

Cantigny First Division Oral Histories II

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Interview with Major General Vincent Brooks

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GOODWIN: Hello, my name is Gerald F. Goodwin. The date is August 7th [2009], and I'm here in Dearborn, Michigan interviewing Major General Vincent Brooks for the Cantigny First Division Oral History Project. For the record could you please spell name?

BROOKS: v-i-n-c-e-n-t, middle initial is K and the last name is Brooks, B-r-o-o-k-s.

GOODWIN: What units of the Big Red One did you serve with?

BROOKS: Well, I had the honor of serving as a Captain in the 4th Battalion, 16th Infantry and it was in Germany at the time. Um, 1st Infantry Division Forward. At the time the Division Headquarters and the majority of the Division were at Fort Riley, Kansas; and one Brigade essentially was Forward in Germany. I was a part of that Brigade. I commanded Bravo Company 4th Battalion, 16th Infantry; a Mechanized Infantry Unit, and later commanded Headquarters and Headquarters Company; 4th Battalion, 16th Infantry, Mechanized as well. Of course prior to those two as many Captains do, you first start in a Staff Position. I was the Battalion Adjutant for that same Battalion; 4th of the 16th Infantry.

GOODWIN: When did you serve the 1st Division?

BROOKS: That was uh, 1984 uh to 1987. I arrived in October of 1984 and left in December of 1987. Still during the Cold War and still uh, at a period of time where we never knew what the next day's alert was gonna bring.

GOODWIN: And now you've come back, correct?

BROOKS: Yes, I came back to the Big Red One uh, on the 14th of April. Took command on the 15th and have been in command since that time, uh 15th of April 2009.

GOODWIN: Now just to back it up a little bit, why don't you tell us a little bit about your life before entering the military?

BROOKS: Well, I claim the age now of 50 that I've been in the army for 50 years. I'm the son of a military Officer, a career Officer who was commissioned through The Reserve Officer Training Core Program at Virginia State College at the time; Petersburg, Virginia. He and my mother are both Virginia State graduates. He served a full career, 29 and half years, and uh, rose to the rank of Major General himself. So the stars other than this uniform, but uh, the brass stars that I wear are his stars and shoulder boards that I wear are his shoulder boards. Um, he retired in

1984. The, his effective date of retirement was the day I made Captain, 1st of February, 1984. So we grew up in a military home and lived in a number of places. I have an older brother and a younger sister. My older brother also was an Army Officer and uh, retired as a Brigadier General in 2006. As it turns out that's the only African-American family thus far in our nations history that has had three Generals in two generations. Uh, so we're honored to be able to have a military tradition here that carries on. My sister currently is an attorney in Washington, D.C. and my mother and father are retired in Alexandria, Virginia where their both from. So that was life growing up. Uh, we went to a number of schools and lives in a number of areas; although the longest was in Alexandria, Virginia. We had a streak of years where my father had a series of assignments including a tour of duty in Vietnam and we stayed in place. So unlike most military dependents, I had seven straight years and essentially had the same friends from elementary school up to high school. Uh, but like many military kids we didn't make all the way through high school before orders came. My brother got moved at the start of his senior year and in my case the start of my junior year. We moved from Virginia to California and that were I uh, graduated in Sacramento, California at Jesuit Prep High School. Uh, from east coast to west coast in that case and then went off to the U.S. Military Academy in 1976 with the first class that admitted women. Four years there, my brother one year a head of me uh, having entered West Point in 1975 in his case, 1976 in my case. He graduated in 1979 as one the top ranking Cadets at West Point. Uh, Air Borne Ranger as a Cadet, which is most unusual that point in time and a pretty good example for me. Then I took over the ranking position for a Cadet at West Point in my senior year uh, graduating in 1980 and that was a historic moment at that point in time; the first African-American in West Point's history to hold that position of a Cadet First Captain or Brigade Commander. Since then I've served in a number of assignments. Five of the Army's Divisions: The 1st Division, The 2nd Division, The 3rd Division, The 82nd Airborne Division, and The 1st Calvary Division. And I've had a series of assignments uh, around the world that bring to this point now to the Commanding General of the Big Red One.

GOODWIN: Now as a, as a child you mention moving around a lot. How did you feel that affected your childhood?

BROOKS: Well, you know a lot of military kids end up generally one of two ways; either they're able to make friends very quickly and adapt to changing circumstances or they're reclusive and have a very difficult time adjusting, so they tend to be one or the other. I'm probably somewhere between those two. Uh, I usually can make friends pretty fast but I'm also an introvert, believe it or not, and it often doesn't show when you're having to do things that leaders have to do. But my natural self is really probably an introvert. I can be quiet and be by myself for a long time without uh, having any problem. But uh, it made me understand how important it is to have friends and also made it possible, in my case, to long for the reuniting with friends. And it happened from time to time. There were, I remember some kids I went to school with at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in third grade and I saw them again in seventh grade; and it's like we... never parted. And that same experience then is repeated every few years in military assignments in my adulthood. So I'm very accustomed to that military lifestyle because of that.

GOODWIN: You mention uh, your significant role as an African-American; did you experience any racism growing up?

BROOKS: Oh ya, absolutely. So being born in the late 50s to parents who were born in the 30s to grandparents who were born at the turn of the century uh, the..the impact of racism was always evident. Uh, but in my particular family tradition uh, there was always a desire to achieve and to pursue excellence and it manifested itself in a number of ways. So all my parents' siblings, each of them were one of five, in my fathers' case four boys and one girl, and in my mothers' case four girls and one boy; and all of them achieved uh (pause) high honors. As it turns out then made significant contributions in their adulthood and still do to this day. And it's because of the example set by the parents, an example of excellence, even through humble beginnings working through racism, not being hindered by racism but it was always there. And I can tell you growing up in schools myself uh, in areas where desegregation had been ordered but had not come into effect, in Virginia for example that was still the case uh, particularly in city of Alexandria even during the years that I was in school. My mother taught in a segregated school system initially. It was desegregated by the time uh; I ended up passing through that schools system. So we always saw it there. Uh, and certainly by the time I got to the Military Academy there were still examples of racism that popped up and most notable when I was singled out for that high honor in my senior year. I began to get a lot anonymous letters from all over the country. Some of which were racial hatred, some of which were uh, expressions of racial accomplishment but the idea that race was still an issue was quite evident then; and uh, some times that even continues to this day.

GOODWIN: Did your parents' prepare you for this in any way?

BROOKS: They did in the way that I think is most appropriate. Some would argue that this is not the most appropriate method and that is you don't worry about race, ok. You're aware of it and you preserve your...your cultural identity but you never use it as a crutch or an excuse, ever. And being in a military community which was already highly integrated, although there were issues even at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas as a child in third grade uh, there were issues in the swimming pool on post. The guy who was teaching swimming, that's the year I learned how to swim, the guy that was teaching swimming had issues with having black kids in his swimming pool, and there he is on the military post. So it was evident even then uh, but for the most part in the military community there was already was a tremendous sense of teamwork and partnership and commonality. The issues tended to be off post more than on post.

GOODWIN: Ok. Now you mention joining the military, what were your motivations in joining the military?

BROOKS: Uh, always wanted to be a doctor, I don't know where that came from but I've always had an interest in medicine from early in my youth and I can remember as a young adolescent my parents' had a copy of Gray's Anatomy. They had gotten it from my grandfather, my mothers' father in this case, who worked for many, many years for The United Mine Workers and was the uh, personal chauffeur for John L. Lewis and so all of his years and every president thereafter all the way up until to Trunka my grandfather was their chauffeur and in John L. Lewis case, he was essentially his valet and assistant at the...the uh Lewis House. Incidentally, my grandfathers' name was also Lewis, there's no family connection. But John L. Lewis had a daughter I guess and a son. One of the two of them became a doctor and so their study library passed on to my grandfather and my grandfather gave it to my mother, so I was

studying Gray's Anatomy at a very early age. So I always had all the anatomical models and those sorts of things; everyone else is out playing football, I'm studying to figure out where the hippocampus is located in the brain. But uh, all these sorts of things were always my interest. And somewhere in my high school years, probably around my sophomore or junior year in high school I became more interested in being a doctor in the Army. Uh, some of that was exposure to uh military doctors in Sacramento, California; there was one I particularly admired and I thought well this might be a pretty good way to balance it. As many teenagers I was rejecting following in the family tradition of military service at that point in time but it began to have an appeal. Then later that year I realized maybe really what I want is to be is an army doctor, sequence matters here, before it was a doctor in the army, then it was an army doctor where being in the army was more important to me perhaps than..than medicine. Then I frankly saw my brother return uh, after the first six months at West Point and saw how profoundly he was changed by just six months at the U.S. Military Academy and I wanted some of that. Of course now I'm almost too late to apply and uh, as it turned out I was a pretty good basketball player at the time. He mentioned to uh, the basketball coach at West Point, Mike Krzyzewski, who was the head coach at the time; said "my brothers' a basketball player would you be interested?" Well, "sure is he any good?" Well he was all this and all that and all state and whatever. And on my mother's birthday, on the 14th of April, we get a phone call at our house in California from coach Mike Krzyzewski, said "Send me a tape. Heard you might be a pretty good player and you're interested in West Point." I was academically strong and I was a leader in my class, was the captain of my team; so I had all the prerequisites except for a late application. And as it turns out he was able to uh, recruit me in as a basketball player. One day I got a letter that says, I'm sorry you will not be enrolled in class of 1980 to be entered in the summer of 1976. Thank you for your interest. The next day I get a different letter saying congratulations, you've been accepted into the class of 1980 uh, to enter in the summer of 1976. It was one of those cases of learning what snafu means to army people. The good news is the second one was the right one.

GOODWIN: How did your parents' react to you joining the military?

BROOKS: I think they were excited about it. They were very good about not pushing me or my brother to go into the military but at the same time making sure we knew it was an option. Uh, they took us to West Point once as we were growing up and I was probably around the age of 13 or 14 or so and exposed us to the environment. A seed may have been planted then but it wasn't one of those from then on I wanted to go to West Point. It really wasn't until much later that uh, we decided both of us, my brother and I, decided to go that way. So they were proud of us at being accepted at the Military Academy. The curriculum that they wanted us to study in high school, a college preparatory curriculum, obviously that paid off because we were able to get admitted in the Military Academy and that's of course that's a very high entry to be able to do that and we both flourished while we were there.

GOODWIN: Did you end up playing basketball while at West Point?

BROOKS: I did. I played for coach K. Um, my freshman year I was on the varsity team. Uh, it was a young team...the uh, top player on team that year was a junior, we didn't have any seniors on the team that year and he was an all American. I was playing behind him, so I called myself his daily punching bag. A very physical player, not real tall but he was very physical and very

skillful. I got in a few games uh; one of my high honors was being able to play against Boston College. And Bob Cousy was calling the game that day and he said as I dove for the ball and slid out of bounds underneath some seats something like, “That Vinny Brooks is like a real hustler “and that was one of my high honors. But I didn’t play very much to be honest with you and then the next year I decided I wanted to concentrate more on academics.

GOODWIN: Now you attended West Point, what did going to West Point mean to you?

BROOKS: It meant going to the premier leadership institution in America. And that’s kind of how that...that whole series that I just talked about of how I ended up going into the army, how it emerged to be West Point. Ultimately, I decided I wanted to go where my best chances as an Army Officer would be fulfilled and wanted West Point. And being accepted there, I certainly have never been disappointed about that.

GOODWIN: You mentioned your brother changing, did you change?

BROOKS: Oh yes, absolutely. My girlfriend’s mother said to me, “You West Point, you’ll never make it there.” Others said the same thing about my brother. I don’t know why they said that. Maybe their just their expectations were too low.

GOODWIN: Haha

BROOKS: But it fit both if us very, very well. So I matured quite a bit uh, became more focused while there. I learned how to have some self-confidence while also tempering it with the humility that everyone that comes in a West Point class is a leader from their high school. Might have been captain of multiple sports teams, all of them were academically talented, almost all were in the National Honors Society, many were class presidents; someone will be last in that class, ok. And the daily competition at the Military Academy is well known at that point in time. The Boreman Commission analyzed it during my freshman year, it was one year after the honors scandal occurred at West Point and probably was too competitive at the time, that was certainly found, but it does temper you in such a way that you learn how to perform while under pressure. And that has been a very, very important skills for me since.

GOODWIN: Was there any competition between you and your older brother?

BROOKS: Unintentional, but yes. The good news is we played different sports. He played football and ran track; was a triple jumper and a hurdler. I played basketball and sometimes did track, was a high jumper. So we didn’t uh compete directly in things like that. He had his social group, I had mine but uh, to be sure as the second child I always emulated my brother. I always wanted to, I looked up to him, still do. And always uh kind of wanted to make sure I could keep up with what he was doing.

GOODWIN: Now you mentioned as a senior you were names Cadet Brigade Commander and that was the first time ever for an American-American...

BROOKS: Yes.

GOODWIN: ...how did it feel as an African-American to be the first one?

BROOKS: Well, it was an honor. Uh... very interesting set of experiences and emotions as I look back on that time. Part of it was I don't want anyone to look at it as a significant achievement as an African-American Commander. I want to be seen as the Cadet 1st Captain and let's get away from the race piece. That was a bit naïve 'cause it was a significant milestone for America and particularly for the United Military Academy at that time. Um, it was an honor indeed. There were times where I wondered what was the motivation, why did they pick me now? Was I really qualified to do that? Because that's the top Cadet position and you look up to those folks and I had been looking up to three prior ones as I was a freshman, sophomore, and junior. There at the top of the heap. Was it a quota? Some of the letters that I received said it's because of quotas. Some said it was a token, but I was convinced by the Commandant of Cadets then uh, retired as a Major General, Joseph Franklin, and by the Superintendent at that time who had just come back previously, General Andrew Goodpastor became Lieutenant General back on active duty. They both assured me that West Point is not the kind of place to take such experiments and if they didn't have total confidence in me and then some that selection would never have occurred. That was very important that they had told me that.

GOODWIN: What sort of responsibilities did you have in that position?

BROOKS: It was the senior leadership position for 4000 of my contemporaries, 4000 Cadets. There's an Officer leadership structure and there's a Cadet leadership structure that really runs things in the core Cadets. It's more than a student body president. It's, there's command like authority in there, short of the ability to restrict ones liberties or to uh uh administer punishment; those are reserved to actual commissioned Officers. But the day-to-day guidance and direction, putting out the rules, what is the uniform gonna be for the particular day. Uh, one of my favorite stories is uh, when the United States hockey team beat the Russians, that was during my senior year, and of course everyone was up watching, didn't matter what their class was. If they were freshmen and weren't allowed to watch TV, they were all watching. Everyone made exceptions that night and the roar that occurred late that night when the United States team beat the Russians in a time were we were clearly still engaged closely with the Russians uh, that was a moment to behold. So the decision was, this was a Friday night, well I think we should cancel all Saturday morning inspections. Well, it's one o'clock in the morning, probably too late for me to call all the Tactical Officers and let them know that, so we're going to make a command decision. We have the authority as Cadets; we're going to decide everyone has an exception from the Saturday morning inspection which we did every week at West...at West Point. Rooms would be open, drawers would be open, everything is perfectly arranged inside of the. Officers came in and inspect them every Saturday morning. So I dismissed all that, that night at the encouragement of my classmates who (pause) often got me into trouble with things like that. And the next morning many of the Tactical Officers showed up knocking on the doors. Open up the doors, and there are cadets doing what they usually do when they have a moment's time – sleeping, laying on their beds sleeping. Rooms not in order and everyone wondering what is going on here. I had class that morning and as I came out of class, I got a message from a uh great soldier named Major Fred Johnson, he was the Executive Officer to the Commandant of Cadets, come see the Commandant right away. I went up there and found out we had caused a bit of a fence and taken

purgatives that were not ours, or at least as it was deemed at that point in time. So it's that kind of role that the Cadet 1st Captain has; guidance and direction of the system of developing Cadets, leadership of the core Cadets. Each class had leaders inside of it and military structure, so.

GOODWIN: What did you do after graduating from West Point?

BROOKS: I went to the 82nd Airborne Division. Uh, I had a bit of too much media exposure my senior year having been a spokesperson for West Point, particularly with that unique honor that occurred that year. I was often off campus uh, doing a variety of things. I just wanted to be another 2nd Lieutenant of Infantry., which is what I choose to do. So I went to the 82nd Airborne Division, it was my second choice. I actually wanted to go to the 2nd Division in Korea uh, 'cause I heard at that point in time, 1980, was a great a soldier still had a threatening enemy on the other side of the militarized zone. But it went out too high in the class, believe it or not so there's an order of merit that is used for you to choose exactly what branch is and then within your branch the order of merit determines what assignment you get depending on how many slots there are. Korea went out in the first five. I was not in the first five. I was up in the top quarter but uh, not in the first five by any means. So I got the last Infantry position for the 82nd Air Born Division and was just very, very fortunate to have started there.

GOODWIN: Ok. Can you tell us about some of your experiences there?

BROOKS: Uh, it was just a great place to learn, a terrific place to learn. It was a...an environment where everyone was already Triple Volunteer, you know we still had an all volunteer army; there were still some draftees left but the all volunteer army had started there. Uh, we had people who were Air borne qualified and it was just an excellent environment where there was great esprit. I didn't want to leave there. The very best thing that happened to me though was that I did not get to stay there. After about three years I went to the Advanced Course and I went to the Big Red One, and learned even more about leadership there.

GOODWIN: Ok. So...ya, so then you talk about getting into the 1st Division, what was that like? What had you heard about the 1st Division at this point?

BROOKS: Well, the Big Red One was always had a...a distinguished history and is well know among patches of units, the Bid Red One itself. Uh, the other one I was well acquainted with was the 1st Calvary Division. As I was growing up that...that patch was very popular and well known from Vietnam especially. Then of course 82nd Airborne Division had a tremendous reputation from it's gallantry in WWII and it's continued the role of being a rapidly deployable unit; uh it's role in Vietnam, Dominican Republic, and certainly up to the time that I served there including through Grenada, which happened right before I left there. Uh, when I got to the Big Red One I knew I was going to a great unit and wasn't sure what to expect. It was a Mechanized Unit. I had been filled with all the bravado of the Airborne at that put in time and uh, didn't know what was going to happen when I got into the non-Airborne Unit. But I learned that good soldiers are in every unit. Great soldiers emerge when they get good leadership and uh, I really learned that in the Big Red One. Some terrific leaders there.

GOODWIN: What are some of the qualities that you look for in a leader and then adapted to yourself?

BROOKS: Well, particularly for Officer leaders and that's the frame of reference from which I operate of course, first they've got to care. They have to truly care about the condition of their soldiers. And the means they are interested in their well-being, they talk to them, they know what's happening in their lives, and they commit the resources that they have available and the resources they can reach beyond their own control to the benefit of their soldiers. So I expect...I expect leaders to do that. I just had a discussion with some uh, Cadets who are within the next two years going to be our new Lieutenants, this was just a few days ago. I told them I expect them to lead upon arrival 'cause that's the role that they are fulfilling. Unlike enlisted ranks you don't...you don't start as a leader but in the Officer ranks start as a leader, particularly in combat arms. So I expect them to lead. I also expect them to listen and the best way for them to listen, or for them to lead in many cases is to listen to the experience of their non-commission Officers and learn then from that. Uh, the best Lieutenants are the ones who have learned from their NCO's and then apply that learning to the leadership that they give every single day caring for their soldiers. If they do that then uh, we'll always have a great army and I'm convinced we will.

GOODWIN: What did you do after leaving the 1st Division for the first time?

BROOKS: I uh became an assignment Officer at our Personnel Command and assigned Infantry Captains like myself away from troops. So it was assigning your peers to the things they did not want to do. It was exciting I learned a whole lot during that time about how are personnel system works; did that for a couple of years. Uh, also was responsible for the professional development of all Combat Arms Officers for about a year and a half. That's everything from people we send off to Congressional Fellowships to who became an instructor at West Point, to uh, those sorts of things. Uh, very interesting experience there learning about how to broaden ones experiences. And from there I went off to the Commanding Staff General College at Fort Leavenworth. Um, I was fortunate to be selected for promotion to Major, a year ahead of my contemporaries. That year at Leavenworth was actually the year of Desert Storm. So we arrived in the summer of 1990 and were most frustrated by about November of 1990 that we were going to be stuck in school while people like the Big Red One were getting to a fight. Uh, we were not able to escape an earlier then our time and then at the end of that year by the summer of 1991, I was fortunate to be accepted into the School of Advance Military Studies uh, some have called them the Jedi Knights that helped to develop for Dessert Storm and other missions uh, that occurred that time. Did that second year of study at Fort Leavenworth and then uh, was posted as a Major to the 1st Calvary Division.

GOODWIN: Where were you stationed at this point?

BROOKS: This was at Fort Hood, Texas, so it was my second time being assigned to a combat unit in the United States. First assignment was at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Second combat unit assigned was in Germany and now this one, as Major in the 1st Calvary Division at Fort Hood, Texas.

GOODWIN: Ok. Where they ever stationed in Iraq or in the area?

BROOKS: Well, they'd just gotten back.

GOODWIN: Ok.

BROOKS: So like uh, many units at that time everyone had finally returned home uh, by the summer of 1991 and they'd been around for about one year. So the experience of Desert Storm was still fresh in the minds and in the training of all the soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas. And some of it had gone well and some of it did not go well. The deployment processes for example did not go well and there are many, many lessons and indications that we needed to change the way that we projected heavy units from the United States. My first role was to be a Plans Officer for that 1st Cavalry Division and it was principally to design a way to rapidly deploy heavy forces for the continental United States. Those, that process uh, that operations plan is still in use even to this day.

GOODWIN: Ok. So then what did you do after that was done?

BROOKS: I got to do the fun stuff. I went back down to a Battalion, after one year as a Plans Officer, Division Level. I went uh, down to a Battalion Level, was a Battalion S3 in 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry uh, part of the 1st Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division. Uh, spent a year doing that, then the following year became the Brigade S3 of the higher level from that unit, the 1st Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division, uh, until I got extracted and pulled into the Pentagon.

GOODWIN: Ok. So go to the Pentagon, what was the change over there? How was that, obviously that a lot different from a field commander?

BROOKS: It is completely different. Uh, now I'd been to Washington before, the previous assignment as an Assignment Officer but it was not in the Pentagon. This one was actually in the heart of the Army's senior level decision making in the Army's staff and uh, it was interesting and eye-opening but for me not as fulfilling as being in a unit where you're dealing with soldiers. Uh, but I had a tremendous amount of experiences, a greater array of experiences that I had there at the Pentagon um, most notably I spent about eleven month as the Aide-de camp to the Army's number two General, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, General Ron Griffith and there's where I really, really leaned a lot. First, he's a terrific Officer, a great combat leader uh, commanded 1st Armor Division in Desert Storm just a few years before that. Served as the Inspector General of the United States Army and then as he became the Vice Chief, I came in with him as his Aide-de camp. Just before that I also had the privilege of serving on the Transition Team for the incoming Chief of Staff for the Army, General Dennis Reimer, as one of the few Lieutenant Colonels who supported uh, the analysis of the Army that was done and provided to him. So I learned a lot while in the Pentagon and it broaden me and the good news is I didn't have to stay there too long. I stayed there for about 14 months and went off to Battalion Command in Korea, 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry part of the 2nd Infantry Division. Uh,... a great time to be there, a troublesome time. The day I arrived in Korea we couldn't land because a MiG had just defected from North Korea, crossed into South Korean air space. All the air space got locked up until they resolved what was this MiG gonna do. That's how I arrived. Literally, as I was in the air overtop of Seoul-Gimpo Airport. Uh, great experience, two years of exactly what I

thought it would be. As I told you when I was a Cadet, my first choice was Korea. By that point in time having been married for a number of years, it was not my first choice. (laughs)

GOODWIN: Hahaha

BROOKS: It was far down the list but I was really, really pleased that it worked out the way it did. It was a fabulous experience, fabulous command. Two years uh, unlike it had been in prior to that point in time, all the Battalion commands were one year and my predecessor did a two-year tour. So I was the second commander of a unit to do a two-year tour over there and just learned tremendous amount as a soldier there.

GOODWIN: I understand you were stationed in Kosovo, at one point as well, what was that like?

BROOKS: That actually followed that time. My Battalion command was from 1996 to 199-, I'm sorry 1995, try that again, 1996 to 1998 and as I left Korea I was fortunate to be selected uh, for War College. In my case instead of the traditional War College I was a Fellow at Harvard University at the John F. Kennedy School of Government and that was a tremendous opportunity to open my horizons quite a bit in an environment where there weren't many military people like me. Any conversation I had, had to be translated in a way that people who bright, intelligent, and highly interested could understand; and that was...that was a gift for me to be able to do that in that point in time. So after one year there I was selected by the guy who had been my Division Commander when I came into Battalion Commander Career, General Tommy Franks to join him at 3rd Army in Atlanta, Georgia and really do a lot of war planning as his Chief of Plans and Programs. Planning for what do we do in our partnerships with everyone inside of the Central Command Region, we were at that point in time very interested in creating a relationship with Kurdistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and uh, trying to counterbalance things happening in Pakistan, Afghanistan but more importantly we were concentrating on Iraq. Uh, this was back in 1999. I had a short stint before that uh, assisting with uh, some ground options for what might happen if we could not compel Yugoslavia to back out of Kosovo and uh, became a...a planner at uh, European Command for a period of time to assist that process before I went to 3rd Army. Then after a year I followed in on that same planning that I did regarding Kosovo. Took command of a Brigade in the 3rd Infantry Division, 1st Brigade of the 3rd ID and deployed uh, as the Principal element of U.S. Task Force Falcon into, into Kosovo. We were know as Rotation K43-Alpha. So each one of those rotations was a six-month rotation: 1-Alpha, 1-Bravo, 2-Alpha, 2-Bravo, 3-Alpha. So I was the fifth six-month rotation into Kosovo since the uh, entry of forces in the summer of 1999. By the way, those forces were the Big Red One forces that came in first. But uh, 3rd Division was where I was. Very interesting experience, learned a lot about how to pull the teeth out of a insurgency while not engaging in traditional combat operations. It was counter-insurgency in many ways. At that point in time the people we had supported uh, Kosovo Albanians were creating uprisings that changed the political order in the remnant of Yugoslavia and also in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Using Kosovo and the demilitarized zone between those two countries as a safe haven, operating inside of a sanctuary that had been created by United Nations and so we had to find ways do doing that, pulling the teeth out of it so it didn't destabilize the region, while also trying to create a relationship with those uh, with whom we'd been engaged just a year and a half before. And that's the Yugoslav military and

Yugoslav police. Very interesting experience that stood me in good stead in Bagdad a few years later.

GOODWIN: Cool. Um, just a few last questions. Um, at one point you became the youngest nominee to go before the U.S. Senate for confirmation as a General, how did you feel about that?

BROOKS: Well, I was the youngest on that list and I don't know if I'm the youngest ever but certainly on that particular promotion list uh, I was the youngest and my brother had been the youngest on the list before me. As it turned out, you asked if there was competition between my brother and I, well sort of I was just trying to keep up. So there's competition in that regard. I finally caught him at the rank of Colonel; we were on the same promotion list. He had one sequence number in front of me and we got promoted on the same day. Had the same date of rank, my father presided over the ceremony. We did it at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. I caught him but I said in that ceremony that uh, my brother has away of hitting the accelerator when someone catches up with him, he's probably gonna do that now and indeed he made Brigadier General a year before I did. So he was the youngest on his list. The next year I was the youngest on my list, it was a high honor. I was the first one from my commissioning year group of 1980 to be selected for Brigadier General and I was just honored to be able to be that person who was chosen.

GOODWIN: Ok, and during the second Iraq War you were named by Tommy, General Tommy Franks as the spokesmen for the U.S. Central Command. Um, can you tell me about some of your, briefly, some of your experiences in that position.

BROOKS: Well, first I was actually; I had just come out of Brigade Command from the 3rd Division. Uh, while we were deployed 9/11 occurred, the world changed during that time obviously. We came out of the deployment in November of 2001 and of course at that point in time we had already entered Afghanistan. Uh, so we knew that the world was about to change. I left Brigade Command and went to the Pentagon to the Joint Staff and had responsibilities for the Western Hemisphere and Political Military Policy and Planning. It was from that position the Chairman from the Joint Chiefs uh, responded to General Franks request for me to come and assist him for a period of time. UH, I got that call while in Canada in Halifax, Nova Scotia in February of 2003 and four days later I was at Central Command Headquarters. Four days after that I was in Qatar. And it was obviously about a month or so before the hostilities began. That too was one of those wow, you've got to be prepared for any mission that might come to you. But when the Army, your former bosses, when your nation calls you to do something just like our motto says in the Big Red One, there's no mission too difficult and no sacrifice too great. Duty is what comes first for us and so I responded to that and felt uh, highly honored while also feeling like I was walking a tight rope in front of the world every day. But uh, it was an honor to be able to do that and take that same knowledge that I had as General Franks' Planner a few years before updated with the new additions to the way the planning had unfolded and be able to try to articulate that to a watching world.

GOODWIN: Now we are here today and you're back in the 1st Division, how does it feel to be back?

BROOKS: I love it. As I said in my Assumption of Command speech uh, I feel like I've returned home. Uh, the things I learned about command, I learned in the Big Red One while wearing this patch. And many of the people I served with then I'm still in contact with today. Uh, so it's a great return home. There are only two units that I served in twice. The 1st Calvary Division, which I served with uh, in 2006 up to 2008 and had the privilege of commanding it for a period of time. And the Big Red One and of course this being the most recent one, at this stage of my career could be able to serve with soldiers is the...the highest honor that I can hope to achieve. It doesn't matter what comes next, doesn't matter what came before but right now I get to be a Commander. I get to be among a very, very honored group of men, who have had a chance to command this Division and take the flag into the combat zone, which we will do in January of 2010. So it's a great privilege and I'm just honored to be able to do it now.

GOODWIN: You've been called a role model to young African-Americans, how do you feel about that title?

BROOKS: I think I am. Uh, my desire of course is to be a role model more broadly than that. Uh, I want to be broad enough and seen as an exemplar enough that there is value in who I am and what I do and that people can take something from that and be better themselves, whatever it happens to be. Uh, there are always things that I can do better and so I know I serve to be an exemplar on sometimes not what to do. But uh, certainly to be a positive example and positive role model of being able to achieve, to be able to overcome things that might have been uh, unanticipated odds at the beginning and then just to uh, be one who's known for giving his best and caring about his organization.

GOODWIN: One last question. Um, you with your basketball background and now we have a President who's very into basketball as well, do you think you could beat him in a game?

BROOKS: Probably not, he still plays and I don't. (laughs)

GOODWIN: hahaha

BROOKS: So I'd be at a distinct disadvantage. Uh, I stopped playing at the age of 30, in an over 30 league which we won. We were the Washington area champions at that point in time uh, but to concentrate on keeping my knees and my body ready for the Infantry I stopped playing all together. So he's still got skills and I don't. We are both left handed, so you know it might be a challenge.

GOODWIN: (Laughs) Ok. Uh, anything left to add?

BROOKS: Nah, I just appreciate that you're doing this project. I think it's really important to uh, try and capture the history and experiences that people who have served this great Division have been a part of; that we're grateful for you doing this.

GOODWIN: Thank you for your time, thank you for the interview, and thank you for your service to the country.

BROOKS: Thank you.