our last names; we didn't want white people calling us by our first names. Like, "Here, George," "Hi, Tom." It was a habit, not just in the military, but of all Negroes. So, I went back to Tuskegee Institute for primary training. I really didn't give a hoot about it because I was a civilian. I had my wings, and that was that, as far as I was concerned. So, that's pretty much the story.

TD: You were a civilian at heart? In a sense.

WF: Civilian at heart, yeah.

TD: Would you call yourself, that you weren't a great soldier, or a natural soldier?

WF: Oh for God's sakes no. I could read a map, though. In fact I got a good map reading [score? Grade?] in ROTC. I was the only non-engineer who got a passing high grade.

TD: Did you ever think at 20 years old, "What the heck am I doing wearing this uniform for a country that treats me like this?"

WF: I had strong views about the war in Europe. People really may not think that these things were true. But I think I told you about the war in Ethiopia, and about the Italian, Mussolini. I used to wake up in the middle of the night and listen to shortwave broadcasts of Hitler's speeches. I followed intently what was happening in Europe, and what I thought would happen all over the world if Hitler were to win. I didn't spend as much time about the Japanese. I never did. Not that I thought that they were our friends; they were clearly our enemies, and they were vicious in many ways. But, they did not have World Empire. They did not have the idea of conquering the United States. They could have done it, maybe. But they didn't. But Hitler did have that idea. And so, I was not fighting so much for my country, with all of its frailties, as I was fighting Hitler. And I would point out that, over the years, I have always defended my country against attacks by British subjects who thought they were better than I. Those were the British subjects in college, British subjects who came over to the United States, who would pass as white. And talk about, "We are who we are." But they were the subjects of the crown. And they talked about what the Negroes in the United States were like. "They're not like us," they

would say. Well, they weren't like us in many ways. But they had no greater freedom than we had. We had greater freedom than they did. That's where the people in the Caribbean, the people in West Africa, the people in East Africa, many of whom I met at Howard and in my later years. So that's about it.

TD: You mentioned before, you're light-skinned: did you ever get mistaken for white?

WF: I don't know.

TD: Did you ever consider passing?

WF: No.

TD: Why not?

WF: I had a family. My family is unbelievable for me. It's just not in my genes. Carrie and Harvey Freeland wouldn't have a boy who would pass for white.

TD: I remember, I think you told a story, you thought, somebody asked you if you went to Howard College, thinking a college in South Carolina, maybe.

WF: Alabama.

TD: Alabama? Was that mistaken?

WF: He may have been mistaken, I don't know. He was an idiot.

TD: You mentioned you didn't want to be happy. You weren't interested. You were interested in excelling, achieving. You were a serious kind of student, I suppose. Is that accurate?

WF: Well, we were all serious students. Nobody made 80s on the tests. Almost everybody in my group was always above 90. I think most of my scores were 95 to 100, except in weather. I made a 70. In fact, I ducked the exam the first day, I was CQ. And had it the second time. But I still don't know the weather. The Aleutian currents from Alaska and all that stuff. I never knew that. I learned one thing about the weather though, and I learned it from being in the South. And that is, that when there's a storm coming, and the wind passage, whatever it is, you see the underside of the leaves. But that's not on the test. [Laughs]

TD: One more question. That is, you said you wanted to avoid the flavor of mutiny. How did you avoid the flavor of mutiny? By not talking to one another about it or coordinating?

WF: We maintained, it's "I, I, I." We never answered questions other than "I." And when we were at Godman Field, Kentucky, under arrest, we would often go in the showers and talk. Because we didn't know whether our conversations were being wired. We had two experiences there. I'm sure the command, the government had spies. I'd recite one spy's name, but I don't know if he's living or dead and it might be slander. We had two

experiences there which we blamed on one man. Ironically, the name of this man is the same as the man who identified Denmark Vesey and his effort to have a revolution. And real revolution because there were more Negro slaves – though Vesey was not a slave – more Negroes in South Carolina than white people. And on one occasion, there were some young women from Louisville brought in, young women of the evening. When some of us found out about it, and I was not among them, they told them to go back home, go back to Louisville. They would have nothing to do with them because they knew that any slip-up would destroy our whole activity. We knew that. The other example we blamed on the same guy. I think this was very certain this was he, because the Negro mess hall attendance reported that someone had stolen some hams that morning when they got to work at 5 or 6 o'clock. Of course, if that were known by the command, it again would destroy us. It was determined that it was the same guy and the hams were taken from his room and put back in the mess hall before the white command knew anything about it.

TD: Do you remember seeing German POWs?

WF: Yes, yes. German POWs walked up and down the highways. Some of them were cleaning, some of them weren't cleaning. But we knew, we saw them. Yes. That was the highway between Fort Knox and they were housed at Fort Knox.

TD: Were you ever afraid of being executed? I mean you're 20 years old.

WF: One of the things about it is, when you're 20 years old, you're not afraid of anything. If you look at fighter pilots, those guys are crazy. There's an expression: "There are bold pilots, and there are old pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots." I must have been afraid. I didn't tell my mother anything. She finally saw a story in the Afro-American newspapers about it, and she said the only thing she worried about being in the South and some white woman accusing me of rape or something. But she was certainly for me. She was a fighter of her own right.

NTD: Failing to obey a direct order in time of war … you can be shot.

WF: Yeah, I know.

NTD: Did you guys talk about that at all?

WF: I suppose, basically what we believed was that they couldn't kill all of us. 101 of us is a hell of a lot. And we were the best and the brightest. You know? Jesus Christ.

NTD: It was a calculated risk.

WF: It was. It was. And I don't know, now that I'm 87, if someone said something like that to me now, how I'd react. I'm sure I'd say, "I'll sign." But, when I was 20 and I wasn't gonna sign, I was a pretty radical guy.

TD: Did you get that radical courage, you think, from your mother?

WF: My mother and my father.

TD: And your father, both?

WF: Yeah. I'll tell you one story about my mother. My mother used to walk to work when she worked at the Millburn Apartments, where Ada Cohen lived. She always carried an umbrella and a little bag. She was coming home one night – this was maybe when she was in her 70's, I don't know – and there was someone who was walking on the same street, and she could see his shadow. And she stopped, turned around, pointed with her umbrella and said, "Young man, if you want to go this way, you get in front of me." She had no fear. She had no fear. She didn't fear death. She died at 101. My father at 79. So, that's about all I can tell you about myself.

TD: Here are your wings.

WF: [Chuckles] As I look at them now, it's kind of funny. I thought they were silver when we were given them. They were called "silver," you know. Silver wings. These are bombardier wings. The difference, you can see, is the bomb going down. Those are the wings that we got when we finished Bombardiering School.

TD: Here's this.

WF: This is a replica of a Congressional Gold Medal. It has "Tuskegee Airmen" in the front, "1941-1948." The certified original Tuskegee Airmen served at Tuskegee between '41 and '48. So there are many men who were not in combat. This was given by the Act of Congress in 2006, and presented by the President, George W. Bush. Three planes on the back, one of them is, I believe, a P-47. Then there's a B-51 and there's a B-25.

NTD: Could you turn that around so that – yeah, that's it. Were you there at the ceremony?

WF: No, I was not. Pittsburgh was not very sensitive to what was going on in the rest of the country.

NTD: Did you say you were not?

WF: I was not, no. Here's a hat that anybody can buy, I'm not gonna sell it to you. Well I'd sell it to you. 'Cause I think Glenn Mahone gave me this hat, but it has "Tuskegee" and "Never Forgotten." And various insignia that men may have used. There is a picture of a B-25 on the back. But there are various insignia for the Air Corps of the time and different commands. I put it on my head today and brought it down here because I wanted to show you. And this is a photograph of the men who were present when the Congressional Gold Medal was awarded to the Tuskegee Airmen. I think it was given particularly to a man who went to the University of Pittsburgh, or at least did Master's

work at the University of Pittsburgh. And I must tell you I've forgotten his name; he's now dead. He was lieutenant colonel, and he was the only Negro ace of World War II.

TD: What did your time in the service mean to you? How did it shape the rest of your life?

WF: Well it was a great bridge between childhood and adulthood. When I came out, I was in a hurry. I did two years in 15 months of college – I don't know, I did more than that – and then I went to law school. I was in a hurry to finish everything because I had lost two years.

TD: Did it commit you even more to civil rights or had you already been committed?

WF: It's hard to know about a commitment to civil rights from my generation. I suppose if you weren't committed to civil rights, you just didn't live, I felt. My obligation to my community, my obligation to those who followed me, obligation to those less fortunate than I.

NTD: What was your law focused primarily on?[This is my best guess] Business or-?

WF: No, I'm a non-business man. I wouldn't know a business from a horse. I did criminal law; I did civil rights; I did personal injury law, including medical malpractice. I was a chairman of the Medical Malpractice Commission under Elliot Richardson back in '71-'72.

NTD: So you weren't piling up money?

WF: No. My wife tells our daughter, who is a lawyer, and who is the Chief Federal Defender for the Western District of Pennsylvania, "I knew you were going to be like your father," when she turned down an offer from a major firm. But, we made it.

TD: Thank you, very much.

WF: Okay, thank you guys.

[End tape]

[End Interview]