



City of Alexandria  
Office of Historic Alexandria  
*Alexandria Legacies*  
**Oral History Program**



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**Interviewers:** *Jim Mackay and Audrey Davis*

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**Abstract:** *Courtney Brooks was born in Alexandria in 1923. He served with the 515th Port Battalion in England and France. He worked for the federal government and also played in bands in Alexandria and across the South. He talks about his life here, including the desegregation of the City, his experiences in World War II, and his successful music career.*

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<b>Introductions and World War II Basic Training Memories</b>	
Jim Mackay:	This is Jim Mackay from the Lyceum and we're talking with a Mr. Brooks this afternoon, Mr. Courtney Brooks, about his experiences in World War II as a veteran. What I will start off by asking you about, Mr. Brooks, is some of your feelings on the late [19]30s early [19]40s as the War was approaching and after it started. What motivated you to join the service and get involved and what kind of feelings did you have at that time?
Courtney Brooks:	Really, I didn't have a lot of feelings about it. I was involved because -- Well, I had to sign up and register and I got recruited. I was drafted, so I had to go into the service.
J.M.:	You didn't have much choice after that.
Courtney Brooks:	No. And that was really how I got into the service, by being drafted.
J.M.:	Did you have friends or relatives who had already gone in ahead of you or—
Courtney Brooks:	I had some friends, but believe it or not [inaudible], I had friends that we were real close. In fact, some of us were in a little social club together. We were all drafted at the same time. It happened that two or three of us served in the same outfit, at the same time. We went over together and just about came back together.
J.M.	When you were drafted and had to report, how did your family react to that?
Courtney Brooks:	They took it like everything else, because it was something that you had to do. I mean, it wasn't something that you could duck or dodge. You just had to go. So that was it.
J.M.	So many other people that they knew—
Courtney Brooks:	[Interrupting] Right.
J.M.	...That you knew, had already gone.
Courtney Brooks:	Right.
J.M.	When were you actually drafted? When did you hear? [inaudible]
Courtney Brooks:	[194]3.
J.M.	Spring, summer? Do you remember approximately when?
Courtney Brooks:	I went in around September of [194]3 --something like that.
J.M.	Fall of [19]43.
Courtney Brooks:	Right.
J.M.	What were you doing around that time? Where were you working, or what

	were you doing?
Courtney Brooks:	Working in the government. The federal government.
J.M.	Downtown or—
Courtney Brooks:	Yeah, in [Washington,] D.C. Yes.
J.M.	Doing what kind of stuff?
Courtney Brooks:	I was messenger there, working in the Water [De]partment. Under Secretary of War. I was a messenger.
J.M.	And that call came and you had so many days to report or—
Courtney Brooks:	Well, yeah. They took you down for examination, and then you had so much time to report. Then you were taken in and we went up to Pennsylvania, is where we started out the training up in Pennsylvania.
J.M.	But when you first reported and went for your registration process, was that done in Richmond?
Courtney Brooks:	Yes.
J.M.	So did you take the bus down there, or?
Courtney Brooks:	If I remember right, we did.
J.M.	Then you had some time before you shipped out for basic training or whatever?
Courtney Brooks:	I'm not quite sure. It kind of slips my mind, but we didn't have too much time. If we did— we may have had a little time to come back and get ourselves together. Then we were called up, you know, we knew that we were 1A and we knew it wouldn't be long.
J.M.	You say you went to Pennsylvania then for your basic training?
Courtney Brooks:	Yes, we first went down there. They cut us down to Norfolk [Virginia], then we were shipped up to Pennsylvania for basic training.
J.M.	Where was your base at?
Courtney Brooks:	I forget the name of the place [gets interrupted by Mackay] and the camp.
J.M.	So was it near Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] somewhere or—
Courtney Brooks:	Not too far from Philly, yeah.
J.M.	What do you remember about that? Was it really difficult or not too bad?
Courtney Brooks:	No, because, see, way it ended up, we went what you call a port [pronounced it "put," similar to "foot"] battalion we had most of our training was how to operate different machinery and do different things to get cargo loaded and unloaded off of ships that were carrying material and bring the material into the docks.
J.M.	[Sounds of agreement] Did they do physical training, rigorous kind of stuff?

Courtney Brooks:	No, not very rigorous.
J.M.	Your job was rigorous enough probably once you got started. [Laughs].
Courtney Brooks:	Yes, indeed.
J.M.	What was your unit? What unit where you assigned to?
Courtney Brooks:	It was the 515 Port Battalion.
J.M.	515 Port Battalion.
Courtney Brooks:	530 Company, 515th Port Battalion
J.M.	515th. What were the living conditions like during basic training? What do you recall about that? Little wooden barracks? Or—
Courtney Brooks:	Barracks, yes.
J.M.	Was the food any good? No? [Laughs]
Courtney Brooks:	No, I think the worse food that we had was on the ship when we were going overseas. 'Cause I remember, going, heading for the mess hall on the ship, going down to eat, and I got half way down the steps going to eat and I couldn't go any further. I had to turn around and go back up and I had to make a phone call back to New York over the side of the ship, you know...—
J.M.	What else? Anything else you remember about basic training? Was there any special training part of it, or did they just show you how to use these different machinery—
Courtney Brooks:	Just showin' us how to use the different equipment and what not, different things like that. I think the biggest thing that stuck out in my mind, on our way up to Pennsylvania -- when we left Norfolk [Virginia] goin' up to Pennsylvania we stop out here at Potomac Yards. We were that close to home and we could not get off the train or anything and I think hurt me more than anything. That close to home and we couldn't get off the train.
J.M.	You were already homesick at that point.
Courtney Brooks:	Yep. Right at—
J.M.	How long did your basic training last? Was that several weeks or a couple months, or—
Courtney Brooks:	Yes, several weeks. See, most of it half of it or most of it was in Norfolk [Virginia], then they shipped us up to Pennsylvania.
J.M.	What was the biggest adjustment you think you had to make for, from civilian life to now, all of the sudden, you're in the military? What did you have to get use to—
Courtney Brooks:	I think the biggest thing was gettin' up early in the morning, having to do this and what time you had to be in, what time the lights had to be turned

	out and just gettin' out in the field and marchin'. Someone call in the cadence and marchin' to it, it just something you hadn't done before.
J.M.	[Sound of agreement] Do you have any sense that, when you first started in the military basic training, that you were being treated any differently in the military than you were at home around town or anything—
Courtney Brooks:	No [firmly].
J.M.	You didn't feel any blatant racism or segregation or anything like that?
Courtney Brooks:	Not at that time, I don't think I did.
J.M.	But your unit was entirely black; there wasn't any integrated unit or anything.
Courtney Brooks:	Oh, no there wasn't. The officers.
J.M.	You had white officers.
Courtney Brooks:	Yeah, commissioned officers.
J.M.	From Pennsylvania, where did you go? They put you back on a train and sent you somewhere else?
Courtney Brooks:	From Pennsylvania we went -- we went back to Newport News [Virginia] or something like that, and that's where we shipped out from to go overseas. [Softer] That was Newport News or Norfolk [Virginia].
J.M.	So that's goin' to be late [19]44, late fall or early winter.
Courtney Brooks:	Naw. In fact it was April of—
J.M.	[Overlapping Mr. Brooks] You joined in [19]43.
Courtney Brooks:	Joined in [19]43, but in April of [19]44, Easter of [19]44 we were on the water goin' overseas.
J.M.	So spring of [19]44 you're on your way to Europe.
Courtney Brooks:	Right.
J.M.	Did they make any kind of special preparations for you to go overseas? Did you have to get shots or anything, any special training like that?
Courtney Brooks:	No.
J.M.	You're just ready for your port battalion activities.
Courtney Brooks:	Right.
J.M.	Did they train you with weapons at all? Just in case.
Courtney Brooks:	Just on a firin' range.
J.M.	Just showing you how to use it.
Courtney Brooks:	Just showin', that's all. See we didn't have—

J.M.	[Interrupts but words are inaudible]
Courtney Brooks:	No, we had the carbines, we didn't have—
J.M.	But you didn't need anything other than that.
Courtney Brooks:	[whispered] No.
J.M.	Did you serve any guard duty or anything like that, M.P. [Military Police] duty?
Courtney Brooks:	After we were over there for sometime, just before we came back we did serve as some guard work. That was our main thing after, because at that time the War was just about over and we did act as some guards for a camp over there. It was just outside of Marseilles [France].
J.M.	A P.O.W. [prisoner of war] camp or something?
Courtney Brooks:	No, just a—
J.M.	Guarding like a base camp.
Courtney Brooks:	A base camp, yes.
J.M.	So, spring of [19]44 you arrive where in England or—
<b>World War II Memories: England and France</b>	
Courtney Brooks:	We went to England and I forget the name of the place over there—
J.M.	Liverpool or—
Courtney Brooks:	Liverpool—that's where it was, it was Liverpool. That's where it was. 'Cause I can remember, standing on the shores, the banks of the bay there and looking across, you can see the Germans bombin', the planes flyin' over dropping bombs over in France.
J.M.	There was an attack goin' on right then, that you saw?
Courtney Brooks:	You could just see it.
J.M.	Do you remember anything about the crossing? You said the food you weren't too interested in.
Courtney Brooks:	When we went over we landed at Isigny [France], and we went ashore. You could just smell the death, you could smell, it had that odor.
J.M.	This was in France?
Courtney Brooks:	It was on the western shore of France. It was—
J.M.	When was it that you went to? Spring?
Courtney Brooks:	I forget exactly what time, but it was in June.
J.M.	After D-Day [The day that the Allies landed on the beaches of Normandy, France, June 6, 1944].

Courtney Brooks:	Yes.
J.M.	So you arrive in France after D-Day and there's still corpses?
Courtney Brooks:	It was bad. I think that was the worst part. Just the odor. You might see a body every once in a while, but it was mostly that odor -dead, decomposing and things.
J.M.	How long were you in England before they went across the channel?
Courtney Brooks:	A few months. Say we got over to England in like in April and then in like two or three months, three or four months, something like that.
J.M.	What were your living conditions like in England? Were you in town or out in the countryside—
Courtney Brooks:	Out in the countryside.
J.M.	Living in tents—
Courtney Brooks:	Yes.
J.M.	What kind of stuff were you doing there, continuing your training... [inaudible]
Courtney Brooks:	Continuing training and assisting with the loading and unloading of ships.
J.M.	Sending stuff across.
Courtney Brooks:	Yes.
J.M.	You went to France in the spring – June - so D-Day hadn't occurred too much before.
Courtney Brooks:	It hadn't occurred, not too long before, no.
J.M.	And then where did you go in France? Where did they put you?
Courtney Brooks:	We went to Isigny first, and then we went down to Marseilles and then up to Rouen and then we went back to Marseilles before we came back over. Before we came home.
J.M.	Does anything stand out in your mind about some of your jobs over there? Do you remember specific things that you did —
Courtney Brooks:	Like I said, we would unload the ships, then we had to provide guard duty. Like for instance, maybe a load of cigarettes or something would come over. We would load the trucks. Then we would have to have a guard on the truck when the truck got goin' to whatever warehouse it was goin' to. We had to have a guards on it and things like that.
J.M.	Something as valuable as cigarettes, you had to do some guarding.
Courtney Brooks:	Cigarettes. Then there were other things, y'know, but you had these liners and this was it -- mostly getting them unloaded and—
J.M.	What did you do in your time off—



Courtney Brooks:	You had time to go into town once in a while. Could play some ball. Each little platoon maybe'[d] have a softball team or baseball team. And we play against somebody else if they were close around, something like that. Or play basketball.
J.M.	Was your team any good?
Courtney Brooks:	Yeah, we had a basketball team. They picked some guys from our company. It was a group that came out of North Africa. They had been winnin' the basketball championships all the time and they saw a bunch of guys in our group and they put them in special services and our group, guys from our company. Our battalion—they won, beat the other fellows and won the championship.
J.M.	We talked to Harry Burke last week and he was talking about some of the same stories, basketball team and stuff he was on.
Courtney Brooks:	That's my next-door neighbor.
J.M.	He is? You played him over there?
Courtney Brooks:	No, no, no. I didn't play 'cause I didn't have the height, but I never did run into Harry while I was overseas. But, one of his brothers, that was one of the fellas I was talkin' about -- That we were teenagers together and we went into the service together and spent the whole time and came back home just about together.
J.M.	Harry had mentioned that his brother went in ahead of him, so you must have been ahead of him as well, in the service.
Courtney Brooks:	Yeah, his brother, Chip Burke, we were in the service together.
J.M.	Do you remember anything about friends that you knew or people from Alexandria that you had known who were actually in combat or did you hear from them while you were over there at that so and so was involved in some battle?
Courtney Brooks:	No, I never heard anything from them. I did run into two or three friends, from here, happened to run into them in Marseilles or something like that. Just happen to run into them while we were on leave.
J.M.	Some of the Alexandria crowd.
Courtney Brooks:	Yes.
J.M.	What were your living conditions like, once you got to France? Was it similar to England, camps?
Courtney Brooks:	Yes, it was pretty good. We had tents, but some of the places had wooden floors in the tents. We had like a squad tent where eight or twelve people could be in and they had wooden floors in 'em.
J.M.	'Cause you were gonna be there for so long? And what kind of off-time

	activities did you have over there? Did they let you go into town, go to dances—
Courtney Brooks:	Oh yes, you could go into town. Mostly, if you went into town, you just went to one of the clubs or went to a bar or something like that, just go around. At one time, we had some time off, we had like a week or so of leave and we went down to Cannes to spend the week down on the beach. We spent 'bout a week on the beach. And this was, they say the beach where more pebbles down there than sand. But this was after D-Day, just about ready to come home then.
J.M.	So, you're moving around [to] a couple of different places in France while the War is going on, through [19]44 into early [19]45?
Courtney Brooks:	Into [19]45, yes.
J.M.	What was it like spending Christmas of [19]44 overseas? Did you get a care package, or anything special at Christmas?
Courtney Brooks:	No. Nothing special. I can't remember anything special.
J.M.	Eat turkey out of a can or something like that?
Courtney Brooks:	If you had to. Most of the time it was something like 'Spam' or something.
J.M.	Did you receive any kind of special training while you were overseas or were you doing pretty much the same thing the whole time you were over there?
Courtney Brooks:	Just about the same thing.
<b>End of the War and Returning to Alexandria/GI Bill</b>	
J.M.	When did you hear that the War was over? You were still over there early May [19]45? Do you remember how you heard that?
Courtney Brooks:	No. I'm not sure how we heard, but we heard about it and I'm trying to think, I think we were in Rouen at the time, if I'm not mistaken. I think we were up in Rouen at the time, and I think that's when we came back down to Marseilles and then, that's when we were no longer needed as a port battalion. That's when they put us in this like a guard battalion doing guard duty at the base.
J.M.	So, after the War, your duties shifted and you're doing a lot more guarding.
Courtney Brooks:	Doing guard duty, yes.
J.M.	Port facility stuff. And then how long did you stay in Europe before you came back?
Courtney Brooks:	Until November. We left the day after Thanksgiving in November [19]45, and believe it or not, it took us until the twelfth of December to get back across from Marseilles.
J.M.	Why was that? Just a slow boat?

Courtney Brooks:	The boat would go two feet up and three feet back.
J.M.	But you guys were anxious to get home weren't you—
Courtney Brooks:	[Interrupts] Oh yes.
J.M.	The War had been over for six months, and you wanted to get back. What was it like to get back?
Courtney Brooks:	It was great, to know you were on the way back home, and I think the best part of it was when you received word that you were coming back to the States and not being transferred to an outfit that was being shipped to the Pacific.
J.M.	How much had you heard about that during the War? What was going on out there?
Courtney Brooks:	Just the normal things.
J.M.	The Army newspapers or whatever? When you came back, did you go into Norfolk or were did they take you?
Courtney Brooks:	Yes, we came back to Norfolk. And that's where we stayed until we were released.
J.M.	You were discharged from Norfolk.
Courtney Brooks:	Discharged from Norfolk.
J.M.	How did you get back to Alexandria? They put you on train or—
Courtney Brooks:	Train or bus coming back to D.C.
J.M.	Did they have a homecoming party for ya or anything like that? Do you remember what—
Courtney Brooks:	[laughing] No.
J.M.	...glad to see ya?
Courtney Brooks:	No [inaudible]. My mother had died -- my mother had passed when I was only twelve years old.
J.M.	So, you come home and your father is glad to see ya.
Courtney Brooks:	Right. Well, I was married then. I had gotten married just before I went overseas.
J.M.	So your bride was particularly glad to see you, then.
Courtney Brooks:	Yep.
J.M.	Did they have any kind of big party for you then or anything like that?
Courtney Brooks:	No, nothing special.
J.M.	How long did you take off before you went back to work?

Courtney Brooks:	I'd say maybe a couple of months.
J.M.	Did you go back to your old job or—
Courtney Brooks:	Yes, I went back into the federal government.
J.M.	Did your training, your port facility training, any of that, your War time training pay off for ya down the road? Have you had a chance to use any of that since then or—
Courtney Brooks:	No, 'cause nothing that we did over there—
J.M.	No construction work or anything?
Courtney Brooks:	No, nothing like that. See, say for instance, a hold would be loaded with stuff. We had people, fellas in the hold that was loading, would load the material onto the pallet and then you'd give the signal to whoever was operating the machinery to bring it up, give the thumbs up to bring it on up and bring it on up and bring it over the side and take it over and that was it. Depending on what you had to do, you could just sit down and look over the side of the hold and tell them to bring it up or take it over. So [whispered].
J.M.	When you look back or when you think about your World War II experience today or you're talking to your friends and family about it, how do you look back on it? Was it a big time in your life, or is it just something you had to go through? How do you think about it?
Courtney Brooks:	I think it was just something I had to go through. Possibly, I know a lot of people may frown because of the fact all we did was go into like a port battalion more or less like construction work, but I think I would rather have done that than been in battle, shootin' at somebody or somebody shootin' back at you. There's no telling what could have happened, you know. A couple of times we had to head for cover because of bombing while we were in England. Because, like I said, not only were the Germans bombing France, they were bombing England, too. And you could see the planes coming over with the bombs and you had to, you know, take cover. But, I think, then when we got over, we were lucky enough to be working on the side where they were shipping the supplies up to the front and they call that the "red ball highway," and we were shipping supplies, we were right along that area. And that was most of the main thing. Just made a lot of friends with a lot of people. You know, from all over the country.
J.M.	Have you kept up with some of them through the years or gone to reunions—
Courtney Brooks:	A few of them. You know, we never did have any reunions, but guess the fellas here and one or two of them, we still see each other all the time. In fact, one of the fellas I was just talking about, Burke, he and I, we see each other quite often. In fact, we were born in the same hospital only twelve days apart.

J.M.	How about the GI Bill [The Servicemembers' Readjustment Act of 1944 providing education or training programs to veterans of World War II]? Were you able to take advantage of any of those programs—
Courtney Brooks:	Most of the GI Bill was being able to get into a house—
J.M.	Loans?
Courtney Brooks:	Get a loan, something like that.
J.M.	Or schooling or anything like that?
Courtney Brooks:	No. See, I never did go back to school because I didn't say I was a high school grad. And I never did go back to school.
J.M.	That was enough, you had enough—
Courtney Brooks:	Well, I was working then, and had a family so—
<b>Thoughts on Racism/Segregation and Feelings of World War II</b>	
J.M.	What about differences in the social climate in Alexandria at the time you left? How you were treated? Your feelings of race, segregation, discrimination versus how it was overseas? Did you notice that soon after you got to either England or France people treated you a little differently?
Courtney Brooks:	You were always treated differently. In fact, they always said that the black had tails. They always wanted to know where was your tail and different things like that. Some places accepted you, but, you know, you always ran up on some racism, don't care where you went or what you did.
J.M.	And then returning home after being overseas, did it feel good to be home—
Courtney Brooks:	It was back to what you left.
J.M.	Nothing had changed.
Courtney Brooks:	Not much had changed, no. Especially like at work and all. You still worked at certain positions and what not....
J.M.	Any other thoughts about that period of your life, World War II, thinking about what it's been to ya, down the road?
Courtney Brooks:	I think the biggest thing is just to know that you were just a part of something. You were a part of something that helped keep someone --like Hitler-- from taking over the world --who was a complete racist. He thought the only thing was his way of thinking. To be a part of something that helped to stop that, [is] the main, the biggest thing.
J.M.	Something that your generation shared.
Courtney Brooks:	Yes, that everybody shared in on and [when] we came back, it was a time to put that behind ya and try and get started doing something else. Which I tried to do.
J.M.	Thank you for sharing your World War II experiences with us.

Courtney Brooks:	<p>It wasn't a whole lot, but it's just something that was a part of your life that you had to go through and you'd always think about it. You'd never forget it. Some things you will forget because you can't remember all the dates and things like that, but quite a few things that happen, quite a few things that you saw [you remember].</p> <p>I was shocked or maybe surprised to see how the Germans had dug into the mountainside outside of Isigny or Carentan [France] and for the ships to be able to come into the land like it, without being blown up. Because I don't know what had happened, but we went into some of the places they had dug in battlements in the mountains and still found belts of ammunition and all the dead left behind when they left.</p>
J.M.	They left so quickly. They just didn't come back.
Courtney Brooks:	I mean, they were just walls a foot or two thick and with peep holes in where they could see out over the water and nobody would even notice that they were up there in the mountains, and it's a wonder that more ships didn't get blown off, out the water. I guess by the air strikes and the things like that, they had to leave, they couldn't stay there.
J.M.	Were you involved in trying to rebuild the port facilities at Cherbourg [France] at all?
Courtney Brooks:	No.
J.M.	They moved you into doing something else. Well, great, thank you. Audrey would like to delve into more points of your life too, if you don't mind.
<b>Music Career</b>	
Audrey Davis:	Mr. Brooks, I was just curious about when you became involved in music and how that happened? Were you always involved?
Courtney Brooks:	Yes. I got involved in music with the Elks Band here. They had what they called a Junior Elks Band, even before I went into high school, and they had a band here in Alexandria with the Elks and that's how I got involved in the band... Was my father played in the Elks band before then and that's how I got into the band.
A.D.:	When did you consider making it a profession, or did you?
Courtney Brooks:	I never really till I came out of school in Arlington [Virginia]. We started foolin' around and playing in different --with a marching band here and then with a marching band with the Elks group over in D.C. -- and then later on, I was playing with a group over in D.C. Jacque Taylor had a group and I was playing with them. So that's when I say, "Well, I'll just play some music for a while," so I was doing it more or less on the side... 'cause I was still working.
A.D.:	You were working for the government.

Courtney Brooks:	Government, yes.
A.D.:	Were you on the road when you—
Courtney Brooks:	I didn't go on the road until [19]53.
A.D.:	How long were you on the road?
Courtney Brooks:	'Bout four years.
A.D.:	Four years.
Courtney Brooks:	Yeah.
A.D.:	With any particular band or just with your band or—
Courtney Brooks:	No, first, when I first went on the road I was with a group called the Griffin Brothers out of Norfolk. They had a record out called <i>Little Red Rooster</i> -- Margie Day singing. And then I went with Chuck Willis, and he had out the <i>C.C. Rider</i> and we were packaged with different people like Ruth Brown, different people like that, and then we were all over the country.
A.D.:	Were you playing in segregated clubs or—
Courtney Brooks:	Mostly, we played where anybody could come in. Most of the time, they were segregated.
A.D.:	What were the clubs in Alexandria like?
Courtney Brooks:	We had a night club in Alexandria—because of the fact that, see in Virginia they couldn't sell drinks. Because you had to buy your drinks at an ABC Store. But there was a fella here named Julian Dove that had a dance every Saturday night and that was the social life of Alexandria. Every Saturday night some group would be coming through. And that was one of the reasons I joined. When the fella told me that he wanted me to work with him for a couple of weeks -- to sit in for somebody until they found another drummer -- and they were gonna play Alexandria that Saturday night. I said I'd do it for the week and that week or two weeks ended up being four years.
A.D.:	Oh really? Who was your favorite person to play with—
Courtney Brooks:	To back up, I think Chuck or Ruth Brown, they were both the same. You know, all you had to do was play the music behind them and [inaudible] never had problems or anybody trying to be the great one or anything like that. In fact, old Ruth and I got along so well, so good anytime we were traveling together. We had two or three days off, if we were close to the area, Ruth would come here and stay at my house right here in Alexandria and she came to be friends with quite a few people here in Alexandria.
<b>Personal Life and Segregation in Alexandria</b>	
A.D.:	Where were you living then in Alexandria?

Courtney Brooks:	On Cameron Street.
A.D.:	—but now you're living near Harry Burke.
Courtney Brooks:	Yes.
A.D.:	On Woods Place. Was the Cameron Street house the house you were born in or—
Courtney Brooks:	No, that was the 1300 block of Cameron. Where I was born, was the 1200 block of Cameron Street, but—
A.D.:	But you were on the 1300 block when you were married and—
Courtney Brooks:	Yes, when I first got married, yes, I was living on the 1300 block of Cameron Street.
A.D.:	Do you have any children?
Courtney Brooks:	Yes, one.
A.D.:	Musical or—
Courtney Brooks:	No, he doesn't play music.
A.D.:	How did you manage doing the music and also your job with the government?
Courtney Brooks:	Mostly, with the music was just the weekend. And then I went on the road was when I resigned from the government.
A.D.:	What job did you do with the government?
Courtney Brooks:	I was messenger and then I was a clerk.
A.D.:	You were a messenger before the War then—
Courtney Brooks:	Yeah, then I went back to being a messenger again. Then I would move up to being a clerk.
A.D.:	In the last few years, have you still used any of your musical talent anywhere around Alexandria?
Courtney Brooks:	Oh yes, I played up until then. And now I am a member of the D.C. Blues Society, on the Board of Directors with the Blues Society and we put on different blues functions and blues festivals. In fact, we just had a blues festival up at Carter Barron back in September. We had over five thousand people up there. We put on blues shows around the area, and we just operate on grants, a nonprofit group. And we put on blues shows, we put on some things called 'East of the River,' where people give us grants [for] things over in Anacostia [D.C.] and we put on shows like that.
A.D.:	Beside the dances that you were talking about, here on Saturday nights in Alexandria when you were younger, what were the activities like? What would young people do on the weekends or—



Courtney Brooks:	We had sports, like in football. They would have football games or baseball games. You know, 'cause back in those days it looked like every little town had a baseball team, something like that, but socially. They did have what, at that time, they called a beer garden, or they had different social clubs that would have dances or cabarets they would call them, and that's where you would go out and they would have a dance with a floor show and all like that.
A.D.:	Were you very aware of segregation here in Alexandria when you were younger or were there places that you didn't go?
Courtney Brooks:	We were aware of it. You just didn't go—where I lived was right around the corner from a white area and we never had any problems. A lot of the time, we played together and all and I think, maybe, the sports was one of things that helped break down the walls of segregation in this city. Sports I think, especially football, I think was one of the big things, one of the things that helped break down segregation. Because we started the Alexandria Rams football team. Later on, we had quite a few white fellows who came along to play football with us and that started it.
A.D.:	When you did things like shopping, though, going into town for any kind of errand, did you really feel the effects of segregation or were there mainly black-owned business that you patronized?
Courtney Brooks:	We had to go. There wasn't that many black-owned business. You couldn't eat this place or that place or you had to go to a window and eat, you know, you get served certain places and you couldn't go in this door something like that, so it was still around.
A.D.:	Was it rough too when you were on the road with the band? Did you find it in other areas to be worse?
Courtney Brooks:	Yes, up and down— we were talking about it today—and we went all through Georgia and Mississippi and all them places and you ran into it, don't care where you went, you ran into it. In fact, sometimes we played, I forget where, Arkansas somewhere and the fellow who was the promoter who had booked us, well, he had sold us to a white promoter who was having us play for a white fans. And the promoter who had originally booked us, he couldn't come into the dance himself, he just sat outside the dance in the car for the whole night while we played for the affair then we left town. And I won't forget we went into Mobile [Alabama] right after they had the bus boycott and the people say, "Oh you all coming into town?" I say, "Yeah." "Glad to see, we need more men in town." But I say, "Yeah, we leaving tonight after the dance." That's when they started that bus boycott.
A.D.:	Do you remember any Civil Rights marches or movements here in Alexandria?
Courtney Brooks:	Yes, by the time I got off the road in [19]57. And then they started when

	they first had the march and the breaking down at the library when the fellows went and sit-in at the library and stuff like that—
A.D.:	[19]39.
Courtney Brooks:	Yeah, I remember those.
A.D.:	Who were some of the major figures in Alexandria you think in the Civil Rights movement?
Courtney Brooks:	I think everybody helped. The fellows, I can't remember all the names, I think those fellows that really went on that first sit-in at the library, I think those were the—I have some pictures of 'em. And I can't remember all the names, but I think those were some of the people who really started the major move towards helping to break down segregation when they took their chance to go in. And the police escorted them out of the library, but they really took a chance when they went and sit-in on the library, and I think that was one of the bigger things, or one of the first major things that started to helped break down segregation.
A.D.:	So that's one of the major things that stands out in your mind?
Courtney Brooks:	Yeah, because not that I think it had a lot to do with it, but it was so that we wanted to play an integrated football team and have an integrated football game here and the city manager at that time told me that we couldn't play a white team. The only way we could play would be over his dead body and we wouldn't play. And he died and the next year I scheduled all white teams every game. Didn't play a black team the whole year. I scheduled all white teams just because he made that remark.
A.D.:	Looking back on your years in Alexandria, in everything that has happened, have you been happy with this choice of town?
Courtney Brooks:	Oh, yes. In fact, like we were talking about, they wouldn't even let us play a game here, the first time we played a mixed game here we had to go out, we had to go down and play it down at Mount Vernon school because the city manager said he wouldn't -- they wouldn't -- let us play here in the town.
A.D.:	You had to play at Mount Vernon.
Courtney Brooks:	We played down at Mount Vernon High School, but after that we came back into town and we didn't have any more problems.
A.D.:	So after you started scheduling games that were mixed you didn't have any more problems?
Courtney Brooks:	No.
A.D.:	The crowds or anybody protesting?
Courtney Brooks:	No, no, 'cause after that we joined a league up in Pennsylvania. In fact, the team from here was the only team in the league that wasn't based in Pennsylvania, which meant that every other week some team was coming

	from Pennsylvania down here, or we were going up there. And most of those teams were white teams.
A.D.:	So you were very active in sports besides your music?
Courtney Brooks:	Oh, yeah, I was more or less. I was like the business manager of the team and I scheduled the games and made the arrangement for the trips and stuff like that.
A.D.:	I want to thank you for talking with us today and we really appreciate your coming down.
Courtney Brooks:	Thank you for having me.
A.D.:	We would like to have you back sometime.
Courtney Brooks:	Glad to come back. [End]