Mark Taylor: My name is Mark Taylor. It is 4:08 on February 13, 1990. I am interviewing for the first time Patrick King. This interview is taking place at the office of Patrick King at 2406 Broadway. This is part of the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project at Texas Tech University. The first thing I would like to ask you is, perhaps, how did you get into Vietnam? How did you initially get into the Marines?

Patrick King: Well, I went to college from 64-68, and of course the sixties was a really strange time. The war had been kicking off since '62. But nobody was really aware of it until 64 or 65. And I had been an air officer candidate, I’d been planning on flying since I was five years old. So, I had taken all my Navy tests. Since I was an air officer candidate, I was draft exempt as long as I maintained C’s in college. Graduated from college in 1968. But because of the Tet offensive, the Navy and the Marine Corps especially lost a lot of pilots in the war, so the pipeline in Pensacola was full, and I could not get to Pensacola in September like I was supposed to; they were going take me in January. Meantime, the Army drafted me. Back then, you had no choice. They wanted me to go. I met a Marine Corps recruiter. I don't know if it was the best thing I ever did. I met a Marine Corps recruiter who said, "I can get you in," and I was the first and only officer that sworn in at Beauford, South Carolina, at the air station there. Went to Officer Candidate School at Quantico, Virginia. While I was there, Pensacola was still full. The Marine Corps was hurting for helicopter pilots especially. They gave us a big, huge
speech and they had this program to where they would hand pick four guys from each class that were air officer candidates, (usually about 20 in each class) and two would go to the Air Force and two go to the Army, get their Air Force or their Army wings, come out and get their Navy wings, and then go to Vietnam. All Marine Corps Officers are basically trained to be ground pounders too, which is different than other services, and I decided if I was going to be in the war, back at that time, helicopter pilots were looked at as really gutsy. In fact, even today, when you look at the air in Vietnam, there are all types of air, but the mystique of Vietnam is the helicopter. There’s a thing about that. So I volunteered for helicopters much to my parent's terror, I guess. Got selected and went to Army Flight School in Texas in Mineral Wells then back to Hiram Air Field in Savannah Georgia. Went to Green Beret Jungle Survival School. Got my Army wings, went to North Carolina and trained in instrument training and got my Navy wings and got certified as co-pilot and then went to Vietnam.

MT: After getting to Vietnam, what were some of your initial impressions once you were in-country?

PK: Well, the tapes I was talking about earlier, (Mr. King has several tapes of personal narration during Vietnam) it's really kind of strange. You listen to the first tape, you have a 22 year old, very cocky young, 23 year old, very cocky young American and Marine Corps Second Lieutenant ...Naval Aviator, the best of the best, all that sort of thing. Couldn’t stand Vietnamese. Interesting thing is, prior to going to Vietnam, I went and saw the movie "Woodstock." I went and we were not allowed to go, it was off limits, but I went anyway to watch and to see what was involved on both the peace protest marches, not as a participant, but just being there seeing it. I began to have grave doubts at that point about the war. Prior to that, I just wanted to be a pilot and get my wings and go fight in a war like John Wayne and the whole bit, like a lot of guys did. Raised in middle class American family, I felt it was my duty to do this sort of thing and never thought of evading the draft. This is where I get really kind of concerned and then to add on top of that is the fact that I was... the gold wings, the sports car, the wallet, the money in it. You know, walk into the bar, I wasn't a Christian at that time. Walk up to the bar, excuse my dearest, I'm not this tall, it's my wallet I'm sitting on, that type of attitude. All of a sudden, I have to pay for all that. College education, gold wings, dress blue uniforms,
the BOQ, the traveling in my own airplanes with my name on it. All that stuff, all of a
sudden, I had to go in country and now Uncle Sam was saying, "Now I want you to pay
for what you have done." This in my last tape, it's only 20 minutes long, the day before I
left Vietnam, standing in my hooch overlooking the DaNang valley and the city of
DaNang and the harbor and behind me is the mountains and Sherwood Forest and bad
guy country. And I'm standing there next to my bunk and I'm the only one left in that area
and my roommates were all gone. I was the fourth to the last Marine Corps officer to
leave Vietnam. The Marine Corps left in April, they formed a thing called the 3rd Marine
Amphibious Brigade. There were six officers and a hundred men, and I was the fourth
from the last Marine officer to leave in country Vietnam proper. In this tape it’s different.
The voice sounds older and sounds tired, his whole view on life has changed, and if you
listen to those tapes all the way through, it takes about 6 hours. You couldn't equate at
first that kid and a guy a year older which lost his roommate, two of his best friends, and
killed a bunch of people, seen a bunch of awful things and had it pretty easy in some
ways too. That's basically my feeling for that time.

MT: You flew helos. What were your primary missions as a helicopter pilot in
Vietnam?

PK: I did two things in Vietnam. I started out from July of 1970 into February of
1971, I flew in a squadron called HML 167 which was a Marine Light Helicopter
Squadron 167. There are no longer HML's in the Marine Corps, they are called HMA's,
Attack Squadrons, made of Cobras mostly, which is the skinny. The Huey gunship, the
reason why I got in that squadron, I went to Vietnam trained as a medium lift helicopter
pilot, big tandem rotor helicopter. When I got to Vietnam, they just lost, had two crashes
in this Huey squadron ...and my orders came through and they said, “This guy is an Army
trained pilot, he's got 150 trained hours in Hueys. He's already trained with the Army and
worked with them and done a lot of liaison with them. Let's put him in this squadron.” I
walked in and I already had enough training. I wasn't prepared for what was going to
happen, but I got in there and I flew. We had a number of different missions. Everything
is fragged out of Saigon, the Air Force handles all the orders, in other words, you were
told what you would fly. It wasn't one of these things where you would just get up in the
morning and go fly whatever you want. We had missions we called Ass and Trash which
was just hauling people and gear, boring. Now flying gunships, we didn't haul the people
and a Huey gunship was like a fighter plane. We had two 20-shot rocket pods on each
side, two M-60 machine guns on each side, carried 8,000 rounds of 7.62 mm rounds, all
tracers so you could see better at night, and we carried a mix in the rocket pods
depending on the mission, usually half of Willie-P, White Phosphorous for spotting LZ's
and things and half HE, High Explosive. Of course, the gun platform you are only doing
140 knots in a dive so it wasn't a real stable rocket platform. I mean, anybody who could
say they could put one in a windmill was really kind of blowing smoke because you had
to be careful, you get pretty good at it, but even then you couldn't guarantee that you
could hit this building from a mile away, because those rockets, they are designed to go
off much faster, more like 200 knots. Their spin fins stabilize so the rocket kind of comes
out and wobbles a little bit and then if you're low, 200 feet, 400 feet away, no telling. So,
we flew gun cover if they were going out taking mail, taking troops or transferring guys,
went out and covered like a fighter plane, a section or two and a wingman and a lead. The
lead always ran the mission. A crew of four in each one, a door gunner, a crew chief, a
co-pilot and a pilot. So we hauled gear for people and we did rocket belt VR's. We went
out every morning and every night to look for North Vietnamese. When I was there, we
were fighting very few Viet Cong. Where I was in I Corps was just right near the DMZ,
down past Chu Lai, that is I Corps, down the Khe Sanh Mountains. Quang Nam and Thua
Thien province in the Quang Chi province is where we were. Basically, we would look
for those 122 mm rockets they were firing those big ones, and we would look for that and
we would see guys in the open and we would greet them. Unfortunately, the interesting
thing was that quite often, we were controlled by a unit called Da Nang Dask in Da Nang
and we had a secure radio, it was a secure thing and we would call Da Nang Dask and
say, "We got two gunners in the open. One of them is carrying the back section to a
122mm rocket, they just di di’ed (di di means to move real quick), behind a pile of rocks,
“request permission to waste them.” They would say wait one and they would have to
call the village chieftain in the local province and ask permission. Often, they would
come back and say, "No you can't do it." We had ways of working with that. The crew
chief, we would do this among ourselves, it wasn't pre-briefed in the open, it was all once
you knew your crew. He would say "I've got a hang fire, sir." Then you would hear a
burst from his machine gun. “My weapon froze up on me, sir,” and you would grease him
and leave him. I had a friend one time that his roommate and him got a couple of them in
the open and dropped their weapons and started to run and tackled them right outside the
helicopter at 40 miles an hour, captured them both, which made everybody mad. Other
guys would take their pistols and shoot them out their windows. Sometimes we would
just leave. I’ve actually had times on rocket belt VR’s where we would be orbiting the
area and we couldn't get permission to shoot and there was too many villes around and
too many people in the area and too many people on the radio net. We would fly by low
and they would wave at us and walk off into the bush and usually the crew chief would
flip them off and say we would get you next time. It was a game we both knew. I had
great respect, always for the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. I never, I hated some
of the things they did, but even to this day I have great respect. They're just as tough as
they come. I also believe that the Army that fought in Vietnam and the Marine Corps
were the best that the country has ever had. I think we were very good at what we did. So
we would do rocket belt VR's. We also did hunter killer teams, two gunships and a LOH,
a small Hughes 500 aircraft called the LOH. We had a Marine Corps observer and an
Army pilot and sitting in the backseat on the floor with a bungee cord and a M-60 would
be the door gunner. And we would snoop and poop in an area. We had free fire zones
where we dropped leaflets and got everybody out clear everybody out and they had these
huge areas that might cover the size of Lubbock and they are marked in grids. You would
take a hunter-killer team out and you just get in one corner and start flying down it,
anything in there: birds, water buffalo, dogs, cats, men, women, children, any poor farmer
left out there who didn't get the word, you grease them. You didn't have to ask for
permission or nothing in a free fire zone. And those little LOHs would go out and snoop
and poop and they would find a big rice cache and drop a C-4 grenade or any number of
things in there and burn it up or blow it up with the C-4 or whatever it was they were
using or a pyrotechnic grenade to get it caught or they would smoke it and we would hose
it. Shoot up sampans in the river or stuff like that, that was another mission we did. Troop
insertions, major assaults where Marine Corps would head out to Toulse towards Laos or
that sort of thing and we would prep the area and cover them when they land and stick
around for Medevacs afterwards. Another thing we did was work with recon teams. Our
recon teams were similar, people say they were similar to Green Berets in the Army.
Green Berets worked more in the pacification program, worked in the hamlets with
Popular Forces and kept it secure. Our recon team corresponds to the Army LRRP
program. Specialized teams, radio operator, medic, sniper and all that. Their whole thing
was to go out into the bush and do intelligence work. Not mix it up with them. We were
dropping those guys in Laos at a time when you were not supposed to. They would brief
us before the mission and say, "You're going into Laos today. We are asked for
volunteers, and you just volunteered. If you crash in Laos, we will try to recover your
body and dump it on the Vietnam side and tell your parents you were killed in Vietnam.
If you do die and we can't recover the body, we'll say it was an accident and you drifted
off course." We did not get air medals. To get an air medal, you have to get fired upon
three times and return fire three times in a hazardous area. In missions in Laos, you didn't
get those, it didn't count because you weren't supposed to be there. The President and
Congress said you couldn't be there, but we were flying there all the time. I don't think it
was wrong, we had to, that's where all the stuff was coming from, so that makes sense.
And finally, the last thing we did and the most important, the scariest and the roughest
was Medevac. Night Medevac and day Medevac. Medevac missions in the Marine Corps
ran from six in the morning to six at night was one group and from six at night to six in
the morning. There were three types of Medevac, emergency Medevac, guys close to
dying, routine Medevacs where guys got bit by a snake or broke his leg and permanent
routine where a guy was already dead. You save the permanent routine for the morning,
as the other team comes on, we take off and go and pick up all the dead bodies. We don't
pick them up, we flew gun cover for them. Medevacs were the most important because
time was of the essence. In Vietnam, most of the area, we could get a guy from the point
he got hit to the operating table in Da Nang at the most, 20 minutes, 30 minutes. A lot of
times we didn't make it. The guy died. I've been on missions where the helicopter would
get shot down and kill six people to save one guy that lost his foot. But, you can't send
them out there unless you're willing to lose them. It worked for the Army too. I have great
respect for Da Nang Dustoff. They didn't have gun cover and I've been in plenty of hot
LZ's where we got our fannies shot off. A bunch of those guys would go in by
themselves. We would try to break off and cover them too. I tell you those guys were
gutsy. They were just excellent. That's the kind of missions we flew.

MT: What was your general impression on how the war was run?

PK: (A long sigh) It's been quoted and it's true that we never lost a battle in
Vietnam. There was never an engagement we didn't kick the fire out of them. I don't
mean just like they would show up and kill some of us and then they disappear. We
always kicked tail. The gunships were pretty awesome to the North Vietnamese and Viet
Cong. They had great respect for them. They called them dragons and they hated them.
But sometimes, you would get them in a corner and they would fight back. There have
been accounts in my squadron where a guy came back in just totally out of it. "I caught a
Viet Cong in the open today. The guy stood there with a single bolt rifle in the middle of
a rice paddy firing at a gunship rolling in with all that firepower and just kept shooting
until they cut him to pieces." You know they were awesome. They were dedicated. But, I
didn't agree, but the interesting thing was that the Marine Corps had the pacification
program that really worked, it was a thing we needed to do for everybody. People called
the Marine Corps the killers. The Marine Corps came out of Vietnam smelling like a rose.
Even though our mission is not...the Marine Corps design of amphibious assault is to go
far enough inland to secure a place where they can build a runway to let the Army come
in. The Marine Corps spent 11 or 12 years in Vietnam with equipment that was designed
for short time stuff. I was using a World War II .45 holster and cartridge belt and old
weapons and things in Vietnam. Politically, a lot of books you read today, General Giap
of North Vietnam, was the mastermind of Dien Bien Phu and the French and the Tet
Offensive, I tell you the Tet Offensive was a major failure, as a military. Walter Cronkite
has since recanted, he gave that famous speech “There is no light at the end of the
tunnel,” he has since then said in that Vietnam CBS series at the very end said, “I was
wrong.” But it was because of Walter Cronkite somebody said, who people respected,
and other people and American people, as Giap said, the American people. There are a
number of North Vietnamese who don't want to admit that happened, but Tet was a total
failure. We destroyed almost 68% of the infrastructure of the Viet Cong and we destroyed
almost 45% of the North Vietnamese capability. Had we continued on with the war, we
would have stopped them. Also, never bombing the Red River dikes and basically
industrially shutting down North Vietnam. This idea, I don't believe Kissinger was as
sharp as people think he was. This idea of negotiated peace, building off a major war, just
doesn't compute. And then when the Church Amendment came out where it started
cutting back our supplies, my Mother said, "isn't this great." I said, "Yea, we're fighting
the same war with less stuff and less people and less equipment and guys are dying over
this thing." We finally in this day and age separated the war from the warrior. The warrior
was excellent, the war didn't make sense. Of course we were fighting a war that was very
difficult, it was a guerilla war. You know, in the daytime, we owned it and at nighttime
they owned it. We came inside our bases and shut down, locked our gates, put up our
perimeters and sent Air Force Specter gunships out. We flew missions at night. Air Force
did some bombing, did interdiction and artillery stuff all night long. Every night I would
hear ka-bloom ka-bloom in the distance. When I came back to the States, it was one of
those things I had a hard time sleeping the first couple of weeks because I couldn't hear
it. I didn't hear helicopters go over. I couldn't hear the artillery all the time in the
background. I think Westmoreland, all these guys that came out of the Korean, World
War II Conflict, they had no concept of what was happening. I think we wasted a lot of
people's lives. One of the things that was very clear was that even in your interviews, I
can't tell you what Vietnam was like, only from the view of a Marine helicopter pilot,
which is just one, small, tiny sliver of the whole picture of Vietnam. A riverine boat
captain says, "Vietnam is this." No, that's what Vietnam was for him, that's his sliver. A
grunt in the bush in the Central Highlands is one sliver. Now, you take all that, the war
from 62-66 was a different war or 68 than the war from 68 to 72. Back with the Blues in
the Central Highlands, an Army unit, those guys kicked tail and took names. I know
you've heard of that expression before. Basically, it means to wipe a unit out where it no
longer exists and take their name away from them. Well, the Highland Blues were
awesome, guys who fought their first tours, the Blues, who were just beating up people
wherever they went, came back after 68 and it was a different story altogether. It's a
number or different wars, by a big global view. A cook in the Ia Drang Valley in the Iron
Triangle, a radio operator on Hamburger Hill, a Marine at Khe Sanh, each could do an
interview with you and say this is Vietnam but in reality that is just Vietnam for him.
Vietnam is this huge kaleidoscope of things. I think we just didn't fight it correctly. I still
believe it was right. I can tell you some other time, my last day in Vietnam as I was
getting ready to get in a jeep, and I stood on Highway 1 looking toward the north what I
was thinking one time. But anyway, go ahead.

MT: He had a question. (can hear unknown person in background.)

Unknown Person: I was going to get your general impression. Was there a lot of
corruption in the South Vietnamese government and did you believe you were fighting
for an appropriate cause with that corruption or did you question it at that time?

PK: Yea, I questioned it a lot. As you know probably by doing some studying and
reading, the average American soldier or officer had little or no respect for the
Vietnamese Army, ARVN. It had great respect for the Vietnamese Marine Corps. I can't
think of the name of the unit, but back in 1975, when the North came down in the South,
there was a Ranger battalion of South Vietnamese which almost died to a man and took
the North Vietnamese a number of days to get through to those people, some excellent
individual units. But, by and large, I wouldn't give you a nickel for an ARVN soldier.
They had the ascots and jungle boots and the shiny M-16's but they didn't want to fight. A
lot of people say that Vietnam was a revolution, that it was uniting a common people.
But, I don't agree with that. The people of the South and the people of the North are two
different kinds of people. It's always been that way in their culture. They were only united
by French colonialism. Now, I will say this. I believe our support of the French after the
Geneva Convention after World War II, was wrong. To support colonialism back there,
we shot ourselves in the foot and shot every guy on the wall in Washington DC in the
back, in my opinion, by doing that. They had fought against the Japanese and all of a
sudden war is over, they got their independence and Mi Ni Hoauc who was know as Ho
Chi Minh, people like that. All of a sudden, we put the French back in and colonialism
starts and there is no reason why they reason why they wouldn't hate us, because we
betrayed them. But, that was our ally, you know, DeGaulle and all that kind of garbage.
But, somehow in all this, as we did all this sort of thing, we missed the boat. Rephrase
that question again. I want to make sure that I get the right answer.

UP: I was trying to get your general impression of the South Vietnamese
government and if it was evident if they were corrupt or was it maybe they were kind of
giving a bad light of them?
PK: I think it’s a little of both. There was some bad press. There were excellent Army units and the Vietnamese Air Force did some wonderful stuff. You know, when the brothers were both killed, Madam Ngo's husband and his brother were killed and it says Kennedy was distraught when it happened. I'm not convinced Kennedy wasn't in on it when he allowed that coup. There's military coup after military coup, and they're found murdered in the back of an APC, and we didn't know about it? Either we were very stupid or we wanted to get rid of him. The whole thing with the Buddhists and this and that and our image and we were so worried what the world was thinking that we forgot we were fighting a war. We're funneling American soldiers in here and the South Vietnamese also. One of the difficulties is there is a whole different thing on hubris and pride between the American and them. To see, for example, a helicopter land in a bunch of villages. And these little kids, I'm talking about in the bush not in the cities, but out in the bush and see little kids and women terrified, out comes a guy six foot four, flight suit and helmet and visor down, carrying a M-60 on his hip. He takes his helmet off and his skin is black with big white teeth and a low voice. They didn't know what this guy was, he is a monster. There have been instances where in different areas where we ran into a lot of problems. The Marine Corps had less problems because we learned how to work with the people real well. But, if you're in an area and working with a Vietnamese unit, and you're a captain and he's a captain, they continually worry about losing face. Because you've been trained, we need to go over here, we need to be over here, call in some artillery support, get a Medevac and the captain says, "No I'm in charge, it's my country." This liaison, some people worked very well with it, the Green Berets worked excellent with it. The Marine Corps and their pacification program worked well with it. We would go into a village with what we called stars and Bars bring the Marine Corps Band, bring doctors in, bring in all this kind of stuff. We worked on getting the hearts and minds of the people, that was a big thing, the hearts and minds of the people. There were other times where we didn't do that. But, the South Vietnamese government was corrupt in my opinion. But, there were some good people in it too. Ironically, in Dallas I have some friends who own a restaurant who are Vietnamese. I have some friends here who are Vietnamese, and a friend of mine here is a doctor, Dr. Nguyen. He said at dinner this last spring, remember the guy in Saigon who was the Chief of Police who put the gun to the guy's head and shot
him? He lives in Dallas, the guy who did it. We sat at the table with Nguyen Cao Ky who
was the Air Force general who later became president of the country and my friend sat
between him and that guy. The whole table was all Vietnamese seen on TV who live in
America now. Those guys are good at what they did. People don't realize that the guy
who shot that man in the street. That guy was head of that sapper team that assassinated
half this guy's family. There was a misunderstanding between the Vietnamese and the
Americans. When he did that, his assumption was that the Americans would gripe about
getting these guys out of here and cleaning them up. I've got one of them and I'll show the
Americans our intent to fight, so he blows his brains out. What happens in America? Oh,
how can you do this, it's cruel and unusual punishment. And on TV, here is Mildred
Smith eating her casserole, her TV dinner, and all of a sudden this guy's brains fly out of
the hole and blood starts spurting everywhere and she starts tossing her cookies and her
lunch and her dinner. How can they do this? I think there were good ones and bad ones.
Overall, there was no stable government from week to week and a lot of guys were
getting rich. The warlord concept is very big in Asia, so they were getting rich. Whereas,
the North Vietnamese were very dedicated. Nobody has anything. We're going to go
down there and do it. I know one time I came home and from February I quit flying
helicopters and flew C-117's, old DC-3 Dakotas modified as a flare ship. So I flew up
north to rescue downed Air Force pilots. I came home, I lived in the old French fort in
Da Nang Airbase. In my hooch, my mamason was huddled in the middle of the floor and
she was crying and I walked in there and I had on my flight suit, my shoulder holster and
my .45. You carried a gun everywhere, it was like a tool, it wasn't like a macho thing. It
was like carrying a screwdriver or your wallet. I walked in the room and she didn't speak
much English. I said, "Mamason, get up, what's your problem?" She’s huddle. Whenever
I got her, her face was black and blue and her nose was bleeding. And I picked her up,
she didn't weigh but about fifty pounds, she was a little thing. Picked her up and put her
on my bed and I said, "What on Earth is happening here?" "No can talk, no can talk, nun
batin, nun batin," over and over again. "I said what is going on?" She said, "They beat
me, they beat me." I said, "Who? The Americans?" She said, "No, no, no, No Americans.
I can't talk. You must leave, dangerous." I walked out in the hallway and as I walked out
into the hallway, I saw a Vietnamese boy about 16 years old. This will kind of tell the
whole story about corruption. About 16-17 years old Vietnamese boy, pair of nice slacks,  
pair of loafers, no socks and kind of a Aloha shirt on. He had some papers in his hand.  
Another kid down at the end of the hall about 17 or 18. They saw me and they froze. I  
didn't even think to take my pistol out. I was so mad. I had Mamason at my side and said,  
"Are those the guys?" She said, "Yea. Nun batin." I pushed her back in my room and  
closed the door. And I told them freeze. They started to run down the long hallway. I  
yelled at the top of my lungs “I've got a couple of gooners,” I hate that word  because it's  
racist, that's what we called them zips or gooners. “ I’ve got gooners in the hallway.” The  
guy at the end of the hall throws open his door and comes out with his .45 and this time I  
pulled my .45 out. We locked and loaded on these guys, and they freeze. But, they froze  
right next to a doorway and zipped out the door. We were both standing there, Jesus.  
They got nabbed right outside the door by a couple of other guys who heard us yelling.  
Grabbed these guys and went back in and took a shower. Got my mamason cleaned up  
and sent her home. Got my jungle clothes on and walked out and my roommate came in  
and said you need to be out in the compound, the General is out there right now. Walked  
out and these two guys were handcuffed to a flagpole.  All the officers, all the troops who  
weren't on duty. Here was the Headquarters of Marine Corps Air of Vietnam. Three star  
general named Armstrong. The Chief of Staff, everybody was there. My boss calls me  
over, a colonel, Chief of Staff and says, "Did you see these guys beat up your  
Mamason?" I said, “Yea, yea, you'll get a full report tomorrow.” Gates open up, in comes  
two South Vietnamese tanks, two Deuce and a Half trucks and a jeep. In the jeep dressed  
up is this elite battalion of air cav, armor type guys, South Vietnamese Army, gold ascots  
I think with a pin on it of some kind. A little short guy gets out, a general. I'm standing  
there you know and they call everyone to attention. Up the flagpole comes the American  
flag, right next to it the Vietnamese flag, the Marine Corps flag and something else. He  
comes up, looks at the flagpole, spits on these guys, walks over to the  general and starts  
apologizing with his interpreter. These guys are both Viet Cong infiltrators. They were  
putting pamphlets and putting drugs in people's lockers to discredit officers and all this  
kind of jazz. Our general says hey we're sorry but what can we tell you? This guy asks for  
these two kids. Our General says, “What are you going to do to them? That's my  
problem.” Got this major standoff between my General, who's already called Washington
and already talked to the Pentagon and the Marine Corps, the Air Force and everyone and
his mother. “What are we going to do with this guy?” To make a long story short, he
says, “I want to make sure these guys get treated, this guy says they will be treated under
South Vietnamese law.” Well, come to find out, that one kid was that General's son. I
don't (know) if that's true or not but that's what came out later. Our General says, “OK,
take them.” They pull up the Deuce and a Half to the flagpole, it's hotter than all blazes
out there, 95 degrees and the humidity’s real high. They untie these kids and these are all
really tough elite Army types with spit shined boots and everything. They pick these kids
up and throw them back of the Deuce and a Half and their heads hit the back, oh man it
was sick. Beat them up inside this truck and drove off. They found their bodies in the
canal the next day, they were murdered. That General was sacked, kicked out. Half the
staff was fired and discredited. So, a lot of problems that way. This is a particular story of
something I saw. END OF TAPE. START REVIEWING AGAIN HERE.

UP: I have one more question. Where you involved in Tet? "Much has been
written about Tet and its strategic surprise.

PK: Tet was January 68 and February 68. I got there in summer of 70. I've read a
lot about and talked to a lot of people about it but wasn't there. My personal opinion was
that they knew for quite a while. They just didn't know what it was. They never
anticipated that the North Vietnamese would move into the country with what they
considered to be 25% of their forces. That all the locals would join them and make a
people's army and push them into the ocean. They also were not aware, interesting
enough, Saigon was caught completely by surprise. I mean there at the US embassy. It
was a big face losing thing. As far as the Vietnamese were concerned, it was terrible. The
Marine Corps recovered very quickly. The bloodiest fighting was in Hue Phu Bai and
securing Da Nang. But, I think the Marine Corps and different Army units and
intelligence units had been writing all along, let's get our act together, something coming
down. But in Washington, they wouldn't believe it. It did more damage from a morale
point of view than it ever did strategically. Strategically, it was the major victory for
American forces in Vietnam. All the books say so nowadays.
MT: I guess the final question here is what effect do you think Vietnam had on both the country from the end of Vietnam to now and also maybe in possible relation to the United States policy toward Central America?

PK: Oh yea, We had never been in a situation like that. I served two tours in Vietnam. I was on the team that went to North Vietnam in ‘73 to bring the POW's out of Hanoi. I was on the [?] took helicopters and stuff. The reason why I went back on that mission, I came back to the States as a flight instructor. I couldn't stand living back in the States. I never got spit on, but I got treated very rudely. I got off the airplane in 1971, June. It was raining at Travis Air Force Base. It was pouring rain. I was the only officer on board, it was myself and 120 enlisted men. The sign says, "Welcome home soldier, America is proud," was broken and banging against this window of this building. Two jerks that were Sergeants were there to receive, get them in a room, these guys were all wet, no umbrellas, nothing, had to walk 50 yards off a airplane in the rain. Supposed to be in their uniforms, that is all they had. Were told they couldn't go out into the street unless they cleaned up, that was a joke. Sat there in the front seat of this thing, wet myself. It was Army and Marines, they had all their orders. These two guys were smoking cigarettes leaning against the wall and finally I walked over to them, I was a Lieutenant at the time and I said, "What time does this show go on the road?" He said that we don't go except on the hour, it's 20 minutes to go. I said do it now. I was angry. I think I would have beat the garbage out of them and gone to jail for it. I said, “Get your behinds up there.” That’s exactly what I said. “Get this thing going.” “We'll talk to our officer and get a Second Lieutenant.” I said, "Listen jerkweed, get up there," then went up there and got this Captain, who outranked me and said, "Who do you think you are?" I said, “I've got 130 men here,” and none of these guys that were doing this were Vietnam Veterans. You could tell by the ribbons they wore. They didn't even have their highway ribbon, International Defense Ribbon. This really made me mad. I said, “These men are waiting, if I have to go call someone in Washington, I'll do it, let's get going.” Then the whole attitude of cab drivers is this big shot coming to America. I got in an airplane one time and was in uniform and some drunk was on board and gave me a bunch of flak. He started mouthing off to the stewardess, so I reached over and grabbed him by his tie and pulled the back part of his tie and pulled as tight as I could get it. I said, "If you don't shut
your face, I'll shut it for you." I carry this anger around. Went home and my family, today
if you talk to them, everything we could do wrong to a returning vet, we did. Forget about
the war, I'm sitting there in my first night home and I've got a cut in my hand that I got in
a helicopter door, it wasn't even healed yet. I still had sunburn and some skin problems
from Vietnam. Still had, in the shower, you know it takes some time to get that red dust
off you. To me, Vietnam was right there behind my shoulder, it was my family that
wasn't. The American people just despised the soldier so bad and the war. Girls wouldn't
go out with me because your hair was short and you killed people, especially if you were
a Vet, especially if you were a volunteer. It was just to be in America. I haven't seen the
movie "Born on the Fourth of July." I can watch Vietnam movies, I thought "Platoon"
was great. But I can't stand to watch a protest movie without getting mad. I hate to hear
people say bad things about my friends who died an all this kind of jazz. I believe that
the War Powers Act to me is unconstitutional. But because the power of Vietnam is so
strong, they won't repeal that. I think our government is deathly afraid to get back
involved in something like that. That is why I think the thing in Panama was good. It
shows you can do it right. It was right. Get in there. To do a night airborne assault and it
come to that, for anybody who's had military experience it's awesome, awesome thing. To
lose a few casualties, it's awesome. That was clean. Of course, all those folks were all
elite, 82nd Airborne, 101st Airborne, Marine Recon, Special Forces, it was all top people.
They knew what they were doing. But America has gotten snake bit by this thing, and it
temper everything we do. You know what I mean [?] in Vietnam. I never saw too many
Congressmen's sons or Senator's sons in Vietnam. Lieutenant, uh Captain Robb, who was
Lyndon Johnson's son-in-law, was in Vietnam when I was there. So I never saw, I never
knew any Congressmen's sons, any rich guys’ sons in Vietnam. They weren’t there. But
those were the guys who were all the time griping back in the States about it. So I think
we, they're so deathly afraid of our national image we lost the war in Vietnam. But what's
happened is the Vietnam Wall being built, in fact I met the fellow who was responsible
for it, Jan Scruggs. He was here and he autographed this book I got, The Wall, and Jan
autographed it, "Many thanks to a fellow Vet." They walked up to a table, Vets know
Vets. I walked up, you can tell who is trying to me. I said, Jan, Pat King. I said I was
with the Marines in so and so and so and so. We talked for about an hour just about life
and things in general. That was a powerful thing. We finally after all those years, when Veterans went into hiding. A whole bunch of Vietnam Veterans groups tried to get together in the 70's and 80's, but it never worked because there was no common acceptance like the Legion and all that, the Legion didn't want you. Because of the fact of the World War II and Korean guys were winners and you are losers. Well now, all the history has come out and all this writing and all this stuff is happening, and all of a sudden it's dawned on people, hey these guys were good at what they did. They did what their country asked them to do. There is a separation between what these guys did and what happened. That's been amazing. Now there are only two or three Vietnam Vets groups that are strong. The strongest are the aviation groups, they're very strong, I don't know why. The government, I believe, has never known how to handle the situation. How can you lose something? If you look at all these videos and things, a lot of these guys were Secretary of Defense and Ambassadors, have tried somehow to separate their involvement with what happened. Somebody messed up, it's obvious that Lyndon Johnson wasn't a very strong guy. As much as I thought Richard Nixon was kind of a crook in some things, General Giap said they were terrified when Nixon took over as President, justifiably so. When I got to North Vietnam, in the spring of 1973 in February '73, and went to Haiphong Harbor, I tell you a little secret I don't think many people know about. When we went there with the ships, the head of the minesweeping detachment was a guy named Art Buker who was the captain of the Pueblo. Remember, they got captured by the Koreans and there was a big scandal. One night in the officer's club in Subic Bay in the Philippines, there is a big officer's club, there is a small officer's club for the single guys and it was rowdy, I mean we're talking rowdy. My roommate, Pete Ferris said that I want you to meet somebody standing over by the bar having a drink he says, "This is Art Buker." He said, "This is my roommate, Pat King," and another friend from the ship, Randy. We sat there and drank and played pool, I got to Art Buker pretty well, terrific guy. We went into Haiphong harbor in February and Art Buker led the squadron of three minesweepers to clear a path for our carrier. And Art went in there and we got it all clear and the Navy jerked him off and kicked him out of the Navy and put another guy in there and the headlines said the other guy's name. That's typical of the military. Art Buker was embarrassed, you see, he was a loser. He did everything he was
supposed to do, but he didn't sink a ship or die with his ship which is Navy tradition. A lot of guys didn't do that, but Art embarrassed America. The American forces embarrassed America supposedly. That was the big excuse. All they were was a bunch of dopers. These guys were guys like me and you. I didn't smoke dope in Vietnam. I drank a lot but that doesn't make me better than anybody else. But they were just guys like your Dad, my Dad, me, you, people in the street, people you know at Tech, your professors, average guys doing a very strange thing called war and combat. All the movies where the guys were kind of wierd and freaking out, I had a crew chief who was like that. I took him almost at gunpoint out of my helicopter. I got out of the helicopter and took his gun out of his hand. My crew chief took his pistol out and held it on him, the guy was strung out on drugs. I got him kicked out; he was gone. We can't have guys like that. For most guys it was just nine to five, just gutting it out. Combat is not just getting shot at one time and surviving, combat is doing day after day, just doing it and trying to keep from losing your mind. I think the American people saw in themselves what Shakespeare wrote, they saw the animal underneath. How you can train men, your next door neighbor, Billy, shoots an eight year old kid in the head, blows his head clean off his shoulders on national TV. The kid had C-4 strapped around his waist and was going to blow up something. They used to take crushed fiberglass and put it in Coke bottles and guys would drink it, get a hemorrhage and die. Someone comes running out of a hooch, what do you do? It isn't like a line with all the Germans lined up with tanks, you don't know who it is. I've killed women and children. I will say this, Lieutenant Calley (referring to My Lai) by and large most soldiers I knew at the time did not condone what Calley did, line up a bunch of kids and women and shoot them in a ditch was wrong. But to be firing on a village, it's a mute point. There is a village, a big fire fight going on, you go in and you blow it up with one bomb, you kill women and children, is there a difference? Yea.

One thing I ought to comment about is when Jane Fonda went to North Vietnam I was in Vietnam when she did that. And that picture came out with her in that gun thing, there were guys who were volunteering to take their gunship and go get her. I knew guys who would fly to Hanoi in a Huey gunship and hose Jane. To this day, I will not watch her in a movie, I don't care about her exercise videos and I think she is a waste and I think she is a traitor. She made a big apology last year to apologize to the soldiers. The guys said Jane,
you're a jerk. Not saying that Jane is a jerk, two different points of view, but I believe that
the American people because of their fear and disgust and their dread of what they saw in
themselves, sold a whole generation of men. One thing about Vietnam that was different
than World War II was that the average age in World War II was 27, Korea like 23 or 24
and Vietnam, 18, 17, 18, 19. It's different seeing all that at that age. But, I think, what
happened down in Central America, we're so afraid of committing ourselves. George
Bush did us a favor with the Panama thing. We can do it, and nobody in America
sweating it, even the liberals aren't sweating it. This Nicaragua thing, everyone knows
Noriega is a crook, but it's kind of "in" to still have that liberal image. So I guess that's
how I'd answer that question, I guess.

MT: I guess that's about all the questions I have. I appreciate you doing this for
us.