Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I’m conducting an oral history interview with John R. ‘Ron’ Milam. Today is June 27, 2005. It’s approximately 1:41 pm Central Standard time, and Ron and I are in the Special Collections Library Building on the campus of Texas Tech University, and we’re conducting an interview for the Vietnam Archive’s Oral History Project. Ron, why don’t we start with some biographical data on yourself? Could you tell me when you were born and where you are from?

Ron Milam: I was born November 5, 1945. I was born in San Diego, California, to a—my father was an ensign in the Navy, was born at North Island Hospital in Carnada.

RV: Ron, I forgot when we asked you—I need to do the disclaimer that we discussed at length before the interview. By doing this interview, you are consenting to release this interview to the Vietnam Archive, as a donation, as you would a collection or material object, and that we will have this interview in our possession to make available to the public for research, whatever methods. The interview will be in transcript and audio form; it will be here in the archive on CD or future medium, whatever that might be. And will then also be made available to the public via the Internet, on the virtual Vietnam archive. Do you consent to this interview and to the release of the information to the public?

RM: Yes, I do.

RV: And with the caveat that at some point in the future, you feel like you need to withdraw the interview, in time, we as the archive will agree to do so at your wishes. So
continuing, born in San Diego 1945, right there on the west coast after the war’s over, tell me about your parents.

RM: My father was in the Navy. He was an officer; he was a supply officer, and he had been in, I believe he’d been for about a year and a half before the war ended. And so yes, I was born just a few—couple of months after the fall of Japan.

RV: What about your mother?

RM: My mother was a housewife, and I had an older sister that was born right before me, so she was living out there. And as I recall, the course of these stories have been told to me since after, as I was growing up, but my father was on the part of the planned invasion of Japan that never happened, thank goodness. And then he got out of the Navy immediately after the war was over. But I was, I guess I was a Navy brat for six months or so.

RV: So you had one older sister?

RM: One older sister, and then I had a brother born later on, six—who is, my brother is six years younger than I am.

RV: What are their names?

RM: My sister is Judy Karr, K-A-R-R.

RV: Is that J-U-D-Y?

RM: Yes, and my brother is Mike Milam.

RV: Tell me, how would you describe your father? What do you remember about your dad?

RM: My father was—I always remember my father as being a real patriot, very much a supporter of the United States, of our country, and most of our foreign policy efforts. Growing up, we lived out here, not too far from here in Oklahoma, and he was in the oil and gas business. He worked his way up from being at the very lowest levels of the company, all the way up to retiring as a vice president. So he sort of started out as a blue collar worker, although he was a college graduate, first one in our family, and then he worked his way up and retired as an officer of the company. He was second-generation oil and gas person, and I was the third.

RV: How about your mother, what was she like? How do you remember her?
RM: My mom was a very loving mother. I think I would describe her as being a kind of, you might say a typical mother of the ‘50s. That’s my memory as a child. She didn’t work in the business world, but she sure worked at home. When you think back on it now, she worked as hard as most women who later on in life would have jobs. But she was the mother of three children, and she stayed at home, and she took care of the house, and she looked after all the things that were important to us as kids.

RV: How long were you all in San Diego?

RM: Just for, I believe six months, until the war ended. Well, the war had already ended, but I was born in November, and I think we were just there for a couple of more months.

RV: And where did you all move to?

RM: We moved then, I believe we moved to Chicago. My father began a career in the oil and gas business, and I think we moved up to Chicago, and then he had a series of moves. I say he was in the oil and gas business; he was in the natural gas business, and he was involved in a pipeline business- the Natural Gas Pipeline Company of America, and it started out here in Oklahoma and in west Texas and went to Chicago. So we went to Chicago first, and then we moved from Chicago to out to here. And then about every three years or so, we would move north to a different location on the pipeline. So I moved a lot when I was a kid.

RV: What do you remember about all those moves, was that typical for you?

RM: Well, I always thought my dad was being promoted in all those moves; I’m not sure he was. They seemed like they were promotions, but we were moving to different locations. I remember none of it ever bothered me; it was exciting to move to a different place. Living in western Oklahoma as a child, I kind of grew up in the—with the Cowboys and Indians concepts, and I enjoyed all of that. And then as we would move more further north, whatever we did, we just did. I don’t remember it really bothering me; it was just part of growing up.

RV: How about your brother and sister?

RM: I think it bothered my old sister a lot because maybe she was older, maybe because she was a girl it was harder for her to make the adjustments. At least, I remember my parents saying it was harder for her. Maybe I didn’t notice it as much as
they did, but I remember hearing those things, and my brother was so young that I don’t think it made much difference. But I think it probably made me value friendships because you knew you may have them for a short period of time, and then they’d be gone when you move. But it seems like I knew that we were always going to move again. I don’t remember thinking, ‘Well this is it, we’ll stay here forever,’ at least up until I was a teenager.

RV: Describe how you were as a young boy. How would you describe yourself? This is pre-high school, pre-junior high, what were you like?

RM: Well, I remember liking to do adventurous things, and I think my parents have told me since then that I was always involved in active things—riding my bike and playing soldier, and doing all the things that young boys do. It was a pre-television time; we didn’t have a television set until I was 10 or 11 years old, so I didn’t know what the rest of the world was doing in terms of entertainment and those kinds of things. But I remember living out here in western Oklahoma, the big thing was playing soldier and playing Cowboys and Indians. Did that a lot as a child.

RV: Were you a reader? Did you like to read?

RM: I liked to read, but I don’t have great memories of reading. I think it was just sort of a natural thing. I’m sure I did, and I can remember the things that I read were always adventurous things. I still have some of those books that my parents bought me, about Custer and about Davy Crockett, and this was Davy Crockett even before there was a Walt Disney Davy Crockett, and Amelia Earhart. Everything that I liked to read was always about somebody that had done something that was adventurous.

RV: What about sports, were you—you mentioned the Cowboys and Indians thing, but what about more organized sports?

RM: There was—I don’t remember being real interested in spectator sports because living out in western Oklahoma, we had a football team that played six man. We didn’t watch television. I remember listening to the fights on the radio with my father. But I don’t—and I remember going to rodeos as a young child—but I don’t remember—and I played baseball—but that was about it because there really wasn’t the era of spectators sports for football and basketball and baseball, that didn’t come later for me, until I was almost a teenager because we didn’t live where we had televisions. So, but I
did participate, I even remember being in track meets and things like that, up until I was
in—before we moved back up north. But I always liked sports, but as a very young child,
it was more a matter of adventurous kinds of things, I think.

RV: Well as you grew older, tell me about how you developed. What kind of
student were you, how much did you like school, sports, socialing, things like that?

RM: I remember in elementary school, there was—I remember getting really
good grades for personality issues and things like that. I don’t remember getting
anything above average grades when it came to scholastic matters. We were graded on
effort, and I remember they always said I tried hard, or sometimes they said I could do
better. But I always got the good grades on, not necessarily on achievement, but on
participation, and I don’t want to say I was the class clown exactly, but I was the kind of
person that people did like to be around. And I remember liking school; I remember
liking going to school. I don’t ever remember thinking, ‘Gee, I wish summer would
come, so I didn’t have to do this anymore,’ but I don’t remember particularly liking being
there because of the things I was learning, as much as just being there with my friends
and doing school kind of things. That was more important than the actual scholastic
achievement.

RV: And getting into junior high school and high school, were you still moving
every few years, or—

RM: We moved—until I was 12 years old, we moved about every three years. By
the time I got to be 12, we moved to Michigan, and I didn’t know it at the time that we
would be there for the rest of my life pretty much, but I did—but we were. We didn’t
make another move after that.

RV: And so you were able to basically go through junior high school, high school
in one locale?

RM: Yes.

RV: Where in Michigan?

RM: We moved to a town called Dearborn, Michigan- home of the Ford Motor
Company. We moved there when I was, I believe starting the 6th or 7th grade, and then
we stayed there through my, well actually, I stayed there through high school and went to
college in Michigan. Same area.
RV: What kind of student were you in junior high and high school?
RM: I wasn’t a great student; I was an average student. I was an average student in terms of my grades, but I, again, I participated in everything. By that time, I had become an athlete. I participated in cross-country, track, tennis. I was president of my 10th grade class, I was on the student council, I sang in the choirs- the Men’s League Club, the Concert Choir. I was in the school plays. If you could do it, I did it. My grades were—I was a B student, I guess. But I don’t recall that I was particularly—I wasn’t a great student by any stretch.

RV: What was your favorite subject? And your least favorite subject?
RM: My favorite subject was called Civics. Now we call it government or political science. But it was about politics. If it was about politics, I was interested. History was never interesting to me because I don’t recall ever having a good history teacher in high school, someone that really made me interested. But I had good government and civics teachers, so I was getting my interest in history through political science.

RV: Why so much interest in politics?
RM: I don’t know for sure, but I think my father was always a very active political person. He was always, not so much being in politics, but we talked about it all the time at home. When the conventions were on, before they were on television, we listened to them on the radio, and then when they were on television from 1960 on, I never missed a political convention, and I watched all of all of the political conventions- Republican and Democrat. Was very interested in that.

RV: How about your brother and sister, were they the same?
RM: No, they weren’t interested in either one of those things that I recall. I was a little bit different than they were.

RV: Was this a bonding thing between you and your dad?
RM: I think so. It still is; we still talk politics all the time.

RV: Sounds like great warm memories of sitting by the radio or watching the television, watching the speeches.
RM: It was, it was. We always watched speeches, and we would talk about them.

It was very much a part of our life, of the political world.
RV: Do you want to talk about where your father and your family stood on the political spectrum? Were you all more Democrat or Republican? I mean, of course, it’s changed a bit since then as far as how we see Democrats or Republicans, or how the world does.

RM: My father was a very strong Republican. My father was—my father believed—was not even very much a supporter of Franklin Roosevelt. I remember him, he was from Kansas, and I think he voted for Alf Landon. Maybe the only one outside of Kansas.

RV: (laughs) I see.

RM: (laughs) My father was very much an individualist, a rugged individualist, somebody who believed in entrepreneurial spirit. He was never one to believe that it was important in life that you form organizations to take on the establishment; that wasn’t something he was about. He was about forming—about personal responsibility, he was about accepting responsibility for your mistakes in life and going on with them, not blaming others for things that you should have figured out on your own. And I think he saw some of the change in the New Deal, when the New Deal came in in ’32. I think he saw some of that as trying to have government take over the responsibilities of the individuals. And so I think he, to a certain extent, I think he rejected some of that, although I think he had respect for the president of the United States as his commander-in-chief when he was in the service. But I think that was different than what he saw the President Roosevelt being in so far as his role in domestic policy. So I guess you could say I was raised in a, somewhat of a Republican household. On the other hand, my father had great respect for the office of the president, and even if he didn’t vote for that person, he respected them for the role they were in. He also would be very upset if somebody violated the trust American people had put in that person, and I think he was critical, for example, was critical in some ways of some of the President Johnson’s role in Vietnam. He was very critical of Nixon’s role in Watergate, even though it was a different party, and I think he could find—anyone he’s ever been critical of, it would be because of the way they perceive their role in that job. On the other hand, he was never—I would never classify my father as a right wing conservative because he was very critical of a lot of the things that presidents did, who were considered right wingers. He was not an extremist
in any sense of the word. Very respectful of people’s rights, people’s civil liberties and
all those kinds of things, but basically he believed in the independence of the American
person, American people, and their desire to do things that were—and do them on their
own and not necessarily need organizations to help them, not a joiner in that sense of
believing that the answer to America’s problems is through labor unions and those kinds
of things.

RV: Right, right. What about your mother, was she into politics like this?

RM: I don’t remember my mother ever taking an active role in discussions about
political matters. I remember her being supportive of our ideas and things but not
actively engaging in a lot of those discussions. She was a very loving mother who helped
us with anything that we needed, but I don’t remember her taking those kinds of active
roles in those kinds of discussions. But I come from a family where my father talked a
lot, and you can see I do too, so it was hard for my mother to get a word in edgewise.

RV: Did you all talk as a family about these issues, or not?

RM: Yes, we did. We actually ate dinner together; we ate supper together and
talked about political matters. Usually we would start dinner with listening to the news
on the radio, and then we would all have comments about those things.

RV: That’s neat. Tell me about you in high school, as far as—you did participate
in sports and continued to do this?

RM: Yes.

RV: Did you see value in—and obviously, I mean it was fun for you, but did you
see some value in team sports and going that route with a lot of your focus?

RM: Yes, I enjoyed—I could say I participated. I was on the cross country team
and the tennis team, those were my two varsity sports, and those were both individual
sports. I wasn’t big enough to play football, and I played baseball, but not on the high
school teams. But I did enjoy tennis, and I did enjoy running, so those were considered
individuals things.

RV: Do you still play tennis or run?

RM: I still jog and run, yes, after all my life pretty much. I don’t play as much
tennis as I should. And I began to play golf in those days, and I still play golf, but I never
played on the golf team.
RV: Okay. What was your least favorite subject? You mentioned history; you weren’t really enthralled by because you lacked a good teacher, but were there subjects that you just really did not want to deal with?

RM: I was not real fond of math, and I wasn’t real fond of physics. I liked biology, I believe. But I liked the social sciences; I like sociology and psychology. Those were just subjects that were just starting to be taught in the high school level, back in the ‘60s, early ‘60s. And so I really enjoyed those kinds of subjects because they dealt with people. I was much more involved in the people aspect of educations than I was the thing aspect of education, being the maths and the sciences. I tolerated those kinds of things, but I didn’t enjoy them very much.

RV: How were your parents, concerning your education? Were they encouraging you to go to school, do your homework? Were they kind of focused on that for you and your sister and your brother, or was it something that was really left up to the kids?

RM: I think in my family—my father was a college graduate, he graduated from University of Kansas in 1936, and my mother graduated from a community college a couple years before that- Butler County Community College in Kansas. And that was unusual, to have parents that had both gone to college, so we were always—it was just always understood that all of us would go to college.

RV: Was that a problem?

RM: No, no, I think I just bought into that and said, ‘Yeah, I knew this is what I would do.’ The particular high school that I went to was a middle class high school, but it was a lot, I would say not even 50% of my high school class would go on to college. A lot of them would go on to work in the plant, in the Ford Motor Company plants there in Dearborn, but I understood that it was my job and my role in life to go to college. No question about it. And it was always reinforced that that would be what my destiny would be.

RV: How were you socially in high school? How would you describe yourself?

RM: I was involved in, as I said, I was involved in school government. I was president of my class, I was on student council, I was on every committee to do anything. I was very active socially.

RV: Did you see politics as a future profession for you?
RM: Yes.

RV: What did you have in mind?

RM: I didn’t know for sure, but I knew I’d run for something, and I ended up doing that.

RV: How would you describe Dearborn? What do you remember about Dearborn?

RM: I remember Dearborn as being a very… Ford Motor Company town. It was a one-horse town in that sense. My dad didn’t work for them, but my wife—my girlfriend, my future wife’s father did, and most everyone I knew’s dad worked for the Ford Motor Company. It was a town of a lot of Middle Easterners, Lebanese as we called them then, but they may have been from anywhere in the Middle East, were there working in the Ford Plant. It was a very white town, very segregated town, and I don’t even know if that’s the right word—segregated because there were no African Americans that lived in the town, and it was kind of known for that. It had a mayor who was very famous for trying to make sure that Dearborn, Michigan stayed white. I don’t remember that being a big issue because we—our football team and our basketball team and that sort of thing, all played sports against schools that were either integrated or that were totally segregated the other way, that were all black. We participated in a league of that sort of thing, but I do remember that it was a very white town. Now, as I’ve rubbed shoulders with other people that grew up in other parts of the country, that’s not as unusual as at the time that I thought it might be. There was a lot of segregated towns in America in the ‘60s. But I do remember that we had an all-white school.

RV: What years were you there in high school?

RM: I went to high school from 1960 and graduated in 1963.

RV: Okay. Was there any kind of resentment, or was Ford Motor Company looked upon as a really good thing because it was the economy of the state?

RM: It was looked upon as a very good thing. We had the best school system in the state of Michigan, and it was because the Ford Motor Company paid so much money and property taxes that our property tax burden was low. The Ford Motor Company donated land for the parks and recreation programs; they donated for the swimming
pools. It was a great place to grow up because the Ford Motor Company was so active in
making sure that its employees had a good place to live.

RV: Do you drive a Ford today, Ron?
RM: Yes, I do, as a matter of fact, and pretty much have been a Ford Motor
Company person, even though my wife ended up working for General Motors. But I
think there’s something that stayed with her even, and yes, we do. We do drive Fords. In
fact, at times we’ve driven two Fords.

RV: That was a bit tongue-in-cheek to say, but I had to ask.
RM: No, absolutely.

RV: Well, so you met Maxine there, in Dearborn, in high school?
RM: Yes, she was captain of the cheerleading squad, and I was an athlete, and she
was a year ahead of me in school. But yes, we started dating when we were—I guess I
was 14, and she was 15, and we’ve dated ever since.

RV: Wow, that’s incredible.
RM: It is.

RV: That’s really incredible.
RM: It really is.

RV: So how long until you guys knew that you were going to be married? Is this
something that was right out of high school or was this—
RM: It was during high school—
RV: And you do not have to talk about this Ron. I know this is personal, but I
wanted—
RM: No, it’s important in some ways because she’s been a part of life for my
entire life. I would say that probably by the time we were 15 years old we thought we’d
get married someday. We got married when I was 20, but I think probably by the time
we were on the second or third date, we pretty much knew that that was going to be it.
It’s hard to explain, but that’s the way we felt.

RV: No, if that’s the way you felt, that’s the way you felt. Period. Doesn’t matter
for anyone else. Now tell me about your family, how did they see Maxine and you know,
such a serious relationship at your age.
RM: My family always loved her. They thought that from day one, they liked her, and probably thought that I could never do any better. My dad used to say, ‘if you guys decide to get a divorce, I’m on her side.’

RV: (laughs)

RM: And that pretty much told me the way he felt about her. We were inseparable from the time we were 15 years old, and both sides knew that. I’m not sure, I’m not sure that it was quite the same way on her side of the family; there may have been a little bit of class distinction there that was difficult to get around because her father was a blue collar, tool and die worker, and my dad was an executive in his business by that time. We had a little bigger home, little bigger home than they did, so there may have been a little class problem there, but later on I think that all went away.

RV: Well, moving through high school, a couple of general questions about your military service and your ideas and goal toward that. First going back with your dad: did you all discuss his World War II experiences? I imagine if you discussed politics, that had to play into the war period.

RM: Yes, I don’t remember too much about Korea because I would have been five to eight years old during the Korean War. I do remember someone from our little town—I was living Hooker, Oklahoma and then later in Mineola, Kansas, western part of Kansas and western part of Oklahoma—and I remember that someone that worked from my father’s—son or someone they knew or something being killed in Korea, and I just, I sort of remember that and people talking about it. But I don’t remember making any political feeling about it. I do remember asking my dad what he did in the war because I had a lot of friends whose fathers had served in World War II. And I had one particular friend, Leslie Blanchett I think his name was—I don’t know why that name sticks out in my mind—and his father had fought, had served in the army and had actually been involved in D-Day. And he would tell me these stories, and I can remember him—

RV: Your friend’s father would?

RM: Yes, my friend’s father had been in D-Day, and I remember him telling me these stories that his father had told him, and so I would go home and ask my father, ‘Well, did you do this too, dad?’ And my father said no, he didn’t do that; he was a supply officer. And I can remember in some way feeling disappointed in that because my
dad’s, my father hadn’t fought the way Leslie’s dad had fought. And I remember asking my dad one time about his—‘Well, you must have carried a gun, didn’t you?’ and him telling me, yes, he carried a gun, but he only carried a gun when he—on pay day because he was paying the sailors when he’d go onboard the ship. And that was somewhat disappointing to me. In subsequent years, I realized how important everyone’s role is in the military and that such a small percentage of service men, and now women, ever actually fight in wars. But at the time, as a six, seven year old kid, I thought everybody that served fought.

RV: Sure.

RM: And how could my dad not fight when Leslie’s dad had fought? That didn’t—I don’t want to say it bothered, but it always was a point of curiosity to me. But I do remember my father being very supportive of American efforts in whatever it was we were trying to do.

RV: What are you earliest memories of American foreign policy, kind of being conscious of what we were doing in the world, in the United States?

RM: I remember the election of 1952, and I was only 7 years old, but I remember Eisenhower’s having been elected, and I remember my father and mother being really happy about that. And I remember the, ‘Ike will solve the Korean War’ kind of talk around the household, as my parents were fans of his. And that’s probably the very earliest—and then through the ’50s, I don’t remember thinking much of—I wasn’t as involved and active in the interest of Eisenhower’s policies. That probably didn’t come until 1960, until the election between Kennedy and Nixon, and I was very actively involved in that. I say active—I paid attention, I watched the conventions, paid a lot of attention to the Democratic Party’s 1960 convention with Kennedy and Johnson. Watched every minute of that election, of that campaign, primaries, everything. So, that’s probably the first time I really got interested.

RV: Who did you support there in the ’60s when you were young?

RM: I was supporting Richard Nixon.

RV: Okay, did you see—

RM: My wife’s family was all supporting John F. Kennedy. Dearborn was a very—Dearborn was a very Democratic town because there were so many Ford workers
and the Ford Motor Company was very active in supporting him and the workers, that is because the Union affiliation and that sort of thing. And I think even to a certain extent, of course Robert McNamara ended up becoming the Secretary of Defense out of the Ford Motor Company, but I do, I remember, I remember that election very specifically, and I was on the Republican side of it.

RV: Do you remember anything about John Kennedy, uniqueness as a candidate, or did your mother talk about John Kennedy’s uniqueness as a candidate?

RM: No, I think there was a concern on the part of my family, and along with a lot of other families that were strong Protestant families, that we were about to have our first Catholic president. And I think that concerned people, and I don’t think my family was any exception to that, although I don’t remember them ever saying—I don’t remember them that bold in it, but I do remember that there were discussions about him being Catholic. I don’t think it was so much that; I think it was more along the lines that he was very young, and we’d never had a president quite that young, at least in all of our lifetime, and that he was just a senator and that Nixon had so much more experience, having been a vice president. I think there was also a kind of a feeling, in my family at least, that Kennedy was from that Kennedy family, and my dad knew a lot about Joe Kennedy and the way he’d earned his money and that sort of thing. And like I say, we were basically a Republican family, and this was a Democrat who—and there’s also I think something to be said that my family was very much a supporter of Dwight Eisenhower, and in the process of running, Kennedy had to be—was very critical of the Eisenhower administration, the missile gap, all those kinds of things that were going on in that early part of the Cold War, and that here’s this young sailor—young, he’d been an officer, but he was a young Navy man—that’s coming in saying all these bad things about Ike because if you’re saying those things about Ike, then you’re attacking Richard Nixon, who was Ike’s guy. So I think it was partly that, and I think as a, what was I? 16, 15, 16 years old at the time, I think I bought into my family’s position on that.

RV: How’d you feel when Kennedy won?

RM: In when?

RV: How did you feel when Kennedy won the election? And I’m saying in kind of quotations marks, ‘won the election’. 
RM: Yeah, yeah right, we still wonder about Illinois. I remember being very
disappointed, very disappointed in Kennedy winning because it just seemed to me that
he, because I had listened to my parents so much, that this really spelled doomed for the
country. I don’t remember why I thought it spelled doom, and I don’t remember thinking
anything about, you know, the nuclear issues or any of that, I think it was just in my 16
year old perspective at the moment, the American people had elected the wrong guy and
that all those successful things that Eisenhower had done were now going to go down the
drain.

RV: What was it like to be a child in the ‘50s? I mean you literally grew up there,
these formative young years in the 1950s, and as a historian yourself and me, who teach
about America in the ‘50s, it’s a unique time, as all times are. But there’s this kind of
 stereotype attached to the 1950s. How can you describe what your experience was?

RM: That’s interesting you ask because I’m teaching that very thing right now
and the Cold War. And I think that the ‘50s for me was a great time in the sense that
everything—there was new inventions, and we had this great new thing called rock ‘n’
roll music which I really loved. I was a big fan of Elvis Presley and all of those kinds of
things, and I believe late in the ‘50s, say the ’57, ’58, so I would have been in my early
teen days, 12, 13, 14, 15 years old, I remember really liking the rebellious nature of what
teens were becoming. I bought in completely to Elvis Presley’s ideas of long hair and
doing what you wanted to do and not what your parents told you. Oh, I thought that was
wonderful.

RV: And you thought then that Elvis was really projecting that, that he was
singing it, he was moving that, everything about his public persona was about this—
RM: Yes, yes, and I can remember great arguments in my family about whether
or not his lower hips should be banned from television, the way they were on Ed
Sullivan, my parents thinking it was wonderful and me thinking it was terrible.
RV: Your parents thinking it was wonderful that it was banned?
RM: Oh yeah, and me thinking that was just stupid, that was ridiculous, why
would they do that to this great man, this great singer? We had a lot of fights about Elvis
Presley; we had a lot of fights about rock ‘n’ roll music.

RV: Could you listen to it in your home?
RM: Yes, but it was kind of on our own time, and it was not where they could
hear it and that sort of thing. Elvis was—my sister liked him more than I did. She liked
him from a young teenager girl’s view point, but I just liked him because he represented
kind of a thumb-in-your-nose at the adults sort of thing. And I used to go to all those
rock ‘n’ roll movies where the young people were caught dancing and stuff; I thought
that was so cool. I loved every minute of that, and I think the rebellious ‘60s, which
followed, I was really kind of part of that in the sense of at least I was a supporter of the
ideas of rebellion, even though I didn’t support the specific causes always. I thought it
was really neat that we were kind of trying to take over the world ourselves, in saying
that the things our parents represented were all wrong and old-fashioned and that they
had that stupid Glenn Miller big band music and everything. And we didn’t like any of
that; we rejected all of that. We had our own kind of music, and they hated it, and that
was wonderful.
RV: Who else did you listen to, besides Elvis, what else—
RM: Oh, if it was rock ‘n’ roll, I listened to it. In the ‘50s, it was Elvis and Jerry
Lee Lewis and Conway Twitty, before he became a country singer, and Ritchie Valens
and the Big Bopper and Gene Vincent. It was great, it was great music.
RV: What about Little Richard, did you…
RM: Yes, yes, I did like Little Richard, but I don’t believe that we were exposed
to as much of Little Richard’s music as I would have liked to have been. In a few years,
we will be exposed big time to the Motown sound, and I really enjoyed that. But I think
Little Richard was having less success of getting his music on the mainstream rock ‘n’
roll stations because he was black. But I liked Little Richard, but I think that comes later
for me when it’s more acceptable than there in that beginning period when it really
wasn’t heard that much.
RV: Can you make any comments on what you saw—and you have a little bit
before already—about segregation? And you mentioned what you saw in high school
and Dearborn in general, but what about the 1950s, and of course ‘55 to ‘60 is really that
time when the American Civil Rights Movement starts to kind of kick in.
RM: I remember as a young teenager, I didn’t understand the whole issue of
segregation; I didn’t understand it. I didn’t understand why black people and white
people weren’t living in the same communities if they could both afford the same house. And I remember, generally speaking, hearing people say, ‘Well, if the black people move in, then the property values go down.’ And it made no sense to me because if the black person could afford the house, then why would the property value do a dive? If they had enough money, why would that be—I remember understanding class differences. I understood that you didn’t want somebody who couldn’t afford that house living in it because they would let the house go down, and that would bring the neighborhood down. But I don’t remember understanding why skin had anything to do with that, and I don’t remember being taught that. I just remember that was a curious thing to me. I remember also thinking that the movement—because Martin Luther King, his movement was really starting then, and I can remember now and then he would come to the northern part of the country, and he would say things like, ‘There’s as much segregation up here as there is in the south.’ And I hadn’t really—I’d lived in Oklahoma, but there were no black people in Oklahoma. I don’t remember that even being an issue, and then in my town of Detroit, Michigan, there wasn’t either, but yet on television, the things that I was seeing on television was that all the problems with black and white America were in Mississippi and Alabama and places like that, and yet I looked around in Detroit, Michigan, Dearborn, Michigan, and Detroit was black and Dearborn was white. And that always seemed to be strange to me that we as northerners, because by that time living up there, we were so critical of the south, and yet just look around, and we had just the same kind of segregation problems. Now, the south had voting problems and things like that that the north didn’t have, but I remember the issue of segregation itself being that we had, in a sense, de facto up there, and they didn’t have that in the south. But I remember I think it was a little bit of a double standard; I do remember thinking that.

RV: You were conscious of that?

RM: I was very conscious of it, yes. But I didn’t rub shoulders—I wasn’t in high school with black students. It wasn’t until I went to a university that I started experiencing going to school with black students.

RV: Tell me about that. You said both your parents were college educated and had been to that level of education, and you were expected to kind of follow through with that, that you felt comfortable with that. Tell me about the process of your senior year in
high school and kind of selecting where you were going to go. And with Maxine,
involved in that process.

RM: She had gone away to school herself. She was going to be a stewardess—
they called them stewardesses then, a flight attendant. She’d gone to school in Minnesota
during my senior year in high school. My parents were very much believers in the
community college system; they were both products of a very good junior college, or
community college as they called them, in Kansas, and Dearborn, Michigan had one of
the finest community colleges in America. It was called Henry Ford Community
College, and I believe that I understood almost from the time I was a junior in high
school, that I would go there. I don’t remember us ever having any discussions about me
maybe going to Michigan or Michigan State or any of the universities to start because my
parents firmly believed that you got maybe even a better education at a good community
college than you did at a large university, where you were one of thousands and
thousands, instead of one of hundreds, and you had classes of 25 instead of classes of
250. So I was—I don’t remember there ever being an issue. Now perhaps my grades are
the reason that it never was an issue because I was not a—I had a B average, I guess, and
I’m not sure whether that would have been able to get into the University of Michigan.
But I did know that if I went to Henry Ford Community College that I would do well
there, and I did. But it was just sort of understood that’s where I would go.

RV: So you were there ’63 to ’65?
RM: ’63 to ’65, yes, and I got an Associate’s degree from there, Associates of
Arts degree.

RV: Do you have any memories or anything that you want to comment upon your
two years there?
RM: It was a very solid two years; I think it really turned me onto educations. I
had great professors. I remember having political science professors that were just
incredible; they were lawyers, and they really understood. I remember being in Political
Science class the day that John F. Kennedy was assassinated and having that next week
become the focus, and I think that event probably turned me on to political science more
than other thing. From that moment on, even though I got a degree in Business
Administration, all, virtually all of my elective courses were always taken in political
science.

RV: Tell me about that day; I was going to ask you about that. What do you remember?

RM: I remember leaving my class and going out and getting in my friend’s car
and them saying that the president had been assassinated and then going home. It was
unbelievable. Even my parents, who were not Kennedy supporters were so bothered by it
because it was the first time it had happened in their lifetime. I remember the world
coming to a halt. I remember the NFL shutting down the games on Sunday—no, excuse
me, I remember them playing and the criticism associated with that. I remember it
happened on Friday afternoon and then Saturday, Sunday, and then the funeral was on
Monday, or maybe on Tuesday. But I remember being so impressed that all of the
leaders of the world came to that funeral, even the Soviet Union. I mean it was just
amazing. Charles de Gaulle standing there and Eisenhower, and everybody being there.
It was the first time that I’d seen the world come together that way, even after we had just
gone through the missile crisis and all that kind of stuff the year before. It’s very much a
vivid memory for me, and it was my freshman year of college.

RV: What kind of long-term impact do you think that had upon you? You said it
turned you on more and more—

RM: It turned me on to the issue of politics in the sense that I saw educators
dealing with the issue, and I thought to myself they would discuss the significance of it. I
didn’t take a lot of history classes in college because you had your choice, you could take
history, you could take political science within the frame of my program, and so I always
chose political science instead. But as a result, you have to have a historical background,
so I did a lot of reading in history. But it really turned me onto politics more so than I
had ever been before, watching this change of the guard, President Johnson coming in
and then all the issues associated with changes of policies and everything was very… I
became very much involved. In fact, that was November of ’63; it was in May then of
’64 when President Johnson announced the great society, and I went to hear him deliver
that address at the University of Michigan’s commencement.

RV: Did you really? Wow.
RM: Maxine’s sister was graduating, although she didn’t graduate that day. She
gave us her tickets and didn’t even go through the ceremony, but we were there. We sat
there and watched him deliver his Great Society address.

RV: What was that like, seeing Johnson in person? A democrat, for better or for
worse, there’s the president, and he’s announcing—

RM: I would say that by this time, I haven’t… I don’t want to say I’ve become a
Democrat, that’s too strong a word, but, because, I think, I’m in school, I’m probably
becoming more liberal in my thinking. I’m still living at home, through those days, but I
was much more a supporter—I started thinking that Kennedy had done some good things,
including the Cuban Missile Crisis, his handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis, I give him
credit for that, and I gave him credit for it at the time. And then watching his—I thought
he and Robert Kennedy both had the right idea in civil rights.

RV: Is this Ron today or Ron then?

RM: No, that’s Ron then, absolutely. I could feel myself changing in attitude, just
because I was paying attention, perhaps. I was a college student, tend to be more liberal
at the time, perhaps. Their approach to civil rights made sense to me; it really did, that
students were going down there and trying to solve problems, trying to help blacks get
registered to vote, some of them dying in the process. All of that I thought I was positive,
and so when Kennedy was assassinated and Johnson took over, I was very much a
supporter of President Johnson’s ideas. And I think in the ’64 election, I wasn’t old
enough to vote, but in the ’64 election, had I had a vote, I would have voted for Johnson.
And surprisingly, so did my father. I mean, he’s almost apologized to me, that he
believes that’s one of the mistakes he made in his life was voting for Johnson instead of
Goldwater.

RV: That’s interesting; I would not have guessed that.

RM: I know. He believed that Goldwater was some of those things that people
said he was, in terms of him being a warmonger, not just about Vietnam but about some
of his other positions. So my dad never was—he never bought into the conscious of the
conservative idea from the very beginning of him. My dad was also spending a lot of
time in Texas in those days, and Lyndon was from Texas, and I think he had had a chance
to meet governor Connolly. So I think he was kind of buying into, oh yeah, he’s a
Democrat, but that Democrat is more like some of the Republicans up north. It was a
different kind of a party, and of course ultimately, most of them became Republicans.
But at the time, he was supportive of him, and I think I probably was, too. I thought
Lyndon Johnson’s ideas on the Great Society, some of those were positive. I thought
Kennedy’s Peace Corps was a good idea. I think we tend, through our college days, you
get away from your parents, and you start thinking on your own, but at the same time, I
think my father was almost just like me in that sense, too; maybe he was changing a little
bit too.

RV: Interesting. Well Ron, why don’t we take a break?

RM: Okay.

RV: [finishing up previous conversation] Okay Ron, we’re continuing now.

After your two years there, at Ford Community College, what happened? Where did you
go?

RM: I went to Wayne State University. I don’t remember whether I applied other
places. My grades in community college were pretty good, better than I had done in high
school, and I had shown that I was a serious student, and more importantly than that, I
really enjoyed school. I enjoyed everything about it. I went—carried a full load, plus I
went to summer school, and I worked two jobs. I worked at the National Bank of Detroit,
and I was a playground director during the summer, so I was very busy, but I enjoyed
every minute of it. So I was pretty serious about school. I think I probably wanted to get
a degree in political science, but my father was pretty insistent, pretty clear to me that
political scientists don’t make much money. And my dad was very much—he was a
graduate of the School of Business in Kansas. Wayne State University had a very good
business school affiliated with both General Motors and Ford Motor Company, had a
good program, and so I went to the School of Business. But every chance I got, every
time they didn’t say you had to take this course to get your degree in business, I took a
political science class. Or I took macroeconomics class; I wasn’t much on micro, but I
loved the macro courses. Studied labor history and actually ended up getting my degree
in Industrial Relations, School of Business, but it was very people-oriented, human
resources side of business so to speak, with a very strong political science background
also.
RV: When you say that you loved school, what was it that you loved about it?

Because that’s unique; I haven’t heard that a lot in my interviews, but I also as a teacher here at Texas Tech, I mean you don’t hear that a lot from other people.

RM: I loved everything about it. I loved books, I loved reading, I loved studying, I loved research. I liked being in school, I loved campus life, even though Wayne State University wasn’t a… it was an urban university, so no one lived on campus.

RV: Where was it located?

RM: Downtown Detroit. Right downtown. Known for its medical school, very fine medical school and a very fine law school and a good business school. But I loved everything about it. I went to school everyday, and I hung out down at school, and I stayed there, and I just liked learning. And it was a change for me because I went to a university that didn’t have a sports program to speak of. I followed college sports and things like that, so I wasn’t necessarily enjoying being a student at this university because it was Wayne State University; I think I would have felt that way anywhere because I really enjoyed college life. And I think at that time probably, there was a little bit of me that was saying, ‘Hey, I’d like to this for the rest of my life,’ and there will be times in the next few years here where I will be going back to that idea of becoming a professor. It just took me a little bit longer than some people.

RV: But you made it (laughs).

RM: (laughs) Ultimately.

RV: Was Maxine with you at Wayne State, or where was she?

RM: No, she came back from her flight attendant school, and she was too young to become a flight attendant in those days, so she went to work for General Motors. She worked at General Motors in the Communications department and had a real good career there. We ended up getting engaged while I was just finishing community college and in my junior year of the university, and then we got married when I turned 20. I was very young.

RV: Did it have something to do with you turning 20 or it just so—

RM: I don’t think so. I don’t remember exactly why we even waited the year. We got engaged and waited another year, and we’d been going together for five or six
years. Maybe just because getting married at 19 sounded like too young, we got engaged at 19 and got married at 20.

RV: In November or December?
RM: We got married in September, Labor day weekend of 1966, so I guess I was almost 21. Maybe that’s what it was. I guess I had turned 21, then in November, that would have been ’66, 45, yeah, so I was almost 21. So we got married, and then we continued. I still had school, and her place of business was just to the north side, or about two miles north of Wayne State’s campus, so she had a parking space in between. So we came in there every morning together, and we parked in her lot, and I walked south, she walked north. And we did that for another two years, plus graduate school. It was a good time.

RV: And this was your graduate school?
RM: Yes, I went to graduate school. I went through, got my Bachelor’s degree from Wayne State.

RV: In ’60…?
RM: I actually finished in June—I think I had some classes left to take, but it was like June of ’67, and I applied for graduate school in the School of Business. They had a program where if you went summer and then the whole year and then summer, you could complete it—you could do a two-year program in less than that. So I did that and got my Master’s degree in Business Administration in June of 1968.

RV: This is shaping up very interesting because you’re going to go to Vietnam shortly. You’re getting into the army very shortly here, and you have your MBA and…
RM: My draft notice had come while I was still an undergraduate student. They had sent me this notice saying that my 2S deferment was going to be shifted to 1-A, that would have been in ’67, and that I would be eligible for the draft and that I could expect to be called shortly thereafter. At the time, they had just come up—and they just did this for two years I believe, ’67 and ’68—they came up with that they called the Selective Service Qualifying Test, and if you wanted to go to graduate school or to law school, maybe to medical school, you had to take this test, even though you already would have had to take the GRE or the GMAD or the LSAT or whatever, you’d have to take all those to get into graduate school anyway. But the military had its own test that Princeton
University devised for it, the SSQT. So I applied to take that so that I could go to graduate school, and I remember them sending me my—filling out the forms, sending it off, and I had requested that I would take it at the University of Michigan, Dearborn campus, which was just not too far from us. And the form came back, and I didn’t pay much attention to it; I thought that I’d got my first choice or whatever. And the next morning I remember getting up to drive 30 minutes and looking on my card, and it said, ‘You’re taking the test at the University of Michigan, Flint campus’ which was, instead of being 30 minutes away, it was about two and a half hours away. And I remember getting in the car and just driving breakneck speed, all the way down the freeway, I-75 north out of Detroit, hoping that I could get to the University of Michigan’s Flint campus in time to take that exam, knowing that everything is on the line here. Not only do I have to pass the test, but I’ve got to get there to take it! So we raced up there, and I sat down and took that exam with all the pressure of the world on my shoulders I felt like, that I had to score high enough. And I guess I did because they allowed me to keep my 2S deferment.

RV: And this was in 1960…?

RM: I took that exam in I believe the fall of ’67. No, I must have taken it in the spring of ’67 because I started graduate school in the fall of ’67. I actually started in the summer and then in the fall and then in the spring of ’68, with the understanding that I would become 1-A again and eligible for the draft as soon as I completed my MBA. Then the army had a deal where they had what they called a College Option program, and that is, if you knew you were going to be drafted, you could ask the army to delay your induction until you had completed your degree. And in my case, it would be four months, and then at that time, you could go in immediately. And if you wanted to join the College Option program, they would guarantee you a spot in OCS. They only did this, I believe, for those universities that did not have ROTC programs, and my university did not have an ROTC program, so I elected to enlist under the College Option plan.

RV: Tell me then, Ron, and let’s go back for a moment in time, when were you first conscious of the United States doing anything in Southeast Asia? Well, that’s too general. In regards to what became the Vietnam War for the United States, obviously they have dealings in Southeast Asia before, but post World War II, when were you first
conscious of this? Was this during the ‘50s and Eisenhower, or was it the election of
1960?

RM: I don’t remember ever being conscious of anything that dealt with military
issues until the Cuban missile crisis of October of 1962. I was a senior in high school.
It’s so vivid in my mind; I just got done teaching this, too, but it’s so vivid in my mind
because I remember that we had already gone through the evening thing with Kennedy
coming on television, and I remember the Adlai Stevenson speech when he was going to
confront the Soviet Union at the United Nations, and I remember—

RV: The Hell Freezes Over speech.

RM: Right, the Hell Freezes Over speech. I remember that speech was in the
morning, and I had my transistor radio, and I took it to school, and I wanted to listen to
Stevenson’s speech in my English class. And I could not understand how our English
professor, our English teacher Mr. Cummins, who was teaching us *The Return of the
Native*, very boring English novels that you have to read. And I remember thinking how
stupid it was that we were sitting in this class talking about *The Return of the Native*
when Stevenson was going to be on and confront the Soviet Union with those pictures,
and we weren’t allowed to listen to it. My wife—my now wife, my then girlfriend—was
living in Minnesota at the time, and I remember writing her a letter, and I think she still
has that letter, where I say that I know I’m going to join the army, if I have to wait until
school’s out—I was only 17, so I wouldn’t have been able to do it anyway, but I may
drop out of high school and go join the army; I’m going to go fight those Russians. I
remember thinking that because I totally had bought into the whole idea of what was
going on, even though infantry soldiers would be the last thing that we’d need if that
thing hadn’t worked out the way it did, it wasn’t going to be much of an issue. But I do
remember being so upset with Mr. Cummins, that he didn’t think it was important
enough.

RV: Did he announce that to the class?

RM: Oh yeah, well, I had my radio on, and I said, ‘Mr. Cummins, Adlai
Stevenson’s speaking at nine o’clock,’ you know we got there at nine o’clock, and he
was coming on. And he said, ‘No, we’re going to talk about *Return of the Native*; you
can read about it in the newspaper.’ And I just didn’t understand that; I just didn’t
understand how what we were about—I mean, I had classes where we were allowed to listen to the World Series, and this was so important, but he was an English teacher. Maybe if it had been a different class. But we couldn’t listen to it, so I had to wait and find out what happened later. But that was my first thinking that I, as an adult, was going to be involved in some of this. But I don’t remember it being this wasn’t about Vietnam, it was about those bad Russians, what they had done.

RV: You were well on your way to becoming a history professor (laughs).

RM: I think probably so. I’d had it with the English department. But then when I went to Wayne State University, which was an incredible, a very liberal university, urban university, I remember Vietnam becoming an issue. The Gulf of Tonkin resolution, I remember watching the Gulf of Tonkin resolution on television, coming home from church that morning, watching it at my parent’s house.

RV: The vote? The actual vote?

RM: The vote, yes, the actual vote. It was on a Sunday. Now let’s see… now I’m forgetting whether the Sunday was the incident and the vote came later, but I remember Johnson being on television on a Sunday afternoon. Anyway.

RV: I believe the incident was on that Sunday.

RM: You think it was on a Sunday, but then the announcement wasn’t, and then the vote was Tuesday or Wednesday. But anyway, I remember all of that. So when I went to Wayne State, then I do remember demonstrations, I remember people coming on campus and going to listen to them. I went to everything; I was very much a student who, no matter what my view was, I’d hear the other side. I remember going and listening to Herbert Aptheker’s speech talk about Vietnam, and I remember seeing Cesar Chavez come on campus, when no one even really knew who he was. That was before the Gallow strikes and everything. I was there the day that H. Rap Brown gave a speech and pointed to the flag and said, ‘That ain’t my flag, baby.’ That was at our campus.

RV: Did you hear that? Were you there?

RM: I was there; I was there. It was on the cover of Time magazine, yes. So I was a witness to history of all of that; I was very active. I was active as a spectator; I was didn’t join any clubs, I didn’t participate. I did work a little bit on the ’68 campaign of Governor Ron when he ran for president, but basically I was a spectator to all of this.
RV: But Ron, you are incredibly—you’re describing an individual who’s incredibly politically and historically conscious. I mean, who not only wants to be involved and see these things, but understands the significance at the same time, that you want to listen to Stevenson because it’s historically significant and it’s important in the day. That’s very unique.

RM: And I think that came from my father. My dad’s like that today. If something happened at ten o’clock this morning, my dad will know about it, he’ll read about, and he’ll get on the phone and tell everybody about it. That’s just the way our family was, at least my father. I just remember… and I remember thinking that probably… I don’t remember thinking that, ‘Gee whiz, I’ll probably do this someday’ because, my goodness, ’64, ’65, I don’t even go in until ’68. I watched about the war, I watched everything about it. But I don’t remember having real strong opinions about it. I mean, I’m sure I did, but I remember just being a sponge for all the information.

RV: Even when there’s a good possibility that you might have to go? Or did that not enter the equation?

RM: I remember feeling that if my country is fighting this war, that there’s a strong chance since I’m of draft age and my classification is correct, there’s a strong possibility that I might end up doing that. On the other hand, I was talking to recruiters, looking at what my options might be, and all of them were telling me, ‘Oh, with an MBA, you’ve got a good chance of getting in the army and being in the Finance Corps or the Adjutant General’s Corps in personnel, S1’s got you written all over it, or S4.’ I don’t think I ever thought I’d fight in the war because I sort of knew that not everybody that went over there fought, and you would hear about people that never got out of Saigon and stuff. So I think I probably believed that with my education, my advanced education, that I’d have a good chance of doing something that was more in line with what I did because after all, my father was a supply officer. My dad had enlisted and gone to Harvard. My dad went to the Harvard School of Business to get his—he got his commission. He had a direct commission, and then he went to the Harvard School of Business and learned how to do all that supply stuff. So I thought, ‘Wow, that’s probably what will happen to me, too.’
RV: Let me play devil’s advocate. What about the growing up, the Cowboys and Indians side of you, the adventurous side of Ron, was that part of your consciousness?

RM: That comes a little later when I enlist under this College Option program I mentioned. They tell me—I enlisted in, I believe, November or December of ’67, at least I don’t know that I put my name on the dotted line, but I was sure I was going after having tried to get in the Air Force and the Navy. My math background wasn’t strong enough to become a line officer in the Navy, and that’s all they were taking into Naval OCS.

RV: Now, let me ask you. When were you trying—was this because of your dad, maybe?

RM: Yes, I think so.

RV: Was this during the MBA time?

RM: It was while I was in graduate school, yes.

RV: Okay, so you’re looking at a headlock now: when I get out—

RM: Something’s going to happen.

RV: So let me choose the branch and let me choose kind of where I want to go.

So tell me about the Navy. Well, what was it that got your mind—

RM: The Navy, I think because OCS was in Rhode Island, it sounded exciting.

My dad had been in, I’d grown up on Victory at Sea, all those great ‘50’s films and music and everything. The Navy was—I’d even rooted for the Navy in the Army/Navy game and stuff. I was a Navy guy, even though my dad had only been in a few years; I was a Navy guy. So I applied, and my background in mathematics and sciences was not strong enough for what the Navy was wanting at the time for admittance to OCS. I don’t know that I ever took the examination. I may have, and if I did, I probably didn’t do well on it. That’s a little murky in my mind right now, as to whether I was rejected because I didn’t score well or whether they looked at my transcripts and said, ‘There’s no point; you don’t have the necessary education to become a line officer,’ and there was no supply jobs because the Navy was—everybody wanted in the Navy during the Vietnam war. So they said, ‘Okay, we’ll take line officers only.’ And so I did apply—I did something and was not allowed to join the Navy. So then my next choice was the Air Force, and my eyes were not good enough to be a pilot.
RV: Why the Air Force?
RM: Because it wasn’t the Army, and it wasn’t the Marines.
RV: What was the last choice, was it Marines?
RM: Yes, probably. The Air Force wouldn’t take me because my eyes; I couldn’t be a pilot, but my eyes were good enough to be a navigator, so I went down and took the physical for the Air Force, and they found out I had a heart… what was it they called it? Tachycardia, that my heart rate was too fast. And so I went down to the medical—so they said, ‘You can come back and take it in two months’ or something, so I went down to the medical center at Wayne State University, and I said to the people in the—one of the nurses there, I said, ‘Look, I have to take this electrocardiogram test’ and I said, ‘The one I took down at AFEES showed my heart rate was too fast, and I think it’s because I have this nervousness when people start hooking me up to things,’ so I said, ‘Would you let me lay here awhile and almost like fall asleep, and then you hook that thing up to me?’ And they did, and I passed, and I got whatever medical issues were taken care of. Well then the TET Offensive comes, and the Air Force is no longer interested because everybody wants in the Air Force. They don’t need any navigators, and so—

RV: Why do you think everybody wanted in the Air Force?
RM: Because it wasn’t the Army or the Marines.
RV: So you weren’t going to be trapped at Khe Sanh, you weren’t going to be on the ground?
RM: Yes, right. So I went to the Army, and I started looking into this OCS thing that they had, and the OCS thing said that, at the time when I first applied, they said they had all these OCSes around the country. They had one in Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, and you could become a member of—you could go into the HR branch, essentially, out of that. They had Ft. Belvoir for logistics people. All those looked really good to me, so I made my list of choices—this was in December, January—and I made my choice. I said, ‘Okay, I want to go to Ft. Benjamin Harrison OCS, become an S1, and if that doesn’t work out, I’ll go to be an S4 supply guy like my dad was.’ And then the TET Offensive occurs, and I think I’d already signed on the dotted line over Christmas because I’m going to be graduating in June of ’68 with my MBA. And so about the middle of February, just a couple of weeks after the TET Offensive, I get a phone call.
from my recruiter saying that there has been a major change and that the—all of the, as a result, he said as a result of the TET Offensive, I’ve tried to research this to see if he was telling me the truth, I’m not sure exactly, but he said, ‘as a result of the TET Offensive, they’re going to close down all of the non-Combat Arm OCSes, and everybody must go to armor, artillery, engineering, or infantry, and that if you want to go into the Adjutant General’s Corps or the logistics people, supply corps, if you want to go in those, you absolutely have to go to infantry OCS. And then the Army will choose—if you go to those, if you go to infantry OCS—the Army will then take the top three graduates—not the top three percent, but the top three graduates of each OCS company—and give them their first choice, and if you graduate in the top three, you can choose Adjutant General’s Corps, and you can become the S1. But that’s the only way that you can do it.’ So we had a lot of searching to do, soul searching about this. This was different than what I had thought; I thought I was automatic Finance Corps, automatic Adjutant Corps, something. MBA, that’s what they had all told me.

RV: How did you feel?

RM: Well, I was concerned then, because you know, we’re watching the TET Offensive on television, and we’re seeing guys dying right and left, something like 500 dead in that week, the first two weeks of February of ’68. Lots of guys being killed, and probably maybe then the memory of Cowboys and Indians and Leslie Blanchett and Leslie Blanchett’s dad and everything starts coming in, and I start thinking, ‘Well, I can do this; I’ll go to infantry OCS, I’ll graduate in the top three, but even if I don’t, if I become an infantry officer, I can do it. I can handle this.’ So I allowed myself to be—I mean, I enlisted with the complete understanding—they also had this thing I was hearing about, and I think maybe the sergeant even told me this, recruiting NCO probably even may have said this, that, ‘You know, you can go to OCS, you’ll go basic, AIT, and then you’ll go six months to OCS, and then you’ll have been in for 10, 11 months by that time, you can turn down your commission. And you’ll just then have a year to serve. Now you still will probably go to Vietnam, but you know you’ll only have a year. You can make that choice later on if you choose that this isn’t what you want to do.’ And I remember, I remember talking then to my parents about it, and I believe at that time, my mom was very worried. I don’t know how I knew that exactly, but I sort of sensed that
this was real war, and it bothered her. And that bothered me, that it bothered her. I don’t
remember if I was in her eyes or exactly what, but I remember sensing that this was going
to be a hard thing for her. It was going to be hard for my father, too, but he’d been in
uniform, and he understood war, but for mothers it’s different, I think. And that bothered
me. My wife—you know we’d been married for two years.

RV: Any kids?
RM: No, no. And she was working at GM, and while I went in, she’d have to go
live with her parents or something, and I remember that bothering her. But I also don’t
ever remember there being any question about doing it. I mean, we looked at all the
options, and at that point, the Navy was out of the question, the Air Force was out of the
question, the Marines I’d never even considered, and the Army was going to be what it
was going to be, or the only other two options we thought we had were going to Canada,
which was easy because we lived in Detroit; we’d just walk across the bridge, and you’re
there. That was an option, or jail.

RV: I’m sorry, or—?
RM: Or jail.
RV: Okay.
RM: I don’t remember there being any other options, and Canada—we rejected
Canada immediately. I was not going to leave my country. So the only option to me was
going in or going to jail. I don’t ever remember thinking about, ‘Well, maybe I can go
blow my knee out.’ I don’t remember ever thinking that, ‘Maybe I can get a doctor to
write an excuse; I had hay fever.’ I even, when I took my physical, they found out I was
somewhat night blind; I had a night blindness problem. If a guy’s got problem with night
blindness, why not put him in the infantry? I remember thinking that was a little bit
strange. But I remember thinking that about that time, maybe the adventurous side of me
starts kicking in, and I start saying, ‘I can do this.’

RV: So you accepted your fate?
RM: I had accepted my fate. Everything that I had asked my government to do
for me, they had allowed me to. They had allowed me to get my MBA; they had allowed
me to try these other branches and see if that work, and that didn’t. They had played with
me as far as extending my 2S deferment until I finished everything. So I wasn’t
particularly mad at them; they’d done their part. My draft board stayed out of my—I’d
written letters to my draft board, I still have copies of those. Letters to my draft board
saying, ‘Please allow me to finish my degree’ and all this stuff; they’d done everything
that I’d asked them to do, so now was my turn, you know time for me to make the
decisions as to what I wanted to do. And I don’t remember us giving it a lot of thought
other then, ‘Well, our time has come, and I’ll go do this.’
RV: This seems like a very, very well thought out process for you, that you
explored A, B, C, D and then under A, subset one, two, three. I mean you—
RM: Pretty much.
RV: And you and Maxine doing this as a team?
RM: Yes, yes we were. It was—her family was very active in the anti-war
movement.
RV: Really?
RM: Incredibly so.
RV: Well this is… at this time.
RM: Yes. Oh yes, her sister was a graduate of the University of Michigan, was
living in Washington, DC at the time. Her other sister was married to a guy who was a
true draft dodger, was ready to go to Canada. Didn’t, but would have. His parents were
very wealthy and were funding anti-war movement. They would rent buses and take
students from Ann Arbor to Washington for all of the rallies. So they were active in the
anti-war movement. Her father was not a veteran; he had built tanks, I believe, during
World War II there in Dearborn, so there was no military experience in that family.
Three girls, so none of the boys—she had two sisters, so there was no men facing the
draft, but she supported everything I was trying to do. We looked at it as a we, and she
was very supportive of me. I don’t remember her having an opinion about the war, but I
do remember her having a strong opinion about soldiers, and that was that she was very
supportive of them. And I don’t think I can say that necessarily about her family. I don’t
remember that they were specifically saying things about ‘Why would you do this?’ But
I remember that she felt like there was a questioning on their part about why I am
electing to do what I’m about to do.
RV: There was or was not?
RM: Was, from her family.

RV: Right.

RM: But not from her because she was part of the decision process.

RV: Have you talked to her about that since?

RM: Oh, yeah, and we’ve talked to her family about it, and some of my memories of what I think their perception of me at the time are probably, they’re now saying, ‘Oh, no, we didn’t feel that way and stuff,’ but they did. My whole feeling is based on things that I remember was that because they were so active in the anti-war movement, they could not understand why anybody would go in. Her sister had also been married to a man—I think they were divorced by then—but I think she was married to a guy who had been in the reserves, and so he had gone to Ft. Benning to take his reserve training, and she had gone with him and been a teacher down in there. So she knew Benning, she knew the military, and they were not real supportive of military things. They were very negative about his experiences, having been down in Ft. Benning, and that’s about where I was going to end up going.

RV: Right.

RM: So I remember it as being a time when we felt very much alone, the two of us, on this decision. Dad supported it, mom was a mom, but we didn’t see a lot of options, and we said, ‘Okay, well let’s go do it.’

RV: Did you have communication directly with Maxine’s family, beyond her?

RM: Oh yes, they both lived in Dearborn there.

RV: Were they trying to say, ‘Ron, what are you doing? Don’t do this; you’re making a mistake.’

RM: Not to me directly, but I think through her they questioned why I was going to do what a lot of guys weren’t doing. And I don’t even remember thinking, ‘Hey, all my friends have done it, all my buddies are getting out of this, why am I going?’ I don’t remember that a lot of people were having to go. I don’t remember my college friends were having to go. It seems like everybody had a reason why they couldn’t go—medical or otherwise. I just don’t remember my other friends having to go. And even to this day, we always say about how come I was the only one of a circle of people that went?
RV: That’s very interesting. I can actually feel right now in this room the vacuum in which you and Maxine, you just described you all living.

RM: Yes, yes, we very much felt alone in that process. My sister’s husband had been drafted. He had gone to Vietnam; he was a clerk in Saigon, but by this time, by the time I’m electing to go—I’m trying to think. He was in Vietnam at the time.

RV: Had you had communication with him?

RM: I saw him for a couple of weeks before I went in, and he was very boastful about his service in Vietnam as a clerk. We now think he lied about everything because he later divorced her—he will divorce her before I go to Vietnam. He was a clerk who you would think had the Medal of Honor fighting the VC in the streets of Saigon, and I don’t believe any of that happened because we found out later that he was a perpetual liar who lied about not only that, but everything else in his life up to that time. So that was about the only person that I knew had gone to Vietnam, and his MOS was a clerk. He was questioning why I was going to become an officer because he didn’t like officers, so he was critical of me for going. But we didn’t have any other friend, we didn’t know anybody that had done it; there was nobody saying, ‘Yeah, this is a great idea.’ I know no one said that. I think my father reluctantly said, ‘Well, you know, if you have to, you have to,’ but I don’t remember him having a strong opinion one way or the other, other than accepting my decision. And like I say, I think I could just look at my mother’s eyes and know that she wasn’t real happy about this, as I wouldn’t be if it were my son now. I mean, I understand that parents is a whole different situation. But I do remember… and I think they also thought that, this was summer of ’68 that I actually went in, and my goodness, we’d been fighting for three years, this thing can’t go on forever; even World War II was over in four. And I think maybe we even thought that a little bit, summer of ’68. Why would you think that since I’m enlisting for three years, and chances are pretty good that if I do basic and AIT and OCS, there’s 10 months and then your leave in between, there’s a year, and then we knew that when you get commissioned, you’re going to get some time in-country before you go. Why would we think this war would continue for what has to be at least another year and a half before I go?

RV: What’s Johnson—
RM: Johnson’s already decided not to run; Nixon’s got a secret plan to end the war.

RV: Negotiations have started in Paris?

RM: No, not quite. Negotiations in Paris I don’t think started—

RV: The announcement—

RM: The announcement that there might be some, but Johnson gets out on March 31 of ’68, so I go in in July, it was November when the talking starts, and I was in AIT by then. But there’s a sense that this removing would stop the—we’ve stopped the bombing, you know bombing pauses had come and gone, and so we feel, as a young man going in, I could certainly feel that maybe there’s a chance this thing will be over before I have to go. And if I end up having to in to the infantry, at least maybe it will be over—the real fighting will be over by the time I get there. So perhaps that made my parents feel better, and maybe that’s what her family felt too; maybe they felt like probably it would be over.

RV: You sensed from her family that they were actually worried about you individually?

RM: I don’t know if I sensed that or not. I probably didn’t sense that; I was probably a little bit feeling that they weren’t very supportive, therefore they were against it, and then knowing their anti-war attitudes, I’m not sure I even sought their approval. So there may have been a little bit of a reluctance for me to ask too many questions about how they felt. But at the time, they knew their daughter was going to come back and live with them, which she did for that first part, and they probably liked that part. And so I think it was just a matter of go do what you have to do, and I got my orders to go to basic.

RV: Why don’t we stop here for today?

RM: That’s a good time, that’s a good time.

RV: Okay, thanks Ron.